



Stefan Artymowski

Plan zagłady Warszawy

[A Plan for the Annihilation of Warsaw]

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The photo-book under review is an edition of exceptional iconographic material – two box files of photographs, maps, tables and architectural patterns that constituted an annex to the mysterious German *Bericht über Warschau* (*Report on Warsaw*). They document the destruction wrought by the German air forces in Warsaw in September 1939. This rather rich material, conscientiously edited by Dr. Stefan Artymowski (then employee of the National Digital Archives, presently working at the Józef Piłsudski Museum in Sulejówek), was discovered in quite unusual circumstances – on an internet auction in Germany. Purchased by the Foundation for the Remembrance of the Heroes of the Warsaw Uprising, the materials – though devoid of their proper context in the form of the above-mentioned *Report on Warsaw* – offer an invaluable insight into the German inventorying of the architectural destruction of the city at the onset of the Second World War. In this way, they supplement our knowledge about the first significant act of destruction of the Polish capital committed by the German invaders, which is far less prevalent in the public mind in Poland than the complete annihilation of Warsaw five years later. It is worth adding here that it was not by coincidence that the book was published in 2019, as it constituted a part of the effort to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the September defense of the capital.

The photo-book, published beautifully in a format proper for its contents – with large reproductions of photographs and other illustrations from the *Report* – is divided into seven parts. It begins with a short foreword (*Słowo wstępne*) by Rafał Szczepański, President of the Foundation for the Remembrance of the Heroes of the Warsaw Uprising, followed by a slightly longer essay by the author (*Od Autora*), which presents to the readers the purpose and scope of the publication. Artymowski admits that the origins of the published material have not yet been accurately determined, but at the same time he does not shrink from sharing bold hypotheses. The author believes that the Germans could have used the

materials not only for the purposes of inventorying the destruction (with the aim of, for example, protecting their cities from Allied bombings), but also in order to prepare for the annihilation of the Polish capital well before September 1939 (obviously with the exception of photographs depicting the already demolished buildings). Thus Artymowski suggests that the work on the *Report* could have commenced before the war. He takes it for granted that the results of the air raids, captured in the presented photographs, followed from an earlier plan, and that the surviving inventories simply document its execution. At the same time, the author establishes a hypothetical link between not only the *Report* itself, but also those possible earlier plans of purposeful destruction of particular objects with the subsequent German urban plans for Warsaw (the so-called Pabst Plan of 1940 and 1942), and even with the systematic destruction of the city following the Warsaw Uprising of 1944. This is a very bold thesis, but also rather unconvincing. Artymowski gives us no other proof than the fragmentary source material without any unequivocal declarations that could support his argument.

In the editor's note (*Nota edytorska*), the author cites the instruction for the edition of sources, which was elaborated by the Institute of National Remembrance, as the "starting point" for his book. He also explains the materials' pagination, which would make little sense without his clarification. Moreover, he mentions the one handwritten page (the rest is a typescript) that he was unable to decipher, admitting that there was no time for a consultation with a linguistic expert. The obvious inference is that the publication was prepared in haste. However, the book contains a photocopy of the handwritten note.

The first of the two proper chapters, *Plan zniszczenia Warszawy* (*A Plan for the Destruction of Warsaw*), bears a telling title, as it espouses Artymowski's original thesis without substantiating it. Apart from a general and very fitting description of the state of Warsaw on the eve of the September destruction, supplemented with information about the city's defense, Artymowski presents his findings with regard to the origins of the files in question. Although he begins with a rhetorical question whether the German destruction of civilian objects in Warsaw was "pure coincidence" or "a planned operation," it is used only to emphasize the immense significance of the discovered materials, which in turn allegedly point to the latter alternative. Indeed, it would be difficult to agree with the author that the mere fact of preparing the *Report on Warsaw* – penned by the National Air-Raid Protection League (Reichsluftschutzbund) in cooperation with the National Office for Educational Films (Reichsstelle für den Unterrichtsfilm) – proves that the German troops carried out a planned and systemic destruction of the city. It only confirms that the Germans were analyzing the very effects of the September raids. I do not claim that the Germans dropped their bombs haphazardly, without previously determining precise targets. The trouble is that the presented material does

not at all concern the planning phase, and thus cannot be used as a source for researching “the annihilation of Warsaw” suggested by the title of the publication. This is not to say that the author is wrong in assuming that such a plan did actually exist, but that he cannot use the materials in question to prove his claim or to determine the intended goals of such a project. It is also worth mentioning that the “Reichsanstalt d. Lw. f. Ls.,” which is cited on the spine of the box files and for which the *Report* was prepared, is incorrectly identified in this chapter. This abbreviation stands for Reichsanstalt der Luftwaffe für Luftschutz and has nothing to do with Reichsstelle für den Unterrichtsfilm. There is no justification in the sources then for the participation of the office for educational films (and hence of the Reich Ministry of Science, Education and Culture) in these activities.

The second and, at the same time, longest chapter of the book under review is titled *Materiały* (*Materials*) and comprises reproductions of illustrative material from the box files supplemented with comprehensive descriptions penned by Artymowski. The list of objects is impressive both as regards their number and the variety of their functions. It includes among others seats of the authorities, theaters, churches, museums, waterfronts and ports, train stations, department stores, as well as residential, industrial and sanitary buildings. The readers can familiarize themselves with such iconographic gems as the photograph of a completely burned-out seat of the German embassy in a 19th-century palace of Klara Dillenius at Piękna Street. Significantly, the Germans were interested not only in photographic documentation, but also in data concerning roof construction, Polish building and fire regulations and the functioning of emergency services in Warsaw. They also gathered information on population density in various districts (and the percentage of Jewish residents) as well as maps showing destruction of the city. Artymowski concludes that such technical data could be used by the German air defense for comparison with their own system of protection. This thesis is admittedly much more compelling than the previous one.

The book features a short summary, in which the author expresses his emotional attitude toward the analyzed material, pondering rhetorically what was worse: the sheer scale of damage or its cold appraisal by the invaders. He openly admits that one of the main reasons behind the publication is to remind the readers about the September destruction of Warsaw and its defenders, even though the book concerns chiefly the destroyers themselves. The book closes with a calendar of significant events in the battle for Warsaw, including most importantly the dates of the major bombing attacks, which helps the readers better understand the progress of the work (though not necessarily the plan) of destruction.

In summary, the book edited by Stefan Artymowski contributes to our present knowledge about the destruction of Warsaw during the September Campaign by presenting a comprehensive and previously

unknown source material produced by the Germans, with a particular emphasis on photographic documentation. This publication will certainly feature in bibliographies of future monographs on the subject. At the same time, however, it is questionable whether the title fits the contents and whether the author's supposition as to the origins of the edited material can be considered well-based. The key to the riddle of the *Report on Warsaw* is of course its actual content, which remains unknown. Only when someone discovers and publishes the *Report* will the photographs, maps and tables presented by Artymowski acquire proper meaning and become open to proper interpretation with regard to the purpose behind their collection.

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