

The Library of Congress Jefferson Building, a 19th-Century Neo-Baroque Monument

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The Jefferson Building of the Library of Congress was designed as the national library of the United States; it is also now recognised as a national monument of art. The Baroque embellishments that prevail in the building's architectural composition characterise the Library's style as Neo-Baroque. This style continues a tradition that identifies a significant and vibrant epoch in the architectural history of Western European libraries under different circumstances and on a different continent.

While the Jefferson Building's Baroque architecture and décor proclaim its sponsors' national significance and prestige, the symbolism adds a message that is unique to America: the new Nation's vision of its democratic philosophy. The iconography illustrates the principles of the American Public Library Movement that link education to the progress of society. It reflects the 19th-century brand of American democracy by opening its national library as a institution of learning and advancement open to all its citizens.

The Library of Congress Jefferson Building, a 19th century neo-baroque monument

A ten-year restoration of the public areas of the Jefferson Building at the Library of Congress has returned this beautiful library to its original splendour. Completed in time for the Library's centennial in 1997, the Jefferson Building is the first of the three buildings that now comprise the Library of Congress. It is also a national monument of art and listed in the U. S. National Register of Historic Places.

The Jefferson Building's iconography is similar to still extant libraries in Europe that are characteristic of the Baroque era. These libraries, located primarily in German-speaking countries, still attract many visitors, although most of their once sizeable collections have been scattered or destroyed. Noted extant Baroque libraries include former monastery libraries such as the Strahov Library (built in 1670–79) in Prague, then under the jurisdiction of the Habsburg monarchy; Wib-

lingen (Germany, 1728–62); and St. Gall (Switzerland, 1758–67). The former Court Library in Vienna (1723–26), now the National Library of Austria, and the older library at the Escorial (Spain, 1587), are stunning monuments of secular courtly grandeur.

The embellishments of Baroque libraries, renewed in the Jefferson Building, show the close connection between a collection of books and the room/building that houses them, thus illustrating the two-fold dictionary definition of a library – the building and the collection. This investigation compares the meaning of the Jefferson Library's iconography, its façade and the two major public areas, the Great Hall (Foyer) and the Rotunda (Reading Room), with that of Baroque libraries, describing selected features as part of the Baroque tradition's architectural composition and its popular emblem genre. The profusely illustrated work *The Library of Congress, the Art and Architecture of the Thomas Jefferson Building* (1997) provides an extensive background for this interdisciplinary study.

The Symbolism of books and libraries during the baroque.

The Baroque age extends for almost two hundred years, from the end of the sixteenth to the middle of the eighteenth century. Both the Renaissance and the ensuing Baroque mark the beginning of modern times that changed the religious, intellectual, and social lives of its people. The prevailing ideas of any era are reflected in its books and works of art, making learning indispensable for an understanding of the complexities of contemporary life and its expanding dimensions.

The significant book collections of libraries in princely palaces and large estate-holding monasteries enhanced the intellectual prestige of their owners. In addition to providing access to learning, libraries were attributed with a symbolic meaning. Their splendid architecture, similar to those of contemporary representative buildings, was adorned with a variety of art works, such as paintings, sculptures and other artistic features. This display was a perceptible indicator of the respective owners' importance and of their intellectual astuteness. Furthermore, such showcases of ostentatious self-representation and image building may have nourished a competitive element to surpass other architectural feats of grandeur and cleverness and thus contributed to a splendid cultural treasure exhibited by many of the still extant Baroque libraries (Rovelstad 1993).

Books assumed a symbolic role in that turbulent age that strove for an awareness of the totality of human existence, its secular ambitions and its spiritual needs. In this search the ideas they contained were of lasting value; they connected the past with the present and the future. Jochum (1993, 99) even suggests that books did not need to be read; their mere presence and effective display were sufficient to praise and indicate the accomplishments of human intelligence.

Even though the great thinkers of this epoch set the modern world in motion, the contemporary concept of *polyhistory* was characteristic of Baroque learning. According to this theory the learned man had to be aware of the entire scope of existing knowledge and to be cognisant of intellectual advances as presented in contemporary bibliographic surveys, in encyclopaedias and in library collections. The promotion of learning as *polyhistory* (knowledge of books) was also a

subject of instruction at many German universities from the middle of the 18th century forward (Blum 1980, 8). It was the intellectual foundation of the contemporary scholar.

The notion of polyhistory may have influenced the concept and the formation of iconographic components that characterise the hybrid library of the Baroque period, which consisted of a book collection as well as pictorial components. Since the title of a work and its presence within a subject group on the shelves does not indicate details about its contents, paintings, statuary, and other decorations were used to expand the bibliographic identification and to provide comments by highlighting events, places, historical personages and significant accomplishments. Additional facts could thus be supplied in images familiar to viewers and presented to an audience much larger than one consisting of readers only.

Baroque revival in the United States

The late 19th century revival of the European Baroque style's representative grandeur in America was to some extent inspired by European examples of sumptuous architecture, which reflected the self-confidence, prosperity, and national pride of their respective countries. A then-fashionable eclecticism combined Baroque principles with those of the classical style elements of the Renaissance and idealised embellishments of the Beaux Arts (architecture, paintings and sculpture) which were promoted by the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, and represented in the beautiful Garnier Opera in Paris (1862–74). The Opera's magnificent foyer is reflected in the Jefferson Building's Great Hall. In the United States the Beaux Arts triumphed in the temporary construction of the *White City* built for the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago (1893).

When plans for a national library in the United States were formulated, this eclectic style seemed most suitable to reflect the young nation's self-confidence, pride, and its vision of a prosperous future. The Baroque elements that were a major part of the new style could convey the image the new library was to project. The European models were impressive representative public buildings whose sumptuous architectural composition and embellishments would also satisfy American tastes.

The Genesis of the Jefferson Building

Ainsworth Rand Spofford's (1825–1908), Librarian of Congress from 1864 to 1897, was the driving force behind efforts to create a national library for the United States to be housed in a separate building commensurate with the country's new position in the international arena. Originally the subject of the Library's collection was law and housed in a room of the nation's Capitol. Legislative acts, such as the Copyright Law of 1870, increased its size rapidly and expanded its scope to include all fields of knowledge, as it would be expected of a national library. Therefore the shortage of shelf space had become critical and a larger library had become a necessity.

The process of planning and constructing the building extended over two decades: The first architectural composition took place in 1873, the

cornerstone was laid in 1890, work on the interior's artistic embellishments began in 1892 and continued beyond its inauguration in 1897. The delay was caused by controversies regarding the Library's location and its architectural design as visualised by the Library Committee, by Congress, by the American Library Association, and by the Librarian, Mr. Spofford (Library of Congress 1997, 31–63).

The firm of Smithmeyer & Pelz of Washington, D.C., won the first architectural competition (1873) with a design for a classical monumental building that harmonised with that of the Capitol's exterior. The two architects were foreign-born, John L. Smithmeyer came from Vienna (Austria) and Paul J. Pelz from Silesia. However, after delegates visited the British Museum Library and the national libraries in Paris, Vienna, Rome, Berlin, and Munich, the Smithmeyer design



Figure 1: Jefferson Building, Library of Congress, Washington DC. (Photo: Library of Congress)

was no longer considered impressive enough and a new competition was authorised (1874). Smithmeyer submitted an enlarged proposal that stressed the building's role as a national showcase and won for him the unofficial approval of Congress and the library profession. In spite of authorisation for construction (1886) disagreements continued. Smithmeyer was dismissed (1888), and in order to expedite construction, the U.S. Army took over. Brigadier General Thomas Lincoln Casey (1831–1896), Chief of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, who had successfully completed other major public buildings in Washington DC, was appointed to bring the Library to its completion. He was assisted by an experienced civil engineer, Bernard Richardson Green (1843–1914), as superintendent of construction. Smithmeyer's former partner Pelz was appointed as the new architect. The original basic plan was maintained, though continually modified, but finally the construction of the Library progressed rapidly.

The Library's exterior displays Baroque features which were borrowed from European models or adjusted to underline its national significance (see Figure 1). The building's juxtaposition to the nation's Capitol, the two buildings classical features, each with a dome, suggest their relationship to each other. In the symbolic picture language of the Baroque these similarities imply that both are important parts of a whole, which is the government of the United States. Cupolas have had since antiquity a religious/visionary connotation, and therefore the Capitol building with its dome can be perceived as a *Temple of Liberty* (Scott 1995), the title of a recent work on the Capitol's genesis. The adjacent building with its cupola that houses the legislators' intellectual resources, could thus be appropriately called a *Temple of Learning*. Since the Baroque period, cupolas have been favourite additions to library buildings. They adorned the first independent circular library in Wolfenbüttel (Germany, 1706–10), the circular Radcliffe Camera (1737–49) of Oxford University and the Reading Room of the British Museum (1854). A cupola for the Jefferson Library's Rotunda was already included in Ainsworth Rand Spofford's plan (Cole 1973, 478).

The Jefferson Library's dramatic Baroque façade stands in contrast to the Capitol's restrained classical structure. The striking display begins at

street level with a gigantic fountain set against a grotto background, a characteristic of Baroque garden architecture. The fountain offers a group of mythological figures dominated by Neptune, the God of the Seas. Its stage-like setting recalls other Baroque landmarks such as Rome's *Trevi Fountain* or the Vienna Court Library's *Minerva Quadriga*. Neptune's presence further suggests the country's newly perceived international role. The seas brought Columbus to the American shores, as well as immigrants who have enriched America's cultural heritage. They are no longer barriers; rather they connect countries around the world, enhancing world trade and the exchange of ideas. A divided ceremonial stairway, adorned with large candelabra, flanks the fountain. United at a higher level, the stairway leads to the portico's three bronze entrance doors. During the Baroque such ornate stairways were intended to build up visitors' anticipation as they ascended to participate in court events.

Knowledge in the Library's iconography is valued for its prestigious roots (Minerva, the Goddess of Wisdom and Patroness of the Library, in the lunette of the Main Portal); its universality (the keystone heads stand for various cultures); its transmission (tradition, writing, and printing); and its major branches (art, literature and science in the doors' arcades). The Library's collection of world literature is represented by nine busts of literary giants, Benjamin Franklin, the country's prototype for experimental research is in the centre. Other typical Baroque embellishments are the *Atlantides* (or *Telamones*) placed on the two balconies above the columns. They are sculptured male figures, the equivalent of the female *caryatids*, modelled on the mythical *Atlas*. Replacing columns they stand with their hands behind bowed heads, as if supporting a heavy load. Claude Clement's seminal work on the iconography of Baroque libraries recommends their use (Clement 1635, 255). Corner pavilions interrupt the straight architectural lines of the façade, leading the eyes to the flaming torch mounted on the cupola's lantern, a symbol of learning that brings light into the darkness of ignorance. This image, popular during the Age of Reason, is also present in some libraries of the late Baroque period, such as in the ceiling painting of the Vienna Court Library, where the Emperor himself carries the torch.

The Iconography of the interior

The overall picture programs in European Baroque libraries were carefully designed by professional *conceptors* who, together with their patrons developed suitable themes, outlined historic imagery and chose relevant metaphors (Bauer 1992, 184). Originally there were no provisions for elaborate embellishments of the Jefferson Library's interior. The Archives of the Library of Congress have no records of a plan to embellish the interior. Then in 1892, money became available to add such decorations. (Cole 1973, 494). Early intentions were to create a national monument executed primarily by American artists (Cole 1973, 495), but since construction was progressing rapidly, time was limited.

In the case of the Jefferson Building, the whole iconographic project for the interior was carried out – like that for the creation of the *White City* of the World's Columbian Exposition – as a group project. It was to be completed under the supervision of the experienced engineer Bernard Richardson Green and Edward Pierce Casey (1864–1940), General Casey's son, a 28-year old architect. Forty-two artists were commissioned for specific projects, and nearly fifty sculptors and painters worked on various kinds of ornaments. The correspondence between the artists and the two men does not refer to a picture program. It deals only with technical details, such as the size of statues, their location, sources of light and colours to be used. Several of the artists were young and had lived abroad; some had studied at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris where they had been exposed to a stimulating artistic climate. Richard Murray (The Library of Congress 1997, 194–225) argues that the unity of the murals in the Library does not derive from the artists' close co-operation but rather from the resources available to them, such as historic examples of mural paintings, sculptures, and allegoric symbols displayed in widely accessible works. During the Baroque artists have also relied on printed sources of reference and on existing examples of iconographic compositions. While the many editions of Ripa's *Iconologia* (1593) attest to this reference guide's popularity, Claude Clement's detailed suggestions for suitable imagery, though written in Latin (1635), are reflected in the embellishments of contemporary libraries (Masson

1981, 27). Thus the style that had crystallised during the Baroque and the time of the decoration of the Jefferson's interior was deduced primarily from the specific characteristics of these two periods' works of art.

Two intriguing features of the Baroque style, also employed in the Jefferson Library, should be noted: The use of light and the optical illusions created by *trompe-l'oeil* techniques. Light enlivens space and energises it. As it penetrates through high-placed windows, shifting directions over the course of the day, it lends warmth to the colour of the paintings and accentuates structural features which for short periods of time appear to be almost three dimensional. This interplay of light and space creates a mood that engages viewers' imagination and emotions and becomes, as it was perceived during the Baroque, a metaphor for intangible values, such as abundance and power. Interestingly, the Jefferson builders added a modern feature to manipulate the incoming light, though not for its energising effect on the interior architecture, but for the benefit of the readers. A second type of glass was used for the outside of the Rotunda's double windows, which though plain, has a different transparency to control the incoming light (Small 1901, 68–69). However, due to the installation of air conditioning, this restraining technical aid is no longer effective.

The Rotunda illustrates the use of the *trompe-l'oeil* technique that deceives the viewer's eye. This room is an octagon, capped by a round cupola, its furniture is arranged in a circular pattern to accentuate an overall roundness. As a result visitors have the impression of being in a round hall, hence the name Rotunda. Another illusion is created by the lantern. Its ceiling can not be seen from some locations in the hall, thus the lantern could, like the Pantheon's cupola, be open to the sky, a visual deception, as well as a reminder of antiquity.

The subject of knowledge is a favourite iconographic theme of Baroque libraries. This topic is usually developed within a supportive structure of architectural composition, the Baroque's total-work-of-art concept (*Gesamtkunstwerk*). In this complex design, the assembled works of art, which represent individual concepts, are harmonised within an individual architectural unit, such as the liberal arts, and subordinated to a



Figure 2: View from lower entrance towards the mosaic of Minerva. (Photo: Michael Dersin)

central idea, the *concetto*, (Bauer 1992, 183). In most cases, the *concetto* is learning and is represented pictorially at a conspicuous point. As viewers become aware of the interdependence of all parts, they perceive them as a total experience. The composition of the Jefferson building's façade focuses on knowledge and is linked to the concept of democracy as the national library's iconographic theme. This subject is further explored in the design of the Library's two public areas, the Great Hall (foyer) and the Rotunda.

The Great Hall is the Library's iconographic tour de force. While hybrid Baroque libraries displayed their books and works of art within one hall or room, the Great Hall is without books, depicting the Library's significance in the alternate language of imagery. A Baroque painting may extend a view into a distant landscape; here the visitor is part of the setting itself, experiencing a different place and time. This foyer resembles an Italian Renaissance courtyard (*cortile*). Space abounds and extends upward through the three-story well to the glass ceiling, whose pattern is in



Figure 3: *History*. One of the eight symbolic plaster statues atop the Rotunda's piers representing civilized life and thought. Artist: Daniel Chester French. (Photo: Library of Congress)

harmony with that of the marble floor below, creating a self-contained unit by setting boundaries for the area enclosed. A divided ceremonial stairway, the pride of palatial architecture, leads upward past soaring double columns where it combines, reaching a large mosaic of Minerva, the Goddess of Wisdom and Patroness of the Library (see Figure 2). Its *subscription* (Baroque term), quoting Horace, praises the unlimited capacity of the mind that transcends man-made physical structures (*Nil invita Minerva, quae monumentum aere perennius exegit* – not unwilling, Minerva raises a monument more lasting than brass). The mosaic is the focal point of this theatrical setting from the time the visitor enters the Foyer. To emphasise the courtyard's architectural design, paintings have been relegated to the corridors surrounding the well and are partially hidden behind a balustrade and columns, creating a stunning iconographic apotheosis of knowledge.

The arcaded courtyard serves as a prologue to the Library Hall, the sedate Rotunda. The arrangement of its iconographic components is

interesting for the hierarchical development of its theme, the alliance of knowledge with the young country's democratic theory. As in Baroque libraries, works of art are placed in an ascending order of their symbolic meaning, progressing from the material world to the intangible one of ideas. Books meld, almost like tapestry, into the alcoves, as if they were mere decorations. The arcades above them form a uniform pedestal for the two rows of statues that complement each other in their praise of learning and its significance for society. The lower row personifies progress achieved through the contributions of sixteen outstanding men in their respective disciplines, a traditional Baroque method of showing major contributions to learning. The upper row of eight symbolic figures internalises their achievements, the rewards of knowledge as the basis of civilised life (see Figure 3). The figures are positioned between the eight semi-circular windows, which are decorated with the seals of the individual states, chronologically arranged around the seal of the United States, all forming a visual record of the young nation's growth out of the union of states. The paintings in the collar below the lantern resemble those of a Baroque narrative. Its twelve figures represent the achievements of those countries that have contributed to the growth of Western civilisation. The wings of their figures touch and unite the individual parts of the composition, creating a coherent image of Western heritage and presenting it as a whole. One study interprets the collar's theme as contemporary Darwinian (Elson 1981, 9). However, considering the Jefferson iconography's close relation to the Baroque, its symbolism rather suggests the continuation of Western civilisation in America, the early immigrants' tribute to their new country and the foundation for its future.

As in Baroque libraries, the ascending placement of meaningful illustrations guides the viewer from the material world to the spiritual that is expressed in the *concetto* of the lantern's ceiling. It is an allegory for Human Understanding, personified by a woman in a classical gown. Lifting her veil, she looks upward to the far-off sky and infinity. One of the two cherubs attending her points upwards to the realm of thought, the other downwards to the literature assembled there. In the proposal for this icon, its artist, Edwin Howland Blashfield, who had also designed the

collar below, connects the two themes by philosophically alluding to the intangible world of ideas (Blashfield 1895). In comparison with the Baroque libraries' favourite *concetto*, the promise of salvation, the theme of the Jefferson Library's allegory, is the promise of knowledge and wisdom through the application of ideas accumulated in the Library's collection.

Knowledge and democracy

The universal collections of Baroque libraries and of the Jefferson Library indicated the extent of contemporary knowledge. The accompanying pictorial comments were intended to inform and teach and to make viewers aware of learning, its organisation and its rewards. The Jefferson Library's iconography of knowledge is linked to the young country's vision of its democratic future.

Many of the building's icons that depict knowledge are in the form of emblems (Rovelstad 1996). Because emblems combine words and images and can please and teach at the same time, they were very popular during the Baroque. In its most typical form an emblem consists of three parts: an icon (*pictura*) with a symbolic meaning, a motto (*inscriptio*) that is part of the allegory, and an interpretative epigram or quote (*subscriptio*). These three components are not always present, which is the case for most of the Jefferson's emblems. Adapted to 19th-century American tastes the illustrations and their captions are no longer enigmatic, and many of the epigrams and quotes are displayed separately on different walls.

One series of emblems represents individual branches of learning. They are depicted by women painted in the idealised Beaux Arts style, carrying an identifying attribute, with the name of the respective discipline inscribed on a tablet above each panel (Upper Corridor) (see Figure 4). Another group that portrays individual disciplines consists of marble cherubs (*putti*) placed in the balustrades and landings of the double staircase. The cherubs are identified only with the instruments characteristic of the professions they represent. They include academic disciplines as well as other early pursuits that have played a role in the development of the country.

The fields of architecture and sculpture are portrayed in an unusual variation of an emblem (below the entrance of the Visitors' Gallery): In-



Figure 4: *Archaeology*. One of the eight symbolic icons, all female figures. Archaeology is dressed in a Roman gown and wears the helmet of Minerva. Among the attributes that identify her are a book, a scroll and a magnifying glass. Artist: Walter Shirlaw. (Photo: Library of Congress)

stead of a picture each trophy is described with words. The emblem for architecture displays the names of famous buildings and their locations (e.g., the Parthenon in Athens). The accompanying description reads: "Too low they build who build beneath the stars."

A unique series of fifty-six emblems, distributed over the four upper corridors, represent the

printing trade. These emblems are trademarks used by famous printers in different countries to guard against counterfeit editions. In other emblem variations a field of learning is identified only by its symbol or with the name of one of its successful practitioners (Lower Corridor). Often different symbols are used to characterise one discipline, such as architecture pictured either by a mallet and a chisel or by geometric figures on a scroll.

The Baroque inclination to combine several fields of learning in one work of art, as exemplified by the opera genre, is also used in the Library's imagery. Six paintings (Main Entrance Hall) explore the affinity of poetry/philosophy and painting by merging these subjects iconographically. The poets' visions are expressed not with their own words but through the painter's imagination. The American author Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–82) is represented by his poem *Uriel*, a defence of his transcendental philosophy (see Figure 5). A poem by the British writer Adelaide A. Proctor entitled *Unexpressed* can be interpreted as an explanatory comment (*subscriptio*) for this series, even though its verses are inscribed on a different wall (Upper Floor, North Corridor). It voices the difficulties of communicating emotions with words.

Another feature of the Library's picture program is its appeal to viewers' imagination by using names without accompanying illustrations. This practice had now become necessary because of the substantial expansion of knowledge and the lack of available wall space for the iconographic representation of its many divisions. Names create a picture and associations in a viewers' mind and are, therefore, an economic method of expanding an picture program. Persons so identified must, however, be familiar to viewers to be recognised. The mental images they may recall depend on an individual's background and interests, resulting in a fuller and personalised picture. Names either stand alone or several names represent American research in a discipline, or names of noted Americans are added to those from other countries to indicate the international dimensions of research efforts such as those of notable educators from different countries. To give an idea of outstanding advances in the sciences, the allegoric personifications of disciplines are supplemented by lists of



Figure 5: *Uriel*. One of six youthful male figures representing British and American poetry. The image stands for Ralph Waldo Emerson's (1803–82) poem in which he defends his philosophy. Artist: Henry Oliver Walker. (Photo: Library of Congress)

distinguished researchers whose names are engraved on the wall next to these icons. The name of the archaeologist Schliemann, for example, expands the meaning of the icon that merely symbolises archaeology.

Names of successful Americans enhance America's prestige in the international community of scholars. The method of their research, characterised by its practical orientation, differs from the theoretical approach of European researchers (Boorstin 1965, 1:149–68, 2:398). The country's westward expansion offered opportunities for everyone regardless of educational background, to apply new knowledge to new situations. Many investigations were in the natural sciences. Benjamin Franklin is the prototype for this experimental research. The names of Thomas Bay and James Dana are inscribed on the ground floor's pendentives. They were involved in data-gathering expeditions of both George Philip Bond, explorer of the use of photography in mapping the sky, and also of members of the Stevens family who contributed to the improvement of transportation on land and water. Also honoured are Nathaniel Bowditch, who had no

formal education but excelled in the field of navigation, and David Rittenhouse who was a clockmaker before he became known for developing mathematical instruments. The success of these distinguished men illustrates how the country's unique geography, and the wealth of its natural resources offered unlimited possibilities to inquisitive minds, a praiseworthy subject for a national library.

Emblem subscriptions (epigrams or quotes), the third component of traditional emblems, provide a verbal expansion to the depiction of knowledge. In the Baroque tradition, which is followed here, the term "inscription" connected with an emblem is a title or motto, while "subscription" (written below) stands for an explanatory epigram or quote. As John Y. Cole's work (Cole 1995) attests, the walls of the Library abound with such subscriptions/quotes. In the Jefferson Library most of them are separated from the icons; only in a few cases are they attached to one. The Minerva mosaic of the Great Hall displays as its subscription a quote from Horace's *Ars Poetica*. Subscriptions also accompany the series on the *Life of Man* (Vault East Corridor, Sec-

ond Floor) and are taken from literary sources. In the case of the above described merger of poetry/philosophy with painting, Proctor's poem, located on a different wall, could be seen as a subscription that interprets the paintings. Subscriptions/quotes, which are inscribed on the wall and not accompanied by icons, reflect on life and learning and are from the works of noted writers of world literature. These stimulating thoughts of great minds can be seen as links to the Library's collection and thus might motivate viewers to read their authors' works.

A traditional Baroque symbol that reminds of the brevity of life and the necessity to use time prudently is a large marble clock adorned with icons, placed above the entrance to the Rotunda. The life-size figure of Father Time above the clock, often also depicted as God Cronos, or Death, swings a scythe. It is set against a mosaic background decorated with the signs of the zodiac, arranged in a circular position. The twelve constellations of the heavens have since antiquity suggested cosmological relationships and are a standard feature of Baroque iconography.

The Alliance of knowledge and politics

The role of civic power and its relationship to the general public under its jurisdiction are a standard component of library iconography. The presence of a palace library suggested a ruler's appreciation of learning and his wise use of knowledge in decision making, while embellishments indicated his generous support of the arts. The monolithic complex of the sixteenth century Escorial in Spain consists of a palace and a monastery, and conveys symbolically Philip II's idea of government and state. The Vienna Court Library displays in the centre of the hall a life-size statue of its absolutist builder/patron Charles VI (1685–1740). Garbed with the Imperial vestments of the Holy Roman Empire, his title though honorary, attests to his political influence beyond his country. In the former Wiblingen monastery library, life-size symbolic statues of royal power (a king's crown and sceptre) and civic power (the contemporary sphere of Roman-Catholic influence indicated by a globe and a crown) face each other on opposite sides of the balcony, suggesting the two powers' balanced influence on the people under their jurisdiction.

During the more than two hundred years that followed the Baroque period, the library's public had extended beyond the traditional circle of scholars. The public library movement in the young United States had linked libraries with education, society and the government's special brand of American democracy. It opened the public libraries to all who cared to enter. Garceau (1949, 4–8) traced this theory to the Puritans' belief in individuals' reading in and learning from the Bible, the centre of their culture, and in the Humanists' trust in literature as a guide to human conduct. This new library philosophy, unique to the United States, and often claimed as the new country's contribution to modern civilisation, is also reflected in the iconography of the country's national library.

The Jefferson Library's iconography illustrates the young country's faith in learning as essential to its progress. The alliance of the United States' government with knowledge is already indicated in the designation *The Library of Congress*, the Library's original name that has been retained, even though its responsibilities were expanded from a legislative library to include those of a national library. It serves the country's legislators, but as a national library it also belongs to the citizens.

Apart from the illustrations of the alliance of government and knowledge in the Library's Rotunda, the theme of representative government is shown in five large paintings conspicuously displayed in the tympana of the Reading Room's vestibule. They depict the presence or absence of a representative government symbolised by an urn for voting, and set against trees with or without leaves to underline political differences. When votes are cast by informed citizens, society can enjoy *Peace and Prosperity*, while without such a vote there will be *Anarchy* (see Figure 6). Another group of paintings, only vaguely related, idealises labour, rest, study, recreation, and religion, as aspects of a harmonious family life.

The idea of the alliance of government with knowledge can be linked to the symbolic Baroque concept of a marriage (*conumbium*) which symbolises a union of two entities of a similar predisposition or with similar goals (Garberson 1991, 324–5). At that time such associations united for example Christian virtue with pagan wisdom, or the faculties of science and philosophy. They were reflected upon in books and were con-



Figure 6: *Anarchy*. One of five paintings on representative government; here its absence is illustrated. Artist: Elihu Vedder. (Photo: Library of Congress)

sidered fundamental to Western culture (Masson 1981, 23). The Jefferson Library's iconography of the alliance of knowledge with democracy ties a political concept to a cultural one to express pictorially the country's democratic vision of its prosperous future.

The decision to adapt the idealistic and positive *Zeitgeist* of the Baroque libraries' iconography and the Beaux Arts style excluded a realistic presentation of 19th-century America, its social inadequacies, and its struggle to formulate its national identity. Instead, the Library's iconography is a vision of how the young nation wanted to see itself and how it wanted to be seen by others. America's optimistic trust is in the sciences which are portrayed as the road to progress and prosperity, and which are expressed by statues and names that honour eminent Americans in

these fields. To balance this stress on the sciences, eminent voices in literature such as those of James Fenimore Cooper, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Washington Irving, who reflect nationalistic elements in the selection and treatment of their material, could have been given greater visibility to enrich this pictorial review of national achievements. The iconography also demonstrates a British bias by favouring admired authors from England, the home of many immigrants, who found their cultural and social ideas in European culture.

Conclusion

Because of the eclecticism and the prevalent Baroque principles of the Jefferson Building's iconography, the term Neo-Baroque is preferred to that

of Baroque Revival, which could be interpreted as a work of art solely indebted to the Baroque style. The picture program's artistic elements, however, were combined with other style elements and adapted to American contemporary tastes. Also the metaphysical symbolism of the Baroque libraries' embellishments was changed to express the new nation's political philosophy. Therefore, the style and the ideas imbued in this Neo-Baroque monument are uniquely American and reflect the country's mind at the end of the nineteenth century.

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