

Article 22

Dr Grzegorz Ostasz, Polish Underground State's Patronage of the Arts and Literature (1939-1945)

Both the Germans and the Soviets treated occupied Poland's cultural tradition with exceptional brutality. They tried to choke and paralyse its rich resources, destroy its nationally conscious and unyielding intelligentsia. '*Sonderaktion Krakau*' on 6th November 1939 symbolised the infliction of German terror on the Polish academic world, but the Soviets also had their version of '*intelligenzaktion*'. In response, a cultural self-defence emerged. Alongside the underground military and political resistance, a struggle for cultural legacy began.

Although Polish Underground State patronage was not a major policy priority in the years 1939-1945, it was practised on a daily basis together with spontaneous private sponsorships of scientific, literary and artistic works. In wartime conditions this primarily meant providing broad material support for academics, writers, artists and their families. A separate activity of Underground State patronage was to provide conditions in which these people could continue their work. Efforts were made to save from looting or destruction works of art in state and private collections, museums, libraries and archives, such as those of Jan Matejko.

As the continuator of the Republic of Poland, the Polish Underground State automatically became an active patron of Polish culture, science and art. Actions to protect Polish culture were left to various homeland cells of the Government Delegation (*Delegatura*). An exceptional role was played by the Department of Culture and Art, which was put in charge of: literature, the theatre, libraries, archives, monuments, museums, music and fine arts. A special team efficiently realised the Underground State's patronage of literature and theatre. Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz was put in charge of dividing financial support among the various writers. A particular example of Government Delegation patronage was its sponsorship of the underground publications of works by, for example, Winston Churchill, Arkady Fiedler and Jan Kisielewski as well as 10,000 copies of a Polish primary-school primer.

Likewise the Department of Labour and Social Care provided social support and patronage for Polish scientists and artists. In the autumn of 1944 the Krakow Regional Delegation Department of Social Care organised the so-called 'Warsaw Action' to help 132 families of Warsaw academics. Also deserving distinction was the Wilno Delegation Department of Social Care – headed by Fr. Aleksander Lachowicz (alias '*Leszczyna*' – Hazel) – for the consistent help it provided for a number of representatives the cultural and artistic world. It was the initiative of the Department for the Elimination of the Effects of War to register and document of lost cultural treasures. Its first report on robbery or destruction of works of art was sent to the Polish Government-in-Exile in 1940, when the latter was still in France. Finally, the Department of Internal Affairs issued decrees for the protection of monuments of Polish culture as well as also overseeing actions of patronage and social care for artists and scientists.

Another important patron of Polish culture was the Catholic Church. Apart from protecting a large part of society (including Jews), it took special care of scientists and artists. Here a great contribution was made by Archbishop Adam Sapieha. One of the forms of help was to employ

artists in restaurants located next to places of worship. Help was also provided by various Catholic organisations (which were usually banned by the occupying authorities), including: the 'Caritas' Union, Marian Sodality, 'Odrodzenie' (Rebirth) Academic Association and Catholic Action. During the war the Franciscans of Krakow kept in hiding the stained-glass panels of Stefan Wyspiński and Józef Mehoffer. Patrons of another sort were the aristocracy and landed classes. Many a palace and manor house became a sanctuary for people of science and culture. Aristocrats and landowners provided their 'lodgers' with a roof over their heads, their upkeep and conditions for them to continue their work. An example of such a patron was Janusz Radziwiłł of Nieborów.

The only charities that could provide help on broad scale were those organisations legally recognised by the occupant, above all the Chief [Social] Care Council (*Rada Główna Opiekuncza* – RGO). Apart from the help provided to deportees, ordinary prisoners, POWs from the *Stalags* and *Oflag*s as well as refugees from Wołyń (Volhynia) and Podole (Podolia), this charity also assigned money to save the nation's culture. It was the RGO that protected the musicians, painters, sculptors and graphic artists of Warsaw and Krakow.

The financial situation of artists and academics depended on their stance with regard to the occupant. Most were no longer able to officially continue their professions. Nonetheless, a large percentage did not desist. Wartime artistic groups appeared, e.g. 'Bacciarówka' in Warsaw and the Young Painters Group in Krakow. And there were wartime commissions from private art collectors and patrons. Thanks to such people, secret artwork presentations and exhibitions were held in Krakow, Warsaw, Lwów, Wilno, Lublin, Radom, Sandomierz, Kielce, Zakopane, Nowy Sącz and Białystok. Secret State agencies were among the most important sponsors and patrons of fine art. Artwork commissions came from the Home Army Chief Command Bureau of Information and Propaganda (BIP) as well as various Government Delegation cells. The above-mentioned Department of Culture and Art not only provided social care but also financed art, issued scholarships and commissioned paintings and sculptures.

The Government Delegation also concerned itself with music. Thanks to it, despite the limitations and persecutions, the Polish music movement did not quite vanish. Participating in clandestine concerts even became an act of resistance of sorts. Artistic cooperatives, such as those in Warsaw and Krakow, were another type of patron. A similar role was played by private sponsors, antique bookshops, art salons and cafes. The Clandestine Theatre Company provided financial support for actors who boycotted official German controlled productions. Thus a privately funded underground theatre emerged. The performances (recitals) were held in private homes, schools and churches. One of the actors of the Rapsodyczny Theatre in Krakow was Karol Wojtyła.

In a time when the nation's very existence was under threat the importance of books increased. The occupying powers drove Polish literature underground. They destroyed collections, including: the Sejm and Senate Library, the Przedziecki Estate Library, the Zamoyski Estate Library and the Central Military Library together with the Rappertowski Collection. Thus a genuine war for books was waged. Secret distribution networks were set up in Warsaw, Krakow, Lwów, Grodno, Wilno, Mielec, Przeworsk, Rzeszów, Brozów and Nowy Sącz. Thanks to the Krakow bookseller and publisher Stefan Kamiński, many books that had been plundered by the Germans were eventually salvaged. Kamiński was also a patron who secretly commissioned 200 scientific and literary works, some 300,000 [copies] of which appeared after the war. This was a frequently practised form of sponsorship. Contracts were signed, after which the authors received advanced payments or royalties. Stanisław Arct was a 'book patron' in Warsaw. The Gebethner and Wolff publishing house paid royalties to among others: Kornel Makuszyński, Juliusz Kaden-Bandrowski, Jan Marcin Szancer, Zofia Nałkowska and the family of Leon Kruczkowski, who was at the time in a German POW camp for officers (*Oflag*). Other organisations to issue royalties were Ossolineum and the printing houses Biblioteka Polska, Nasza Księgarnia Trzaska-Ewert-Michalski, the Lwów Atlas Library and Poznań Sw. [St.] Wojciech. The journalist and satirist Zbigniew Mitzner made advanced payments for 150 works and signed a contract with the young poet Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński.

One cannot fail to mention the wartime émigré support and patronage. Though it was not directed exclusively at Polish communities, much of it went to the occupied homeland. The exiled Polish authorities also coordinated the registering and documenting of Polish works of art that had been either destroyed or plundered by the Germans. An important part of art sponsorship from abroad was instigated and managed by the National Culture Foundation (reactivated on 10th January 1940).

Wartime patronage, both from within occupied Poland and by émigré circles, was treated very seriously. The significance of protecting national culture was universally recognised. Although the lives of many artists and academics as indeed many works of art could not be saved from destruction, nowhere else in occupied Europe was underground-state and private patronage so comprehensive and effective. The Polish Underground State was free from any ideological bias and protection of items deemed to be of particular value was never motivated by political sympathies. This was a society's struggle to defend its national bonds of memory, culture and tradition.

Dr G. Ostasz

Translation from Polish: W. Zbirohowski-Koscia