



1. Wrocław University Museum cast gallery before 1945. The author of the photo unknown; courtesy of the Wrocław University Museum

Copying after masterworks of ancient art

The plaster cast collection of the Museum of the University of Wrocław and its ideological and academic context

Agata Kubala

University of Wrocław

University collections of plaster casts in 19th-century Europe

The time of common establishment of museum plaster cast collections of ancient art is, not accidental. The beginning of the 19th c. was marked with rapidly growing interest in classical art, especially sculpture, presented in chronological order. The overarching goal was the encyclopaedic completeness of the series, enabling the visualization of successive stages by which ancient art developed. Plaster casts ensured the mobility of the originals via their copies, thus extending their reach to a wide circle of recipients who had no direct access to the original works of ancient art. The role of casts was not limited to spreading knowledge about the originals they represented, and through them about ancient art in various social strata of 19th c. Europe. We cannot underestimate their influence on the development of scientific archaeology, to which German researchers made the greatest contribution. According to the rules in force at German universities, studies of form were a mandatory part of training in classical archaeology understood as the history of ancient art. This was made possible by plaster cast collections, the tradition dating back to the 17th c., although initially they had been meant for use by artists in training. This exact idea underpinned the decision by the Brandenburg elector, Frederick III (later to become the first Prussian king, Frederick I), to found a collection of plaster cast copies of antique art for the Berlin Academy of Art opened in 1696¹. The plaster cast collection initiated in 1707 by the Elector of the Palatinate of the Rhine, prince Johann Wilhelm, consisted of direct copies of antique original art (from the collections of Medici, Borghese, Ludovisi, Farnese and Capitoline collections). In 1767, it was eventually trans-



¹ See G. Heres, *Die Anfänge der Berliner Antiken-Sammlung zur Geschichte des Antikensabinetts 1640-1830*, „Forschungen und Berichte“ Vol. 18 (1977), pp. 100-101.



² See **Ch. Schreiter**, “Moulded from the best originals of Rome” – Eighteenth-Century Production and Trade of Plaster Casts after Antique Sculpture in Germany, [in:] *Plaster Casts: Making, Collecting, and Displaying from Classical Antiquity to the Present*, Ed. **E. Marchand, R. Frederiksen**, Berlin – New York 2010, p. 125.

³ See **P. Connor**, *Cast-collecting in the Nineteenth Century: Scholarship, Aesthetics, Connoisseurship*, [in:] *Rediscovering Hellenism: the Hellenic Inheritance and the English Imagination*, Ed. **G. W. Clarke**, Assist. **J. C. Eade**, Cambridge 1989, p. 203.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 187.

⁵ See **M. Beard**, *Cast and cast-offs: the origins of the museum of classical archaeology*, „Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society” Vol. 39 (1993).

⁶ Quoted from: *ibidem*, s. 3.

⁷ See **D. Kurz**, *Reception of Classical Art in Britain: An Oxford Story of Plaster Casts from the Antique*, Oxford 2000.

⁸ **J. Abt**, *The Origins of the Public Museum*, [in:] *A Companion to Museum Studies*, Ed. **Sh. Macdonald**, Chichester 2011, p. 124.

⁹ See also *Ashmolean Museum Oxford: Cast Gallery*, <http://www.ashmolean.org/departments/castgallery/about> (access date: 1.10.2021).

¹⁰ *Helsinki University Museum: Research, Art, History*, Ed. **K. Heinämies**, Transl. Language Services, University of Helsinki Language Centre, Helsinki 2003, p. 125.

ferred to the purpose-made *Antikensaal* in the Fine Arts Academy in Mannheim, one of the teaching spaces for students². In the same year, also in Germany, the earliest teaching plaster cast collection was launched in Göttingen by Christian Gottlob Heyne (1729–1812)³, but it was not until the first decades of the 19th c., along with the change in the political and cultural situation, such collections proliferated, both in number and in size, marking the beginning of the era of grand academic plaster cast collections. In Great Britain, the university collections of antique plaster cast collections caught on later than on the continent, in the second half of the 19th c., fueled by what Peter Connor called “a crusading zeal, not content with founding a collection of casts, strove also to influence others to do likewise”⁴. An excellent example of the implementation of the pan-European idea of the academic antique copies collections in UK was the creation, in 1884, of the museum of plaster cast collections of Greek and Roman art at the University of Cambridge, consisting of over 600 objects at the time of its opening. Copies of famous antique art objects were held at Cambridge much earlier, by the university Fitzwilliam Museum established in 1816⁵. The Cambridge Museum of Classical and General Archaeology, an independent institution created in 1884, held a much more substantial collection of copies of antique art masterpieces, was open to the public and greeted with much enthusiasm. Its tasks included, according to the dignitaries present at the opening ceremony, stimulating artists and new talents and making the society more sensitive to art. Above all, however, it was to be a place of education, indispensable for teaching a new field of science, i.e. archaeology. The importance of the latter task was emphasized by Charles Newton, then the keeper of the department of Greek and Roman antiquities at the British Museum, according to whom an attempt to teach archaeology without plaster cast museum would be “like trying to teach chemistry without a laboratory, or medicine without a hospital”⁶. The decision-makers at the Oxford Ashmolean Museum probably had the same intention when they founded, also in 1884, the so-called Cast Committee, whose task was to raise money and to order plaster casts of Greek original artwork⁷. The oldest university museum, located in Oxford and dating back to 1683⁸ thus acquired a collection consisting in nearly 1000 items⁹.

The second half of the 19th c. was also the time when the collection of plaster casts was started at the Imperial Alexander University in Helsinki. The first systematic efforts to obtain copies of the most famous works of the ancient Greece and Rome were made in 1869 and four years later the collection was made available in the university building erected for this purpose¹⁰. The University of Helsinki’s collection was based on German models, as was one of the earliest 19th c. university collections of ancient works casts, created in the present-day Estonian Tartu, then German-speaking Dorpat, launched as early as 1803 due to the efforts of the first director of

the newly established Museum der Kunst der Universität zu Dorpat (now University of Tartu Art Museum) Johann Karl Simon Morgenstern, educated at the University of Halle and familiar with German models¹¹. The centre of this expansion, observed throughout the 19th c., in the university's collections of ancient sculptures' copies was in fact the area of present-day Germany, where, apart from Berlin¹², the plaster cast collecting was closely linked to the universities since it was German scholars who first noted the necessity of such museums for teaching classical archaeology. The copy perfectly captures not only the iconography of the inaccessible original, but above all, its three-dimensional appearance, which cannot be reproduced in a drawing, a novel, previously unknown visual element that the viewer can add to his or her repertoire of knowledge. The university museums were thus opened in German academic centres, on a much larger scale than in other parts of Europe, with a collection of ancient sculpture casts as their core. The very process of their creation was, at least in Prussia, centralized by the establishment of the Gipsformerei, a royal gypsum foundry¹³ by order of King Frederick William III of Berlin, issued in 1819. Until the 1860s, almost all German universities had their own plaster cast collections, which were then used to teach archaeology students rather than to educate artists and visitors in Greek ancient art¹⁴. Among the German institutions of this type dated back to the 19th c., was the Akademisches Kunstmuseum in Bonn, founded in 1819 at the local university¹⁵, for which the first casts were purchased at the Louvre Museum in Paris and arrived a year later. The first director of the museum, Friedrich Gottlieb Welcker (1784–1868), who was also a lecturer in classical archaeology at the local university, stressed the importance of casts in the education of young archaeologists¹⁶ in a catalogue of his collections published in 1827. This was well understood by one of his successors, Reinhard Kekulé von Stradonitz (1839–1911), who lectured to students in the museum halls where the castings were displayed¹⁷. An important centre was the museum at the University of Göttingen (see above), established in the 18th c., whose collection increased significantly at the end of the third decade of the 19th c. due to the donation by the King of Great Britain and Ireland, George IV, who donated plaster casts of the so-called Elgin Marbles stored in the British Museum. The collection was then successively enlarged in the following decades of the 19th century¹⁸.

Slightly later, as it was not until the early 1840s that the acquisition of plaster casts was initiated in Tübingen for the purpose of education and scientific research in classical archaeology¹⁹.

Plaster cast collection in Wrocław

In Wrocław, the tradition of making university collections of plaster casts of antique art, just like in Bonn, dates back to the second



¹¹ See J. Anderson, *Reception of Ancient Art: the Cast Collections of the University of Tartu Art Museum in the Historical, Ideological and Academic Context of Europe (1803–1918)*, Tartu 2015, pp. 89–90.

¹² Dating back to the 17th c. the plaster cast collection at the Fine Arts Academy in Berlin was largely destroyed in a fire in 1742. New important acquisitions were then added at the beginning of the 19th c. Held in Monbijou Palace, they became the foundation of the public museum of antique art copies, open to the public in 1830. See P. Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 193–194.

¹³ See *Staatliche Museum zu Berlin. Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Gipsformerei*, <https://www.smb.museum/en/museums-institutions/gipsformerei/about-us/history.html> (access date: 15.12.2019).

¹⁴ See P. Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

¹⁵ See *ibidem*, p. 203.

¹⁶ F. G. Welcker, *Das Akademische Kunstmuseum zu Bonn*, Bonn 1827, pp. 3–4.

¹⁷ For the activities at the museum under the management of R. Kekulé see W. Geominy, *Das Akademische Kunstmuseum der Universität Bonn unter der Direktion von Reinhard Kekulé*, Amsterdam 1989.

¹⁸ See D. Graepler, *A Dactylitheca by James Tassie and Other Collections of Gem Impressions at the University of Göttingen [in:] Plaster Casts: Making, Collecting and Displaying from Classical Antiquity to the Present*, Ed. E. Marchand, R. Frederiksen, Berlin – New York 2010, p. 436.

¹⁹ See P. Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 206.



²⁰ Wrocław which is now part of Poland, in the 19th c. was a Prussian city, and after the 1871 unification of Germany, became part of the newly created German Empire.

²¹ See **Z. Bandurska**, *Królewskie Muzeum Sztuki i Starożytności*, [in:] **P. Łukasiewicz**, *Muzea sztuki w dawnym Wrocławiu*, Wrocław 1998, p. 28.

²² We have only scant accounts of antique engraved gems and few objects coming from ancient Rome and Egypt (including three Egyptian mummies). See **M. Mencfel**, *Skarbc natury i sztuki. Prywatne gabinety osobliwości, kolekcje sztuki i naturalistów na Śląsku w wiekach XVII i XVIII*, Warszawa 2010, pp. 95–96.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 96.

²⁴ **J. G. G. Büsching**, *Antiken-Sammlung der Universität zu Breslau*, „Schlesische Provinzialblätter” 1824, No. 12.

²⁵ August Stüler expressed it best when describing the ruled of the new museum (Altes Museum) on the Museum Island in Berlin, where the whole of the middle floor was to be devoted to a grand collection of plaster casts of ancient artworks. He stated that these should constitute the core of every museum collection. See **G. Platz-Horster**, *Zur Geschichte der Berliner Gipssammlung*, [in:] *Berlin und die Antike. Architektur, Kunstgewerbe, Malerei, Skulptur, Theater und Wissenschaft vom 16. Jahrhundert bis heute* [exhibition cat.], Ed. **W. Arenhövel**, **Ch. Schreiber**, 22 April – 22 July 1979, Schloss Charlottenburg, Grosse Orangerie, Berlin 1979, pp. 273–274.

²⁶ Secularization of Prussia was the result of an edict issued by the king Frederick William III on the 30th of October 1810.

²⁷ See e.g. **D. Graepler**, *op. cit.*, p. 435; **M. Beard**, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

²⁸ **J. Kinne**, *Die klassische Archäologie und ihre Professoren an der Universität Breslau im 19. Jahrhundert. Eine Dokumentation*, Dresden 2010, p. 345.

²⁹ Quoted after: *ibidem*, p. 63.

decade of the 19th c. In 1811, the Prussian city of Breslau²⁰ gained a State-run university, and several years later (1815) the Royal Museum of Art and Antiquities (Königliches Museum für Kunst und Altertümer), was added to the university as the first public museum in the city²¹. The pan-European fascination with antiquity that characterized modernity was also palpable in the Silesia, but in this case, it mainly brought about antique coins which had been added to the local coin collections since the 16th c. The antiquities coming from the Mediterranean, other than coins, were rare in the Silesian collections of the 16th–18th centuries²². This was probably due, as Michał Mencfel rightly noted, to the high prices these objects carried in antiquity markets and difficulties in acquiring them, perhaps compounded by the lack of relevant models²³. The latter factor changed in the first decades of the 19th c., when the city, located at the eastern borders of the Prussian state, was penetrated by the philhellenic ideals and the resulting interest in the antique heritage and the novel way of teaching archeology. These were introduced by the first director of the university museum, Berlin-born Johann Gustav Gottlieb Büsching (1783–1829), a lawyer by trade, an enthusiast archeologist and ethnographer, who since 1817 was also a professor of archeology (both pre-historic and classical) at the University in Wrocław. According to his own words, from the paper published in “Schlesische Provinzialblätter”, Wrocław was bound to be a part, as far as possible, *in den schoenem Kunsteifer*, which took over Berlin²⁴. What he meant, was probably the belief, then pretty prevalent also outside of the Prussian capital, in the privileged role of plaster casts – the copies of antique art of the finest quality, which for diverse reasons could not be acquired by the museums²⁵.

The collection in Wrocław started with the objects acquired through secularization of Silesian monasteries²⁶. The first museum copies of antique art were thus requisitioned, unlike in other European institutions of this type, which usually bought their first display pieces²⁷. The first to be thus obtained for Wrocław collection were the copies of *Apollo Belvedere* and parts of the *Laocoön Group* (centre figure being a Trojan priest), famous antiquity art pieces known and admired in the modern world since the Renaissance, the *Borghese Gladiator*, and two heads of Venus, as well as a head of Antinous. Their presence in the monasteries, from which they have been obtained, was probably due to a growing interest in classical antiquity throughout the 18th century²⁸. Büsching never intended to stop at these few requisitioned objects, which were cast using popular molds, and thus were pretty commonplace in the European collections of the time. He aimed to create a specialist university museum collection of plaster casts to be used for teaching. For several years he made efforts to obtain information in Berlin, “whether the local university could obtain antique copies from Paris? This would enable thorough study not only by artists but also by all students of our university”²⁹.

He was eventually successful, and in 1824, in preparation for receiving of the new pieces, and with the university building lacking suitable space, Büsching started adapting one of the parts of the building along the Oder river, formerly, i.e. before desacralization, an Augustine monastery, with the intention of turning it into the new seat of the museum. The first scanty cast collection was soon extended with new objects, acquired in 1825. This first acquisition also set a pattern for the gradual growth of the collection, which continued over the next few decades. An expert in pre-historic archeology, Büsching did not made decisions on what to add to the museum collection on his own. He was advised by two well-known sculptors of that time, Friedrich Tieck and Christian Daniel Rauch. The choice of the latter, especially, was not coincidental. Rauch was already experienced in the matter. In 1816 he had been entrusted with the mission to acquire Italian casts for the plaster cast museum in Berlin (see footnote 21), which task he executed with much success, obtaining also copies of a collection of newly discovered (1811) pedimental sculptures from the Aphaea temple in Aegina, restored and completed in Rome by the excellent Danish sculptor Bertel Thorwaldsen³⁰. The result of their collaboration were 40 new plaster casts of antique sculptures: statues, busts and reliefs from the museum collections in Rome, the Vatican, Dresden and Potsdam³¹. A year later, the collection was enriched by the cast of the *Praying Boy*, ordered by Büsching, from the original which was then held by the Royal Museums of Berlin³². The cast, unfortunately with head, right hand and a substantial part of the left hand missing, which is now part of the collection of the University of Wrocław museum, is the oldest extant piece of the old collection. When we compare the preserved parts of the plaster cast with the original, we can see that the cast is an excellent reproduction, probably made in the Berlin cast workshop (see footnote 21), scaled 1 : 1. It was even painted brown, to imitate bronze material of the Hellenic sculpture on which it was modeled³³, a testimony to the attention to meticulous reproduction of all aspects of the original. In 1826, when the museum was opened in the new location, the director could boast having 47 plaster casts of famous classical antique artworks, displayed in spacious, well equipped rooms [Fig. 1]. Keen to present the diversity of antique art, Büsching strived not only to obtain copies of sculptures, but also ornamental objects. In 1826, the university museum in Wrocław acquired copies of cameo engraved gems from the old collection of Philipp von Stosch³⁴, which at that time were held in the Royal Museums in Berlin, as well as 12 most exquisite gems from the collection of the imperial antique collection in Vienna, including the copy of the famous *Gemma Augustea*³⁵.

In autumn 1828, during his next visit to Berlin, Büsching ordered next casts for his museum collection. They were delivered to Wrocław after his death, in spring the next year, when the museum was managed by the new director Franz Passow (1786–1833) – since 1815 the



³⁰ P. Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

³¹ An exhaustive list of casts delivered to the museum is provided by J. Kinne (*op. cit.*, p. 345–346).

³² Currently Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Inv. No. Sk 2, see B. Andrae, *Skulptur des Hellenismus*, München 2001, Fig. 1.2.

³³ See A. Kubala, U. Bończuk–Dawidziuk, *Sztuka starożytnej Grecji i Rzymu. Katalog odlewów gipsowych ze zbiorów uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego / The Art of Ancient Greece and Rome. The Catalogue of Plaster Casts in the University of Wrocław Collection*, Wrocław 2018, Fig. 35.

³⁴ The gems copies of the von Stosch collection were preserved and are currently held at the Museum of the University of Wrocław, however, their thorough study is still pending.

³⁵ See J. Kinne, *op. cit.*, p. 68.



professor of antique literature at the University in Wrocław, since 1829 also lecturing on classical archeology³⁶. The newly obtained objects included parts of relief decoration of the Trajan's Column, the cast of which was made in Rome³⁷. Büsching's successor made sure the collection of antique art was extended with new copies. He even managed to secure a steady ministerial subsidy of 200 thaler per annum³⁸. Passow, however, was not very impressed with the limited offer of the Berlin cast workshop where his predecessor ordered the bulk of new acquisitions, so he bought casts from Vienna, Paris and Munich. As a result, the museum collection gained 11 new copies in 1830, including the head of *Niobe*, a depiction of her son, the so-called *Ilioneus*, *Venus Medici*, a copy of the original held in Florence, acquired through Vienna, as well as relief decorative pieces from the *Amazon Sarcophagus*³⁹. The number of newly acquired copies may have been greater, unfortunately, a substantial part of casts ordered in Vienna were damaged in transit, which made them unsuitable for display in the museum rooms⁴⁰. Passow's contribution to the history of the University museum also consisted in authoring the first antique cast collection catalogue, published in 1832⁴¹. This first important archeological publication had, as it turned out, a vital impact on the museum and the whole of classical archeology in Wrocław. According to Johanna Kinne, "it put Wrocław on a par with the leading scientific community in Bonn"⁴².

After Passow's death in 1833, the museum, whose collections encompassed different areas and times, was managed by two directors, also university professors, the German language and literature scholar August Hoffmann von Fallersleben (1798–1874) and classical philologist Friedrich Wilhelm Ritschl (1806–1876). The latter was made responsible for the collection of casts. Following the pattern established by his predecessors, he strived to extend the collection. Copies of antique art available in Dresden and Berlin were largely already held in Wrocław, so Ritschl ordered new artefacts from the Paris, based on advice from Friedrich Gottlieb Welcker, the founder and director of rapidly developing university museum in Bonn⁴³. He was particularly interested in acquiring the copy of Parthenon reliefs and the so-called Theseion⁴⁴, which would render the teaching offer of his institution significantly more attractive at the time when Greek antiquities were universally admired in Europe under the influence of Philhellenic ideals. However, due to insufficient funds, he only managed to acquire single pieces. The next acquisition batch by Ritschl, enabled the university museum to create a gallery displaying scaled down copies of decorative sculptures from Parthenon, ordered from the model maker John Henning – 36 smaller, scaled 1 : 20 plaster cast reproductions of specific parts of decorative structures from this key temple from Athens, from pieces held in London. Wrocław gained copies of parts of high-relief pentelic marble sculpture from the Parthenon Frieze, the casts of 2 metopes, six statues

2. Figurine of Nike standing on a sphere, a plaster cast from the collection of the Wrocław University Museum. Photo: W. Małkiewicz



³⁶ See *eadem*, *Archeologia klasyczna / Classical Archaeology*, [in:] *Księga pamiątkowa jubileuszu 200-lecia utworzenia Państwowego Uniwersytetu we Wrocławiu / Commemorative Book for the 200th Anniversary of the Establishment of the State University in Wrocław*, t. 2: *Universitas litterarum Vratislaviensis 1811-1945*, Ed. J. Harasimowicz, Wrocław 2013, p. 274.

³⁷ See *Verzeichniss der antiken und modernen Bildwerke in Gyps auf dem akademischen Museum für Alterthum und Kunst in Breslau*, Hrsg. F. Passow, Breslau 1832, No. 119; J. Kinne, *Die klassische...*, p. 347.

³⁸ See *Chronik und Statistik der Königlichen Universität zu Breslau*, Ed. B. Nadbyl, Breslau 1861, p. 87.

³⁹ See J. Kinne, *Die klassische...*, p. 348.

⁴⁰ See *eadem*, *Archeologia...*, p. 274.

⁴¹ *Verzeichniss...*

⁴² J. Kinne, *Archeologia...*, p. 274.

⁴³ See *eadem*, *Die klassische...*, p. 145.

⁴⁴ The temple in Athens now referred to as Hephaisteion, which in 19th c. was considered to be the temple of Theseus.



⁴⁵ See A. Rossbach, *Das archäologische Museum an der Universität zu Breslau*, Breslau 1877, pp. 25–26.

⁴⁶ See A. Kubala, U. Bończuk–Dawidziuk, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

⁴⁷ A. Rossbach, *Verzeichniss der Gypsabgüsse und Originalien antiker Bildwerke im Königlichen Museum für Kunst und Alterthum an der Universität Breslau*, Breslau 1861, p. 31, No. 258.

⁴⁸ *Idem*, *Das archäologische...*, p. 26, No. 118.

⁴⁹ Quoted from: J. Kinne, *Die klassische...*, p. 147.

⁵⁰ *Chronik...*, p. 88; A. Kubala, U. Bończuk–Dawidziuk, *Sztuka...*, pp. respectively 181–182, 185–186.

⁵¹ See J. Kinne, *Die klassische...*, p. 213, footnote 634.

⁵² See *ibidem*, footnote 51.

and a horse head from the eastern pediment, as well as one statue from the western tympanum⁴⁵, of which only the head of a horse of Selene was preserved until today⁴⁶. Ritschl's successors managing the museum after him did not much treasure this last acquisition. In the new museum collection catalogue, published in 1861, compiled by the director August Rossbach, we read that these miniature pieces were kept in the drawer of a table located in the third room from the entrance⁴⁷. Rossbach himself, in the next collection inventory that he made several years later, in 1877, noting that the pieces had been transferred (to room no 4), clearly states that the miniatures bought by Ritschl "are not suitable for a museum", and may only be used for "initial, general orientation"⁴⁸.

The last acquisition made by Ritschl before he was relieved of his duties as the director of the University Museum in Wrocław was a set of 20 plaster casts from Berlin cast workshop which had by then expanded his offer and which he had noted on his visit to the Prussian capital. His main objective was to enrich the collection in Wrocław with objects that would make it, as he stated: "hold a series of art works representative of a sequence of old artistic traditions and masters, so as to depict main stages of the historical development of art"⁴⁹. Ritschl dreamt of making the Wrocław collection as prestigious as its sister institution, namely the university museum in Bonn, the leading institution of the type in Prussia.

Under Ritschl's management, the university appointed Joseph Julius Ambrosch (1804–1856) as the professor of classical archeology. In 1839, he took over as the university museum's director. His extensive archeological knowledge was derived from a three-year long scholarship stay in Italy, prior to his appointment in Wrocław, and the resulting collaboration with the German Archeological Institute. It is not surprising, then, that his first cast acquisitions, in 1845, were copies of antique objects discovered in the archeological sites in the south of Italy, in Pompei, Herculaneum and Taranto and kept in Naples. Wrocław's collection was extended with 28 new items – copies of antique sculptures, busts and ornamental objects. Two of these are still held in university collections, i.e. a statuette of Nike standing on a globe [Fig. 2] and a stag head shaped rhyton, both reproduced after bronze artefacts discovered in Herculaneum⁵⁰. Together with 11 new casts bought a year later in Paris, including the copy of the whole *Laocoön Group* (so far, the museum only had a plaster cast of the father, acquired by Büsching from one of the secularized Silesian monasteries, see above) and *Venus de Milo*, a masterpiece of Greek Hellenic art, bought by Louvre a quarter of century earlier, the museum collection in Wrocław comprised of 259 cast copies, as stated in the collection inventory made at the beginning of 1848⁵¹. Comparing Ambrosch's list with the first inventory of casts prepared by Passow in 1832, who listed 82 items⁵², we can note that within fifteen years spanning the inventories, the number of items tripled. For Ambrosch – an archeol-



3. *Apoxyomenos*, a plaster cast from the collection of the Wrocław University Museum. Photo: W. Małkiewicz



4. Fragment of a statue of *Niobe with the Youngest Daughter*, a plaster cast from the collection of the Wrocław University Museum.
Photo: W. Małkowicz

ogist and an academic teacher of archeology, the collection of plaster cast copies of glorified classical antiquity art, was doubtless the key part of the museum collection used mainly for teaching purposes and thus it had to reflect the current knowledge developed within classical archeology. The core function of casts as teaching material as understood by the 19th c. humanism, is best reflected by the fact that Ambrosch used to conduct his archeology course in museum rooms, which however was only possible in summer months, as the rooms lacked heating facilities⁵³. He also was aware of the necessity to constantly enlarge the museum collection with new acquisitions, so as to match the leading academic centres in their teaching offer in classical anthropology, especially Bonn (which was also Ritschl's ambition, see above). In 1844, the university museum in Bonn had 614 plaster casts of antique art objects⁵⁴. The efforts to match Bonn university collection, which was without doubt the model for Ambrosch and his predecessor, included projects aiming at extending the display spaces in Wrocław, already cramped at that time, so as to appropriately exhibit the collection of antiques copies, which he soon hoped to enlarge. These plans, however, were not implemented then, due to insufficient funds⁵⁵. It was only Ambrosch's successor, August Wilhelm Rosbach (1823–1898) who made them a reality.

When he took over as the university museum director in 1856, Rosbach faced a difficult task of re-organizing and modernizing the institution under his management. In particular, he scrutinized the collection of antique art casts, which – in his opinion – was not sufficient both in terms of quantity and its quality, apparently made of haphazardly acquired items, lacking specific method and clear selection criteria. For example, there were no copies of antique architectural details, and almost one third of the casts owned by the museum was – according to Rosbach – entirely useless for teaching, and therefore unsuitable for a university museum, which, at the same time, lacked items necessary for teaching classical archeology. Ritschl's acquisition of miniature copies of Greek original artefacts (described above) was subject of particularly harsh critique. Wrocław's cast collection was also negatively assessed by the German classical archeologist Eduard Gerhard. Taking over the management of the institution, Rosbach also noted the lack of scientific catalogue of the collection. His conclusions were summarized in a letter addressed to the relevant Ministry in 1858⁵⁶.

Because museum lacked sufficient exhibition space, Rosbach initially had to limit his own acquisitions. The first orders were made in 1857 in Dresden and Frankfurt, from where 13 objects were delivered in the same year, and in Munich. The latter order included 15 pedimental sculptures from the Aphaea temple in Aegina (in the 19th c. known as Athena's temple), the famous sculpture purchased by Ludwig I of Bavaria for the Glyptothek in Munich, which, however, only reached Wrocław in 1873. Before any new acquisitions were



⁵³ See J. Kinne, *Archeologia...*, p. 276.

⁵⁴ J. Bauer, *Gipsabguss-Sammlungen an deutschsprachigen Universitäten. Eine Skizze ihrer Geschichte und Bedeutung*, "Jahrbuch für Universitätsgeschichte" vol. 5 (2002), p. 119.

⁵⁵ See J. Kinne, *Die klassische...*, pp. 222–223.

⁵⁶ See *ibidem*, pp. 314–315, footnote 913.

5. Statue of Athena, a plaster cast from the collection of the Wrocław University Museum. Photo: W. Małkowicz

made, the museum needed a reform and a significant extension of its exhibition space. Rossbach's efforts were supported by the curator of the University, baron Johann Eduard von Schleinitz (1798–1869) and the general director of the Royal Museums in Berlin, Ignaz von Olfers (1793–1871), an active patron of plaster cast collections in Prussian universities⁵⁷. With their assistance, the objects unrelated with antiquity were gradually separated both legally and organizationally, and then transferred to newly created museums in Wrocław. In this way, Rossbach gained much needed space for antiquity collection, which finally spread over the whole museum building, including the radically restructured ground floor. After the museum took over, in 1861, the collection of original antiques, including over 300 mainly Greek objects, collected by Wrocław-based architect Eduard Schaubert over the twenty years he spent in Athens⁵⁸, Rossbach suggested, and was granted permission to transform the Royal Museum of Art and Antiquity into the Archeological Museum at the Royal University in Wrocław.

Rossbach, for whom the academic Museum of Art in Bonn was, just like for his predecessors, a model to strive for, made sure to stay up to date on the new trends in classical archeology and archeological collections of other university museums, making new orders accordingly. He also procured lists of plaster casts available in important national and international cast workshops. As a result, by 1861, with extra funds and savings from the annual income, the collection of antique art copies held by the university museum in Wrocław grew by one third⁵⁹. The first catalogue of plaster cast objects prepared by Rossbach in that year lists 328 items⁶⁰. The new acquisitions, apart from the copies of sculptures from Aegina, mentioned above, included replicas of the statue of *Apoxyomenos* from the Vatican Museums, discovered a few years earlier, in 1849⁶¹, the upper part of the statue of *Niobe* from Florence, both preserved until today [Figs. 3–4], or *Apollo of Tenea* kept in Glyptothek in Munich, an excellent example of Greek archaic sculpture. After many journeys, which brought him to visit many European university museums, Rossbach noted that his institution was second only to Bonn in Germany, a leading country in that discipline at that time⁶². Still, despite many efforts, there were gaps in the Wrocław's collection, which prevented satisfactory presentation of the development of antique art in then preferred chronological manner. Apart from the miniatures from Parthenon's decorations (see above), there were no copies of much sought after antiquities dating from classic stage of Greek art, which, according to Rossbach, were in possession of all other university museums he had visited. The director's wish list of that time included mostly copies of relief decorations from Erechtheion, the Temple of Athena Nike, the Temple of Zeus in Olympia and the Temple of Apollo Epicurius in Bassae, which he saw in University museums in Bonn and nearby Leipzig⁶³. In order to achieve the set objective, Rossbach decided to



⁵⁷ See *Chronik...*, p. 88.

⁵⁸ For more information on Schaubert's collection see **A. Kubala**, *Philhellenic Attitudes. Eduard Schaubert's Wrocław Collection: An Account of Its Antiquities and the Circumstances of Its Formation*, „Journal of the History of Collections” 2019, No. 2.

⁵⁹ See *Chronik...*, p. 88.

⁶⁰ **A. Rossbach**, *Verzeichniss...*

⁶¹ See **B. S. Ridgway**, *Hellenistic Sculpture III: The Styles of ca. 100–31 B.C.*, Madison 2002, p. 74.

⁶² See *Chronik...*, p. 88.

⁶³ See **J. Kinne**, *Die klassische...*, pp. 320–321.





6. Metope with a representation of Perseus killing Medusa, a plaster cast from the collection of the Wrocław University Museum.
Photo: W. Małkowicz

spend the entire museum budget on new casts, completely ignoring the so-called *vaterländische Altertümer*, i.e. local ancient artefacts, on which the museum had spent quite substantial funds since its establishment, but which were, so far, not used during lectures on archeology⁶⁴. As a result of such financial policy, over the next several years the museum acquired plaster cast copies of many masterpieces of Greek art of the 5th c. B.C., and sculptural objects from other periods. The second collection catalogue, published in 1877, Rossbach listed replicas of classical artworks such as *Discobolus*, *Doryphoros*, *Athena Lemnia* (with added head, based on another sculpture of the so-called *Athena Giustiniani* [Fig. 5]) and a Caryatid of Erechtheion⁶⁵.

We should also add copies of two metopes from the Temple of Zeus in Olympia, two relief boards from the inner frieze of a *cella* in Basae, and a board from the parapet of the temple of Athena Nike from Acropolis in Athens⁶⁶, bearing ornaments that Rossbach was especially keen to have in the collection. The new acquisitions that he reported on with much enthusiasm were also a copy of the decoration of the so-called Lion Gate of Mycenae and the casts of archaic objects: metopes from Selinunt [Fig. 6], relief decoration of the so-called Harpy Tomb of Xanthos⁶⁷.

Rossbach's catalogue from 1877 lists as many as 439 plaster casts arranged chronologically, according to the fashion, which was also reflected in the way the items were exhibited in seven museum rooms. Two rooms were devoted to archaic art, three to classical art (including art work by Phidias, Polykleitos, Scopas, Praxiteles and Lysippos), the penultimate room contained copies of Hellenic objects and the last room – the Roman ones⁶⁸. For comparison, the catalogue of the University museum in Munich made in the same year 1877 listed only 302 items⁶⁹.

At the turn of 1879 and 1880 new precious acquisitions were brought to Wrocław: casts of sculptures discovered since 1875 by the team of Ernst Curtius in Olympia – Praxiteles' *Hermes and the Infant Dionysus* and Paeonius' *Nike*, as well as copies of 6 heads of pedimental sculptures and three other metopes from the temple of Zeus. Later, in 1880-1881, Rossbach managed to procure 19 other casts, including copies of sculptures from Olympia and artworks discovered during German-led excavations in Pergamon since 1877. Many of these casts were made simultaneously for the university Museum of Art in Bonn and Wrocław⁷⁰. It was perhaps still under Rossbach's management, that the museum acquired a plaster cast of the statue of the Charioteer from Delphi (the so-called *Auriga*), discovered in 1896 by a French research expedition led by Jean Théophile Homolle⁷¹. Since the museum documents are missing, we cannot be entirely sure about those. What we do know is that between the last effort at cataloguing the cast collection in 1877 (see above), until Rossbach's death in 1898, the collection was enlarged by 100 more items⁷².



⁶⁴ See *ibidem*, p. 323.

⁶⁵ See A. Rossbach, *Das archäologische...*, p. 20, No. 75, p. 33, No. 121, p. 24, No. 98, p. 37, No. 131.

⁶⁶ See *ibidem*, p. 21, No. 77–78, p. 34, No. 127, p. 36, No. 128.

⁶⁷ See J. Kinne, *Die klassische...*, p. 327. See also A. Rossbach, *Das archäologische...*, p. 5, No. 10, p. 7, No. 11–12, p. 11, No. 30–41.

⁶⁸ See A. Rossbach, *Das archäologische...* The outline of rooms within the museum is held at the Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz in Berlin; reproduction – see J. Kinne, *Die klassische...*, p. 274.

⁶⁹ See H. Brunn, *Kurzes Verzeichniss des Museums von Gypsabgüssen klassischer Bildwerke in München*, München 1877.

⁷⁰ See J. Kinne, *Die klassische...*, p. 332, footnote 960–961.

⁷¹ See M. L. Bernhard, *Sztuka grecka V wieku p.n.e.*, Warszawa 1970, p. 180.

⁷² A. Kubala, U. Bończuk–Dawidziuk, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

Conclusions

Roszbach's efforts spanning his forty years of work as the museum director, aiming at expanding the collection of antique art casts, by the 1870s made the university museum in Wrocław a significant institution, boasting one of the richest collections of plaster casts held by German universities. The collection, just like the whole practice of systematic collecting of casts within German University museums, started in the first decades of the 19th c., and were based on the models established in the second half of the last century in Göttingen (see above). Starting the collection and its gradual expansion were closely linked with the increasing importance of classical archeology as a field of study and shaped by the reforms introduced by von Humboldt (see above), including the curriculum and the ways of teaching. This makes Wrocław one of those academic centres of the 19th c. Germany, where enthusiasm for classical antiquity had – from the very beginning of the century, when it became clearly noticeable – decidedly more scholarly and educational character than, e.g. in Great Britain, where the focus was more on shaping public tastes in ancient Greek art, and where most of the academic collections of antique art copies only emerged over the last two decades of the 19th c.

It seems that we may assume that plaster cast collections of antique art held by all European university museums looked the same in terms of their composition and the way items were displayed. The development trajectory of Wrocław's academic cast collection described above points out to its similarity to other such collections at European universities. It was, therefore, typical of the period in which it was created, and thus allows us to trace the whole trend of selection of casts ordered by university museums not only in Germany, but across Europe. The emerging pattern is as follows: it starts with copies of the most famous artwork, kept in the greatest museum collections, especially sculptures described by Winckelmann, who considered them masterpieces and made them into a mandatory part of university collections, and leads towards priority given to copies of art objects discovered during archeological field research conducted in Greece on a regular basis since the 1870s. The changes to the process of plaster casts acquisitions that occurred over that century, the selection of art works, their placement in the exhibition spaces and their management testify to the growing body of knowledge over this crucial period in archeology, when it was shaped as a scientific discipline. The changes can also be seen as markers of wider transformations of cultural nomenclature in the early and late 19th c. Europe. In order to fully acknowledge the importance and popularity of plaster cast copies of antique art over that period, it is also worth noting that the demand for casts, increasing alongside the growing number of new university museums, was so great that over the 19th c., cast production became a large-scale enterprise. Moreover,

archeological missions in Greece, such as the German-led research in Olympia or French-led excavations in Delphi, apart from receiving licenses to conduct excavation research, also secured the right to make casting molds and copies of all their discoveries⁷³.

Many university-based collections of copies of antique art survived intact until today⁷⁴. Some of these are still, at the time of 3D models and prints, used for teaching, still fulfilling the role they had been assigned at the moment of their creation⁷⁵.

The collection based in Wrocław is also used for this purpose – it has been gradually extended by two other museum directors who succeeded Rossbach, namely Richard Foerster (1843–1922) and Fritz Weege (1880–1945). The collection is still used in academic teaching, even though a significant number of casts were destroyed towards the end of World War II, when the museum building where they were kept was bombed during the city's siege in spring 1945⁷⁶.

Słowa kluczowe

kolekcje muzealne odlew gipsowy, Wrocław, XIX wiek, filhellenizm

Keywords

museum collections, plaster cast, Wrocław, 19th century, philhellenism

References

1. **Anderson Jaanika**, *Reception of Ancient Art: the Cast Collections of the University of Tartu Art Museum in the Historical, Ideological and Academic Context of Europe (1803–1918)*, Tartu 2015.
2. **Bandurska Zofia**, *Królewskie Muzeum Sztuki i Starożytności*, [in:] *Muzea sztuki w dawnym Wrocławiu*, Ed. P. Łukaszewicz, Wrocław 1998.
3. **Bauer Johannes**, *Gipsabguss-sammlungen an deutschsprachigen Universitäten. Eine Skizze ihrer Geschichte und Bedeutung*. „Jahrbuch für Universitätsgeschichte” Vol. 5 (2002).
4. **Brunn Heinrich**, *Kurzes Verzeichniss des Museums von Gypsabgüssen klassischer Bildwerke in München*, München 1877.
5. **Büsching Johann Gustav Gottlieb**, *Antiken-Sammlung der Universität zu Breslau*. „Schlesische Provinzialblätter” 1824, No. 12.
6. *Chronik und Statistik der Königlichen Universität zu Breslau*, Ed. **B. Nadbyl**, Breslau 1861.
7. **Connor Peter**, *Cast-collecting in the Nineteenth Century: Scholarship, Aesthetics, Connoisseurship*, [in:] *Rediscovering Hellenism: the Hellenic Inheritance and the English Imagination*, Ed. G. W. Clarke, Assist. J. C. Eade, Cambridge 1989.
8. **Graepler Daniel**, *A Dactylitheca by James Tassie and Other Collections of Gem Impressions at the University of Göttingen*, [in:] *Plaster Casts: Making, collecting and Displaying from Classical Antiquity to the Present*, Ed. E. Marchand, R. Frederiksen, Berlin – New York 2010.
9. **Heres Gerald**, *Die Anfänge der Berliner Antiken-Sammlung. Zur Geschichte des Antikensabinetts 1640–1830*, „Forschungen und Berichte” Vol. 18 (1977).



⁷³ See **P. Connor**, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

⁷⁴ See e.g. the collection in Bonn: *Abguss-Sammlung*, https://www.antikensammlung.uni-bonn.de/copy_of_abguss-sammlung (access date: 1.10.2021); the cast collection in Oxford – see **D. Kurz**, *op. cit.*; *Ashmolean...*

⁷⁵ E.g. the collection in Göttingen – see **D. Graepler**, *op. cit.*, p. 436; the collection in Munich – see *Museum für Abgüsse Klassischer Bildwerke*, <https://www.uni-muenchen.de/einrichtungen/sammlungen/abgussammlung/index.html> (access date: 1.10.2021).

⁷⁶ Only 56 items survived the bombing, excluding the casts of engraved gems – see **P. Chudzik**, *Sztuka starożytnego Egiptu. Kolekcja odlewów gipsowych ze zbiorów Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego / The Art of Ancient Egypt: The Collection of Plaster Casts at the University of Wrocław*, Wrocław 2017; **A. Kubala**, **U. Bończuk-Dawidziuk**, *op. cit.*

10. **Kinne Johanna**, *Die klassische Archäologie und ihre Professoren an der Universität Breslau im 19. Jahrhundert. Eine Dokumentation*, Dresden 2010.
11. **Kinne Johanna**, *Archeologia klasyczna / Classical Archaeology*, [in:] *Księga pamiątkowa jubileuszu 200-lecia utworzenia Państwowego Uniwersytetu we Wrocławiu / Commemorative Book for the 200th Anniversary of the Establishment of the State University in Wrocław*, Ed. J. Harasimowicz, t. 2: *Universitas litterarum Vratislaviensis 1811–1945*, Wrocław 2013.
12. **Kubala Agata, Bończuk-Dawidziuk Urszula**, *Sztuka starożytnej Grecji i Rzymu. Katalog odlewów gipsowych ze zbiorów uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego / The Art of Ancient Greece and Rome. The Catalogue of Plaster Casts in the University of Wrocław*, Wrocław 2018.
13. **Kurz Donna**, *Reception of Classical Art in Britain: An Oxford Story of Plaster Casts from the Antique*, Oxford 2000.
14. **Platz-Horster Gertrud**, *Zur Geschichte der Berliner Gipsammlung*, [in:] *Berlin und die Antike. Architektur, Kunstgewerbe, Malerei, Skulptur, Theater und Wissenschaft vom 16. Jahrhundert bis heute*, [exhibition cat.], Ed. W. Arenhövel, Ch. Schreiber, 22 April – 22 July 1979, Schloss Charlottenburg, Grosse Orangerie, Berlin 1979.
15. **Rosbach August**, *Verzeichniss der Gypsabgüsse und Originalien antiker Bildwerke im Königlichen Museum für Kunst und Altertum an der Universität Breslau*, Breslau 1861.
16. **Rosbach August**, *Das archäologische Museum an der Universität zu Breslau*, Breslau 1877.
17. **Schreiter Charlotte**, “Moulded from the best Originals of Rome” – *Eighteenth-Century Production and Trade of Plaster Casts after Antique Sculpture in Germany*, [in:] *Plaster Casts: Making, Collecting, and Displaying from Classical Antiquity to the Present*, Ed. E. Marchand, R. Frederiksen, Berlin 2010.
18. *Verzeichniss der antiken und modernen Bildwerke in Gyps auf dem akademischen Museum für Alterthum und Kunst in Breslau*, Hrsg. **F. Passow**, Breslau 1832.

Dr. habil. Agata Kubala, agata.kubala@uwr.edu.pl, ORCID: 0000-0002-4601-1958

Mediterranean archaeologist, graduate of the Institute of Archaeology of the Jagiellonian University, works at the Institute of Art History of the University of Wrocław. Her research interests include the art of ancient Greece and the Near East in the first millennium BC, as well as the reception of antiquity in the 19th century, with a particular focus on collecting ancient objects.

AGATA KUBALA (University of Wrocław) / Copying after masterworks of ancient art. The plaster cast collection of the Museum of the University of Wrocław and its ideological and academic context

Plaster cast collections of antique art, considered to be ideal form, constituted a significant part of public expositions in the European museums of the 19th c. The Museum of the University of Wrocław was then holding one of the biggest such collections among university museums in Europe. This paper presents the collection of plaster cast copies of antique art objects held at the University of Wrocław and contextualizes it within the tradition and purpose of academic art collections in Europe. To define the idea underpinning the creation and gradual expansion of Wrocław-based collection, and to present it against its European background, the paper also refers to cast collections held at other academic institutions. Wrocław-based collection is also contextualized within the philhellenic ideals setting the criteria for objects collected by the newly created museums and determining the ways in which these objects were exhibited.