

# *Notes & Essays*

## **THE HISTORY OF THE JAGIELLONIAN LIBRARY**

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This essay places the Cracow Academy, founded in 1364, and its library, known today as the Jagiellonian Library, in the context of European cultural history. The essay explores the role of these two institutions in the secularization of knowledge and the promotion of religious tolerance during the Renaissance and Reformation. It also shows the ideological and scholarly degradation of the Academy and the Library between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, from the time of the Counter-Reformation through the wars and crises of the seventeenth century to the partitions of Poland between 1772 and 1793. Yet despite these odds, Polish society as well as the staff of the Library continued their efforts to preserve the socio-educational role of the Library (which had been open to the general public as early as the mid-sixteenth century) and its mission of guarding national unity during the partitions (1772–1918), as well as under German and Soviet domination during and after the Second World War.

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this paper is to present the Jagiellonian Library in the context of European political and cultural history in the belief that such an approach would better demonstrate the Library's national and international significance, the fate of its collections, its administration, and the cross section of its reading public. This approach will also show that the Cracow Academy, established in 1364 by King Casimir the Great and known today as the Jagiellonian University, and its library, known today as the Jagiellonian Library, constituted a significant element in shaping intellectual and spiritual aspects of that history in the face of the political forces which either promoted or obstructed the secularization of knowledge and religious freedom in Europe. Looked at from this point of view, the fate of the Jagiellonian Library reflects the bright and the murky periods of Polish cultural history. It also demonstrates the impact of that history in both nurturing and hindering progressive ideas

in and outside of Poland from the Middle Ages through the Reformation until modern times.

### **The Jagiellonian Library in the Middle Ages**

When Casimir the Great established the first Polish university in Cracow, humanism in Western Europe had already succeeded in freeing scholarship from the restrictive hegemony of the church. The Cracow Academy was both a product and perpetrator of the progressive ideas embedded in humanistic thought. Its lay curricula in law, mathematics, astronomy, and liberal arts, as well as the quality of the students and staff it attracted, soon promoted the Academy to a center of secular learning. The Academy did not exist in a vacuum, however; it owed its status to a tradition of lively interaction between itself and scholars of other European countries, most notably France and Italy. In Bologna, for example, “between 1275 and 1500, Poles held the office of Rector [and played a significant] part in student life.” Casimir the Great vested in these scholars the responsibility of preparing an official charter which delineated the Academy’s mission and the secular character of its administration.<sup>1</sup>

One of the chief results of the Academy’s contacts with leading European thinkers was the role of the latter in building the Academy’s book collection. Even if the charter had included a provision for librarians, and it did not, the Academy had no formal library of its own. European scholars recruited to teach at the Academy had to bring their own books and usually donated these books to the Academy either at the end of their tenure or posthumously, in their wills.<sup>2</sup>

In 1399 a generous endowment to the Academy made by King Wladislaw Jagiello and his consort Jadwiga made possible the reorganization of the Academy into a centralized institution of learning with a library. Collegia, representing various disciplines, comprised the Academy’s new structure. The Collegium Iuridicum offered canon and civil law; Collegium Medicum, the medical sciences; and Collegium Maius, liberal arts and theology.<sup>3</sup>

Collegium Maius, the largest of the Collegia, quickly evolved into a center not only of academic life but also of book collecting. In 1426 by the means of a statute, the professors of the Collegium Maius in effect incorporated themselves. Joining the corporation meant that a professor automatically endowed his books to the Collegium. The donation of his books to the Academy library became the obligation of any scholar affiliated with the Academy. A list of donors, including those from outside the Academy, was meticulously kept and read from the pulpit during the Academy’s annual devotion. Paying further homage to the benefactor,

the books were not classified by subject and/or author. Rather, they were arranged by the names of their respective donors. Thus, due to the incorporation of their faculty and the philanthropic nature of Cracow society at large, the libraries of the three Collegia grew rapidly. Additionally, Cracow, Poland's capital at the time, became a center of book production and trade. Its booksellers comprised some of the basic contributors to the Academy's collection. Similarly, wealthy private citizens generously contributed to the development and longevity of these collections by donating either books or funds for their purchase. Due to the participation of Polish statesmen in the Councils of Basel and Constance, who promptly brought newly published material home, holdings of legal texts and works on political science increased most dramatically.

Eventually the Collegium Maius became the center of the Academy's library. The principles of the Collegium's administration were delineated in a statute which made a provision for two top offices: a Custodian Librariae, in charge of management, and Pater Librorum, responsible for the security and maintenance of the collection. Both offices were honorary, given to the most prominent, not to mention most trusted, scholars elected by the corporation for a period of one year. With the exception of the Collegium Iuridicum, Collegium Medicum, and the library of the Bursa Pauperum, the Collegium Maius controlled the libraries of all other Collegia.<sup>4</sup> The Collegium Iuridicum and the Collegium Medicum had no formal libraries. Their faculty lived and owned their books privately. Control of the Bursa Paperum library was vested in a professor, also responsible for the supervision of the Bursa residents.

Soon the Collegium Maius became too small a space to accommodate the rapidly increasing quantity of books. The Academy had no funds with which to either purchase a new building or expand the old one. Fate, however, took matters into her own hands. In 1492 a fire destroyed a major part of the Collegium Maius, making reconstruction a must. Since the Academy refused to finance this undertaking, the faculty of the Collegium, most of whose members were quite poor, decided to finance the rebuilding themselves. In 1493 a contract between the faculty and a Cracow-based building crew outlined the future shape of both the Collegium and its library. Financial shortages again presented an obstacle—the personal endowments of the faculty and some contributions from other sources could not begin to finance this task. However, in the process of reconstructing the destroyed building, five chests full of money were excavated: the first one in 1494 and the remainder between 1515 and 1518. This money allowed not only the completion of an expanded building but also covered the costs of the library's furniture and the acquisition of new books.<sup>5</sup>

The new Collegium Maius represented a mixture of styles which were, in the tradition of Cracowian architecture of this era, Gothic. However, Italian influences were clearly visible in the design of the courtyard, the nucleus of the Collegium. This deviation from traditional Gothic style was considered an expression of humanism on the part of the fifteenth-century Cracow scholars.

### **The Renaissance and the Reformation: The Library and the Golden Age of Polish Culture**

Three forces shaped the cultural history of sixteenth-century Europe in general and the development of European libraries in particular: the invention of print by Johannes Gutenberg in 1456, an escalating interest in the sciences, and a reformatory movement within the church which culminated in Luther's ninety-five theses. The onset of the Reformation resulted in a surge of vernacular writings and a rise in apologetic literature which, in turn, either attacked or defended the teachings of the church. These trends greatly alarmed the Catholic Church and the governments of individual European states very much under the church's influence. Anti-Protestant decrees and open persecution of dissidents followed.

The majority of European universities were firmly opposed to the secularization of their curricula. Polish universities were an exception to this attitude. Although in 1523, under pressure from the church, King Zygmunt I officially forbade the import and dissemination of Luther's works, these works

were favorably accepted by Polish scholars and thinkers and studied with great interest at Cracow University . . . [they] rapidly gained popularity with all classes of Polish society. . . . [Zygmunt August] (1548–1572), by abolishing anti-Protestant decrees immediately after his enthronement . . . secured full religious tolerance . . . for all foreign and native dissidents in Poland.<sup>6</sup>

Intellectual freedom and the secular character of the Academy continued to attract the best students and scholars from abroad. Given these freedoms, Polish cultural life thrived. This was marked by a spectacular surge of writing and publication in the areas of science, law, political science, religion, and liberal arts.

The Academy's library, under its new name *Libraria Publica*, continued to grow in both resources and stature. Because of an increasing demand for education on the part of the general public, the *Libraria* had to extend its services beyond the scholarly community. It now began

providing its patrons with books addressing actual issues and problems of that era, including works by dissident authors banned in other European countries. The library collection was enriched with gifts of books, private collections, and funds for purchasing books of the donors' choice. Exclusion of theological material was the most frequent request of donors—one which was not always complied with, however. First of all, the Academy needed a strong collection on theology to keep up with other leading European universities. Secondly, marking a major shift in the scope of the Academy's collection policy, after the 1564 arrival of the Jesuit order, acquisition of theological works became the Libraria's first priority.<sup>7</sup>

### **The Counter-Reformation and its Impact on the Libraria Publica**

The arrival of the Jesuits marked the beginning of the Counter-Reformation. Monopolization of education by the Jesuits, whose primary objective was the mass production of "good Catholics," preceded a speedy elimination of schools run by dissidents. A biased, homogeneous level of instruction conjoined with religious fanaticism, censorship, and the practice of public burning of "heretic" books. This led to a rapid decay of scholarship and progressive writing. Rejection of a lay approach to education and a return to a theocentric approach to other disciplines marked the beginning of the Academy's loss of influence and its gradual decline.<sup>8</sup>

Restricted in its acquisition policy by censorship, the Collegium Maius library became increasingly estranged from the foreign book market, including the progressive writings permeating other European countries. To make matters worse, the last decades of the 1500s were marked by international conflicts in which Poland was extensively involved. These conflicts culminated in a series of wars on Polish soil which lasted throughout the seventeenth century.

From 1655 to 1657, during the Swedish occupation of Poland, the Academy suffered damages which were truly severe. The siege of Cracow resulted in the destruction of many Collegia and their libraries. Due to the heroic efforts of students and faculty, the library of the Collegium Maius suffered no substantial losses. The government of Cracow, as part of the capitulation act, negotiated a clause that would guarantee the safety of Polish cultural treasures, including the property of the Collegium Maius. Yet because the Academy and the Collegium refused to sign an oath of loyalty to the Swedish king, these efforts could only succeed through the intervention of influential Swedish officials. Valuable books from the Collegium Maius library were payment for services rendered. The clause was never fully respected, and it took additional

payments—again in the form of valuable books—to guarantee protection of the library from the plundering perpetrated by the Swedes.<sup>9</sup>

The end of the Swedish occupation generated a wave of patriotism, and some donations to the Collegium Maius library followed. However, many of its benefactors and its most prominent librarians had perished during the occupation and the plague of 1651–1653. This loss, bringing with it a lack of expertise, resulted in a severe mismanagement of the Libraria's newly collected funds. Lack of management, in combination with the Academy's investment policies regarding funds for repairing its building and the purchasing of books, expedited the Libraria's physical and intellectual decay.

The Academy's top priority was the canonization of Jan Kanty, one of its fifteenth-century professors. Unfortunately, the process of his beatification, which lasted from 1667 to 1687, consumed most of the Academy's fiscal resources.<sup>10</sup> In addition, the library was plagued by an escalation in the theft of books. Since there was no money to hire adequate staff, the safety of its holdings was secured by a bull enacted by Pope Clement X in 1672. The bull—enacted at the Academy's request—mandated punishing by excommunication anyone stealing from the Collegium Maius library.<sup>11</sup> In spite of such efforts, the enormous costs of Jan Kanty's canonization, the cultural and economic consequences of yet another Swedish invasion from 1702 to 1709, and the conservative attitude of the Academy itself annihilated the efforts of dedicated individuals, both benefactors and librarians, to prevent a complete degradation of the library for the next fifty years.

## **The Enlightenment**

Ideas of the Enlightenment, introduced to Poland in the 1790s by the aristocracy and higher clergy educated abroad, failed to generate any progressive changes in the Academy. Despite being initiated and supported by such prominent individuals as the Cracow diocese archbishop Andrzej Zaluski, a bibliophile, bibliographer, and, together with his brother Józef, founder of the Polish national library in Warsaw, these ideas began to infiltrate Polish society on a national scale only after Clement XIV disbanded the Jesuit order in 1773. Prior to this, however, the enlightened forces continued to mobilize the intelligentsia for the imminent task of redirecting the fundamental goals of Polish education beyond the production of good Catholics. That same year King Stanislaw August appointed a Commission of National Education (KEN—Komisja Edukacji Narodowej), a state agency in charge of the modernization and administration of Polish schools on all levels of instruction.<sup>12</sup>

KEN immediately took over the Academy and its library, promoting progressive curricula, discarding the traditional scholastic method in favor of a lay approach to teaching, replacing Latin with Polish as the official language of instruction, and establishing a permanent fund for the Academy's library. Funding permitted the hiring of competent staff, an inventory of the collection, a catalog of manuscripts, and, most importantly, the consolidation of the Collegia libraries into one centralized institution.

Because of the changes instigated by KEN which resulted in the library's 1745 status as the country's depository library, the Jagiellonian Library's acquisitions policy began to reflect the abolishment of censorship in domestic book production, a restoration of contacts with foreign book markets, and a generous increase in endowments. These trends reflected and served the new objectives of Polish education both in and outside of the Academy.<sup>13</sup>

In 1772, one year prior to the establishment of KEN, Russia and Prussia annexed some of the Polish territories, an act called the "first partition of Poland." More than a century of internal disintegration, wars, and the election of the Dukes of Saxony to the Polish throne, whose sixty-year rule devastated the Polish economy, made this partition possible. In spite of this, twenty years after the establishment of KEN,

reformation of commerce and industry brought about economic improvements which enabled Poland to increase its military potentials. . . . The new May Third Constitution proclaimed in 1791 secured political and civil rights for townspeople and peasants and built up great hopes for Poland's future. The extent of national revival alarmed Russia and Prussia. . . . Immediately following the end of the Turkish war, Catherine II [in alliance with Prussia] invaded Poland and carried out the second (1793) and the third (1795) partition. . . .<sup>14</sup>

### **From 1795 to 1945: "God's Playground"**

Following Austria's annexation of Galicia after the third partition, the Jagiellonian Library shared the fate of the Cracow Academy, whose gradually curtailed autonomy was totally abolished in 1801. German became the official language of instruction, and the Polish faculty was replaced by Austrian and German instructors.

Following the creation of the Duchy of Warsaw after Napoleon's defeat of Austria in 1807, the Academy and its library, under the leadership of

Jerzy Samuel Bandtkie, began to flourish again. A historian, a linguist, and an excellent administrator, Bandtkie, as its director, bibliographer, and historiographer from 1811 to 1835, revived the library. According to its 1809 statistics, the library's holdings consisted of 2,943 manuscripts and 29,994 monographs. Bandtkie enriched this collection by adding to it valuable pieces acquired from antiquarian booksellers, by weeding duplicates and exchanging them for unique items, and by successfully soliciting both gifts and endowments.

The revived prominence of the Academy and its library survived yet another wave of oppression when, in 1815, after Napoleon's defeat, the Duchy of Warsaw was annulled by the Vienna Congress, and Cracow was proclaimed a free city. For Russia, Prussia, and Austria, the Academy, officially renamed the Jagiellonian University in 1818, remained "a living symbol of the continuity and the indivisibility of Polish culture, an embodiment of the best traditions, achievements and aspirations of the nation."<sup>15</sup> Albeit a "free city," Cracow remained under control of the partitioning powers. A meticulous limitation of the university's privileges began almost immediately, and when, following the uprising of 1846, Cracow was stripped of its free city status and incorporated into the Austrian Empire, the university was destined to become an institution of secondary status, educating subjects loyal to the Austrian monarchy.

Nevertheless, the Jagiellonian Library continued to maintain its services. In the mid 1800s, after Cracow's incorporation into the Austrian Empire, the library together with its Polish staff found itself under the jurisdiction of the Austrian Ministry of Science and Education. The ministry granted the library the status of Galicia's depository and permitted the circulation of its material free of charge to students and educational institutions outside of Cracow. When in 1861 Galicia became autonomous, the Jagiellonian University and the Jagiellonian Library merged and, once again, began to flourish.

The Jagiellonian Library's most noteworthy developments during the last quarter of the nineteenth century are inexorably connected with the name of Karol Estreicher, the library's director from 1868 to 1905 and the author of the seminal *Polish Bibliography (Bibliografia Polska)*. He instigated the processing of the library's collection and the organizing of its operations. This included the circulation of books to foreign libraries, most notably Hungary, Bohemia, Austria, and Russia, thus pioneering the idea of international cooperation. During Estreicher's tenure, the library's holdings nearly tripled from approximately 100,000 monographs to over 275,000, the number of manuscripts reached approximately 6,500 in addition to approximately 17,000 miscellaneous items such as maps, drawings, and music.

Estreicher's successors continued the task of modernizing the library, expanding its reading opportunities for the general public and updating its catalogs. The public from all three parts of divided Poland supported the institution which came to be their *biblioteca patria* and, given the deportation of the National Library in Warsaw to Petersburg during the third partition, their national library. Together with the Jagiellonian University, the library became a center of cultural life and a symbol of national unity.<sup>16</sup>

The end of the First World War brought with it a restoration of Poland's independence. Yet the postwar economic troubles compelled the Jagiellonian Library to cancel subscriptions to numerous periodicals and foreign publications. Help came from the Society of the Jagiellonian Library Friends (*Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Biblioteki Jagiellońskiej*) established in 1923. Moreover, the League of Nations as well as the governments and universities of numerous countries donated books and periodicals. Financial support also came from the Rockefeller Foundation, the Smithsonian Institution, and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

The Libraria of the Collegium Maius long ago ceased being a space large enough to accommodate the library's holdings. The decision to build a new, more spacious building was made in 1931. Its construction was completed in 1939.

The German invasion of Cracow on September 1 of that year opened yet another dramatic chapter in the history of the library. The spring of 1940 witnessed its relocation to a new building named by the occupying forces *Staatsbibliothek Krakau*. Access was restricted to the German population. Collegium Maius became a seat of the *Institut für Deutsche Ostarbeit* in charge of Germanizing Cracow and the eastern territories of Poland. While under occupation, the Polish personnel took note of the shipments of the library's most valuable books and works of art to the Reich. At the same time, members of the resistance took note of the shipments' routes and destinations. Because of such efforts, a majority of the uprooted library materials were revindicated and eventually returned to the Jagiellonian Library. Unfortunately, numerous works of art never made their way back to the Collegium Maius library.<sup>17</sup>

## 1954-

After 1945 the Jagiellonian Library began another revival. Even during the Stalinist era when censorship and regulations limited access to certain materials, administration and staff prevented the library's conformity with the regime. Organization, security of the collections, and library education became the pivotal considerations of the day.

After the 1956 “thaw”, cooperation with other European countries and the United States began to develop. The library was both a beneficiary of and a contributor to these exchanges.

As of 1987, the holdings of the Jagiellonian Library consisted of 1,327,732 monographs, 466,575 volumes of periodicals, and 894,663 special collections items. The library also controls forty-one specialized departmental libraries; no current data is available as to the quantity of their holdings.<sup>18</sup>

Today the library performs a triple task: it is a university library, a public research library, and a second bibliotheca patria.

According to an agreement between the National Library in Warsaw (which lost most of its rare and valuable holdings during the war) and the Jagiellonian Library, the former concentrates on newer materials, while the latter attempts to maintain a complete record and collection of old Polish books and periodicals.<sup>19</sup>

As soon as the building on Mickiewicz Boulevard became the seat of the Jagiellonian Library in 1963, the historic building of the Collegium Maius was turned into a museum. The restoration of the Collegium to its original form was completed in 1954.

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## Notes

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10. Zathę, “Biblioteka Jagiellońska,” 95; Hajdukiewicz, “Biblioteka,” 373, 405, 412.
11. Hajdukiewicz, “Biblioteka,” 332; Bar, *Przewodnik*, 42; Kończyńska, *Zarys*, 73–74.
12. Kończyńska, *Zarys*, 87; Gorecki, “The Commission,” 142–146; Hajdukiewicz, “Biblioteka,” 377–378, 394, 402–403.
13. Bar, *Przewodnik*, 15–16; Lepczyński, *Uniwersytet*, 39–40; Estreicher, *Collegium Maius*, 39; Kończyńska, *Zarys*, 88–93.

14. Gorecki, "The Commission," 162.
15. Hajdukiewicz, *The Jagiellonian University*, 50.
16. *Ibid.*, 49–55; Bar, *Przewodnik*, 17–22, 25–26, 29; Kończyńska, *Zarys*, 156–157; Estreicher, 64–69.
17. Hajdukiewicz, *The Jagiellonian University*, 58–63; Bar, *Przewodnik*, 30, 41; an oral history about the underground activities of the library during the German occupation.
18. Renata Dutkova, *The Jagiellonian University: the Present* (Cracow: The University, 1990), 45; for a comprehensive list of the library's holdings, see Richard C. Lewański, "Biblioteka Jagiellońska (The Jagiellonian Library)," in *Guide to Polish Libraries and Archives* (Boulder, Colorado : East European Quarterly; New York: Distributed by Columbia University Press, 1974), 35–37; Estreicher, *Collegium Maius* (1971), 30–32.
19. Lewański, *Guide to Polish Libraries*, 34–35.