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Tomasz Stolarczyk
Biblioteka Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego
e-mail:lenczycanin1975@gmail.com
ORCID: 0000-0002-9824-426X

Monastic book collections in Central Poland in the light of the inventories and library catalogues from the 16th , 17th and 18th centuries. A comparative analysis. Contribution

Księgozbiory klasztorne w Polsce Centralnej w świetle inwentarzy i katalogów bibliotecznych z XVI, XVII i XVIII wieku. Analiza porównawcza. Przyczynek

Abstract
The aim of this study is to compare the old book collections of monastery libraries in the area of present-day Central Poland: monastery libraries of the Franciscans Observant, Dominicans, Calced Carmelites, Paulines and Piarists. The analysis was based on available library inventories and catalogues, currently kept mainly in monastic archives and literature on the subject. The study suggests that these libraries were typical monastery libraries of the modern era with the exception of Piarist libraries, where

historical works and textbooks for learning Polish and other foreign languages predominated in 18th century and had larger book collections.

Keywords: monastery libraries, Central Poland, 16th-18th centuries

Streszczenie
Celem niniejszego opracowania jest porównanie dawnych księgozbiorów z bibliotek klasztornych z terenu dzisiejszej Polski Centralnej: franciszkanów obserwantów, dominikanów, karmelitów trzewiczkowych, paulinów i pijarów. Dokonano tego w oparciu o dostępne inwentarze i katalogi biblioteczne, przechowywane obecnie głównie w archiwach klasztornych, oraz literaturę przedmiotu. Z przeprowadzonych badań wynika, że biblioteki te były typowymi bibliotekami klasztornymi epoki nowożytnej, z wyjątkiem bibliotek pijarów, w których w XVIII wieku dominowały dzieła historyczne oraz podręczniki do nauki języka polskiego i innych języków obcych, a także posiadały większe księgozbiory.

Słowa Kluczowe: biblioteki klasztorne, Polska Środkowa, 16-18 w.

Introduction

According to Irena Szostek, "every school – in order to perform teaching and educational functions, must have a library as a research base and a work workshop". Krystyna Zawadzka agrees with her, claiming that "the education of monks, as well as the performance of their priestly duties (sermons, confessions, celebrating mass) were inextricably linked with books" (1975, p. 401; 1999, p. 18).

So it was, in every monastery there was a library. Their functioning was regulated by monastic legislation, from the rule and constitution itself to monastery chronicles and expense registers: for example among the Dominicans it was the basic manual of life for the Dominicans from the 13th century *De vita regulari* by Humbert de Romanis in the thirteenth chapter, entitled *De officio librarii*; in the case of the Jesuits it was *The Institute or Collection of Laws* (*Institutum Societatis Iesu*); in the case of the Paulines they were in the third part of the monastic constitutions adopted in 1644, in the twenty-fourth chapter entitled (*De officio bibliothecarii*) *On the office of librarian*; in the case of Franciscan Observants (in

Poland called Bernardines) they were in *Summarium Statutorum Municipalium… Provinciarum Matris Minoris Minoris Poloniae Ordinis Minorum Regularis Observantiae* published in Cracow in 1763 (Stolarczyk, 2023, pp. 37-38).

The basic sources for reconstructing old book collections, including monastic ones, are inventories and catalogues as well as preserved volumes (Stolarczyk, 2014, p. 18, 22).

> *Catalogs showed the state of the book collection, the number of volumes, the value, the degree of care taken by the religious institution for the books, and above all they were an instrument helpful in controlling the life and development of a specific religious house by the superiors. Catalogs were therefore inventories in the modern sense. Their purpose was to facilitate access to books, which were arranged – according to content – in individual sections, and then sorted according to formats and authors (alphabetically). [...] The catalog was used only when searching the shelves did not bring results. Catalogs helped with the purchase of new items, allowed for quick orientation as to whether a given book was in the collection"* (Kochanowicz, 2004, p. 164).

The aim of this study is to compare old book collections from monastery libraries in the area of present-day Central Poland. The focus was primarily on the monastery libraries of the Observant Franciscans, Dominicans, Calced Carmelites, Paulines and Piarists.

The main text.

The library collection should be arranged factually, divided precisely into ecclesiastical and secular literature: speculative, scholastic, moral theology called casuistic, mystical (ascetic) and preaching (*Theologi, Scholastici, Positivi, Mystici, Casuistae, Concionatores*): philosophy, history and rhetoric (*Philosophi, Historici,*

Rhetores et alii Prophani) and prohibited books (*Libri prohibiti*) excluded from the basic collection *(Łuniewski, 2020/2021, pp. 274-275).*

Among the seventeenth-century Dominican libraries from the area of present-day Central Poland the largest collection of books belonged to the Dominicans from Sieradz – about 400 volumes. In the second place there was the library in Gidle with 345 volumes. In third place was the library of the Lowicz convent, which had 294 volumes. The fourth place was taken by the library in Piotrkow Trybunalski, which had about 215 volumes. In the Leczyca library, at the beginning of the 17th century, there were about 100 volumes (Stolarczyk, 2009, p. 240; Stolarczyk, 2016, pp. 219-279).

The library of the Franciscan Observants of Leczyca in 1815 included 383 works in 440 volumes (Stolarczyk, 2020b, p. 43).

In the eighteenth-century library of the Paulines from Wielun there were 243 books in 1711, in 1716 –223, in 1717 – 217, in 1721 – 254, in 1739 – 294, in 1742 – 292, in 1747 – 286, 1748 – 284, in 1750 – 285, in 1752 –286, in 1770 – 520, in 1789 – 448. In turn, the library of the Pauline monks from Wiegomlyny contained 180 books in 1717, in 1719 240 books, in 1739 780 books, in 1742 724 books, in 1745 629 books, in 1748 569 books, in 1753 670 books in 1755 746 books and in 1755 already 746 books (Stolarczyk, 2021b, p. 56; Stolarczyk, 2022b, p. 56).

On the other hand the eighteenth-century library of the Paulines from Oporow contained in 1716 – 199 titles, in 1728 – 259 volumes, in 1729 – 294 volumes, in 1732 – 312 volumes, in 1738 – 327 volumes, in 1747 – 345 volumes, in 1748 – 336 volumes and in 1753 – 319 volumes (Sukiennik, 2019, pp. 121-125).

However, the largest book collections were owned by the Piarists. The library of this order in Piotrkow Trybunalski numbered 1885 volumes in 1756 and in 1770 2257 volumes, in 1774 over 2500 volumes and in 1795 circa 4000 volumes, in 1827 5520 volumes (Kwiatkowska, 1991, pp. 76-77, 79, 83, 86). In turn library of Piarist from Lowicz numbered 1395 volumes in the beginning of 18th century, in 1730 already 2123 volumes and the library of Piarist

from Wielun numbered over 1300 books in 1809 (Stolarczyk 2023, p. 122; Stolarczyk 2025, p. 161).

The core of each monastery book collection, however, consisted primarily of theological works (dogmatic, moral, theology of the inner life, asceticism and mysticism) , and collections of sermons (*Lenten, Passion, Sermons for the Holidays, Mariological, Moral, Occasional, Dogmatic***)**. Among the former, the most important, in Dominican libraries, were the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas (the greatest theologian among the Brethren Preachers, the founder of Thomism, known as the *Angelic Doctor*), headed by the *Summa Theologiae*. Usually there were more theological works than sermons and collections of sermons. There were, however, two exceptions: in the library of the Leczyca Franciscan Observants (Bernardines), according to the inventory from 1815, and in the library of Piarist in Łowicz, according to the inventory from 1730, there were more of the latter. Of course, the monastery libraries could not be complete without the *Bible* and its commentaries. In every monastery library there were also polemical works (Stolarczyk, 2016a, pp. 145-252; Stolarczyk, 2020b, pp. 41-48; Stolarczyk 2022a, pp. 156-162).

The libraries of the Pauline monks of Wielun, Oporow and Wielgomlyny also contained large collections of books on historical topics both sacred, ecclesiastical (first of all the history of miraculous images of the Blessed Virgin Mary and history of the Order of St. Paul the Hermit, playing a special role in the libraries of the Polish province – they allowed the Paulines to familiarize themselves with the history of their own order and the theological thought of previous generations of monks) such as *Fragmen panis Corvi Proto Eremitici* by Andrzej Eggerer and *Annalium Eremi Caenobiticorum* by Mikołaj Benger and secular history – especially ancient history and Polish history – in the latter case they had primarily chronicles and memoirs first of all by Jan Długosz, Wespazjan Kochowski, Stanisław Orzechowski, Maciej from Miechow, Salomon Neugebauer, Maciej Stryjkowski Marcin Bielski, Szymon Okolski, Augustyn Kordecki. Paulines from Wielun had in 1711 16 of them, in 1770 67, in 1789 62. However, the Oporow

monastery had in 1717 32 volumes, in 1728 21 and in 1753 18. This was because these books played a significant role in the order of St. Paul the First Hermit (Sukiennik, 2019, pp. 136-137; Stolarczyk, 2021a; Stolarczyk, 2022b, pp. 53-54)[1].

Only in the libraries of the Piarists were there more books from history than in the Pauline the ones from monasteries – Piarists from Wielun had in 1809 185 volumes of history, from Lowicz in the early 18th century 205 volumes, in 1730 255 volumes and in the Piarist library from Piotrkow Trybunalski books of history accounted for 17.5% of the entire book collection in 19th century. This was due to the fact that from the mid-18th century, history as a subject taught in Piarist schools began to occupy an important place. The topics that were assigned to their students showed, against the background of historical events, the need to carry out reforms in the country (Kwiatkowska, 1991, p. 86; Stolarczyk, 2017, p. 5; Stolarczyk, 2022a, p. 158-161). "Historical education was to [...] serve to educate an exemplary citizen" (Taraszkiewicz, 2011, pp. 145-146).

The Piarists also possessed books on natural history, although the Piarists from Piotrkow Trybunalski had only one book on this subject in their library. The Piarists from Wielun, on the other hand, had approximately 20 volumes and from Lowicz 48 volumes (M. Kwiatkowska, 1991, p. 87; Stolarczyk, 2019, p. 85; Stolarczyk, 2025, pp. 818-831).

The same situation occurred with political treaties and collections of laws. In the mid-18th century the Piarists of Lowicz had 83 volumes of treatises and political writings in their library (Stolarczyk, 2022a, p. 160). At the beginning of the 19th century, the Piarists of Wielun had 14 volumes of these books. In turn, the Pauline monks of Wieluń had the largest number of parliamentary statutes and constitutions in their collections – 7 volumes (Stolarczyk 2022c, pp. 368-369). No other monastery libraries in the Central Poland region I researched contained so many of these works. The majority of them are works in Polish. Among them, in the libraries

[1] Akta prowincji 1719–1801: Wielgomlyny, AJG, sign. 1647, p. 12, 36, 56, 74, 94, 115, 116, 136; sign. 1648, p. 251.

that interest us, there were also real gems, such as the monumental work of Stanisław Konarski *O skutecznym rad sposobie* (in English: *On the effective method of advice*), or Stanisław Staszic's *Uwagi nad życiem Jana Zamoyskiego* (in English: *Notes on the life of John Zamoyski*), Stanisław Herakliusz Lubomirski's *Rozmowy Artaksesa i Ewandra* (in English: *Conversations between Artaxes and Evander*), and Jean Bodin's *De Republica* (Stolarczyk, 2022c, pp. 358-360, 362)[2].

Piarist libraries were also dominated by textbooks for learning Polish and other foreign languages e.g. in Lowicz (the library of the local school run by the Piarist order) there were 108 volumes for the Polish language, 21 volumes for the French language, and 14 volumes for the German language (Stolarczyk, 2019, p. 85).

At the time in question, the monastic libraries were definitely dominated by ecclesiastical authors (primarily theologians, polemicists and sermon writers). Their works constituted the canon of obligatory readings for the monks, unchanged over the centuries and continuously supplemented in accordance with the monastic legislation – it was a *constans*. Over time, however, the number of secular authors increased, including contemporary ones – humanists, philosophers, etc., but also carefully selected, influencing the way we think and perceive the world. Despite everything, their writings still constituted only a small percentage of all the books collected in libraries. The Latin language literature was definitely predominant, which was characteristic of all monastic libraries. From the second half of the 16th century, books in national languages also began to appear in monastery collections, but they were few in number (Stolarczyk 2016a, p. 238, Stolarczyk 2022a, p. 161). The situation in this respect changed among the Piarists in the second half of the 18th century, when they began to teach the noble youth civic attitude, as mentioned above. At that time, more books in Polish and other national languages, including French, German

[2] Katalog biblioteki Wieluń 1809, Archiwum Zakonu Pijarów w Krakowie (AZPKr), sign. Col. Viel 9, p. 9v, 48v; Akta prowincji 1719–1801: Wielgomlyny, AJG, sign. 1647, p. 38, 58, 74b, 95.

and Italian, appeared in their libraries – of course, Polish predominated among them[3].

In 1815 there were 209 medical books in the library of the Pauline monks from Wieluń. Even though it is already the 19th century, such a situation is surprising. I have never found so many such books in any old monastery library. There were rather single volumes (Stolarczyk, 2020a, p. 98). It is true that the Piarists of Wieluń also possessed books on medicine at the beginning of the 19th century, but there were far fewer of them. They also had in their possession (Stolarczyk, 2025, pp. 818-831).

In all monastery libraries there could not be missing the works of the following theologian authors: St. Thomas Acquinas, Peter Lombard, Peter Comestor, John Duns, Antonino Diana Panormitanus, Eloi de la Bassée, Francesco de Toledo, Hermann Busenbaum, Claude'a Lacroix, Ambroży Szymon Nieszporkowicz, Pelbart de Themeswar, Thomas de Vio-Kajetan, Mikołaj Mościcki, Martinus ab Azpilcueta (Navarrus), Louis de Grenada, Stanisław Hozjusz, saint. Agustyn from Hippona, Antonio Fernandes de Moura, Walenty Kuczborski, Hieronim Powodowski, Mikołaj Popławski, Michał Rychalski and saint Mechtylda from Hackeborn, saint Teresa from Avilla, Diego Estella, Diego Nisseno, Jean z Combes, Richard Arsdekin (Archdekin), St. Albert the Great, St. Francis de Sales, Emmanuel Sa, Janos Nadasi, saint Tomas a Kempis and preachers: Jakob de Voragine, Fabian Birkowski, Piotr Skarga, Johannes Wild (Ferus), Wilhelm from Meffret, Gilles Dominique Topiarius, Mathias Faber, Bernardo de Busto, Cornelio Musso, Pseudo-Pierre de La Paluda, Martin Eisegrein, Thomas Stapleton, Diego de la Vega, Paul Wan (Wann), Jacob Schöpper, Philippe Bosquier (Boskhier), Gabriele Inchino, Gaspar Sanchez, Piotr Poznański (Petrus Posnaniensis), Mario Bignoni, Pierre de Besse, Szymon Stanisław Makowski, Evangelista de Momigno, Hieronim Powodowski, Diego de la Vega (Sukiennik, 2019, pp. 126-135; Stolarczyk 2016a, pp. 230-234; Stolarczyk 2022b, p. 48-52). The library

[3] Katalog biblioteki Wieluń 1809, sign. Col. Viel 9, AZPKr.; Materiały Ludwika Chmaja (Materiały Chmaj). Inventarium Bibliothecae Colegii Lovicensis Scholarum Piarum. Polska Akademia Nauk. Archiwum w Warszawie (PANA) pp. 1-63v.

of the Calced Carmelites from Kłodawa stood out somewhat. It contained a relatively small number of works on dogmatic and moral theology—only seven (Stolarczyk, 2018, p. 321).

The monastery libraries also housed the so-called forbidden books. They had to be appropriately marked and placed in a place that was difficult to access and under lock and key**.** They could only be used with special permission from the monastery superior first of all preachers and lecturers and theologians writing polemical works. In the case of the monasteries we are interested in, only the Pauline monks from Wielgomlyny had collected a number of books banned by the Church (63 volumes). These were *the Polish Bible* and panegyrics (Stolarczyk 2022b, p. 56)[4].

The Pauline monks of Oporów also had panegyrics – in 1725 there were 14 of them, and in 1728 10 more. However, unlike the Pauline monks of Wielgomlyny, they were not designated as forbidden books (Sukiennik, 2019, pp. 135-136).

Thanks to inventories and provenance records, we know the donors who donated their books to monastery libraries in Central Poland. Among them, the three largest donors are worth mentioning: Dominican Feliks Gozdawa of Sieradz, of the Wierzbno coat of arms, the prior of Sieradz donated a considerable collection of books to the Sieradz monastery, numbering no less than 182 volumes, including 14 incunabula, which became the basis of the 16th and 17th century conventual library. They came mainly from the printing houses of Cologne, Lyon, Basel, Antwerp, Venice and Paris, there were only a few Polish prints. In 1625 Maciej Sisinius, bequeathed his considerable collection of books to the Dominican monastery in Piotrków Trybunalski. In 1719, the Pauline library in Wielgomlyny received 42 volumes of his books from Ambroży Swinarski. In the same year and in 1725, Konstanty Moszyński donated his books to the library (15 volumes in 1719, 335 volumes in 1725), and in 1738, Bazyli Krupski donated 13 volumes. In 1647 the Franciscan Observants (in Poland called Bernardines) library in Lowicz received a gift of 4 private collections of old prints.: primate

[4] Akta prowincji 1719–1801: Wielgomłyny. AJG, sign. 1647, p. 123–124, 145.

Jan Wężyk donated 92 old books, vicar Mateusz Makowski – 98 volumes, parish priest Adam Kuczborski from Bolkow – 52, and Wincenty Czarnecki – 25. Around 1630, the vicar of the local parish church, Jan of Leczyca, donated 250 books to the library of the Franciscan Observants in Leczyca. In 1731, the Pauline provincial, Anastazy Kiedrzyński, donated his book collection to the Pauline monks of Oporów. (Pawłowski, 2014, p. 386-391; Sukiennik, 2019, pp. 123, Stolarczyk 2015a, p. 91-92; Stolarczyk, 2016a, p. 224; Stolarczyk 2020b, p. 42; Stolarczyk 2022b, p. 46).

The superiors of the Piarists in Piotrkow Trybunalski, during their tenure and even after moving to other cities, enriched the library with several donations. The most numerous came from priest Wacław Zawadzki (1698-1700) – 50 books, from priest Paulin (1718-1720) – 90 books, and from priest Damian (1721-1726) – 217 books. The growing popularity of the Piarist school among the townspeople and nobility brought the library significant gifts. The first, recorded in 1700, came from a member of the Piotrków patrician Peycer family, who sent 80 books from Torun. In the second half of the 18th century, the Piotrków Piarist book collection grew rapidly, influenced by numerous gifts received at the time. The most valuable collection, that of Crown Undersecretary Józef Szaniawski, was donated in 1761 by his widow, Anna née Ossolińska. The collection comprised 455 volumes of historical, legal, and political works in expensive bindings. In 1781, the Commission of National Education donated the book collection from the Jesuit in Piotrkow to the Piarists. Initially, however, the Piarists showed little interest in this collection. They did not add it to their library until 1794, when they took over the Jesuit church (Kwiatkowska, 1991, pp. 76, 79).

In 1683, Szymon Korzeniowski, the parish priest of Raczyno, donated his book collection to the Franciscan library in Wielun. Unfortunately, it is not known what books these were or how many there were, as a list has not survived. In 1764, Józef Sławęta Stawski donated his library to this monastery; unfortunately, the titles and number of books are unknown. In 1772, Stanisław Męciński,

the mayor of Wielun, donated six books to the monastery, all in folio format (Stolarczyk, 2016b, p. 228-229).

Another way of obtaining books for monastery libraries was to purchase new ones. In 1647, the aforementioned Bernardine monastery in Łowicz purchased 75 old prints for 2,000 florins (given to the monks for this purpose by the aforementioned Mateusz Makowski). Around 1650, the Reformed Friars from Wieluń purchased an unknown number of books for 600 florins. In 1683, the Piarists from Piotrków Trybunalski, by order of the provincial, established a fund for the purchase of books. 15 zlotys was allocated annually for this purpose. In the mid-18th century, the rector of the Piarist monastery in Piotrków Trybunalski allocated 200 zlotys annually for the library. In 1772, the superior of the Franciscan community in Wieluń purchased three books (Kwiatkowska, 1991, p. 76; Stolarczyk, 2015a, p. 92; Stolarczyk, 2016b, pp. 228-229).

Monastery libraries also took over books from deceased monks. This was the case, among others, after the death of Father Koloman Pszczołowski in 1731 and in 1786 after the death of Father Alojzy Grzegorzewicz from the Pauline monastery in Oporow. In 1732, the Pauline monks from Wielgomlyny took over Maciej Świtalski's book collection of 70 volumes after his death (Sukiennik, 2019, pp. 120, 123; Stolarczyk, 2022b, p. 46).

In 1736, the Pauline monks of Oporów acquired seven books at the provincial chapter. In the 18th century, the same monks came into possession of the monumental work on the seven sacraments (Experientiae Theologicae) by the Swiss Jesuit Jerzy Gobat from 1678. It is unknown whether they acquired it through purchase, as a gift from another monastery, or as a legacy from a deceased monk. The aforementioned Father Alojzy Grzegorzewicz made particular contributions to expanding the library holdings at the Oporow monastery in the 18th century. He acquired books from Józef Sołłohub, a Pauline monk who was well-disposed towards the Pauline order, and whom he assisted as a court chaplain and close associate. He also acquired them on the book market using funds obtained from Sołłohub or the order's authorities, or acquired them on his own (Sukiennik, 2019, pp. 119, 123, 131).

In the 19th century, the liquidation of most Polish monasteries (the so-called dissolutions) by the occupying powers led to a significant dispersion of conventual book collections. Much of their destruction was brought about by world wars, especially the second. Currently, the saved volumes are kept both in church libraries (diocesan, parish and monastery libraries, the latter mainly in provincial libraries of individual religious orders) and in libraries of secular institutions, especially university libraries, e.g. Library of the Major Seminary in Wloclawek and University Library in Warsaw (Czapnik, 2020, pp. 9-11; Stolarczyk, 2015b, pp. 141-142).

Conclusions

The Polish libraries of the Observant Franciscans, Dominicans, Calced Carmelites, and Pauline monks were typical monastery libraries of the modern era – theological treatises, sermons, and collections of sermons predominated. However, unlike other orders, the Paulines had considerable collections of works on history, both ecclesiastical and secular.

The works of ecclesiastical authors (primarily theologians, polemicists and sermon writers)constituted the canon of obligatory readings for the monks, unchanged over the centuries and continuously supplemented in accordance with the monastic legislation – it was a *constans*.

The situation was different within the Piarist Order in Poland. In the 18th century, especially since the reforms of Stanisław Konarski (mid-18th century) and the later ones (from 1773) of the Commission of National Education, particular emphasis was placed on the patriotic education of young citizens of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth who would dedicate themselves to saving their homeland. Particular importance was attached to the study of the history of Poland and the world from ancient times to the present day, geography and foreign languages. Because their collections served both clerics and lay students of the schools run by the order, Piarist libraries, differed somewhat. Historical and political

science works as well as textbooks for learning Polish and other foreign languages dominated there. Piarist book collections were also larger than those of the other studied orders – they are counted in thousands of volumes, while the rest were in hundreds of volumes.

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