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# Libraria Interior In The Collegium Maius – Present And Past

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**Abstract:** This paper presents the story of the transformation of the interior of the library in the Collegium Maius in Kraków, from the very founding in the 16th century until today, based on various sources. A different approach to the interior arrangement was proposed, relating in its nature to the medieval library.

**Key words:** arrangement, historic building, medieval library, Collegium Maius

## 1. Introduction

In Collegium Maius in Kraków, containing the University Museum, in the hall called Libraria, a new inventory of the vaults was performed in 2014 (initiated by the author and funded by a grant of the National Science Centre). This sparked interest in the object's past, its today's condition and functioning. The history of this unique place where the oldest university library was created, the foundation of the currently existing Jagiellonian Library, stimulates reflection and imagination, desire to compare, to make own research. Longer contact, careful observation, analysis of the object and historical sources resulted in new perception, noticing advantages and shortages of the present object. The value of a historic building and its importance for culture is unique – here, masterpieces were studied, intellectual life flourished, intellectual professions were taught. Looking at this place now, we unfortunately get a different impression: inconsistent but beautiful architecture of the interior with equipment, modern but somehow unfinished arrangement. So critical, subjective look requires explanation and proposing specific changes.

## 2. Libraria today

Libraria is entered through a stone, late-gothic portal, incredibly effective, emphasising the meaning of Libraria. Due to the golden decoration elements – the only one in Kraków – it is called Porta Aurea – Golden Gate (Fig. 1, 2).

The interior makes a strong impression with a beautiful composition, glamour. It is spacious and bright (Fig. 3.4). Volumetrically, it is the largest room in the Collegium, a well-lit one (eight large, highly situated windows).

Libraria is covered by a ribbed vault from the early 16th century made of bricks. It is decorative, a true dominant of the interior. The spatial layout of the interior is typical for many centuries ago – still present thick walls, stone portals, window framings, vaults. Plan of Libraria is very distinctive, it is L-shaped, made of two perpendicularly situated elongated wings. The equipment consists of simple, humble library cabinets, a long table with chairs, chests of drawers and a wide variety of different furnishings, memorabilia, globes, etc. Items are historic, though diverse in style. The room is divided in two by a mobile bulkhead (a large drape): larger at the southern wall, near ul. Jagiellońska and smaller by the Golden Portal. A drape, large just as a theatre curtain, was installed in the 60s for practical reasons: so the visitors would not disturb the functioning of the university room (Fig. 5). The smaller part "behind the curtain" is filled with furniture presenting different style, namely huge wardrobes, chairs and tables made in the 19th century – lavish, almost like in a palace. The wall is

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decorated with a giant founding painting of the University. Large wardrobes placed away from walls are used as museum display cabinets, presenting collections of decorative arts (Fig. 6, 7).

Libraria was thus divided into the wing "for the university" (senate meetings) and another wing "for the visitors" entering through the portal.

Such interior arrangement was common after the war. Collegium Maius building was subjected to extensive conservation and construction works in the years 1950-1963. The general principle of renewal was the removal of the pseudo-gothic and the return to the former division of the interior, still present in the first half of the 19th century (before the restaurant of K. Kremer). In the 20th century there was demolishing and transformations of roofs, ceilings and facades. Roof above libraria was changed, step gable was reconstructed. In the interior, pseudo-gothic arcades were removed, along with the decoration of ceiling and walls, 19th century racks and display cabinets were eliminated. The resulting empty space was gradually filled with purchased furniture, recovered deposits, produced copies and reconstructions. Today's condition of the equipment is a creation of conservators, made of original, reconstructed fragments more or less accurate – thus it can be discussed and modified.

### 3. Libraria in the past. Past recorded in the walls, paintings and descriptions

Questions arise – how did Libraria look like in the past? Are there original interior details preserved? Why does the room have such an untypical layout (L-shaped)? What was the reason for unregular (no axis) situation of windows and weird height of the sills (approx. 2 metres)? What is the reason for such type of ceiling?

First, let's recall the opinion of professor K. Estreicher, expert on university matters (1968): "Libraria's architectural forms were not discussed in detail, and here lies the source for some kind of underestimation for value of this library hall, one of the few in Europe built so purposefully and modern, though gothic in terms of ceilings. The name Libraria appears in Vienna, Paris, Oxford and Cambridge. Sometimes it concerns books, sometimes a room. Since the end of the 15th century, the name refers to the great hall on the first floor, organically associated with the Collegium Maius"<sup>2</sup>.

The history of founding of the oldest university library has long interested researchers, detailed studies of written sources were developed: chronicles, contracts, receipts. The very architecture as the source enjoyed less attention. It was only in the 20th century that systematic architectural and archeologic research was conducted along with interpretations of the preserved iconography, studies of history of the building. State of the art expanded considerably back then. The history of the Collegium Maius was described by Stanisław Tomkowicz, Jerzy Zathę, Anna Lewicka-Kamińska, Leszek Hajdukiewicz, and comprehensive study was prepared by Karol Estreicher.<sup>3</sup> Books of Andrzej Włodarek, Stanisław Waltoś and Andrzej Chwałba have been published recently<sup>4</sup>.

Let's recall selected information (from these studies), which are essential for understanding the historical architecture and its interior.

The form of library in Collegium Maius in Kraków was probably influenced by inspirations with former solutions in libraries in Wrocław and Vienna. Numerous library halls emerged in Wrocław: at the St. Mary Magdalene Church and St. Elisabeth Church, at the cathedral. Before that, many libraries were founded in Italy in the 15th century, such as the one in Urbino castle. Italian libraries were imitated in Europe: France, England, Germany, Hungary and Silesia. The layout of libraries was influenced by the way books were secured and used. Extremely valuable manuscripts and printed works were treated as treasures. They were kept in boxes or closets. They were not borrowed, but only used on site in the reading room, put on bookrests. More valuable works were secured with chains and padlocks at the bookrests. Comfortable use required appropriate library halls – elongated, rectangular with numerous windows. This significant number and height of windows in Libraria

2 Estreicher K.: *Collegium Maius*. „Zeszyty Naukowe UJ, CLXX. Prace z historii sztuki”, z. 6, Kraków 1968.

3 Morawski K.: *Historia Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego. Średnie Wiek i Odrodzenie*. TT. I-II, Kraków 1900; Barycz H.: *Historia Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego w epoce humanizmu*. Kraków 1935; Lepszy K. (red.): *Dzieje Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego w latach 1364-1764*. T. I, Kraków 1964; Tomkowicz S.: *Gmach Biblioteki Jagiellońskiej*. Historia i opis. „Rocznik Krakowski”, IV: 1900, s. 113-175; Zathę J., Lewicka-Kamińska A., Hajdukiewicz L.: *Historia Biblioteki Jagiellońskiej*. T. I, 1364-1775. Pod red. I. Zarębskiego. Kraków 1966; Estreicher K.: *Collegium Maius*. „Zeszyty Naukowe UJ, CLXX. Prace z historii sztuki”, z.6, Kraków 1968.

4 Włodarek A., *Architektura średniowiecznych kolegiów i burs UJ*, Kraków 2000, Waltoś S., *Collegium Maius UJ*, Kraków 1999, Chwałba A., *Collegium Maius*, Kraków 2009

(originally there were nine) in every external wall (the longest one to the south) is caused by the need to light up the reading room with high bookrests. Brick vault provided durability and protection against fire. Bars in the windows protected valuable books. The L-shaped layout was caused by the shape of the plot used for the library construction, completing the quadrangle of older development around the courtyard.

The iconography experts emphasise the richness of the views of Maius, but from the later ages, as only 17th century pictures have survived. Unfortunately, there is nothing from the founding of the university<sup>5</sup>. View from the courtyard on the wing with Libraria was presented in the 17th century on the bas-relief in the reliquary of St. Jan Kanty<sup>6</sup>. It shows everyday life in the academy: hall filled with students, cloisters, professors lecturing at cathedrals (Fig. 8). Above the entrance to libraria, decorated with a decorative portal, a large clock was presented (reconstructed in the 20th century). The oldest picture of the library interior is the drawing from 1820 by Michał Stachowicz (Fig. 9). It shows a portion of decoration in the Jagiellonian Hall, painted on a large scale on the walls. (destroyed in the 19th century). Only graphic designs of the same author survived, drawings on a smaller scale. Stachowicz presented events during the Swedish invasion, the scene of looting of the harvest. He illustrated the story of 1655, however, the background – the interior of the library hall – was presented in accordance with the reality in the 19th century, observed directly next to the decorated hall. He presented the interior surrounded by cabinets filled with books: “we can see a few thousand of books” (description of prof. Putynowicz, 17th century), high ladders rested against the shelves, a long table with teaching aids in the middle. Other pictures of the interior date back to the 19th century, the time of changes after regothisation. Most Maius pictures were created in the 19th century, the courtyard was presented very often (with the portal by Libraria) or the view of the entire building from afar (Fig. 10, 11).

The old inventories with building plans are valuable sources of information. There is a preserved set of plans for university buildings, made from the end of the 18th century to the beginning of the 20th century. Preserved objects also include revisions with the oldest descriptions of colleges and halls of residence.

University accounts are especially valuable and interesting. The oldest ones date back to the turn of the 15th and the 16th century and are the records of prosecutor Mikołaj from Koprzywnica. They describe expenditures on construction and renovation works; in particular they document the construction of Libraria. They allow us to analyse the organisation and funding of the former building technology based on contracts, bills, legacies and donations related to the construction. Fragments of those documents, translated from Latin, are quoted by K. Estreicher and A. Włodarek – it is worth to show some of them<sup>7</sup>.

“Before the construction, a significant amount of construction materials was collected, squared stone was purchased for portals, window frames and vaults under Libraria. In 1516, rector and stonemasons revised walls, they also started the foundation for the walls of the library. That year, a contract was concluded with Stefan, a bricklayer, for construction of three vaults in the basement. Earlier, in 1515, wood was purchased for the construction of the vaults. In 1516 axilla vaults were filled with debris, which indicates that the vaults were finished. Another contract for the construction of two vaults was concluded in 1516. These plans were not implemented, because it was decided to extend the walls of the future libraria. Apparently, there was a change of the concept. Originally, probably smaller rectangular libraria was planned, but later it was decided to extend it. In 1516, a treasure was found (used to extend the library). In 1518, the foundation for the extended libraria appeared. Last record and payment for the cooper for the vault in the libraria’s basement proves it was built on centrings. Works were conducted under the supervision of urban and municipal masons. In 1519, a roof was installed over the new libraria and this is where the records of Mikołaj from Koprzywnica end. Further construction process is unknown. Works must have been still conducted, finished in 1540, which is evidenced by donations and employment of permanent curator of the collections.

The meticulous records of building expenses associated with the establishment of the medieval Collegium are rare – and their value is even enhanced by the fact that the building still exists and has been serving science and culture for several centuries. The wish of the funders came true – the academy is to be “forever and ever”.

The source references find their confirmation in the architectural structure, and these correlations speak to the imagination. You can visually see how the object grew, where new parts were connected to the old ones,

5 Banach J., *Kraków malowniczy. O albumach z widokami miasta w XIX w.*; Kęder I, Komorowski W. *Katalog widoków Krakowa, t.5, Kraków 2015*

6 Silver reliquary of St Jan Kanty in Collegiate of St. Anna in Kraków.

7 Włodarek A., *Architektura średniowiecznych kolegiów i burs UJ, Kraków 2000, s.120-127*

how the thread changed. This proves inconsistent architectural concept and building over a long time, in many phases. There are parts with different structure. The *libraria* building was connected in the 16th century as the last one, closing the square courtyard.

#### 4. About *Libraria*'s arrangement – in the quiet library

The current arrangement creates a mood of gravity and past, but there are too few readable references to the former function, content and equipment. The interior design does not reflect the character or rich medieval library visited by kings, scientists and travellers, where researchers worked every day. It rather resembles museum halls and collections with various exhibits, busts, large paintings, etc. (Fig. 5). "Some" books are found in the glass library cabinets – but there are no bookrests, benches, boxes, tall shelves filled with books to the very top.

#### How to reflect the mood of medieval library today?

There are conditions to at least change the decor in the smaller part of the room, which is poorly used – to once again fill the large walls with tall bookshelves, scrolls of parchments, maps, library ladders, bookrests with opened manuscripts or beautifully decorated old prints and writing tools. We can show the daily life of medieval library, reading room and workshop. *Libraria* is a monumental and beautiful space in the college, distinctive compared to humble, ascetic conditions in other places of its kind. Observation of the entire interior, however, is not easy. It is only possible after dismantling the textile drape. It reveals impressive, homogeneous vaults zone, but also separate design and equipment in both "wings" of the room. It causes an adverse effect of inconsistent design.

It is suggested to replace the velvet drape with e.g. transparent divider made of bookshelves or at least their illusion painted just as on the former curtains, or photo-imitation of library shelves, used e.g. on advertising banners. Or maybe it would be a good idea to install a giant mirror under the vault, which would illuminate the space, just as it did in the old house on market square, in gothic hall with vault.

We could probably better use the underrated space closed under the gothic vault. We could expose it, stop using it as a hallway or lobby with facilities (changing room, etc.).

The proposed arrangement does not require large investment or introducing aggressive, irreversible changes. Part of the hall, where meetings, promotions and formerly the proceedings of the Senate were held, looks like a university hall and it can be left this way, but some of the interior from the cloisters by the Golden Portal could be radically changed. This "reconstruction" of the former library, somehow stenographic, would enrich the exhibition (at least for some time) even for educational purposes, emphasising this unique place that kept books for centuries, the very foundation of the Jagiellonian Library.

When equipping the library, we could use the analogy to the academic libraries or their images, like Leida or Prague in the 16th century. We can also suggest with the oldest image of the interior from 1820 by Michał Stachowicz.

#### 5. Conclusions

The aim of changed design would be to suggest a vision of the past, bring back the glorious history of the university and its library, its association with the royal foundations, and, above all, to display the high rank of this treasury of scientific works.

The design could be complemented with the virtual guide to the collection, taking into account various themes such as history, preservation of monuments, artistic creation on Collegium Maius and the importance of culture books.

The Kraków Collegium is exceptionally well preserved on a European scale and deserves special attention, and an interesting design would encourage the visitors.

In Europe, few medieval academic buildings survived. Collegiums in Italy, e.g. in Padua, Siena, Perugia, Rome, has been completely rebuilt or demolished. In Bologna there is still the Spain Collegium. In Northern Europe, there is the Carolinum in Prague (reconstructed in the 20th century) and the Collegium in Erfurt. England has the still existing medieval quarters of academic buildings.

Some call the Maius building in Kraków the architectonic pearl, but real treasures of science and culture were located just behind the Golden Portal in Libreria – in the quiet library.

Maybe it would be good to prepare their modern pictures, reconstructions – virtual or real – and to summon timeless values that evolved here.

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## Illustrations to the article – miniatures



Ryc. 1,2



Ryc 3,4



Ryc 5,6



Ryc 7,8



Ryc 9,10,11,



Ryc 1. Collegium Maius. Courtyard view

Ryc 2. Collegium Maius. Courtyard view

Ryc 3. Collegium Maius, Libraria interior, south-eastern corner.

Ryc 4. Stellar vault in the middle arch of the library.

Ryc 5. Libraria interior, view from the middle arch on the large drape

Ryc 6. Libraria interior, view on the northern wall by the Golden Portal

Ryc 7. Libraria's equipment from the 19th century: cabinets, chairs

Ryc 8. Bas-relief on the reliquary of St. Jan Kanty. View on the Collegium Maius courtyard, 1695 (one of the oldest images of the Collegium)

Ryc 9. Libraria interior by M. Stachowicz, 1821.

Ryc 10. Collegium Maius. View on courtyard before the restauration of K. Kremer. Painting by M. Zaleski, 1846.

Ryc 11. Collegium Maius. Corner of ul. Jagiellońska and ul. Św. Anny, lithography by H. Walter, 1862