

IMAGO LIBRARIAE

By Sonja Svoljšak



Fig 1. St. Jerome in his study (Anonymous ca. 1500) Savonarola, *Confessio[n]ale pro i[n]structione co[n]fessorum* (Venetiis, 1517), 1.

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AN IMAGE OF A BOOK generally symbolizes wisdom, erudition, or authorship. It may appear in the hands of an author, a saint, a clergyman, or a biblical person. It can also be an attribute of rhetoric, history, philosophy and grammar.¹ A personification of melancholy may be surrounded by books. There are many motives where a book is present as a symbol or an attribute. St. Jerome in his study is one of these famous timeless motives where a book, a writing desk, an armarium or books on shelves appear.

A library is most often symbolically referred to as “a temple of wisdom,” “an arsenal of knowledge,” “the memory of human civilization,” etc. But what message does an image of a library carry apart from these almost proverbial sayings describing its spiritual essence?² Does it emphasize the notion of wisdom and civilization compared to an image of a single book? Is it merely an image of a place where many books are put together in an organized manner? Can it also convey some other symbolic or historical information? This article will discuss a couple of cases in which a library is used as a symbolic pictorial setting reaching beyond the simple symbolism of wisdom and erudition or in which a complex symbolism is used to depict a certain idea or a library collection.

THERSIAN ACADEMY LIBRARY GETS CLOSED, REOPENED. AND AUGMENTED: (HISTORICAL?) PICTORIAL EVIDENCE

(Johann Nepomuk Cosmas) Michael Denis (1729–1800),³ the author of *Einleitung in die Bücherkunde*⁴ was a Jesuit and a professor of literature at the Theresianum⁵ in Vienna. He

1 James Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art* (London: John Murray, 1996), 163.

2 There have been countless studies and papers dealing with the symbolism of a book as an object or a book as an artistic symbol, while the role of the library in iconography is rarely mentioned.

3 Arthur F. J. Remy. “Johann Nepomuk Cosmas Michael Denis.” *The Catholic Encyclopedia* accessed March 25, 2011. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04721b.htm>.

4 Michael Denis, *Einleitung in die Bücherkunde* (Wien: J. T. Trattner, 1777–1778).

5 Established in 1746 by Maria Theresa it was a private boarding school governed by the Jesuit order; see Michelangelo Zois, *Das Theresianum* (Brünn: s. n.), 17–8.

was also a poet and a bibliographer. He held the post until 1773 when the Society of Jesus was suppressed. Denis then became assistant librarian at the Garellian Library in Theresianum. After the academy was closed by Joseph the II's decree in 1783, he was appointed assistant librarian of the Imperial Court Library in 1784. In 1791 he was advanced to chief librarian. His *Einleitung in die Bücherkunde* is a short literary history overview from antiquity to “present times” with an emphasis on bibliographic and literary sciences development.

It contains an anonymous engraving, depicting the Garellian Library of which Denis was in charge. Bibliotheca Garellia was a private collection of Pius Nikolaus Garelli (1675–1739), Prince Charles the VI's personal physician and prefect of the court library, the imperial court librarian and director of the collection of antiquities and coin cabinet. Two years after Theresianum was established, his whole collection was bought and transferred to the academy premises and thus became its core collection.⁶ It contained over 10,000 books. During the Academy's closure,⁷ the whole library was transferred to Lemberg,⁸ was eventually dispersed and lost in the first half of the nineteenth century (Zois, 1910, 19-20). So when the academy reopened in 1797 the entire library collection had to be reestablished. Simultaneously, one room was added to the existing library hall.⁹ The engraving in question is supposed to be evidence of the *status quo ante*.

It shows a baroque interior with stuccoed ceiling and wooden library furniture. There is also chessboard-style tile flooring and some reading tables and chairs are placed in the room. The central image is framed and there is an inscription “Bibliotheca Garellia” at the bottom of the engraving. It is a surviving image of the later lost Garellia. However, it is not all that. When one looks at the present Theresianum museum library furniture and decoration (the original pieces from the eighteenth century are still preserved), one notices that the number of shelves is not right. There is one bottom shelf (now closed) and eight more shelves for different formats in the illustration. In reality, the number of library shelves before its augmentation after 1797 must have been bigger (at least 11). The picture is therefore not the exact documentary evidence and the lacking shelves might be due to the artist's poor counting, composition or perspective problems. We may say that this image is not an exact presentation of the Garellia as it was before its content was removed from

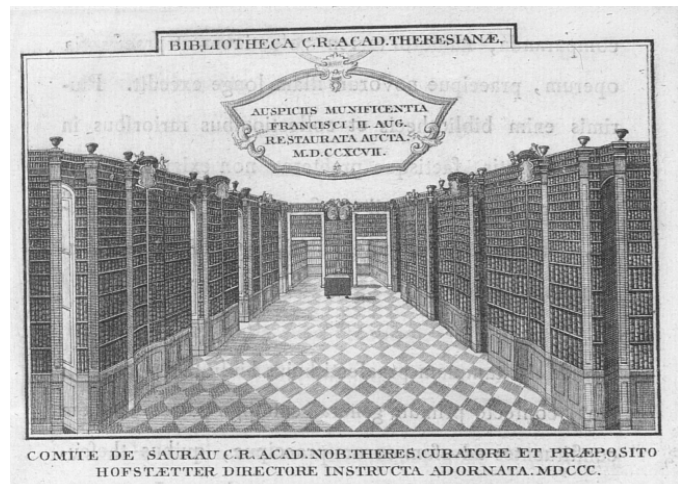
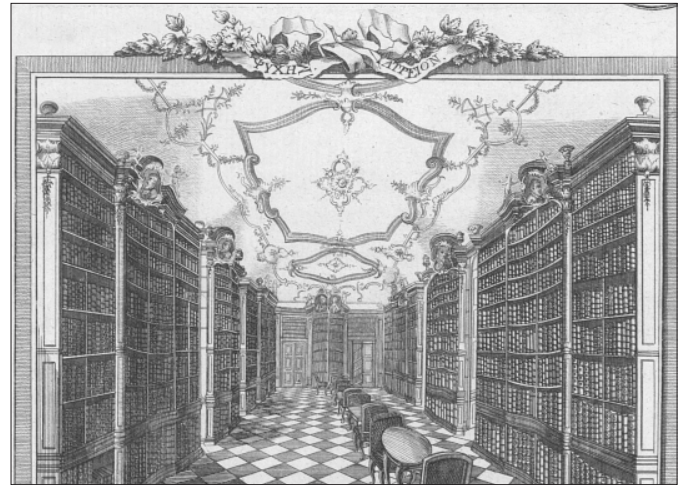


Fig. 2. Anonymous: Garellia (before 1783).

Fig. 3. Benedictus: library hall (ca. 1801).

6 Eugen Guglia, *Das Theresianum in Wien*. (Wien: A. Schroll), 26.

7 In 1783 the Academy was disbanded by Joseph the II and in 1797 it was reopened by Franz the II. In the next couple of years the number of books exceeded 11.000 again, see Ignaz Hradil, “Nachrichten über das k. k. Theresianum und über die Entstehung der daselbst befindlichen Bibliothek,” *In Jahrsbericht über das Gymnasium der k. k. Theresianischen Akademie für das Schuljahr 1865–1866*. Wien: A Schweiger, 1866), 14–23.

8 Now Lwiv in Ukraine.

9 Hradil, “Nachrichten über das k. k. Theresianum und über die Entstehung der daselbst befindlichen Bibliothek”, 14–23.



Fig. 4. Library hall with two additional shelves on top still present (ca. 1916).

Fig. 5. A present day historical library hall at Theresianum with the two additional shelves on top removed.



Vienna as we might have concluded from the title of the engraving. It presents the baroque Garellia interior but is not to be taken as a piece of historical evidence to what the library hall really looked like before 1783.

These are minor discrepancies compared to some obvious visual reductions and exaggerations in another depiction of the same library hall, made after the library was reestablished in 1797. We find this depiction in the “*Catalogus bibliographicus librorum in Bibliotheca Caes. Reg. et equestris Academiae Theresianae ...*”,¹⁰ a library catalogue, composed by Joseph Von Sartori which was published in 1801. The floor tiles in this depiction remain the same, but their amount is increased considerably, producing an illusion of a much broader space. The stuccoed ceiling is clearly simplified, as stucco decoration is obviously reduced and lacks a proper perspective and shortening. What is interesting is the way the library furniture and the quantity of library materials are depicted. The depiction of the furniture (namely the wooden shelving cases) together with the information about when and who did the renovation and augmentation during the last three years of the eighteenth century, which is also a part of the engraving,¹¹ might lead us to think that the whole library interior was quite considerably redone. This however is not true. What the image reflects is merely a contemporary, more classical taste for interior design, while the library hall stayed almost the same. Judging by some older pictures of the library hall, only two additional shelves were added on top and the lowest shelf was closed. It looks like Hieronymus Benedictus, the author of the engraving, adjusted the appearance of the library interior to new classicist trends and tastes. Besides the obvious reductions (furniture details, vases, stucco) there is an interesting exaggeration present in this image. To emphasize the augmentation of the library the two doors at the end of the library hall are opened and we are able to see a new, additional room which is packed with books. But this is not all: to support the inscription in the engraving, which is telling us that the library was considerably augmented, the number of shelves is increased to 16, while the number of shelves in the Theresianum Library hall was only increased by two.

Though they seem to depict a real library neither of the two illustrations can be regarded as historical evidence of the Theresian academy library hall development during the second half of the eighteenth century. The first image is more true to the baroque

¹⁰ Joseph von Sartori, *Catalogus bibliographicus librorum in Bibliotheca Caes. Reg. et equestris Academiae Theresianae*. (Viennae: vidua Alberti, 1801–1806).

¹¹ Comite de Saurau C. R. Acad. Nob. Theres. Curatore et praeposito Hofjaetter direttore instructa adornata MDCCC.

nature of the interior and furniture, while the second one tells us more about the tastes and aspirations of the library patrons than about the real changes the library hall went through towards the end of the eighteenth century. The differences between reality and the depictions may be due to the lack of the engravers technical skills, but in the second case they may as well be an intentional modification of reality.

A LIBRARY: THE SCHOOL OF ATHENS AND A TRANSITIONAL SPACE OF WISDOM

The “Nouvelle bibliotheque des auteurs ecclesiastiques”¹² by Louis Ellies Dupin (1657–1719),¹³ a French ecclesiastical historian, was the first history of Christian literature in a modern language. It is renowned for introducing new, critical, multilayered, bio-bibliographical, historical, and literary bibliographical methodology. It was fiercely criticized by many of Denis’s contemporaries (Bossuet, Didier) who themselves wrote a couple of volumes, deliberating on the factual and dogmatic mistakes Dupin had made.

There is an interesting engraving on the frontispiece of the first volume: church fathers, old ecclesiastical writers and other prominent theologians have come together in a library, where their works have been placed on the shelves. They are now engaged in conversation or contemplation over some books and scrolls which, judging from the shelves’ titles, seem to be their own works. The choice of a library hall interior reflects the revival of the antique architectural components;¹⁴ the ceiling is barrel vaulted, there are some *oculi*, through which the light protrudes, and the library shelves are placed between Corinthian columns. There is an architrave around the upper zone of the walls, where busts of some important biblical figures such as Moses and Aaron are placed.

Among the “patrons” present in the composition we can make out St. Hieronymus who had even brought the lion and is now engaged in a conversation with St. Gregory. We see St. Ambrose and St. Augustine in the back. There are also some more plainly dressed men and some clergymen wearing biretta with no other distinctive attributes of their identity. Judging from the book’s content, they are also ecclesiastical authors. The four fathers of the church have a long tradition of appearing together in a single composition. The peculiarity of this depiction is that they interact with each other and with other figures, like in some kind of *conversatio erudita*.

In general, the frontispiece illustration emphasizes the divine wisdom and erudition by putting so many important ecclesiastical figures together in a single room. Secondary components and motives in the picture can also be seen as a means to gradate this notion. The choice of a library hall for this anachronistic get-together is upgraded by the choice of antique and renaissance architectural elements. Further on these are complemented by the biblical figures of the prophets on the architrave, the *oculi* (the holy eyes) and finally completed by the prominent holy patrons who occupy the hall. The composition also alludes to two famous Raphael frescoes in the papal Stanzae: *The School of Athens* and



Fig. 6. “Nouvelle bibliotheque des auteurs ecclesiastiques” (frontispiece), Anonymous (ca. 1690).

¹² Louis Ellies Dupin, *Nouvelle bibliotheque des auteurs ecclesiastiques*, (Paris: A Pralard, 1690–1711).

¹³ Paul Lejay, “Jobann Nepomuk Cosmas Michael Denis.” In *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, accessed March 25, 2011. <http://www.newadvent.org/catben/05204a.htm>.

¹⁴ Peter Murray: *Renaissance Architecture* (Milano: Electa; New York: Rizzoli, 1985). Frederick Hartt, *History of Italian Renaissance Art: Painting, Sculpture, Architecture* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994).



Fig. 7. Raphael: *The school of Athens* (1510–1511).

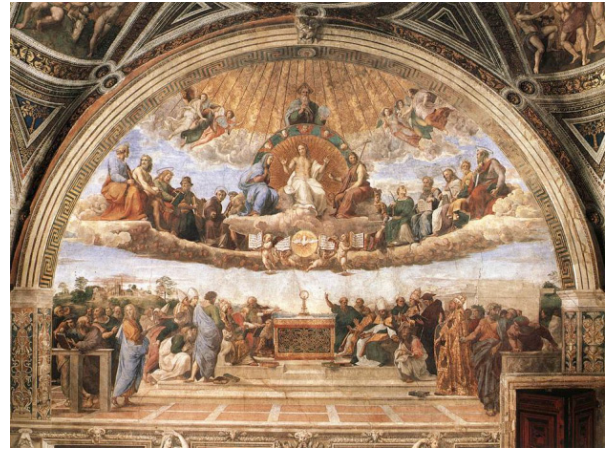


Fig. 8. Raphael: *Disputa* (1510–1511).

Disputa. In the first one, nearly all Greek philosophers are promenading, conversing, contemplating or teaching under a barrel vaulted, Greek cross-shaped building. In the lower part of *Disputa*, we can find church fathers, saints and theologians interacting again; in this case, they are debating transubstantiation. The frontispiece of “Nouvelle bibliotheque des auteurs ecclesiastiques” looks like a blending of both paintings: the composition is less hierarchical and the distinction between the heavenly and the earthly is less evident than in the *Disputa*, while the main protagonists interact like the philosophers in Raphael’s *The School of Athens*.

With regard to “Nouvelle bibliotheque des auteurs ecclesiastiques” content, the frontispiece could also simply be regarded as an illustration of the book’s content or a complementary pictorial bibliography. In this case, the library space could be interpreted as a pictorial presentation of the bibliographic collection in question, while the “patrons” would represent the book’s content.



Fig. 9. *A library*. Daniël met de Penningen (ca. 1690).

Fig. 10. Piero della Francesca: “*Ideal city*” (ca. 1470).

While the frontispiece illustration of the “Nouvelle bibliotheque des auteurs ecclesiastiques” is an allegory of wisdom and erudition, the little head pieces at the beginnings of major chronological sections by Daniël met de Penningen bring different symbolic content, though a library is again the main setting. This time a cross-section of the library interior reveals a library hall with the repeated semicircular arcade arches, which resemble the loggia arcade from Brunelleschi’s *Ospedale degli innocenti* in Florence. We can see a number of clergymen in the hall. They are engaged in various scientific and scholarly activities, namely reading, taking the books from the shelves, measuring the globes or conversating.

The symmetrical library interior extends towards the city limits in the background. Even the shelved walls and the floor tiles almost reach the city walls. The scholars thus seem to be able to freely traverse from the realm of erudition to the metropolis. The layout, symmetry and obvious use of linear perspective look like descendants of renaissance urban utopias, like Piero della Francesca’s of Fra Carnevale’s ideal cities. But is the city in the background just a city or does it also carry some symbolic meaning? Could it be a specific city? We see a city wall surrounding a couple of church towers, pinnacles and a building which looks like a baptistery at a first glance. The panoramic view of the city background slightly resembles that of Oxford University with the Radcliffe Camera, an eighteenth century Bodleian Library addition.¹⁵ This is combined with a Tuscan proto-

¹⁵ Some earlier descriptions of the building with engravings in: *A Pocket Companion for Oxford*, 1762.

Renaissance multiple loggia-library, which resembles the loggia arcade from Brunelleschi's *Ospedale degli innocenti* in Florence. But at the same time it is possible, that according to the book's content the whole scene is a representation of an imaginary holy city. Maybe it could even be an allusion to Jerusalem. Although the tradition of depicting the Holy city as an imaginary place and the Temple as a round or polygonal building based on an image of the Dome of the Rock ceased with the introduction of new archeological and more realistic approaches to city and landscape painting during the renaissance, it would be possible that the city in the background of de Penningen's engraving is an intentional allusion to those earlier depictions. This would put the somewhat eclectic motives and architectural styles of this engraving into some sort of symbolic harmony, with the library hall being a transitory space between the worldly and the divine or a space where both realms of wisdom meet, intertwine and connect. Even if the city in the background was some kind of arbitrary depiction of Oxford University, one must keep in mind that the Radcliffe Camera was intentionally modeled upon classical architecture (circular temple), which together with the fact that what we are seeing could be a university town, yet again symbolizes human wisdom and erudition.

IDENTITIES UNCOVERED: "THEATRUM ANONYMORUM AND PSEUDONYMORUM"—AN APOLOGY OF A SCIENTIFIC METHOD

Vincent Placcius (1642–1699) was an eminent philologist from Hamburg. His *Theatrum anonymorum and pseudonymorum*¹⁶ is the chief early research on works published anonymously or under pseudonym. It was published nine years after Placcius's death and identifies some 2,777 anonymous and pseudonymous works.

There is an anonymous engraved frontispiece in the first edition, which depicts a library interior. In the background we can see a room which could be a cabinet of curiosities with some statues of antique deities and a male bust statue (a philosopher?). From behind a curtain a small boy is peeping into the library hall and a man is just entering with his face covered with a mask.

An interesting scene is taking place in the hall. We see a person (maybe the author) taking masks from the faces of several men and attaching them to a cord overhead. The cord with the masks could represent the *Zettelkasten* to which single slips of paper with textual quotations were attached to facilitate the classification and storage of a text. As a person entering the room has his face covered with a generic face mask, the other two men, who are just being uncovered, show their real, distinctive, individual faces beneath. The masks, hanging from the cord above the men, symbolize the anonymous and pseudonymous authors (the anonymous authors might be the generic faces, while the pseudonymous authors might be those who still retained some distinctive features, such as a beard or moustache). Identified and sorted, the uncovered authors are symbolically proceeding to the front from the realm of anonymity.

Besides pointing to the content of Placcius's work, the frontispiece also illustrates a certain scientific method. The "information explosion" in the sixteenth and the seventeenth

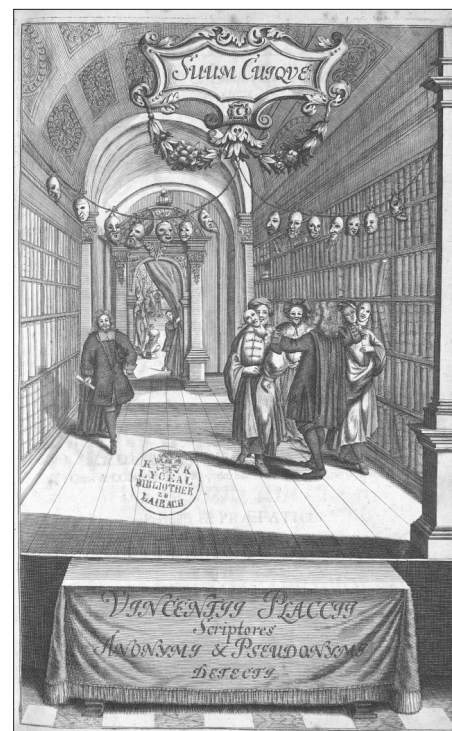


Fig. 11. *Theatrum anonymorum et pseudonymorum*, frontispiece. Anonymous (ca. 1708).

¹⁶ Vincentius Placcius, *Theatrum anonymorum et pseudonymorum*. (Hamburg: vidua G. Liebernickelii, 1708).

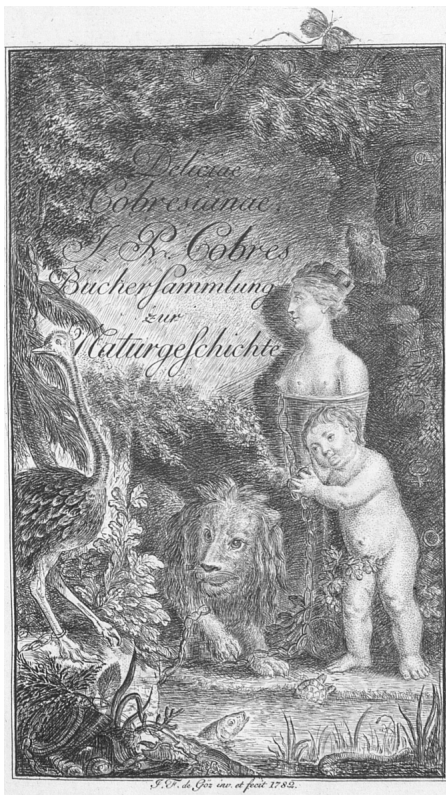


Fig. 12. *Deliciae Cobresianae*, title page. J. F. de Göz (ca. 1782).

centuries was, with the help of the thriving printing presses, caused by the ever increasing production of texts. For various reasons, it became a frequent practice to publish polemical, heterodox, or somewhat explosive material anonymously or pseudonymously. This situation triggered the creation of dictionaries of anonymous and pseudonymous works in the seventeenth century, culminating in the monumental “Theatrum anonymorum et pseudonymorum.” Many scholars and polyhistorians have tried to resolve false or hidden identities by cross examining and classifying literary and other sources. The unmasking was a double-edged venture in that it contributed to transparency, but it could also lead to undesired disclosure of false identity or even discrediting of an author.¹⁷ Of course, the frontispiece in question represents an apology and a justification of the noble nature of unmasking and does not refer to the unwanted disclosure the unmasking may also cause.

The anonymous authors seem to come to the disclosure point willingly and appear content when their true faces are finally revealed. The library hall¹⁸ as an architectural entity does not seem to play any particular role, besides being a predominantly generic space with the generic volumes placed on the unmarked shelves which can in a way also signify anonymity. But symbolically it is a very important place where the truth is being revealed.

DELICIAE COBRESIANAE—HOW TO SHOW OFF AS A PROUD LIBRARY COLLECTION OWNER IN “SEVERAL PICTORIAL WAYS”

Nothing about the content of *Deliciae Cobresianae*¹⁹ would be immediately evident from its illustrated title page if there wasn't also a subtitle, indicating that the book is actually a private natural sciences book collection catalog. The title page is full of animals and plants. There are astrological signs, a small boy holding a chain and a bust of a three-breasted woman in a plant pot. At a first glance, a majority of motives are used to indicate the collector's passion for flora, fauna and art. The little naked boy might be a putto. However, the story is not that simple.

Joseph Paul von Cobres (1737?–1825)²⁰ was a wealthy merchant, banker and more importantly a natural history literature collector from Augsburg. His library contained one of the most prominent, relevant and diverse natural sciences collections in 19th-century Europe. As a rich man, he also sponsored scientific ventures, research and scholars.

Kobresia is a genus of about 50 species of the *Caricoideae* subfamily of the *Cyperaceae* family. It grows in the northern Hemisphere, especially at high altitudes in the Himalayas,

¹⁷ Martin Mulsow, “Practices of Unmasking: Polyhistorians, Correspondence, and the Birth of Dictionaries of Pseudonymity in 17th Century Germany” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67, no. 2 (2006): 219–250.

¹⁸ The interior resembles the studiolo of Francesco I de' Medici in Palazzo Vecchio in Florence.

¹⁹ Joseph Paul von Cobres, *Deliciae Cobresianae* (Augsburg: Selbstverlag, 1708).

²⁰ “Cobres, Joseph Paul, Ritter von.” *Stadtarchiv Augsburg*, <http://augsburg.de/index.php?id=17323>.

China and central Asia. The genus was named after Joseph Paul von Cobres,²¹ most possibly, because he also sponsored some botanical research.

The three breasted woman in a plant pot represents goddess Meenakshi, who is an avatar of the Hindu goddess Parvati and a consort of Shiva. When she was born, she had an extra breast which disappeared when she met her future husband in the Himalayas. Parvata, from where Parvati derives, is one of the Sanskrit words for “mountain”; “Parvati” translates to “She of the mountains” and refers to Parvati as the daughter of Himavan, lord of the mountains and the personification of the Himalayas. As a goddess of power and creation she is also the one who gives power to all beings.²²

With this piece of information the riddle of the *Deliciae Cobresianae* title page is now easier to explain. While the three breasted goddess in a plant pot as a personification of the Himalayas also symbolizes Cobres himself through the Kobresia, the chain passing from the goddess through the hands of a human child and connecting the rest of the animals and plants symbolizes Parvati’s creative force and the power of life. Therefore, the whole title page composition is an allegory of nature, life, natural sciences and, finally, Cobres and his natural sciences collection.

CONCLUSION

What does an image of a library symbolize? Judging from the cases presented and analyzed in this article, an image of a library does not simply mean a large number of books put together in an orderly manner. It may serve as a perfect setting for numerous allegorical scenes symbolizing worldly and divine knowledge and wisdom, erudition or even all of these noble virtues at the same time (Dupin). It can be a place of authority, where the truth is revealed (Placcius). Sometimes it reflects shifts in artistic tastes and (over) glorifies the collection content or acquisitions the owner has made (Denis, Sartori and Cobres). In case of the emblematic title page of *Deliciae Cobresianae*, the natural and mythological worlds seem to symbolize a single library collection and its proud and learned owner. A library image therefore does emphasize the notion of wisdom and scientific progress in various ways. At the same time complex allegories may also represent libraries and library collections or even scientific methods. To conclude, an image of a library can and does carry some iconographic value beyond the proverbial symbolism of wisdom and erudition. It would be very interesting to explore more potential messages a library image might carry or other roles it might play in iconography. ■

21 Kesbab Raj Rajbhandari and Hideaki Obba, “A Revision of the Genus *Kobresia* Willdenow (Cyperaceae) of Nepal, *The Himalayan Plants*” 34, (2002), March 25, 2011. http://www.um.u-tokyo.ac.jp/publish_db/Bulletin/no34/no34008.html.

22 Davir R. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition* (Berkeley: Los Angeles: London: University of California Press, 1986).