

Muz., 2020(61): 219-223
Annual, eISSN 2391-4815

received – 08.2020
accepted – 08.2020
DOI: 10.5604/01.3001.0014.3817

SAFE MUSEUMS, SAFE COLLECTIONS. A SELECTION OF ARTICLES BY PIOTR OGRODZKI, NIMOZ LIBRARY, VOL. 13, WARSZAWA 2020

Father Piotr Paweł Maniurka
Diocesan Museum in Opole

*Safe Museums, Safe Collections. A Selection of Articles by Piotr Ogrodzki*¹ is a publication discussing problems of contemporary crimes against heritage objects. The book presents the topic in a clear and understandable way. The published essays written over the span of 20 years were systematically published in the “Cenne, Bezcenne/Utracone” [‘Valuable, Priceless/Lost’] journal, the only periodical dedicated to the recovery and restitution of the lost national heritage. Interestingly, the contents presented in the selection continue of relevance. The 18 papers characterize chosen threats to museums and collections: crimes, thefts in museums, thefts from sacral facilities, as well as extraordinary threats: floods, extreme meteorological phenomena, and technological failures. All the presented texts oscillate within the semantic concepts related to crime and theft in museums and sacral facilities, as well as extraordinary threats. Enriched with Piotr Ogrodzki’s short biography and bibliography, the book begins with the papers by Piotr Majewski, Paulina Florjanowicz, Kamil Zeidler, and Jacek Rulewicz. It concludes with the message of Chief Inspector Adam Grajewski of the Polish Police Headquarters under a meaningful title: *In Lieu of an Afterword. Museum Collection Safety*.

The first of the papers *Burglary at the Adam Mickiewicz Museum in Śmiełów... and return of the Śmiełów paintings*

describes the disappearance of 17th- and 18th-century Netherlandish and German paintings from the Śmiełów Museum,¹ a division of the National Museum in Poznań. Such problems were close to the late Piotr Ogrodzki’s heart. The paper is divided into two parts, the first dedicated to recreating the events at the night on which the Museum was robbed. Ogrodzki points to the lack of any security devices within the Museum as well as to the failure to comply with security procedures. The second part of the article discusses in detail the process of restituting the works and the legal difficulties involved. The paper is summed up with the information on recovering five paintings from antiquarian shops in Germany, the Netherlands, or Austria, with three more remaining lost.

The second article speaks of the theft of historic objects from a museum in Pszczyna.² In the introduction, the Author describes the important issue of securing the precious items deposited in the Castle, providing the description of its alarm system. It was precisely lack of an effective system that had led to the loss of five porcelain figurines by J.J. Kändler, a Saxon sculptor and designer of figurines and tableware sets for the Meissen Manufactory. Additionally, the copy of the *Weimer Bible* was robbed. The described burglary provides a lesson in several aspects. Firstly, it confirms that securing a large museum is possible only when all the elements that make up the security system are faultless.

Secondly, it was one of those infrequent theft cases that can be described as hired robbery, since it was also one of the rare examples painfully demonstrating how quickly robbed objects could be taken outside the country's borders.

The subsequent text speaks of the burglary into the Museum of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn from where icons were stolen.³ The loss was all the more devastating as the collection of icons deposited at the Museums ranked among the most interesting in Poland. From over 240 of them, a hundred of the most precious ones from the 16th–19th-century, mainly from the Moscow and Novogrod Schools, were on display. At the beginning, the Author emphasizes that robberies in museums are extremely rare. For quite a number of years the percentage of such crimes has remained unchanged: between four and eight such cases annually. When giving the details of the robbery, the Author informs that 29 art pieces from the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries were robbed in total from the Museum. Among them the oldest icon kept in the Museum. Dating back to the early 16th century, it featured the three Marys at the Tomb.

The next topic tackled by the Author is the security of special collections in libraries.⁴ Ogródzki was prompted to write it upon the theft of the work by Nicolaus Copernicus *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres* from the Library of the Polish Academy of Sciences. As it turns out, a reader actually unidentified by the Library employees, while reading it, left for the toilet, following which he disappeared; obviously not leaving the precious volume behind. Ogródzki identifies failures and flaws, as well as the violation of the Library's regulations, as the reasons that allowed for the theft. At this point it would be worth repeating after the Author the remarks that may contribute to securing other collections. Firstly, access to special collections should only be granted to scholars conducting their individual research. Instead of allowing access to antique books and documents, the Author suggests providing readers with microfilms. It is also recommendable that if a precious item is given to a reader, a library employee should be assigned to monitor the collection and to be there to ask the user to return the lent materials, even if only for the period of them leaving to go to the toilet. However, the most important element of the security should be a CCTV system and other technological solutions. Concluding, the Author gives examples of other similar thefts that have taken place in Europe.

The subsequent paper tackles the doubts that have remained to this day after the loss of Peter Paul Rubens's *Descent from the Cross*. The Author describes the history of the painting that prior to the fire which consumed the chancel of the Parish Church in Kalisz⁵ in 1973 had remained in the high altar. Following the fire it was supposed to have been entirely destroyed. What remained of the famous painting were merely frame fragments. The conducted investigation pointed to arson or a short circuit, however the testimony of expert witnesses and eye-witnesses diverged. The suggested version assumed that the painting had been first cut out of the frame and stolen, with the rest of the altar only then set on fire. Bearing this in mind, the Author hopes that one day the painting will resurface.

Following this, the paper Theft at the Lidzbark Warmiński Museum once again demonstrates the well-thought-out methods of the robbery of works of art.⁶ On this occasion,

also masterpieces of sacral goldsmithery art from the 15th and 16th centuries from the collections of the National Museum in Warsaw also disappeared. In total, 11 historic objects were robbed. The Author describes the course of the investigation and its lucky conclusion leading to the recovery of the stolen historic items which, regrettably, had suffered some damage to become more sellable. Once again does Piotr Ogródzki point to what is the most important in the keeping of such precious collections, namely the security that was missing in the Lidzbark Warmiński Museum. The only buffer were the Castle's walls and elderly ladies, guardians of the display.

Piotr Ogródzki, a specialist in the security of cultural heritage, in his next paper shows how robbers get round security systems.⁷ In this particular case the facility in Biała Podlaska was perfectly prepared: the alarm system had been installed in every single room except for the interiors in the attic neighbouring on the display halls. And it was through the attic that the robbers reached the display room to steal four paintings by the Kossaks (Wojciech, Jerzy, and Juliusz). The further part of the paper demonstrates security officers' and police errors. The security service, after the alarm had been initiated, did not check the reasons for its activation, since the main door had remained sealed. The police investigating the facility omitted the part of the Museum hiding the access to the attic with a ladder standing and the roof damaged to allow access to the building. Summing the article, the Author informs that the stolen items were recovered.

The paper in which Piotr Ogródzki does not only show a chain of unlucky developments, but also formulates the recommendations meant to secure precious sacral objects concerns churches' refurbishing.⁸ The article formulates remarks stemming from the analysis of several dozen robberies from churches throughout Poland. The thefts often went unnoticed, or because they were trifling situations, the administrators of the robbed facilities did not report the robbery to appropriate services. This paper makes one realize how easily small heritage items can be sold to antique dealers throughout Poland, this possible owing to the fact that sacral works hardly ever boast any documentation, and are not catalogued.

In the next paper two losses within one year at the Stawisko Museum are discussed.⁹ The Author emphasizes the fact that when providing security to a museum or any collection, one cannot rely on technological solutions only. The Stawisko facility had its alarm system and the CCTV in place, however the perpetrators accessed the interiors through a window, robbing their spoils within seconds. Apart from these security measures the Museum applied special methods of mounting the most precious paintings, yet they did not play their role. Ogródzki emphasizes that to provide a full security to the Museum, it should have a 24-hour security patrol, claiming that short-term interventions of security officers cannot play this role.

The greatest robbery in the history of Polish museums is described in two subsequent papers focused on the robbery of Claude Monte's painting *The Beach in Pourville*¹⁰ from the National Museum in Poznań. From the very beginning Ogródzki emphasizes how easy it was for the burglar to rob this only painting by the French Impressionist in Poland.



The perpetrator took advantage of a brief moment when the Museum staff were changing clothes shortly before the Museum's closing. The next paper speaks of the recovery of the stolen painting: the perpetrator was caught ten years after he had committed the robbery.

Interestingly, the next article titled *Opportunity Makes a Thief*¹¹ as if summarizes all the prior papers in the collection. The Author analyses Stéphan Breitwieser's thefts from European museums, showing different methods and means of art works' thieves. Quoting the culprit's statement during trials, he demonstrates faults and imperfections of security measures of museums and facilities housing art works in Europe and Poland.

Subsequently, Ogrodzki moves on to the theft of the *Arbeit macht frei* sign atop the entrance gate leading into Auschwitz-Birkenau.¹² This example demonstrates that there exists no museum or a museum collection that would be safe from the threat of crime. Robbers just need to find gaps in the security system that allow them to commit a crime. In some cases, they do not even need to resort to extremely sophisticated techniques, this clearly testified to by the theft of the afore-mentioned inscription over the Auschwitz gate. Robbers, sensitive to what they have to pay attention to when planning the theft are able to swiftly identify the range of the technical security systems of the majority of facilities. If these feature CCTV systems, they can easily assume the coverage of particular cameras, thus find space of poor coverage or even blind spots. In his conclusion, Ogrodzki emphasizes that when talking of memorial sites the fire safety must not be overlooked. This actually applies to all types of facilities housing art works. If a heritage

object is burnt down, no conservation work can restore its previous state.

The yet another article by Ogrodzki focuses on the rarely tackled issue: the threat posed to art collections by extreme weather conditions and technical malfunctions.¹³ Among the extreme weather conditions, the Author enumerates: downpours, storms, thunderstorms, hurricane winds. He also points to the particular danger posed by technical infrastructure malfunctions among which he judges the burst of water or heating supply pipes as potentially the most devastating. The second part of the paper is focused on crisis situations and extraordinary threats that have occurred over the last fifteen years, drawing the conclusion that the greatest losses in heritage objects (also including cultural institutions) were suffered as the result of the 1997 flood. On that occasion over 1.200 historic facilities in southern and western Poland suffered damage. Furthermore, Ogrodzki analyses acts of vandalism and their causes: motivations of political, religious, moral, or individual character, discussing such cases on the example of incidents from Poland and abroad.¹⁴

What the Reader will find interesting are also the papers related to the theft of a monstrance and liturgical instruments from the Parish Church in Sadłowo. The first of them begins with presenting the circumstances of the theft of the liturgical paraments, following which we become acquainted with the course of events and the conducted investigation. In the second part, the Author reports that only a part of the spoils were recovered: the 17th-century monstrance in auction houses in Sweden and Germany. Furthermore, Ogrodzki points to formal and legal problems connected with the recovery of the stolen monstrance. Neither the courts nor foreign institutions abroad demonstrated favourable attitude. The investigators' decision was for the Sadłowo Parish and the auction house in Bremen to reach a consensus, while the Parish would be allowed to repurchase the disputable item. In the conclusion of this article the Author expresses his doubts whether the monstrance would return to its rightful owner. The last chance as it seems to recover the goods may be the intervention conducted in a separate procedure by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. The second article on the topic describes the happy ending to the story of the 17th-century monstrance from Sadłowo. On 8 October 2012, the heritage item was given by the Bremen antique dealers to Poles. Ogrodzki emphasizes that in the search for and recovery of stolen art works all procedures and pressure forms have to be resorted to. The example of the recovered Sadłowo monstrance also shows that what matters in such cases is determination, perseverance, and steadfastness in asserting one's rights.

The selection of Ogrodzki's papers concludes with the one tackling the problems of monastic libraries that until not so long ago had been *shrouded in mystery*.¹⁶ Most commonly their collections are not accessible. Polish convents have continued to keep numerous incunabula and antique books. Ogrodzki discusses the case of the Camaldolese Monastery in Cracow's Bielany. The figures he quotes speak of 9.500 items in the early 20th century making up the Monastery collection (7.000 antique books, and 2.500 printed in the 19th and 20th centuries). The Author then proceeds to the story of two thefts of books from the Monastery Library.

The first may have happened after 1998, and the culprit found was one of the former friars. The particular incident only partially, as was to be found in due course, made the monks sensitive to securing the book collection they owned, since the next theft took place in 2005, when almost 200 books were lost. The Author claims that the lost cultural goods could have been safely deposited in the Monastery collection, had the *physical barriers been supplemented with electronic measures*, the latter's importance sadly underestimated by the administrators and superiors of the monastic facilities.

To conclude, it can be said that Piotr Ogródzki's papers quoted above perfectly fit the topic of the security of cultural objects in museum and sacral facilities. Thanks to a professional analysis, the compendium can be used as reference literature in the field. In view of the information the articles contain they are and will continue sources of knowledge for students and lecturers running courses in art history, security of cultural heritage, law, and museology. The essays aptly juxtapose legal aspects with the practices

of the protection of national heritage, while the described examples of security measures have been and will remain applicable also in the future. The additional value of the publication of Piotr Ogródzki's texts is their translation into English. Although many of the described thefts of art works have taken place in Poland, the Author also points to similar circumstances of such crimes in Europe. Not only does he make Readers realize that such thefts can occur, but also that the art works can be taken outside the country. This, in turn, demonstrates that protection of art works and cultural heritage is our joint concern, regardless of where we live.

Additionally, when presenting the accomplishments of Piotr Ogródzki, apart from the great number of written and published articles, mention should be made of training courses which he organized and ran together with his colleagues form the Centre for the Protection of Public Collections addressed to the lay and clergy responsible for the national culture heritage.

Years later we can state much to our satisfaction how fortunate the employees of the National Institute for Museums and Public Collections were to be benefitting from the knowledge and experience of such a creative and exceptional individual that Piotr Ogródzki was.

Abstract: *Safe Collections. A Selection of Articles by Piotr Ogródzki* is a publication discussing the contemporary problems of crimes against heritage objects. The essays written over the period of 20 years were systematically published in the 'Cenne, Bezcenne/Utracone' ['Valuable, Priceless/Lost'] journal, the only periodical dedicated to the recovery and restitutions of the lost national heritage. The publication is composed of 18 papers characterizing selected threats to museums and collections. All the presented texts oscillate within the semantic concepts related to crime and theft in museums and sacral facilities. The essays aptly juxtapose legal aspects with the practices of the protection of national heritage, while the described examples of security measures have been and will remain applicable also in the future. The

additional value of the publication of Piotr Ogródzki's texts is their translation into English. Although many of the described thefts of art works have taken place in Poland, the Author also points to similar circumstances of such crimes in Europe. Enriched with Piotr Ogródzki's short biography and bibliography, the book begins with the papers by Piotr Majewski, Paulina Florjanowicz, Kamil Zeidler, and Jacek Rulewicz. It concludes with the message of Chief Inspector Adam Grajewski of the Polish Police Headquarters under a meaningful title *In Lieu of an Afterword. Museum Collection Safety*. The publisher of the book, the National Institute for Museums and Public Collections, NIMOZ, should be acknowledged for the noble idea of publishing this book, thus commemorating the outstanding individual that Piotr Ogródzki was.

Keywords: Piotr Ogródzki, book *Safe Museums, Safe Collections*, museum collections, heritage pieces in churches, convent libraries, thefts, burglaries, collections' protection, alarm systems.

Endnotes

- ¹ *Kradzież z Muzeum im. Adama Mickiewicza w Śmiałowie... i powroty Śmiałowskich obrazów* [Burglary at the Adam Mickiewicz Museum in Śmiałów... and the Return of the Śmiałów Paintings], 'Cenne, Bezcenne/Utracone. Valuable, Priceless/Lost' 1997, No. 4(4), pp. 19-21.
- ² *Kradzież z Państwowego Muzeum Zamkowego w Pszczynie* [Theft from the State Castle Museum in Pszczyna], 'Cenne, Bezcenne/Utracone. Valuable, Priceless/Lost' 1998, No. 1(7), pp. 16-17.
- ³ *Włamanie do Muzeum Warmii i Mazur w Olsztynie* [Break-in at the Warmia and Mazury Museum in Olsztyn], 'Cenne, Bezcenne/Utracone. Valuable, Priceless/Lost' 1998, No. 3(9), pp. 28-29.
- ⁴ *Skradzione dzieło Mikołaja Kopernika* [Nicolaus Copernicus Book Stolen], 'Cenne, Bezcenne/Utracone. Valuable, Priceless/Lost' 1999, No. 1(13), pp. 9 and 13.
- ⁵ *Skradziony czy spalony* [Stolen or Consumed by Fire?], 'Cenne, Bezcenne/Utracone. Valuable, Priceless/Lost' 2000, No. 2(20), pp. 3.
- ⁶ *Kradzież z Muzeum w Lidzbarku Warmińskim* [Theft at the Lidzbark Warmiński Museum], 'Cenne, Bezcenne/Utracone. Valuable, Priceless/Lost' 2000, No. 2(20), pp. 4-5 and 37.
- ⁷ *Kradzież z Muzeum Południowego Podlasia* [Burglary at the South Podlasie Museum], 'Cenne, Bezcenne/Utracone. Valuable, Priceless/Lost' 2001, No. 4(28), pp. 28-29.
- ⁸ *Żłodzijski duet, czyli jak okradziono kilkadziesiąt kościołów* [A Thieving Duo: How They Robbed Dozens of Churches], 'Cenne, Bezcenne/Utracone. Valuable, Priceless/Lost' 2001, No. 6(30), pp. 26-27.

- ⁹ *Jeden rok, dwie straty. Muzeum im. Anny i Jarosława Iwaszkiewiczów w Stawisku* [One Year, Two Losses. The Anna and Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz Museum in Stawisko], 'Cenne, Bezcenne/Utracone. Valuable, Priceless/Lost' 2006, No. 1(46), pp. 8-9.
- ¹⁰ *Największa kradzież w historii polskiego muzealnictwa. Szczęśliwy finał* [The Biggest Theft in Polish Museum History. A Happy Ending], 'Cenne, Bezcenne/Utracone. Valuable, Priceless/Lost. Special edition. Catalogue of the Lost Works of Art' 2006, pp. 3-6 and *Największa kradzież w historii polskiego muzealnictwa. Szczęśliwy finał* [The Biggest Theft in Polish Museum History. A Happy Ending], 'Cenne, Bezcenne/Utracone. Valuable, Priceless/Lost' 2011, No. 1(66), pp. 13-16.
- ¹¹ *Okazja czyni złodzieja* [Opportunity Makes the Thief], 'Systemy alarmowe' 2009, No. 3, pp. 40-43.
- ¹² *Muzea ciągle zagrożone, Kradzież w Państwowym Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau* [Museums are Always in Danger. Theft at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum], 'Cenne, Bezcenne/Utracone. Valuable, Priceless/Lost' 2010, No. 1(62), pp. 13-15.
- ¹³ *Wielka woda. Wielkie problemy* [Deep Water. Deep Problems] (1), 'Cenne, Bezcenne/Utracone. Valuable, Priceless/Lost' 2010, No. 3(64), pp. 3-6.
- ¹⁴ *Wandale w muzeach* [Vandals at the Museum], 'Cenne, Bezcenne/Utracone. Valuable, Priceless/Lost' 2011, No. 3(68), pp. 31-33.
- ¹⁵ *Czy odzyskamy monstrancję z Sądłowa?* [Can We Ever Recover the Monstrance of Sądłowo], 'Cenne, Bezcenne/Utracone. Valuable, Priceless/Lost' 2011, No. 4(69), pp. 22-26 and *Powrót do Sądłowa* [Back in Sądłowo], 'Cenne, Bezcenne/Utracone. Valuable, Priceless/Lost' 2012, No. 4(73), pp. 5-6.
- ¹⁶ *Biblioteki klasztorne. Zagrożone dziedzictwo kultury* [Monastery Libraries. Endangered Cultural Heritage], 'Cenne, Bezcenne/Utracone. Valuable, Priceless/Lost' 2012, No. 3(72), pp. 26-28.

Father Piotr Paweł Maniurka, Post-Doctoral Degree, Professor at the University of Opole

Theologian and art historian; (since 1984) Director at the Diocesan Museum in Opole, Diocesan Museum Curator and Conservator of Heritage Objects, member of the Council for the Preservation of Historic Monuments at the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage; (since 2006) active in the Council for Culture and Cultural Heritage at the Episcopate of Poland; author of many papers on history of art and preservation of heritage objects; awarded with e.g. the golden badge for the 'Guardianship of Historic Monuments', as well as with the bronze and silver 'Gloria Artis' medals; he is active as a painter, graphic artist, and photographer, and has held several monographic exhibitions in Poland and abroad; e-mail: pmaniurka@uni.opole.pl

Word count: 3 176; **Tables:** –; **Figures:** –; **References:** 16

Received: 08.2020; **Accepted:** 08.2020; **Published:** 09.2020

DOI: 10.5604/01.3001.0014.3817



Copyright©: Some rights reserved: National Institute for Museums and Public Collections. Published by Index Copernicus Sp. z o.o.

This material is available under the Creative Commons – Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0). The full terms of this license are available on: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/legalcode>

Competing interests: Authors have declared that no competing interest exists.

Cite this article as: Maniurka P.P.; SAFE MUSEUMS, SAFE COLLECTIONS. A SELECTION OF ARTICLES BY PIOTR OGRODZKI, NIMOZ LIBRARY, VOL. 13, WARSZAWA 2020. Muz., 2020(61): 219-223

Table of contents 2020: <https://muzealnictworocznik.com/issue/12766>