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REMBRANDT VAN RIJN AND MICHAEL WILLMANN, OR A STORY OF DISPELLING A CERTAIN MYTH*

In Christof Krumbhermer's *Die Wanderer auf die Brücke* – a fictional story about Michael Willmann and a few other artists of Silesian Baroque, published in 1942 – the author gave a lively and detailed description of the first meeting of Rembrandt with Willmann, who had just arrived in Amsterdam (fig. 1). The young painter, though unfamiliar and unexpected, received a warm and tremendous welcome from the master and his family, Hendrickje Stoffels and his son Titus at the artist's home in Jodenbreestraat. Rembrandt, wearing a simple black doublet and a velvet beret, offered his slightly overwhelmed guest from Königsberg a plain treat of beer, fried eggs and fresh herrings. Then he proudly showed Willmann the etchings and paintings which he was working on at that moment: an etching with elders' faces, a painting of *Noli me tangere*, a portrait of the artist's brother in a golden helmet, a picture of his son Titus and his own self-portrait with a shadowed face. While making a thorough comment on his works, the master warned the young painter of money, which is "a curse for art" (*der Fluch für die Kunst*), and gave him a piece of lifelong advice: "paint for God's glory and not for man's payment"¹. Saying his farewell Rembrandt gave Willmann a great encouragement to visit his workshop: "come again when you want to" (*Kommt wieder, wenn Ihr wollt*), to which invitation the young painter responded eagerly. As Krumbhermer concludes, "he was yet a frequent guest at the famous painter's place, where he learned to mix paints and tried hard to conjure up bright light out of divine darkness"².

This extensive story of an encounter between Willmann, the greatest Silesian painter in the age of Baroque, and Rembrandt, the greatest Dutch painter of that time, is certainly a work of fiction. However, it is based on a belief, common in numerous scientific and popular studies, that during his stay in Amsterdam around 1650 Willmann was in close relations with Rembrandt, which influenced remarkably the subsequent career of the painter from Königsberg. As Willmann was supposed not only to have been taught in Rembrandt's workshop and to have applied Rembrandt's achievements to his own later creation, but also to imitate the master from Amsterdam's specific attitude towards art, God and the reality surrounding him, the attitude expressed here by Krumbhermer in the adage: "paint for God's glory and not for man's payment". Giving up a trip to Italy and a career of a court artist in Berlin and Prague, settling down aside the Cister-

* The following article is a presentation in English of some results of the recent research on Michael Willmann's work, part of which has already been published.

¹ "Malt um Gottes Willen und nicht um Menschen Lohn" – Ch. Krumbhermer, *Die Wanderer auf die Brücke. Künstlerschicksale der Barockzeit*, Breslau 1942, chapter: *Die Reise nach Holland*, p. 24. In the other part of the book the author makes Rembrandt express also a bit more conceding version of the motto: "...malt um Gottes Willen und, nur wenn Ihr müßt, um Menschen Lohn" (*ibidem*, p. 22).

² "Öfters ist er noch in dem Hause des berühmten Malers gewesen, hat gelernt, die Farben zu mischen, und sich bemüht, aus dem göttlichen Dunkel das helle Licht hervorzuzaubern." – *ibidem*, p. 23.



1. Michael Willmann and Rembrandt van Rijn (the initial D), [in:] Ch. Krumbhermer, *Die Wanderer auf die Brücke. Künstlerschicksale der Barockzeit*, Breslau 1942, p. 14. Photo A. Kozięć

cian abbey in peripheral Lubiąż (Leubus) in Silesia and painting mainly religious pictures for the Catholic audience, Willmann was supposed to follow spiritually the trace of Rembrandt, who never travelled to Italy, who never pursued court splendour either, and the main stream of his creation constituted the works with religious subjects. To cut a long story short, it was a myth of Willmann as "Silesian Rembrandt" – a pupil following his master not only in an artistic, but also in a spiritual way.

I

Undoubtedly one of the main sources of this myth was Willmann's (Willemans's) biography published by Arnold Houbraken in *Groote Schouburgh...* in 1718. Thanks to this publication we become aware of the young painter from Königsberg who, after his arrival in Holland, "was kindly welcomed by artists and art lovers for his polite behaviour and talent" and who began his artistic education in Jacob Backer and Rembrandt's workshops. Moreover, "he fancied their art and company as well as the conversations with both of them so much that he gave up the idea of travelling to Italy..."³.

Houbraken based his knowledge about Willmann on the artist's comprehensive biography published by Joachim von Sandrart in 1683 in the Latin edition of *Teutsche Academie der Bau-, Bild- und Mahlerey-Künste*⁴. It was a basic and trustful source of information about the artist's sojourn in Amsterdam, as it must have come directly from Willmann⁵. However, Houbraken misinterpreted and misused it. Sandrart is unambiguous

³ "...wegen seines gefälligen Benehmens und seines Talentes bei den Künstlern und Kunstmündern willkommen war. Er schloss sich zumeist an J. Backer und Rembrandt an, an deren Kunst, Gesellschaft und Geschärchen er so viel Geffallen fand, dass er sein Vorhaben, nach Italien zu gehen, aufgab..." – Arnold Houbraken's *Grosse Schouburgh der niederländischen Maler und Malerinnen*, translated into German by A. von Wurzbach, Wien 1880, vol. 2, pp. 233–234.

⁴ J. von Sandrart, *Academia nobilissimae Artis pictoriae...*, Norimbergae et Francoforti 1683, vol. 2, book 3, p. 393.

⁵ Joachim von Sandrart never had a chance to meet Willmann in person, he did not know his works either, hence it is assumed that Willmann's published biography was based on the curriculum vitae prepared for Sandrart by the artist from Lubiąż himself. Most probably he was also the one to propose publishing of his own biography in the Latin edition of *Teutsche Academie der Bau-, Bild- und Mahlerey-Künste*. For the circumstances of publishing Willmann's biography within Sandrart's work, see A. Kozięć,

about Willmann having no regular education in Amsterdam due to the lack of money. He could not afford any studies “at some very famous master’s”. Therefore – according to Sandrart – Willmann made an effort to get acquainted with “countless and very sophisticated works gathered in the local collections” and develop his “eagerness to create” thanks to “the visits paid to the masters active there”, and his artistic education focused on his own work. For the money Willmann would have had to spend on “an overrated” teacher’s payment he purchased the “prototype” collection. “Perfectly acquainted with drawing” the painter himself, “having accepted Jacob Backer as well as Rembrandt and some others’ methods”, undertook “some very strict exercises”, continuing them hard “day and night”. According to Sandrart, the reason for Willmann’s giving up the idea of going to Italy was also of another kind – the young painter was not able to travel South as he had to “make his living [...] with his own work”⁶.

Unfortunately, for many subsequent authors it was exactly Houbraken’s “incorrect” biography of Willmann that came as the basic source of knowledge about the artist’s education in Amsterdam. Moreover, the short and explicit text by Houbraken used to be treated frequently as an ideal interpretation of the longer and ambiguous Sandrart’s account, and especially his mysterious words about “Jacob Backer as well as Rembrandt and some others’ methods”. It resulted eventually in writing about Willmann usually as Rembrandt, Jacob Backer or both of the artists’ pupil throughout the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Houbraken’s account most often copied exactly the authors of the later dictionaries of Dutch painters, e.g. C.H. Balkema⁷ or Alfred Wurzbach⁸. It became the fundamental source of information about Willmann for those researchers of Rembrandt’s work, who dealt with the problem of his school. “Willemans” as Rembrandt’s pupil was quoted by Carel Vosmaer⁹, and later also by Otto Benesch, who mentioned the painter from Königsberg among the “vierte Generation” of the master’s from Amsterdam apprentices¹⁰. Horst Gerson also had no doubt in a master-pupil relation between Willmann and Rembrandt. He accepted the painter from Königsberg as one of the main representatives of Dutch painting on the court of the Brandenburg elector in Berlin, in Prague and Silesia, the lack of Rembrandtesque character in Willmann’s mature works being explained by the commissioners’ demands¹¹.

The first scholars studying the Silesian painter’s oeuvre, who based generally on misinterpreted records from the artist’s biography published by Sandrart¹², also wrote about Willmann as a pupil of the master from Amsterdam. Strictly following this text, the more important role in Willmann’s education was admitted initially to Jacob Backer’s workshop. The young painter from Königsberg was supposed to attend this workshop, there he could have also got acquainted with Rembrandt’s creation. That is the way Gottfried Johann

Rysunki Michaela Willmanna (1630–1706), Wrocław 2000 (“Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis”, 2212, Historia sztuki, 14), pp. 52–53, 175–176, and R. Klessmann, *Michael Willmann und Joachim von Sandrart. Bemerkungen zu einem Dialog*, [in:] *Willmann i inni. Malarstwo, rysunek i grafika na Śląsku i w krajach ościennych w XVII i XVIII wieku*, ed. A. Kozięł, B. Lejman, Wrocław 2002, pp. 16–20.

⁶ “Cumque / ad acquirendam majorem in Arte peritam / in Hollandiam et potissimum Amstelodamum se reciperet, insignia ibidem fervoris aui incrementa persensit non visitatis tantum illius loci Artificibus, sed et perlustratis operibus in eadam Urbe celeberrimis variis. [...] Quamvis autem informationi / Celeberrimi cuiusdam Artificis // sese committere minime detrectasset, didactri tamenexcessu deteritus mediorumque penuria impeditus, id quod in Praeceptorem expendere cogeretur, in prototypa imperidere statuit. Cumque / in Diaphaphice jam esset verratissimus / hinc propositis sibi Jacobi Backeri, ut et Rembrandi aliorumque methodis, privato labore, continuisque / noctu et interdiu // exercitiis severioribus / victum sibi parare cogebatur / ut Italiam petere hac ratione minime posset...” – Sandrart, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, book 3, p. 393.

⁷ “...il suivit à Amsterdam les écoles de J. Backer et de Rembrandt.” – C.H. Balkema, *Biographie des peintres Flamands et Hollandais, qui ont existé depuis Jean et Hubert van Eyck jusqu'à nos jours*, Gand 1844, p. 354.

⁸ Michael Willemans “...war 1650 bei Rembrandt” – A. Wurzbach, *Niederländisches Künstler-Lexikon auf Grund archivalischer Forschungen bearbeitet*, vol. 2, Wien–Leipzig 1910, p. 389.

⁹ “On le voyait ordinairement dans la société de Rembrandt et de Backer...” – C. Vosmaer, *Rembrandt. Sa vie et ses œuvres*, La Haye 1877, p. 297.

¹⁰ O. Benesch, *Rembrandt. Werk und Forschung*, Wien 1935, pp. 43, 71.

¹¹ H. Gerson, *Ausbreitung und Nachwirkung der holländischen Malerei des 17. Jahrhunderts*, Haarlem 1942, pp. 227, 292–293, 296.

¹² Willmann’s biography in Sandrart’s account was exactly quoted in the artist’s curriculum vitae, described in handwritten chronicle of the Cistercian abbey of Lubiąż (A. Teichert, *Historia domestica Lubensis Notitiae praeclaris repleta...*, [Leibus 1754], Biblioteka Uniwersytecka we Wrocławiu, Oddział Rękopisów, sign. IV F. 209, p. 105). Later the chronicle text was the basis for the information about Willmann. It was sent by the last abbot of Lubiąż, Gabriel Otto, to the authors of the first lexicons of Bohemian and Moravian artists: Johann Peter Cerroni and Gottfried Johann Dlabac̄.

Dlabac¹³ and Georg Kaspar Nagler¹⁴ wrote about Willmann's work in their lexicons. Soon afterwards, it was Rembrandt, in the late 1640s at the peak of his creative abilities and fame, and not the less known Backer, who had already died in 1651, thought to be the real Willmann's teacher. That is what Augustin Knoblich, the first artist's monographer, wrote in 1868, arguing that Willmann "sank entirely in his [Rembrandt's] manner and copied his paintings with such a striking fidelity that many of them were thought to be the originals"¹⁵. The methods of interpreting the relations between Willmann and Rembrandt was appreciated in later studies, among the others: Hugo Cimbal¹⁶, Willy Drost¹⁷, Erich Hubala¹⁸, Jaromír Neumann's¹⁹, even the last artist's monographist, Hubertus Lossow's, who – relating directly to Houbraken's account – wrote about Willmann almost as a co-worker and a friend of the master from Amsterdam, dangerously approaching his account to Krumbhermer's story²⁰.

This conviction about close relations between Willmann and Rembrandt was present in reference literature despite the opinions of scholars of Willmann's creation questioning the records of his education in Rembrandt and Backer's workshops. In 1902 Erich Klossowski undermined the reliability of Houbraken's account, quoting directly Willmann's biography published by Sandrart as the only reliable source of knowledge about the artist's education in Amsterdam²¹. Dietrich Maul acted alike; he completely rejected the thesis about Willmann's education in Backer's workshop as he found no evidence in the archival documents connected with the activity of the artist from Amsterdam²². Ernst Kloss was also critical of Houbraken's account as he defined it as "such a superficial and erroneous summary that it can hardly be treated seriously as a source"²³. What is important, the relations between Willmann and Rembrandt were not confirmed by the artist's own notes, discovered in 1980s in the Premonstratensians monastery library in Strahov, the district of Prague. There were over few dozen of painting and graphic recipes and tables of proportions of children's bodies, along with a so-called family chronicle, all of them attached on separate cards to the copy owned by Willmann of the third part of a popular treatise by Gualterus Hermenius Rivius *Der furnembsten, notwendigsten, der gantzen Architektur angehörigen mathematischen und mechanischen Künst...*²⁴. The only

¹³ "Hier [in Amsterdam] traf ihn das Glück, in die Schule des berühmten Jakob Backers zu kommen. In dieser Schule arbeitete er nach Backer, und Rembrandt..." – G.J. D l a b a c ž, *Allgemeines historisches Künstler-Lexikon für Böhmen und zum Theil auch für Mähren und Schlesien*, vol. 3, Prag 1815, col. 374.

¹⁴ "begab er sich nach Amsterdam, wo ihn J. de Backer in sein Haus aufnahm. Willmann richtete aber auch ein Augenmerk auf Rembrandt, und kopierte mehrere Werke desselben." – G.K. N a g l e r, *Neues allgemeines Künstler-Lexikon oder Nachrichten von dem Leben und Werken der Maler, Bildhauer, Baumeister, Kupferstecher, Lithographen, Formschnneider, Zeichner, Medailleure, Elfenbeinarbeiter etc.*, vol. 24, Leipzig 1851, p. 409.

¹⁵ "Jedenfalls aber blieb Rembrandt Willmann's vorzüglichstes Bild. Er vertiefte sich ganz in seine Manier und kopierte Bilder desselben mit so täuschender Treue, dass sie Viele für Originale des Ersteren hielten." – A. K n o b l i c h, *Leben und Werke des Malers Michael Lucas Leopold Willmann, 1629–1706*, Breslau 1868, p. 2.

¹⁶ H. C i m b a l, *Michael Willmann. Sein Leben und seine Werke*, [s. l.] 1903, p. 8.

¹⁷ W. D r o s t, *Barockmalerei in den germanischen Ländern*, Wildpark–Potsdam 1926 ("Handbuch der Kunswissenschaft", ed. A.E. Brinkmann), p. 283.

¹⁸ E. H u b a l a, *Malerei*, [in:] *Barock in Böhmen*, ed. K.M. S w o b o d a, München 1964, p. 203.

¹⁹ J. N e u m a n n, *Expresivní tendence v české barokní malbě*. 1, "Galéria", 3 (1975), p. 156.

²⁰ "Im Hause Rembrandts ist er offenbar oft gewesen, hat mit ihm über Malerei gesprochen und sicherlich in seiner Werkstatt gearbeitet, wenn auch kein eigentliches Schülerverhältnis bestand" – H. L o s s o w, *Michael Willmann (1630–1706) – Meister der Barockmalerei*, Würzburg 1994, p. 21. See A. K o z i e l, (review) H. L o s s o w, *Michael Willmann (1630–1706) – Meister der Barockmalerei*, Würzburg 1994, "Dzieła i Interpretacje", 3 (1995), p. 132.

²¹ E. K l o s s o w s k i, *Michael Willmann*, Breslau 1902, pp. 6–7.

²² D. M a u l, *Michael Willmann. Ein Beitrag zur Barockkunst Schlesiens*, Straßburg 1914, pp. 2–3.

²³ "ein so flüchtiges und fehlerhaftes Résumé, daß er alß Quelle nicht ernstlich in Frage kommt" – E. K l o s s, *Michael Willmann. Leben und Werke eines deutschen Barockmalers*, Breslau [1934], p. 12.

²⁴ G.H. R i v i u s, *Der furnembsten notwendigsten der gantzen Architektur angehörigen mathematischen und mechanischen Künste eygentlicher Bericht und verständliche Unterrichtung*, Nürnberg 1547, part 3 (Strahovská knihovna, Prague, sign. AY XII 15). Rivius's work reprint was published within the series "Dokumenta Technica. Darstellungen und Quellen zur Technikgeschichte", ed. K.-H. M a n e g o l d, W. T r e u e, serie II: "Quellenschriften zur Technikgeschichte", Hildesheim–New York 1981. For Willmann's notes, see mainly R. K l e s s m a n n, *Willmann i Niderlandy*, [in:] *Michael Willmann (1630–1706)*. Exhibition catalogue, Residenzgalerie Salzburg, 15 VI – 25 IX 1994, Muzeum Narodowe we Wrocławiu, 22 X – 11 XII 1994, ed. M. A d a m s k i, P. Ł u k a s z e w i c z, F. W a g n e r, Salzburg 1994, p. 74, note 49; L o s s o w, *op. cit.*, pp. 18–19, 131; A. K o z i e l, *Why Did Michael Willmann Study Proportions of Children's Bodies? Some Remarks on the Artist's Notes in the Strahov Library, Prague*, "Umění", 47 (1999), no. 6, pp. 453–471.

trace of the artist's stay in Amsterdam was a recipe for "a beautiful golden varnish", which he learnt – as it was admitted by Willmann himself – from Bartholomäus van der Helst²⁵.

Questioning of the belief about Willmann's education at Rembrandt's workshop gained support from the researchers of the work of the master from Amsterdam, who initiated the process of revising the over-used opinion of Willmann as "Rembrandt's pupil". Almost simultaneously Ben Broos placed Willmann among numerous artists acknowledged falsely as Amsterdam master's apprentices²⁶, and Werner Sumowski recognised the Silesian artist as a creator remaining under only limited influence of Rembrandt and he excluded Willmann's works from the monumental corpuses of paintings and drawings of the pupils of the master from Amsterdam²⁷. As the result in the circle of the researchers of Rembrandt and his school the name of Willmann was crossed definitively off the list of his pupils and it is now mentioned very rarely among those creators who only kept in contact with the master²⁸.

Excluding Willmann from the group of Rembrandt's pupils caused the discussion on the Silesian artist's education to concentrate on answering the question: what Sandart really meant by the words about "Jacob Backer as well as Rembrandt and some others' methods" that Willmann was supposed to acquire in Amsterdam, and what actually were "the strict exercises" to be continued by the young painter "day and night" about? The opportunity to make an attempt to answer the questions came with the international exhibition of Willmann's paintings, arranged by the Residenzgalerie in Salzburg and Muzeum Narodowe in Wrocław in 1994. In the exhibition catalogue Rüdiger Klessmann, analysing the relations between Willmann and The Low Countries recognised that Sandart's words about Jacob Backer and Rembrandt's "methods" should be interpreted in the context of Willmann not continuing his artistic education in Italy. The young painter from Königsberg would have referred to the encouraging examples of Backer and Rembrandt, who developed their skills in the Netherlands only and who never went to Italy. According to Klessmann, Willmann's reasoning may be compared to the young Rembrandt and Lievens's position, as they were both supposed to reply to Constantijn Huygens, exhorting them to visit Italy, that "in their youth there is no time to lose for travelling", and besides "they had seen the greatest Italian paintings behind the Italian borders, and the paintings which widely scattered everywhere would have taken much effort to find there, they have here in great amounts gathered in one place"²⁹.

II

Both Klessmann and former scholars gave their opinions about the relations between Willmann and Rembrandt based exclusively on Sandart's text, not knowing any single work of the Silesian artist from his Amsterdam sojourn. The situation changed after it had been discovered that the commonly known series of twenty prints by Josef Gregory, carried out in 1794–1795 after Willmann's drawings, mostly lost at present, edited in Prague in 1805, is the most probable documentation of the artist's sketches created in Amsterdam. The sketches were the result of that "strict exercises" led "day and night" with the use of the engraving collection of "prototypes"³⁰ bought in Amsterdam. In case of as many as fourteen sketches of this series it was

²⁵ "Ein Schönnen Goldt firmitz Zu machen auff silber zu laisiren, Auß Amsterdam von H(err) van der Elst gelernt" – Strahovská knihovna, Prague, sign. AY XII 15. What is interesting, Bartholomäus van der Helst most probably gave Willmann an incorrect recipe, since after the very first attempt of using it the recipe text was crossed out by the painter, and on the margin there appeared a note: "Dieser firniß ist falsch".

²⁶ B.P.J. Broos, *Fame shared is fame doubled*, [in:] *The Impact of a Genius. Rembrandt, his Pupils and Followers in the Seventeenth Century*. Exhibition catalogue, Waterman Gallery, Amsterdam, Groningen Museum, Groningen, Amsterdam 1983, p. 49.

²⁷ W. Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler*, vol. 1, London 1983, pp. 82–83, and idem, *The Drawings of the Rembrandt School*, vol. 10, New York 1992, p. 5413.

²⁸ As the example comes the last publication by Gary Schwartz, where the author made a key to the analysis of Rembrandt's artistic personality from the completely incredible Houbraken's claim about "the conversations" led by Willmann with the master from Amsterdam. See: G. Schwartz, *Das Rembrandt Buch. Leben und Werk eines Genies*, München 2006, p. 48.

²⁹ Klessmann, *Willmann i Niderlandy...*, pp. 55–56.

³⁰ Historische Darstellungen in 10 Blättern nach dem berühmten Meister Willmann. In Kupfer gebracht und herausgegeben von Josef Gregory. Kupferstecher und Zeichnungslærer in Prag, I. Heft, 1805 (10 engravings), II. Heft, 1805 (10 engravings) – Prague, Národní galerie, Grafická sbírka, Inv. Nos. R 55001–55020. See A. Kozięt, Michaela Willmannna droga na "szczyty"



2. Josef Gregory after Michael Willmann, *The Holy Family with young St. John the Baptist*, 1795, etching, 156 × 184 mm, Prague, Národní galerie. Photo after A. Koziel, *Rysunki Michaela Willmanna (1630–1706)*, Wrocław 2000, fig. 224

possible to set engraving “prototypes” used by Willmann in his drawing exercises, and a similar formal character of the rest of the works indicates that they were carried out after graphic models.

The artist’s most elementary practice was studying single figures and scenes with a few persons on separate subjects copied after a graphic model. The examples of this kind of practice are: *The Holy Family with young St. John the Baptist* (fig. 2) following the central group from Martino Rota’s etching after Titian’s painting *The Rest on the Flight into Egypt*³¹, or *The Bearing of the Cross – Christ and St. Veronica* (fig. 3), which was entirely copied from Giovanni Battista Franco’s cooper-plate engraving *The Bearing of the Cross*³². The young artist’s next step was practice in which he tried to “improve” the main copied fragments of “prototype” compositions by adding new figures or changing a composition concept of the model image. This new attitude to a model may be found in the following drawings: *Twelve-year-old Christ in the Temple* (fig. 4), where the artist, having copied the main scene from Cornelis Cort’s copper-plate engraving after Michiel Coxie (with the same subject)³³, reversed the situation of the key figure of the teaching Jesus, and *The Scene with Male and Female Figures* (fig. 5), where the artist “condensed” the figure group from the first plan, copied from Georgio Ghisi’s copper-plate engraving after Francesco Salviati’s fresco *Visitation*³⁴,

sztuki”. Wczesne rysunki artysty w grafikach Josefa Gregory’ego, “Biuletyn Historii Sztuki”, 58 (1996), no. 3–4, pp. 285–306 (in English: A. Koziel, *Michael Willmann’s Way to ‘the Heights of Arts’ and His Early Drawings*, “Bulletin of The National Gallery in Prague”, VII–VIII [1997–1998], pp. 54–66). Only two works of Willmann’s Amsterdam sketches have been preserved: *The Incredulity of Thomas* (Prague, Památník Národního Písemnictví, Grafická sbírka, inv. no. IK – 1324/v/19) and *Drawing Studies with the Scene of Washing of the Feet*, not mentioned by Gregory (Prague, Národní galerie, Grafická sbírka, inv. no. K 12017).

³¹ *The Illustrated Bartsch*, vol. 26: *The Works of Marcantonio Raimondi and his School*, ed. K. Oberhuber, New York 1978, no. 21.

³² *The Illustrated Bartsch*, vol. 32: *Italian Artists of the Sixteenth Century School of Fontainebleau*, ed. H. Zerner, New York 1979, no. 11–I.

³³ J.C.J. Bierens de Haan, *L’Œuvre gravé de Cornelis Cort, Graveur Hollandais 1533–1578*, Le Haye 1948, no. 53, fig. 15.

³⁴ *The Illustrated Bartsch*, vol. 31: *Italian Artists of the Sixteenth Century*, ed. S. Boorsch, J. Spike, New York 1986, no. 1–I.



3. Josef Gregory after Michael Willmann, *The Bearing of the Cross – Christ and St. Veronica*, 1794, etching, 195 × 314 mm, Prague, Národní galerie. Photo after A. Koziel, *Rysunki Michaela Willmanna (1630–1706)*, Wrocław 2000, fig. 240



4. Josef Gregory after Michael Willmann, *Twelve-year-old Christ in the Temple*, 1794, etching, 178 × 313 mm, Prague, Národní galerie. Photo after A. Koziel, *Rysunki Michaela Willmanna (1630–1706)*, Wrocław 2000, fig. 234



5. Josef Gregory after Michael Willmann, *The Scene with Male and Female Figures*, 1794, etching, 192 × 309 mm, Prague, Národní galerie. Photo after A. Koziel, *Rysunki Michaela Willmanna (1630–1706)*, Wrocław 2000, fig. 228

adding two figures to frame the scene. Willmann's drawing practices were crowned by the most creative exercises, in which the young artist practised an entirely new figural composition of a scene by an appropriate combination of separated fragments of one or two prints. For instance, copying the adequate parts of the scene from Marcantonio Raimondi's copper-plate engraving *Martyrdom of St. Lawrence* after Baccio Bandinelli³⁵, Willmann made two drawings depicting *Scenes with Male Figures* (figs. 6, 7), where we can see a balanced composition with an accentuated centre and the figures facing the centre on both sides of the group. Whereas the completed, balanced and rhythmical arrangement of *The Massacre of the Innocents* (fig. 8) was made up by combining single figures and groups copied after two prints of the same subject: Marco Dente's after Baccio Bandinelli and Philips Galle's after Frans Floris³⁶.

Thus with the aid of the collection of some graphic "prototypes" purchased in Amsterdam Willmann in his individual practice tried to follow the composition teaching methods used in the best workshops of that time, including also Rembrandt's "academy"³⁷. The compositional studies of historical scenes performed by Willmann "day and night", occasionally dealing with the same subject a few times (*The Massacre of the*

³⁵ *The Illustrated Bartsch*, vol. 26..., no. 104–1.

³⁶ *The Illustrated Bartsch*, vol. 26..., no. 21; *The Illustrated Bartsch*, vol. 56: *Netherlandish Artists. Philips Galle*, ed. A. Dolders, New York 1987, no. 29.

³⁷ For teaching methods in Rembrandt's workshop, see *Bij Rembrandt in de Leer / Rembrandt as Teacher*. Exhibition catalogue, Museum het Rembrandthuis, Amsterdam, 26 X 1984 – 6 I 1985, ed. P. Schatborn, Amsterdam 1984; W.W. Robinson, *Rembrandt's Sketches of Historical Subjects*, [in:] *Drawing defined*, preface and commentary by K. Oberhuber, ed. W. Strauss, T. Felker, New York 1987, pp. 241–256; S. Alpers, *Rembrandt als Unternehmer. Sein Atelier und der Markt*, translated from English by H.U. Davitt, Köln 1989, pp. 80–197; P. Schatborn, *Aspekte der Zeichenkunst Rembrandts*, [in:] *Rembrandt. Der Meister und seine Werkstatt. Zeichnungen und Radierungen*. Exhibition catalogue, ed. H. Bevers, P. Schatborn, B. Welzel, München–Paris–London 1991, pp. 10–21; J. Bruyn, *Rembrandt's Werkstatt: Organisation & Produktion*, [in:] *Rembrandt. Der Meister und seine Werkstatt: Gemälde*. Exhibition catalogue, Berlin, Gemäldegalerie SMPK im Alten Museum, 12 IX – 10 XI 1991, Berlin 1991, pp. 68–89; C. Brusati, *Artifice and Illusion. The Art and Writing of Samuel van Hoogstraten*, Chicago–London 1995, pp. 24–45, and M. Franken, *Lernen durch Nachahmung: Über das Kopieren von Gemälden in Rembrandts Werkstatt*, [in:] *Rembrandt. Genie auf der Suche*. Exhibition catalogue, Berlin, Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 4 VIII – 5 XI 2006, Köln 2006, pp. 145–163.



6. Josef Gregory after Michael Willmann, *The Scene with Male Figures*, 1794, etching, 174 × 306 mm, Prague, Národní galerie.
Photo after A. Koziel, *Rysunki Michaela Willmanna (1630–1706)*, Wrocław 2000, fig. 225



7. Josef Gregory after Michael Willmann, *The Scene with Male Figures*, 1794, etching, 198 × 314 mm, Prague, Národní galerie.
Photo after A. Koziel, *Rysunki Michaela Willmanna (1630–1706)*, Wrocław 2000, fig. 226



8. Josef Gregory after Michael Willmann, *The Massacre of the Innocents*, 1794, etching, 198 × 313 mm, Prague, Národní galerie.
Photo after A. Koziel, *Rysunki Michaela Willmanna (1630–1706)*, Wrocław 2000, fig. 230

Innocents, Lamentation), even though created outside Rembrandt's workshop, still they seem to belong, as the matters of style and subject are concerned, to the particular series of drawings documenting the practice of the master's pupils³⁸. Not only must Willmann have studied thoroughly the drawings resulting from the didactic practice performed in the workshop in Jodenbreestraat, but also he must have been well-informed about the character of these exercises and the topics of that time. Willmann's studies over such scenes as *The Incredulity of Thomas*, *Adoration of the Shepherds*, *Christ Washing St. Peter's Feet*, *Twelve-year-old Christ in the Temple*, *The Bearing of the Cross*, *Lamentation*, *Christ and the Woman taken in Adultery*, or even *Scenes with Male Figures* are strictly adequate to the themes undertaken as compositional practice in the master's workshop in Amsterdam just around the year 1650³⁹. For Rembrandt's pupils it was his own drawing and graphic models as well as the drawings of single figures or of some paratheatrical groups of a few people "from nature", made under the master's personal guidance, that came as help for them in finding the relevant historical scenes arrangements. However, the not wealthy Willmann in his own individual practice was forced to rely completely on the purchased set of engraving "prototypes". A nude study *naar het leven* was replaced then by copying some relevant figures from the engraving, and the very arrangement of the entire composition took a shape resembling a collage made up with figures and scene fragments "cut out" from the prints. These, mentioned by Sandrart, secret "methods of Jacob Backer so as of Rembrandt and of some others", which Willmann was about to follow in his self-studies, occurred to be the practice of teach-

³⁸ Striking indeed seems to be the lack of this type relations between the drawings of Jacob Backer and his apprentices. The drawing of *David and Bathsheba*, acknowledged by Sumowski as Willmann's early work, following the stylistics of Backer's drawings (Sumowski, *Gemälde...*, vol. 1, p. 82, note 11), appeared to be the work by Backer himself (Koziel, *Rysunki...*, p. 290).

³⁹ Compare some of the chosen examples of the drawings with the specified topics, created in Rembrandt's circle just at that time: O. Benesch, *The Drawings of Rembrandt*, vol. 1–6, enlarged and edited by E. Benesch, London–New York 1973, cat. nos. 511a, 867, 1010; Sumowski, *The Drawings...*, cat. nos. 146X, 581XX, 848X, 974X, 1052, 1106, 1142X, 1213X, 1353–55, 1377X, 1384X, 1419X, 2085X; P. Schatborn, *Tekeningen van Rembrandt zijn onbekende leerlingen en navolgers / Drawings by Rembrandt his anonymous pupils and followers*, 's-Gravenhage 1985, cat. nos. 25, 28, 62, 86, and *Rembrandt. Die Dresdener Zeichnungen 2004*, ed. Th. Ketelsen, Köln 2004, cat. nos. 1, 13, 85, 93.

ing composition used in the best artists' workshops in Amsterdam at that time, including those of Backer and Rembrandt.

What is important, while deciding on his own individual studies according to the methods used in Backer and Rembrandt's workshops, Willmann gave up consciously including both of the masters' works within the collection of model graphic works he was gathering at the moment. Exceptionally remarkable is the lack of traces of Willmann's use of those etchings done by Rembrandt deliberately for his pupils as models of right composition and nude studies⁴⁰. Moreover, this omission of Rembrandt's originals concerned not only Willmann's drawing exercises, but also his first school engravings, made in the etching technique, probably still during his educational sojourn in Amsterdam. Both *Susanna and the Elders* (fig. 9), and *David before Saul* (fig. 10) – two earliest known Willmann's etchings⁴¹ – are the sketch repetitions of the compositions thoroughly transferred from the two graphic "prototypes": the etching *Susanna and the Elders* by Rubens's pupil, Cornelis Schut⁴² and Frans Floris's copper-plate engraving *David before Saul*⁴³. Both of the school etchings by Willmann may be safely assumed as graphic equivalents of the artist's drawing sketches from the Amsterdam period. However, taking the stylistics into consideration, the etchings were performed in the commonly admired Rembrandt's graphic manner⁴⁴, but the scenes were repeated faithfully after Flemish compositional models, having nothing in common with the master from Amsterdam.

As it is thought, for the young painters, already possessing enough of the basis of artistic education, subsequent studies at Rembrandt's workshop were an attractive alternative to "classical" model of education, demanding from the future artist a journey to Italy and lessons in antiquity to complete the studies⁴⁵. Despite that, Willmann, imitating the didactic practice of the master from Amsterdam, at the same time chose his own exercises as the models and he was positively for "classicistic" norm of art. The collection of "prototypes", purchased by Willmann in Holland, consisted of some prints made mainly after the works by the commonly known and appreciated Italian painters. Among them with no hesitation we can place: Baccio Bandinelli, Giulio Romano, Francesco Salviati, Titian or Tintoretto, the artists who were active throughout Cinquecento and who represented various artistic milieus of Italy. This set of Italian "prototypes" was completed by Willmann with a few graphic works etched after some models by the Netherlandish artists strongly influenced by Italian art, among them: Michiel Coxie, Frans Floris, Lambert Lombard or Karel van Mander.

This explicit and conscious choice of the "prototypes" of right composition and nude, derived exactly from the circle of the sixteenth-century Italian art, and not graphic models performed by Rembrandt, may be seen as the first critique of Rembrandt's model of art, presented from the position of a "classicistic" Italian ideal. The negative attitude of Willmann's towards Rembrandt's aesthetic norms, expressed around the

⁴⁰ See J.A. Emmens, *Rembrandt en de regels van de kunst*, Utrecht 1968 ("Orbis artium. Utrechtse Kunsthistorische Studien", 10), pp. 155–158 and *Rembrandt. Der Meister und seine Werkstatt. Zeichnungen und Radierungen...*, cat. no. 21 (H. Bevers).

⁴¹ See Kłoss, *op. cit.*, p. 147, cat. nos. C. I. 8 and 9, figs. 155, 159; Łoszow, *op. cit.*, p. 95, cat. nos. C. 1 and 2; *Op Nederlandse Manier. Inspiracje niderlandzkie w sztuce śląskiej XV–XVIII w.* Exhibition catalogue, Muzeum Miedzi, Legnica, V–VII 2001, ed. M. Kapustka, A. Kozięć, P. Oszczanowski, Legnica 2001, cat. nos. III. 11 and 12 (A. Kozięć); A. Kozięć, *Sztuka i promocja sztuki. Ofunkcji akwafort Michaela Willmanna*, [in:] *Niderlandyzm na Śląsku i w krajach ościennych*, ed. M. Kapustka, A. Kozięć, P. Oszczanowski, Wrocław 2003 ("Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis", 2508, Historia Sztuki, 17), pp. 340–341, figs. 1, 2.

⁴² G. Wilmers, *Cornelis Schut (1597–1655). A Flemish Painter of the High Baroque*, Twulecht 1996, cat. no. A 82. Willmann probably had the occasion to see Schut's painting which the etching was released after. This work of art – present in the famous painting by David Teniers with the image of archduke Leopold William's picture gallery (Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum) – might have found its way to the emperor's painting gallery in Prague after 1656. See K. Garas, *Die Entstehung der Galerie des Erzherzogs Leopold Wilhelm*, "Jahrbuch der kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien", 63 (1967), p. 42, fig. 37, and eadem, *Das Schicksal der Sammlung des Erzherzogs Leopold Wilhelm*, "Jahrbuch der kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien", 64 (1968), pp. 191–278.

⁴³ F.W.H. Hollstein, *Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts ca. 1400–1700*, vol. 6, no. 1.

⁴⁴ We cannot exclude, that Rembrandt's workshop in Amsterdam was for Willmann also the source of technological knowledge on this difficult graphic technique. Not a single technological recipe out of numerous ones concerning etching preparation, written down by Willmann himself in his notes (Strahovská knihovna, Prague, sign. AY XII 15), was affixed with a provenance note, that would have certified the origins in Rembrandt's workshop. In case of a few recipes we can be quite certain that they were copied from the German edition of a popular handbook by A. Bosse, *Kunstbüchlein von der Radier- und Etz=Kunst...*, Nürnberg 1652.

⁴⁵ See: Alpers, *op. cit.*, p. 179.



9. Michael Willmann, *Susanna and the Elders*, around 1650, etching, 115 × 92 mm, Warsaw, Muzeum Narodowe. Photo Muzeum Narodowe, Warsaw



10. Michael Willmann, *David before Saul*, around 1650, etching, 80 × 120 mm, Warsaw, Muzeum Narodowe. Photo Muzeum Narodowe, Warsaw

year 1650, anticipates the beginnings over twenty years later of the “classicism” critical estimate of life and creation of “the first heretic in painting”, first of all expressed in the works by Andries Pels and Joachim von Sandrart. The latter in his *Teutsche Academie* disapproved of Rembrandt for the fact that “He used to have principles at which he stuck and he had no fear to fight against our rules of art, as for instance anatomy and human body proportions, against perspective and applying antique sculptures, against Raphael’s drawing and sensible education, and against academies, so useful in our profession...”⁴⁶. Celebrated and full of pupils Rembrandt’s workshop was for Willmann the source of composition teaching methods only, and not the ideal of art.

III

This basing on Rembrandt’s workshop “methods” was not limited solely to drawing exercises, but most probably applied also to the way of painting. For we can regard as almost certain that Willmann got acquainted with the way of painting used by the commonly appreciated master who then had numerous pupils, peeping at drawing lessons in composition led in Rembrandt’s workshop in Amsterdam. The majority of Willmann’s early paintings known to us, dated at the period soon after the artist had left Holland, in scholars’ shared opinion show the trace of the formal manner used by Rembrandt and the artists from his circle⁴⁷. In a small-sized picture with the scene *Susanna and the Elders* (fig. 11) – the early Willmann’s work commonly recognised as the closest to Rembrandt’s stylistics – “the evident” example of the master from Amsterdam, according to Jaromír Neumann, appeared in the contrast way of “operating paint and light”⁴⁸. Whereas the painting of a rarely depicted subject from The Old Testament *The Healing of the Paralytic* (fig. 12), acknowledged already by Ernst Kloss as still presenting Rembrandt’s manner entirely⁴⁹, Rüdiger Klessmann defined the work as completely dependent, as it comes to “colour” and “soft passages of light”, on “the painting performed in Amsterdam in the 1640s under Rembrandt’s influence”, taking into consideration even the possibility that Willmann created the work still during his stay in Holland⁵⁰. The evident traces of Amsterdam inspirations were spotted also in one of the earliest Willmann’s works dated at 1656, the painting produced for the abbot of Lubiąż, Arnold Freiberger, depicting *Landscape with St. John the Baptist* (fig. 13). According to Antoni Ziembra, “...loose and painterly manner of Rembrandt and his circle exerted decisive influence”⁵¹.

Making an attempt to adopt Rembrandt’s manner, Willmann however did not apply in any of his early paintings compositional patterns of the master from Amsterdam. *The Healing of the Paralytic* is solely based on the same subject painted by Rembrandt’s follower, Salomon Koninck⁵², whereas in the other Willmann’s works created in the same period, e.g. *Landscape with St. John the Baptist* are modelled entirely after Jan van Londerseel’s engraving after Gillis Claesz. d’Hondecoeter’s painting⁵³, the loose painterly manner is applied to the compositional “prototypes”, which had nothing in common with Rembrandt’s art. Hence it can be assumed that the master’s paintings were for the young newcomer from Königsberg most of all the

⁴⁶ “...bliebe er beständig bey seinem angenommenen Brauch / und scheute sich nicht / wider unsre Kunst-Regeln / als die Anatomia und Mass der menschlichen Glied=maßen / wider die Perspectiva und den Nutzen der antichen Statuen / wider Raphaels Zeichenkunst und vermutliche Ausbildungen auch wider die unserer Profession höchst-nöhtigen Academien zu streiten...” – J. von Sandrart, *Teutsche Academie der Bau-, Bild- und Mahlerey-Künste*, Nürnberg 1675–1680 [Reprint, introduction by Ch. Klemm, Nördlingen 1994], vol. 2, book 3, p. 326. See also Eemanns, *op. cit.*, pp. 63–96.

⁴⁷ See Lossow, *op. cit.*, cat. nos. A. 7, 22, 39, 49, 136. See also Kloss, *op. cit.*, pp. 47–52; Gerzon, *op. cit.*, pp. 292–293; Klessmann, *Willmann i Niderlandy...*, pp. 56–62, and Kozięt, *Rysunki...*, pp. 98–109.

⁴⁸ “...příklad Rembrandtův patrný v zacházení s pastou a světlem...” – Neumann, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

⁴⁹ “...noch ganz im Geiste Rembrandts gedacht” – Kloss, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

⁵⁰ “Koloryst ten jak i miękkie przejścia światła są charakterystyczne dla malarstwa uprawianego w latach czterdziestych w Amsterdamie, któremu piętno nadali Rembrandt i jego naśladowcy” – Michael Willmann (1630–1706)..., cat. no. 1 (R. Klessmann).

⁵¹ “Decydujący wpływ wywarła nań jednak swobodna i malownicza maniera malarstwa Rembrandta i jego kręgu” – *Ibidem*, cat. no. 4 (A. Ziembra).

⁵² Klessmann, *Willmann i Niderlandy...*, pp. 60–61.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 56; Michael Willmann (1630–1706)..., p. 86.



11. Michael Willmann, *Susanna and the Elders*, oil, panel, 43,6 × 33,5 cm, Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum. Photo after A. Koziel, *Rysunki Michaela Willmanna (1630–1706)*, Wrocław 2000, fig. 31



12. Michael Willmann, *The Healing of the Paralytic*, oil, canvas, 55,5 × 81,5 cm, Nelahozeves, Lobkowiczké sbírky. Photo after Michael Willmann (1630–1706). Exhibition catalogue, ed. M. Adamski, P. Łukaszewicz, F. Wagner, Salzburg 1994, p. 81, fig. 1



13. Michael Willmann, *Landscape with St. John the Baptist*, 1656, oil, canvas, 88 × 118 cm,
Warsaw, Muzeum Narodowe. Photo Muzeum Narodowe, Warsaw

ideal of a painting “method” – unrestrained, rough use of paint on the surface of a picture, defined as *ruwe manier* in the seventeenth-century Holland⁵⁴.

Willmann tried to learn the painting lesson of a difficult sketchy manner, what Karel van Mander himself discouraged the beginning artists warning them: “Straight forward painting [...] is not designed for everyone”⁵⁵. Deciding on the manner Willmann searching for a model worth following referred to the masterworks of Rembrandt, who was commonly praised then and was recognised as the leading Dutch representative of *ruwe manier*. Needless to say, for his way of painting Rembrandt was appreciated even by his critics, to name just Joachim von Sandrart, who pointed him out as an ideal, admitting that “[he] could break colours in an excellent and entirely artistic way and with their help he was able to recreate the true simplicity of nature and life harmony, opening the eyes of those traditionally being more dye-makers than painters; for they apply paints in a harsh, rough and tough manner, one by one, what effects in their pictures having nothing in common with nature, rather reminding paint-box on market stalls or canvas brought from a dye-house”⁵⁶.

⁵⁴ The division between “smooth” (*nette*) and “rough” (*ruwe*) painting manner was one of the fundamental differences between the ways of elaborating the surface of a painting, commonly used both in North-European painting theory and painting *praxis* of that time. See J.A. E m m e n s, *Natuur, onderwijzing en oefening Bij een drieliuk van Gerrit Dou*, [in:] *Album Discipulorum J.G. van Gelder*, Utrecht 1963, pp. 125–128; E m m e n s, *Rembrandt en de regels...*, pp. 30–36; A.K. Whee lock Jr., *Reappraisal of Gerard Dou’s Reputation*, [in:] *William A. Clark Collection. The Corcoran Gallery of Art*, Washington 1978, pp. 60–67; B.P.J. Broos, (review) S. Slive, *Frans Hals*, vol. 1–3, London 1970–1974, “Simiolus”, 10 (1978–1979), pp. 121–123; O. Naumann, *Frans van Mieris the Elder (1635–1681)*, Davaco 1981, pp. 40–41; Alpers, *op. cit.*, pp. 39–40; E. van de Wetering, *Rembrandts Malweise: Werk im Dienst der Illusion*, [in:] *Rembrandt. Der Meister und seine Werkstatt: Gemälde...*, pp. 13–39.

⁵⁵ “Ten ersten schier sonder teyckenen schilderen, wil hem met yeder niet schicken...” – C. v a n M a n d e r, *Den grondt der edel vry schilderkonst*, uitgegeven en van vertaling en commentar H. Miedema, Utrecht 1973, vol. 1: text, part 1, fol 47a.

⁵⁶ “...er die Farben sehr vernünftig und künstlich von ihrer ignen Art zu brechen / und nachmalen darmit auf der Tafel / der Natur warhafte und lebhafte Einfältigkeit / mit guter Harmonie des Lebens / auszubilden gewust / wormit er dann allen denen die Augen eröfnet / welche / dem gemeinen Brauch nach / mehr Färber als Mahler sind / indem sie die Härtigkeit und rauhe Art der Farben ganz frech und hart neben einander legen / daß sie mit der Natur ganz keine Gemeinschaft haben / sondern nur denen in den Kram-Läden gefüllten Schachtlen / oder aus der Färberey gebrachten Tüchern ähnlich und gleich sehn“ – S a n d r a r t, *Teutsche*

The choice between “rough” and “smooth” manner of painting made by Willmann around 1650 may be compared to a portrait painter from Haarlem, Jan de Baen’s hesitations described by Arnold Houbraken: “Now he had to conceive of a praiseworthy manner of painting in which to continue. The brushwork of Ant. van Dijk was held in great esteem, and that of Rembrandt also found many followers. At this crossroads he long stood to ponder, not knowing which road was best to take, but chose the first method, being of a more enduring nature, as his goal”⁵⁷. In his biography Willmann referred to the typical traits of a colourist painter (*pictor vulgaris*), i. e. inborn “talent” and “nature borrowed from God”⁵⁸, he followed another road. What is important, the young newcomer from Königsberg decided on following Rembrandt’s “rough” manner despite the fact that since ca. 1640 it was the “smooth” manner being absolutely preferred, both by the artists and the patrons of paintings. Philips Angel praising “smoothness” (*netticheyt*) of Gerrit Dou’s paintings stated clearly: “the one who works otherwise, will be rather laughed at than praised”⁵⁹. Furthermore, of all Rembrandt’s numerous pupils only Gerbrand van den Eckhout and Aert de Gelder continued painting in their teacher’s manner after leaving the master’s workshop in Amsterdam⁶⁰.

Willmann’s decision on taking a lesson of painting in the manner less and less appreciated by the Dutch people, *ruwe manier*, was influenced strongly in my opinion by the common practice of associating this difficult method of painting with the creation of the Venetians. As Abraham Bosse noticed in his published in 1649 *Sentiments sur la distinction des diverses manières de peinture, dessin et gravure, et des originaux d’avec leurs copies...*: “...some try to paint by making the picture surface homogenous, as used to do Léonard d’Auincy, Jean Bellin, Albert [Dürer] and Olbins [Holbein] among many others, and colours – very shiny and vivid. The others act on the contrary, also in their manner of painting, favouring a method, which allows us to separate almost every single touch of a paintbrush and where the paint is thick and rises distinctly in different places [...], as it was in the case of Tintoretto, Paul Veronese and Bassano among many others”⁶¹. First of all Titian however, was regarded as an unattainable ideal of a sketchy manner of painting. Van Mander paying much concern for the description of the late manner of work of the Venetian artist, who used to paint with “patches and rough strokes” (*vlekken en ruwe streken*), at the same time mentioned “various masters” tried hard to follow this Venetian manner in their paintings, but “not being able to act so successfully, they created solely poor objects”⁶². The only one out of a few Northern artists who succeeded in applying this difficult art was Rembrandt himself, whose individual “rough” style in his late paintings was recently claimed by Ernst van de Wetering as the result of the artistic rivalry with the original painting manner of the Venetian master initiated by the creator from Amsterdam⁶³. It is significant that Roger de Piles, perceiving the “Venetian” character of Rembrandt’s works and even comparing his painting manner with Titian’s painting technique, was convinced that Rembrandt travelled to Venice in 1635–1636⁶⁴.

Venetian sources of the unrestrained, “rough” manner, used in Willmann’s paintings dated as the earliest were for the young artist, in my opinion, equally important as the choice of compositional drawing

Academie..., vol. 1, part 2, book 3, p. 326. Another representative of such a method of painting, admired by the contemporaries was Frans Hals – see *B r o o s*, (review)..., pp. 121–123.

⁵⁷ “Nu moest hy zig een wyze van schilderen voorstellen die prysellyk was om zig daar aan te houden. De penceelkonst van Ant. van Dyk was in groote agting, en die van Rembrandt vond ook veel aanhangiers. Op dezen tweesprong stont hy lang te dutten, niet wetende wat weg best in te slaan, doch verkoos de handeling van de eersten als van een duurzamer aart, tot zyn voorwerp” – *Houbraken*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 305. Translation after: *B r o o s*, (review)..., p. 123.

⁵⁸ S a n d r a r t, *Academia...*, p. 393. For details on the difference between *pictor doctus* and *pictor vulgaris* in the seventeenth-century painting theory, see E m m e n s, *Rembrandt en de regels...*, pp. 28–62.

⁵⁹ “...die anders hier in te werck gaet, sal meer bespot dan gepresen werden...” – Ph. A n g e l, *Lof der Schilder-Konst*, Leiden 1642, p. 56.

⁶⁰ See A. B l a n k e r t, *Rembrandt’s impact*, [in:] *Rembrandt, a genius and his impact*. Exhibition catalogue, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 1 X – 7 XII 1997, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 17 XII 1997 – 15 II 1998, Zwolle 1997, pp. 211–212.

⁶¹ A. B o s s e, *Sentiments sur la distinction des diverses manières de peinture, dessin et gravure, et des originaux d’avec leurs copies...*, [in:] *Le peintre converti aux précises et universelles règles de son art...*, ed. R.-A. Weigert, Paris 1964, p. 146.

⁶² “Verscheidene meesters nu, die dit in hun werk wilden navolgen, hebben er niets behoorlijks van gemaakt maar lelijk spul tot stand gebracht” – C. v a n M a n d e r, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 258, 261.

⁶³ V a n de W e t e r i n g, *op. cit.*, pp. 16–22, and i d e m, *Rembrandt: The Painter at Work*, Amsterdam 1997, *passim*.

⁶⁴ R. de Piles, *Abregé de la Vie des Peintres, avec des reflexions sur leurs ouvrages, Et un Traité du Peintre parfait, de la connoissance des Desseins, et de l’utilité des Estampes*, Paris 1699, p. 437–438. See also E m m e n s, *Rembrandt en de regels...*, pp. 78–80.

exercises for graphic models associated exclusively with the circle of Italian art. Combining in his education the use of graphic “prototypes” of a classicist nude and composition with the manner of applying paints, copied from Venetian ideal of colorist painting, the young arrival from Königsberg seemed to aim to practise in real life Van Mander’s universal recipe for painter’s completed education, dedicated to young artists: “From Rome bring back solid drawing and [...] painting from the city of Venice”⁶⁵. The example of a conscious attempt to follow this simple recipe for a painter’s ideal education may be the description of Joachim von Sandrart’s trip to Italy, published within the first volume of his *Teutsche Academie...* in the artist’s biography. After the studies on Venetian paintings by the local masters, “...which gave him excellent practice, especially the possibility of learning about invention and use of colour...”, the artist “to make a better progress in the art of drawing [...] headed from Venice to Rome...”⁶⁶.

Willmann acted alike, however, as he had no possibility of travelling south, he reached out for the models available outside Italy. The studies of the sketchy manner of painting begun by young Willmann in Holland were certainly continued over his later trips, mainly during his longer stay in Prague. The words written down in Willmann’s biography published by Sandrart about the artist who “benefited [...] greatly” from watching “the emperor’s painting collection”⁶⁷ prove not so much – as some scholars still believe⁶⁸ – his fascination with emperor Rudolph’s II *Kunstkammer*, for the collection was withdrawn from Prague by the Swedes already before 1648⁶⁹, as they confirm Willmann’s studies of the paintings from the emperor’s new painting gallery in the Hradčany castle, which was created since around 1655. Its core constituted masterworks of the Venetian school⁷⁰. Among the paintings purchased for the gallery in Prague by the archduke Leopold William, the renowned collector, Venetian art lover and connoisseur, Willmann could find some representative works of all the important northern Italian colourist painters: a large collection of Titian’s work, Paolo Veronese, Jacopo Tintoretto and the Bassanos’ works as well as those of Schiavone, Palma Giovane, Paris Bordone’s and other less known Venetian masters. The artistic value of the collection in Prague must have been highly estimated, as Charles Patin, the renowned French doctor and numismatist, in his letter of 1673 to the duke Anton Ulrich of Brunswick, the owner of a famous painting collection, defined the emperor’s masterworks enthusiastically as “...the most beautiful pictures in the world with no exaggeration: they have here fifty Titians, a small chamber full of Raphael’s works and four or five chambers filled with distinguished masterworks”⁷¹.

Willmann’s deep appreciation of the impact of his visits to the emperor’s painting gallery in Prague on the young painter’s artistic education, expressed in his biography, is reflected in the painting form of his pictures of that time. The painting lesson in *ruwe manier* acquired in Amsterdam, with the ideals of first of all the pictures by Rembrandt and by the artists of his circle, underwent at Willmann’s some noticeable changes in Prague, certainly after some thorough analysis of the masterworks of Venetian artists. The rough and textural manner of applying paint with the use of its material substantiality in chiaroscuro and spatial rela-

⁶⁵ “Brengt van Roome mede teycken zedich / En t’wel schilderen van de stadt Venedich” – v a n M a n d e r , *op. cit.*, vol. 1, part 75.

⁶⁶ “...aus welchen eine schöne Practic, absonderlich in der Invention und im coloriren zu erlernen [...], noch mehrere Progressen in der Zeichenkunst zu thun machte [...] von Venedig nach Rom abreisen...” – *LebensLauf und Kunst-Wercke Des WolEdlen und Gestrengen Herrn Joachim von Sandrart auf Sockau Hochfürstl. Pfalz-Neuburgischen Rahts: zu schuldigster Beehrung und Dankbarkeit beschreiben und übergeben von Desselben Dienst-ergebenen Veitern und Discipeln*, p. 8, [in:] S a n d r a r t , *Teutsche Academie...*, vol. 1.

⁶⁷ “...et in specie in Pinacophylacio Caesareo Pragensi / mirum in modum proficiebat...” – S a n d r a r t , *Academiae...*, p. 393.

⁶⁸ L o s s o w , *op. cit.*, p. 15; B. S t e i n b o r n , *O żywciu i twórczości Michaela Willmanna*, [in:] M i c h a e l W i l l m a n n (1630-1706)..., pp. 12–13.

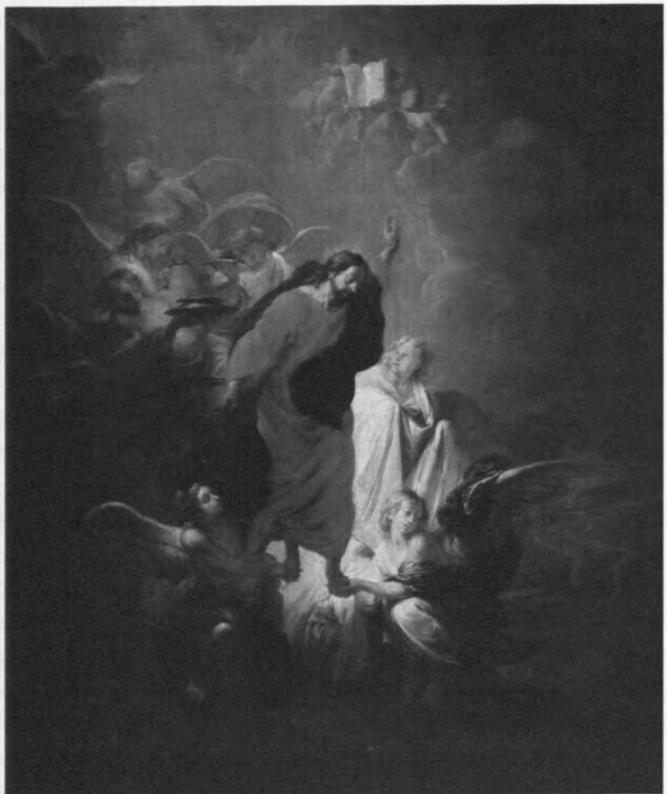
⁶⁹ N e u m a n n , *op. cit.*, p. 157. About Willmann who could not have seen Rudolph’s *Kunstkammer*, there were as early records as of 1902, see K l o s s o w s k i , *op. cit.*, p. 13.

⁷⁰ For the restitution of the emperor’s painting gallery in Hradčany after 1648, see J. N e u m a n n , *Obrazárna Pražského hradu*, Praha 1964, p. 19 ff.

⁷¹ After N e u m a n n , *Obrazárna...*, p. 25. Neumann presumes that Patin writing about as many as fifty Titian’s paintings thought also about other painters of Venetian school, whereas “a small chamber full of Raphael’s works” defined the works of a classicist trend in Italian painting. The descriptions of the European collections by the French doctor must have been treated as the trustful source of information at that time, for Joachim von Sandrart himself based his museographic part of his *Teutsche Academie...* – see S a n d r a r t , *Teutsche Academie...*, vol. 2, part 3 and Ch. K l e m m , *Pfade durch Sandrarts “Teutsche Academie”*, [in:] S a n d r a r t , *Teutsche Academie...*, vol. 1, p. 22.



14. Michael Willmann, *The Coronation of the Virgin*, 1656, oil, panel, 138 × 89 cm, Wrocław, Muzeum Narodowe. Photo A. Podstawa



15. Michael Willmann, *Christ borne by the Angels*, oil, canvas, 198,5 × 166 cm, Prague, Národní galerie. Photo after Michael Willmann (1630–1706). Exhibition catalogue, ed. M. Adamski, P. Łukaszewicz, F. Wagner, Salzburg 1994, p. 83, fig. 2



16. Michael Willmann, *The Martyrdom of St. Simon*, 1662, oil, canvas, 395 × 313 cm, Warsaw, All Saints Church. Photo M. Łanowiecki

tions within the image is characteristic for the dated as the earliest Rembrandtesque Willmann's works: *Susanna and the Elders* and *The Healing of the Paralytic*⁷² and three paintings released in 1656 for the abbot of Lubiąż, Arnold Freiberger: *The Crucifixion*, *The Coronation of the Virgin* (fig. 14) and *The Landscape with St. John the Baptist*⁷³. In the artist's later works the painting manner became much more fluid and flat, whereas shaping of the fundamental painting structure focused on the traces of the brush led quickly but firmly, even dashing, which were often exposed. The vibrating "spatial" painting structure, following some optical effects of Rembrandt's relief alike pictures, so characteristic for Willmann's early works, is replaced later by a painting sketch, produced in a flat and mostly softer manner, often with a loose structure built upon the traces of quick brush strokes. The latter can be seen in a painting performed in Prague of *Christ borne by the Angels*⁷⁴ (fig. 15), with the mature examples of the first large-sized religious paintings released after his settling down in Lubiąż in Silesia in 1660, for instance the paintings from the renowned cycle of *Martyrdoms of the Apostles* (fig. 16).

IV

As long as Willmann underwent the period of self-studying, Rembrandt's workshop was one of the points of reference for the young artist. As soon as he settled down in Lubiąż and commenced his own artistic activity the dependence actually lost its meaning. For over forty-six years of his professional career Willmann applied some models deriving from the circle of Rembrandt only a few times, and even so the borrowings were of a limited kind. Working on the composition of the painting of *Christ healing the Sick* for the Cistercian convent church in Henryków around 1678, Willmann made use of Rembrandt's etching known as *Hundred Guilder Print*⁷⁵, next to two Italian prints: *The Massacre of the Innocents* by Marco Dente after Baccio Bandinelli (B. no. 6-I) and *Fire of Borgo* by Marcantonio Raimondi after Raphael (B. no. 21). In 1693 when Willmann designed the fresco painting of *Abraham, Isaac, Sarah, Jacob and Judas* on the ceiling of St. Joseph church in Krzeszów, he took over the standing figure of Abraham after the renowned Rembrandt's etching of *The Expulsion of Hagar* (B. no. 30)⁷⁶. Eventually in 1702 Willmann created the dynamic composition for the painting of *The Expulsion of the Merchants from the Temple* designed for Knights of the Cross with the Red Star church in Prague, following not only Bernardo Cavallino's painting of the same subject (London, The National Gallery), but also Rembrandt's engraving of *The Expulsion of the Merchants from the Temple* of 1635⁷⁷.

Willmann was slightly more dependent on Rembrandt only in his own etchings⁷⁸. All ten of his preserved etchings of a certain authenticity, released after the artist settled down in Lubiąż, are made in a characteristic painterly stylistics of Rembrandt's etchings, just like the two school works described above. However, in one of his own etchings only, namely in his *Self-Portrait* of 1675 (fig. 17)⁷⁹ proceeded by a missing oil sketch, Willmann referred directly to Rembrandt's original – the etching of his *Self-Portrait* of 1648,

⁷² See Neumann, *Expresivní tendence...*, p. 161; Klessmann, *Willmann i Niderlandy...*, pp. 59–61, and Michael Willmann (1630–1706)..., cat. no. 1 (R. Klessmann).

⁷³ See Lossow, *op. cit.*, cat. no. A 39; Klessmann, *Willmann i Niderlandy...*, pp. 56–57, 61; Michael Willmann (1630–1706)..., cat. nos. 3 (M. Pierzchała) and 4 (A. Ziembka).

⁷⁴ See Neumann, *Expresivní tendence...*, p. 161; Klessmann, *Willmann i Niderlandy...*, p. 63; Michael Willmann (1630–1706)..., cat. no. 2 (P. Preiss).

⁷⁵ See Sumowski, *The Drawings...*, vol. 10, p. 5411; Klessmann, *Willmann i Niderlandy...*, p. 72, note 19; V. Manuth, *O sztuce rysunku Michaela Willmanna*, [in:] Michael Willmann (1630–1706)..., p. 155.

⁷⁶ See Kozięć, *Rysunki...*, p. 264.

⁷⁷ See J. Šperling, *Nové poznámky o Michaelu Willmannovi a Janu Kryštofu Liškovi*, [in:] *Staletá Praha*, ed. Z. Buřival, Praha 1966, p. 172.

⁷⁸ See Maul, *op. cit.*, pp. 39–40, 77–79; Klöss, *op. cit.*, pp. 146–147; Lossow, *op. cit.*, pp. 94–95, and Kozięć, *Sztuka i promocja sztuki...*, pp. 339–351.

⁷⁹ For the first state: A. Kozięć, *Michael Willmann und sein Kreis. Johann Christoph Liška, Georg Wilhelm Neunhertz und Johann Jakob Eybelwieser. Zeichnungen*, translated into German by T. Wimroiter, Exhibition catalogue, Salzburg, Barockmuseum, 20 VII – 2 IX 2001, Stuttgart, Staatgalerie, 15 IX – 18 XI 2001; Wrocław, Muzeum Narodowe, 1 XII 2001 – 13 I 2002, Salzburg 2001, p. 14, fig.; for the second state see Klöss, *op. cit.*, cat. no. C. I. 4, fig. 162; Lossow, *op. cit.*, cat. no. C. 11, fig.; Kozięć, *Sztuka i promocja sztuki...*, pp. 349–350, fig. 11.



17. Michael Willmann, *Self-Portrait*, 1675, etching, 106 × 77 mm, Warsaw,
Muzeum Narodowe. Photo Muzeum Narodowe, Warsaw

which was often followed in the own images created by the pupils and co-workers of the master from Amsterdam⁸⁰. This making himself alike Rembrandt's self-image after almost twenty-five years since he had left Amsterdam was not paying a tribute by the Silesian artist to the Dutch master, rather a conscious reference to Rembrandt's elaborated model of a self-portrait of "a great creator at work" with an adequately exposed full signature as a workshop's logo⁸¹. For Willmann his etched self-portrait was most of all the element of self-promotion and as such may be confronted with a relevant "commercial" fragment of his biography published by Sandrart eight years later⁸².

The majority of Willmann's other etchings were also thought of as self-promotional, for these were the copies of the most important paintings of the master from Lubiąż, e.g. *Beheading of St. Paul* (1661) from the famous cycle from Lubiąż of *The Martyrdoms of the Apostles* (fig. 18), *St. Francis of Assisi* and *St. Anthony of Padua* (1677) from the Franciscan monastery in Jawor, or commonly admired *Assumption* (1683)

⁸⁰ See *Bij Rembrandt in de Leer...*, pp. 16–17, cat. nos. 3 (W. Drost), 4 (A. de Gelder), 5 (N. Maes?), 6 (H. Dul-laert).

⁸¹ Willmann acted in a similar way when he made his painted self-portrait of 1682 alike the engraved portrait of Stefano della Bella, an etcher from Florence, reproduced in Sandrart's work (*S a n d r a r t, Teutsche Academie...*, vol. 1, part 2, the table with figures between pages 360 and 361). It was a conscious and profound identification of the self-portraiting painter with the accepted model of an image of "a famous artist". See K o z i e l, *Rysunki...*, p. 165, figs. 58, 59.

⁸² "...cum et inventione polleat, tanquam historiarum et Poëmatum lectioni deditissimus, et penicillo sit promtissimus vitamque et naturalem rerum colorem qum proxime imitetur multoque vigore lumina exprimat et universal quodam pingendi studio prae-mineat" – S a n d r a r t, *Academia...*, vol. 2, book 3, p. 393. See K o z i e l, *Sztuka i promocja sztuki...*, pp. 349–350.



18. Michael Willmann, *Beheading of St. Paul*, 1661, etching, 269 × 197 mm,
Warsaw, Muzeum Narodowe. Photo Muzeum Narodowe, Warsaw

from the main altar of the abbey church in Lubiąż. Contrary to Rembrandt, Willmann did not treat producing etchings as an autonomous part of his creation; as soon as he commenced working for the church publishers as a designer of the popular, printed in large quantities, religious images, which were prepared by professional etchers, as early as in 1683 he gave up designing his own etchings.

This humble number of Rembrandt's models, used by Willmann in his mature works is still significant, as Rembrandt since the second half of the seventeenth century already was more and more appreciated and well-known in Silesia. His prints were even applied by some Silesian artists. As the model come the etching of *Christ before Pilate* by Jan Gillisz. van Vliet and Rembrandt of ca. 1636: its exact copy was created already in 1660 by an unknown artist in the painting of the same subject in the monastery of the Brothers Hospitallers in Prudnik (Neustadt)⁸³, and repeating the heads of the most important figures in the later school drawing by Johann Jacob Eyblewieser, a guild master from Wrocław (Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, Brunswick)⁸⁴. In the Silesian collections of art works there were some paintings and numerous etchings known as released by Rembrandt, and he himself was received as one of "the great masters". A large collection of fifty-eight prints assumed to be Rembrandt's works was part of the collection of Albrecht Saebisch, an architect and city arsenals inspector⁸⁵, and another collector from Wrocław, Ernst Benjamin von Löwenstädt

⁸³ See A. Koziel, *Barok i rokoko*, [in:] *Op Nederlandse Manier...*, p. 93, and B. Steinborn, P. Oszczanowski, *Aneks. Spis rycin użytych w obrazach śląskich od XVI do połowy XVII wieku*, [in:] *Niderlandyzm na Śląsku...*, p. 69, no. 103.

⁸⁴ See K. Koziel, *Rysunki...*, cat.: Johann Jacob Eybelwieser, no. A. II. 1, fig. 280.

⁸⁵ See *Verzeichnis der vom Schlesischen Museum der bildenden Künste von der Stadtbibliothek zu Breslau zur Aufbewahrung*

und Ronnenburg, gathered in his collection so many graphic works of the master from Amsterdam that he owned "almost everything he etched"⁸⁶. After Saebisch's death his collection was brought in 1689 to the art room in St. Elisabeth church in Wrocław, where the image of "a Greek bishop", then attributed to Rembrandt, was gifted by Magnus Anton von Götz und Schwannenfliess (died in 1714), a town councillor of Wrocław⁸⁷. According to Johann Christian Kundmann and Daniel Gomolcky's records there were many more paintings attributed to Rembrandt in private collections in Wrocław: two painted busts in Graf Franz Adrian von Hatzfeld's collection, "a pretty head" from Ernst Benjamin von Löwenstädt und Ronnenburg's collection and the cycle of as many as twelve portraits of ancient philosophers in Graf Georg Christoph von Proskau's collection⁸⁸. There were also drawings by the master from Amsterdam – Johann Georg Pauli owned "numerous" works of historical subjects⁸⁹.

Willmann however, did not follow the Rembrandtesque inspirations, for him the Italian art was an artistic ideal with the works of these artists from the North whose creation was based on the Italian models, among them Rubens and van Dyck. Sandrart's statement, that young Willmann in Amsterdam "was forced to make his living and for that reason he was not able to go to Italy", was not an excuse, rather an evidence of the painter's life defeat, who not having enough money could not provide full artistic education for himself. Quite on the contrary to young Rembrandt and Lievens, who refused to go south, Willmann was willing to travel to Italy, and when he failed, he tried to complete his education later on with every possible occasion. He did so not only during his stay in Prague in the late 1650s, but also in the later period of his artistic career⁹⁰. However, till the end of his life, Willmann was aware of some lacks in his artistic education. In the letter of 22nd May 1702 to Heinrich Sonepek, the abbot of the Cistercian monastery in Sedlec, Willmann recommended his stepson, Johann Christoph Liška. He praised him to the abbot for being a "real" painter, as he "finds" easily a visual equivalent to the performed "story" and for being able to put the painting "in order", indicating that the skills were gained thanks to the education in Italy. As Willmann admitted regretfully, Liška "saw and learnt" there more than he was able to in Holland in the other days⁹¹.

Translated by Anita Wincencjusz-Patyna

⁸⁶ übernommenen Kupferstiche. A. Sammlung "Rehdigerana", Breslau 1888 – Biblioteka Uniwersytecka we Wrocławiu, Oddział Rękopisów, sign. Akc. 1949 KN 670, and E. H o u s z k a, Prehistoria wrocławskich muzeów / Vorgeschichte der Breslauer Museen, [in:] Muzea sztuki w dawnym Wrocławiu / Kunstsammlungen im alten Breslau, ed. P. Łukaszewicz, Wrocław 1998, p. 17.

⁸⁷ "...insonderheits des Rembrandts fast alles was er radiert" – J.Ch. Kundmann, *Promtuarium rerum naturalium et artificialium Vratislaviense*, Vratislaviae 1726, p. 61.

⁸⁸ Nowadays the painting is attributed to Helmich van Thwenhuysen, working under Rembrandt's influence. B. Steinborn, *Muzeum Narodowe we Wrocławiu. Katalog zbiorów malarstwa niderlandzkiego. Wydanie drugie, poprawione i rozszerzone / Catalogue of the Collection of Netherlandish Painting. Second edition, revised and updated*, Wrocław 2006, pp. 180–181.

⁸⁹ Kundmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 51, 59; D. Gomolcky, *Des kurzgefaßten Anbegriffs der vornehmsten Merkwürdigkeiten in der Kayser- und Königl. Stadt Breslau in Schlesien*, vol. 2, Breslau 1735, p. 67; J.Ch. Kundmann, *Academiae et Scholae Germaniae, praecipue Ducatus Silesiae, cum Bibliothecis, in Nummis. Oder: Die Hohen und Niedern Schulen Teutschlandes...*, Breßlau 1741, pp. 368, 408.

⁹⁰ Kundmann, *Promtuarium...*, p. 84; idem, *Academiae...*, p. 425; Gomolcky, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

⁹¹ For instance, around the year 1677 Willmann began regular studies on the matter of body proportions of children at a different age, inspired by the reading of Joachim von Sandrart's *Teutsche Academie...* (See Kozięć, *Why Did Michael Willmann Study Proportions...*, pp. 453–471). Whereas many inspirations with Italian art started to appear in Willmann's painting since the end of the 1670s. See A. Kozięć, "Włoski przełom" w malarstwie barokowym na Śląsku, czyli rzecz o kłopotach Michaela Willmanna, [in:] *italská renesance a baroko ve střední Evropě. Příspěvky z mezinárodní konference, Olomouc 17.–18. října 2003 / Renesans i barok włoski w Europie Środkowej. Materiały międzynarodowej konferencji, Olomuniec 17–18 października 2003*, ed. L. Daniel, J. Pelán, P. Salwa, O. Špilarová, Olomouc 2005, pp. 197–210.

⁹² "...er schon in seinem besten Alter undt in Italien mehreres gesehen oder begriffen alß ich in Hollandt thun kennen. Er ist auch in Inventirung der Hißtorien sehr geistreich in der Ordinanzen die Bilder voll in und durcheinander lebhafft auch gluhenden Colleritten Summa waß einem rechten Kunstmahler nettig er in allem gute wissenschaft (durch die gnad Gottes) begriffen hat" – Státní oblastní archiv, Třeboň, sign. XLVII/4. See Kozięć, *Michael Willmann's Way...*, p. 54 and idem, *Rysunki...*, p. 51.

REMBRANDT VAN RIJN I MICHAEL WILLMANN, CZYLI HISTORIA UPADKU PEWNEGO MITU

Streszczenie

W wielu naukowych opracowaniach i popularnych opowieściach dotyczących twórczości najwybitniejszego barokowego malarza na Śląsku, Michaela Willmanna, często pojawia się przekonanie, iż podczas pobytu młodego malarza w Amsterdamie około 1650 r. łączyły go z Rembrandtem van Rijn bliskie związki. Willmann miał nie tylko pobierać naukę w pracowni Rembrandta i później wykorzystywać Rembrandtowskie osiągnięcia w swej własnej twórczości, lecz także naśladować specyfczną postawę mistrza z Amsterdamu wobec sztuki, Boga i otaczającej artystę rzeczywistości.

Jednym z głównych źródeł mitu Willmanna jako „śląskiego Rembrandta” była biografia artysty pióra A. Houbrakena (*Groote Schouburgh...*, 1718), który błędnie wykorzystał podstawowe i wiarygodne źródło informacji o amsterdamskim pobycie Willmanna, jakim był obszerny życiorys artysty opublikowany przez J. von Sandrarta (*Academia nobilissimae pictoriae*, 1683). Z relacji Sandrarta bowiem jednoznacznie wynika, że Willmann nie przeszedł w Amsterdamie żadnej regularnej edukacji, ponieważ z powodu braku pieniędzy nie było go stać na naukę „u jakiegoś bardzo sławnego mistrza”. Stąd też główny ciężar jego artystycznej edukacji spoczął na własnej pracy – Willmann zakupił zbiór „prototypów” i „przyjawszy metody Jacoba Backera jak również Rembrandta i innych”, podjął „bardzo surowe ćwiczenia”, kontynuując je pilnie „dniem i nocą”. Co więcej, zmuszony „własną pracą [...] zarabiać na życie” Willmann nie mógł kontynuować swojej edukacji we Włoszech.

Niestety, to właśnie opublikowana przez Houbrakena „błędna” biografia Willmanna stała się podstawowym źródłem wiedzy o amsterdamskiej edukacji artysty dla wielu późniejszych autorów. Relację tę najczęściej wiernie powtarzali autorzy kolejnych słowników malarzy niderlandzkich (m.in., C.H. Balkema, A. Wurzbach), stała się ona także podstawowym źródłem informacji o Willmannie dla badaczy szkoły Rembrandta (m.in., C. Vosmaer, O. Benesch, H. Gerson). O Willmannie jako uczniu mistrza z Amsterdamu pisali także pierwsi badacze twórczości śląskiego malarza, którzy początkowo większą rolę w jego edukacji przyznawali pracowni J. Backera (G.J. Dlabac, G.K. Nagler). Wkrótce jednak to Rembrandta, a nie Backera, zaczęto uważać za rzeczywistego nauczycielą Willmanna (m.in., A. Knoblich, H. Cimbal, W. Drost, E. Hubala, J. Neumann, H. Lossow).

To przeświadczenie o bliskich związkach Willmanna z Rembrandtem było obecne w literaturze naukowej, mimo iż wśród badaczy twórczości Willmanna zaczęły się pojawiać głosy kwestionujące wiarygodność tych przekazów (E. Klossowski, D. Maul, E. Kloss). Związków Willmanna z Rembrandtem nie potwierdziły także odkryte w latach 80. XX w. w bibliotece klasztoru premonstratensów na Strahovie w Pradze własne notatki artysty, wśród których jednym śladem jego pobytu w Amsterdamie był przepis na wermiks, którego Willmann nauczył się od B. van der Helsta. To zakwestionowanie tezy o edukacji Willmanna w pracowni Rembrandta zyskało wsparcie także ze strony badaczy, którzy zainicjowali proces rewizji nadużywanego określenia „uczeń Rembrandta” (B. Broos, W. Sumowski).

Usunięcie Willmanna z grona uczniów Rembrandta sprawiło, iż dyskusja na temat edukacji śląskiego artysty skoncentrowała się na uzyskaniu odpowiedzi na pytanie, co tak naprawdę oznaczają słowa Sandrarta o „metodach Jacoba Backera jak również Rembrandta i innych” i na czym polegały owe „surowe ćwiczenia”, które młody malarz miał kontynuować „dniem i nocą” w Amsterdamie? R. Klessmann uznał, iż słowa te należy interpretować w kontekście braku kontynuowania przez Willmanna swej artystycznej edukacji we Włoszech. Młody malarz z Królewca miałby się w ten sposób odwołać do ośmielającego przykładu Backera i Rembrandta, którzy kształcili się tylko w Niderlandach i nigdy nie wyjechali do Włoch.

Zarówno Klessmann, jak i wcześniejsi badacze, formułowali swoje sądy na temat relacji pomiędzy Willmannem a Rembrandtem nie znając żadnych prac z amsterdamskiego pobytu śląskiego artysty. Zmianę tej sytuacji przyniosło odkrycie, iż seria 20 reprodukcyjnych akwafort autorstwa Josefa Gregory'ego, wykonana w latach 1794–1795 według dzisiaj w większości już zaginionych rysunków Willmanna i wydana w 1805 r. w Pradze, najprawdopodobniej dokumentuje szkice artysty powstałe jeszcze w Amsterdamie, które były rezultatem owych „surowych ćwiczeń” prowadzonych „dniem i nocą” przy wykorzystaniu zakupionego w Amsterdamie zbioru miedziorytniczych „prototypów”. W przypadku aż czternastu szkiców z tej serii udało się bowiem ustalić miedziorytnicze „prototypy”, które zostały wykorzystane przez Willmanna do rysunkowych ćwiczeń, a zbliżony charakter formalny pozostałych prac z tej grupy wskazuje, iż także powstały one na bazie graficznych wzorców.

W swoich ćwiczeniach Willmann starał się naśladować metody nauczania kompozycji stosowane wówczas w najlepszych amsterdamskich pracowniach, w tym także w „akademii” Rembrandta. Wykonywane przez Willmanna „dniem i nocą” kompozytoryczne studia scen o tematyce historycznej, niekiedy kilkakrotnie dotyczące tego samego tematu, mimo iż powstawały poza pracownią Rembrandta, to zdają się wręcz przynależeć pod względem stylistycznym oraz tematycznym do poszczególnych serii rysunków dokumentujących ćwiczenia uczniów mistrza. Jednakże podczas gdy dla uczniów Rembrandta pomoc stanowiły dostarczane przez nauczyciela rysunkowe i graficzne wzorce oraz wykonywane „z natury” pod okiem mistrza rysunki pojedynczych postaci czy też parateatralnych układów kilku osób, Willmann zmuszony był oprzeć się wyłącznie na zakupionym zbiorze miedziorytniczych „prototypów”. Wspomniane przez Sandrarta „metody Jacoba Backera jak również Rembrandta i innych” okazały się być praktykami nauczania kompozycji stosowanymi ówcześnie w pracowniach najlepszych amsterdamskich artystów, do których zaliczali się i Backer i Rembrandt.

Decydując się na podjęcie własnych indywidualnych ćwiczeń według metod nauczania stosowanych w pracowniach Backera i Rembrandta, Willmann jednak świadomie zrezygnował z włączenia do kompletowanego przez siebie zbioru wzorcowych grafik dzieł obu mistrzów. Szczególnie uderzający jest brak śladów wykorzystania przez Willmanna tych akwafort, które Rembrandt wykonywał specjalnie dla swoich uczniów jako wzorce poprawnej kompozycji i aktu. Co więcej, to pominięcie Rembrandtowskich wzorców dotyczyło nie tylko rysunkowych ćwiczeń Willmanna, lecz także jego pierwszych szkolnych rycin, wykonanych w technice akwaforty być może jeszcze podczas edukacyjnego pobytu w Amsterdamie: *Zuzanna i starcy* oraz *Dawid przed Saulem*. Willmann, imitując dydaktyczne praktyki amsterdamskiego mistrza, jednocześnie opowiedział się w wyborze wzorców do swoich własnych ćwiczeń zdecydowanie za „klasycystyczną” normą sztuki. Zakupiony przez Willmanna w Holandii zbiór „prototypów”

tworzyły bowiem miedzioryty wykonane głównie według dzieł powszechnie cenionych włoskich malarzy (m.in., B. Bandinelli, G. Romano, F. Salviati, Tycjan, Tintoretto) oraz artystów niderlandzkich o zdecydowanie italianizującej orientacji (M. Coxie, F. Floris, L. Lombard, K. van Mander). Ten jednoznaczny i świadomy wybór „prototypów” poprawnej kompozycji i aktu właśnie z kręgu XVI-wiecznej sztuki włoskiej, a nie wykonywanych przez Rembrandta graficznych modeli, można postrzegać wręcz jako pierwszą krytykę rembrandtowskiego modelu sztuki przeprowadzoną z pozycji „klasycystycznego”, włoskiego ideału. Pracownia Rembrandta była dla Willmanna źródłem jedynie metod nauczania kompozycji, nie zaś artystycznego ideału sztuki.

To opieranie się na „metodach” stosowanych w pracowni Rembrandta nie zawęzało się wyłącznie do rysunkowych ćwiczeń, lecz najprawdopodobniej obejmowało także sposób malowania obrazów. Większość ze znanych nam wczesnych obrazów autorstwa Willmanna datowanych na okres wkrótce po opuszczeniu przez artystę Holandii (m.in., *Zuzanna i starcy*, *Uzdrowienie paralityka*, *Krajobraz ze św. Janem Chrzcicielem*) nosi piękno maniery formalnej stosowanej przez Rembrandta i artystów z jego kręgu. Podejmując próby adaptacji malarskiej maniery amsterdamskiego mistrza Willmann jednak w żadnym ze znanych nam wczesnych obrazów nie wykorzystał prac naśladowanego artysty jako kompozycyjnych wzorców. Można zatem sądzić, iż obrazy amsterdamskiego mistrza stanowiły dla młodego przybysza z Królewca przede wszystkim wzorzec „metody” malowania – swobodnego, fakturowego operowania farbą na płaszczyźnie obrazu określonego w Holandii w XVII w. jako *ruwe manier*.

Willmann zdecydował się naśladować „szorstką” manierę Rembrandta pomimo tego, iż poczawszy od około 1640 r. to „gładka” maniera była zdecydowanie preferowana i to zarówno przez artystów, jak i fundatorów obrazów. Na decyzję Willmanna o podjęciu lekcji malowania w coraz mniej cenionej przez Holendrów *ruwe manier* istotny wpływ miało powszechnie łączenie tego trudnego sposobu malowania z twórczością Wenecjan, z których to Tycjan uważany był za niedościglego mistrza tego trudnego sposobu malowania. Jednym z nielicznych artystów Północy, który dorównał Wenecjanom, był właśnie Rembrandt, którego indywidualny „szorstki” styl późnych obrazów uznano za rezultat podjęcia artystycznej rywalizacji z malarską manierą Tycjana (E. van de Wetering). Weneckie źródła swobodnej, „szorstkiej” maniery, w jakiej namalowane zostały najwcześniej datowane obrazy Willmanna, były dla młodego artysty równie istotne, jak wybór do kompozycyjnych rysunkowych ćwiczeń graficznych wzorców związanych wyłącznie z kręgiem sztuki włoskiej. Łącząc w swej edukacji wykorzystanie graficznych „prototypów” klasycystycznego aktu i kompozycji ze sposobem operowania farbą wzorowanym na weneckim ideale malarstwa kolorystycznego, młody przybysz z Królewca zdawał się dążyć do wcielenia w życie kierowanej do młodych artystów przez K. van Mandera powszechniej recepty na pełne wykształcenie malarza: „Przywieź ze sobą z Rzymu porządne rysowanie a [...] malowanie z miasta Wenecji”. Jednak wobec braku możliwości podrózowania do Włoch Willmann sięgał do dostępnych poza Włochami wzorców. Rozpoczęte w Holandii studia młodego Willmanna nad szkicową manierą malarską były zapewne kontynuowane w czasie późniejszych podróży artysty, zwłaszcza podczas dłuższego pobytu w Pradze. Zapisane w opublikowanej przez Sandrarta biografii Willmanna słowa, iż artysta „szczególnie wiele [...] skorzystał” oglądając tamtejsze „cesarskie zbiory malarstwa” widzieć należy jako potwierdzenie studiów Willmanna nad obrazami z tworzącej się od około połowy lat 50. XVII w. na zamku hradcańskim nowej cesarskiej galerii malarstwa, której rdzeń stanowiły wysokiej klasy dzieła szkoły weneckiej.

Wyróżona w biografii malarza wysoka ocena roli wizyt w cesarskiej galerii malarstwa w Pradze dla artystycznej edukacji młodego Willmanna znajduje swoje pełne odzwierciedlenie w malarskiej formie ówczesnych obrazów artysty. Wyniesiona z pobytu w Amsterdamie lekcja malowania w *ruwe manier* uległa w Pradze istotnym modyfikacjom. Szorstki i fakturowy sposób operowania farbą z wykorzystaniem jej materialnej substancialności, charakteryzujący najwcześniej datowane, „rembrandtyzujące” dzieła Willmanna, w późniejszych pracach artysty stał się o wiele bardziej płynny i płaski, natomiast ciężar kształtuowania podstawowej struktury malarskiej spoczął na często odsłoniętych śladach szybko prowadzonego pędzla, czego dojrzałym przykładem są pierwsze wielkoformatowe przedstawienia religijne wykonane po osiedleniu się artysty w 1660 r. w Lubiążu na Śląsku.

O ile w okresie edukacji Willmanna pracownia Rembrandta była jednym z punktów odniesienia dla autodydaktyki młodego artysty, o tyle po jego osiedleniu się w Lubiążu i podjęciu własnej działalności artystycznej zależność ta przestała mieć większe znaczenie. W ciągu całej swojej ponad 46-letniej zawodowej kariery malarza Willmann zaledwie kilka razy sięgnął po wzorce z kręgu twórczości Rembrandta, a i tak zapożyczenia te miały na ogół ograniczony charakter. Z nieco większą zależnością od prac amsterdamskiego mistrza spotykamy się jedynie na polu autorskich akwafort Willmanna. Choć wszystkie zachowane dzisiaj akwafort lubiąskiego mistrza wykonanych już po osiedleniu się artysty w Lubiążu jest utrzymanych w malarskiej stylistyce akwafort Rembrandta, to jednak tylko w jednej akwaficie – graficznym autoportrecie z 1675 r. – Willmann odwołał się wprost do Rembrandtowskiego wzorca: autoportretowej grafiki z 1648 r. To upodobnienie się Willmanna na własnym wizerunku do autoportretu Rembrandta było jednak jedynie nawiązaniem do wypracowanego przez Rembrandta modelu autoportretu „wielkiego twórcy przy pracy”. Dla Willmanna bowiem jego własny graficzny autoportret oraz pozostałe akwaferty pełniły przede wszystkim funkcję autopromocijną. Willmann nie traktował wykonywania akwafort jako autonomicznej dziedziny swojej twórczości i gdy tylko rozpoczął pracę jako projektant miedziorytniczych przedstawień religijnych, które były sztychowane przez profesjonalnych grafików, to już w 1683 r. zaprzestał przygotowywania własnych akwafort.

Ta skromna liczba rembrandtowskich wzorców wykorzystanych w samodzielnej twórczości Willmanna jest znacząca, albowiem poczynając już od 2. połowy XVII w. Rembrandt był coraz bardziej znany i ceniony na Śląsku. Z jego wzorców korzystali ślascy artyści, w śląskich kolekcjach dzieł sztuki znajdowały się obrazy oraz liczne rycinę uznawane za dzieła amsterdamskiego artysty, a on sam był postrzegany jako jeden z „wielkich mistrzów”. Willmann jednak nie korzystał z Rembrandtowskich inspiracji, albowiem dla niego to przede wszystkim sztuka włoska oraz dzieła tych artystów Północy, którzy – jak Rubens czy Van Dyck – opierali swoją twórczość na włoskich wzorach, były ucielesnieniem artystycznego ideału. Podana przez Sandrarta informacja o tym, że młody Willmann nie mógł wyjechać do Włoch była świadectwem życiowej porażki malarza, który ze względu na brak pieniędzy nie był w stanie uzyskać pełnego artystycznego wykształcenia. Ta świadomość niedostatków własnej artystycznej edukacji towarzyszyła Willmannowi już do końca jego życia.