

Bibliotheca Patria in the 21st Century



A 17th-century gradual, the largest book in the Kórnik Library collection

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Since the mid-19th century, the Kórnik Castle near Poznań has been the location of one of Poland's most valuable and oldest library collections

The origins of the Kórnik Library building are intertwined with the Górka family, living there as far back as the early 15th century. The castle, rebuilt in the Baroque style by Teofila Szoldrska nee Działyńska, later Potulicka, was in later years thoroughly restored by Count Tytus Działyński. This beautiful Neo-Gothic building, almost untouched since the mid-19th century, is a popular tourist destination. In addition to its museum rooms, it houses individual departments of the library and a reading room, plus it stores the most precious collections. The castle is a top-grade historical building; in 2011 it was added to the list of Poland's historical monuments. The PAS Kórnik Library, supported by a number of other institutions, car-

ries out extensive renovation work on the castle. Recent years have seen the repairs of the main bridge and roof, work on the walls is almost complete, while efforts to conserve and dry out the ground level are ongoing.

Collectors and donors

The history of the library and museum collections dates back to the first half of the 19th century. When Count Adam Tytus Działyński, founder of the Kórnik Library, was searching through family mementoes, books, and paperwork at Konarzewo, he decided to collate and secure all the evidence documenting the existence of free, independent Poland – a kind of *Bibliotheca Patria*. The library was handed down to Tytus' son, Jan, and then to Władysław Zamoyski; soon after the end of the First World War, the latter bequeathed all his assets to the nation. On 30 December 1923, the Kórnik Foundation was established, whose profits – mainly originating from the assets donated by Władysław – were to be designated for a wide range of cultural and educational purposes, in particular the maintenance of the library and castle in

Kórnik. Władysław Zamoyski passed away on 3 October 1924, two days after the Council of Ministers adopted the bill on setting up his foundation. It survived until the end of the Second World War, when it was dissolved and the library and castle were handed over into the care of the Polish Academy of Sciences.

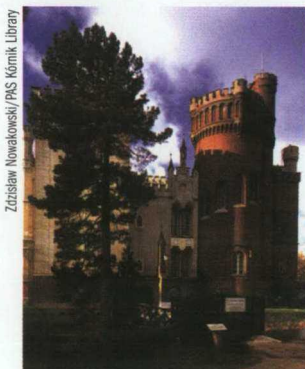
Kórnik collections

Today, the Kórnik Library functions as a PAS auxiliary research unit, and it is one of the largest and most significant such institutions in Poland. Its collection numbers almost 350,000 volumes, including 15,000 manuscripts and 30,000 old printed works. The most valuable are manuscripts by Adam Mickiewicz (part III of "Forefathers"), Juliusz Słowacki ("*Smutno mi, Boże*"), and Cyprian Kamil Norwid ("*O miłości ksiąg dwoje*"). The library also holds texts written by Napoleon Bonaparte, including the emperor's only known novel. The extensive collection of old printed books includes several unique editions, such as works by Jan Kochanowski and Mikołaj Rej. The library also holds over 19,000 prints from the 19th and 20th centuries.

The works are frequently displayed at exhibitions in Poland and abroad. The exhibition *Stanisław August: the last king of Poland - Revival in decline*, held at the Royal Castle in Warsaw (November 2011 - February 2012), included two drawings from the Kórnik Library collections - Jean-Pierre Norblin de la Gourdain's "Hanging of traitors at Warsaw's Old Town Market" and a copy of Norblin's drawing by an unknown author from the 19th century, plus a Virtuti Militari medal from the numismatic collection.

The library's employees engage in research, educational and information activities, as well as assembling and preparing new collections. The most valuable pieces are cared for by the Special Collections Department, divided into the Manuscripts and Old Prints Division and the Bookbinding and Conservation Workshop. Readers are looked after by the Access Department. The librarians perform submitted research queries, supervise the Interlibrary Lending Department, and lead groups visiting the castle. They also prepare exhibitions, raising the awareness of the library and its founders.

Due to high demand, the library employees, together with the Kórnik Foundation, prepared the project "The most precious jewels of culture: The Kórnik meetings," co-financed by the Wielkopolska Regional Operational Programme for 2007-2013. The project includes a cycle of educational events that commenced in January 2011 at the PAS Kórnik Library. Meetings are held every Saturday and Sunday; the project will



Zdzisław Nowakowski/PAS Kórnik Library

continue for the next three years. Between January and April, the library presented the history of manuscripts. From June until September, our most valuable old printed works go on display, while the end of the year will be devoted to 19th and 20th century prints. The meetings are accompanied by multimedia presentations, conservation workshops, and exhibitions. The lectures are also hugely popular, attracting visitors from across the country.

In May 2012, the Kórnik Library invited visitors to spend their weekends at the castle for the fourth time. The vault holding the most exceptional collections was opened yet again, allowing guests to admire selected manuscripts and other valuable items. As usual, the annual Weekend with Romanticism was the most popular, presenting manuscripts by writers from the era, with a special focus on part III of Adam Mickiewicz's "Forefathers," taken out from the library's vaults for a brief period. As the event has been enjoying huge popularity and attracts thousands of visitors to Kórnik each year, the library intends to repeat it in the hope that the "May Weekends at the Kórnik Library" will become a permanent fixture in the calendar of the Wielkopolska region's cultural events.

Digitized Romantics

Libraries are always seeking new ways of attracting and engaging visitors. In response, the Department of Digitizing Humanities Texts was formed in 2003, making it the Kórnik Library's youngest addition. Its employees are engaged in archiving and digitalizing collections, which are then made available as part of the Wielkopolska Digital Library (WDL). The Kórnik Library was one of the first to conduct such activities on a national scale: in the first years of the WDL, over half the collections placed in it originated from Kórnik. As late as 2010, 16% of the collections made available across Poland as part of the Federation of Digital Libraries (FDL) originated from the Kórnik Library. Even today, when the majority of research facilities in Poland scan and digitize their collections, the Kórnik Library is still a leading contributor to the WDL (we make 50% of all our publications available), with its share in the FDL at around 9%.

Facing waning demand for traditional reading rooms and falling readership levels, the position of traditional libraries is changing rapidly. At the Kórnik Library, we strive to meet the challenges posed by 21st century readers. Our achievements as part of the project "The most precious jewels of culture: The Kórnik meetings," and the high interest in our collections resulting from their availability in the WDL, show that the Kórnik Library is heading in the right direction. ■