

Historical collections of the Research Library in Olomouc



The origins and later development of the so-called historical book collections (i.e. books published before 1800) of today's Research Library in Olomouc are closely linked to the history of the University of Olomouc. In **1566**, the Jesuit Academy, the first grade of higher education, was established in Olomouc at the behest of the Olomouc Bishop, **Vilém Prusinovský of Víckov** (1534-1572), and with the consent of Pope Pius V.

That same year, the gradual building of the necessary library commenced. Bartholomew Weissag, a native of the Kłodzko Region and Master of Philosophy, was charged with the task. The original collection of the library included mainly donations from the Bishop himself, as well as donations from canons, municipal

officers, and townsmen, and books were also purchased from renowned printing companies (e.g. in Augsburg) with the help of various foundations. In 1573, the Jesuit Academy became a full-fledged institution and its reputation grew in the following years, which meant greater prestige for the library as well. The increasing numbers and demands of the students necessitated a continuous expansion of the library and care for it.



P. Georgii Pellegri S.J. Moravici, ardente Divini verbi predicatoris et illius contra hereses propaganda pietate et industria summo ad Deum successu insignis. Martire quousq. Laboribus tandem Missionis Cathedrae fructuosus. Klattavia in Boemia etc. Obiit. A. 1600. aetatis 67.

A particularly great increase in the number of books was recorded in 1599, when a large number of books was purchased with money donated to the university by the Moravian Municipal Marshal, Jáchym Haugvic of Biskupice; a year later, therefore, the library already occupied three rooms. The library was to experience exceptional gains and losses **during the Thirty Years' War**. The university, managed by the Jesuits, and the library itself were the first to enjoy the benefits of the abundant confiscations that took place, and then suffered losses caused by the eight-year-long occupation of Olomouc by the Swedes (1642-1650) that it was extremely hard to recover from. The Swedish troops complied fully with the instructions of Christina, Queen of Sweden, to pay great attention to all artistic collections, which also meant books.

Despite many efforts to keep the library secret, therefore, the Swedes naturally discovered the renowned university collection. Even though the library was guarded, the librarian, George Pelling, whose task it was to watch over the library during the Swedish occupation, managed to smuggle out some of the rarest manuscripts and prints in secret, together with a student called Michael Sartorius. The Swedes still looted the library and took away its contents, together with other valuables, allegedly on one hundred carts. A majority of the Olomouc books then became a part of the Royal Library in Stockholm. In the following decades, the Jesuits tried hard to bridge the huge losses.



The first relatively detailed information on the composition and size of the university library in Olomouc can be found in the preserved volume catalogue of 1704, apparently made by the librarian Fredrik Knittig. The catalogue is sorted by fields and authors, and a careful arrangement of the library is apparent in it. In that year, the library had approximately 4,000-5,000 volumes, while a further 2,000-2,500 volumes could be found in the teachers' quarters etc.



GREGORIUS LAMBER ABBAS LUCENSIS VISITATOR ET HUNGARIE VICARIUS GENERALIS.

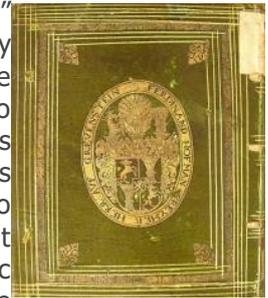
The library moved to a more appropriate and prestigious location in a new Baroque hall as a result of an extensive building initiative by the Jesuits during the first quarter of the 18th century, when a new college building was built as well; the renowned painter, Johann Christoph Handke, participated in the magnificent decorations of the Baroque hall (brand new Baroque bookcases were purchased in 1729).

When **the Jesuit order was disbanded in 1773**, only 8,100 volumes were left in the library, including copies. In **1775**, the library became a **public university library** by decision of the Moravian government; that same year, its collection was significantly enriched with selections of the collections of

<https://www.vkol.cz/en/hist--collections/>

five Moravian Jesuit colleges that had been closed (Brno, Jihlava, Telč, Uherské Hradiště, Znojmo). A mere three years later, then, the library already comprised 16,500 volumes, over 11,000 copies, 1,256 incomplete works, and 340 manuscripts.

Further significant growth of the historical collection occurred as a result of a decision made by the Emperor Joseph II, who ordered the court office to make a list of all the so-called "useless" monasteries of meditative and mendicant orders and their properties in the hereditary lands on 29 November 1781. The subsequent patent of 12 January 1782 closed all the monasteries that, in the Emperor's opinion, were not beneficial to society. Among the valuable property of each monastery there was usually a centuries-old library. According to the regulations applicable at that time, the university library in Olomouc was to take care of all the closed Church libraries in Moravia. The difficult task of making the individual lists was delegated to the Olomouc librarian **Johann Aloys Hanke**, while the priority right to choose books belonged to the Imperial Court Library in Vienna (however, for various reasons the Imperial Court Library exercised its right only rarely). The rest of the vast collection of 47 closed Church institutions, which meant more than 88,000 works in approximately 400,000 volumes, could have fallen to the university library in Olomouc. However, Hanke failed in the attempt to secularise the Moravian monastery libraries. He worked in a hurry as usual, so too many books were marked as waste and irretrievably lost. A number of works produced by printing houses in the Czech lands thus uncontrollably disappeared. A large part of the books that were auctioned was, because of Hanke, sold for ridiculously low prices. Hanke recklessly disposed of many rare copies, and squandered a unique opportunity to enrich the collections of his parent library, for which he chose only a small part of the quantity auctioned. According to a rough estimate, approximately 6,000 works were chosen.

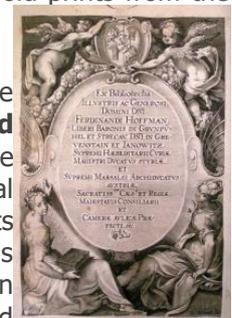


The gradual enrichment of the historical collection continued in the 19th century. It was mainly possible thanks to numerous donations and inheritances. Among these and also older additions, including other confiscated collections, were, above all, the libraries of the Abbot of Louka, **Gregorius Lambek**, and the Earls **of Zástřizly**, the collection of books of the Dean **George Henry Maierwaldt**, a part of the family library of **Ferdinand Hoffman of Grünpühel**, and the libraries of the Lords **of Vrbno** and **Žerotín**.

The collection was further increased **in the 1950s** as a result of further closures of monasteries and other Church institutions. The collection gained 150 manuscripts, 27 incunabula, and 412 old prints from the closed monastery libraries.



The last major acquisition is, paradoxically, associated with the restitutions after 1989. It was the library of the **closed Dominican monastery in Litoměřice**. The property of the Litoměřice Dominicans had been handed over to the National Library in Prague at the beginning of the 1950s, and stored in its depository in Postoloprty. Because the Litoměřice monastery was never restored after 1989, its property was given to the Dominican Order of St. Giles in Prague in 1993. The new owner, however, sold



the library collection to an antiquarian bookshop near Charles Bridge, which no longer exists today. The employees of the bookshop informed the library public of this sale, and the Ministry of Culture mediated successful negotiations on the purchase of the whole library collection of this bookshop. In 1994, 5,295 volumes from the Litoměřice Dominican library were added to the collection of the Research Library in Olomouc. They were primarily old prints; unfortunately, manuscripts or incunabula were not a part of the purchase.

Today, the historical collections comprise **1,455 manuscripts** (401 of which are medieval), almost **2,000 incunabula**, and **more than 65,000 old prints**, which makes the historical collection of the Research Library in Olomouc one of the largest and rarest in the Czech Republic.

[Manuscripts](#), [incunabula](#), and [old prints](#) may be searched in the individual databases of the catalogue. These documents are made available at the [Study Room of Historical Collections](#).