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## SECURING THE COLLECTION OF MANUSCRIPTS AND OLD PRINTS AT THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY IN TORUŃ



Andrzej Mycio studied history, specializing in archival studies, at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń between 1990 and 1995. In 2002, at the same institution, he successfully defended his doctoral dissertation entitled *Zadłużenie hipoteczne i obrót nieruchomościami w Starym Mieście Toruniu w pierwszej połowie XVII wieku (Mortgage Debt and Real Estate Transactions in the Old Town of Toruń in the First Half of the Seventeenth Century)*. His professional career began at the State Archives in Toruń, followed by subsequent positions at the Institute of National Remembrance (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej) in Bydgoszcz and in the archival collections of the Office for State

Protection (Urząd Ochrony Państwa) and its successor institution, the Internal Security Agency (Agencja Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego), also in Bydgoszcz. Since 2004, he has been affiliated with the University Library in Toruń, working within the Manuscripts Section of the Special Collections Department, where, since 2006, he has held the position of Head of the Department”.

**KEYWORDS:** Manuscripts, old prints. Cimelia. Academic libraries. Secured collections. Nicolaus Copernicus University Library in Toruń. Library storage. Securing library collections.

**ABSTRACT: Thesis/Purpose** – The author attempts to familiarize the reader with the current principles of storing and making available the most valuable collections housed in the Nicolaus Copernicus University Library in Toruń.

**Method** – The article serves as a form of case study. **Results/conclusions** – In the introduction, a brief historical outline of the Library is presented, with particular emphasis on the origins of the Toruń cimelia. The main part of the article describes the storage facility where the most valuable collections are kept. It then mentions the regulations governing the storage and accessibility of cimelia, describes the rules for lending, and briefly discusses the conservation efforts applied to the collections. Finally, it answers the question of whether the collections stored in Toruń are safe and presents the possibilities for development in this area.

The Nicolaus Copernicus University Library in Toruń (NCU Library) was officially established on September 1, 1945, with the founding of Nicolaus Copernicus University (NCU), but it actually began operating on June 11 of that year (Burhardt, 1987, p. 8; Burhardt, 1995, p. 13-24). In a short period from 1945 to 1949 it managed to gather a massive collection of over 600,000 volumes. The majority of the collected books came from the so-called safeguarded collections, which consisted primarily of collections from former German libraries located in the northern and western territories that were incorporated into the Polish state after the end of the Second World War (Baranowski, 1990, pp. 23-27). Among the books acquired were also substantial collections of old prints totaling 40,000 volumes, as well as over a thousand manuscripts. Among these collections found in Toruń were cimelia, priceless objects mainly originating from the State and University Library in Königsberg which had arrived here in 1946 through the palaces of the aristocratic von Dohna family in Karwiny and Słobity (now part of Braniewo County), where they were deposited by the German administration towards the end of the war, and then via the collection repository in Pasłęk, where they were transported by the local Polish authorities (NCU Library Archive in Toruń, file. 1/240, pp. 7-8). The gathered manuscripts and old prints, along with the Königsberg cimelia, have from the beginning constituted the true value of the Toruń university library resources. Initially there was cautious boasting about the post-German collections, especially those from Königsberg; however, over time, they were increasingly revealed, even to researchers from behind the Iron Curtain. Since the early 1990s people have openly admitted to possessing collections originating from German libraries, including those from Königsberg (Archives of NCU Library in Toruń, ref. 1/181-239).

However, having a valuable collection poses a problem for its safe storage. The collections, initially brought to Toruń, were stored in the building on Wysoka Street (the first headquarters of the NCU Library in Toruń, now the headquarters of the Toruń Society of Arts and Sciences), and later in three other buildings located in Toruń, namely in the building at Plac Teatralny 2 (the current Marshal's Office), the building at Fosa Staromiejska 3 (the current Collegium Maius of NCU), and the property

at Mickiewicza 2 (the current Student Dormitory No. 1 of NCU). Since 1946, when the Library was assigned a new building – officially opened on May 10, 1947 – the secured collections were transported to Chopin Street (Burhardt, 1987, p. 20; Burhardt, 1995, pp. 13-24). The building on Chopin Street had separate storage facilities for old prints, where manuscripts were also kept. Over time the last items, due to lack of space in the library stacks, had to be partially relocated to cabinets located in one of the corridors of the Library. The security of the collections during this period left much to be desired, as evidenced by the thefts that occurred, including some of the most valuable collections. In the 1950s three medieval manuscripts were stolen, and in 1972 one binding from the collection of the Silver Library of Duke Albrecht Hohenzollern and his second wife Anna Maria. An investigation was conducted only in the case of the theft of the silver binding, but it yielded no results, and the perpetrators were not identified (Archive of the NCU Library in Toruń, signature 1/263). In the case of medieval manuscripts as well as the silver binding, we are most likely dealing with internal theft, meaning that the act was presumably carried out by an employee of the Library. Today we know that one of the stolen medieval manuscripts is held in the collections of the National Library in Warsaw, two are in the collections of the National Ossolineum Library, while the upper cover of the stolen silver binding is stored in the collections of the Royal Castle in Wawel (Mycio, Czyżak, 2024, pp. 31-32; Możdżeń, Strutyńska, 2024, pp. 59, 65-66; Manuscripta.pl).

In 1973, a modern building was opened at Gagarin Street 13, which became the new headquarters of the NCU Library. In the new building, both manuscripts and old prints were immediately placed in a spacious archive that allowed them to be gathered in one room. The location of this archive provides the highest possible security: it is located on the middle floor and inside the building, without any external walls or windows, which naturally makes unauthorized entry difficult. This archive was designated during the design stage for storing the most valuable collections from the resources of the NCU Library. Currently, the archive holds about 50,000 volumes of old prints (including old prints from cartographic, musical, and graphic collections) and 5,000 inventory units of manuscripts. Today, in addition to the repository of manuscripts and old prints, there are some titles of antiquarian magazines as well as small collections stored in the department libraries of the Nicolaus Copernicus University. However, we are gradually trying to gather all volumes published before 1800 in the repository of manuscripts and old prints, which will ensure high standards of storage and security for this collection. The most valuable items are placed in safes and metal cabinets, providing additional protection. Other items are stored on metal shelves, some of which are compact shelving. Metal shelves ensure compliance

with fire protection standards. Unfortunately, the lowest shelves in some racks are only 3 cm from the floor, which poses a risk to the safety of the prints placed on them in the event of potential flooding. Humidity also has an adverse effect here, which shows in the storage during floor cleaning. These shelves were installed at the beginning of the 1970s when less demanding regulations were in place.

The described storage has had an air conditioning system since its inception (1973). In the 1980s, it was replaced with a new one. However, already at the beginning of the current century, this device did not fulfill its task, and the climatic conditions in the storage were far from ideal. Fortunately, during the renovation work carried out in the Library between 2010 and 2011, it was possible to install modern air conditioning, which has kept the conditions in the storage optimal for most of the year to this day, meaning that the temperature is maintained at 18°C and the humidity at 50%. Only in summer, with high temperatures and humidity levels outside, is it not possible to maintain the set parameters: the temperature and humidity levels then rise slightly. To mitigate these unfavorable conditions for the materials in the library storage, first an attempt is made to achieve the required parameters through adjustment of the air conditioning (the operator is the Energy Department of NCU), and if that does not succeed, dehumidifiers are used, their use slightly reducing the humidity level. It has been adopted as a principle that dehumidifiers are activated if the humidity in the room exceeds 60% (Możdżeń, Strutyńska, 2024, pp. 70-73).

The library storage, like the entire building of the Library, is equipped with a fire detection signaling system with a POLON 4000 control panel. The existing fire partitions in the building significantly reduce the risk of fire spreading within the Library. The fire alarm is automatically transmitted to the fire brigade. The storage space is also under constant rodent control; the poisons placed in its area are regularly replaced.

The room described here has an integrated security management system that offers advanced access control features, an alarm system, and monitoring. Only employees of the Manuscripts Department and the Old Prints Department are authorized to enter the storage independently. The alarm signal is automatically sent to the security agency. In justified situations, entry into the storage by other Library and University employees, as well as guests and employees from various companies providing services, is allowed, but only accompanied by one of the employees authorized to enter the storage independently. Visits by such persons, apart from being recorded on the monitoring system, are also noted in the visitor logbook. The keys to the safes and metal cabinets located in the storage are treated even more restrictively. They can only be used by two designated employees, and under the condition that there

is always another librarian from the Manuscripts Department or the Old Prints Department present.

In 2021, several dozen medieval manuscripts from the previously mentioned storage facility were incorporated into the National Library Resource (NCU Library in Toruń, *Rękopisy średniowieczne...*). This qualification led to the imposition of restrictive rules for the storage and accessibility of this collection (Regulation of the Minister of Culture and National Heritage, 2012). A protection plan for this collection was developed, which details the rules for its storage and also regulates the handling of the collection in the event of various threats (Protection plan for the collections of NCU Library in Toruń...). The plan describes in its first part the storage location of the collection and the security systems that protect this collection. It then discusses the procedures for handling the collections of the National Library Resource (NZB) and the individuals responsible for their safety. The main part of the Plan focuses on the various types of threats to which the collections of the NZB may be exposed. This includes: disruptions in electricity supply, failures of heating infrastructure, failures of water supply infrastructure, flooding due to heavy rainfall, high outdoor temperatures, storms, hurricanes, tornadoes, severe frosts and heavy snowfall, microbiological and biological threats, thefts, cyber-attacks, epidemics, chemical contamination, radioactive contamination, social protests, forest fires, building disasters, aviation disasters, floods, terrorism, fires in the Library, and military conflicts. The author of the Plan attempts to assess the risk of individual threats. The final part discusses the possible evacuation of the NZB, the behavior of employees in crisis situations, methods for documenting potential losses, and the measures planned to improve the security of the collections.

In 2024, another document was created at the NCU Library in Toruń concerning the handling of cimelia in the event of various types of threats. Specifically, this document is an evacuation plan for the most valuable part of the NCU Library collection (Evacuation plan for the National Library Resource...). This document outlines the procedures for handling the most precious collections, stored in the manuscripts and old prints repository (this plan also applies to the collection stored in a separate repository and belonging to a separate unit, namely the Department – Archive of Emigration and University Museum). Undoubtedly, a strong incentive to work on this document was the beginning of the full-scale Russian-Ukrainian conflict and its consequences for historic collections. The library purchased several dozen specialized aluminum cases for transporting historic objects. A list of items selected for evacuation was prepared. Each case is equipped with a list of items that are to be evacuated in that particular case. The cases are locked, and the lists are kept inside the cases. Outside, the crates received markings of the Hague Convention

describing cultural monuments. Additionally, each crate is labeled: 'Cultural Monuments. Property of Nicolaus Copernicus University.' As part of the Plan, evacuation sites for objects were designated in case of various types of threats, including military actions. It is, however, assumed that evacuation is a last resort. At the same time, the process of digitizing the most valuable collections selected for evacuation has begun, as making copies of them is considered an additional safeguard. The inventories of both manuscripts and old prints are also being digitized, which serves as an additional safeguard for information about the most valuable collections in the Library. In addition to the collection of medieval manuscripts, which is the NZB, the following groups of objects have also been selected for evacuation: incunabula, relics from the modern and contemporary manuscripts collection, relics from the old prints collection, including the Silver Library of Duke Albrecht Hohenzollern and his second wife Anna Maria, early Polish prints from the 16th century, part of the collection of foreign prints from the 16th century, and rare prints from the collection of early Polish books from the 17th and 18th centuries. In total, there are 1208 objects (not including the collection stored in the Department – the Emigration Archive and the University Museum of the University Library in Toruń, see above).

Other important documents in operation at the Nicolaus Copernicus University Library in Toruń concerning security issues include:

1. Protection Plan. Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń. Main Library, 2022.

2. Protection plan for movable cultural goods in the event of an external threat to the security of the state (political-military conflict) and war at Nicolaus Copernicus University, 2004.

The first document discusses the security systems operating in the Library, including those related to the storage of manuscripts and old prints. However, from our perspective it is a very general document that does not contribute much to the detailed issues of managing the security of the manuscripts and old prints collection. The second document, on the other hand, would be extremely important for our considerations, but unfortunately it is already very outdated and completely irrelevant. The document was prepared by someone outside the Library, resulting in its collections being treated very broadly, which unfortunately meant that right from the beginning its informational value was rather low, and after two decades since its creation it is negligible. An update of it is currently being prepared. The person responsible for drafting the new document is working closely with the library staff, and there is hope that it will be significantly better as a result. However, it covers such a wide range of issues that its update requires a very long time to complete. Most likely, the information regarding the security of the manuscripts and old prints

collections contained in the document will reiterate the findings included in the above mentioned library documents.

It is worth mentioning, moreover, two documents that regulate the issues of making special collections available, namely:

1. Regulations on Access to the University Library Collections, dated June 16, 2020.

2. Regulations on Access to Special Collections at the University Library in Toruń, dated November 26, 2020.

The first of these refers to the collections held in the manuscripts and old prints storage only very generally. The second, on the other hand, addresses the topic in detail, describing the procedures for handling special collections, including manuscripts and old prints. This document is divided into three chapters. The first pertains to the availability of the Special Collections Reading Room for use by individual users, which is under the constant supervision of the on-duty librarian and of cameras. The sharing of medieval manuscripts, incunabula, as well as rare manuscripts and old prints requires the consent of the Library Director, and in their absence, the head of the Special Collections Department. A reader is allowed to request five inventory items at a time, and when using the most valuable collections, they can have only one volume on their desk. The second part of the Regulations concerns the availability of objects to institutional entities, primarily for exhibitions. The third chapter pertains to the movement of objects within the Library, primarily to the Conservation and Security of Collections Department and to the digitization workshop.

Apart from the monitoring system (there are several cameras in the Reading Room) and a supervising librarian, the Special Collections Reading Room is also equipped with gates featuring an RFID control system. These gates prevent unauthorized removal of books from the reference collection, which are secured with magnetic strips. Both manuscripts and old prints do not possess magnetic strips; therefore, the aforementioned gates do not protect them from unauthorized removal. Manuscripts and old prints awaiting readers are stored in a metal safe located behind the Reading Room. The items may remain in this safe provided the reader has declared their intention to use them at a later date. However, this procedure does not apply to cimelia, which must be returned to the storage immediately after being used by a reader and brought back to the Reading Room the following day, if necessary. Special collections, including manuscripts and old prints, cannot be loaned outside; they can only be used on-site in the Reading Room. A similar rule applies to the reference collection. Primarily, scientific staff and students and doctoral candidates of Nicolaus Copernicus University have the right to use special collections. Additionally, any other person registered in the NCU Library

system as a reader, as well as external individuals who register in the system as guests, can access them. Before using special collections, the reader is required to fill out a declaration in which, in addition to noting the purpose of their visit and their research topic, the reader commits to citing the materials they used in their work. In justified cases, a reader may be asked to provide a certificate from their supervisor or institution justifying the need to use a given facility.

The collections stored in the manuscripts and old prints repository are under conservation care. The NCU Library employs a relatively large team of qualified conservators, consisting of five members, who diligently carry out their tasks. The most important objects undergo full conservation, which, however, takes a lot of time and is only possible for a selected, highly curated group of items. Currently it is assumed that a better overall result for the entire collection can be achieved by subjecting as many objects as possible to preventive conservation. At the same time, a program has been introduced that aims to secure the objects stored in the repository with protective boxes. The subject boxes are produced by the bookbinding workshop operating in the Library, and are also ordered from the specialized company Beskid Plus. Roughly speaking, it can be estimated that both preservation conservation and protection through storage in boxes have been applied to about 10% of the entire collection in the library storage. The entire collection has passed through the fumigation chamber at least once, which minimizes the development of harmful microorganisms. The library storage worker responsible for the described space continuously cleans the entire collection with a specialized vacuum cleaner, which additionally protects the books. The library storage undergoes microbiological testing every two years, allowing for constant monitoring of the air composition.

Are the objects stored in the manuscripts and old prints storage safe? They seem to be well secured, in every respect. However, of course, there is always room for improvement to the existing security systems. We are considering a system of sensors that react to changes in humidity, which would protect the library storage from potential flooding consequences. A permanent gas fire suppression system is also being considered. In the near future we plan to raise the lower shelf of the racks so that the height from the floor is at least 10 cm. We also want to purchase a climate-controlled cabinet which would be placed in the Reading Room for storing items intended for sharing. This would ensure that objects waiting to be released would have conditions identical to those they have in storage. It seems that the most important factor in this system is the human element, which is why it is very important that the individuals hired for positions that will have access to the most valuable objects are employed with particular care in order to eliminate any threat from this side (Makiłła-Polak, 2024).

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