

Beate Störtkuhl (Oldenburg)

Between Exchange and Rivalry – *Kunstschutz* Professionals on the Polish Territories during World War I

By the end of August 1915, the German and Austro-Hungarian troops had definitively driven the Russian army from Congress Poland and divided the territory between themselves. In the North, a region consisting of Courland/Kurland, Lithuania, parts of North-Eastern Poland and Belarus was created under German military administration: the so-called *Ober Ost*. In the South, the Lublin General Government came under Austrian military command. The heartland, including the Polish capital city, became the 'Warsaw General Government' with a civil administration under the auspices of Germany.

In light of the heavy destruction, experts organised a program of preservation for historical monuments and art in the occupied areas in the East; following the so called *Kunstschutz* measures already taken up on the western front in autumn 1914. Contemporary testimonies indicate that there were positive interactions between Polish and German, as well as Austrian, professionals involved in the research campaigns and protection activities. I want to focus on these interactions in the context of an 'entangled history'; and ask about the intrinsic, professional and personal networking which took place between the occupiers and the occupied.

A considerable number of Polish intellectuals, art historians and architects had previously studied in Germany and acted as go-betweens. The photographic archives and catalogues of monuments and sites, compiled by Polish non-government organizations, served as groundwork for the German authorities who were concerned with preservation and reconstruction in the Warsaw General Government and in Ober Ost; while German architects and art historians became fascinated by the historical landscapes of Poland. Conditions were substantially different in Galicia where the Polish art historian, Tadeusz Szydlowski, was appointed to the newly established office of State Curator for Western Galicia in Kraków, in January 1914. The archival files show Szydlowski's full integration into the Habsburg Monarchy's administration system. When Poland became independent after the war, Szydlowski continued his career at the same level in the Polish monument services,

where he now incriminated his former employer, as well as German and Russian troops, for the destruction of his homeland during the war.

In the meantime, a nationalistic approach to the materials gathered in the documentation and preservation campaigns of World War I could also be noted on the side of the occupiers: Whereas first descriptions of the “terra incognita” in 1915, for example by Paul Clemen, show sincere admiration for the cities of Warsaw or Vilnius; the same author, four years later, stated just ‘imitations and variations of the styles created in the neighbouring German countries’ – a remark that leads straight on to the German *Ostforschung* discourse of the following decades.

Rivalry and confrontation between specialists, equally on both sides, seem to have increased towards the end of the war, with the result that political expectations and promises turned out to be in vain. However, the factual interaction between the experts of the occupiers and the occupied, the quality of their personal relationships and networks, and the changes they underwent during the wartime years must be verified by intensive archival research – this will be my focus in our project.