In the autumn of 1914, voices of complaint and accusation at the sufferings which the kingdom of Belgium had to endure during the first months of the war, flashed throughout the whole world. We share the sorrow at the losses which were inflicted upon several parts of this beautiful land in the autumn months of 1914; how slight, however, these appear to be to-day in comparison with those losses which the following years of war caused on French soil and in Western Flanders. In compiling the list of losses one must constantly realise that, fortunately, the monuments of the chief towns, Brussels and Antwerp, of the three important Flemish centres of art, Ghent, Bruges, and Tournay, all the monuments of Liege, as well as those of Courtray, Hal, Nivelles, Oudenarde, Mons, Tirlemont, St. Trond, Tongern, Léau, have come out of these first battles completely unharmed. The first destruction of 1914 has not been forgotten, but has been exceeded by that of the succeeding years. […]

After the first precautionary measures for the protection of Belgian art monuments and museums had been carried out, it did not appear to be immediately necessary to create a permanent department for this work in the German administrative department. Only when the war became indefinitely protracted was a permanent office attached in the summer of 1916 to the chief administrative department of the Governor-General in Belgium, under the charge of the art critic Bersu, assistant to the Archeological Collection at Stuttgart. The principal function of this department was to permanently superintend the museums, to protect them against interference from unauthorized departments, and to negotiate with the German departments for the requirements of the museums, such as the supply of coal and the repairing of damaged buildings, etc. The result reached was that during the further course of the war the Belgium museums suffered no losses whatever. […]

Together with the task of restoring public activity and welfare, which in accordance with the terms of the Hague Convention fell to the lot of the occupying power, the matter of town-buildings came within the administration of the German authorities, as well as the care of the devastated residential quarters and technical buildings, in fact, the whole control and organization of buildings. Supported by the personal interest of the Governal-General, Freiherr von Bissing, the Imperial civil administration accepted this task with the best zeal. Landesbaurat a. D. Rehorst, adviser to the town of Cologne, had been appointed superintendent for municipal buildings by the Government-General since 1915. According to the German statistics, 21,184 buildings
were destroyed or damaged in Belgium within the war territory in the province of Western Flanders, barely 2% of the buildings in Belgium before the war. Even if certain towns, more especially Louvain, Dinant, Lier, Termonde, and Visé, have suffered severely, still the extent of the destruction is not nearly as great as one feared after the first reports and charges. The endeavour of the German administration was to re-awaken the building enterprise of the municipalities and the population. Belgium possessed a highly developed system of building, a perfectly-working organization of building authorities, and a widely-spread body of architects, to a certain degree of very high artistic capacity and strong *esprit de corps*. The old Commission Royale des Monuments et des Sites, founded simultaneously with the Belgian empire, represented also for the complete building system a sort of high court of justice in purely artistic questions, concerning town architecture. Naturally the Belgians have their own conceptions not only of life and comfort, which together with their needs determined their form of architecture, but also with regard to the principles governing the laying out of towns. However, the development appears to have stood still in some respects, and when the venerable commission in their first official statement upon the "Réconstruction des villes et villages détruits par la guerre" in 1914, knew no better than to establish the "Esthétique des villes" of Charles Buls (so highly respected also in Germany), as a sort of canonic law, one is reminded of Ibsen's words, that "a normally constructed truth can only live for twelve, fifteen, or at the most, twenty years"; this form of aesthetics has long been superseded. […]

The German administration constantly pointed to these modern principles of town-building and attempted to establish a system of home protection and preservation of the character of places and landscapes in their plans for new buildings; they laid stress upon the employment of the talent of Belgian architects in the rebuilding. They were willing to support communities and private persons to a considerable extent in their rebuilding by the granting of building loans, through direct advances, by encouraging handicraft and finally they offered their own artistic and technical forces on a wide scale, without the Belgian contractors thereby suffering any unpleasantness. At the Brussels War-conference for the Preservation of Monuments Karl Rehorst, reported in a broadly-planned lecture upon the tasks of municipal building. A commission, comprising delegates from the two largest German societies of architects from all parts of Germany, were here to assist with their advice in the matter of town-building.

The success fell short of the aim and the wish. The Belgians in most cases have not accepted the assistance which was offered them. Almost everywhere they have opposed well-mean suggestions and advice with silent resistance, they also persistently and abruptly rejected the material assistance we offered them. The German administration had the opportunity of interesting itself in the rebuilding of Louvain, Termonde, Malines, Aerschot, Dinant, and other places, and were also able to confer with the local authorities. Very often, fundamental differences of opinion resulted. The very able town-architect, M. Vingeroedt, drew up a whole row of plans for the new formation of the quarter around the Town-Hall in Louvain. The plan, however, which was finally drawn up by the architect Francotte for this whole neighbourhood, was so radical and took the modern conception of town-building so little into account, that any agreement was here impossible. Out of hygienic considerations and for reasons of public safety, in September 1916, the Governor-General ordered the ruins which had been damaged
through the war and whose collapse was becoming increasingly imminent, to be pulled down, in those cases where the owners stated their unwillingness to undertake the rebuilding—but remains which had a pronounced architectural or archeological value were always exempted. Subsequent to this, a number of new buildings arose, especially in the neighbourhood of historical monuments; in these cases the German administration were able to assist with their advice, and it is to be hoped that the seed which the German building administration have sown in this activity will take root after the war. Perhaps one may also say that the German conception of the terms "home protection" (Heimatschutz) and "protection of the landscape" have gained ground in Belgium only during the last years. [...] 

As early as 1915, by order of the Governor-General, Generaloberst Freiherr von Bissing, three of the most important and extensive Gothic monuments in Belgium were sketched, namely, the three Cistercian Abbeys at Orval, Villers, and Aulne, which had lain in ruins since the time of the French Revolution. The records were made by the Dresden architects, Fucker, Zschaler, and Kroner, the publication prepared by Paul Clemen and Cornelius Gurlitt. Also this publication should serve as a testimony to the earnestness and expertness with which the German administration, conscious of their great responsibility, had turned to tasks of peaceful culture even in the midst of battles. 

They had the wish to create a solid foundation for a further architectural movement and for the necessary question of building, still more they felt the need of making the wealth of the extant Belgian monuments widely accessible for research purposes, and of preserving these important sources for international history of art, more especially for the research work of the adjoining Germany. This fostered the idea of a collection of sketches of the Belgian monuments of art, which was put into execution in the summer of 1917, by German art critics and architects who were active in Belgium either in a military or official capacity. The term "inventorisation" which was first chosen as a convenient abbreviation and subsequently used officially, does not really quite cover the original intention nor the manner of its execution. We have not here to deal with statistics of monuments according to a German standard, nor even with a handbook for Belgian works of art in the form of that which Georg Dehio compiled of German monuments, but for the present, only with a systematic collection of records and the creation of archives for monuments. Belgium does not yet possess real statistics of its monuments. Two illustrated catalogues of works in the provinces of Brabant and Antwerp and part of the province of East Flanders have been published, but are not purchasable; with regard to the two first-named provinces, they refer to the contents of the public buildings only in catalogue form and do not describe or reproduce the buildings themselves, whilst the text is restricted to the merest essentials. The secular buildings, more especially the extremely important castles, large private properties, and also the collections have been completely omitted. During the last decades the "Commission Royale des Monuments et des Sites" had worked upon a plan for combining real and comprehensive statistics of monuments; especially the present President, who has an excellent knowledge of the country, has interested himself in its homogeneous realisation. All these efforts have, however, been frustrated, and the provincial commissions follow more or less their own ideas. The Commission itself does not possess systematic archives for monuments, but only a collection of plans which have accumulated in the course of the construction of different architectural works. The
photographic department of the Musée du Cinquantenaire however, possesses a rich fund of records, which might well form the nucleus of historical archives. Through its collection of records and bibliographical sources, German enterprise had to make up what was here missing. These records equally included works of ecclesiastical and secular architecture, painting, decorative and industrial art. It was also the intention to include the treasures of the libraries and, according to the need, also those of public and private collections. The work was at first begun through the initiative and assistance of the South-German art patron, Louis Laiblin, who had already earned a reputation in the modern art-world as the donor of the Pfüllingen Halls. Later, the Kaiser lent his animated personal support to this enterprise, as the result of a report presented to him and warmly advocated by the Prussian Culture Minister and Finance Minister, and assigned a considerable sum out of the public treasury for this purpose. The whole work was under the control of the Imperial General Government in Belgium, and was there regarded as a separate branch of the local administration; since the autumn of 1917, it has been subsidised from the funds of the General Government. The complete records were later to be placed at the disposal of all interested persons with the fullest liberality and without restriction. Here also, however, the political events of the autumn of 1918 brought an abrupt conclusion to the work, but nevertheless, it may be regarded as completed in its essential features. Naturally, the records are not equally representative of the whole country. In those cases where standard and adequate records, publications or photographs existed, we could limit our work.

It seemed superfluous to take new photographs of the paintings in the large museums, it appeared much more important to search the small ones. Highly important material has been compiled, with special attention to quite specific research wishes and tendencies, which contains the old and new illustrations in a "Catalogue raisonné"; this material, which has already been partly used and treated, will be presented to the professional art-world in a collected volume of essays on Belgian history of art. Thus also in this respect German administration and German science have tried, within the limits prescribed by circumstances, to serve unselfishly the interests of the preservation and history of monuments of art.

2 A detailed account of the organization of this work in the Kunstchronik, 1918, Nr. 42, p. 485. At the head stood a committee consisting of Geh. Reg.-Rat Clemen as leader of the whole enterprise, Landrat Freiherr von Wilmowski and Geh. Reg.-Rat Bodenstein. Dr. Hensler officiated as secretary; in each province the work was arranged by a branch head: Dr. Hensler, Prof. Kehrer, Prof. Rauch, Baurat Flesche, Freiherr Schenck zu Schweinsberg, Prof. M. Schmidt, Arch. Paffendorf, Arch. Freiherr v. Schmidt, Prof. Laur, Dr. Baum, Dr. Koehler. Apart from these co-workers who were active in military or civil posts in Belgium, the Prussian Messbildanstalt, Prof. Hamanns, Dr. Stoeptner, Mrs. Deetjen Lit. D. and a number of eminent German architects have greatly participated in the work.
3 The following works are available: Province de Brabant. Inventaire des objets d'art existant dans les édifices publics des communes, 3 vols., Arrondissement de Bruxelles,