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# THE STATUE OF CERES FROM THE ROYAL- UNIVERSITY COLLECTION OF PLASTER CASTS

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One of the more interesting collections of plaster models, as yet not thoroughly studied, is the Warsaw collection of plaster casts. In the to-date studies it has been analysed perceived by a museum curator, enabling identification of the objects composing the Collection. It is not until respective elements of the Collection are identified, their provenance, dating, and even the exact number oscillating over the centuries ascertained that it is hard to claim that it has been studied for the purpose of evaluating it from the museological perspective. Thus, it is all the riskier to jump to far-reaching conclusions on its impact on Polish culture and scholarship, particularly on the grounds of the not fully identified Collection.

The history of the Warsaw Collection has inseparably been bonded with the University of Warsaw and teaching methods applicable in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. What became essential at an Enlightenment University were specialized scientific cabinets gathering collections representing respective disciplines of science.<sup>1</sup> The most attractive ones could undoubtedly be seen in plaster cast collections. The exhibits they contained combined aesthetical and scientific qualities: each cast was an example of the art of a given era, while the collection as a whole helped illustrate the development of art over centuries. Cabinets offered the opportunity to gather reproductions of the major sculpture pieces under one roof, which would never be possible if the aim was to bring together the genuine pieces. Another important advantage was lower production costs: casts were cheaper than

from the perspective of history and history of art as a homogenous whole, a carrier of artistic culture. However, what is still missing are analyses focusing on basic facts as reproductions in stone, yet at the same time they allowed making twin copies retaining all the details of the original.<sup>2</sup>

It is only in the recent years that such collections have once again become objects of interest to researchers. Casts had ceased being perceived exclusively as copies of famous historic pieces, becoming the matter of studies, turning into museum objects in their own right, with their own respective history requiring a factual analysis. The collections amassed by universities, as well as by private individuals have been thoroughly studied, e.g., the collection of the University of Tartu Art Museum,<sup>3</sup> Jagiellonian University,<sup>4</sup> Ashmolean Museum,<sup>5</sup> Thorvaldsens Museum,<sup>6</sup> or the exhibits from the collection of the French Academy in Rome.<sup>7</sup> Scholars have studied the history of the above-mentioned plaster cast collections, they have identified their content, and their respective impact on scholarship and culture. The casts have become subject of interdisciplinary research in which historical issues are combined with chemical and physical analyses permitting the confirmation of many hypotheses. Who excel at this are researchers representing the Victoria and Albert Museum<sup>8</sup> and the British Museum.<sup>9</sup>

The roots of the Warsaw plaster cast Collection reach the times of Stanislaus Augustus and his art collection created with the intention to establish a centre to educate artists in Warsaw.<sup>10</sup> The King collected over 500 casts containing copies

of sculptures at the time regarded as canonical.<sup>11</sup> Following the King's death, the Collection became property of Prince Józef Poniatowski and his heirs, and subsequently, in 1811, it was purchased by the Chamber of Public Education of the Duchy of Warsaw to be assigned to the planned School of Fine Arts.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, in 1816, the Royal University of Warsaw was founded, and the Collection was transferred to its Department of Fine Arts. Placed in the Columned Hall in the Department's building as a cabinet of plaster models, in successive years it was gradually extended with new objects executed in prestigious European workshops.

The Warsaw Cabinet of Plaster Casts was opened to wider public, this perfectly in line with the phenomenon happening at numerous European universities. The collections planned to be used in the educational process were to broaden the horizons of students as well as of the general public, not necessarily acquainted with history of art.<sup>13</sup> Plaster cast collections constituted a permanent medium for communing with high culture, thus exerting a real impact on shaping aesthetic sensitivity and on the knowledge of the past.<sup>14</sup>

The history of the University of Warsaw, and thus the status of the majority of its collections, were correlated with Poland's political situation, yet the integrity of the Plaster Cast Collection remained untouched until 1940. The Cabinet operated uninterruptedly throughout the times of the Royal University of Warsaw, School of Fine Arts, Imperial University of Warsaw, and the University of Warsaw restored in 1915.

The situation of the Collection changed together with the outbreak of WWII when Nazi troops occupied the University premises. It was only in the summer of 1940 that following arduous efforts of Stanisław Lorentz, Director of the National Museum in Warsaw (MNW) at the time, the Germans authorized the transfer of the preserved figures to MNW's storages. The transportation of the Collection from the occupied University aimed at preserving it from destruction and dispersion, yet paradoxically to a degree it contributed to the end of the Cabinet. The Collection of Casts of antique works never returned to the University in the form that it existed for 123 years.

The idea to revive a coherent plaster cast collection emerged in the 1960s. Prof. Marek Kwiatkowski, Curator of the Royal Łazienki Museum, succeeded in obtaining authorization to transfer the majority of the preserved casts from MNW's storages to the Old Orangery with the intention to open a new gallery of sculptures. Having undergone conservation, the chosen pieces were placed in the renovated gallery.<sup>15</sup>

The dispersion of the exhibits and of the Cabinet's documentation (containing inventory books, invoices, correspondence) generates major difficulties in the research into the composition of the Collection and the identification of the prototypes for respective casts.

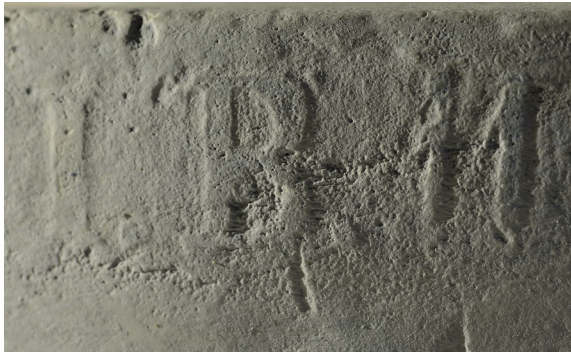
One of the objects whose model remained unidentified for many years is the 120-centimeter-high statue presenting a woman wearing a subtly folded peplos and himation covering the shoulders and the head. The figure featuring long wavy hair decorated with a crown, rests her body weight on the left leg; her arms have not survived till our times (the right raised, the left lowered, bent in the elbow). In the present lists of casts the figure is enumerated as a 'Vestal



1. Plaster cast of a statue of a veiled woman, Columned Hall (Faculty of History, University of Warsaw), Photo: Monika Dunajko

Virgin', thus when attempting at attributing it the proper original the first step was to trace archival inventories in order to find appropriate records. Casts of sculptures showing a Vestal Virgin appeared already in the first University inventories written down as of 1820 by Prof. Antoni Blank to be later consistently recorded in the Cabinet's documentation until the outbreak of WWII Curators enumerated two fully detailed Vestal Virgin figures, however, none of them referred to the discussed cast.

The next research stage consisted in confronting the Accession Numbers placed on the statue with the documentation in question. On the front part of the base, hidden under the layer of paint remaining after the conservation in the 1960s,<sup>16</sup> the following number can be discerned: 'I.B.11', which actually corresponds with the system of marking



2. Accession number placed on the cast base, Photo Monika Dunajko

casts introduced around 1838.<sup>17</sup> Thanks to the description by Feliks Paweł Jarocki and the notes entered in the inventory by Zygmunt Batowski it is clear that the Roman figure 'one' refers to fully detailed statutes, letter 'B' marks casts purchased in Paris in 1820 or 1830, while '11' is an ordinal number.<sup>18</sup> The information provided by the Accession Number, preserved on the object is completed by the casting stamp placed on the figure base. Earlier analyses confirm that this type of markings identified copies cast in the prestigious casting workshop at the Louvre in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century by François-Henri Jacquet, royal caster in 1816–1848.<sup>19</sup> A high quality of the cast is also testified to by gentle lines, traces of the connections of mould tenons visible on the statue's surface.<sup>20</sup>

The figure first appeared in Prof. Blank's inventory: '[group] XXXIII continued to arrive. According to the rescript of the Government Committee on Religion and Public Education dated 5 August 1830',<sup>21</sup> as a statue of Ceres purchased for 50 francs. The identity of the cast is also confirmed by sales catalogues of the Louvre atelier from the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century. Interestingly enough, at the time the Paris casting shop did not offer any casts showing a Vestal Virgin.<sup>22</sup>

Regrettably, the identification of the cast maker as well as of the year and place of its production did not translate into the identification of the cast's model. No contemporary catalogue of the Louvre features a Ceres statue matching the Warsaw cast. Numerous doubts were also raised whether the figure pertained to the Graeco-Roman world owing to the woman's face not complying with the canon's of female beauty applied in antiquity. The next challenge was the figure of the cast maker himself. Jacquet made copies of both exhibits that were at the Paris Museum and sculptures from his private collection. It is likely that in order to boost the prestige and the prize of the casts of the works from his own collection, he would stamp them with the stamp of the Louvre. For that procedure he was dismissed as the royal cast maker in 1848.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, the question arose whether the Warsaw Ceres was truly the copy of a work from the famous Museum.

The process of ascertaining the model for the cast in question was aided by the drawing copy of the sought after statute in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century publication by Frédéric de Clarac serving as iconographic documentation of sculptures to be found in famous European museums.<sup>24</sup> An additional advantage of the publication is the completion of the illustrations

of catalogued art pieces with the accession numbers of the museums they were kept at. This allowed to finally localize to model of the analysed figure. The original of the sculpture is property of the Louvre. Dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, the exhibit originally came from the Borghese Collection, and its acquisition is associated with the infamous and controversial purchase from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>25</sup>

The Rome's branch of the Borgheses boasted one of the most prestigious collections. Its art pieces, just like the luxurious suburban villa which housed them<sup>26</sup> enchanted and inspired artists and art enthusiasts of the time.<sup>27</sup> The popularity the property enjoyed was boosted by its renovation, lasting for almost 20 years, initiated in 1775<sup>28</sup> by Prince Marcantonio IV Borghese and his architect Antonio Asprucci. The layout of the galleries at the Casino and Museo di Gabii<sup>29</sup> significantly increased interest in collecting and the development of contemporary public museums. The fame of the villa and the masterpieces it housed reached Napoleon Bonaparte himself;<sup>30</sup> even before becoming a dictator, the latter had been famous for his love of antiques.<sup>31</sup> Having become acquainted with the art masterpieces amassed in the villa, in May 1806, he instructed Dominique Vivant Denon,<sup>32</sup> Director of imperial museums, and Ennio Quirino Visconti,<sup>33</sup> imperial antiquarian, to prepare the purchase of one of the major collections. It was Prince Camillo Borghese, Marcantonio's son, at the same



3. Casting shop stamp placed on the cast base, Photo: Monika Dunajko

time Napoleon's brother in law, who owned the Collection at the time. On 27 September 1807, Bonaparte issued a decree with whose provisions the aristocrat was almost forced to sell a part of the family collection to Napoleon: the part containing 695 items to be precise, for 13 million francs.<sup>34</sup> The acquired works, including the prototype of the Warsaw Demeter<sup>35</sup> valued at 3.000 francs, formed the Borghese Collection at the Louvre.

Thanks to the catalogue of the sculptures from the villa by Visconti and Luigi Lambertti we know that the model of the analysed cast was not merely the figure showing goddess





4. Drawn copy of the Ceres statue by Frédéric de Clarac, F. de Clarac, *Musée de Sculpture antique et moderne*, Vol. 3, Paris 1821–1853, Fig. 754

Ceres kept in the Collection. The publication mentions five other statues; all of them were sold to Napoleon.<sup>36</sup> They all share a certain resemblance: a figure posed in contrapposto, its hand of a slightly bent arm holding attributes characteristic of the earth fertility goddess.

The sculpture having served as the model for the cast purchased by the University of Warsaw is most likely one of the muses from a group by Philiskus of Rhodes.<sup>37</sup> Such attribution is suggested by the meticulous approach to the robes: through the crosswise pleats of an almost transparent coat rhythmically draped material can be seen.<sup>38</sup> The pose and the arrangement of the body show that the statue is an example of the so-called Hera Campana variant. Dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC and purchased for the Louvre in 1863 from the Giampietro Campana Collection, Hera Campana is considered the ideal of this presentation type.<sup>39</sup> There exist



5. Ceres statue, Photo © RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre) / Tony Querrec



6. Ceres statue, Photo © RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre) / Tony Querrec



7. Hera Campana, the Louvre, Photo: Monika Dunajko

numerous replicas, or, better said, variants of this category of sculptures, however, it is impossible to judge whether they all drew inspiration from a single original or from several ones. The robes' arrangement is always similar: a chiton or peplos rolled on a hip, a coat enshrouding the shoulders, with its rich pleats flowing down from the shoulder to the knee. The movement and posture shown may gently differ: the body rests either on the left or on the right foot, the right arm is raised and is often laid on a sceptre, while in other presentations it is lowered along the body, with the hand resting on the hip; the left arm can be either bent or dropped.<sup>40</sup> Sculptures of the type comply with *chiasmus*, the rule shaping the silhouette mass into an 'X', keeping the balance on both sides of the body: upper and lower, creating the illusion of movement.<sup>41</sup> Either uncovered or covered with a coat or veil, the figure's head can be gently directed to the left or right, more rarely shown *en face*. In the Roman period many pieces of the kind were created. Depending on the attributes they are shown with they have been identified as Hera, Demeter, Tyche, one of the muses, a Vestal Virgin, or Isis.<sup>42</sup> Apart from the statue whose cast is in Warsaw, the examples of such presentation type are: Ceres with wheat spikes, also from the Borghese Collection, Juno Regina from the Giustiniani Collection, or Isis-Persephone from the Archaeological Museum in Herakleion. In all the

four examples we observe a similar robe arrangement and an analogical counterpoised body composition.<sup>43</sup>

The challenge entailed in the interpretation of the sculpture which actually served as the prototype for the discussed cast in 1830 stems from its preservation state at the moment of its discovery: the piece was missing the head, the left arm, and the right forearm. Its current appearance, and as a result the identifying of the statue with the presentation of Ceres is owed to the reconstruction conducted by a modern artist, today unidentified,<sup>44</sup> this best seen in the face discussed above. All the attributes which would suggest earth fertility goddess are not genuine.

When analysing the preserved archival resources we cannot ascertain whether the creators of the Warsaw Cabinet suspected that the actual model for the discussed cast is to be found in a sculpture showing a muse. Neither are there sources available allowing to identify the plaster figure as a Vestal Virgin: that is the attribution the statue was given after 1945. Meanwhile, not only the crown of wheat spikes and poppy seed heads that the figure is holding, but also archival sources make the following thesis likely: the curators completing the University Collection commissioned a cast



8. Statue of Ceres with a crown of wheat stalks, Borghese Collection by Ennia Quirina Visconti, E.Q. Visconti, *Sculture del palazzo della villa Borghese detta Pinciana*, Vol. 2, Roma 1796, Fig. 10





9. Juno Regina, Giustiniani Collection, Galleria Giustiniana del Marchese Vincenzo Giustiniani, Vol. 1, Roma 1631, Fig. 125

which they identified as Ceres. Such a decision may have resulted from the real need for a sculpture showing this goddess, and not a Vestal Virgin or another figure known from the mythology. Resorting to the preserved archival records we have verified that prior to 1830 the University Plaster Cast Collection had not featured any casts showing Ceres. This particular purchase may suggest that the Collection's custodians followed a strictly specified policy of extending the Collection, complying with certain factual assumptions. At the initial stage of creating the University Cabinet the collection was added casts of sculptures representing the Graeco-Roman pantheon whose representations were missing. The purchases may not have followed exclusively aesthetical, but also factual choices. Interestingly, Jacquet made casts of at least three different statues of Ceres, but not of a single Vestal Virgin.<sup>45</sup> The reasons accounting for the acquisition of this very representation have not as yet been identified.

Hence the question arises how the discussed piece should be called today. The identification of the plaster statue should be analysed in relation to its 19<sup>th</sup>-century attribution when the Plaster Cast Collection was operational. Although its prototype may have been a muse representation, for the modern artist the sculpture provided merely a departure point to create a statue of Ceres which was purchased for the Warsaw collection. Therefore, the discussed plaster figure should be today identified as Ceres.

Incidentally, the sculpture of the goddess, similarly as other casts from the University Collection served as inspiration for

many 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-century pieces of fine arts and architecture, this perfectly illustrated by a sophisticated sculptural programme of the façade of Józef Grodzicki's tenement house in Krakowskie Przedmieście Street. Among the 14 *all'antica* statues placed in the balustrade attic and executed by graduates of the School of Fine Arts, there was also a copy of the discussed piece.<sup>46</sup>

From the 1960s the statue was regarded by museum curators to have been a copy of an 18<sup>th</sup>-century *all'antica* work. Neither was it included in the publication by Marta Korotaj and Tomasz Mikocki containing a catalogue of casts of exclusively ancient pieces in the Royal-University Collection.<sup>47</sup> The study authors must have not considered the statue to have been a copy of an ancient sculpture. Nonetheless, in the light of the current studies it is certain that despite later partial reconstructions, Ceres is an ancient statue.

The above discussion serves to demonstrate how the study of the history of one cast extends our knowledge of the entire collection. Identification of a piece and of its provenance can help us better understand the curators' motivations behind the purchase of definite exhibits, as well as the impact of museum exhibits on shaping Polish culture and scholarship.

In 2012, the cast returned to the University of Warsaw as a deposit of the Royal Łazienki Museum.



10. Isis-Persephone, Archaeological Museum in Herakleion, Wikimedia Commons

**Abstract:** One of the more interesting collections of plaster prototypes, as yet not thoroughly studied, is the Warsaw collection of plaster casts. In the to-date studies it has been analysed from the perspective of history and history of art as a homogenous whole, a carrier of artistic culture. However, what is still missing are analyses focusing on basic facts as perceived by a museum curator, enabling identification of the objects composing the collection. The present paper aims at discussing the issues related to the identification of the works' models and interpretation of

works which come from university museums' collections. The case study selected will concern one of the statues from the collection of the University of Warsaw. A detailed study of the goddess demonstrates how an analysis of one object can extend the knowledge of a whole museum collection. An accurate identification of the object and of its provenance allow us to better see custodians' motivation for the selection of definite exhibits, and to enhance our understanding of how museum exhibits shape Polish culture and scholarship.

**Keywords:** University museum, provenance, University of Warsaw, collections, collection history, plaster cast.

### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> M. Mycielski, 'Uniwersytet Królewski 1816-1831', in: *Dzieje Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego 1816-1915*, ed. by T. Kizwalter, (Warsaw: 2016), p. 78.
- <sup>2</sup> Making plaster casts began already in antiquity. Such objects were used mainly as models for making copies of marble statues. See J. Anderson, *Reception of Ancient Art. The Cast Collection of the University of Tartu Art Museum in the Historical, Ideological and Academic Context of Europe (1803-1918)*, (Tartu, 2015), pp. 21-23.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibidem.
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- <sup>13</sup> S. Morinière, 'Les gypsothèques universitaires, diffusion d'une Antiquité modèle', *Anabases*, 18 (2013), (p. 72).
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- <sup>15</sup> M. Kwiatkowski, *Nowe dzieje Starej Pomarańczarni*, (Warsaw: 2007), pp. 21-37.
- <sup>16</sup> Inventory record of object ŁKr 601, Royal Łazienki.
- <sup>17</sup> Archives of the National Museum in Warsaw, List of Plaster cabinets made by Feliks Paweł Jarocki, Cabinet Director after former University in 1838, 3c.
- <sup>18</sup> University of Warsaw Library, Manuscript Section, University of Warsaw. Inventory. History of Art Unit, MS ACNO 331, pp. 1-3.
- <sup>19</sup> M. Dunajko, 'Plaster Casts of Ancient Sculptures From the Collection of the University of Warsaw. Markings and Origins', *Światowit* 59 (2020), 189-204.
- <sup>20</sup> In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, traces of tenons were left on purpose to confirm the product's high quality. See E. Payne, op. cit., pp. 27-29.
- <sup>21</sup> National Museum in Warsaw, Iconography Department, MS 1224, List of Busts and Various Figures in the custody of Professor Blank of the Royal-Warsaw University.
- <sup>22</sup> Archives des musées nationaux, Inventaire indiquant le prix des plâtres moulés sur l'antique qui se vendent à la collection du Musée Royal, Atelier de moulages du Louvre (série Y) 20150043/3.
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- <sup>26</sup> J.L. Martinez, 'Avant-propos', in: M. Fabrèga-Dubert, *La collection Borghèse au musée Napoléon*, vol. 1, (Paris: 2009), p. 11.
- <sup>27</sup> C. Paul, *Making a Prince's Museum. Drawings for the Late-eighteenth-century Redecoration of the Villa Borghese*, (Los Angeles: 2000), pp. 8, 137.
- <sup>28</sup> Eadem, 'Introduction: The Grand Tour and Princely Collections in Rome', in: *The First Modern Museums of Art. The Birth of an Institution in 18<sup>th</sup>- and Early 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Europe*, ed. by Carole Paul, (Los Angeles: 2012), pp. 11-13.
- <sup>29</sup> The Museum was created in order to display sculptures uncovered during Gavin Hamilton's excavations in ancient Gaii in 1792. See F. Haskell, N. Penny, *Taste and the Antique*, (New Haven: 1981), p. 113.

- <sup>30</sup> The display concept and the educational programme used in the Villa Borghese were later adapted by the museums which were subsequently founded, including the Louvre. See C. Paul, *Making a Prince's Museum...*, p. 78.
- <sup>31</sup> A. McClellan, 'Musée du Louvre, Paris: Palace of the People, Art for All', in: *The First Modern Museums of Art...*, pp. 225-226.
- <sup>32</sup> In 1798, having been personally invited by Napoleon, Denon participated in the expedition to Egypt representing the Commission of Science and Arts. See K. Michałowski, *Nie tylko piramidy... Sztuka dawnego Egiptu*, (Warsaw: 1974), pp. 16-20.
- <sup>33</sup> The choice was not accidental. Earlier, Visconti had been responsible for cataloguing the collection of sculptures in the Villa Borghese, at the time being property of Marcantonio IV Borghese, Camillo's father. See. C. Paul, *Making a Prince's Museum...*, pp. 2, 113.
- <sup>34</sup> J.L. Martinez, *Avant-propos...*, pp. 11-14.
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- <sup>46</sup> H. Kowalski, op. cit., pp. 137-166.
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