

# Ambiguous Heritage: ‘Plaster Saints’, Cast-iron Christs and other Mould-made Catholic Sculptures from the Second Half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries\*

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*Ambiguous Heritage: ‘Plaster Saints’, Cast-iron Christs and other Mould-made Catholic Sculptures from the Second Half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*

This paper deals with the phenomenon of mould-made religious sculptures, which were burgeoning in Catholic milieus in the second half of the 19th and the early 20th centuries. The reported observations are based on research into artistic production in Catholic, or partly Catholic, German areas (such as Bavaria, Rhineland, Silesia) and the Habsburg Monarchy. The study makes use of publicity sources (advertisements, catalogues and price lists) and technological publications, as well as opinions of Catholic art critics and art theoreticians of the period. Extant mould-made Catholic sculptures represent an ambiguous heritage. They are generally assumed to be mass-produced, clichéd artifacts, and not usually considered to be works of art. Nonetheless, as relics of a bygone epoch that spanned over a century, they do deserve protection and preservation, or at least documentary work and research.

Keywords: plaster casts, cast-iron sculptures, mould-made sculptures, Catholic art, artistic mass-production

“*A most gracious Raphaelesque Madonna with the Christ-child*”, St. Vincent de Paul, St. Charles Borromeo as well as numerous other statues, “excellently moulded in plaster and accessible in many copies”; some intended for church use, others “perfectly suited for the decoration of homes of Catholic Christians in order to elevate the religious spirit” : that was how the products created by a plaster figures manufacturer called Massini (?–1862), active in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century in Breslau (modern-day Wrocław), were described in an enthusiastic press note from 1849.<sup>1</sup> Although the works of Massini, who belonged to the first generation of artisans producing plaster figures for Catholic clientele, are impossible to trace and identify today, we can, nonetheless, easily envisage what they might have looked like because in Catholic churches, chapels and monasteries, such “*most gracious*” specimens of mould-made Madonnas, Christs and saints can still be encountered (Pict. 1–2, 8–9).

\*Translated by Małgorzata Haladewicz-Grzelak

<sup>1</sup> “(…) eine höchst anmutsvolle raphael’sche Madonna mit dem Jesuskinde (...). “(…) vor trefflich aus Gyps geformt und in mehreren Exemplaren vorhanden.” “(…) welche ganz geeignet sind, zur Hebung des religiösen Gemüts die Wohnung katholischer Christen zu schmücken.” – *Schlesisches Kirchenblatt*, 15, 1849, p. 453-454. The press note from 1849 was not the only one in which the periodical of the Wrocław diocese praised the activities and artistic output of Massini. See also: *Schlesisches Kirchenblatt*, 15, 1849, p. 263; 20, 1854, p. 487; 22, 1856, pp. 43-44, 175. On the reception of Massini’s religious plaster casts see: LUBOS-KOZIEL, Joanna. Urok gipsowej madonny. In: *Marmur dżelowy. Studia z historii sztuki*. Poznań : Wydawnictwo Poznańskiego Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Nauk, 2002, pp. 415-420.

Mould-made religious statues, still relatively common in most Catholic (or formerly Catholic) countries, are often seen as symbols of Catholic imagery and aesthetics stemming from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The term 'plaster saint', commonly used in many languages to denote such figures,<sup>2</sup> suggests that the unique material from which these figures were cast was gypsum plaster. In fact, for the serial production of devotional figures, in addition to pure gypsum plaster, various other materials were used, such as so-called 'alabaster material', 'ivory material', 'hardened casting material', 'stone material', clay, cement and papier mâché. Mould-made devotional metal sculptures, mainly corpuses of Christ, were also very popular. They were usually made of cast iron or zinc.

These various types of sculptures that were mass-produced in batches to meet the demands of Catholic recipients in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries are the subject of this article. The serial manufacturing of church sculptures was an international phenomenon that developed in many Catholic countries. It should be emphasised, however, that the reported observations are based on research into artistic production in Catholic or partly-Catholic German areas (such as Bavaria, Rhineland, Silesia) and the Habsburg Monarchy. As such, the discussion and conclusions presented in this paper refer mainly to these regions. However, the supralocal character of the Christian art market in the period under discussion, as well as a significant homogenisation of Catholic art production, gives grounds for generalising the phenomena known from the areas of German and Habsburgian countries to a reflection of wider tendencies.

The study is based principally on publicity sources, such as advertisements, catalogues and price lists. Historic manuals of casting and moulding, as well as other technological publications were consulted regarding the technologies and materials used in the serial manufacturing of sculptures. The analysis of the reception given to 'plaster saints' and other mould-made sculptures in Catholic milieus was informed by the publications of Catholic art critics and art theoreticians of the period. Contemporary scholarly publications related to the issues analysed in the article are scarce.<sup>3</sup>

## 1. Gypsum plaster and other materials used in the serial production of sculptures

The first generation of craftsmen to undertake the manufacture of plaster statues for Catholic customers was active in the 1840s and 1850s (like the aforementioned Massini from Breslau). Of course, there are references to plaster casts representing Christian themes which date back to before the 1840s, but they are infrequent and refer to collectors' copies of medieval sculptures,

<sup>2</sup> For example: in German, 'Gipsheiliger'; in French, 'saint en plâtre'; in Polish, 'gipsowy święty'. In English, and also in German and French, the phrase 'plaster saint' is also used in a figurative sense to describe a one-dimensional, schematically depicted positive hero.

<sup>3</sup> Above all, one should mention the following publications: BUSCH, Silvia Maria. *Grottempelidee und Industrialisierung. St. Nikolaus zu Arenberg. Eine Wallfahrtsanlage der katholischen Spätromantik im Rheinland (1845–1892)*. Frankfurt a. M.: Kunstgeschichtliches Institut der Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität, 1984, pp. 102–108, 199–202; LINGENS, Peter. *Gipsgießer und Polychromeure in Kevelaer: zur Geschichte der Devotionalien, Gipsfiguren und Polychromie am Niederrhein und darüber hinaus*. Kevelaer : Verein für Heimatschutz und Museumsförderung e.V. Kevelaer, 2004; FONTAINE, Arthur. *Die religiösen Terrakotta-Bildnisse aus den „Kunstanstalten“ des 19. Jahrhunderts*. Merzig : Provesa Verlag, 2015. The author of this article has already written about mould-made religious sculptures in these works: LUBOS-KOZIEL, ref. 1; LUBOS-KOZIEL, Joanna. „Z terakoty, gipsu oraz sławnej i niezawodnej masy kamiennej?". Seryjna wytwórczość rzeźb kościelnych w 2 pol. XIX i początkach XX w. oraz jej oceny w tekstach niemieckich autorów katolickich. In: LIPIŃSKA, Aleksandra (ed.) *Materiał rzeźby. Między techniką a semantyką / Material of Sculpture. Between Technique and Semantics*. Wrocław : Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2009, pp. 329–345.

rather than to devotional statues. The ‘church career’ of plaster casts undoubtedly began no earlier than the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Considering the origins of the phenomenon of devotional plaster statues, it must be emphasised that by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, plaster-casting had already established its position as the most popular technique for sculpture replication, having been used for decades. It was a technique with multifaceted applications, although mainly associated with copying antique figures. The development of the production of devotional plaster statues can thus be treated as an expansion of this well-known technique into the realm of church art. However, the whiteness of traditional plaster casts, natural in works mostly referring to antique marble figures, was unacceptable for Catholic buyers of devotional statues. That is why the ‘classic’ technique of plaster-casting, having been introduced into religious artistic production, was enriched with widely used polychromy, gilding and other types of finishing. Polychrome ‘plaster saints’ joined the antique-like gods, goddesses and heroes, creating a completely new sector within plaster cast manufacturing.

Nevertheless, the production of ‘plaster saints’ cannot be treated simply as one chapter in the history of plaster-casting. The phenomenon should also be considered in the context of examples of devotional figures manufactured from other casting and plastic materials. Throughout the history of Christian sculpture, we encounter numerous precedents for multiple mould-made statues. Particularly noteworthy in the context of the phenomenon under discussion are the clay sculptures made in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Rhineland, for example, those by Caspar Odendahl (1725–1792) or Peter Joseph Imhoff (1768–1844). The manufacture and sale of terracotta sculptures might have been a factor in preparing the groundwork for the positive reception of plaster casts by a Catholic audience.

After the spread of religious plaster casts, the popularity of terracotta figures and reliefs also grew concomitantly. Aside from sculptures made from plaster and clay, the manufacturers and sellers of devotional items also offered figures and reliefs manufactured from a wide range of other casting and moulding materials. Some of these materials, such as ‘alabaster material’ (‘Alabastermasse’), ‘ivory material’ (‘Elfenbeinmasse’) or ‘hardened casting material’ (‘verhärtete Gussmasse’), were most likely refined versions of gypsum material. Others cannot be treated as direct alternatives to plaster. For example, papier mâché, which made relatively short-lived products, was used exclusively to make ornaments and minor sculptures (e.g. crèche figurines). On the other hand, clay and cement, as well as cast iron and zinc, were more resistant to damage, and therefore served well to manufacture sculptures for outdoor use. However, the analysis of the character and purpose of particular materials is often not possible because it is difficult to determine what the names found in advertisements and catalogues denoted.

We can of course refer to the lexicons of the time or to professional handbooks devoted to casting and moulding, e.g. those by Martin Weber<sup>4</sup> or Eduard Uhlenhuth.<sup>5</sup> However, these sources are not always helpful. Some of the materials were mentioned in advertisements and catalogues in too general a way (e.g. ‘hardened casting material’) to be able to search for them

<sup>4</sup> WEBER, Martin. *Die Kunst des Bildformers und Gipsgießers (...)*, Dritte vermehrte und verbesserte Auflage. Weimar : Bernhard Friedrich Voigt, 1871. The manual by Weber was published six times between 1861 and 1898.

<sup>5</sup> UHLENHUTH, Eduard. *Vollständige Anleitung zum Formen und Gießen oder genaue Beschreibung aller in den Künsten und Gewerben dafür angewandten Materialien (...)*. Wien – Pest – Leipzig : A. Hartleben’s Verlag, 1879; UHLENHUTH, Eduard. *Vollständige Anleitung zum Formen und Gießen oder genaue Beschreibung aller in den Künsten und Gewerben dafür angewandten Materialien (...)*, Fünfte, vermehrte und verbesserte Auflage. Wien – Leipzig : A. Hartleben’s Verlag [1899]. Uhlenhuth’s handbook had nine editions, published between 1879 and 1928.

further in professional books. Furthermore, many materials could appear in several varieties, relating to the individual inventions of particular producers.

For example, 'stone material' ('Steinmasse'), according to its name and definition from Meyers *Konversations-Lexikon*,<sup>6</sup> should imitate stone. However, the "famous and reliable stone material", recommended in catalogues published by the Munich company Mayer'sche Kunst-Anstalt,<sup>7</sup> one of the leaders in the church art market, seems to have been a composite of a different kind. In a company chronicle from 1872 it was described as "wood-like".<sup>8</sup> Also, the anonymous author of an article published in 1865, in the journal *Organ für christliche Kunst*, criticising the Munich 'stone material' (most probably from Mayer's company), contrasted it with wood.<sup>9</sup> Mayer's 'stone material' was sometimes used to make stone-like statues; however, most frequently, it served – just like gypsum plaster – to imitate polychrome wooden figures (Pict. 1 and 8).

Additionally, terms used in advertisements and catalogues were not always precise and accurate for marketing reasons, which encouraged the choice of more prestigious names for materials. The chapter on 'ivory material' ('Elfenbeinmasse'), included in the book by Martin Weber,<sup>10</sup> makes for very instructive reading; according to Weber, in order to obtain this material substituting ivory, the manufacturer could use up to seven different recipes, of which only the first two required the use of powdered ivory or bone. The remaining recipes were based on ingredients which had nothing to do with the target noble material, e.g. cement, rice, starch or gypsum plaster. The terms 'alabaster material' or 'alabaster casts' were also ambiguous. For example, Massini, after a few years of operation, enriched his offerings with "alabaster figures" which, in fact, according to another press note, were only "alabaster-like" and "quite inexpensive".<sup>11</sup> Moreover, in a critical article published in *Organ für christliche Kunst*, we can find the categorical statement that the "so-called alabaster material" "is nothing more than plaster, boiled in wax or oil and well polished".<sup>12</sup>

Regardless of the critical opinion on 'alabaster material' cited above, experiments to improve existing and invent new casting and moulding materials should not be underestimated. Undoubtedly, plaster casting remained the most important technique used to multiply sculptures until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Nevertheless, in the production of Catholic sculptures, more often than the 'classic' plaster-casting technique, its modified versions and related techniques were applied. The technique of making clay sculptures was also improved, where new types of clay compounds and new firing technologies were used to create sculptures with increased resistance. Technological experiments and commercial strategies connected with finding and promoting new, nobler or more resilient materials contributed to a large extent to the boom in the serial production of devotional statues in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>6</sup> MEYER, Hermann Julius (ed.). *Neues Konversations-Lexikon für alle Stände*, 14, Hildburghausen – New-York : Verlag des Bibliographischen Instituts, 1860, p. 692.

<sup>7</sup> "die bekannte und bewährte Steinmasse" – MAYER, Konrad. *Franz Mayer'sche Hofkunstanstalt, gegründet 1847. Geschichte – Leistungen – Bedeutung. Eine Münchner Unternehmensbiographie*, 1: *Die 1. Generation, 1847–1883*. München : Franz Mayer'sche Hofkunstanstalt GmbH, 2001, p. 96.

<sup>8</sup> "Nach einer Reihe von Versuchen gewann er [J.G. Mayer] eine zähe, holzähnliche, zum Ausformen sich eignende Formmasse." – MAYER, ref. 7, p. 14.

<sup>9</sup> Statuen für Kichen. In: *Organ für christliche Kunst*, 15, 1865, pp. 169-172; p. 172.

<sup>10</sup> WEBER, ref. 4, pp. 65-67.

<sup>11</sup> "die alabasterartig gefertigten Gegenstände", "recht preiswürdig". In: *Schlesisches Kirchenblatt*, 20, 1854, p. 487.

<sup>12</sup> "Figuren von (...) sogenannter Elfenbeinmasse (die nichts Anderes ist, als in Wachs oder Oel gesottener und ganz polirter Gyps)..." – Statuen, ref. 9, p. 172.

## 2. Christian art revival as the ideological basis for the development of Catholic art

The expansion of plaster-casting and other improved materials and technologies dedicated to the serial production of sculptures was undoubtedly a pivotal factor that underpinned the burgeoning ‘plaster saints’. However, in searching for the sources of the popularity of devotional plaster casts and other mould-made religious statues, we should also turn our attention to the ideological basis of the development of Catholic art in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The beginnings of the production of devotional plaster casts and other mould-made sculptures coincided with the spread of ideas concerning the Christian art revival in Catholic circles. Around the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century we can observe the development of an influential religious-artistic movement, the proponents of which supported and propagated religious art.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, in German and Austrian dioceses, a network of Christian art societies (*Christliche Kunstvereine*) was formed, the first diocesan museums were set up, and periodicals devoted to Christian art appeared, such as *Organ für christliche Kunst* (published in Cologne in 1853–1873), *Kirchenschmuck* (published in Stuttgart in 1857–1870) or *Christliche Kunstblätter* (published in Linz in 1862–1943). Catholic authors called for a raise in the quality of artistic production, as well as for elevation in the taste of the clergy and the faithful. Considerable importance was attached to popularising works of high artistic value, the impact of which would be felt by a large Catholic population.

This policy of Catholic milieus supporting Christian art bore fruit in the form of a real invigoration of the field of religious art production and the gradual shaping of the modern market of church art. The market subsumed both traditional domains of art, such as oil painting, wood or stone sculpture, and new types of artistic production, e.g. cast and moulded sculptures. The latter, being a type of output using serial manufacturing techniques, seemed useful at a time of a tendency towards disseminating and popularising religious works of art. Because of the appearance of mass-produced, cheap and easily accessible sculptures, even poor and peripheral parishes could participate in the process of the revival of Christian art. The advantages of the serial manufacturing of sculptures were appreciated in many Catholic circles, whose members did not hesitate to eulogise cast or moulded sculptures in religious periodicals. Consider, for example, a fragment of an extensive letter entitled “*Sollen mechanisch verfertigte Bildhauerwerke aus den Kirchen entfernt werden oder nicht?*”, which was published in 1857 by an influential Catholic newspaper in Bavaria, *Augsburger Postzeitung*.<sup>14</sup> The anonymous author of this text stated, among other things: “*If an artist makes a church sculpture in stone or wood with his chisel, it exists only in one copy, it can be seen in only one church and only a few people have the opportunity to be spiritually uplifted by it. If, however, he executes a sculpture model in moulding material, plaster or wax, it*

<sup>13</sup> See: KNIEß, Friedrich Wilhelm. Kirche und Kunst. Kunstopolitik und Sammeltätigkeit des Bischofs Eduard Jakob Wedekin im Kontext seiner Zeit. In: BRANDT, Michael (ed.). *Schatzkammer auf Zeit. Die Sammlungen des Bischofs Eduard Jakob Wedekin 1796–1870*. Katalog zur Ausstellung des Diözesan-Museums Hildesheim. Hildesheim : Diözesan-Museum, 1991, pp. 26–50; GUSSONE, Nikolaus. Die Anfänge der Diözesanmuseen im Zeugnis ihrer Initiatoren. In: ALZHEIMER, Heidrun et al (eds.). *Bilder – Sachen – Mentalitäten. Arbeitsfelder historischer Kulturwissenschaften. Wolfgang Brückner zum 80. Geburtstag*. Regensburg : Schnell & Steiner, 2010, pp. 541–552.

<sup>14</sup> Sollen mechanisch verfertigte Bildhauerwerke aus den Kirchen entfernt werden oder nicht? In: *Augsburger Postzeitung*, 1857, Beilage zur Augsburger Postzeitung, No. 224, p. 895.

*can be replicated mechanically, cheaply and quickly, so that it can be placed in hundreds of churches and serve thousands of worshipers to pray and to lift up their spirits.”<sup>15</sup>*

### 3. Catholic critique of devotional mould-made sculptures

Although the serial manufacturing of religious statues gained popularity during the Christian art revival and seemed to be an answer to the call for the dissemination of religious art, it was, nevertheless, also subject to strong critique. The leading spokesmen and theoreticians of the revival of Christian art had a decidedly negative attitude towards cast and moulded sculptures. The widespread interest on the part of buyers and the positive reactions of local milieus contrasted sharply with opinions castigating the series manufacture of statues authored by the then-leading German theoretician of Catholic art, August Reichensperger (1808–1895), as well as by publicists publishing in the Cologne periodical, *Organ für christliche Kunst*, and with objections raised in official directives issued by *Christlicher Kunstverein für Deutschland*.<sup>16</sup>

The critique of the sculptures, “*cast in plaster, moulded in paper or similar materials and disseminated by means of industrial multiplication*”,<sup>17</sup> constituted an element of a broader crusade against ‘industrial’ production, the inundation of which was supposed to threaten not only sculpture, but also other domains of contemporary Christian arts and crafts, such as goldsmithing and metalworking, parament manufacture and even printmaking. The rejection of ‘industrial’ production became an indissoluble element of the theory of Christian art, which was developed in opposition to the secular artistic world. The proponents of this theory made many charges addressed at artistic mass production, targeting both the materials used and the very manufacturing process.

Casting and plastic materials used in the manufacturing of sculptures were categorised as ‘surrogates’ (*Surogatte*). This pejorative concept, being a key term in the vocabulary of Catholic polemists fighting ‘industrial’ production, stigmatised these materials as substitutes and therefore worthless. Sculptures made of ‘surrogates’ were portrayed, in contrast to those made of wood or stone, as lacking in quality and short-lived. There appeared suggestive descriptions of contemporary church interiors full of plaster and terracotta ‘martyrs’, lacking noses, fingers or toes.

However, over practical issues around the durability or quality of materials, there prevailed ideological questions. The use of ‘surrogates’, “*which aim to pretend to be something which in reality they are not*”,<sup>18</sup> spurred a principled resistance, because they were perceived as a deception and a breach of the truth deluding the spectator. The term ‘deception’ (*Täuschung*) was another key concept which was characteristic of Catholic discussions on mass artistic production and the materials used in it. The postulate of the veracity of the materials often received a religious

<sup>15</sup> “Wenn ein Künstler ein kirchliches Bildhauerwerk aus Stein oder Holz meiselt, so existiert es nur in einem Exemplar, kann nur in einer Kirche gesehen werden und nur wenige Menschen haben Gelegenheit, sich daran zu erbauen, wenn er aber ein Modell zu einem Bildhauerwerk von Masse, Gips oder Wachs verfertigt, so kann es mechanisch, wohlfühl und schnell vervielfältigt und somit Gelegenheit gegeben werden, dass es, in hundert Kirchen aufgestellt, Tausenden von Gläubigen zur Andacht und Erbauung dient.” – Sollen mechanisch, ref. 14.

<sup>16</sup> Sample German-language source texts containing criticism of religious mould-made sculptures were cited and analysed in the following studies: BUSCH, ref. 3, pp. 102-104; LUBOS-KOZIEL, ref. 1, p. 417; LINGENS, ref. 3, p. 23-33; LUBOS-KOZIEL, ref. 3, pp. 337-343; FONTAINE, ref. 3, pp. 77-80.

<sup>17</sup> “(…) der aus Gips gegossenen, aus Papier oder ähnlichen Stoffen gepressten und auf dem Wege fabrikmässiger Vervielfältigung verbreiteten Statuen und Bildwerke” – Christliche Kunst und Kunst-Industrie. In: *Organ für christliche Kunst*, 8, 1857, pp. 253-255, 268-270, 280-283; p. 253.

<sup>18</sup> “(…) etwas scheinen wollen, was sie in Wirklichkeit nicht sind” – REICHENSPERGER, August. *Fingerzeige auf dem Gebiete der kirchlichen Kunst*. Leipzig : T.O.Weigel, 1854, p. 64.

interpretation: according to Catholic theoreticians, since art serves God, who Himself is the Truth, it is improper that art refers to lies and deception. In this way, the admonitions to avoid surrogate materials received ultimate justification.

Aside from the materials, the industrial-like manufacturing process was also criticised, as well as the implied marketing methods. The “*fabricates, manufactured in large batches and offered for sale similar to other mass-produced goods*”<sup>19</sup> were rebuked. It was emphasised that even works made after the best models, after being multiplied to produce a large number of copies, were devoid of “*the most important feature of a work of art: originality*”.<sup>20</sup> The pejorative term ‘Dutzendwaare’ (which can be translated as ‘a dime a dozen product’) was used to label these types of mass-produced products, deprived of originality and individuality, for example: “*glittering, but from an aesthetic and technical point of view, objectionable Dutzendwaare*”.<sup>21</sup>

#### 4. Production, advertising and sales: mould-made sculptures in the market of Catholic art and crafts

The stigmatisation of moulded devotional statues was widespread, though totally ineffective. The development of series production of Catholic sculptures was by no means affected by these repeated charges. Of crucial importance was undoubtedly their tacit acceptance on the part of countless ecclesiastical customers. Beginning in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, during the era of striving to revive Christian art, the production of mould-made religious sculptures, regardless of the recurring criticism from Catholic ideologues, continued to develop more and more intensively in subsequent decades. The number of producers and sellers of ‘plaster saints’ was growing, as was fierce competition between them. Throughout the German Empire during the 1870s, particularly in Prussia, a limitation lasting a few years was placed on the functioning of the Catholic arts and crafts market, in the form of Kulturkampf’s policy. However, after the struggle with the Catholic Church was over, devotional artistic production—including the series production of Catholic sculptures—was reborn in Germany with even greater momentum. The period of the most intense activity of producers and sellers of ‘plaster saints’ and other mould-made sculptures, associated with the peak of market mechanisms development, was at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century—in both the German Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Mould-made sculptures were one of the many artistic or craft objects offered to Catholic clients. Figures and reliefs were advertised and sold alongside artefacts such as wooden sculptures, oil paintings, chromolithographies, goldsmiths’ works and metal church utensils, liturgical vestments, stained-glass windows, decorative liturgical books, religious graphics and various small devotional items (rosaries, medallions) (Pict. 3). Hence, the activity of the producers and sellers of cast and moulded sculptures should be considered in the wider context of the totality of the market for Catholic arts and crafts of that period.

The development of this market was linked to the rise of Catholic publicity. Advertisements constituted the most important form of publicity. They were not only published in the

<sup>19</sup> “(...)*jene Fabrikate, die in Menge erzeugt und, gleich andern Fabrikwaaren, feilgeboten werden*” – Ueber die Verwendung von Fabrikerzeugnissen statt der Kunstwerke in der Kirche. In: *Organ für christliche Kunst*, 3, 1853, pp. 25-26, 35-37, 46-48; p. 47.

<sup>20</sup> “(...)*der wesentlichsten Eigenschaft eines Kunstwerkes, der Originalität*” – Ueber die Verwendung, ref. 22, p. 47.

<sup>21</sup> “(...)*eine glitschende, aber ästhetisch und technisch verwerfliche Dutzendwaare*” – [Endert, Joseph van (?)]. Unwahrheit, Ungeschmack und Ungeschick in der Kunst und Kunsthantwerk, *Organ für christliche Kunst*, 13, 1863, pp. 200-202, 211-214, 221-224; p. 200.

religious press, but also in various periodical and compact publications, such as, for example, schematism of the Catholic clergy (Pictures 3–4).<sup>22</sup> These advertisements, often impressively and attractively illustrated, were primarily meant to channel the attention of potential buyers to a given company and its range of products on offer. However, prospective customers could find more detailed and structured presentations of offers in catalogues or price lists. The fact that catalogues and price lists for the sale of church statues and devotional articles were a very popular form of advertising publication is corroborated by the content of the announcements, in which numerous sellers of Catholic sculptures recommended precisely these kinds of publications to their future clients. Usually, these catalogues were marketed as available 'gratis und franco', i.e. free of charge, and sent by post at the company's expense. Less extensive price lists and prospectuses could also be included, especially at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, as additions to the editions of periodicals read by clerics. Unfortunately, the former popularity of the catalogues and price lists is not reflected in the current state of preservation and availability of that type of publication. In spite of their often beautifully decorated covers (Pict. 5) and numerous illustrations (Pict. 6), they were generally treated as publications of short-term and utilitarian value, and as such, relatively rarely were they incorporated into public libraries or archival collections. Nevertheless, the activities of a number of German and Austro-Hungarian Catholic producers and sellers of mould-made figures are quite well documented by extant examples of catalogues and price lists.

Mayer'sche Kunst-Anstalt of Munich is a German company active in the Catholic arts and crafts market, for which probably the greatest number of catalogues have been published. It has been operating since the mid-1840s, specialising in the production of church sculptures from 'stone material'.<sup>23</sup> Particularly extensive and impressive catalogues documented the offerings of the Viennese company Johann Heindl's Kirchliche Kunst- und Paramenten-Handlung, founded in 1869. These catalogues were, incidentally, printed by the publishing house belonging to Johann Heindl, who, apart from producing paraments and selling various works of church art,

<sup>22</sup> See e.g.: *Schematismus und Adressbuch der katholischen Geistlichkeit im Königreiche Bayern*, München : Verlag von Dr. M. Huttler (Konrad Fischer), 1889; *General-Schematismus der katholischen Geistlichkeit Deutschlands*, 1893, vol. 1, 2; 1894, vol. 1; 1898, vol. 1; 1904, vol. 1; 1905, vol. 1; 1906, vol. 3, 4; 1908, vol. 1–4; 1909, vol. 1–4; 1911, vol. 1–4; 1914, vol. 1–4; *General-Schematismus der katholischen Geistlichkeit Österreichs*, Urfahr – Linz : Verlag des General-Schematismus, 1905, vol. 1; 1907, vol. 1.

<sup>23</sup> We managed to locate as many as 12 copies of other catalogue editions, including interesting examples of lithographic prints from the 1850s and early 1860s. See e.g.: *Mayer'sche kgl. privileg. Kunstanstalt plastischer Arbeiten (...)*, IV Auflage. München [published after 1854, before 1861], copy in Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich, shelfmark: Bav. 5195 h; digital copy: <http://opacplus.bsb-muenchen.de/title/BV020316683/ft/bsb11000400?page=11> [18.12.2018]; *Mayer'sche Kunstanstalt für kirchliche Arbeiten (...)*, VI Auflage. München [published after 1861], copy in Münchner Stadtmuseum, shelfmark: G – Z 2030 a/2; *Mayer'sche-Kunstanstalt für kirchliche Arbeiten (...)*, XVI Auflage. München, 1875, copy in the author's collection; *Mayer'sche kgl. Hof-Kunstanstalt für kirchliche Arbeiten, Statuen, Altarbau und Glasmalerei (...)*. München – London – New York, 1895, copy in Moravské zemské muzeum in Brno, Vědecká knihovna, shelfmark: D2163; *Mayer'sche kgl. Hof-Kunstanstalt für kirchliche Arbeiten, Statuen, Altarbau, und Glasmalerei*. München – London – New York [no indication of date], copy in Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich, shelfmark: Bav. 4317 r; [*Mayer & Co. Bavarian Ecclesiastical Art Establishment*]. [München, no indication of date], incomplete copy in the Mayer'sche Kunstanstalt in Munich; *Mayer & Co. Bavarian Art Establishment for Stained Glass, Statuary etc.* München [no indication of date], incomplete copy in the Mayer'sche Kunstanstalt in Munich.

also engaged in editorial and book-keeping activities (Pict. 6).<sup>24</sup> Other producers and sellers of Catholic sculptures, whose interesting catalogues and price lists have been preserved, include the following:

- The multi-branch company founded by Leo Woerl in 1866 in Würzburg, which had a subsidiary headquarters in Vienna; the company advertised under a number of names, including K. & K. Hofbuchhandlung und Kunstanstalt von Leo Woerl, and Leo Woerl'sche Buchhandlung und kirchliche Kunstverlags-Handlung (Pict. 5).<sup>25</sup>

- Anstalt für kirchliche Kunst owned by Carl Walter from Trier, which was a renowned manufacturer of Catholic terracotta sculptures.<sup>26</sup>

- Anstalt für christliche Kunst owned by Heinrich Bösken from Geldern, who produced sculptures using various types of moulded materials.<sup>27</sup>

- A Munich foundry and metal factory named F.S. Kustermann (after its late founder), known for producing Christ corpuses and religious figures made from cast iron and zinc.<sup>28</sup>

All the entities mentioned above were large workshops, manufactories or trading companies. The flourishing of the Catholic arts and crafts market in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries was mainly associated with the activities of these types of institutional entities, which replaced individual artists and craftsmen. These large workshops or manufactories offered a ready-made sculptural product, presented in illustrated catalogues and price lists, from which customers would chose models that were of interest to them. Moreover, the buyers could specify the dimensions of the works they ordered, as well as types of material and finishing. The correspondence between producers or sellers and their clients was very popular, both as discussions of the details of transactions carried out by post, as well as postal delivery of the works themselves.

Many producers of mould-made figures engaged in supralocal or even international activities. Customers in distant places were reached through multilingual catalogues or company branches – on both a foreign and a domestic scale – as well as through cooperation with numerous sales representatives. An example of a German label conducting extensive supralocal and international activities was the already mentioned Mayer'sche Kunst-Anstalt from Munich.

<sup>24</sup> The catalogues present a wide range of the company's assortment, of which sculptures were only one of the sections: *Katalog von Kirchen-Ornamenten und Paramenten. Johann Heindl (...), kirchliche Kunst- und Paramenten-Handlung*. Wien, [1886], copy in Österreichische Nationalbibliothek in Vienna, shelfmark: 1963896-B; *Die kirchliche Kunst, das Kunstgewerbe, Handel und Industrie vom Standpunkte des christlichen Consumenten, herausgegeben von Johann Heindl*. Wien, [1895], copy in Moravské zemské muzeum in Brno, Vědecká knihovna, shelfmark: D4092; Joh. Heindl's kirchl. Kunsthändlung. In: *Die kirchliche Kunst*, Beilage zum *Katholischen Vereinsblatt*, 3, 1896, No. 9, pp. 73-136, copy in the author's collection.

<sup>25</sup> The catalogues published by Woerl's company were in the form of booklets devoted to separate sections of its rich offer. All the volumes listed here include sculptural works: *Kunst-Anstalt von Leo Woerl. Kgl. Bayr. und Kaisl. und Kgl. Oest.-Ung. Hof-Buch- & Kunst-Händler (...)*, L: [Auszug aus den Katalogen A - K]. Würzburg – Wien, 1892, copy in the author's collection; *Katalog der K. & K. Hofbuchhandlung und Kunstanstalt von Leo Woerl*, B: [Kreuzwege und heil. Gräber]. Würzburg, [after 1894], copy in the author's collection; *Katalog der K. & K. Hofbuchhandlung und Kunstanstalt von Leo Woerl*, D: *Marienstatuen*, G: *Statuen der Heiligen*, J: *Christusstatuen*, Würzburg [no indication of date], copy in the author's collection.

<sup>26</sup> *Anstalt für kirchliche Kunst von Carl Walter, Bildhauer*. Trier, 1906, incomplete copy in Bibliothek des Bischoflichen Priesterseminars in Trier, shelfmark: RON 7484; *Carl Walter, Bildhauer. Anstalt für kirchliche Kunst*. Trier, 1914, incomplete copy in Amt für kirchliche Denkmalpflege in Trier.

<sup>27</sup> *Heinr. Bösken. Anstalt für christliche Kunst (...).* Geldern, [no indication of date], copy in Stadtarchiv in Geldern, shelfmark: Geldern, Akten E 388.

<sup>28</sup> *F. S. Kustermann (...), Katalog 25/5. Kirchliche Gegenstände aus Eisen- und Zinkguß*. München, [no indication of date], copy in Bayerisches Wirtschaftsarchiv in Munich, shelfmark: F 19/118.

This tycoon in the field of serial production of church sculptures distributed his products in numerous European and non-European countries. For example, in the territory of Austria-Hungary, Mayer's sculptures were sold through the Vienna company of Johann Heindl (Pict. 6).<sup>29</sup> In remotely located foreign centres, such as London, Paris and New York, the Munich company had subsidiaries. The global functioning of the Mayer'sche Kunstanstalt is confirmed by its catalogues, which were published not only in German, but also in English, French and Spanish.

## 5. Serial manufacturing of sculptures for Catholic clients: the still unfinished chapter

The manufacturers of 'plaster saints' continued their flourishing activities until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The 'golden age' of serial production of devotional sculptures was only curbed by the outbreak of the First World War, although even this did not terminate this branch of Catholic artistic production. The manufacturing of cast and moulded religious statues, although quantitatively limited and slowly relegated to the periphery, continued into the interwar period and after the Second World War, and has in fact never died out completely. This is evidenced by the plaster and cement saints, which, together with their modern brothers and sisters made of resins or fiberglass, are still being manufactured and marketed (Pict. 7), along with the use of modern online trading methods.<sup>30</sup> The presence of such mass-produced devotional figures on the market indicates that they still find buyers in traditional Catholic environments.

## 6. Ambiguous heritage

Setting aside the currently manufactured and sold devotional figures, which may be an interesting topic for researchers investigating the popular religious culture of our time, let us return to the issue of the relics of mould-made Catholic sculptures from before the First World War. 'Plaster saints' from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, which can still be encountered in numerous Catholic devotional establishments, represent an ambiguous heritage. They are generally assumed to be mass-produced, clichéd artefacts, and not usually considered to be works of art. Nonetheless, they are relics of a bygone epoch that spanned over a century. They bear witness to the disappearing formation of Catholic culture and are the fruits of the former heyday of artistic casting and moulding techniques. Finally, they document the intriguing phenomenon of the rise of mass artistic production and the marketing of art. For these reasons, 'plaster saints' do deserve protection and preservation, or at least documentary work and research.

In considering how extant historic mould-made religious sculptures are protected and documented, we need to pay attention to the places where and the way in which they are stored. Most of the preserved specimens of 'plaster saints' have survived to this day because they are still used for their original purpose (Pict. 8). We can find them in various Catholic venues of a public or semi-public character: in churches, chapels, presbyteries, monasteries and a variety of confessional institutions. Tokens of sculptures made of such materials as cast iron, zinc, terra

<sup>29</sup> See Heindl's catalogues, which contain additions presenting the offer of sculptures from Mayer'sche Kunst-Anstalt: *Katalog von Kirchen-Ornamenten*, ref. 28, pp. 77-107 [+ 3 unnumbered pages]; *Die kirchliche Kunst*, ref. 28, pp. 135-140.

<sup>30</sup> See e.g.: [https://www.holyart.pl/artykuly-religijne/figury/figury-z-wloka-szklanego?sorter\\_id=5&sort=20a](https://www.holyart.pl/artykuly-religijne/figury/figury-z-wloka-szklanego?sorter_id=5&sort=20a) [15.05.2019].

cotta or cement can be found outside buildings, not only in the immediate vicinity of churches, but also as elements of roadside shrines and crosses, outdoor Ways of the Cross or replicas of the cave of apparitions from Lourdes, which mark the landscape of Catholic countries.<sup>31</sup>

The survival of historic religious moulded sculptures in situ, in their original context, and fulfilling their primary functions is of course the optimal way to preserve them. However, it is not known how long this situation will last. Will the relics of once serial-made sculptures placed in Catholic venues survive safely through subsequent decades and will they be preserved for generations to come? Unless they are treated as part of our heritage and monuments of the past, they are vulnerable to destruction and disposal.

The removal of ‘plaster saints’ from churches and chapels may be encouraged by pursuit of the modernization of Catholic sacred interiors. Another factor whose significance cannot be overestimated is the progressive secularization of contemporary European societies. It involves (or will involve eventually) a diminishing demand for ecclesiastical buildings and, consequently, the desecralization of some of them and redeveloping them for non-religious purposes. Of course, the legacy of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries is (or will be) particularly threatened in these processes due to the still ambivalent (or sometimes even clearly negative) attitude towards it. Secularisation processes are already at work in Germany and the Czech Republic, and, in time, they will probably affect all Central European countries.

A comparison of the state of preservation of mould-made religious sculptures from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in Germany with those found in the former German territories that today belong to Poland (e.g. Silesia) shows evident differences: many more examples of mould-made sculptures remain in Polish churches. This is undoubtedly due to the great attachment of Polish Catholics to traditional elements of church decor and their resistance to change and modernisation. In Germany, a large wave of church modernisation had already been experienced at the end of the 1960s and in the 1970s, after the Second Vatican Council. During that period, the legacy of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries was not appreciated at all; hence many works from that period were lost, including a number of ‘plaster saints’. The ongoing process of secularisation and the decline in the number of Catholics in Germany create further dilemmas associated with desacralised church buildings and their interior decor.

Assuming that the phenomena of modernisation and secularisation will undoubtedly spread to Poland and other Central European countries, it is justifiable to argue for the safeguarding of at least a selection of specimens of historic mould-made Catholic sculptures in museums. Unfortunately, in light of the current prevailing practice, it seems unlikely that museums will prioritise the collection of these artefacts. Examples of mould-made Catholic sculptures from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries are currently found only sporadically in museum galleries and collections.

‘Plaster saints’ are exhibited in some diocesan and church museums. This is the case, for example, at the Archdiocese Museum in Wrocław (Pict. 9). However, the isolated examples of

<sup>31</sup> It is worth noting that relics of old devotional sculptures in private use are unfortunately much harder to find. It should be emphasised that private recipients were also important clientele for the Catholic arts and crafts market. Numerous producers of Catholic sculptures (as we can infer from the catalogues and price lists that have survived) produced for their private clientele rich offerings of small-sized figurines and crucifixes, Christmas cribs, miniatures of Lourdes grottos, or religious souvenirs usually sold in pilgrimage centres. Examples of these types of artefacts have probably survived in some homes, and also appear on the antiquarian market, but it is difficult to study them comprehensively.

mould-made figures in the Wrocław Archdiocese Museum, displayed in corridors and along staircases, are not exhibited as an important part of the museum's collection.<sup>32</sup>

Another possible context in which historic mould-made religious sculptures can be presented is in association with folklore and the history of culture. This context is illustrated by the example of the Niederrheinisches Museum für Volkskunde und Kulturgeschichte, which is located in the well-known pilgrimage town of Kevelaer.<sup>33</sup> Since the end of the 19th century, Kevelaer has been an important production centre for polychrome Catholic sculptures made from gypsum plaster and other materials. This production developed until the 1960s.<sup>34</sup> In the permanent exhibition of the museum in Kevelaer, the theme of 'plaster saints' manufacture and the trade in devotional items form part of the history of the town and of the pilgrimage centre.

However, it is religious figures and reliefs from cast iron that have a better chance of becoming part of museum collections, rather than sculptures made of plaster and similar materials. Due to the greater material value of cast-iron sculptures they are more often considered to be works of art and not just mass-produced products. The attractiveness of patinated cast-iron works is in all probability also appreciated by museum directors and exhibition curators. However, the growing interest in cast-iron artistic objects may not necessarily bring about the rediscovery of Catholic statues. For example, The Artistic Casting Department of the Museum in Gliwice, Poland, which documents the history and production of the famous Königlich Preußische Eisengießerei in Gleiwitz,<sup>35</sup> contains no typical Catholic church sculptures among the works exhibited.

Although plaster saints, cast-iron figures of Christ and other mould-made Catholic sculptures from the second half of the 19th and the early 20th centuries currently find their way into museums only in exceptional cases, it is necessary to argue for inclusion of their tokens in museum collections. The documentation and safeguarding of these artefacts, which are so characteristic of Catholic aesthetics of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, could form part of the scope of the activities of diocesan and other church museums. Secular museums, with collections related to religious life, old material culture, folk culture, or industrial heritage and metal foundries, can also contribute to the preservation of Catholic sculptures from this fascinating era of serial artistic production.

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<sup>32</sup> The Archdiocesan Museum in Wrocław is currently undergoing refurbishment and its collections are to be rearranged, so it is not known what the role of the 'plaster saints' will be in the newly redecorated museum.

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.niederrheinisches-museum-kevelaer.de/> [13.05.2019].

<sup>34</sup> On the production of plaster casts in Kevelaer see: LINGENS, ref. 3.

<sup>35</sup> KWIECIEŃ, Anna. Źeliwo. Odlewnictwo artystyczne w dawnych Gliwicach (1796–1945). *Wystawa ze zbiorów Muzeum w Gliwicach / Cast Iron. Art Casting in the Old Gliwice (1796–1945). An Exhibition from the Gliwice Museum Collection.* Gliwice : Muzeum w Gliwicach, 2017.



**Pict. 1:** Statue of St. Mary Queen of Heaven, made of the so-called 'stone material': product of Mayer'sche Kunst-Anstalt in Munich. Photograph by Andrzej Koziel.



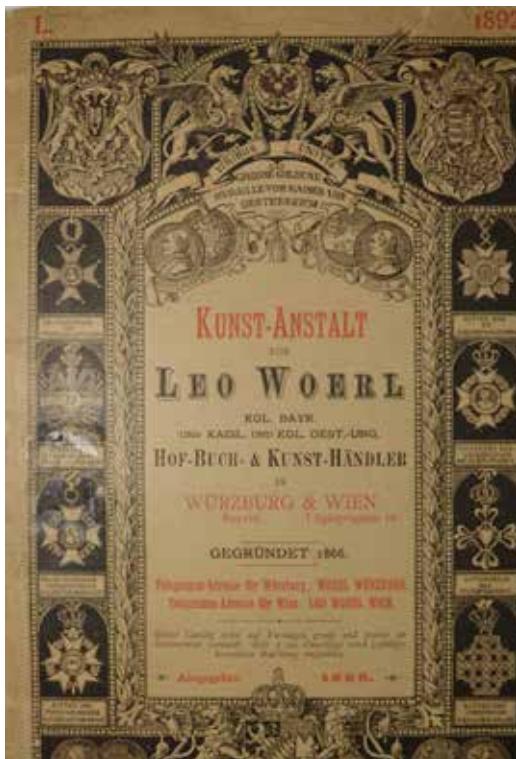
**Pict. 2:** Statue of St. Antony of Padua, made of gypsum plaster. Photograph by Andrzej Koziel.



**Pict. 3:** Advertisement by Glaesser'sche Buch- und Papierhandlung in Limburg, published in: *Schematismus der Diöcese Limburg, Limburg a. d. Lahn : Verlagsgeschäft von Phil. Jac. Glaesser 1893.* Statues and reliefs are advertised alongside other devotional items and religious literature.



**Pict. 4:** Advertisements by sculpture manufacturers, published in: *Schematismus und Adressbuch der katholischen Geistlichkeit im Königreiche Bayern, München : Verlag von Dr. M. Huttler (Konrad Fischer), 1889.*



**Pict. 5:** Cover of a catalogue of Leo Woerl's company, headquartered in Würzburg und Vienna: *Kunst-Anstalt von Leo Woerl. Kgl. Bayr. und Kaisl. und Kgl. Oest.-Ung. Hof-Buch- & Kunst-Händler (...), L: [Auszug aus den Katalogen A – K]. Würzburg-Wien, 1892.*



**Pict. 6:** Page from a catalogue of Johann Heindl's *kirchliche Kunst- und Paramenten-Handlung* in Vienna, presenting sculptures from Mayer'sche Kunst-Anstalt in Munich. This catalogue was published with the title: *Die kirchliche Kunst, das Kunstgewerbe, Handel und Industrie vom Standpunkte des christlichen Consumenten, herausgegeben von Johann Heindl. Wien, [1895]*.



**Pict. 7:** Contemporary cement figures (before assembling and finishing) in Zakład sztuki kościelnej of Barbara Schaefer-Kobyłczyk in Piekary Śląskie, Poland. Photograph by Joanna Lubos-Koziel.



**Pict. 8:** Sacred Heart statue, made of the so-called 'stone material': product of Mayer'sche Kunst-Anstalt in Munich. The figure, located in the Catholic church in Jełonia Góra-Cieplice, Poland, seems to still function as an object of veneration. Photograph by Andrzej Koziel.



**Pict. 9:** Statue of St. Mary, made of moulding material (repainted white), produced (or sold) by Goerlich & Coch, Buch- & Kunsthändlung in Breslau. The statue belongs to the collection of Muzeum Archidiecezjalne in Wrocław. Photograph by Joanna Lubos- Koziel.

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