

ROBERT KOTOWSKI
Faculty of Journalism, Information and Book Studies
University of Warsaw
e-mail: r.kotowski@mnki.pl
ORCID: 0000-0002-9742-2159

THE ROLE OF THE MUSEUM LIBRARY



ROBERT KOTOWSKI, habilitated doctor, historian, museologist, certified curator, director of the National Museum in Kielce (formerly vice director of the National Museum in Krakow). Editor-in-chief of the Annual of the National Museum in Kielce, assistant professor (adjunkt) at the Department for the Study of Libraries and Other Cultural Heritage Institutions at the Faculty of Journalism, Information and Book Studies of the University of Warsaw. A member of many museum councils. Author of numerous articles and studies in the field of history and museology, including *Nowoczesne muzeum. Dziedzictwo i współczesność (A modern museum. Heritage and modernity)*, (Kielce 2010) (together with Roman Batko); *Dziewczynka z obrazu. Historia życia Józki Olderfeldówny*

(The girl from the painting. Life Story of Józka Oderfeld), (Kielce 2014); *Muzeum jako lokalny ośrodek społeczno-gospodarczego oddziaływania (The Museum, as a local centre of socio-economic impact)*, in: *Institucje kultury jako ośrodki życia społecznego (Institutions of Culture, as centres of social life)*, edited by A. Mierzecka, E.B. Zybert, Warsaw 2017. His research interests focus on museology and social history of the 20th century.

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ABSTRACT: **Objective** – Libraries and museums operate on the basis of the same program assumptions, as their role is to collect, store and preserve and disseminate collections. **Conclusions** – The article presents the principles of organization and activity of the museum library in the context of history and changing principles of the functioning of special libraries, as well as similarities in the program assumptions of libraries and museums on the example of the National Museum in Kielce. The article is an attempt to look at how the

role has changed over the decades, but also at the function of a museum library in the local space and how its readership and public perception have changed.

Museums and libraries have similar missions: they collect, secure, describe and share records of human activities. The museum library can be talked about in many aspects, ranging from its history through the development of the book collection, its organization, a description from the book-reading point of view, to the role it plays in cultural spaces and its significance for recipients. However, it is worth looking at the library also from the perspective of its presence in the museum's structures as an integral department.

Museums have accompanied humankind for almost two and a half thousand years; we can find its conceptualisation in the writings of Aristotle. Inextricably linked with libraries from the beginning, they developed in different ways, always remaining a centre of science and education. There have always been various festivals, scientific centres, large collections of various items, treasuries, mouseions, pinacothecae, thesauruses, gliptothèques, all constituting the first proto-museum forms, the essence of which was the collection of valuable objects resulting from the passion of collecting deeply rooted in human nature. All civilizations, from the most primitive to the most advanced, have been characterized by the desire to collect beautiful, expensive, rare, and above all interesting objects. The first collections were created by rulers, magnates, clergy, and scholars. These were the temples of the souls – mouseions – institutions devoted to history, music, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, but also, importantly, literature. One of the best-known, ancient mouseions was the Mouseion in Alexandria, formed in the 3rd century BC from the foundation of Ptolemy II Philadelphos. What made it stand out from other such institutions were the 400,000 scrolls of the first copies and doublets forming a huge library (Żygulski jun., 1982, p. 12). In fact, it was a kind of academy of sciences, a research institution associating scholars of many fields and a meeting place, as described by the Greek traveller and historian Strabo: "The Museion belongs to the palace complex, has peripatos and exedra, as well as a wide oikos in which there is a common board of philologists, or men who are members of the Museion. This synod manages the common good and serves the good of the Museion, originally created by kings, now belonging to the emperor" (Folga-Januszewska, 2015, pp. 16-17).

The museum has survived to modern times in this or similar forms, in the meantime absorbing the material forms of collection such as libraries, treasuries, archives, equipment of academies and residences, while still remaining a centre of science and knowledge and at the same time approaching a kind of public institution with social goals. This is connected with the emergence in the 18th century of the British Museum, gather-

ing library and natural collections, as well as a large collection of antiquities, which, according to the first statute, was to serve mainly artists and scholars (Żygulski jun., 1982, p. 51). There was no more general need to share collections for visitors to see. In practice, the British Museum was only available to a small privileged group. The breakthrough in the dissemination of museum collections to the broad masses of society did not occur until the French Revolution. The French Louvre National Museum was made available to the public to visit, displaying the most valuable works of art in a systematic fashion according to schools, thus associating it with the idea of the educational role of museums. They were to testify to the power of the state, but also to educate, shape, and cultivate national identity. On the other hand, they were to become a mirror reflecting the then dominant philosophical and scientific discourse: evolution, progress, attitudes, and national ideologies. The exhibition concepts were to reflect taxonomic ideas characteristic of that period, applicable in the methodology of the exact and natural sciences (Rottermund, 2001, p. 1). In Poland, due to the political situation, it was not possible to establish national museums organised by state authorities, which is why national art collections were usually presented in the residences of Polish aristocrats such as the Czartoryski, Działyński, Potocki, Lubomirski, Zamoyski, Raczyński, and Krasiński families (Żygulski jun. 1982, p. 63). However, these collections had a different profile. For patriotic reasons, when Poland was deprived of political independence, works of Polish art and memorabilia related to the history of the nation were collected and protected (Rottermund, 2001, pp. 11-12). It was not until 1801 that the first museum, the Temple of the Sibyl, was established in Poland, which was devoted to national issues and served a broad educational purpose by showing souvenirs of old Poland, which was defined by the maxim "the past of the future".

An important element of museums' activities as educational institutions has always been the presence of libraries, which are considered to be an integral part of them. On the one hand, they were a place for collecting valuable, historical collections, but they also provided documentation and literature on the objects collected in the museum, being a perfect complement and extension to the content conveyed by means of displayed museum objects. While museums presented several specimens, museum libraries collected books in which examples of hundreds of subsequent objects of the same type were illustrated. Thus, they became a kind of tool supporting the work of museum professionals. This also applied to regional museums created in the revived Polish state. Regina Danysz-Fleszarowa, in the first Polish museum textbook, discussed the role of museum libraries, pointing out that: "a library in a regional museum is a department equal to the others, it is like one of the cells of the body with a special task to fulfil. This task is to gather as much as possible of everything that has

ever been written, published or drawn in relation to the territory covered by the museum's activity" (Danysz-Fleszarowa, 1928, pp. 262-270).

An example of such an institution, not chosen by accident, is the current National Museum in Kielce, which I manage, and which, like most of this type of institution in Poland in the early years of the 20th century was at the beginning of its existence a regional institution. The library was established as a department together with the founding of the museum of the Polskie Towarzystwo Krajoznawcze – PTK (Polish Rural Society) in Kielce in 1908. Pursuant to the Act on Associations of 1906, each PTK branch, in addition to amassing collections of physiography, organizing scientific activities and exhibitions, and providing care for art monuments, historical memorabilia, and natural curiosities of the country, was also required to collect and share book collections in the field of sightseeing and related issues. Hence, as happened in many other places in the area of the Russian partition, a library was also found within the structure of the museum to fulfil this obligation. It was an extremely important institution, both as a department in the structure of the museum and more widely among the local community, gathering not only scientists and regionalists, but also readers who could be classified as belonging to many other groups.

The first volumes that found their way into the museum library in Kielce were the gifts of individual donors, residents of Kielce. In fact, the origins of museology and librarianship were largely based on this form of obtaining collections. The main purpose of such action was to preserve the spiritual and material culture of the nation and consolidate it for posterity. The gifts were not of an isolated or accidental character. They were a quite spontaneous response by the city's inhabitants to an appeal made in the pages of the "Gazeta Kielecka" ("Kielce Daily") in 1909 by the first librarian and curator of the Kielce museum, Tadeusz Szymon Włoszek (1843-1933). Włoszek wrote:

(...) we call to the attention of people friendly to the Society the fact that many of them have a certain number of books or periodicals they have read, which they no longer look at (...), while pictorials serve children to entertain, providing illustrations to pull out and cut out. Others again have truly valuable works that they do not use because of their scientific or special content. In both cases, the books in question are useless, and in the end sold for a song and go to the hands of the peddlers, where they await their final destruction. So if the owners of such books and magazines would like to entrust them to our Society, whether as a gift or a deposit, we would be able to use them and provide them with due respect and care. However, particularly useful for the Society would be books and magazines that refer directly to sightseeing or have an indirect connection with it. Like the works of Oskar Kolberg, the magazine "Wisła" ("The Vistula"), *Słownik Geograficzny Królestwa Polskiego* (*The Geographical*

Dictionary of the Polish Kingdom), *Starożytna Polska* (Ancient Poland) by Michał Baliński, *Encyklopedia Powszechna Orgelbranda – duża* (*Universal Orgelbrand Encyclopaedia – large*), *Górnictwo w Polsce* (*Mining in Poland*) by Hieronim Łabędzki, “*Tygodnik Ilustrowany*”, formerly edited by Jeniki, with lots of biographies, engravings, descriptions of historic places, castles, churches, ruins, descriptions of travels around the country, archaeological searches, excavations; but every valuable work is desirable in the collections of the Society. As for multi-volume works and publications, such as encyclopaedias, *Słownik Geograficzny* (*Geographical Dictionary*), “*Wisła*” (“*The Vistula*”), “*Tygodnik Ilustrowany*” (“*Illustrated Weekly*”), “*Biblioteka Warszawska*” (“*Warsaw Library*”), we accept all individual volumes, notebooks, or even a single issue, which will eventually form a whole¹.

The response to the appeal was numerous gifts in the form of valuable items, including 19th-century magazines, such as “*Kłosa*” (“*The Ears*”) from 1865-1890, “*Tygodnik Ilustrowany*” (“*Illustrated Weekly*”) from 1866-1878, “*Biblioteka Warszawska*” (“*Warsaw Library*”) from 1855-1858, and historical books published in the 19th century. In the entire book collection, only a small number of receipts were made from company funds. The generosity of residents and their commitment to creating a regional book collection prompted the library to renew its appeal in 1917. Once again, readers of “*Gazeta Kielecka*” (“*Kielce Daily*”) were asked for gifts from regional publishing houses:

Collecting all kinds of works related to Kielce or the local part of the country in the Kielce museum is highly desirable. Apart from their usefulness on the spot, it often happens that non-local researchers of nature or local relations are looking for brochures published in Kielce, but having already exhausted the book trade they go to the museum with a request to broker their purchase from the owners or to grant the use of them².

As a result of this call, valuable titles – both books and magazines – were given to the library once again. Along with the development of the collection and influenced by subsequent museum acquisitions, the subject matter of the book collection quickly expanded to include items from other fields, such as archaeology, numismatics, history, and geography. Since the regaining of independence in 1918, the PTK Kielce Museum, which collects archaeological, historical, and other related files from the region, has become a place for study and meetings with scientists from universities and research institutions from all over Poland, which in turn opened up further possibilities for expanding the library collections. Thanks to this, the regional department of the library was significantly enlarged by gifts from authors who were carrying out research in the Kielce region.

¹ „*Gazeta Kielecka*” 1909, No. 36.

² „*Gazeta Kielecka*” 1918, No. 40.

A collection of 61 old prints has also been added to the library. The most valuable collections and old prints were often shown at exhibitions. The first such presentation took place in 1926 under the title "Wystawa Książki Polskiej" ("Polish Book Exhibition"). Nineteenth-century prints, publications of Kielce publishing houses and other related regional issues were also presented (Podpłóńska, 2006, pp. 31-33).

The dynamic development of the library and of the entire museum was interrupted by World War II. During this period, the book collection shared a common fate with the museum collections. Several times it was moved and hidden in various parts of the city, it was partly dispersed, and some copies were lost forever. After 1945, the library's collections were gathered in the new headquarters of the Museum (from 1945 the Świętokrzyski Museum) at pl. Partyzantów (now Rynek), where the library has had its headquarters to this day (Skrzypczak, 2009, p. 246). The post-war development of the Museum influenced the extension of the book collection to include publications in the fields represented in the Museum, such as archaeology, library science, ethnography, history, nature, art, and auxiliary sciences. Thus, the character of the library gradually changed from a typically regional one to a specialized one. The recipient of library services and the role that the library played among many other institutions also changed. This does not mean, of course, that the role of the museum library has been reduced, but a new chapter in the library's life has been initiated.

This somewhat concise historical outline of the library is not intended to present its history over the next decades. It is only an incentive to look at how the role has changed over the past several decades, and also at the function of the museum library in the local space. How have readers changed, and how has its social perception evolved? Today, the museum library still occupies a special place in the structure of the museum and also plays a large role among special libraries in the region. However, it is no longer a regional institution focused on building collections related only to the region. Many functions that were fulfilled by museum libraries, after World War II, were taken over by other institutions, such as archives, academic libraries, and public libraries, from the smallest municipal ones to provincial public libraries. These changes can be successfully applied to most museum libraries of large museums in Poland.

As you know, libraries and museums operate based on the same program assumptions, and their role is to collect, store and preserve, and disseminate collections. Of course, the library continues to perform these functions similarly to how it has done in previous years of its activity but, apart from that, it also helps in studies conducted by museum employees, curators, scientists, historians, and conservators, becoming a specialist library in the course of its development. The local community of the city,

which has been a recipient of library services for many years, has turned into a local community of museum workers, although people not employed in the museum – scientists, students, all those interested in art – also have access to collections, on site, in a reading room accessible to all.

The library is specialized and serves, above all, as a workshop for the scientific studies of monuments. To this end, it has accumulated a book collection which consists of Polish and foreign books and magazines, the subject of which are the fields represented in the museum's collections, from specialist bibliographies, encyclopaedias, dictionaries, through textbooks and studies on the history and theory of art, museology, protection of monuments, conservation, archaeology, numismatics, history, cultural history, and related fields. The book collection is supplemented by a set of magazines, in many cases rare exemplars, from all of the above-mentioned fields. Thanks to this, the museum library today supports the conducting of research on individual objects, their history, methods of conservation and protection, and finally on issues concerning exhibits and the organization of exhibitions. The essence of this is, of course, the appropriate selection of collected literature, which allows users to thoroughly study, document, and interpret the collections. As in the past, it is also a kind of complement to the content conveyed in the museum narrative. Those interested have the opportunity to expand information about objects displayed in the museum, as well as those that are not available in the museum. The collections of the museum library allow one to learn more about the authors of the objects presented, learn about the other works of the same artist or designer, as well as other examples of works from that period or town, or simply learn basic information about the period. This enables recipients to create a broader context for the objects they explore. In the same way, as Jan van der Wateren notes, the museum library compensates for the natural limitations in the traditional message of the museum. It meets the special expectations of the audience, and thanks to the specific nature of the collection supports the museum in the implementation of its mission. Museum visitors know that they have the opportunity to find the most detailed information about collections gathered there in the museum library. They also know that they can get information on the activities of museums, as well as on collections and exhibitions in other institutions. More often and to a greater extent than in public libraries or even academic libraries, the museum library collects catalogues of collections of various museums, catalogues of temporary exhibitions, as well as catalogues of auction houses. These are usually publications that find their way here through exchange, mainly with other museums, libraries, art colleges, and associations, as most exhibition catalogues are rarely available for sale in bookstores. The museum library also collects catalogues of auction houses that help curators track the history and therefore the authenticity of the

object, which is of great importance in the work of every museum worker. In addition, museum library collections include press clippings, rich collections of leaflets, such as invitations or folders, which are not found elsewhere, and which strengthen the role of the museum library as an information base for various groups of recipients.

Currently, the book collection of the library of the National Museum in Kielce contains 50 685 copies of library materials, and each year it is enriched by several hundred items, i.e. 300-500. Annually it is used by around 300 people (borrowing about 500 books, using about 1000 books in the reading room). The library has an alphabetical catalogue (compact prints, magazines, continuous publications) and a systematic catalogue as well as a computer catalogue that has been publicising new publications since 2004. Every year, if possible, previously acquired publications (books, magazines, and catalogues) are also recorded. Its current development is based on the regulations published by the Polski Komitet Normalizacji, Miar i Jakości (Polish Committee for Standardization, Measures, and Quality), and developed by the National Library in Warsaw. The computer catalogue is created in the MAK (Małe Automatyczne Katalogi – Small Automatic Catalogs) program, in which 23,652 documents were recorded (i.e. 47% of the entire collection). It is indispensable that this is associated with the proper preparation of librarians in the field of cataloguing collections, standardizing descriptions, identifying resources, and search methods. This, in turn, translates into the smoothness and quality of cooperation between the library and substantive departments, and, consequently, the improvement in the functioning of all museum work areas, which should ultimately result in the satisfaction of visitors.

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