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KNOWN, YET UNDISCOVERED. INTRODUCTION TO THE QUESTIONS OF MUSEUM LIBRARIES IN POLAND

Magdalena Skrejko

Karol Rzewuski Museum of Photography in Cracow; Section of Libraries at Museums, Galleries, and Cultural Institutions at the General Board of the Polish Librarians Association
ORCID 0000-0002-0180-1577

Katarzyna Żák-Caplot

Museum of Warsaw, Section of Libraries at Museums, Galleries, and Cultural Institutions at the General Board of the Polish Librarians Association
ORCID 0000-0002-4114-8082

At present, it is almost a worldwide phenomenon that museums. One cannot ignore the library of the Paris Centre Pompidou or that of the Amsterdam Rijksmuseum. Among other impressive libraries of art museums let us mention those in Barcelona: the Arxiu Library in the complex of the Museu d'Art Contemporani and the Centre de Cultura Contemporània, or the Biblioteca de Arte at the Lisbon Gulbenkian Museum.¹ *As for our southern neighbours, the Library of the National Museum in Prague had been founded before the national library. Currently it boasts the collection exceeding 1.6 million volumes and until 1996 it had received a legal deposit of all the prints published in the Czech Republic.*²

In Poland, the issue of museum libraries is beginning to be more widely identified and popularized. Owing to intensified activity of employees from libraries operating at museums it has been of growing interest to both librarians practitioners and academic circles. The present paper aims at demonstrating the potential and worth of museum libraries, which in many countries have for long been equal partners to their parent institutions, and specify the challenges they

museum libraries consolidate the prestige of their parent face today. Often due to the unawareness of legislators and administrative organs museum libraries balance on the edge of legal regulations and customary operation mode ranging between library- and museum-related ones, in practice, different and even mutually exclusive. A museum and a library are seemingly very similar institutions of approximate functions. However, after a closer analysis it can be seen that in harmony with the law they should operate following slightly different principles, while their employees and their competences cannot always be comparable to the museum ones.

The paper also tries to identify challenges museum library employees encounter; it addresses the questions of their competences, career promotion, and knowledge of the law.

The authors of the paper did not decide to conduct a statistical research which would allow to give the number of museum libraries operating in Poland, or to describe the employment structure... *the data on museum libraries that we are able to obtain from research officially carried out in our country is scarce... GUS reports do not include issues related to museum libraries. Although most museum libraries fill out*

the GUS statistical form Report from the K-03 library, the data obtained from this survey are not visible in the Report on the condition of libraries in Poland... Selected data and indicators.³ Let us illustrate this with the report for 2020 showing that in Poland there operated 932 museums and museum branches.⁴ It does not, however, specify which of those have museum libraries. In that very publication Katarzyna Żák-Caplot discusses the reports prepared by the National Institute for Museums and Public Collections (NIMOZ): *Museums in Poland* and *Museum Education in Poland*.

The description of the scale of the question requires time and thorough research with the application of several research methods. The pieces of information used in the paper were obtained through direct or telephone conversations, or from museum websites.

Mouseion/museum and the first libraries

The response to which came first, the museum or the museum library? Does not seem to be that unequivocal. Let us, therefore, look more closely at the definition of the mouseion, namely the first museums. Following Folga-Januszewska,⁵ mouseions evolved from the venues connected with music to literature centres. At one point, they were even called *travelling libraries*. Several centuries before the concept of museum as a literary collection had been known and it stayed until the modern era. The ancient meaning of the word 'musaeum' is 'home of the muses', thus a place of inspiration and repository of the effects of creative inspiration.⁶ *The concept of museum was incorporated into French as a synonym of a knowledge institution that plays the role of a library... When searching for the old museum definition, one must not forget that it was associated with the experience derived from the amassed collection... You can look at the library in exactly the same way – not as a collection of books (in Greek *biblion* means a book), but a place where knowledge and inspiration for further creative activity takes place.*⁷

The concept of a library has been inseparably connected with literary work and realm of science and inspiration thanks to collections amassed there: not just books, but also prints, maps, and occasionally art works. This does sound highly familiar.

The Great Library of Alexandria founded at the Alexandrian Mouseion in the 3rd century BC has to this date remained the largest and best-known book collection of the ancient world. Ptolemy I Soter (367 BC–283 BC) founded it to serve the Alexandrian Mouseion. The idea to collect writing, systematize knowledge, and make it available to scholars was justified. It was here that Callimachus (ca 310 BC–240 BC) prepared the first catalogue and the first bibliography of Greek literature.

The Vatican Library (*Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana*) was founded in Rome in the 5th century; although it was at the Lateran State Archive, it has to be borne in mind that since the 18th century it has operated within the complex of the Vatican Museums: Pio-Clementino, Gregoriano Egiziano, Gregoriano Etrusco, numerous galleries and laboratories, and even the Vatican School of Librarianship.

At the British Museum founded in 1753 and opened to the public on 15 January 1759, simultaneously to the museum collection, also the following were amassed: manuscripts,

books, drawings, and maps. It is here that the Magna Carta of John of England from 1215 has been preserved.

When at the turn of the 19th century Princess Izabela née Fleming (1746–1835) and Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski (1734–1823) were organizing the first Polish museum at Puławy, from the very beginning they understood the urge to collect books in it. This engendered the Princes Czartoryski Library, today a branch of the National Museum in Cracow.

An excellent example of a simultaneous amassing of library and museum collections can be seen in the Józef Maksymilian Count Ossoliński Foundation authorized with the decision of Emperor Franz Joseph I in 1817.

State of research

To-date little room has been dedicated in Polish writing related to libraries, librarianship, and museology to museum libraries; if any at all, the focus was mainly on describing the amassed collections, particularly on discussing the historic items. One of the scarce publications talking about foreign museum libraries can be found in the following papers: Jan Sobczyk, *Libraries of Art Museums on the Examples of the Arxiu CCCB Library in Barcelona and the Biblioteca de Arte of the Gulbenkian Museum in Lisbon*⁹ and that by Anna Adamek, *Museum Library: from the Experience of the Canada Science and Technology Museum in Ottawa*.¹⁰

It has only been since 2018, namely the year in which the Museum of Warsaw organized its first conference for librarians and employees from museum libraries titled 'Museum Library Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow' that the topic of the organization, revitalization, principles of museum library operations, and the profession of a museum librarian has entered for good the librarians' periodicals and published conference proceedings.

The first article to address the whole of the phenomenon of a museum library as a part of its parent organization, namely museum, was the already-mentioned paper by Katarzyna Żák-Caplot *An Unexplored Phenomenon on the Border of Two Worlds. An Introduction to the Issue of Museum Libraries in Poland*¹¹ published in a special issue of 'Przegląd Biblioteczny' in 2019. Soon after, owing to the efforts of librarians and guardians of library collections No. 192 of 'Elektronik Biuletyn EBIB'¹² of June 2020 entirely dedicated to library museums was released. In their respective papers the authors described the most important and most strategic ranges of the libraries' operations: amassing and collecting,¹³ disseminating,¹⁴ education,¹⁵ promotion and marketing,¹⁶ resorting to their own experience stemming from often really long-standing work.

The topic of the Second Polish Conference of Museum Library Librarians and Employees titled 'A Librarian in a Museum. Work, Cooperation, Challenge' held at the Malbork Castle Museum in 2020 was the job of a museum librarian, and this important topic was tackled in two papers: by Magdalena Skrejko and Katarzyna Żák-Caplot, *A Museum Librarian, Namely a Hybrid in the World of Culture* and by Aleksandra Siuciak, *A Museum Librarian, Namely What Kind of a Librarian? On the Role and Professional Competence of a Librarian at a Museum, on the Example of the Malbork Castle Museum*.¹⁸

Due to an increasingly more active attitude of museum

librarians, and thanks to a certain distinctiveness and possibility to act more flexibly than at a museum (this idea will be tackled more extensively below), museums libraries cooperate with other departments of their parent institution and external users, creating unique and genuine popularizing and educational projects, using both museum and library collections. A good example in this respect can be found in the following papers: by Magdalena Skrejko in cooperation with Maria Masternak, *'3D Light Engraving', as a Form of Working with the Beholder and Reader, Namely on Reading Photographs by the Blind and Visually Impaired. From the Experience of Cooperation Between the Museum Library and Promotion Department of the Museum of Photography in Cracow*,¹⁹ serving as an excellent example of parallel amassing of library and museum collections for the excluded, and the paper by Katarzyna Żák-Caplot, *Strategy of Implementing Educational Innovations at the Library of the Museum of Warsaw. An Example of Linguistic Projects*,²⁰ in which the author describes a several-year experience of working with foreigners and the relations between the Library of the Museum of Warsaw with the 'Polonicum' Centre of Polish Language and Culture for Foreigners at the University of Warsaw and the European Language Label.

New museum libraries have been created, while the older ones are undergoing thorough transformations in the course of the revitalization of their parent museums. For this reason museum librarians have decided that their third annual conference titled 'A Modern Museum Library. Meaning: We Are Revitalizing, Organizing, Creating' to be held at Warsaw's Station Museum in September 2021 will be dedicated to this constantly topical issue. It is thus likely that many papers dealing with revitalization will be published later on this year and next year. Currently, the available articles include the following: Justyna Długosz, *Library of the Silesian Museum in Katowice: a Contemporary Museum Library at a Modern Cultural Institution*,²¹ discussing the modernization of the Library of the Silesian Museum in Katowice, and by Katarzyna Żák-Caplot, *A Museum Library A New, Namely Between the Second and the Third Place*,²² which actually speaks more extensively on thorough transformations that a library museum underwent in 2015–2018, both organizationally and technologically, also in relation to its parent museum.

As has been demonstrated, the community of museum librarians have become more and more active, working on popularizing the job of a museum librarian, so well known and highly appreciated abroad. It is for this reason, among other things, that the Section of Libraries at Museums, Galleries, and Cultural Institutions at the General Board of the Polish Librarians Association was founded in December 2020. On shared actions and goals quite a lot has been written in librarian trade journals. To conclude the overview of the literature on the subject let us quote the papers by Katarzyna Żák-Caplot: *Museum Libraries: a Feature Article*²³ and *It Is Our Turn Now, Namely on the Cooperation among Museum Librarians in Poland*²⁴ which she prepared together with Aleksandra Siuciak as summing up of the activity of librarians in 2019–2020.

Position within the parent institution. Terminology

A museum library forms part of its parent organization, and its situation depends, among other things, on the position within the museum structure, thus its hierarchy. Most frequently, it is an independent department, though it can also form part of another unit: scientific department, scientific-and-educational, or educational, rarely of information or documentation ones. Occasionally, it happens, though really infrequently, that the library is under the administrative department, as is the case at e.g., the Archaeological and Historical Museum in Głogów.²⁵ In certain cases, bearing in mind and emphasizing the profile of a given museum, the library is located at a different, but special venue. At the MOCAM Museum of Contemporary Art in Cracow the book collection has been located within the Department of Art Knowledge, while the Wejherowo Museum of Kashubian-Pomeranian Music organized the Department of Literature and Press commonly referred to as a library;²⁶ there is a separate Manuscript and Antique Books Section within it.

Museum libraries operate under different names, defining e.g., the range of the amassed collections: Book Collection,²⁷ Library,²⁸ Libraries and Archive,²⁹ Scientific Library and Archive,³⁰ Archive and Library Department,³¹ Corporate Library and Archive,³² Library and Scientific Information Department,³³ Library and Special Collections Department,³⁴ Library and Antique Books,³⁵ Library and Publishing Department,³⁶ Department of Publications, Library, and of Information.³⁷ This depends on the internal regulations adopted by the museums.

Museum libraries often define themselves as 'specialized'. In some cases, however, in order to emphasize the quality of the amassed collections, they define themselves as scientific specialized ones. There are some which for historical reasons or owing to tradition define themselves as scientific libraries,³⁸ although they are not listed among those ranked formally as scientific libraries:³⁹ the latter include only two museum book collections: the Princes Czartoryski Library (branch of the National Museum in Cracow) and the Library of the National Museum in Warsaw.

Their subordination vary; also their supervisors do: they can be directors or their deputies, plenipotentiaries for managing collections, chief curators. Regardless, however, of its positioning, the library should constitute an integral part of the museum. After all, it is the space that programme or factual departments cannot do without. It has to be clearly emphasized, though, that the library is dependent on its parent organization as far as organisation, venue, and finances are concerned. It is good practice if the library is treated within the museum equally as other departments. This allows to run an equal policy of e.g. financing, accessibility to conservation services, and collection digitizing. The libraries find themselves in a much more deplorable position if marginalized in the museum's activity, the latter lamentably often the case in Polish museums.

Amassing. Collections

In order to be able to describe a museum library, one has to, first of all, look at the museum within which it operates.

Owing to the fact that it is not a sovereign unit, but functioning within a superior institution, its operation is subordinated to the museum operations. This applies mainly to the thematic selection of the collections amassed in the library which should harmonize with the museum's profile, the collecting policy it has outlined for itself, as well as the institution's mission and strategy. When amassing literature and varied artefacts (often not associated with library collections), what has to be borne in mind are the domains represented at the museum. A good knowledge of the museum collection helps to build a unique library collection, often of historical or artistic character. The thematic range of the book collection in multidisciplinary museums is much broader than that collected in thematic or biographical museums, which, however, does not mean that they have fewer acquisitions.

Apart from basic reference literature: general and thematic encyclopaedia, biographical and language dictionaries, lexicons and studies in the disciplines represented by the museum: history, art history, ethnography and ethnology, archaeology, and others, also historic collections are gathered. They are historic book collections, often amassed from the beginning of the museum's existence, in many a case associated with the museum's founders, the first donors, e.g. antique books or manuscripts. Regardless of those, historic items are collected; they are selected in the special library collection or archives operating within the library. They have room for artifacts of particular artistic, historical, or technological value. Entered into separate inventory books, studied and included in special catalogues dedicated to them, they often require special storage conditions and conservator's care. They are collections completing the main museum's collection, items contextually associated with the museum exhibits.

Users

Art, 24.1 of the Libraries Act stipulates that: *Specialized libraries shall support the implementation of goals of enterprises and serve for the professional in-service training of personnel.*⁴⁰ As much as this sounds convincing, it can be clearly noticeable that such a definition looks a bit too limiting, outdated, and unmatching the tasks fulfilled by contemporary museum libraries. On the one hand, it is true that museum book collections serve museum employees as their tool for an academic study of museum exhibits, a source of additional knowledge, or self-training: they constitute an excellent background for academic research and support for the museum-conducted research processes; that they are resorted to by exhibition curators, museum curators, authors of museum and exhibition catalogues, museum guides, educators, or conservators of art works. On the other hand, however, museum libraries have been becoming more and more often public book collections, though they are not, in fact, such organisations.⁴¹ Their change of character has been occurring under the transformation, evolution of the libraries, also due to technological changes. This process is primarily connected with the variety of tasks they face as well as with the availability to users.

Let us not forget that the museum library is not the first choice and target destination of museum visitors, who are not even always aware of the existence of the library in

the museum. They are firstly interested in the display offer, they want to be in the presence of art works, historic monuments, artifacts from the past, namely exhibits in the display space. Only once they have become familiar with the museum's full offer, do they reach the library. Cases are known of visitors getting to the library following a series of visits to the museum or participation in museum educational events. Meanwhile, museum libraries are not open merely to the institution's employees, but to everyone who wishes to visit them for reading. They offer their holdings to university and secondary-school students looking for sources for their theses: doctoral, Bachelors', and Masters'; they welcome the youngest students to their educational events, they host senior citizens for whom increasingly more special programmes are mounted. Let us quote as an excellent example of openness the Library of the Museum of Art in Lodz and of the Museum of Warsaw where visually impaired visitors find scanning screen readers allowing blind and visually impaired individuals to independently scan documents and have these read out thanks to a speech synthesizer transforming printed text into speech.

At this point it is most appropriate to remind that more and more frequently the popularizing activity of museum libraries boosts the number of visitors to their parent institutions and consolidates bonds with the public groups already cooperating with the museum. As the example let us point to the educational activity of the Library of the Museum of Warsaw targeted mainly at foreigners and Polish youth attending Polish schools abroad. The literary competition held annually has systematically attracted several hundred participants,⁴² not only from around Poland, but also the whole world, while their language projects⁴³ engage foreigners living in Warsaw.

Hybridity of services

The range of works conducted in museum libraries is wide. Next to basic standard library operations, such as: collection amassing, studying, preserving and making it available, libraries are engaged in tasks and projects conducted by their parent institutions. They participate in the cyclically organized Long Nights of Museums, Museum Doors Open Days, city events, outdoor games. These popularize not only books and reading, but also the disciplines represented by the museum! In museum libraries the museums' actions are documented and informed about, while museum library employees by definition have the knowledge of the collected museum exhibits, collection, or their institution's structure. Librarians and library employees are increasingly more obliged to participate in academic projects, publish their research results, take part in academic conferences and seminars. In many a case, they participate in acquiring financing for the museum. Furthermore, museum libraries also fulfil other non-standard tasks, this exemplified by the Library of the Museum of Papermaking in Duszniki-Zdrój where works on the bibliography of papermaking have been conducted.⁴⁴ Others implement publishing projects.⁴⁵ As mentioned above, the Museum of Warsaw runs their genuine projects of teaching Polish to foreigners using their museum exhibits and book collection.⁴⁶ This is a resultant of the activity conducted on the borderline between the museum and the library. On the

one hand, a museum library is expected to fulfil the standard functions of an effectively-operating book collection, yet on the other, to perform the mission of its parent museum and to remain subordinate to it in its structural hierarchy. This phenomenon is defined by museum librarians as hybridity of services.

Legal regulations

This hybrid character has far-reaching consequences, also within the valid law. Acting between the acts addressed to libraries and those resulting from the fact of libraries being within the museum structures, on a daily basis museum library employees face multiple challenges.

A museum librarian must be familiar with: Libraries Act of 27 June 1997, Act on Museums of 21 November 1996,⁴⁷ Act on National Archive Resource and Archives of 14 July 1982,⁴⁸ Regulation of the Minister of Culture and National Heritage of 4 July 2012 on the national library resource. A museum librarian should be well acquainted with the Act of 4 February 1994 on Copyright and Related Rights⁴⁹ and the Act of 10 May 2018 on the Protection of Personal Data.⁵⁰

Importantly, museum libraries were excluded from the Regulation of the Minister of Culture and National Heritage of 29 October 2008 on the register of library materials⁵¹ while in their inventory they are obliged to comply with the Act of 29 September 1994 on Accounting.⁵² The latter Act treats books collections equally to other durable assets. Such an approach is not privileged for museum libraries for two reasons: the Act on Accounting shortens the requirement for inventory from five to four years, and more importantly, it rigorously defines the date for the inventory's beginning and completion. Those regulations give very limited time for the inventory of sometimes really extensive book collections! It should be emphasized that such a treatment of museum book collections diminishes their prestige.

In harmony with the provisions of Art.14.1 of the Libraries Act, services provided in libraries, also museum libraries, are provided to general public free of charge (with clearly specified exemptions⁵³). Meanwhile, museum libraries operate within institutions which are active VAT payers! This has yielded many controversial issues, e.g., the necessity to provide library services to general public for a fee. The example here being paid admission to the library in the form of single or season tickets.⁵⁴ It is, however, true that Art. 14.2.4. of the Libraries Act clearly stipulates that *Conditions and rules for the use of a library shall be set out in the regulations drafted by the director (head) of the library.*

Both as far as collection inventorying and charges for library services are concerned, there are no universal solutions: each museum applies separate arbitrary means of coping with them, and specified in their internal regulations.

A museum librarian

One of the most urgent challenges requiring a solution is lack of detailed legal regulations related to the career promotion

within the museum structure. Art. 29.2 of the Libraries Act defines, however, subsequent amendments and the 2013 librarian's job deregulation superseded the point related to librarian's positions. It is specified in the Regulation of the Minister of Culture and National Heritage of 5 December 2012 on the required qualifications for the librarian positions in libraries as well as positions of other specialists related to library operations.⁵⁵

The regulation specifies five steps of the career promotion: junior librarian, librarian, senior librarian, curator, and senior curator whose respective competences are clearly defined. In the Act on Museums there are only four positions: assistant, adjunct, custodian, and licenced custodian, while senior custodian is missing.

The discrepancies in the provisions cause that a museum librarian often does not get promoted to a senior custodian position. Additionally, in order to become a custodian in a museum library, the candidate often has to follow a post-graduate museological course. It is true, indeed, that museum libraries more and more willingly employ specialists in the discipline represented by the museum: art historians, historians, ethnographers, ethnologists, archaeologists, literature specialists, or philologists. In some cases, however, candidates for the positions at the museum library are requested by the parent institution to boast a librarian education, if only in a post-graduate format.

Regrettably, some institutions impede the career promotion in the library, since Art. 32b.1. of the Act on Museums does not mention librarians among specialists in the professions related to the museum activity of librarian, whereas in the museum career promotion path there is no senior custodian position.

Fortunately, the light at the end of the tunnel can be seen, since in the project implemented by the Culture Department of the City of Warsaw related to the evaluation and verification of the position description in four city museums works are underway for a career promotion path for employees of the Library section.

The community of museum librarians has undertaken a shared effort to integrate and cooperate more closely. Not only has it yielded annual academic conferences and the establishment of the Section of Libraries at Museums, Galleries, and Cultural Institutions at the General Board of the Polish Librarians Association, but has also allowed to make librarians and librarianship specialists to become interested in the phenomenon of museum libraries. Today, the issues connected with museum libraries are not unknown to the librarians' circles; the recently-established section is regarded to be an effective unit, while museum librarians are appreciated as professionals in national competitions for librarians.⁵⁶

The present paper is an introduction to the topic of museum libraries addressed to museological circles. That is why the authors have contained in it numerous practical issues, at the same time pointing to challenges and problems which do not face only museum libraries, but also museums as their parent institutions.

Abstract: The phenomenon of a museum library in Poland is the only topic of the present paper. Addressed to the academics dealing with the issues related to museum organization or collection development, it is also, or maybe first of all, targeted at the higher-ranking management staff,

since it does not only offer an introduction to the discussed issue, but also an attempt at mapping problematic questions along the relation: parent museum – museum library, as well as challenges connected with legal solutions and the museum librarian job.

Keywords: museum library, museum, museum librarian, career promotion, collection registering, hybrid character of services.

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Magdalena Skrejko

A graduate in Library and Information Science, from Post-graduate Editing Studies and Post-graduate Museological Studies at the Jagiellonian University; a curator at the Walery Rzewuski Museum of History of Photography in Cracow; researcher into the history of Cracow photography and the Guild of Cracow Photographers; author of numerous studio photography exhibitions, e.g., 'Cracow Photography Studios by 1914', 'An Artist or a Craftsman. Galician Photography Studios from the Turn of the 20th Century'; author and co-author of photographic albums: Vilnius of Jan Bułhak, Cracow, Photography from the Old Times, The Borderlands in Old Photographs, Cracow in Old Photographs, and Photography. Bułhak, as well as of biographies of photographers in the Polish Biographical Dictionary and in the Allgemeine Künstlerlexikon; also author of the audio-descriptions of the photographs from the Museum of Photography; e-mail: magdalena.skrejko@mufo.krakow.pl.

Katarzyna Żák-Caplot

Graduate in the Slavonic and Polish Studies and Post-Graduate Information Science Studies at the University of Warsaw; she runs the library network of the Museum of Warsaw; her interests focus on the phenomenon of library museums in Poland and worldwide, as well as the integration of elements of library and museum education within the framework of teaching foreign languages with the use of the CLIL methodology; author of exhibitions related to Polish-Czech and Polish-Hungarian relations and of the publication: *Legends of the Old Town in Warsaw. A Selection of Texts to Teach Polish as a Foreign Language with Exercises*; fellow of the American Kosciuszko Foundation and laureate of the European Language Label for the Projects: (2019) 'Warsaw for Intermediate Learners' and (2020) 'Warsaw for Beginners'; (2019) chosen the Mazovian Librarian of the Year; (since 2020) Chairperson of the Section of Libraries at Museums, Galleries, and Cultural Institutions at the Main Board of the Polish Librarians Association; e-mail: katarzyna.zak@muzeumwarszawy.pl.

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Table of contents 2021: <https://muzealnictworocznik.com/issue/13664>