

PREFACE

In the summer of 1939, at the time of finishing his great paper on initial segments of transfinite induction, Gerhard Gentzen started to write down ideas for a popular book on the foundations of mathematics. His somewhat unlikely motto for the planned book was “Spannend wie ein Kriminalroman!” (“Exciting like a detective story”). Nothing definitive came of this book idea, for Gentzen was drafted to military service by the end of September of the same year. His war ended in a nervous breakdown by the beginning of 1942, with nothing at all of his plans finished after 1939, but just a life lost in 1945, at the age of 35.

Two slim folders of stenographic materials in Gentzen’s hand were found in 1984. They contain notes and developments Gentzen thought could still be of some use to him, from between 1931 and 1944. In the past ten years or so, these notes and some additional manuscripts I had the fortune to find have been the object of a detective work of mine, done alongside systematic studies on proof theory. The major part of the work has consisted in the control, word for word, of the contents of transcribed manuscripts against the stenographic originals, in their interpretation in English, and in thinking of their significance against the rest of Gentzen’s results. Occasional forays into archives in Germany, Switzerland, and elsewhere have provided some additional excitement.

I worked on the shorthand notes initially on the basis of transcriptions prepared by Christian Thiel. The sources of the present collection were completed through transcriptions made by Gerlinde Bach on my commission. On occasion, I filled in some gaps myself, though very slowly. I am indebted to both transcribers for what they have accomplished. I also thank Gereon Wolters for his help with the source materials.

The letters of Paul Bernays are published through an agreement with Dr. Ludwig Bernays.

My special thanks go to Eckart Menzler: Our knowledge of the details of Gentzen’s life is the result of the relentless efforts of his *amateur* historianship in the proper sense of the word. I dedicate this edition to him, in thankfulness for his invaluable services to scholarship.

Saved from the Cellar

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von Plato, J.

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