



LIGUE DES BIBLIOTHÈQUES EUROPÉENNES DE RECHERCHE  
ASSOCIATION OF EUROPEAN RESEARCH LIBRARIES

Manuscript Librarians Group

## Poland – Progress Report 2003-2007

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### 1. Acquisitions

- For the present report a cautious estimate of the holdings of libraries and museums is attempted: secular institutions hold in total c. 180,000 manuscript items, church institutions c. 40,000 manuscript items. Out of necessity these figures are very approximate, as uncatalogued holdings have been estimated only very roughly, especially as some museums count individual letters and documents as units, whereas others provide only a number of manuscript collection groups without giving their size.
- At present resource expansion activities in manuscript collections are not spectacular: only the largest libraries can afford to purchase such collections (for example the purchase of the Archive of Zbigniew Herbert by the National Library), or to provide care of large collections such as the House Archive of the Pawlikowski Family (Biblioteka Jagiellonska). Apart from such cases, incoming manuscripts per year even in major libraries and museums do not exceed several to several dozen items. These are most often legacies of creators - men of letters, theatre and plastic artists, scholars and scientists, cultural and social activists, and at times archives of cultural or social organizations, periodicals or publishing houses terminating their activity.

### 2. Cataloguing projects

- Collections described in the publication noted above are usually inventoried in at least a preliminary way, most frequently either in card indexes or typed inventories with indexes which facilitate responding to queries. The largest and oldest libraries and museums often possess printed catalogues of their holdings, but they cover only part of the holdings. Full bibliographic records of all these catalogues

- and inventories are provided in: *Manuscript Collections in Libraries and Museums in Poland 2<sup>nd</sup> edn*, revised and expanded, compiled by Danuta Kamolowa with the assistance of Teresa Sieniacka, (The National Library, Warsaw 2007).
- Online access to catalogues of manuscript collections is still in the future for Polish libraries. At present they usually have to cope with the lack of both hardware and well trained staff. Only 6 libraries provide online access to at least part of the inventories or catalogues of their manuscripts. These libraries are:
    - Biblioteka Jagiellonska, Cracow:  
<http://www.bj.uj.edu.pl/>
    - Ossolineum Library, Wrocław:  
<http://www.oss.wroc.pl/>
    - Wrocław University Library:  
<http://www.bu.uni.wroc.pl/en/>
    - Voivodship and Municipal Public Library, Łódź:  
[http://www.wimbp.lodz.pl/en/public\\_libraries/](http://www.wimbp.lodz.pl/en/public_libraries/)
    - Książnica Cieszyńska (Cieszyn Library):  
<http://www.biblioteka.cieszyn.pl/>
    - Kórnik Library of the Polish Academy of Sciences:  
<http://www.bkpan.poznan.pl/biblioteka/index.html>
  - Three other libraries possess databases with on-site access, as does the National Library where the database covers the entire collection of manuscripts, numbering at present 23,000 items, but online access to the database is dependent on fundamental changes in the INNOPAC system. So far the database is accessible only on-site, and descriptions of part of the medieval manuscripts can be found in the international 'Manuscriptorium' database that we joined together with Wrocław University Library.

### 3. Digital access

- Digitization has become an important problem. First of all we are constrained by shortage of hardware for safe digitization, and secondly by lack of storage and access possibilities as far as such big files are concerned. Libraries limit the presentation of manuscript holdings to displaying 1-2 pages as a decorative image to accompany the collection description or even full images in a presentation of an educational and publicist collection. So far the largest collection of full digital copies is offered by the Biblioteka Jagiellonska in the form of 370 CDs containing manuscript images. The Wrocław University Library presents its 75 medieval manuscripts in the Digital Library of Wrocław University. The Main Library of the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń provides access to its manuscripts in the Digital Library of Kujawy and Pomerania (<http://www.bu.uni.torun.pl/en/>). Over 1,000 manuscript items of the libraries of Poznań and Kórnik can be viewed in the Digital Library of Wielkopolska (<http://www.wbc.poznan.pl/dlibra>). The National Library's CBN Polona contains digitized versions of 18 manuscripts, and new items will be added soon (<http://www.polona.pl/dlibra?action=ChangeLanguageAction&language=en>).

- It is very common for libraries and museums to provide access and copy microfilm items on microfilm, and the largest collection in Poland is held by the National Library. On the other hand, almost every library is equipped with cameras – be they even the simplest cameras – to make copies ordered by users, either in a microfilm format or as digital photographs.

#### 4. Conservation

- Conservation has now become solely and yet overwhelmingly a financial problem. Bigger or smaller workshops able to perform professional conservation treatment of manuscripts are based in almost all major libraries. They offer services for other institutions. The awareness of proper storage and physical protection issues, and the need for active conservation efforts which entail the approval of necessary funds is unfortunately often nonexistent among persons responsible for these institutions. And the art of conservation and the craftspersons' talents will not become cheaper.

#### 5. Selected exhibitions

- Insufficient information about our holdings means that they are often not taken into account by organizers of international exhibitions, and lack of funds prevents launching international exhibitions in our libraries. In recent years only the National Library has shown its manuscripts at exhibitions arranged in Ferrara, Padua, Istanbul, Vienna, Munich, Stockholm, Vilnius and Marseilles.
- This is, however, not to say that other libraries give up displaying their collections. Particularly public libraries are actively involved in the life of local communities and use their holdings to bring into focus the tradition, culture and awareness of the *piccole patrie* (small fatherlands). The Książnica Cieszyńska provides an excellent example of very robust activation of a local community. It offers online access to its manuscript holdings, as well as digitization services. It pursues a very conscious preservation and conservation policy; participates in major research programmes; conducts its own regional projects; and arranges collection promoting exhibitions.

#### 6. Other research activities

- The involvement of staff members of manuscript departments in libraries in research projects depends first of all on the rank of a library. Libraries of the Polish Academy of Sciences or university libraries employ staff able to conduct independent research activity based on manuscript collections. However, their most important duty is preparing scientific descriptions of collections and catalogue publishing. Major libraries such as the Biblioteka Jagiellonska, the Library of the Czartoryski Dukes or the National Library obtain grants for the preparation of consecutive volumes of the collections' catalogues.

- Also cataloguing projects covering Polish collections held abroad – in Paris, London, Uppsala – all conducted by the National Library, are long-term programmes involving more than one institution.

## 7. Selected literature

- It would be hard here to list all publications concerning Poland's manuscript holdings, be they only the recent ones. To find out more see: *Manuscript Collections in Libraries and Museums in Poland* 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, revised and expanded, compiled by Danuta Kamolowa with the assistance of Teresa Sieniatecka, (The National Library, Warsaw 2007).

## 8. Education

- This item of the suggested list of topics covered by the present report reflects a painful problem. For 75 years the personnel selection in the profession of a librarian of manuscripts has been definitely negative. None of the universities in Poland runs manuscript librarianship courses for students, and no post-graduate courses are available for this group of librarians. University departments of history provide students with basic knowledge on criticism of historical documents, yet the focus is definitely on archival research.
- What remains is old style disciple/master on-the-job learning, but what can you do if there is no master within one hundred kilometers? What happens is that manuscripts in libraries and museums are dealt with by a few enthusiasts in love with the smell of old paper and other people able to do little, for all that they are full of good intentions; yet they are usually badly paid, which only increases fluctuation and hampers the launching of larger projects. This problem still needs to be solved.

## 9. News on staff, organizations; varia

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