



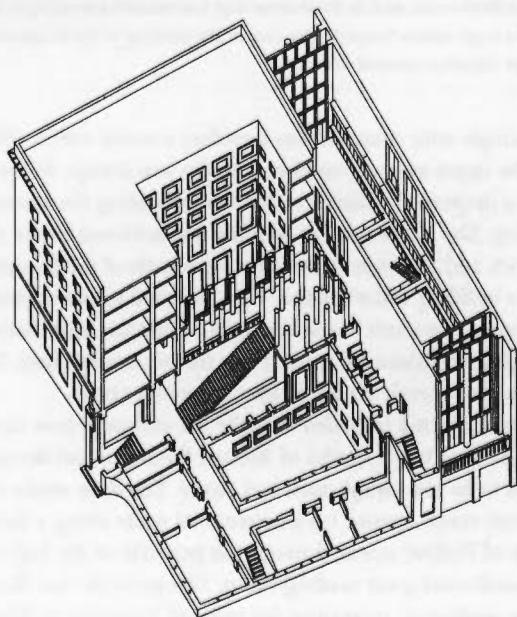
National and University Library (NUK) IRN373

<i>Location</i>	Ljubljana
<i>Address</i>	Turjaška Ulica 1
<i>Planning and completion</i>	1930–1931; 1936–1941
<i>Architect</i>	Jože Plečnik
<i>Investor</i>	King Alexander University of Ljubljana, Government Administration of Drava Governorate (Banska Uprava Dravske Banovine)
<i>Contractor</i>	Matko Curk and others
<i>Building type</i>	Library

Other buildings by the same architect Zacherl Mansion, Vienna 1903–1905; Church of the Holy Spirit, Vienna 1910–1913; Church of St. Francis, Ljubljana, 1925–1927; Parish Church of the Ascension of Our Lord, Bogojina 1925–1927; Church of the Heart of Jesus, Prague 1928–1931; Insurance Company (Vzajemna Zavarovalnica), Ljubljana 1928–1930; royal hunting lodge, Kamniška Bistrica 1932–1933; Peglezn building in Poljanska Cesta, Ljubljana 1933–1934; Church of St. Michael in Barje, Črna Vas 1937–1938; Parish Church of St. Benedict, Zgornje Stranje 1946–1947; renovation of Križanke (former monastery of the Teutonic Knights), Ljubljana 1956

The University Library in Ljubljana, also named the National Library since 1947, is one of the main works by Jože Plečnik. Together with the Asplund City Library in Stockholm, it represents one of the outstanding examples of the architectural style parallel to international functionalism.

The protracted endeavours for the construction of the Library were connected with efforts to establish Slovene cultural independence within the former monarchy in the Balkans. The memory of the late Renaissance Princely Palace (Knežji Dvorec) that used to occupy the same location until the beginning of the 20th century played an important role in the planning of the Library. Plečnik was primarily solving the problem of a wound in the historical urban landscape



▲ Section in axonometric projection

◀ Reading room ... "The furniture was reminiscent of Greek models, while the two galleries in the centre followed the industrial aestheticism of the 19th century."

[caused by the disastrous earthquake in Ljubljana in 1895] with a huge mass of the building. Simultaneously he endeavoured to emphasize the symbolic values of the house of national learning within the given construction programme. In the artistic sense, the Library was a synthesis of his experiences demonstrated by the Zacherl Mansion in Vienna and the building of the Insurance Company (Vzajemna Zavarovalnica) in Ljubljana. Particular attention was paid to the exterior that was created according to the Semper theory of dressing as a huge woven "carpet". The core of the building in the image of



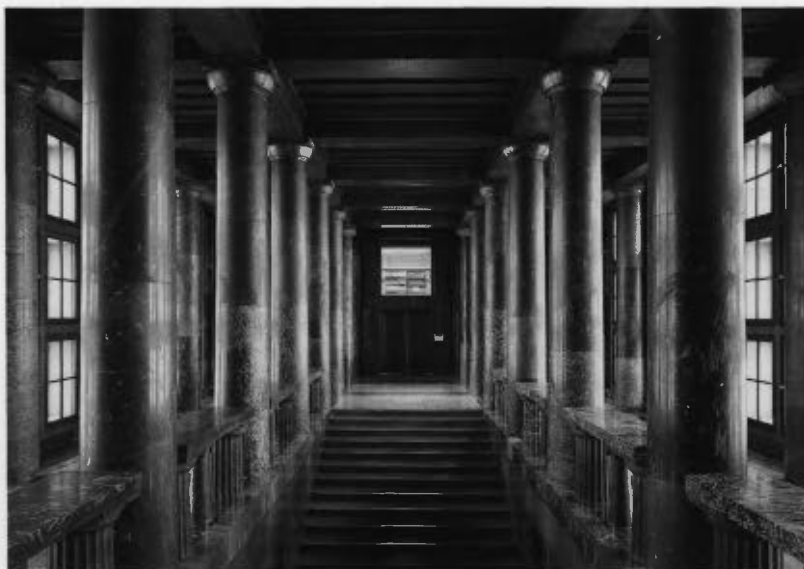
"Particular attention was paid to the exterior that was created according to the Semper theory of dressing as a huge woven "carpet". The core of the building in the image of a Greek temple with columns was therefore covered with it."

a Greek temple with columns was therefore covered with it. The windows of the upper storeys, together with the two portals, followed the logic of the draping of a fabric, without emphasizing the tectonics of the building. The impression of weaving was achieved by the mixture of bare brick and different stone slabs. Remnants of the foundation of the former building at the location were included in the construction as well as Roman remnants of the city walls so that the legitimacy of the Library within the historical context was further emphasized. The temple roof was merely indicated by a decorative crown.

Originally Plečnik intended to make the entrance door cast in bronze according to the model of Roman Pantheon, yet the process turned out to be too complicated and costly. The door made of timber covered with metal opened up a ceremonial route along a dark staircase made of Podpeč stone, through the peristyle of the hall to the laterally positioned great reading-room. The peristyle was the most persuasive ambiance, recreating the spirit of Antiquity in Slovene architecture. The high reading-room was lit by daylight through two windows filling up the smaller sides of the room. The wooden coffered ceiling imitated a carpet. Three chandeliers were attached to it according to the logic of textile decorations, not matching the lat-

eral axis of the room. The furniture was reminiscent of Greek models, while the two galleries in the centre followed the industrial aestheticism of the 19th century. The metamorphosis of antique textiles in the fashion of Semper was also used for the entrance to the exhibition hall, the portal of which was made of "petrified" curtains of reddish stone from Hotavlje.

The Library underwent its first renovation directly after its construction, when a military mail aeroplane crashed into it. After the war Plečnik added a new ceiling and chandeliers to the damaged



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reading-room. In the 1970s the roof was uncovered by strong winds and had to be replaced. In the mid 1990s the Monument Protection Service carefully renovated the facade, and the two-leaf door was replaced by a new one made by employing original technology in the same workshop. The Library experienced the severest blow in the form of ambitious architectural interventions between 1997 and 1998 concerning the opening of a new entrance to the basement rooms and their renovation.

The transformation of the original layout and a pointless crescendo of Postmodern forms occurred in the place where the architecture was purposefully silenced by Plečnik in order to intensify the effect of the prestige part of the building. New interpolations are in sharp contrast with the basic architectural concept and are to be removed sooner or later. The unfortunate state of affairs was caused by ignorance of the rule, well established in Europe, that monuments of the highest quality demand a special approach and cannot be spoiled, not even by minor transformations of their original function. The matter is even more unpleasant since it has already caused indignation in Slovenia as well as abroad. A particularly offensive manner of renovation can be traced even in the reading-room.