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The influence and significance of monastic lace workshops on the development of Polish lace-making (as exemplified by the Benedictine Convent in Staniątki)

“Seclusion determined that the outside world – even that which was most close at hand, in the immediate vicinity of the convent, heard very little even about the most distinguished among them. Yet within the convent, seclusion meant that even humble services were remembered and cultivated over the centuries. The monastery thus has its illustrious and brilliant figures, forgotten by the world, but well known within the enclosed order at Staniątki.”¹ These words were written by Professor Bogusław Krasnowolski in his introduction to “A history of the Benedictine Convent in Staniątki.” No study has appeared hitherto concerning the artistic activity at Staniątki in the sphere of lace-making or likewise embroidery. Of course, one cannot fail to mention the great contribution of Professor Bogusław Krasnowolski in his history of the convent, or indeed the “The Inventory of the Benedictine Archives in Staniątki,” by Władysław Kolak, the Reverend Professor Józef Marecki and Sławomir Radoń. It is also worth recalling the numerous publications of Benedictine Sister Małgorzata Borkowka, a distinguished expert on the life of the order, who was awarded an honorary doctorate by the Catholic University of Lublin.

The Benedictine Convent of Nuns dedicated to St. Adalbert was founded in Staniątki around the year 1228 by castellan of Krakow Klemens of Ruszcza, a scion of a knightly family known as the *Gryfici* (Griffins).² Initially, the convent

¹ B. Krasnowolski, *Historia klasztoru Benedyktynek w Staniątkach*, Kraków 1999, p. 7.

² In academic studies one can encounter various hypotheses regarding the date of the appearance of the order in Staniątki. They are the years: 1200 (see also *Zarys historii klasztoru pp. Benedyktynek w Staniątkach*, Kraków 1905, p. 9), 1216 (see also *Pamiętka 700-letniego jubileuszu*

was intended to house 30 nuns, although in the post-Tridentine period, the number rose to about 50. Henceforth, there were minor fluctuations, but the number remained on average the same until 1774. After 1796, the convent in Staniątki was the only one in the Austrian partition of Poland that avoided complying with the quota imposed by the government. In 1900 there were 46 sisters, meaning that the convent counted among the most populous on formerly Polish terrain. In 1954, as a result of an order by the state authorities, the entire congregation of nuns at Staniątki was transferred to the formerly Bernardine monastery in Alwernia. However, after two years they returned to Staniątki. In 1989, the sisters numbered 26.³ Currently, that is in 2015, there are 15 nuns there. Isolated from the world for all the centuries that they were based there, the Benedictines influenced history, as is likewise marked in the sphere of Polish lace-making.

Handicraft skills were highly desirable and candidates for the order were often asked if they possessed such abilities. It was important to ascertain whether she would be able “to sow, embroider or carry out any other kind of handicraft? In which manner had she been taught? How many methods is she acquainted with?”.⁴ Apart from advantages connected with the adornment of liturgical vestments, any kind of knowledge relating to the execution of various types of handicraft was likewise of value as regards the possibility of teaching such a skill in convent schools.

The chronicles of the Benedictine congregation in Staniątki from the end of the 18th century provide information about a school which had apparently functioned there since the time of the foundation of the convent in the 13th century. Unfortunately, there are no other archival materials that confirm this [date of the school’s creation]. The earliest preserved record comes from the end of the 16th century, and it concerns the visit of Cardinal and Archbishop of Krakow Jerzy Radziwiłł in 1597. We learn from the document that young ladies (from

klasztoru staniąteckiego, nakładem pp. Benedyktynek w Staniątkach, 1929, p. 5), 1228 (see also B. Ulanowski, *O założeniu i uposażeniu klasztoru Benedyktynek w Staniątkach*, Kraków 1891, p. 3; B. Krasnowolski, *Historia klasztoru...*, op. cit., p. 27; M. Borkowska, *Benedyktyнки w Polsce*, [in:] *Encyklopedia katolicka*, t. 2, Lublin 1976, col. 256; J. Stabińska OsbaP, *Mniszki Pierwszej Rzeczypospolitej*, Kraków 2009, p. 55), 1235 (see also M. Borkowska, *Słownik mniszek benedyktyńskich w Polsce*, Tyniec 1989, p. 105; L. Rotter, *Duchowość i historia benedyktynek w symbolice dekoracji malarskiej kościoła w Staniątkach*, Kraków 2004, p. 45), 1238 (see also M. Borkowska, *Leksykon zakonnic polskich epoki przedrozbiorowej*, t. 2, Warszawa 2005, p. 398).

³ M. Borkowska, *Słownik mniszek benedyktyńskich w Polsce*, Tyniec 1989, p. 105–106.

⁴ M. Borkowska, *Życie codzienne polskich klasztorów żeńskich w XVII–XVIII wieku*, Warszawa 1996, p. 24.

the laity) were sent to the convent school for the purpose of being educated and brought up correctly, conforming with special regulations that were issued for this purpose. According to these, the pupils had to reside at the convent in separate quarters that were assigned to them, away from the nuns' cells, and the abbess was to appoint mistresses, whose duties were to teach the young ladies. Having reached the age of 16, all pupils were obliged to take the decision as to whether to stay in the convent, or return home. A recommendation of an inspector the following year, in 1598, calls for the opening of a second school, and "[...] all the lay pupils should study there who are either in the convent for instruction, or are still studying more minor matters."⁵ In the provisions set out as a result of that inspection we also find a stipulation that "they should obediently carry out work by hand, when time allows freedom from religious duties."⁶

The bishops' visits during this period of great reforms at the Staniątki convent had a very emphatic influence on the instruction of candidates for the order in the novitiate, stressing at the same time the separateness of the novitiate from the school for young ladies. This is echoed in the Staniątki version of the Benedictine regulations published in 1646. In this instance, the principles for the education of the girls were adopted from the regulations of the Chelms congregation, where the matter of education played a very important role. A school for girls from the laity was opened there by Abbess Morteska, who recommended that other convents should carry out similar activities.⁷

The Benedictines' establishment of boarding schools on the premises of convents, and consequently free education for young ladies, was their main duty, which together with prayer constituted the basis of the reformed Benedictine regulations, "pray and work" (*ora et labora*). The convent schools were above all concerned with the upbringing of the girls, shaping their morality through adherence to the tenets of obedience, modesty, piety, mutual respect, and love. A further task of the school was the preparation of pupils for the role of lady of the house, and so they were familiarized with practical and necessary women's work, the so-called amusements. They were taught home economics, i.e. sewing, embroidery, how to make stockings, and how to launder clothes and undergarments. Silence was enforced when pupils were learning how to carry out domestic chores, and in exceptional circumstances they were allowed to talk in a low voice, and the work was often broken off so that the pupils could engage

⁵ Archiwum Benedyktynek w Staniątkach, inventory no. 203, p. 199–202.

⁶ Archiwum Benedyktynek w Staniątkach, inventory no. 203, p. 210.

⁷ B. Krasnowolski, *Historia klasztoru...*, op. cit., p. 115.

in communal prayer. Besides learning handicrafts, an equally important branch of convent education was the imparting of intellectual knowledge. Pupils were taught how to read, write, count, and they were also furnished with a little Latin. They were likewise taught the catechism, which constituted one of the foundations of religious and intellectual education. Depending on the abilities of the pupils, classes in music and singing were also held.⁸ “This kind of convent education was above all characterised by great simplicity, deep religiosity, devout piety, great modesty and bashfulness, and careful diligence, especially in work by hand.”⁹

Thanks to thorough reorganisation at the turn of the nineteenth century, a normal convent school was created, significantly broadening its spheres of activity. It continued along these lines until the tragic years of Stalinist repression. Teaching at the school, in accordance with the official programme, took in religious education, Polish, German, elementary knowledge of history and geography, and there were also classes taught by a lay governess, preparing pupils for everyday life. The more gifted girls learnt how to play instruments (e.g. the piano) and took dancing lessons. Country girls learnt more practical matters, such as how to operate a spinning wheel, as advocated by a certain prefect from Bochnia called Mr Hoppe in 1788. A spinning reel, in all likelihood used for such teaching, has been preserved in the collections of the convent. Until 1855, a village school functioned at the convent, whose programme took in the teaching of reading, writing, counting, and handicrafts. Attendance at the normal school was fee-paying, and only girls from poorer families were maintained by the convent, thereby no profit was made from running the school. In this regard, the convent merely strove for the costs which it had taken upon itself to be balanced out by fees from the paying students and state subsidies.¹⁰

The running of schools by the Benedictine nuns at Staniątki was the most important aspect of the external activities of the convent, and with time it became one of their main and most important activities in general. The teaching of handicrafts, including lace-making, which particularly interests us in the present essay, developed here on a decidedly large scale, and likewise contributed to the development of Polish lace-making itself.

⁸ A. Szylar, *Działalność oświatowa benedyktynek sandomierskich w latach 1616–1686*, [in:] *Klasztor Panien Benedyktynek w historii i kulturze Sandomierza*, red. K. Burek, Sandomierz 2003, p. 76–77.

⁹ *Zarys historii klasztoru pp. Benedyktynek w Staniątkach*, Kraków 1905, p. 79.

¹⁰ B. Krasnowolski, *Historia klasztoru...*, op. cit., p. 232–239.

Lace is an openwork material that is created via braiding, and the twisting of thread with the use of a needle or also a set of bobbins, on which the thread is wound. At present, there are several different lace-making techniques, but only needle lace or bobbin lace can be counted among the authentic ones, as their development can be traced to the 15th and 16th centuries.¹¹ Other types of this branch of art which are commonly referred to as lace are: tatting,¹² crocheted lace¹³ and macramé.¹⁴ We also encounter such lacework in the Staniątki collections. These articles are principally works from the 19th–20th centuries that adorn liturgical vestments – albs, surplices and rochets, as well as ecclesiastical undergarments. Lace doilies made using the crocheting technique are also among the items mentioned in the Staniątki inventories. It is also worth drawing attention to the lace pattern-book in the aforementioned collections, where we find examples of crocheted lace, Teneriffe lace and macramé.

The fashion for lace began in Italy, and the craft soon spread to France, Belgium, Spain, and many other countries in northern and southern Europe. However, lace was also made in other parts of the world – Eastern Europe, China, India,

¹¹ *5000 years of textiles*, ed. J. Harris, London 1993, p. 34.

¹² *Tatting* (fr. *frivolities*) – a type of knotted lace. Tatting articles characteristically have openwork structures, which are created via thickly tied knots. They are mainly made from linen or cotton thread, with the aid of two (or more) specially designed tatting shuttles. The tatting technique came from Ancient Egypt and China. It was brought to Europe from the East and became popular primarily amongst wealthy ladies. The greatest blossoming of such material was in the 18th and 19th centuries, when it was mainly used for headwear, doilies and the adornment of tablecloths and clothing (see also M. Michałowska, *Leksykon włókiennictwa*, Warszawa 2006, p. 97; H. Hořáková, *Koronka frywolitkowa*, Warszawa 2005, p. 8).

¹³ *Crochet lace* – a lace group with openwork structures, of various thicknesses, made with the aid of a specially designed crochet hook. It is made from linen or cotton thread, or from floss silk in various colours. Crochet stitches are used to make combined lace. It broadly imitated needle lace, bobbin lace and filet lace. It was made from around the 18th century in France, and in the 19th century in Ireland, Belgium, Germany and Poland. It attained particular popularity at the turn of the 20th century. It is still made today in Belgium and Poland. It is mainly used as a decorative element for tablecloths, and the adornment of costumes. The technique is also used for doilies, shawls, copes, bedspreads and curtains (see also M. Michałowska, *Leksykon...*, op. cit., p. 201; J. Malinowska, *Wstawki i koronki szydełkowe*, Warszawa 1989, p. 3).

¹⁴ *Macramé* – this is a patterned openwork product that is made from especially stiff thread, thickly twisted string, or also from narrow strips or leather. It is created with the aid of a knot, together with a needle and sometimes a crochet hook. It is mainly used for interior decoration, but also for various types of nets, hammocks, bags and also certain openwork items of clothing, and textile adornments like galloons, fringes and tassels (see also M. Michałowska, *Leksykon...*, op. cit., p. 229).

the Philippines, as well as South and Central America.¹⁵ As regards the period during which such lace products emerged, there was a slight development of lace-making even in the Middle Ages, but the handicraft was still in the shadow of embroidery. Handicrafts functioned under the auspices of the Church, and likewise lace-making was primarily handled by monasteries. However, the real flowering of lace-making took place during the Renaissance. It was then that the art of lace-making emerged in Italy in its mature form, and over the next hundred years it spread across virtually all Europe. The next blossoming, which is widely referred to as the golden age of lace-making, ensued in 17th century France, during the reigns of Louis XIII and Louis XIV.¹⁶

During the 18th century, two other techniques for making lace became widespread, and these were the aforementioned tating, as well as lace knitting, which are differentiated by the use of a crochet hook and by a knitting needle. Nevertheless, neither of these techniques ever attained the high artistic level of needle lace or bobbin lace.¹⁷

This period also saw the advent of machine-made lace, which meant that a crisis began to occur for those involved in the making of handmade lace. It was only in the 19th century that handmade lace production began to gain momentum again, in spite of competition from factory-made lace, the quality of which was nonetheless very high. However, for the true connoisseurs of this craft, handmade lace had a completely different value than that which was machine-made.¹⁸

Bobbin lace belongs to the most interesting yet also difficult techniques of this artisanal handicraft. As the name itself indicates, this type of lace is made with the use of bobbins specially designed for the purpose, on which the thread is wound, via which the lace is created with the application of appropriate types of intertwining. Bobbin lace is made on a cylinder or also on a bobbin pillow and the so-called prickings attached to it, namely the lace pattern. The open-work background and the pattern are simultaneously created by the appropriate handling of pairs of bobbins, the number of which depends on the width and complexity of the lace pattern.

¹⁵ 5000 years..., op. cit., p. 34.

¹⁶ J. Kołaczkowski, *Wiadomości dotyczące się przemysłu i sztuki w dawnej Polsce*, Kraków 1888, p. 263.

¹⁷ I. Turnau, *Historia europejskiego włókiennictwa odzieżowego od XIII do XVIII wieku*, Wrocław 1987, p. 200.

¹⁸ M. Modes-Dudrewiczowa, *Koronki klockowe. Metodyczny podręcznik dla szkoły i domu*, Kraków 1937, p. 4.

Bobbin lace was famed and purchased with gusto, likewise in Poland. It was initially imported from Italy, but over time less costly products began to appear, chiefly Silesian. Ladies of the court learnt the technique of making bobbin lace thanks to Queen Bona, who brought teachers to Poland from Italy. The upshot of this was a huge demand for lace, which was used to adorn court dress as well as liturgical vestments.¹⁹

During the 17th century, other types likewise began to appear, namely Brussels lace, Blonde lace and Chantilly lace. In the 18th century, bobbin lace-making became one of the most popular types of needlework for women. Unfortunately, there is a lack of archival data about the guilds that brought together lace-makers. The sole bobbin lace workshop on Polish soil was launched in Grodno in 1777, but it went under as early as 1780, and its products did not play a considerable role on the market. One could order lace ruffles and jabots for men's shirts there, in accordance with the lace sample books of the workshop. The lace was made with cheap labour, yet it was nevertheless relatively expensive, as the raw material itself, namely thin yarn linen, was imported from Brussels. Besides, it was possible to buy Brussels lace for an only slightly greater price in well-stocked Warsaw shops. In the opinion of King Stanisław August, the lace made in Grodno was "on the level of the middling sort of Brabant lace."²⁰ As Kolaczkowski informs us in his publication *Particulars concerning industry and art in Old Poland*, gold and silver lace were produced at the Tyzenhaus workshop in Grodno at the end of the 18th century in the Brussels fashion.²¹

In Silesia, lace was widely used as a decorative element in folk costumes. The most popular type was bobbin lace, the production of which developed on a large scale at the turn 20th century in Upper Silesia and Cieszyn Silesia. The lace produced there was mainly used for insertions, ruffs, scarves and for the decoration of liturgical paraments.²²

As it was, the production of metallic lace developed much more widely in haberdashery guilds, and it was used for the adornment of national costumes, and it was likewise created via the bobbin technique.²³ This kind of lace was made with plaited metallic threads or thin metal plate, and also stretched wire, or thirdly with metallic plate. There was also silk needle lace, to which gold metallic thread

¹⁹ I. Turnau, *Historia europejskiego...*, op. cit., p. 213.

²⁰ J. Kamińska, I. Turnau, *Zarys historii włókiennictwa na ziemiach polskich do końca XVIII wieku*, Wrocław 1966, p. 566–569.

²¹ J. Kołaczkowski, *Wiadomości dotyczące się...*, op. cit., p. 263.

²² Cf. M. Rostworowska, *Śląski strój ludowy*, Wrocław 2001.

²³ I. Turnau, *Historia europejskiego...*, op. cit., p. 213.

was added, as exemplified by Spanish lace.²⁴ Metal lace was chiefly made for the purpose of adorning clothing and liturgical vestments. In the first half of the 18th century, panniers for skirts were trimmed with such lace, and men's and women's sleeves (the latter were called *engageantes*²⁵) were finished in this manner. This kind of lace was also used to trim chasubles, dalmatics, copes, veils and stoles, as well as for church banners and altar cloths.

One can find in the collections of the Benedictine Convent in Staniątki many liturgical vestments that were adorned with metal bobbin lace. These include: 1 cope, 32 chasubles, 13 dalmatics, 20 chalice veils, 26 stoles, 23 maniples as well as 19 burses and palls. A further key factor which appears to confirm that the lace was indeed made in this very convent are the prickings that have been preserved, in essence the lace patterns. There are 27 of these in the Staniątki collections. Thanks to knowledge about bobbin lace-making techniques, I was able to match certain prickings with actual articles. A fragment of guipure bobbin lace has also been preserved in the aforementioned collections, made from whitened linen threads, together with the relevant prickings. It is also worth noting the variety of lace patterns used to adorn vestments. To date it has been possible to distinguish patterns for metallic bobbin lace. One can find several of these in the collections of Museo Civico d'arte w Modenie.²⁶ A valuable relic that has been retained within the walls of the Staniątki convent is the preserved cylinder and bobbins that were utilised for the production of lace, which also confirms that such items were made by the nuns, or their pupils.

The exhibited examples of lace in the Benedictine Convent in Staniątki constitute just a small fraction of the treasures that have been preserved within these historic walls. Undoubtedly the number and likewise the quality of the lace testifies to the exceptional level of artistry which the sisters apparently attained, or likewise their pupils at the convent school. The lace-making activity of the Benedictines, like indeed that of many other orders of nuns, such as for example the Order of the Visitation of Holy Mary or the Clarisses (the Poor Clares), had a great significance and influence on the development of Polish bobbin lace. We are able to compare the designs that have been preserved, as well as actual examples of articles

²⁴ I. Turnau, *Historia europejskiego...*, op. cit., p. 198.

²⁵ *Engageantes (angażant)* – long lace cuffs, typically consisting of three different rows of increasing length. Widely used to decorate both men's and women's shirts from the middle of the 17th century. Engageantes were complemented by lace jabots and ribbons (see also E. i A. Banach, *Słownik mody*, Warszawa 1962, p. 10).

²⁶ See also *La Collezione Gandini Merletti, ricami e galloni dal xv al xix secolo*, a cura di T. Schoenholzer, I. Silvestri, Modena 2002.

of lace, with other articles that can be found in countless museums the world over, which provides hope that this sometimes disregarded and forgotten branch of artisanal craftsmanship becomes the subject of further research and studies.

In conclusion, I would like to quote an excerpt from a testament from the year 1916 with instructions listed prior to the death of a certain Mrs Flawia, who supervised the looking after and restoration of liturgical vestments in the Staniątki collection. "In the drawer of the cabinet near the stove are some very precious broad galloons, pure gold on both sides, although unpicked from a very old cope – there are several long pieces, God forbid that it be cut, it was intended to be sewn as the central strip of an ancient pink chasuble. There is a little old gold and silver lace, and various other pieces of lace, precious pieces of ancient galloons and fringes, which should not under be wasted under any circumstances. Please remember that ancient fabrics, lace and galloons are invaluable."²⁷

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Abstract

The running of schools by the Benedictine nuns at Staniątki was the most important aspect of the external activities of the convent and with time it became one of their main and most important activities in general. Free Education “Maidens lay” was their duty. That apartment next to the Prayer was the basic assumptions of the reformed Benedictine Rule “pray and work”.

This article presents selected examples of lace from the collections of the Benedictine monastery in Staniątki. That would represent only a small fraction of these treasures stored weight of Historical Walls. Undoubtedly the number and also the quality of the laces are evidence of extraordinary artistic craftsmanship. That works, probably made not only by nuns or monastery school students but also by their lacemakers, had a great importance and influence on the development of Polish lace tread.

Keywords

bobbin lace, lacemaker, Staniątki, Benedictine

Abstrakt

Wpływ i znaczenie przyklasztornych warsztatów na rozwój koronkarstwa polskiego (na przykładzie opactwa Benedyktynek w Staniątkach)

Prowadzenie szkół przez benedyktynki staniąteckie było najważniejszym aspektem zewnętrznej aktywności klasztoru, stając się z biegiem czasu jednym z jego podstawowych działań. Nauka robót ręcznych, w tym szczególnie interesujące nas koronkarstwo, rozwinęła się tu na dość dużą skalę i przyczyniła się do rozwoju polskiego koronkarstwa. Bezpłatne kształcenie „panien świeckich” było główną powinnością siostr, która obok modlitwy stanowiła podstawowe założenia zreformowanej reguły benedyktyńskiej: „Módl się i pracuj”.

W niniejszym artykule przedstawiono wybrane przykłady koronek ze zbiorów klasztoru Benedyktynek w Staniątkach, które to stanowią tylko niewielki ułamek skarbów przechowywanych w tych historycznych murach. Niewątpliwie ilość, a także jakość przedstawionych koronek świadczą o niezwykłym kunszcie artystycznym, które zapewne posiadały siostry zakonne lub też uczennice szkoły przyklasztornej, podczas gdy ich działalność koronczarska miała wielkie znaczenie i wpływ na rozwój polskiego koronkarstwa klockowego.

Słowa kluczowe

koronka klockowa, koronczarstwo, Staniątki, benedyktynki



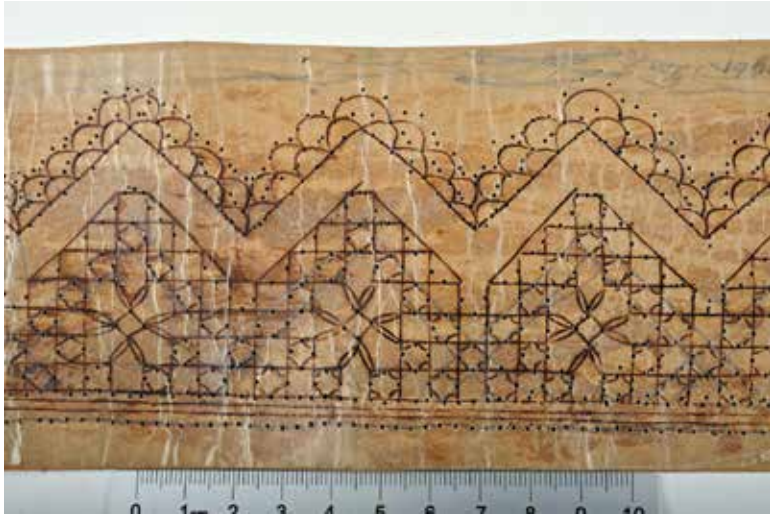
1. A piece of metal bobbin lace adorning the chasuble from the collections of Benedictine Convent in Staniątki, second half 19th century



2. A piece of metal bobbin lace adorning the chasuble from the collections of Benedictine Convent in Staniątki, 18th/19th century



3. A piece of metal bobbin lace adorning the chasuble from the collections of Benedictine Convent in Staniątki, early 20th century



4. A piece of pattern of torchon bobbin lace from the collections of Benedictine Convent in Staniątki



5. A piece of pattern of Slavonic bobbin lace from the collections of Benedictine Convent in Staniątki