

## *Abstract*

Until publication of this book, the issue of conservation of heritage sites in Prague between 1939 and 1945, which is so fundamental for our cultural history, has not been addressed with the attention it deserves. In the thirties and forties of the twentieth century, the discipline of heritage conservation in periods of war evolved significantly, and lay down the foundations of modern approach to cultural heritage site protection.

Even before the Second World War, in the Great War, a number of European countries experienced serious damage to their valuable collections. For this reason, in the period between the wars, first theoretical attempts to establish new approach and methods of protection of cultural heritage vulnerable to damage in war appeared, as documented in studies by several significant public figures, e. g. by Carl Justi. The deteriorating political situation in Europe in the thirties inspired reflection upon this issue, considering means of modern war, technological progress in weaponry, as well as destructive capacity of the arms, threatening European cultural heritage.

Four years before the Second World War started, discussion on how to effectively protect heritage from war-imposed damage had been initiated in Germany by prof. Otto Kümmel. In that time, Kümmel did not have sufficient support from German authorities for his idea of a uniform strategic plan. The research-based articles I found during my visits to Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte in Munich, Germany, helped me depict the second-world-war related history of exhibition halls in Dresden and get a clearer picture of the system of German exhibition institutions in that time. The cases presented (Dresden-based) can be understood as the first evidence of actual effort to secure art-related estate in Germany before 1939, as well as of the system and operation of German exhibition institutions upon the early weeks of war, when the Nazi army were not sure about the force of the possible response from Poland they had just invaded. Most of the institutions in Dresden were closed until the end of the year, even though they continued in their scientific work. In advance, German institutions managed to provide material for production of special cases meeting specific criteria for the purpose of storing art works from their collections and reserve storage space.

Independently from the development in the segment of conservation of heritage threatened by war in Germany, “Fliegerschutz für Kunst und Kulturdenkmäler. Ein technischer Wegweiser”, a study by Karl Friedrich Kühn, was submitted in Czechoslovakia in 1938 and then also

published. This study was the first to define protection measures regarding more or less all fields of art.

Heritage conservation in the territory of the capital city of Prague in the Second World War was the major issue addressed in a submitted book and it suggests that the half-forgotten study by Karl Friedrich Kühn was crucial in securing heritage sites and collections in Prague. In 1941, after the fusion of the offices in Prague and Brno, Kühn became one of the dominant personalities in salvage of cultural heritage in the Protectorate territory. According to available documentation, he was also the person who later recommended and required application of the methods suggested in the study.

Securing and protection of heritage in Prague was a response to a regulation issued in summer in 1942 by German Ministry of Aviation, which commanded the soonest possible implementation of heritage conservation measures both in Nazi Germany and in outer territories. In practice, their implementation in Czechoslovakia started one year later. This might have been caused by the fact that, until 1942, a number of different people took turns in holding the post of the head of National Heritage Institute in Prague. After the war had started, Cyril Merhout (until 1940) and Václav Wagner (until 1941) were the directors of National Heritage Institute. After the fusion of the offices in Prague and Brno, Wilhelm Turnwald worked in this post in 1941. When he joined the army, he was replaced by his deputy Karl Friedrich Kühn. Born to the Liberec-based family of a famous constructor Konrád Kühn, Karl Kühn was an ambitious person, proud of his family and all his personal and professional achievements. He studied civil engineering, and later also art history at the University of Vienna.

Starting from 1942, as a preservationist, it was Kühn's job to address conservation of movable and immovable cultural heritage in the territory of the Protectorate, especially in Prague. He organized negotiations with experts and city officials, playing a significant role in decisions and resolutions involving heritage sites and institutions in Prague. From his post, he even wrote and submitted lists of prioritised heritage items in Prague, obviously selected in accordance with ideological preferences of German authorities. Moves and measures were often applied with absolute secrecy.

Besides the head of National Heritage Institute, a group of representatives of exhibition institutions of the capital city also played role in the decision-making process regarding cultural heritage in Prague. Another important entity in the heritage preservation and export of

art works was the Bohemian and Moravian Gallery (present National Gallery), which worked as a co-decision institution.

As indicated in the book, a general inventory of constructions was established in the period of the Protectorate, which divided heritage sites into three conservation levels. The list resulted from Kühn's negotiations with general Petersen. A map was also attached, showing position of the sites in question. In my work, I have focused on the methods of protection of both civil and sacral sites. The situation regarding sacral sites is illustrated with a list of individual urban subdivisions including lists of sites. As implied by records from relevant periods, these sites were divided into two levels of protection. Besides other issues, Kühn and Petersen agreed on storage of valuable furniture, especially furniture from St. Vitus Cathedral, as documented by inventories of National Heritage Institute kept in the National Archives of the Czech Republic in Prague.

A specific approach was needed in case of sculptures located in outdoor sites, including mainly monuments, or sculptures and statues connected to architectural entities. Conservation of sculptures and statues was co-decided by the Municipality of the capital city Prague, represented by Josef Pfitzner on the German side, who contributed to removal of certain monuments and statues which contradicted the ideology of Nazi Germany from public places, e.g. the Monument of František Palacký and the Woodrow Wilson Monument. One of the big issues of that time was protection of the statue of Saint Wenceslas in Wenceslas Square. The statue was subject to protection and the entire process of securing protection of the statue was thoroughly documented, with detailed schemes attached. The documentation suggests how different the views of Czech and German sides were. Whereas the Czech side understood the process as protection of a Czech national symbol, the representatives of German administration considered it as a symbol of the Legend of Saint Wenceslas, which they misinterpreted to provide evidence proving that the territory of Bohemia had always actually belonged to Germany.

Collections maintained by institutions were also addressed, secured repeatedly using the inventory held by the German administration. Safekeeping of valuable inventories was most thoroughly addressed in a document found in the archives of National Heritage Institute. It was issued on March 2, 1944, and involved use of mansions, castles and presbyteries located off the crucial traffic network and industrial sites in Bohemia for safe storage of art works,

archives and other artefacts. The inventory involved not only exhibition institutions, but also archives of public authorities and ministries.

The range of the issue of heritage conservation in the period of the Protectorate is extensive. In the context of Czech history mapping, the issue is not well-discussed. For this reason, the issue of heritage conservation in the Protectorate tends to get misinterpreted. Real understanding of this problem is also difficult due to the fact that certain records have been lost and to unclear attitudes of preservationists of that time. As evidenced in my study through period documents, the circumstances of cultural heritage conservation in Prague in the period of Nazi government in the Second World War were a complex issue consisting of not only specific challenges and problems, but also political and personal interests.