

Art in Poland from the Renaissance to the Rococo

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In 1492, the year America was “discovered”, Casimir IV Jagiellon, King of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, perished after a 56-year reign. His death marked the end of an era. The two brief rules of his sons – Jan Olbracht (1459-1501) and Aleksander (1461-1506) – were a transitional phase. The Constitution of 1505 ended the process of the medieval monarchy’s transformation into a state with a new, distinct structure, known as the *respublica mixta*. By the time Sigismund I the Old (1467-1548), another son of Casimir IV, acceded to the throne the following year, Poland was a sort of republic ruled by the nobility, with a king whose position was in fact comparable to that of a lifelong president, however much the splendour of the monarchy was maintained. Although this structure had dangerous and even self-destructive aspects, it survived until the end of the eighteenth century, and the reigns of Sigismund I the Old and his son, Sigismund II Augustus (1520-1572), are considered the country’s most prosperous period and a golden age in the history of Polish culture. Despite the growing crisis in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the republic’s vast territories – which spanned Poland, Lithuania, today’s Belarus and a substantial part of Ukraine – invaluable cultural and artistic works were produced. The long years from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries are defined as the “Old Polish” era and, in the traditional terminology of the history of European art, correspond to the Renaissance, Mannerism and the Baroque and Rococo periods.

The aforementioned political transformation took place during the transition from fifteenth to sixteenth century, and was accompanied by equally swift changes in art. In 1489 Veit Stoss (1447/48-1533) completed the massive sculpted altarpiece in St Mary’s church in Krakow, which is hailed as the greatest artistic achievement in late medieval Polish art. During this period art flourished, underpinned by prosperous cities with autonomous laws, where crafts and trade were developing on an international scale. In Krakow, the capital city, the main Gothic buildings were erected in the latter half of the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. Painting and sculpture soon moved into the forefront, with the idealism of the “international style” of the early fifteenth century giving way to the realism and expressionism of the latter half

of that century, of which the most outstanding exponent was the work of Veit Stoss. The decorative arts also attained a high standard, the craft of goldsmiths in particular. Stoss's last great work in Krakow, produced in 1492, was the tomb of Casimir IV, carved in red marble. The Gothic style, far from having exhausted its potential, seemed to be holding its own. A mere ten years later, however, the execution of the architectural framework of the tomb of King Jan Olbracht was entrusted to Francesco Fiorentino (d. 1516), who was known in Poland as Franciszek Florentczyk. The classical, Florentine brand of the Italian Renaissance thus found its way to Krakow cathedral at the very beginning of the sixteenth century.

Franciszek Florentczyk's arrival in Krakow in 1501 or the early months of 1502 was part of a special phenomenon. As Professor Jan Białostocki has noted, Italian Renaissance art was not first assimilated in Western Europe. In the second half of the fifteenth century, Italian artists had appeared in Hungary, whose borders stretched as far as the Mediterranean Sea, and which had become a thriving cultural centre during the reign of King Matthias Corvinus (1443-1490). It was from nearby Hungary that the Italians came to Poland. Italian influence spread considerably further eastwards – as far as Moscow, and even to the Tartar states in the Crimea.

New ideas were espoused relatively quickly. They originally spread from the court, but their dissemination was facilitated by the early acceptance of humanist culture in Poland, and by the young Poles' eagerness to travel. It should be pointed out that the Italian Renaissance forms adopted in Poland resembled the original forms quite closely, especially in Krakow, where Tuscan masters were predominant. This assimilation of the Italian Renaissance in Poland was, however, initially restricted to certain branches of art, primarily architecture and stone sculpture. In wooden sculpture and goldsmithery in particular, a whole generation continued to cultivate Gothic traditions, while easel and miniature paintings were much more strongly tied to the southern German centres than to the Italian ones. In architecture too, especially outside Krakow and the other major cities, Italian-style ornamentation was most commonly applied to late Gothic structures. Moreover, a revival of the Gothic tradition was witnessed around 1600. Churches with chiefly Gothic features – such as the structures enclosing the presbytery, ribbed vaulting and the widespread use of the ogive – were built in the southeast of the country up until the latter half of the sixteenth century. Despite espousing the new Renaissance style from Italy, Poland did not sever its traditional ties with Germany. There were also increasing attempts to reach further westwards. For example, the most remarkable work of royal patronage of the arts in the sixteenth century was a collection of tapestries commissioned from Brussels by King Sigismund II Augustus.

Returning to Franciszek Florentczyk, his architectural structure for the tomb of King Jan Olbracht in c. 1502-1504 marked a real breakthrough, as it

introduced the Florentine Renaissance to the Gothic setting of the cathedral. The success of this first work paved the way for a much larger commission – the reconstruction of Wawel Royal Castle, which was damaged by fire in 1499. The bricks were laid by local builders, headed by Eberhard Rosemberger, and Franciszek was entrusted with the stone decoration. He also designed the castle's most beautiful feature – the arcade of the courtyard. Construction began on the west wing of the castle around 1504, and the whole building was completed in 1536. After Franciszek's death, his role was taken over by a local builder named Benedykt, and another Italian, Bartolomeo Berrecci (1480/1485-1537). Wawel Castle courtyard immediately brings to mind Florentine Renaissance architecture, though it also has many features of its own, such as its grand dimensions, its variations on the Italian model as regards the functions of the various floors of buildings (the *piano nobile* is the second floor) and its sloping roof. The royal residence had a splendid decoration – part of which survives to this day – based on a coherent symbolic scheme which presented Sigismund I as the ideal ruler, in accordance with the principles of classical Antiquity (mainly Stoic) and Christianity: hard on enemies, but gentle to his subjects, just, wise and pious.

While the castle was being built, King Sigismund I embarked on the second most important work executed under his royal patronage – the chapel/mausoleum, also on Wawel Hill and constructed between 1519 and 1531. It was designed by Bartolomeo Berrecci and we know the names of the whole group of Italian artists in his workshop: Antonio da Fiesole (d. 1542), Nicolo Castiglione, Filippo da Fiesole, Bernardinus Zanobi de Gianotis (d. 1541), Giovanni Soli, Giovanni Cini (1490/1495-1565) and perhaps Gian Maria Mosca, called Padovano (1493-1574). The decorative fixtures were made of bronze and silver, such as the rails enclosing the entrance from the cathedral side, the altar and candelabras, and commissioned from the finest Nuremberg workshops.

The chapel of Sigismund I was built on a square-shaped plan. Above it rises a tall, eight-sided drum that supports the cupola, which has a semi-elliptical cross-section; the svelte lantern tower is surmounted by a crown and a putto. The superimposition of these elements gives it a pointed appearance, with proportions that are almost tower-like. The chapel's exterior displays a coolly classicist formal language, although the most eye-catching feature is the cupola covered in gilt scales. In contrast, the interior is lavishly decorated in grey sandstone with grotesques and classical themes, figured scenes and other motifs. At the far end are figures of saints sculpted in red marble, and the royal tomb with the likeness of Sigismund lying on the sarcophagus. In 1574-1575 the tomb was altered to include his son, Sigismund II Augustus.

Bartolomeo Berrecci, whose name is displayed on the cupola lantern, no doubt designed the chapel's architecture and decoration. The sculptures, which vary in terms of stylistic attributes and artistic quality, cannot be ascribed to particular artists of his workshop. A careful analysis of the architecture and

ornamentation of the chapel allows us to relate it to important works in Florence, Rome and other Italian centres, chiefly Loreto. However, it is difficult to date them with certainty to a particular phase of Italian Renaissance art. The chapel was executed when the Renaissance was in full swing, although some of its features are clearly connected with the *Quattrocento*, while others are more Mannerist.

The architecture and decoration of the chapel of Sigismund I stem from a complex iconographic programme that is Christian and classicist in inspiration. There is a perfect balance between both influences in the lower part, and we are left in no doubt about the religious nature of the interior. The upper part is different, as the motifs are themes are taken solely from classical Antiquity. Their function and significance have sparked heated debate amongst leading Polish art historians for decades, and the lack of reliable sources prevents us from settling the question.

These three royally founded buildings on Wawel Hill – the castle, the chapel of Sigismund, and his tomb itself – served as models for the further development of Renaissance art throughout the country. These were, however, difficult and ambitious models to follow. In most cases, local patrons and artists were incapable of grasping and recreating the purity of the Italian style either in the formal or the iconographic aspects. The resulting simplifications blended Tuscan motifs with Gothic, northern Italian and Dutch ones. From around the mid-sixteenth century Mannerist techniques became increasingly evident, culminating in the last quarter of the century in the art of Santi Gucci (c. 1530-1600) and his circle.

None of the Polish castles built in the first half of the sixteenth century fully embraced the artistic programme of Wawel Castle. They merely borrowed single elements, which they incorporated into structures that continued to be essentially late Gothic. In the southeast territories of the kingdom – now Ukraine – a particular kind of castle evolved, conditioned by the constant threat of Tartar and Turkish invasions, and lasted until the mid-seventeenth century. Its defensive system was archaic, its architectural solutions provincial, and its chief attribute was the sprawling space of the courtyard, surrounded by a wall and turrets, which served to protect as much of the local population as possible. Examples of this type of castle are Stare Sioło and Kamianets-Podilskyi.

Only around 1580 did visibly modern solutions emerge in residential architecture. In Baranów castle (1591-1606) we find a rigorous consistency in the ground plan, a facade accentuated by a higher tier in the centre, and a decorative attic floor. It was also around this time that the first palaces appeared in which a single, compact block was replaced by a design of several wings arranged around an inner courtyard, and the line of defence was shifted outwards towards an artillery stockade (*Książ Wielki*, 1585-1595).

The great success and prestige of the chapel of Sigismund soon prompted innumerable imitations, though none of these could compare in

thoroughness and artistic quality with Berrecci's masterwork. Polish patrons and artists needed some time to fully understand the lesson provided by the royal mausoleum. Until the mid-sixteenth century it was emulated only twice, one example of which, the bishop's chapel by Piotr Tomicki in Wawel cathedral, was a simplification of Berrecci's royal model. Few of the burial chapels built around the country in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were based on that of Sigismund, as they are closer in design to the chapel of Bishop Tomicki, whose somewhat more modest form (above all the suppression of the cupola drum) was more affordable to private investors. By the end of the sixteenth century 17 more chapels had been built, but they reached their height of popularity from 1600 onwards. Some 130 were built in the first half of the seventeenth century, and the fashion lingered on in the 1650s. The powerful demand for structures of this kind gave rise to a special phenomenon: workshops emerged that specialised in prefabricated stone elements for chapels, which were transported and assembled on site.

All these chapels repeat the basic features of the original model: the square ground plan, the cupola and the basic forms of the Renaissance language. However they are quite varied in dimensions, decoration, stylistic details and artistic quality. To illustrate the various degrees of fidelity to or departure from the model, let us examine a few important examples. The exterior of the Vasa chapel on Wawel Hill is a faithful copy of the neighbouring chapel of Sigismund, and it was designed to underline the inherited right of the Swedish dynasty to the Polish throne. The Myszkowski family chapel in the Dominican church in Krakow, designed by the workshop of Santi Gucci between 1603 and 1614, is a fine example of a High Mannerist interpretation of Berrecci's ideas. The Boim chapel in Lwów (1609-1615), with its very elaborately decorated facade displaying Dutch and German motifs, marks the furthest point of departure from the classical ideals of the Renaissance.

The tomb of King Sigismund I the Old played a similar role in the development of Renaissance sculpture in Poland to that of the chapel of Sigismund in architecture. The model it established lasted for several decades of the seventeenth century. Even today Polish churches contain hundreds of tombs of men, women and even children that are built according to this uniform model, with an architectural frame that shelters the "slumbering" likeness of the deceased. Only the earliest Renaissance tombs depart from this model, and are nearer to fifteenth-century Florentine designs, with the figure of the deceased practically a bas-relief on the lid of the sarcophagus – such as the tomb of Chancellor Krzysztof Szydłowiecki (d. 1532) in Opatów. Also relatively infrequent are monuments with standing or seated figures, such as that of Piotr Kmita Sr in Wawel cathedral, executed after 1505, those of Seweryn and Zofia Boner in St Mary's church in Krakow, dating from 1535-1538 – all three hailing from the Vischer workshop in Nuremberg – and that of the Kryski family in the church of Drobina, near Płock, which was built by Santi Gucci in 1572-1576.

The main features of King Sigismund I's tomb are derived from Italian art. The form of the wall alcove was introduced by Bernardo Rossellino in the fifteenth century, although the half-supine figure of the deceased was known in medieval art, and originates directly from the Roman work of Andrea Sansovino (1504-1507), which is why this model is often defined as Sansovinoesque. Polish tombs with "slumbering" figures appear in many variants, one of the most typical being a two-tiered composition featuring pairs of relatives, most often married couples. This type of sculpted architectural composition is highly characteristic of the Polish Renaissance and almost unheard of in neighbouring countries.

Tomb figures are the core feature of Polish Renaissance sculpture. The finest examples are works by masters who arrived from Italy: apart from the above-mentioned Berrecci, there were Gianotis, Padovano and, somewhat later, Santi Gucci and Girolamo Canavesi (c. 1525-1582). Only in the second half of the century did an outstanding Polish-born Renaissance sculptor emerge: Jan Michałowicz (1525 /1530-c. 1583). And the last quarter of the sixteenth century also saw the arrival of excellent German- and Dutch-born sculptors such as Herman van Hutte and Heinrich Horst.

The large number of extant tomb sculptures allows us to trace their stylistic development. Works by Berrecci and his circle draw from the classical tradition and technical perfection of Roman and Florentine sculpture. In Giovanni Maria Mosca we find Venetian elements, while Santi Gucci introduced the whimsical tendencies of Florentine Mannerism to Poland. Jan Michałowicz at first worked in the Italian manner, but in his later output also displays Flemish motifs. Van Hutte and Horst are fully consonant with the Northern European Renaissance.

The enormous popularity of tombs with figures in repose has a twofold origin that is both aesthetic and ideological. The monument of King Sigismund I was a prestigious example which the nobility strove to emulate. The architectural structure of the tomb was of equal importance, as it alluded to the Triumphal Arch, a motif deliberately used to emphasise the knightly tradition of Polish noblemen. In nearly all the male tombs (except those of men of the cloth) the figures are shown in full plate armour. By the sixteenth century the process of transformation from medieval knight to landowner was practically complete. The majority of the "slumbering" knights found on tombs never wore armour when alive and some may not even have possessed it. In portraits of the period – the most realistic branch of the arts – knights are rarely depicted in armour. The widespread dissemination of this type of tomb allowed the Polish nobility to shape an image as defenders of the country and of Christian authority. The less the truth behind this, the more they needed the symbolic image.

Castle, burial chapel and monumental tomb were thus the three artistic subjects in which the Polish Renaissance achieved its greatest accomplishments

in the sphere of court and aristocratic art. City art, which was highly developed in the late Middle Ages, put up a certain amount of resistance to the new ideas flowing in from Italy. City and town halls were still built according to the medieval fashion, which was imposed by local authorities and harsh building regulations. Almost the only innovation was the replacement of the tall Gothic spires crowning the facades with decorative attics. These were originally designed as fire protection, which was compulsory in Krakow beginning in 1544. Only at the end of the sixteenth century did some city houses adopt the look of Renaissance palaces. Similarly, the modernisation of the city halls generally involved the addition of an attic, almost without changing the structure. The best example of a fully-fledged Renaissance city hall was built in Poznań by Giovanni Battista Quadro of Lugano in 1550-1560. The building evidences strong links to Renaissance architectural theory and practice, and many of its features derive from Sebastiano Serlio's treatise.

The most important initiative in the field of Renaissance town planning came from Chancellor Jan Zamoyski (1542-1605), an outstanding politician and humanist. A new town, named Zamość after its founder, was built in 1587-1605 according to a design by the Venetian architect Bernardo Morando. Both Morando and Zamoyski himself were well versed in Renaissance political and architectural theories. Zamość was to be the capital of the chancellor's properties, and would ensure his family the dominant position in the region. His design survived the centuries – at the outbreak of the Second World War the counts of Zamoyski were the greatest landowners in Poland, and the Zamość township covered around 2,000 square kilometres. The layout of Zamość combines the Renaissance principle of a centrally-planned city with economic and military needs, and also with an original concept of the city as a living, anthropomorphic organism. This well-preserved city is the largest example of late Renaissance architecture in Poland, after Krakow.

The Jewish communities played a vital role in all of Poland's cities. In some cases they occupied separate districts (sometimes because of legal restrictions, sometimes for purely practical reasons), but in general they mingled with the Polish population and other minorities. There is no evidence of Jewish homes having a distinct appearance in Polish cities, although the synagogues did strike a different note in the urban landscape. In the countryside they were chiefly made of wood, and some were decorated in an extraordinarily elaborate manner. Unfortunately, none of these have survived. Many were lost in the First World War, and their destruction was completed during the German occupation of 1939-1945. Nonetheless, some Polish cities – above all Kazimierz, today the southern district of Krakow's old town – retain important Jewish monuments. The most valuable of these, the Old Synagogue, was probably built at the end of the fifteenth century, though it owes its present appearance to the reconstruction by Matteo Gucci after the fire of 1557. Its beautiful interiors are covered by light vaulting, supported by slender columns,

and its roof is topped by a high attic. Other examples are more modest. The Remuh Synagogue and its neighbouring cemetery were built in around 1558, the High Synagogue between 1556 and 1563, and the Isaac Synagogue between 1638 and 1644, all of them in the Jewish district of Kazimierz.

Unlike in the majority of European countries, in Poland Renaissance painting clearly lagged behind sculpture. Italian painters were seldom employed, and the whole of this branch of art was dominated by the Northern European style. Certain elements of the modern style first appeared in local painting at the beginning of the sixteenth century: rejection of late Gothic conventions, three-dimensional portrayal of space, and the introduction of Renaissance details and decorative elements. Miniature painting was the most stylistically advanced. The finest examples of this include the illustrations for the "Baltazar Behem Codex" created shortly after 1505 and displaying residents of Krakow at work with disarming realism. The most remarkable miniaturist was Stanisław Samostrzelnik (active 1506-1541), a monk from the Cistercian abbey of Mogiła, near Krakow. His works include illustrations for the prayer books of King Sigismund I, Queen Bona, Chancellor Krzysztof Szydłowiecki and the Lithuanian Chancellor Wojciech Gasztołd, and numerous portraits in the *Liber geneleos* of the Szydłowiecki family. He also painted frescoes and is considered to have produced a portrait of Krakow's Bishop Piotr Tomicki. Samostrzelnik's art is fully consonant with the northern Renaissance, and shows the influence of German painters such as Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528) and Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472-1553).

Over the course of the first three decades of the sixteenth century, Krakow received three outstanding painters from the Franconian school. Michael Lancz of Kitzingen worked there from 1507 to 1523 and Hans Dürer (1490-1534), brother of the great Albrecht, was active in Krakow from 1529 to 1534. There is no record of the arrival in Krakow of the third, Hans Suess von Kulmbach (c. 1476-1522), but the significant number of paintings by him in the city indicate that he must have worked there from about 1514 to 1516.

The activity of local and German artists flagged after 1530, when the traditional guild system began to break down. Among the important examples of sixteenth-century art are a group of portraits of various bishops of Krakow and the likenesses of kings Sigismund I and Stephen Báthory (1533-1586), the latter painted by Marcin Kober in 1583. These were important steps towards shaping a local portrait style, which was to be dominant throughout the following two centuries.

The relatively clear picture of Polish art in the first half of the sixteenth century, in which the Gothic tradition coexisted alongside the Renaissance models that arrived from Italy (in architecture and sculpture) and Germany (painting), became increasingly more complex in the latter half of the century. The growing influence of Flemish art has already been noted, but later, in the third quarter of the century, an entirely new factor appeared. As a result of the

accession to the throne in 1576 of Stephen Báthory, Prince of Transylvania, and with the consecutive Ottoman conquests in the Balkans and in what was then Hungary, Poland came into direct contact with oriental culture. In a political and military sense, the Orient stood as a lethal threat, but in the arts it was highly attractive. Within a relatively brief period Turkish and Persian influence swept across the Polish arts, primarily in fields where Polish culture crossed paths with the oriental world, such as male fashion and military equipment and ornament. Oriental carpets enjoyed great popularity. Expeditions to Persia were organised to acquire them, and carpets displaying the Polish noble families' coats of arms were even commissioned. The Armenians played a vital role in these contacts with the East, having settled in large numbers in Lwów since the fourteenth century, and elsewhere in the southeast region of the country. Over the centuries they remained in contact with their homeland and almost monopolised trade with the Orient; in Poland they produced numerous items adapted to local needs, but remaining faithful to the techniques and styles of the Persian models.

The process whereby oriental influence was absorbed generally involved first accepting a formula or type of object, and then producing it in Poland. Accordingly, the latter half of the sixteenth century saw the adoption of a style of men's clothing based on the *żupan* – a sort of long gown – and various outer garments (the *delia*, *ferezja* and *kontusz*), which underwent many changes in choice of materials, cut and accessories over their 200 years of popularity, in accordance with fluctuating fashions. This type of garment was swiftly acknowledged as “native” and became an important sign of national identification, and an emblematic feature of a particular cultural phenomenon known as Sarmatism, on which we shall expand later. This clothing, which was both the costume of the nobility and a military uniform, indicated courage and dignity, unlike the scanty Western apparel, which ceased to be worn by these social classes. In the eighteenth century a few variants of this Polish national costume were formally singled out as the uniforms of the orders of the White Eagle and of St Stanislaus, and in 1776 it became compulsory for nobles to wear a monochrome version for their public appearances, the colour of which indicated their voivodeship of origin.

The long, flowing Polish costume required a belt. Sometimes the leather strap of the sheath of the sword served this purpose, while in the seventeenth century metal belts were widely worn; stemming from the tradition of knights' belts, they were made of rectangular and often richly decorated links. Beginning in the sixteenth century, silk sash belts imported from the East (Turkey, Persia, India) were also worn, and in the eighteenth century such belts, sometimes woven with metal threads, in vivid colours and rich ornamentation, were a compulsory feature of ceremonial dress. In the first half of this century the great demand for belts led to their domestic production, with Armenian craftsmen, and later French ones – from Lyon – being enlisted for the purpose.

These sashes, designed to be worn with the *kontusz*, are among the most beautiful examples of old Polish craftsmanship. Although they gained popularity relatively late, they eventually became one of the objects most strongly associated with Polish tradition. Their decorativeness, rich colours and use of gold threads splendidly reflected the somewhat ostentatious Sarmatian sense of beauty, in this case faithfully replicating oriental models.

The sabre (*szabla*), a cavalry blade weapon from the East, underwent a similar evolution and adaptation process. It reached Poland via Hungary, and very soon became widespread. It was both a privilege and a basic duty for the nobility, as heirs to chivalric tradition, to carry a sabre. At first, a type of sabre devised in Hungary was the most common, but in the mid-seventeenth century a local type of sabre emerged, known as the *husarska* or hussar's sabre, and was the highest functional/aesthetic achievement in the development of this weapon. Unlike oriental sabres, which had simple hilts, the *husarska* had a hand guard which provided greater protection. In addition to the steelwork of the "black" battle sabres, some *husarska* sabres were marvellously decorated with refined ornamentation on the silver hilt and on the sheath. Another type of sabre, the *karabela*, originated from Turkey, although it was generally considered to be a Polish weapon. Its hilt was shaped like a bird's head in profile and was made of wood in battle *karabelas* and of ivory, silver and semiprecious stones in parade versions.

The art trend stemming from fascination with the East was nevertheless of limited scope, as it affected neither architecture, nor painting nor sculpture, which remained under the sway of western influence. Over the course of the eighteenth century, as a result of intensified contacts with France, oriental influence gradually subsided. The Polish costume was discarded at the beginning of the nineteenth century, although the historicism of the latter half of the century led it to be used on special occasions as a sign of loyalty to national traditions. The *husarska* sabre, for its part, served as a model for most European cavalry weapons from the late eighteenth to the twentieth century, a fact which is often overlooked.

When describing Polish ties with the Orient, an important factor that needs to be stressed is Sarmatism – a cultural phenomenon which developed in Poland from the sixteenth to the late eighteenth century. The Polish nobility enjoyed full civil rights and lived off the land they possessed, and considered themselves heirs to the tradition of medieval knights, defenders of the faith and the homeland. The nobility's genealogical roots were traced back to the ancient Sarmatians, who inhabited the vast lands stretching from the north to the Black Sea. The ethnic origins of the nobility were thus seen as different to those of the other levels of society, and this led them to further justify their political and economic dominance. On the other hand, Polish institutions were derived from ancient Rome, and Latin was in general use. Thus the Polish nobility of the sixteenth-eighteenth centuries considered themselves descendants of the

Sarmatians, Romans, and medieval knights all at once. They were generally fervent Catholics (though members of the Orthodox and Protestant Churches also adopted Sarmatian customs) who lived mainly in their rural properties – neither the dilapidated cities nor the royal court attracted them much – dressed in the oriental manner, prided themselves on their knowledge of Latin and were deeply convinced of the perfection of the Polish political system and their own lifestyles. Over time, this none-too-logically constructed amalgam of customs, convictions and complexes became a hindrance to the country's development, and therefore, after the enlightened elite class became aware of this in the second half of the eighteenth century, it was gradually abandoned. However, in the romantic period it was a colourful reminder of national traditions and the onetime greatness of the past.

As a political and social system, Sarmatism was also powerfully present in literature, although it did not give rise to a coherent set of forms or stylistic principles in the fine arts. The Sarmatians' approach to art was a pragmatic one. It was a decorative frame for the various settings of their lives, a means of social communication and a sign of prestige, equivalent to splendour of costume or number of servants. Nevertheless, the characteristics of this movement left a deep mark on the types of various objects, from architecture to crafts. Some of these creations are reminiscent of those found in other countries, though in Poland they gained particular popularity and underwent unique changes. Others are original products of Sarmatian culture and not found outside Poland, although they sometimes exerted influence on neighbouring lands.

The chapel/mausoleums and knights' tombs discussed earlier should be regarded as art forms typical of the early phase of Sarmatian culture. During the transition from sixteenth to seventeenth century the most characteristic architectural backdrop for the life of the Sarmatian nobility was the manor – the residence and centre of rural properties. These manors were usually built of wood and were generally large, single-floor constructions, sometimes with an upper floor for secondary bedrooms. Their spatial arrangement was often derived from Renaissance architectural treatises, chiefly those of Sebastiano Serlio and Andrea Palladio. The most common layout featured an entrance hall along the central axis and a symmetrical arrangement of rooms on either side, making it possible to fit from three to more than a dozen rooms into the space of a compact rectangular structure, which often had additional corner alcoves. The typical floor plan of northern Italian villas was thus repeated time and time again throughout Poland. It was gradually adapted to the needs of other social strata, and in the first half of the twentieth century it was still being used in peasant architecture in many regions of the country. The majority of the manors were the work of local builders, but they were designed by such outstanding architects as Giovanni Battista Gisleni (1600-1672) and Tylman van Gameren (1632-1706).

The interiors of seventeenth-century manors were relatively modest, as it is not until the eighteenth century that chroniclers begin to report a clear improvement in home comforts. Their main decorative features were oriental carpets – generally hung on walls to insulate and to conceal the wooden structure, a custom which survives in Poland to this day – arms, religious pictures and family portraits. The genre regarded as most typically Sarmatian is portraiture in its various incarnations. Polish portraits of the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, either bust- or full-length, generally borrow compositional devices from western art, particularly those codified by Titian (1485/1490-1576) and those developed and popularised by the painters of the following generations, primarily Rubens (1577-1640), Velázquez (1599-1660) and Van Dyck (1599-1641). They differ from their western counterparts only in their Sarmatian features, and this applies to both provincial works and those of high quality. Although the former arouse little interest in the West, they are appreciated in Poland, in spite of their evident technical flaws, as realistic documents of a bygone culture.

Two types of portrait, closely linked to Sarmatian funeral customs and practically unknown outside Poland, deserve special attention. The first is the so-called coffin portrait: generally a bust-length depiction of the deceased, painted on sheet metal (pewter, sometimes silver) in the shape of the end of the coffin, on which it was placed during the funeral rites. These portraits were often accompanied by coats of arms and inscriptions, arranged along the long sides of the coffin. From a strictly pictorial point of view, coffin portraits are not much different from other types of old Polish portraits. Many are no doubt copies of secular portraits, and they most closely resemble those made as epitaphs to be placed on tombs. Their greatest virtue is the striking realism of the physiognomies. Limiting the composition to bust length masks the painters' technical shortcomings, which are so visible in larger-scale portraits. Coffin portraits were made from the early seventeenth to the early nineteenth century. Their genesis, most likely tied to funeral customs, has never been fully clarified. But it is almost certainly an art form that is unknown outside Poland.

Another type of portrait that is equally original and considerably rarer in our day is the funeral banner, a sort commemorative feature with a painted depiction of the deceased. Such banners could be used independently or were hung alongside stone memorials. The custom of creating funeral banners was very popular throughout Poland in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and examples have also been found in eastern Prussia, Silesia and the Hungarian borderlands. They were generally made of purple damask and painted on both sides, depicting the deceased at prayer, the Crucifixion or the Virgin Mary, knightly attributes, coats of arms and inscriptions. In churches banners were hung below the vaulting or on poles attached to the walls. They are assumed to have been made as early as the fifteenth century, although the oldest surviving example dates from 1570, and the latest from 1681. In the

Duchy of Prussia funeral banners were still being made in the eighteenth century. They were mainly for Christian ceremonies. Of the hundreds or even thousands crafted in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, many of which are mentioned in the literature, just over a dozen survive today. Funeral banners were particularly devoted to soldiers who fell in battle – hence the purple background, a symbol of bloodshed – but they also commemorated men of the church, women and even children. Together with coffin portraits, funeral banners are the most original objects associated with Sarmatian burial rites. Everything indicates that they developed in Poland, from where they spread to neighbouring lands. From a stylistic and iconographic perspective, the paintings on the banners are closely linked to religious and portrait painting of the day, and particularly to Baroque and Renaissance epitaph portraits.

The aforementioned oriental and Sarmatian aspects are by no means the only expressions of Polish culture of the period. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the mainstream of art – i.e. architecture, painting and sculpture – still drew from Western European models, principally from Italy and the Netherlands, although the seventeenth century was also marked by influences from France and German-speaking countries. Poland thus adopted western architectural models and followed the stylistic trends of the rest of Europe in other disciplines. Most of the important architects came from Italy: Andrea Spezza (pre-1580-1628), Matteo Castelli (c. 1580-1632), Giovanni Trevano (d. c. 1647) and Giovanni Battista Gisleni (1600-1672) in the first half of the seventeenth century; and Giuseppe Bellotti (d. 1708), Pompeo Ferrari (c. 1660-1736), Francesco Placidi (c. 1710-1782) and the Solari and Fontana families in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Many were from the Lake Como region at the Italian-Swiss border, but had generally served apprenticeships in Rome. The most outstanding architect of the last quarter of the seventeenth century, Tylman van Gameren, a Dutchman educated in Venice, was strongly affiliated with the Italians. Polish architects educated at St Luke's Academy also had Italian leanings (Kacper Bażanka, 1689-1726), as did those who had come into contact with Italian architecture through their travels and studies of Italian treatises, such as Bartłomiej Nataniel Wąsowski (1617-1687) and Paweł Giżycki (1692-1762). During the reign in Poland of Saxon electors Augustus II (1670-1733) and Augustus III (1696-1763), the Saxon architects brought over to work in their service – Daniel Joachim Jauch, Johann Friedrich Knöbel, Karl Friedrich Pöppelmann, Johann Siegmund Deybel – cultivated a somewhat restrained Baroque style with evident French influence. In the second and third quarters of the eighteenth century a vital role was played by a group of remarkable architects from German-speaking countries, such as Johann Christoph Glaubitz (c. 1700-1767) and Bernard Meretyn (d. 1759), who introduced forms typical of the Hapsburg monarchy and southern Germany. A Pole with a Dutch surname, Jan de Witte (1709-1785), displayed a similar approach. We should note that a significant number of architects, Poles

in particular, were military engineers (such as De Witte) and professors of pure sciences at colleges run by religious orders (such as Wąsowski and Giżycki).

These geographical origins and sources of inspiration for the main architects active in Poland in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had a direct influence on the type and style of their works. Just as the average Polish nobleman resided in a manor made by local builders – though based on Italian Renaissance treatises – the so-called magnates, who were much wealthier, built their residences according to western fashions. One of the fashionable types in the first half of the seventeenth century was the *palazzo in fortezza* – a compact structure surrounded by artillery bastions, such as those in Zbaraż, Podhorce and Krzyżtopór. As French influence intensified, the *entre cour et jardin* became all the rage, such as those in Wilanów, Radzyń and Białystok. Although the types and styles of secular architecture were basically uniform throughout the country, certain local phenomena are worth examining. Along the Baltic coastline, whose main centre was Gdańsk, Dutch influence was predominant. And, as the seat of the Augustuses' court, Warsaw was dominated by Saxon architecture.

Throughout the Baroque period Polish religious architecture drew inspiration from Italy, and numerous churches can be directly linked to their Italian prototypes. For example, the Jesuit church of SS Peter and Paul in Krakow (1697-c. 1730) is a very successful imitation of that of the Gesù in Rome; the oratory of St Philip Neri in Gostyn (1675) is a replica of Santa Maria della Salute in Venice; and the Missionaries' church in Krakow (1719-1728) combines features from two Roman buildings: the spatial arrangement of the chapel of the Magi in the Colleggio Propaganda Fide, by Borromini, and the facade of Sant'Andrea al Quirinale, by Bernini. It was not only the architects who had a thorough knowledge of Italian architecture, but the patrons as well. When discussing the design for St Anne's University church in Krakow (1789-1703), representatives of the academic world expressed the wish that the structure should resemble the church of Sant'Andrea della Valle in Rome.

The most widespread types of architecture reflect the consecutive phases of stylistic development in Italian architecture, initially Roman and subsequently northern Italian. In the first half of the seventeenth century the Roman *stile grande e severo* was dominant (the Jesuit church of SS Peter and Paul in Krakow and the Carmeldolese church in Bielany), while in the latter half and the beginning of the following century the most outstanding works were in accordance with the conventions of classical Baroque (St Philip Neri Church in Gostyń, St Anne's in Krakow, and the Carmeldolese Church in Pożajście, Lithuania). In the second half of the eighteenth century northern Italian models became fashionable, chiefly those of the Piedmont – the work of Paolo Fontana (1696-1765) – as seen in the churches of Lubartów and Włodawa. Publications including designs by Guarino Guarini and the treatise of Andrea del Pozzo played an important role in the spread of this school of architecture.

In the second and third quarters of the eighteenth century late Baroque art reached the eastern regions of the country (now Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine). These lands held the largest properties of the land-owning Polish aristocracy, who in times of relative political and economic stability had begun operating on a grand scale. This social stratum had generally acknowledged Roman Catholicism, but when it merged with the Orthodox Church in Polish territories in 1596, the great landowners of the outer regions founded Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic churches in almost equal measures. These special circumstances, which lasted until 1740-1770, coincide chronologically with the influence of numerous artists from the territories of the Hapsburg monarchy, which was undergoing a crisis owing to its war with the Prussians over Silesia. Within a relatively short period many splendid buildings were erected across a vast area stretching from today's Latvia to the Carpathian Mountains; these works often appear to have been transported from Austria, Bavaria and the Czech Republic. This art was not "discovered" by Polish art historians until the 1920s and 1930s, and was severely damaged during the Soviet period. Our knowledge of dates and names is thus very limited, and worse still, no trace remains of many invaluable works. Nonetheless, this trend is relatively consonant with the so-called Vilnius School of religious architecture, examples of which are (or were) scattered across the territory of today's Lithuania, Latvia and Belarus. Among its fragmentarily known practitioners are Italian names (Antonio Paracca 1572-1646, Abramo Antonio Genu) and Polish ones (Antoni Osikiewicz, Ludwik Hryniewicz, Błażej Kosiński, Tomasz Żebrowski), but its most outstanding representative appears to have been a German, Johann Christoph Glaubitz (1700-1767).

This school displays certain technological and stylistic characteristics of its own. The great fires suffered by Vilnius in 1737 and 1748, which incidentally paved the way for the reconstruction of the city in a late Baroque style, led to the avoidance of wood as a construction material. The picturesque pinnacles of Baroque towers, generally made of wood and faced with sheet metal, were built of intricate brickwork there. Attempts were made to replace wood with masonry, even in roofs. Altarpieces, which played an enormous role in Baroque interiors, continued to be fashioned from wood elsewhere in the country, but were consistently made of stucco there. The typical church of the School of Vilnius had a facade flanked by pointed towers of several tiers. The aisles and the presbytery were often crowned with decorative towers inscribed with calligraphy. The picturesque design of the cupolas was based on motifs borrowed from Borromini and Guarini. The interiors were decorated with stuccowork altarpieces, with scenographic and perspective arrangements devised to astonish the viewer. We might mention, as an outstanding example, the Missionaries' church in Vilnius (1750-1753), although the peak achievement of the School of Vilnius was the Orthodox Catholic church of St Basil in Berezwech (now Belarus), most likely designed by Glaubitz in 1753-1756 and

unfortunately destroyed during the Soviet rule. Naturally the School of Vilnius also had its limitations. Above all, original spatial layouts are seldom found in its works, which were often reconstructions of older, seventeenth-century buildings, and the magnificence of the altarpieces is not matched by the accompanying sculptures.

In the southeast regions, the architectural designs of the middle decades of the eighteenth century were both similar and different: similar because here too numerous splendid religious buildings were erected in the late Baroque manner of the Hapsburg monarchy and southern Germany; and different because no uniform school like that of Vilnius emerged there. The two most talented architects active in these territories were the aforementioned Jan de Witte and Bernard Meretin. The former, a professional military man – who commanded the border fortress in Kamianets-Podilskyi – is chiefly remembered as the designer of the monumental Dominican church in Lwów, which recalls the Viennese church of St Charles by Jan Bernard Fischer von Erlach. Meretyn, ethnically a German, perhaps from Moravia, was also a splendid designer and a dynamic entrepreneur, with an extensive team of builders and decorators. His work includes the Orthodox St George's cathedral in Lwów, the Missionaries' church in Horodenka and the church in Hodowica (just outside Lwów), which inspired a whole series of village churches. His works combine very elegant architectural designs and attention to detail, as well as a high degree of coherence in the interior decoration. The greatest sculptor of the day, Johann Georg Pinzel (1720-c. 1761/62), collaborated regularly with him. In spite of their shared sources of inspiration, stylistic differences can be seen between Jan de Witte and Bernard Meretin. The works of the former display the characteristics of the monumental and dynamic late Baroque style, whereas the lighter and more linear architecture of the latter comes closer to Rococo. Apart from De Witte and Meretin, other outstanding architects of the region were the Jesuit Paweł Giżycki, the highly talented amateur August Moszyński (1731-1796), Gottfried Hoffmann and Franciszek Ksawery Kulczycki (1738-1780). The Orthodox church of St Basil in Poczajów is the joint work of the last two; its picturesque integration into the landscape recalls the Austrian abbey of Melk.

These most outstanding phenomena and works of architecture do not, of course, complete what was a complex picture. In addition to them there was a large national, even provincial movement, which produced traditional designs that were often almost completely lacking in style. Up until the mid-seventeenth century Gothic traditions remained alive in the provinces, generally combined with Renaissance or Mannerist features – sometimes in almost pure form, as in the substantial number of churches in Podolia dating from the first half of the seventeenth century.

Although sculpture played a central role in the Polish art scene of the sixteenth century, in the following century it slipped into the background. The tradition of Renaissance tomb sculpture continued more or less until

the middle of the century, adapting details to suit the changing tastes of late Mannerism and early Baroque. Polish churches commonly had abundant sculpted architectural decoration in stucco, which was often of a high artistic standard but featured few figural elements. Equally numerous are examples of sculpted wooden altarpieces, which seldom surpass the mediocre provincial level.

The few churches whose stucco decoration is more than merely an architectural complement are therefore all the more remarkable. Among these is the church in Tarłów (c. 1650), where an elaborate and multifaceted *vanitas* scheme was executed featuring representations of Sarmatian noblemen that are astonishing for their realism. The church of SS Peter and Paul in Vilnius is filled with a group of extremely elaborate stucco figures made by Giovanni Pietro Perti (1648-1714) and Giovanni Maria Galli (1677-1684); they retain a northern Italian flavour and display great similarities with works in Italy itself and in southern Germany – Perti belonged to an extensive family of artists active in many countries – but also indicate a familiarity with Bernini. A direct reference was made to this great master of the Roman Baroque by Baldassare Fontana (1658-1733), who devised the stucco interior decoration of St Anne's church in Krakow, and produced a few smaller works in the city and its surroundings. Fontana, who directed a large stucco workshop, was equally proficient in creating dynamic figures and ornamental features. Above all, however, his works splendidly fit the architectural framework and, often combining with fresco decoration, stand as splendid examples of the Baroque *Gesamtkunstwerk* or “total work of art”.

The finest Polish Baroque sculpture is represented by the School of Lwów, which developed from around 1745 to 1780. Its genesis and the sources of its remarkable quality and stylistic harmony remain vague. It is a similar case to the School of Vilnius: the Baroque sculpture of Lwów was “discovered” late, and research by Polish art historians was merely beginning when the eastern part of the country was annexed by the Soviet Union. The destructive fury of the Soviet powers was exceptionally efficient when it came to the wooden furnishings of the churches – around 70 percent of the valuables extant up till 1939 disappeared.

Among the representatives of the Lwów School were artists with German surnames – Sebastian Fesinger (d. 1769), Johann Georg Pinzel (d. 1761 or 1762) – and Polish surnames, such as Antoni Osiński (d. 1764), Maciej Polejowski (active c. 1755-1794), Jan Obrocki (d. before 1800) and Franciszek Olędzki (d. 1792). These artists worked in stone and stucco, but most of their masterpieces are in wood. The works of the School of Lwów are marked by dynamic compositions based chiefly on the arrangement of the drapery and the “metallic” appearance of the sharp folds. In accordance with a tradition that dates back to late Gothic woodcarvings, the majority of figures are painted in a naturalistic style and the robes are gilded. In the later phase, after 1760, we also

find sculptures entirely painted white, as if to acknowledge the fashion for porcelain at the time. All in all, Lwów sculpture displays very close similarities to Bavarian, Austrian and Bohemian sculpture, although there are no examples of direct borrowings or copies of particular works from those areas.

The main representative of this school is Johann Georg Pinzel, who regularly worked with Bernard Merentin, the designer of the decoration of St George's cathedral in Lwów – also built after a design by him – and the churches in Horodenka and Hodowice. None of his works has fully survived *in situ*, but existing fragments and old photographs place him among the most outstanding masters of European late Baroque. His figures show a mastery of technique and a “late Gothic” combination of naturalism and expressionism. At first glance, his works appear to be similar to those of the greatest masters of Bavarian sculpture, above all Ignaz Güther (1725-1775), but on closer examination Pinzel is found to be by no means inferior to the latter, and even surpasses him in dramatic expression.

The painting of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, much like the sculpture, shows no single line of development, with the exception of Gdańsk, which had close connections with Dutch and German art. Numerous first-rate painters were active there, such as Harmann Han (1574-1627), Daniel Schultz (c. 1615-1683) and Andrzej Stech (1635-1697), who represent successive phases of Mannerism and the Baroque in its northern version. They worked on commissions from all around the country, and Schultz was a court painter to kings Jan Casimir (1609-1672), Michał Korybut Wiśniowiecki (1640-1673) and Jan III Sobieski (1629-1696). Other fine painters with a northern style were also active outside Gdańsk, such as Bartłomiej Strobel (1591-1647) and Peeter Danckers de Rij (1695-1661). Krakow was home to a Venetian, Tommaso Dolabella (c. 1570-1650), who produced numerous religious paintings in the tradition of late Venetian Mannerism. In the latter half of the seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth centuries the Italianate trend was continued by the splendid fresco painter Michelangelo Palloni (1637-1711/13) and the painter of battle scenes Martino Altomonte (1757-1745). The former was responsible for the marvellous decoration of the chapel of St Casimir in Vilnius cathedral, while the latter painted enormous canvases celebrating Jan III's victory over the Turks. In the eighteenth century a group of talented fresco painters emerged from the lands of the Hapsburg monarchy: Franz Eckstein (1689-1741, Georg Wilhelm Neunhertz (1689-1749) and Josef Majer (active in the third quarter of the century). The *trompe-l'oeil* paintings they produced, like those of some Polish painters – primarily Stanisław Stroiński (1719-1809) – were generally modelled on Italian (del Pozzo) and German (Johann Jacob Schübler, 1689-1741) engravings and were incorporated into the stucco decoration of the churches, covering the huge walls and vaults with depictions of architecture and scenes of martyrdom and the apotheoses of countless saints.

These numerous foreign painters easily found work, given the poor standard of their local counterparts, with the exception of those of Gdańsk. Polish painters were unable to overcome the crisis of the collapse of traditional forms of art which took place at the beginning of the Modern Era. The traditional guild system was no longer in any position to equip them with the skills required to produce the new forms of art, such as knowledge of anatomy, geometrical perspective, or the less formalised but even more difficult principles of Baroque composition. As in other peripheral areas, their main contact with western art was through engravings, chiefly Flemish, which were imitated on a mass scale. For painters with a traditional grounding there was still a huge provincial market, which commissioned religious paintings and portraits from them. It was they who painted the Sarmatian portraits referred to earlier. It was not until the latter half of the seventeenth and in the eighteenth century that we find the first young Polish painters studying at St Luke's Academy in Rome. Jerzy Eleuter Szymonowicz-Siemiginowski (c. 1660-1711), Szymon Czechowicz (1689-1775) and Tadeusz Kuntze (1727-1793) thus became genuinely Baroque painters in the Italian sense. The above-mentioned Stanisław Stroiński became a leading fresco painter.

Our limited space does not allow us to present an exhaustive picture of Polish art of the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, and we have therefore merely discussed its most salient features and the processes behind them. Poland did not produce great masters during this period. However, Europe's artistic heritage is not only built from masterpieces and great names; it also encompasses countless works which, despite their varying quality, provide an invaluable testimony to historical vicissitudes and past customs. In the big picture of Renaissance and Baroque art, room should be made alongside works by Leonardo, Michelangelo, Raphael, Titian, Bernini, Rubens, Velázquez and Rembrandt for Poland's Renaissance chapels and tombs, for its coffin portraits and for its funeral banners. Any vision of European late Baroque architecture and sculpture that fails to take into account the original phenomena that arose on the cultural peripheries of eastern Poland is undoubtedly incomplete. And Polish *kontusz* sashes and the work of the Armenian goldsmiths of Lwów are an important and impressive testimony to Europe's fascination with the art of the Orient.