

The Collection of Ancient Art at the National Museum in Warsaw during the Second World War (1939–1945)

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Abstract: The Collection of Ancient Art at the National Museum in Warsaw constitutes the largest assemblage of its kind in Poland. Until recently, its history during the Second World War (1939–1945) had been neglected. However, thanks to recent research, it has become possible to provide new information about the wartime robbery and destruction of the collection. The latter tragedy, especially, concerns the Egyptian mummies, which were allegedly destroyed by German soldiers. The research has also brought to light new details concerning the first X-ray examination of an Egyptian mummy in Poland, which took place in 1941, as well as new information concerning the provenance of some of the objects from the collection.

Keywords: National Museum in Warsaw, University of Warsaw, Second World War, mummies, coffins, cartonnages, Tell Edfu, Deir el-Medina

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The Collection of Ancient Art at the National Museum in Warsaw currently constitutes the largest and most important assemblage of its kind in Poland, amounting to over 16,000 objects originating from Egypt, the Middle and Near East, Greece and Rome. One of the incentives for the establishment of the permanent exhibition was the start of the Polish-French excavations at Tell Edfu, which began in 1937 thanks to the efforts of Kazimierz Michałowski (1901–1981) and lasted for three seasons until 1939.¹ Due to the considerable number of antiquities from Tell Edfu that entered the University of Warsaw’s collection, a temporary exhibition of ‘Egyptian Excavations’ was made available to visitors

¹ For the excavation reports, see: Bruyère *et al.* 1937; Michałowski *et al.* 1938; 1950.



1. First room of the Gallery of Ancient Art in 1938 (National Museum in Warsaw: DI 102899).

of the National Museum in 1937 for a two-month period. The temporary exhibition was a huge success, reportedly visited by over 60,000 people,² and had a considerable impact on the creation of the permanent exhibition. The latter was officially inaugurated in June 1938 and presented not only objects obtained during the Polish-French excavations at Tell Edfu, but also objects from earlier French excavations at this site, and also at Deir el-Medina and Meir; gifts from the French Institute for Oriental Archaeology in Cairo (Ifao) to the University of Warsaw, which deposited its artefacts on long-term loan to the National Museum. Additionally, the collection was enriched with objects from older collections of the University of Warsaw, the Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts in Warsaw (Zachęta), along with numerous gifts and deposits obtained from other institutions and private individuals. The collection of the newly established department, which numbered between 4,000³ to 6,000⁴ objects in 1938, was housed in five rooms on the ground floor of the museum (**Fig. 1**), where Egyptian artefacts dominated both in number and quality.⁵ In 1938, Michałowski was chosen to be the first head of the Collection of Ancient Art, while in the same year Maria Ludwika Bernhard (1908–1998) became the first assistant

² Ambroziak 2016: 11. For a catalogue of the exhibition, see Michałowski 1937.

³ Lorentz 1938: 61.

⁴ Archive of the National Museum in Warsaw (ANMW): 1070d, fol. 48 (untitled document concerning the war losses of the National Museum).

⁵ For the layout of the exhibition, see Lorentz 1938: plan of the ground floor.

of the department.⁶ Other pre-war employees of the same section included Jerzy Halicki (1917–1998) and Aleksandra Michalska (1918–1944).⁷

PREPARATIONS FOR WAR

In April 1939, due to the impending threat of war, Stanisław Lorentz (1899–1991) – the director of the National Museum – ordered the preparation of wooden crates to safeguard the objects.⁸ Michałowski was a reserve officer in the army and took part in the Polish Campaign, after which he spent the rest of the war in German captivity.⁹ Due to his absence, Bernhard became the main person responsible for the Collection of Ancient Art. Recently, in the Inventory Department of the National Museum, a previously unknown document likely written by Bernhard was found, which reveals some details concerning the preparations of the collection for war: ‘On 20 August 1939, the packing of artefacts began into crates prepared in advance especially for this purpose. First and second category objects were packed. The intention was to hide everything, but it turned out to be impossible, especially considering the need to pack away the other museum departments and the large amount of pottery, which would have required many crates. In this way, the most valuable artefacts were packed away: like stelae, alabaster objects, one specimen of each type of vessel; in addition, and more valuable small objects, such as necklaces, etc. Apart from the exhibited objects, most of the items brought back from the excavations of the 1939 campaign [at Tell Edfu] were packed up. These objects were properly packed up using parchment, lignin and shavings and were placed in appropriate crates, custom built by the museum’s carpentry workshop. On 27 August, the crates were taken to the large store-room of the Collection of Ancient Art. Three sarcophagi [coffins] and all the sculptures that were not packed away were also placed in the same room, but they were removed along with the showcases. In this state, the work had to be stopped and employees were put at the disposal of other departments, where works were less advanced’.¹⁰

OUTBREAK OF WAR

On 1 September 1939, German troops crossed the Polish-German border starting the Second World War. The document referenced above continues as follows: ‘When the war broke out, all efforts had to be concentrated on the collections located on the upper floors. After the bombing of Saint Lazarus’ Hospital, a group of doctors came to the museum to examine the possibility of setting up a hospital there and the rooms of our department, along with

⁶ Michałowski 1957: 119.

⁷ Michałowski 1957: 119, n. 27.

⁸ Lorentz 1970: 14.

⁹ Michałowski 1986: 192–193.

¹⁰ Archive of the Inventory Department of the National Museum in Warsaw (AIDNMW): Protocols of the Gołuchów collection. All quotations presented in this article in English were translated by the author from Polish, unless stated otherwise.

the basement, were selected. We then had to move the crates from the large basement room from the last one to the left and we started bringing the showcases from the ground floor down [to the basement]. However, when the hospital concluded that the museum was unsuitable due to an insufficient number of water points, further relocations were discontinued. They were even more difficult because we had no physical workers at all. The next day, a bomb hit the gallery on the first floor and the blast and tremor caused all the glass panes in the first and second room to blow out'.¹¹ Unfortunately, the remainder of the text has not been preserved, but further events can be reconstructed and supplemented by other sources. Almost immediately – in the first week of September 1939 – the museum was hit by German aircraft and long-range artillery (**Fig. 2**), and during the siege of Warsaw, its basement was also used as a shelter. The museum assistant Maria Friedel-Bogucka (1909–1984) noted the following memory from the middle of September 1939: 'My mother came to the museum. [...] We are spending the night in the Egyptian basement. She looks at me distrustfully when I tell her that the crate we sleep on supposedly contains child mummies'.¹² Friedel-Bogucka also noted the memory of the following day: 'In the evening, we went to the basement of Egypt with [Zdzisław] Kępiński [1911–1978] and [Jan] Morawiński [1907–1949]. There is a mummy [coffin] standing in the room by the door – we jokingly called it pointy beard [in Polish 'szpicbródka']. "Please help me, sir" – Morawiński said [to Kępiński] – "it needs to be placed in the middle of the room. If it is leaning against the wall, it may tip over and break". They took it down and put it in the middle of the room, opposite the entrance'.¹³ The coffin mentioned above can be identified as the Eighteenth Dynasty coffin lid of a man named Setau from Deir el-Medina (138983 MNW), which had a characteristic rounded false beard attached to the chin.¹⁴ Friedel-Bogucka continues: 'Both he [Morawiński] and Kępiński warned me not to change into my nightclothes, but still I could not get used to sleeping in a dress and shoes. That night was no different. And then there was the alarm. [...] I eventually got out from behind my crate and ran to them. We looked for a flashlight and then there was a bang. Smoke, debris and dust billowed from the exit. If we had not stopped for me to change my clothes, we would have been blown away at the door, just like poor pointy beard was blown away by the shell. Who would have known!... We got out into the inner courtyard, a bit dazed – and there was a light coming from the duty room. The director was running with others. [...] They saw how Egypt had been hit'.¹⁵

The last sentence in the fragment quoted above mentions the shell (or bomb) that hit the Gallery of Ancient Art, which was also referenced in Bernhard's published account, according to which, in the middle of September, a heavy artillery shell fell into the exhibition room destroying some previously emptied showcases, piercing through the floor and falling

¹¹ AIDNMW: Protocols of the Gołuchów collection.

¹² Friedel-Bogucka 1965: 370.

¹³ Friedel-Bogucka 1965: 370.

¹⁴ For a pre-war photograph showing the now missing false beard, see: Bruyère 1937a: Pl. 10, no. 2.

¹⁵ Friedel-Bogucka 1965: 370.



2. Damaged building of the National Museum in Warsaw after the capitulation of Warsaw in 1939 (Author's collection).

into the basement just a few meters from the crates containing the antiquities.¹⁶ This event probably occurred on 25 September 1939, when a stela, which can probably be identified as the Sixth Dynasty stela of Sabni (138874 MNW) from Tell Edfu, is reported to have been destroyed by a German aerial bomb.¹⁷ Bernhard mentioned that some objects were still in exhibition rooms, while the blast and tremor destroyed the glass in the windows as well as the showcases.¹⁸ It was likely soon after that when Polish photographer Henryk Śmigacz (1911–1972) immortalised the view of the devastated first room of the Gallery of Ancient Art (**Fig. 3**). In his glass plate negative a large amount of broken glass can be seen covering the room as well as the broken showcases, one of which contains the aforementioned damaged coffin lid of Setau, which is visible in the lower-left corner. Friedel-Bogucka additionally noted: 'Some damaged objects in the rooms. The most were in Egypt. The fewest objects were packed there, and that is where the shell hit; it flew through the window and exploded in the middle of the room'.¹⁹ According to Bernhard, after the destruction, objects continued to be evacuated from the exhibition rooms to the basement, which was stopped due to the need to move the most valuable items from the burning Royal Castle to the museum and resulted in leaving the objects of lesser value in the devastated rooms.²⁰

¹⁶ Bernhard 1947: 302.

¹⁷ Kaczmarzyk 1976: 616, no. 355a.

¹⁸ Bernhard 1947: 302.

¹⁹ Friedel-Bogucka 1965: 370.

²⁰ Bernhard 1947: 302.



3. The devastated first room of the Gallery of Ancient Art photographed by Henryk Śmigacz in September 1939 (Archive of the Institute of National Remembrance in Warsaw: IPN BU 4111/14, k. 5; the CC BY-NC-ND license does not apply to this illustration).

When the fighting stopped, objects were extracted from the rubble and temporarily moved to the three small, less damaged side rooms.²¹

START OF THE GERMAN ADMINISTRATION

After the defeat of the Polish Defensive War of 1939, the German occupation authorities allowed Lorentz to continue to serve in the National Museum in a reduced role, as its Polish manager. On 15 March 1940, the institution was renamed the Museum der Stadt Warschau,²² and in 1941 a German art historian named Alfred Schellenberg (1888–1957) was appointed as commissary director. The Gestapo arrived at the museum in the first days of October 1939 and systematic looting of the collections began, which was led by SS-Untersturmführer Theo (sometimes written Theodor) Deisel (1909–1992) and Josef

²¹ Only the heavy stone blocks from mastaba tombs excavated at Tell Edfu were reported by Bernhard to have been left in place (Bernhard 1947: 302).

²² ANMW: 654a, fol. 49/p. 1 (Report of the National Museum, 02.10.1939–31.03.1942).

Mühlmann (1886–1972)²³ – the stepbrother of Kajetan (sometimes written Cajetan and abbreviated to Kai) Mühlmann (1898–1958), who played a major role in the expropriation of art in occupied Poland. According to Michałowski, thirty crates containing the objects from the last excavation season at Tell Edfu had reached the National Museum as recently as August 1939 and – due to the lack of time – had not been unpacked and were thus confiscated to Germany shortly after the capture of Warsaw.²⁴ At the end of 1939, the Fayum mummy portrait (236767 MNW) disappeared.²⁵ Josef Mühlmann was informed about this, and it turned out that the object had privately been taken by Deisel and was later found in his hotel room.²⁶

An undated document, preserved in the Archive of the National Museum in Warsaw reveals that an unnamed Egyptologist was commissioned by German authorities to examine the antiquities collection in Warsaw: ‘Antike Sammlung: Ihr wertvollster Teil ist die ägyptische Sammlung. Die Franzosen hatten gemeinsam mit den Polen in Ägypten eine Ausgrabungskonzession. Die Werke halten jedoch mit den ägyptischen Werken in Berlin z.B. keinen Vergleich aus. Ein von Berlin geschickter Ägyptologe hat die Sammlung geprüft und der Museumsdirektion zugesichert, daß die Sammlung unangetastet in Warschau verbleiben kann. Die griechischen und römischen Arbeiten sind belanglos, gutes Anschauungsmaterial für Schulzwecke’.²⁷ According to the text presented above, the aforementioned Egyptologist assured the management of the National Museum that the collection would remain untouched in Warsaw. Even though the name of the Egyptologist was not mentioned, it is possible that it was, in fact, an Austrian scholar named Hans Demel von Elswehr (1886–1951) – head of the Egyptian collection at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. Along with other specialists, Demel visited Poland in late 1939 by order of the Reich Minister of Education, Bernhard Rust (1883–1945), where he had contact with the aforementioned Kajetan Mühlmann.²⁸ Demel’s experience and knowledge of ancient Egyptian art makes it likely that he was the one chosen to evaluate the Warsaw collection.²⁹

When discussing the state of the Collection of Ancient Art during the early months of the German occupation, it must be noted that, during the winter of 1939–1940, the wing containing the Gallery of Ancient Art and its storerooms was unheated and windowless.³⁰

²³ Lorentz 1965: 343.

²⁴ Michałowski 1983: 33. Alternatively, the catalogue of the ‘Warsaw Accuses’ exhibition states that the crates were taken to Germany in 1944 (Kaczmarzyk 1976: 617, witryna 3).

²⁵ Marconi 1967: 271.

²⁶ Marconi 1967: 271. The object seems to have been returned shortly after but stolen again after the fall of the Warsaw Uprising (1944) later being found in Fischhorn Castle in Austria and restituted to the National Museum in Warsaw in 1946.

²⁷ ANMW: 672a, fol. 244/p. 1 (The collection of the National Museum).

²⁸ Löscher 2019.

²⁹ On the other hand, it is worth mentioning that in 1950 and 1952 Bernhard was questioned as a witness during the Polish authorities’ case against Demel concerning his activities in occupied Poland. However, Bernhard was unable to confirm his presence at the National Museum during the war (Archive of the Institute of National Remembrance in Warsaw (AINRW): IPN GK 351/126, fols 35–36, 137–138).

³⁰ Bernhard 1947: 302.

This factor, coupled with the intensity of the winter months, led to additional losses from the collection, which was largely only provisionally secured and is said to have been covered with a thick layer of snow.³¹ It was only in July 1940 that the collection was moved from the basement to more appropriate rooms on the upper floors and the inspection and conservation work could begin.³²

DEPOSITS, ACQUISITIONS AND EXTERNAL COLLECTIONS

During wartime, the National Museum took care of various collections from other institutions that had been destroyed or evacuated from their original locations. Some objects were also acquired from various individuals, but it is difficult to state whether the overview presented below is complete.

On 15 September 1939, Leopold (1886–1944) and Janina (1889–1944?) Binental³³ deposited a small group of antiquities, which mainly included Graeco-Roman pottery, terracotta figurines, as well as several Egyptian objects, then later, in March 1940, the owners decided to donate the collection to the National Museum.³⁴ From May 1941, the National Museum was entrusted with managing the Wilanów Palace,³⁵ where a large group of Greek vases and a smaller collection of Egyptian antiquities was preserved. Tasked with the job of conservation and inventory, Bernhard was sent to Wilanów where, under her supervision, the vases were washed and cleaned of older overpainting. Meanwhile, the broken vases were sent to the National Museum to be glued together and brought back to Wilanów.³⁶ In addition to the well-preserved vases in the palace rooms, Bernhard also found a pile of pottery shards in the palace basement, from which she managed to reconstruct about a hundred vases.³⁷ At the end of November 1941, a small collection of antiquities from the Krasieński Library in Warsaw (destroyed in 1939) was transported to the National Museum.³⁸ The damaged and incomplete collection mainly consisted of Graeco-Roman pottery, along with Roman and Egyptian bronzes with various additional pieces.³⁹ On 1 December 1941, Schellenberg informed Lorentz that in the basement of the house of Princess Maria Ludwika Czartoryska (1883–1958) at 12 Kredytowa Street in Warsaw, there was a hidden part of the collection of the Gołuchów Museum that had

³¹ Bernhard 1947: 302.

³² ANMW: 654a, fol. 52/p. 4 (Report of the National Museum, 02.10.1939–31.03.1942).

³³ Leopold was murdered at Auschwitz concentration camp, while there is no information concerning Janina's fate.

³⁴ Archive of the Collection of Ancient Art at the National Museum in Warsaw (ACAANMW): file VI.1A. According to Bernhard, the collection also contained metal objects including a silver rhyton (Bernhard 1947: 303), but no metal objects appear in the preserved documents.

³⁵ ANMW: 654a, fol. 53/p. 5 (Report of the National Museum, 02.10.1939–31.03.1942).

³⁶ ANMW: 654b, p. 3 (Report of the National Museum – October 1941).

³⁷ Bernhard 1981: 17. The antiquities collection in Wilanów is also reported to have been used by a selected group of students during the secret teaching of Classical Archaeology supervised by Bernhard in spring and summer 1944 (Bernhard 1947: 305).

³⁸ ACAANMW: file V.6.

³⁹ ACAANMW: file V.6.

been evacuated from the latter location immediately before the war.⁴⁰ On 2 December, two basements were opened, where the majority of the Gołuchów collection was found to have been hidden, and Schellenberg ordered the objects to be transported to the National Museum, where employees were to make lists of them before their transport to Germany.⁴¹ Among this collection temporarily housed at the National Museum, items of particular importance were Greek vases, Roman glass, Greek terracotta objects and Egyptian bronzes. Most interestingly, the museum even purchased some objects in secret. In 1944, a red-figure lekythos from the end of the sixth century BC was reportedly bought with the help of social funds.⁴²

X-RAY EXAMINATION OF AN EGYPTIAN MUMMY

In 1896, a German physicist Walter König (1859–1936) published the first radiological investigation of an Egyptian human mummy from the collection of the Senckenberg Museum of Natural History in Frankfurt am Main.⁴³ The history of the radiological investigation of Egyptian human mummies preserved in Poland is much shorter, though longer than previously thought. Until recently, the discussions concerning the earliest radiological examinations of this kind in Poland typically mentioned Polish radiologist Olgierd Billewicz (1928–1996), who conducted such investigations of Egyptian mummies at the Archaeological Museum in Cracow, probably in 1977–1978.⁴⁴ However, the recent discovery of a previously unknown document, which was found by the author of this paper, suggests that the first (known to date) X-ray examination of an Egyptian human mummy in Poland took place much earlier, in 1941. This changes our knowledge of the history of mummy studies in Poland. The document is a report of the National Museum in February 1941 (*Bericht des Museums der Stadt Warschau für Februar 1941*), which was signed by Lorentz: 'Im Konservationsatelier für Plastik und Kunstgewerbe fand ungleichartige Arbeit, je nach Gegenstände, statt: [...] In Vorbereitung steht die Arbeit am II. Mumiensarg /Neues Reich/. Vorderhand wurde die Mumie herausgenommen und nach Metallschmucksachen mit Röntgenstrahlen, im Atelier für Malerei, abgesucht /nichts gefunden/. Zwecks weiteren Verfahrens hat man 2 photographische und 2 Röntgen-Aufnahmen verfertigt'.⁴⁵ According to the text presented above, it can be inferred that during some conservation work a mummy was taken out of its coffin and X-rayed in the Painting Conservation Workshop to check if it contained any metal jewellery. The report states that nothing was detected, but two

⁴⁰ ANMW: 696, fol. 1/p. 1 (Protocol of transporting the Gołuchów collection to the National Museum).

⁴¹ ANMW: 696, fol. 2/p. 2 (Protocol of transporting the Gołuchów collection to the National Museum).

⁴² The lekythos is reported to have been destroyed in August 1944 and its fragments exhibited during the 'Warsaw Accuses' exhibition in 1945 (Kaczmarzyk 1976: 617, no. 420). Unfortunately, it has not yet been possible to firmly identify it in the collection.

⁴³ König 1896: Pl. 4.

⁴⁴ Urbanik, Urbanik 2017: 70. The author owes thanks to Andrzej Urbanik for the information concerning the date of Billewicz's investigation of Egyptian mummies in Cracow.

⁴⁵ ANMW: 654b, p. 4 (Report of the National Museum, February 1941).

photographs were taken along with two X-ray images (radiographs). This enigmatic reference means that the employees of the National Museum in Warsaw were the first to carry out an X-ray examination of an Egyptian mummy in Poland. Unfortunately, the document does not mention the inventory number of the mummy or coffin; only that the latter was (at that time) dated to the New Kingdom. The aforementioned radiographs have not been preserved, but two glass plate negatives preserved by the National Museum seem to be related to the examination. The first of these two negatives (**Fig. 4**) depicts the mummy placed on a table, while the second (**Fig. 5**) shows the same mummy covered with a cartonnage case. The second negative is dated to 1941, and it can be assumed with little doubt that both were taken at approximately the same time, which suggests that they may be connected to the mummy examination undertaken in 1941. The mummy in question (236805/3 MNW) belongs to an anonymous woman and was brought back from Egypt in 1826 by Jan Wężyk-Rudzki (1792–1874), who donated it to the University of Warsaw as a part of the set that also included the cartonnage case (236805/2 MNW) and coffin (236805/1 MNW) with the inscription of the first century BC priest of Horus-Thoth named Hor-Djehuty.⁴⁶ The whole set survived the war and is exhibited at the National Museum in Warsaw. To further support the theory that the discussed mummy is, indeed, the one examined in 1941, it is necessary to mention that the National Museum housed at least three more or less complete human mummies during the war, which came from the collection of the University of Warsaw. Other than the mummy that Wężyk-Rudzki brought back, there was also a disturbed early Ptolemaic mummy of a priest named Amenhotep enclosed in a coffin (236804 MNW), which was brought back from Egypt by Count Aleksander Branicki (1821–1877) in 1864,⁴⁷ and the pseudo-mummy of a child (200334 MNW), which was likely made in the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries AD and was donated to the university by Count Jan Alojzy Potocki (1776–1854) in 1822.⁴⁸ The mummy brought back by Wężyk-Rudzki was, in fact, the best preserved specimen in the collection, while according to Michałowski, the coffin containing the mummified remains of Amenhotep was likely not opened during the war since, in 1948, employees of the museum were not aware of the presence of mummified remains in this coffin.⁴⁹ The pseudo-mummy did not have a coffin, which stands in contrast to the document cited earlier. Furthermore, the pre-war inventory card of the pseudo-mummy states that it had already been identified as a forgery,⁵⁰ so it is very unlikely that this is the mummy that was X-rayed. Even though no metal objects were reported to have been detected in 1941, the mummy brought back by Wężyk-Rudzki was examined again using much better techniques in the 1990s by a team headed by Andrzej Urbanik and later in 2015 by researchers from the Warsaw Mummy Project. It was during

⁴⁶ Dolińska 2003: 445–450, 457.

⁴⁷ Dolińska 2003: 450–452, 456–457. The remains of Amenhotep's mummy and the objects extracted from it are currently registered under different reference numbers.

⁴⁸ Dolińska 2003: 445, 457–458. For additional information concerning the mummies from the collection of the University of Warsaw, see: Ejsmond, Ożarek-Szilke 2022: 7–37.

⁴⁹ Michałowski 1948: 661–664.

⁵⁰ ACAANMW: pre-war inventory card 17333 MN.



4. Mummy of an anonymous woman (deposit of the University of Warsaw Museum in the National Museum in Warsaw: 236805/3 MNW) in 1941 (National Museum in Warsaw: DDWneg.4793).



5. Mummy of an anonymous woman covered with a cartonnage case (deposits of the University of Warsaw Museum in the National Museum in Warsaw: 236805/3 MNW and 236805/2 MNW) in 1941 (National Museum in Warsaw: DDWneg.4801).

the latter examination that the mummy was identified as belonging to a female whose body was adorned with various amulets that were revealed during the study.⁵¹ It seems that Lorentz may have deliberately concealed the real results of X-ray examination from the German authorities in his report to protect the mummy from being taken to Germany.

It is also worth noting some of the details concerning the context of the equipment used during the mummy examination in 1941. It is known that the National Museum bought an X-ray machine in 1937, which was, in fact, the first device of its kind in Poland specifically intended for examining paintings.⁵² The museum conservator Bohdan Marconi (1894–1975) was responsible for X-ray equipment before and after the war,⁵³ which suggests that he was likely the one who examined the mummy in 1941. According to Lorentz, on 25 August 1944, the equipment in the Painting Conservation Workshop, which included the X-ray machine, was destroyed and looted by German soldiers.⁵⁴

DESTRUCTION AND LOOTING DURING AND AFTER THE WARSAW UPRISING

On 1 August 1944, the Warsaw Uprising began. Bernhard was not present at the museum at the time as she was actively taking part in the uprising, but Lorentz did stay behind, along with several of his employees. On 3 August, the museum was garrisoned by German soldiers and rampant looting of the collections began.⁵⁵ According to Lorentz's diary, on 14 August, the 'Egyptian room' remained unchanged.⁵⁶ On 22 August, German soldiers took numerous objects from the room; some were destroyed – including a broken red-figure vase and a few small objects, which were then collected and put in cabinets by Lorentz and his employees.⁵⁷ On the same day, the crate with the rhyton was found opened, and the rhyton itself was damaged.⁵⁸ On 24 August, German soldiers took a number of small Egyptian, Greek and Roman objects, while, two Egyptian coffins were found displaced and broken, and – around a looted cabinet – Lorentz found broken vases, including a large one with red-figure decoration, and several other smaller ones.⁵⁹ On 5 September, Lorentz reported that many of the small Egyptian objects excavated at Tell Edfu in 1939 had been taken from one of the cabinets, while some small modern bronze copies of ancient sculptures were also reported to be missing.⁶⁰ On 7 September, Lorentz noted that since

⁵¹ Ejsmond *et al.* 2021. For additional information and discussion concerning this mummy, see, for example: Saleem 2022; Ejsmond *et al.* 2022; Braulińska *et al.* 2022; 2025.

⁵² Marconi 1949: 25.

⁵³ Marconi 1949: 25–30.

⁵⁴ Lorentz 1970: 62.

⁵⁵ Lorentz 1970: 51–53.

⁵⁶ Lorentz 1970: 54.

⁵⁷ Lorentz 1970: 58.

⁵⁸ Lorentz 1970: 58. This object can be identified as a red-figure rhyton in the shape of a ram's head from the former collection in Gołuchów. For its description and photograph, see: Mizera 2000: 238–239, cat. 855, Pl. 85.

⁵⁹ Lorentz 1963: 75.

⁶⁰ Lorentz 1970: 67.

the nearby Saint Lazarus' Hospital had been blown up by the Germans, the huge explosions had also caused significant losses of antiquities.⁶¹ On 8 September, Lorentz was sorting out the antiquities that had been damaged on the previous day and, while inspecting the building, found that multiple objects had been thrown out onto the main staircase from two small rooms located next to the room with the Collection of Ancient Art.⁶² Among these items were some terracotta lamps that Lorentz later moved to the cabinets.⁶³ On 9 September, Lorentz continued picking up additional ancient objects that had been thrown onto the main staircase.⁶⁴ He noted that he had extracted, among other things, more ancient lamps, a dozen or so Coptic textiles and numerous fragments of artefacts from the third expedition to Tell Edfu, all of which were found in piles mixed with waste, scraps of soldiers' clothing and faeces, etc.⁶⁵ On 14 September, Lorentz found that the collection of antiquities had been plundered again.⁶⁶ On 23 September, a man named Second Lieutenant Meyer came to inspect the museum, as well as inform Lorentz that Dr Keupe(?) had authorised him to choose the objects he liked, and additionally informed Lorentz that the military could choose museum objects.⁶⁷ That same day, Meyer chose a decorative Roman terracotta lamp and a small painted ancient vase, while his accompanying soldiers took various small unidentified [ancient?] objects in three cardboard boxes.⁶⁸ On 24 September, Lorentz noted that two cabinets containing antiquities had also been plundered.⁶⁹

On 2 October 1944, the capitulation agreement was signed by the remaining Polish forces in Warsaw, and shortly thereafter, SS-Obersturmführer Moritz Arnhardt (1911–2002) started taking crates containing objects from the National Museum. On 7 October, Lorentz noted: 'At 8 a.m. SS Arnhardt [sic] arrived with ten SS soldiers and started selecting items intended for export. [...] The items packed in crates were inspected by throwing all the items out of the crates onto the ground, and soldiers then walked over the items not selected for export, crushing most of them, of course. If the object broke while being removed, it was thrown into the corner of the room. In this way, a number of vases and ancient pottery [...] were broken and destroyed'.⁷⁰ On 9 October, Arnhardt continued his work and on that day took a number of crates, some of which contained ancient objects, including the collection from Gołuchów (G XII – ancient terracottas, chest – ancient terracottas, G XXIV – minor ancient art, G XX – [ancient?] bronzes, G XXI – [ancient?] bronzes, black chest with [ancient?] bronzes, G XIX – rhyton, ivory, varia) along with one crate containing objects selected from the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw marked 'Aegypten' [sic].⁷¹

⁶¹ Lorentz 1970: 68.

⁶² Lorentz 1970: 68.

⁶³ Lorentz 1970: 68–69.

⁶⁴ Lorentz 1970: 69.

⁶⁵ Lorentz 1970: 69.

⁶⁶ Lorentz 1970: 73.

⁶⁷ Lorentz 1970: 76.

⁶⁸ Lorentz 1970: 76.

⁶⁹ Lorentz 1970: 76–77.

⁷⁰ Lorentz 1970: 81.

⁷¹ Lorentz 1970: 82.

Additional information concerning the part of the collection left by Arnhard and its robbery after the Warsaw Uprising derives from the accounts of Bernhard, which likely concern the period of the so-called Pruszków Action⁷² initiated by Lorentz, which aimed to save the remnants of Polish cultural heritage located in Warsaw: 'During this period [...] everything that was still in more or less good condition was being packed. It is hard to speak of selection, because the collection was so scattered that it was impossible to find the objects, as almost no artefact was in its previously designated place. At that time, almost all the remaining relics, with the exception of Egyptian pottery, of which only samples were sent, were packed and evacuated, due to the threat of the National Museum in Warsaw being blown up'.⁷³ Speaking about the robbery, Bernhard noted: 'During the evacuation of the collection after the uprising, a certain Dr Roedig [sic], head of the civil Räumungs-Stab [sic], was coming to the Museum, and together with his friend, as great lovers of antiquity, chose souvenirs for themselves; in this way, a wooden Egyptian mask from the sarcophagus [coffin], several Roman glass objects, fragments of textiles and various small objects and amulets were stolen'.⁷⁴ Roedig⁷⁵ can, in fact, be identified as Hans-Georg Rodig (1906–1989), who was at that time the director of the Räumungsstab, which was responsible for the robbery of property from Warsaw after the fall of the Warsaw Uprising. Furthermore, on 7 April 1952, during the second hearing in the case against the aforementioned Demel, Bernhard testified: 'In October or November 1944, on the grounds of the National Museum, I saw a uniformed German, who was selecting a number of objects from the Collection of Ancient Art to supplement his own collections, as he clearly told me in conversation at the time. However, I do not know the name of this German and I do not think I would be able to recognise him from a photograph if I were shown one. This German took a fragment of the cartonnage of an Egyptian mummy and a few small objects, but what kind – I am not able to say. I do not know the market value of these objects, but it is a great scientific loss for us [...]. The objects taken by this German have not returned to Poland to this day'.⁷⁶

On 17 January 1945, German troops evacuated from Warsaw. The following day, a man named Włoczewski went to the museum and asked several looters to leave, and guarded the rooms for some time.⁷⁷ Research has recently brought to light a unique photograph that, despite being published twice by Bernhard,⁷⁸ had escaped the attention of scholars interested in the history of the Warsaw collection. The photograph (**Fig. 6**) depicts a plundered

⁷² For additional information concerning the 'Pruszków Action', see Majewski 2004: 201–235.

⁷³ Bernhard 1947: 304–305.

⁷⁴ Bernhard 1947: 304.

⁷⁵ According to the Lorentz's diary, the same individual, referred to as 'Dr Rudig' [sic], inspected the museum on 12 September 1944 and said to Lorentz that he was interested in numismatics and took a silver coin from the numismatic collection (Lorentz 1970: 71).

⁷⁶ AINRW: IPN GK 351/126, fol. 138. It should be noted that the 'uniformed German' may be the aforesaid unnamed friend of Rodig, but it remains uncertain due to the lack of more precise information.

⁷⁷ Collection of Photography and Iconography of the National Museum in Warsaw: rkps 2146 MNW, p. 7 (Chronicle of the National Museum, 18.01.1945–10.04.1946).

⁷⁸ Bernhard 1947: 304, Fig. 2; 1949: 189.



6. Plundered storeroom of the Collection of Ancient Art in January 1945. The upper arrow points to a wooden coffin from Deir el-Medina and lower arrow to the pseudo-mummy of a child (Bernhard 1949: 189).

storeroom of the Collection of Ancient Art in January 1945. Though published in a poor quality,⁷⁹ the photograph reveals some interesting information as we can firmly identify two Egyptian objects deriving from the deposit of the University of Warsaw. The first one is visible in the background and can be identified as a wooden Roman period coffin in the form of a vaulted cover (with corner posts) resting on a rectangular base board, which was discovered during the French excavations at Deir el-Medina (138984 MNW). The second object is lying on the floor and can be identified as the aforementioned pseudo-mummy of a child donated by Potocki (**Fig. 7**). In the case of the latter object, it is interesting to note the existence of an additional layer of bandages covering the lower portion of the mummy. Thanks to the discovery of a previously unknown photograph taken just before the opening of the aforementioned temporary exhibition of 'Egyptian Excavations' in 1937,⁸⁰ it is possible to state that this mummy had almost entirely been wrapped with an additional layer of narrow bandages prior to the war, which are no longer preserved.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Unfortunately, the original of this photograph was not found as yet.

⁸⁰ For this photograph, see: J.D. 1937: 8.

⁸¹ The bandages may have been removed during post-war conservation work. It is possible that they are the bandages registered under the reference Vr.St.92 MNW. Furthermore, it cannot be excluded that the now missing layer of bandages once held together the fragments of mummy cartonnage, which could have been attached to the surface of the pseudo-mummy, as with similar attested examples. See, for example, a pseudo-mummy at the World Museum in Liverpool (*World Museum*: acc. no. M11098).



7. Pseudo-mummy of a child (deposit of the University of Warsaw Museum in the National Museum in Warsaw: 200334 MNW) – current state (reproduced with the permission of the University of Warsaw Museum).

THE ‘WARSAW ACCUSES’ EXHIBITION AND THE DESECRATED MUMMIES, COFFINS AND CARTONNAGES

Shortly after the end of the German occupation, on 3 May 1945 the National Museum in Warsaw inaugurated an exhibition entitled ‘Warsaw Accuses’, which presented the wartime destruction of Polish culture and science (**Fig. 8**). In a brief description of the antiquities presented during the exhibition, Michałowski mentioned their state after German soldiers had left: ‘Broken vessels from the Old Kingdom that had survived for almost 5,000 years, very valuable Roman glass destroyed, broken stone sculptures and reliefs from Egypt, Greece and Rome, desecrated by soldiers’ boots, trampled and crushed cartonnages with mummies. Also, the remains of looted and broken necklaces and alabaster vessels from this period. [...] However, when it comes to the Collection of Ancient Art, the destruction wrought in its rooms was more barbaric than anything done by the robber soldier’s hand in the other galleries of the museum. Not only were works of art being destroyed here, but even the corpses of ancient Egyptians were abused. In this exhibition, [...] the prominent place in the centre of the room was occupied by crushed anthropoid coffins and trampled cartonnages of mummies. Limbs with tattered bandages were sticking out of them!’.⁸² The exhibition was also widely commented on in the Polish press of the time, which also briefly mentioned the destruction of the Egyptian artefacts such as: ‘Finally, the brutal hands of Hitler’s follower even reached for an Egyptian mummy that had survived four thousand years’.⁸³ Unfortunately, the details of the mummies destroyed by German soldiers were never provided. In the description of the war losses from the collection, Bernhard mentions the barbaric destruction of two mummies by the German soldiers, which she mentioned in a section dedicated to objects dated to the Ptolemaic and Roman periods.⁸⁴ Additionally, Michałowski stated that one of the mummies had been thrown out of its coffin

⁸² Michałowski 1976: 592.

⁸³ Petrow 1976: 657.

⁸⁴ Bernhard 1947: 306.



8. Egyptian antiquities presented during the 'Warsaw Accuses' exhibition in 1945 (National Museum in Warsaw: DI 133660/1).

and its bandages torn apart in search of jewels.⁸⁵ Several months after the aforementioned photograph showing the pseudo-mummy lying on the floor in a storeroom was taken, the same object was exhibited at the 'Warsaw Accuses' exhibition, when, for reasons which remain unknown, it was placed in an unrelated Eighteenth Dynasty wooden coffin from Deir el-Medina inscribed for a boy named Userhat (138980 MNW). Nevertheless, the pseudo-mummy was not destroyed, but probably only slightly damaged. Therefore, it should not be grouped together with the other two mummies that were destroyed by German soldiers.

The first destroyed mummy can safely be identified as the pile of mummified remains presented during the 'Warsaw Accuses' exhibition (**Fig. 9**). These remains were placed at the foot end of Userhat's coffin, which housed the pseudo-mummy during the exhibition. They were described for the exhibition in the following way: 'Here lie the remains of the mummy of a child, which the Germans tore the bandages off in search of jewels'. In the preserved photograph the remains of the alleged child mummy were generally represented by the pile of bones, hair, bandages, fragments of plaster, along with three mummified hands and one foot. However, it should be noted that the mummified hands and foot entered the collection of the National Museum before the war as a part of various donations,⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Michałowski 1948: 663.

⁸⁶ The fragments of mummies featured in the photograph (**Fig. 9**) can be identified as the following: right hand (Vr.St.100 MNW), left hand (Vr.St.106 MNW), right hand (Vr.St.107 MNW) and right foot (Vr.St.254 MNW).



9. Mummified remains presented during the 'Warsaw Accuses' exhibition in 1945 (National Museum in Warsaw: DI 133662).

which suggests that this is a group of mixed human remains. It is unknown whether it was intentional to add the mummified fragments to enhance the visitor's impression of this desecrated and destroyed mummy, or if the remains were stored in one crate during the war and thus may have been chaotically mixed during the looting of the collection. Nevertheless, the provenance of the skeletal remains visible in the photograph – likely identified as some of the bones registered under reference KMS 743 MNW – remains unknown. There are, in fact, two possible options concerning its provenance, discussed below.

An unpublished list of objects from the collection of Mieczysław Geniusz (1853–1920), donated to the National Museum in 1926, mentions a 'mummified human head' as well as 'fragments of mummified heads of ruminant animals' and 'two small mummies (probably animals or birds)'.⁸⁷ The head has not yet been identified, and it cannot be ruled out that it may relate to the remains of a human skull preserved among the skeletal remains registered under reference KMS 743 MNW, which also contain some animal bones, which may relate to those mentioned in Geniusz's collection list. As with the mummified head, they do not appear in the main museum register.

There is also a second theory as to the provenance of the skeletal remains presented during the 'Warsaw Accuses' exhibition. Despite the general belief that the coffins from

⁸⁷ ANMW: 320/44, fol. 170 (List of objects from the collection of Mieczysław Geniusz).

Deir el-Medina donated by the Ifao came to Warsaw empty,⁸⁸ it is not outside the realm of possibility that one of the coffins did, in fact, contain a mummy, as the original register of objects from Deir el-Medina was reported by Bernhard to have been lost.⁸⁹ The aforementioned coffin of Userhat once contained mummified remains belonging to a boy, who had twenty-four teeth and a lock of brown hair on his forehead, while his body was wrapped in a shroud tied up with four bands and measuring one metre in length.⁹⁰ According to the excavation report, the mummy had no jewellery,⁹¹ which suggests it had at least been partially unwrapped in Egypt. Furthermore, Userhat's coffin was likely reused as it was too short for the corpse it contained.⁹² Moreover, according to the aforementioned statement of Michałowski, one of the destroyed mummies had been thrown out of its coffin, which may correspond to the coffin of Userhat. Additionally, the presence of a considerable amount of human hair among the mummified remains presented during the 'Warsaw Accuses' exhibition may correspond to the lock of hair from the mummy found in Userhat's coffin. What is more, the catalogue of the temporary exhibition of 'Egyptian Excavations' mentions child mummies dated to the Graeco-Roman period,⁹³ likely the same child mummies stored in a crate which the employees of the museum are reported to have slept on in September 1939 (see above). This crate must have contained the aforementioned pseudo-mummy of a child, while the second mummy could possibly be identified as the one found in the coffin of Userhat, since its Graeco-Roman attribution mentioned in Michałowski's catalogue could correspond to the fact that the coffin of Userhat was reused. This identification is also supported by the aforementioned fact that Bernhard mentioned two destroyed mummies in a section dedicated to objects dated to the Ptolemaic and Roman periods.

The second destroyed mummy is also problematic, but it can potentially be identified as a Twenty-second Dynasty cartonnage of a woman named Nehemes-Bastet (238435 MNW), which was severely damaged during the war (**Fig. 10**). The object in question was discovered by Count Michał Tyszkiewicz (1828–1897) during his amateur excavations in the Theban necropolis in 1861.⁹⁴ The cartonnage does not appear in the preserved photographs of the 'Warsaw Accuses' exhibition, though it is likely one of the trampled cartonnages mentioned by Michałowski, as its damage seems to have been caused intentionally, resulting in an almost complete deformation of the cartonnage. Its possible connection to one of the two destroyed mummies could be explained by the fact that, historically, cartonnages and coffins were often wrongly described as mummies. This may be supported by its pre-war inventory card that described this object as a 'Portrait case of an Egyptian mummy.

⁸⁸ Dolińska 2003: 460–461.

⁸⁹ ANMW: 859, fol. 151 (Report of the Collection of Ancient Art, May 1948). While the documents concerning the gift of the Ifao, which were kept in Warsaw before the war are considered gone, analogical documents possibly preserved by the Ifao in Cairo are not known as yet.

⁹⁰ Bruyère 1937b: 189–190, Fig. 106.

⁹¹ Bruyère 1937b: 190.

⁹² Bruyère 1937b: 189–190.

⁹³ Michałowski 1937: 42.

⁹⁴ Dolińska 2006: 26–41.



10. Cartonnage of Nehemes-Bastet (238435 MNW) before and after its destruction during the war (National Museum in Warsaw: photographic numbers unknown).

Very late period, probably Roman'.⁹⁵ The incorrect dating of the object fits into Bernhard's aforementioned statement that the two destroyed mummies were dated to the Ptolemaic and Roman periods, but the cartonnage, in fact, dates to the Twenty-second Dynasty.

It is also worth noting that in the cases of the mummified remains and the cartonnage of Nehemes-Bastet, discussed above, it is uncertain when exactly they were damaged. Not counting the fact that on 24 August 1944 two Egyptian coffins were found displaced and broken, Lorentz did not mention the destruction of any mummy-like object, which may suggest that they were damaged after the fall of the Warsaw Uprising. On the other hand,

⁹⁵ ACAANMW: pre-war inventory card 21885 MN.

it is worth noting that there are several fragments of mummies along with a considerable amount of mummy bandages in the collection of the National Museum whose provenance remains unknown. Therefore, it is possible that an additional mummy was also reduced to fragments during the war.

AFTERMATH

The wartime losses of antiquities listed by Bernhard were severe.⁹⁶ One unpublished document states that of 6,000 ancient objects present in 1938, only 1,000 were still present in 1945,⁹⁷ which allows us to calculate that *c.* 83% of the collection was considered lost at that time. It should be noted, however, that this estimate is likely very inaccurate. The serious problem with identifying and estimating wartime losses is that, contrary to Michałowski's statement, in which Bernhard allegedly saved the pre-war inventory books,⁹⁸ Bernhard herself stated that the inventory book of objects from Tell Edfu and Deir el-Medina was lost during the war.⁹⁹ Furthermore, most of the objects were not photographed before the war, not to mention the fact that the collection was also constantly moved around the museum during the war, which contributed to the mixture of various groups of objects. Nevertheless, in the early post-war years, it was possible to retrieve a considerable part of the stolen collection. Unfortunately, many objects were never recovered,¹⁰⁰ and some returned in a bad state of preservation. Michałowski also mentioned that Bernhard is known to have hidden numerous objects from the Germans.¹⁰¹ This is likely the case of the Eighteenth Dynasty papyrus containing the Book of the Dead of Bakai (237128 MNW) brought from Egypt by Tyszkiewicz, which survived the war and was reportedly hidden in the museum.¹⁰² Similarly, the aforementioned cartonnage containing the mummy of an anonymous woman brought by Wężyk-Rudzki was probably also hidden since its gilded face would have likely been destroyed by German soldiers who sought gold objects during the Warsaw Uprising.

CONCLUSIONS

The Second World War not only caused widespread destruction in the Collection of Ancient Art at the National Museum in Warsaw, but also resulted in the death of Michalska – the pre-war employee of the same section – who lost her life on 2 September 1944 while serving as a nurse during the Warsaw Uprising. In addition, the employees of the National

⁹⁶ Bernhard 1947: 305–309; 1948: 150–158.

⁹⁷ ANMW: 1070d, fol. 48 (untitled document concerning the war losses of the National Museum).

⁹⁸ Michałowski 1957: 120.

⁹⁹ ANMW: 859, fol. 151 (Report of the Collection of Ancient Art, May 1948).

¹⁰⁰ In 2000, Grażyna Mizera published a catalogue of ancient objects lost from the Polish collections during the Second World War (Mizera 2000), but it must be noted that her catalogue is by no means complete and contains numerous errors and wrong descriptions, which demonstrates the need for a new one.

¹⁰¹ Michałowski 1957: 120.

¹⁰² Andrzejewski 1951: 15.

Museum faced repressions related to their participation in the resistance movement, including Bernhard, who was arrested by the Gestapo in June 1940 and was released from the Pawiak prison as a French citizen only after the National Museum in Warsaw intervened.¹⁰³ The war also interrupted regular Polish archaeological activity in Egypt for almost two decades. After the third season of the Polish-French excavations at Tell Edfu in 1939, Polish archaeologists were only able to return to Egypt in 1957, starting work at the Delta site of Tell Atrib. Thanks to the combined efforts of Bernhard, Michałowski, Lorentz and other employees of the National Museum, on 30 May 1949, the Gallery of Ancient Art was reopened to visitors. This was largely possible thanks to the earlier steadfast attitude of the Polish museologists throughout the entire war, who are mentioned in this article and who often risked their lives to protect the collection and document it before parts were confiscated, which they often tried to delay as much as possible. It is hoped that further studies concerning the collection and its wartime losses will enable us not only to identify and return more artefacts that were lost during the war, but also to rediscover the lost provenance of various objects, due to the considerable loss of pre-war documentation.

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¹⁰³ Śliwa 1998: 118.

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