

SUMMARY

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 A HISTORY OF AN ALBUM: *POMNIKI KRAKOWA. SZTUKA I STAROŻYTNOŚĆ* [THE HISTORIC RELICS OF CRACOW. ART AND ANTIQUITY] = *MONUMENTA ANTIQUAE ARTIS CRACOVENSIA* BY KAROL BEYER AND MELECJUSZ DUTKIEWICZ

Since the invention of photography attempts had been made to develop a technique that would enable to reproduce photographic images using the printing press. One of such methods, devised in the second half of the nineteenth century, was collotype, a process in which the photographic image was printed from a plate covered in bi-chromated gelatin. A person who was particularly interested in photomechanical techniques on Polish lands was Karol Beyer. He had experimented with such processes from the 1850s, and in 1870, along with Melecjusz Dutkiewicz, opened the first collotype printing studio on Polish lands. One of their earliest productions was the first (and only) instalment of an album entitled *Pomniki Krakowa. Sztuka i starożytność* [The Historic Relics of Cracow. Art and Antiquity] = *Monumenta antiquae artis Cracoviensia*, published by Cracow Scholarly Society in 1872.

An idea of publishing the album was conceived during the conservation treatment of the Veit Stoss Altarpiece in St Mary's Church, conducted since 1866. The – then unfulfilled – intention to execute a photographic record of the altarpiece was resumed by the Section on Archaeology and the Fine Arts of Cracow Scholarly Society which expanded the planned book by inclusion of other historic objects from Cracow. The photographer Walery Rzewuski, who had been commissioned to execute the album, did not fulfil the agreement, likely because of technical difficulties, and the offer to carry out the work was put out to tender which was won by the sole bidder, the studio of Beyer and Dutkiewicz. The photographers came to Cracow in August 1871 and took photographs intended to be published in a few instalments of the *Pomniki*. The first of them, featuring five plates executed in collotype, came out at the beginning of 1872. The images showed: the Veit Stoss Altarpiece (three views), the tomb slab of Piotr Salomon in St Mary's Church and a silver altarpiece in the Sigismund Chapel in Cracow Cathedral. After Cracow Scholarly Society had been transformed into the Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1872, its newly established Commission on Art History confirmed an intention to continue the publication, but, apparently for financial or organisational reasons, never managed to bring it into fruition.

Archival sources are silent on the reasons that motivated the members of the Section when they made a decision to publish the album, but these may be inferred from the character of undertakings the association was involved in. The Section dealt with historic objects in the broadest sense of the word, conducting scholarly research and their

conservation treatment, among others, and employing in these activities, in various functions, reproductions of the works of art. The Section also initiated the publication of such reproductions (an example being the *Pomniki*), which responded at that time to an increasing demand for images depicting objects of Polish historic heritage. Of particular importance among various initiatives of this kind was the work published jointly by Aleksander Przewdziecki and Edward Rastawiecki, entitled: *Wzory sztuki średniowiecznej i z epoki Odrodzenia po koniec wieku XVII w dawnej Polsce* [Models of art in old Poland, medieval and from the Renaissance period, up to the end of the seventeenth century] (publ. 1853–1869). It seems that, just as the *Wzory*, also the *Pomniki* were intended mainly for people who researched art or were at least keenly interested in it. In their album, the members of the Section planned to reproduce primarily images of lesser known and hitherto unpublished objects, with emphasis on painting and sculpture from the medieval and early modern periods. The *Pomniki* differed from other similar contemporary publications in the technology of its production, which was based on photography, and consequently its reproductions were more faithful than those based on graphic or drawn images, a fact that was seen by contemporary reviewers as their crucial asset. Even though the album was never completed, Beyer and Dutkiewicz carried out what must have been the first photographic survey of historic objects on Polish lands conducted on a commission received from a scholarly institution.