

Sem C. Sutter: H. A. Krüss and Gustav Abb as Library Administrators in Occupied Territories

As German armies advanced to the east and west, two leading librarians assumed official roles administering libraries in the occupied territories. Hugo Andres Krüss and Gustav Abb held prominent positions and played leading roles in pre-war German and international library organizations. This paper examines the extent to which they maintained or compromised their perspectives as internationalist librarians in the exigencies of war.

As head of the Benutzungsabteilung of the Preussische Staatsbibliothek 1928-1934, Abb gained recognition as a founder of international lending. In 1935 he became director of the Universitätsbibliothek Berlin and in 1937 chair of the Verein Deutscher Bibliothekare. As administrator for libraries in the Generalgouvernement of occupied Poland he was complicit in the confiscation of numerous libraries, but also resisted removal of Polish collections to Germany and reputedly treated Polish staff well.

Krüss, a non-librarian, became general director of the Preussische Staatsbibliothek in 1925. Active in international library affairs, he was a founder of IFLA; he served as German member of the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation; and in 1936 he became the first chair of the Reichsbeirat für Bibliotheksangelegenheiten. In 1940 after the German occupation of France he became “Reichskommissar für die Sicherung der Bibliotheken und die Betreuung des Buchgutes im westlichen Operationsgebiet”. He was proud of employing French prisoners of war in the PSB and declared that no books were taken from French state libraries. But he countenanced confiscations of private, Jewish and Masonic collections and compiled lists of “German cultural heritage” that might be recouped.

This paper will examine the complex mixture of professional ideals, political convictions, national imperatives, and opportunism represented in Krüss and Abb’s wartime actions.

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