

Stucco-ceilings with moulded ornaments in the Netherlands. The development of and influences from abroad on the 19th Dutch practise

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Abstract: This article focuses on the production of plaster ornaments in the 19th century. The article concludes with a special example in the Netherlands. From the Renaissance stucco ornaments on walls and ceilings were partly cast. In the course of the 19th century, ornaments for stucco ceilings and walls are manufactured on an industrial scale. Unique in the Netherlands in a country house in Wassenaar is the figurative frieze by the sculptor-stuccoist Wilhelm Dankberg from Berlin.

Keywords: casted plaster ornaments, W. Dankberg, Silberling, De Paauw

Techos de estuco con adornos moldeados en los Países Bajos. El desarrollo y las influencias del extranjero en la práctica holandesa del siglo XIX

Resumen: Este artículo se centra en la producción de adornos de escayola en el siglo XIX. El artículo concluye con un ejemplo especial en los Países Bajos. Desde el Renacimiento, los adornos de estuco en paredes y techos se fabricaban parcialmente en molde. A lo largo del siglo XIX, los adornos para techos y paredes de estuco se fabrican a escala industrial. Único en los Países Bajos en una casa de campo de Wassenaar es el friso figurativo del escultor-estucador berlinés Wilhelm Dankberg.

Palabras clave: adornos de escayola moldeada, W. Dankberg, Silberling, De Paauw

Tetos de estuque com ornamentos moldados na Holanda. O desenvolvimento e influências do exterior na prática holandesa do século XIX

Resumo: Este artigo centra-se na produção de ornamentos de gesso no século XIX. O artigo conclui com um exemplo especial nos Países Baixos. Desde o Renascimento, os ornamentos de estuque em paredes e tetos foram parcialmente moldados. No decurso do século XIX, os ornamentos para tetos e paredes de estuque são fabricados à escala industrial. Único nos Países Baixos, numa casa de campo em Wassenaar, é o friso figurativo do escultor-estucador Wilhelm Dankberg, de Berlim.

Palavras-chave: ornamentos em gesso moldado, W. Dankberg, Silberling, De Paauw

Introduction

The first applications of cast plaster ornaments on stucco ceilings date back to the Renaissance, when the aim was to reduce the amount of work on the ceiling. In addition to his work as a craftsman with on-site modelling, the plasterer was able to apply repetitive elements simply with the aid of casts. The oldest applications in the Netherlands can be found in the Berckepoort in Dordrecht (Freling 1999: 234-240) [figure 1]. In the clay plaster ceiling from 1562, the lion's heads and flower buds are casts in plaster. In addition, the still wet plaster layer is stamped with images in intaglio. This combination results in an ornamented Renaissance stucco ceiling.



Figure 1.- Dordrecht Berckepoort. Renaissance clay plaster ceiling with stamped ornaments intaglio and casted lionheads and flowerbulbs, 1562. ©W. Freling.

Examples of coffered ceilings from the 17th century, the so-called Kölner Decke, can be found in various places in the Netherlands (Rinn 2010). In the old town hall of Zutphen, the repeating elements, lion heads and pearl necklaces have also been made in cast work [Figure 2]. In Plompstorengracht 11 in Utrecht, the rosettes, among others, were executed as castings (Van der Hoeve 2010).



Figure 2.- Zutphen oude raadhuis. In the hall stuccoed nudo bars with casted rosetts and lionheads 1639 stuccoworker Jan Craekenborgh van Cleef. ©W. Freling.

A completely different application of plaster casting are the cast chimney posts from the 17th century. In the havezathe De Eese in Eesveen around 1621, in Dekema State in Jelsum from 1622 and an unspecified place in Rotterdam^[1], which are the same casts of the chimney posts [Figure 3]. Specifications from the middle of the 17th century mention "baked, cast and plastered" posts. In Leiden, the 'master post-caster' Jeroen Henricx van der Mey (1616-1667) is active together with his brother Jan van der Mey (1611-?). In 1702, Jeroen's son was a member of the St. Luke's guild in Leiden as a 'beeltgieter' (Olde Meierink 2010). Apparently, in the 17th century, the market for plaster casts already had a size that justified such enterprises. Johannes le Francq van Berkhey puts it a century later in his Natural History of the Netherlands in 1771 as follows: "the art of plaster making and casting, brought over from Italy, is still alive and kicking here and is practised fairly accurately in Holland.... However, when it comes to making forms of sculpture, we have long since surpassed them. I know that most of the forms of sculptures that the Italians walk the streets with, come from our old Dutch sculptors. Van der Meij's famous plaster or plaster foundry in Leiden supplied them from time to time with forms and sculptures, which they applied all over the country...." (Le Francq van Berkhey 1771: 756; Freling 1993: 182).



Figure 3.- Dekema State. Chimney posts casted round 1622, overview. ©W. Freling.

Giorgio Vasari in his *Dell' architettura* already mentions wooden counter moulds. The mould is dusted with marble powder and then the mortar is knocked into it (Beard 1983: 12). After hardening, the mould is released and can be placed on the wall or ceiling after treatment. The other method is to hold the mould against the ceiling until the mortar has hardened.

P.N. Sprengel describes in 1772 that the plasterer makes serially cast parts during the winter period, to be joined together later on a ceiling. He also states that a plasterer is nothing more than a sculptor who decorates with plaster. A sculptor can do plaster work in case of need, provided he has sufficient knowledge of the material plaster (Sprengel 1772). A good example of this in the Netherlands are father

and son Ignatius and Jan van Logteren who are working in the last quarter of the 17th and the first half of the 18th century as sculptors and plasterers in Amsterdam and its surroundings (Fischer 2005) [Figure 4].



Figure 4.- Amsterdam Van Logteren stucco sculpture "Moderation" in the corridor of Herengracht 520. *In situ made sculpture in stucco and plaster, probably partly made in their workplace with some casted elements.* ©W. Freling.

Some years later, in 1780, the stuccoer Jacob Otten Hulsy mentions in his account to his client of the Teylers Museum in Haarlem that "by order of U Edn and Mr Leendert Viervant (architect) made Bootzeersels van Ionische en Corinthische Capiteelen levensgroot en voor de Steen en Beelthouwers verschillende Modellen gebootzeerd. And for the Plaffond in the Great Hall at the Foundation House decorated Lists, Modillons and Capitels formed and casted ...". followed in April 1781 "For stucco work done in the Great Hall of the Foundation House, for the Bootzeren, and casting of modillons, decorated frames, etc" and also in March 1782 "for cast plasterwork and further stucco work in the Staircase and the Great Hall of the Foundation House..." (Ter Molen 1978: 210-214) [Figure 5].

In the Netherlands, as far as is known, castings were still



Figure 5.- Haarlem Pieter Teylers House. Staircase with stucco sculpture and ceiling, First half of the 18th century made by Italian stuccoists. ©W. Freling.

used on a limited scale in the 18th century, but in England and France, during the 18th century, the production of moulds and casts went to specialists such as G. Jackson & Sons in London^[2] and Beunat (Beunat 1810-1812) in Paris (Nègre, 2006) [Figures 6 and 7]. This also led to an increase in scale in the 19th century, first in Germany and later in the Netherlands. In England and France, the number of suppliers increased further. Some important producers are in Germany Maile und Blerch königlichen Hofstuckateure



Figure 6.- London George Jackson Limited. General view of the workplace and storage of the wooden contra moulds. Jackson & Sons produced wooden contra malls by specialists woodcarvers. A complicated technique because of the three-dimensional thinking in reflection. ©W. Freling.

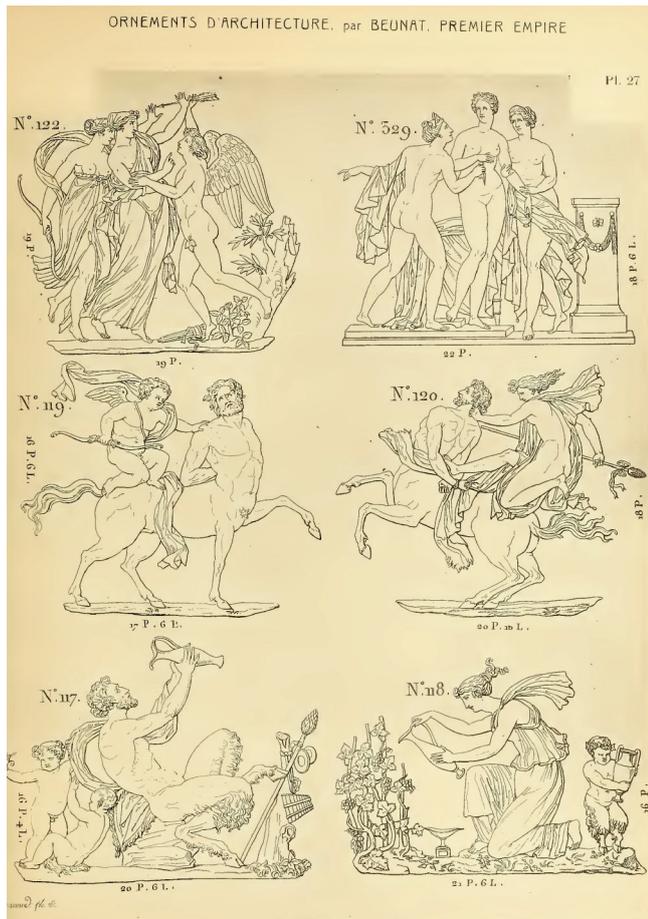
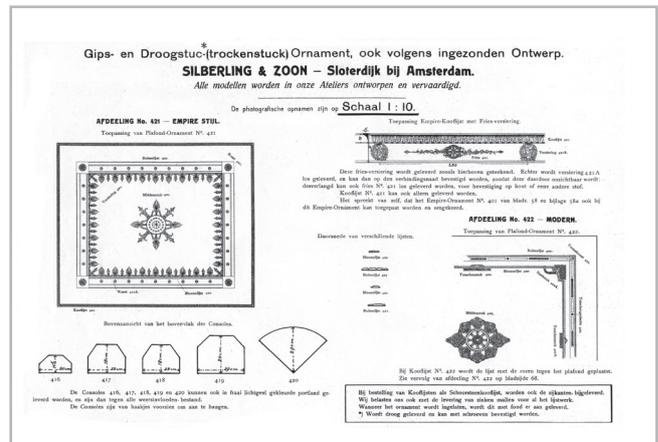
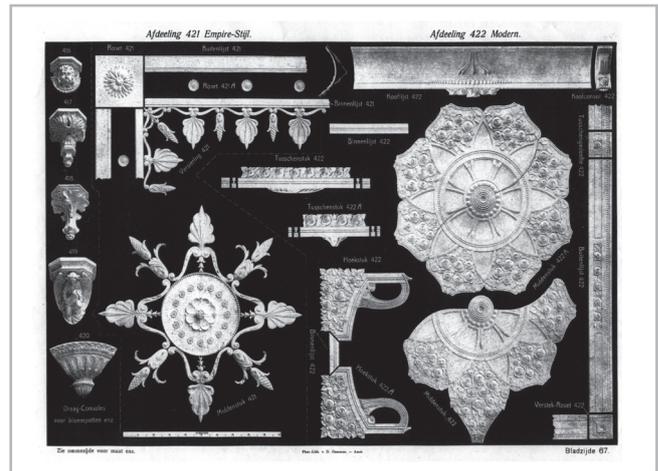


Figure 7.- Paris Beunat catalogue. Example from the catalogue plate 27. Ornaments D'Architecture par Beunat Premier Empire [4].

in Munich, Widmann & Dýckerhoff from Linz and Munz & Co in Göppingen, in France Legrand et Molinos and Wallet et Huber and in England Mabey, Hayles & Howe, Austin and Seeley and Stevensons of Norwich. In the Netherlands, the workshops of Lutters & Zonen in Utrecht, Stoeller Wz. in Arnhem and Busselman Ez. in Groningen are active on a local scale. Firms like Bennewitz & Co. (Catalog. 1890-1912) and Silberling & Son [3] in the Netherlands produce in Amsterdam and supply on a national scale. [Figure 8a and 8b] In sample sheets and catalogues they bring their products to the attention of architects, plasterers, interior designers and private individuals. In time, all producers offered their ornaments and frames in various materials such as cement work, plaster, artificial stone, papier-mâché and carton-pierre.

Plasterers' manuals devote much attention to the casting of models, ornaments and other decorations (Millar 1897; Bohnagen 1914; Poptie 1948). The scale on which this was done has not yet been charted. In restorations of interior stucco work the plasterer sometimes uses a combination of in situ modelling and the use of castings. For small ornaments he will have to rely on his own modelling skills, for larger pieces he will have called in the help of colleagues or, as mentioned earlier, he will have entrusted the work to sculptors.



Figures 8a y 8b.- 8a: Amsterdam Silberling catalogue. Example from the catalogue [6]. 8b: Amsterdam Silberling catalogue Instructions for the stucco-worker to order in combination of the measurements of the ceiling.

Cast plaster ornamentation, applications and collections in the first half of the 19th century

In the first half of the 19th century, drawing schools, following the example of their neighboring countries, built up plaster collections for educational purposes. These collections included sculpture collections, reliefs and also building excerpts and ornaments. The Academy of Fine Arts in Maastricht has built up a collection of almost 500 pieces since 1823. Other collections can be found in the Rijksmuseum of Antiquities in Leiden, Allard Pierson Museum, the Academy of Fine Arts in Amsterdam and the Central Museum in Utrecht, which houses a significant part of the Rijksmuseum collection. It is not known how extensive the collection of architectural ornaments is in these collections. It appears that the renewed interest in these collections is primarily focused on the sculptures and not (yet) on the building ornaments. Research into the frequent use of cast building ornaments in the architecture of the 19th and early 20th centuries is still in its infancy, at least in the Netherlands.

In England, collections can be found in the Victoria & Albert Museum (1852) and Sir John Soane's Museum (1822-1835) in London.

For Germany, Barbara Mundt in her book *Die deutsche Kunstgewerbemuseen im 19. Jahrhundert* (Mundt 1974) gives a detailed overview of craft collections in museums. Some of these institutions also had plaster casts that sold their forms and products by means of catalogues and price lists. Buyers included schools for educational purposes, private individuals to decorate their interiors or gardens, but also other museums to expand their collections. In addition, independent plaster foundries emerged to meet the rapidly increasing demand for construction plastics.

The fact that production in the Netherlands did not take place in isolation is shown by the ornament factories in the surrounding countries. At the beginning of the 19th century, a lively trade and industry of sculptures in cast plaster for collections, educational purposes and building plastic arises. Architects used sculptors and cast ornaments to meet the demand for these artistic products in and around the country houses, palaces. The plaster figures produced by the plaster foundries were also an important source for the zinc foundries in Berlin and the surrounding area, which made zinc casts of them. In *Europe und der Gips Formereien, Museen und Abgüsse*, Charlotte Schreiter puts it as follows:

“With the founding of the Berlin Plaster Foundry, which was established in 1819 under the name of *Königlich-Preussische Abgussanstalt* (Royal Prussian Institute for Castings), and which was clearly nationally oriented and at the same time was intended to promote the development of an industry, the proportion of castings made in Germany increased. The aim was to achieve greater independence from the Louvre’s casting workshop, the *Atelier de Moulage*, which dominated Europe. Even though the foundation was initiated by the all-important figure of the sculptor Christian Daniel Rauch (1777-1857), he remained for a certain period spatially and organizationally linked to his studio. The industrial production of casts began towards the end of the 18th century with the merging of various techniques and needs. With the restoration workshops of the late 18th century in Rome, new forms of work organization came to the fore. These studios, which served the Northern and Central European collector’s market, attracted skilled workers because of the large number of orders they received. They acted as disseminators of knowledge and technical skills and thus influenced sculptural technique throughout Europe” (Schreiter 2016).

For the Netherlands, the firm Silberling & Son is an important player in the market. Around 1860, the engineer J.C.L. Silberling started a plaster ornament and artificial sandstone factory in Amsterdam. Later, together with his son, he expanded his production in Amsterdam with plaster and dry stucco ornaments under the name Silberling & Son. During the company’s existence, he published various catalogue sheets in order to sell his products. The descriptions he included in the catalogue sheets reveal his technical training. These sketches are a

fantastic aid for the plasterer to apply the ornaments and frames from the Silberling collection in an art-historically responsible manner.

J. Silberling was educated in Delft at the Royal Academy for Educating Civil Engineers, founded by King William II in 1842. Undoubtedly, he was influenced not only during his training but also by the architects and teachers at the Academy in Amsterdam. After thoroughly studying the styles of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, he built up a collection of frames and ornaments to market on an industrial scale ^[5]. Looking through the catalogue sheets, it is striking that all the styles were carefully analysed by Silberling and adapted to the views of the nineteenth and later the early twentieth century. By not blindly copying a style, an own style image emerged that can be recognised by the expert. In this way Silberling left an important mark on our stucco ceilings of that era.

Due to the rapid growth in building production in the second half of the nineteenth century, the need for the industrial production of ornaments to decorate both facades and interiors also increased. Silberling & Son (from around 1870) and the firm Bennewitz & Co (from 1890), among others, responded to this need. The fact that time did not stand still at Silberling is evidenced by the later catalogue sheets, which also included Jugendstil, Art Deco and so-called “modern” ornaments. Plasterers in other towns and cities also supplied moulded ornaments. In Utrecht, for example, this was the firm of Th. Lutters, stuccoer, and ornament factory, and in Waddinxveen the factory Ruimzicht as cement and ornamental factory.

In the call for the return of the ornament to the building, following Karl Friedrich Schinkel (1781-1841), this craft from Prussia experienced a tremendous growth in Europe that continued until after 1900. Architects and artists were trained further at the Akademie der Künste in Berlin to demonstrate their craftsmanship in this richly ornamented architecture. One of them is the sculptor and plasterer Willem Friedrich Gustav Dankberg (Halle 9 October 1819 - 13 October 1866 Berlin).

In 1839 he left for Berlin and -became apprenticed to the sculptor Friedrich Wilhelm Holbein. He then entered the Akademie der Künste in Berlin, a lively and important environment after Munich for the arts in the middle and second half of the 19th century in Germany. In 1843, he started his own studio with two of his brothers in the Borsigschen Fabrik in Berlin-Moabit, a cultural cluster of artists and craftsmen. In this studio, he built up a huge sample collection of sculptures, busts, reliefs, friezes, Karyatids, columns, capitals, pilasters, consoles and architectural mouldings (Dohme 1876: 736-737). A series of attractive fountain and well sculptures also emerged from his studio. He was very productive and had a great imagination. He fully exploited his skills in plaster. His work as a sculptor and plasterer must be -highlighted against the great industry of building ornamentation that flourished

in the 19th century (Schasler, 1866) ^[7].

Dankberg was supported in his work by the architects Friedrich Ludwig Persius (1803-1845) and Johann Heinrich Strack (1805-1880). For Strack he produced many plastic-decorative works for the Borsig'schen Fabrik in Berlin-Moabit (1845). Dankberg's name is also associated with the architect Friedrich August Stüler (1800-1865) and Hermann Heinrich Alexander Wentzel (1820-1889). Dankberg had also an important connection to Prince Frederik van Oranje Nassau and Princess Louise van Pruisen. From 1851 he was architect and art director for the Prince. During the 1850s and early 1860s, Dankberg's studio experienced an enormous growth, supplying the most important Berlin architects with the decorations for many buildings of the Berlin School. His work also went abroad ^[8]. One of the places where his work has been preserved is in the Netherlands in Wassenaar at the De Paauw country estate.

De Paauw country house in Wassenaar

Commissioned by Prince Frederik, the second son of King William I of the Netherlands, the De Paauw country estate is rebuilt to a design by Prussian architect Hermann Wentzel around 1859. The country estate is given a Prussian character, which is carried through to the interior in every detail. For the ballroom, a stucco frieze is created by sculptor and stucco artist Wilhelm Friedrich Dankberg. A frieze that is unique to the Netherlands. This element alone gives De Paauw a unique position in Dutch architecture in the mid-19th century.

The fact that a ballroom has a wall decoration can be traced back to the interest of designers and users of Ancient Rome and Greece. From the Renaissance onwards, it was customary in noble circles to make a grand tour to Rome, among other places. When they returned home, their impressions of Rome and later of Greece, Egypt and the Middle East were incorporated into architecture and interiors. The plastered frieze with elements from Roman or Greek times in an entrance hall, stairwell or a hall can therefore be found throughout the centuries. Other examples in Europe are the spectacular are the frieze in Kalmar Castle in Sweden with its hunting scenes and another one in Güstrow Castle in Germany, both with a frieze made in situ. In England in the Ballroom of Knole House there is a ceiling with mermaids and griffins, where repeating figures are probably casts.

In the ballroom of Noordeinde Palace in The Hague, the stuccoer Beretta already made repetitive representations of griffins on the walls around 1818. The dimensional stability suggests that the plasterer had moulds made for this. Similar decorations can be found in the stucco hall of Soestdijk Palace. However, a continuous frieze with a highly varied depiction is reserved for the ballroom in De Paauw, which was installed around 1862 ^[9]. Dankberg placed a similar work in the billiard room in Schwerin Castle. The

frieze is composed of cast plaster parts and the moulds for this casting were therefore used in different places.

During a preparatory research in 2015, the representations in the frieze were inventoried (Freling 2015). A number of representations occur several times in this frieze. The overview below shows the successive figures and representations. Perhaps this will inspire an art historian to make an iconological description [Figure 9].

Conclusion This overview makes it clear that cast building ornamentation demands more attention and that there is still much to discover. Originating from a need to work ever more efficiently, this industry reached a size in the 19th century that has hardly been mapped out yet. With the decline of building ornamentation in 20th century architecture, this area of architectural history was hardly touched upon. Due to the increasing interest in plaster sculpture collections, it can be expected that building ornamentation will also follow suit.



Figure 7.- Wassenaar ballroom corner. *Casted frieze and prefabricated cove mouldings* ©W. Freling.

Notes

[1] Friendly notice of A. Zebel and website Rotterdam Museum.

[2] G. Jackson & Sons Londen since 1780 worked as decorative woodcarvers and plasterers for the Adam brothers. Since 1907 together with the plasterers of Holland & Sons. In 1957 the last Jackson left the firm and in 1989 Clark & Fenn bought the firm. Bron: website apr.org.uk G. Jackson & Sons Ltd (1780-1989).

[3] Het Neerlandsch Stucgilde *De Silberlingcollectie* Veenendaal 2021 reprint of the catalog sheets of the firm Silberling. Consult the catalog on the website of the Neerlandsch Stucgilde www.stucgilde.nl

[4] Scan of original by author.

[5] A part of the mother-casting moulds possesses Het Neerlandsch Stucgilde. They will be used by restaurations and complement missing ornaments in stucco-ceilings.

[6] Scan of original in possession of author.

[7] In his necrology about Dankberg, Schasler describes the qualities and scope of his company with more than 100 hands. This shows that Dankberg was an important player in the market of plaster casting and building ornamentation in Germany.

[8] Works of W. Dankberg. Berlin Charlottenburg Technische Hochschule Chemiebuilding facade ornamentwork; Potsdam Orangerieslot New Orangerie stucco reliëfs on facade; Potsdam triumphal arch design reliëfs with allegory on telegraph and railway; Schwerin Slot biljart room with stuccoed fries with sagas and legends of mankind from Prometheus till the decline and fall of the Roman Empire; The pulpits in artificial stone in the St. Marienkirche in Pasewalk and the Ev. Stadtpfarkirche Heilig-Geist in Werder; in Nederland in Wassenaar de Paauw, stuccoed fries in the ballroom; in Zweden in the National Museum; in Triëst sculptures and ornaments in the palace of the merchant Revoltella.

[9] On behalf of the municipality of Wassenaar, the architectural firm Wevers & Van Luipen and Rocaille B.V. investigated the origin of the frieze. The internal report will be made available in a publication in due course.

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Wijnand V.J. Freling (1956) is an architect and received his PhD from the faculty of architecture at the Technical University Delft in 1993 with his thesis "Stuccoworks in Dutch houses in the 17th and 18th century". He runs a consultancy firm, Rocaille B.V., on the research and restauration of historical stucco and plasterwork. His portfolio includes the Hague townhall, the exhibition gallery of the Mauritshuis in the Hague, different Royal Palaces, Governments buildings, the old townhall of Zutphen and other historical interiors with stuccoworks.

As patron of the Dutch Stucco Guild has taught master stuccoists. He has lectured widely and published on the history of ornamental stuccoworks in the Netherlands and abroad.

Artículo enviado el 30/05/2023
Artículo aceptado el 17/06/2023



<https://doi.org/10.37558/gec.v23i1.1223>