Andreas Schlüter and the Paradekammern in the destroyed Schloss in Berlin

Guido Hinterkeuser

Berlin – Alemanha

Antes da sua destruição em 1945-1950, as Paradekammern do Palácio Real (Schloss) de Berlim constituíam um dos mais notáveis conjuntos de salas de recepção da arquitectura barroca na Europa Central. Estas salas, desenhadas sensivelmente entre 1700 e 1706, eram uma parte integrante da complexa transformação da residência do Eleitor em palácio real (II), levada a cabo por Andreas Schlüter. Um breve relance, que nos dá a impressão de uma abundância deliberadamente perturbadora, revela que Andreas Schlüter encontrou soluções adequadas para a fusão da arquitectura, escultura e pintura num todo unificado.

Na primeira parte (III), este estudo mostrará em pormenor os expedientes técnicos usados por Schlüter na transição entre expressões artísticas. Na Rittersaal (Sala dos Cavaleiros), por exemplo, usou o dourado, prateado e branco na constituição de um padrão ornamental que abrangia e unificava toda a sala. Ainda mais subtil é a forma como o fresco do tecto ultrapassa a sua moldura, gracas a diversos níveis de estuque que, na sua tridimensionalidade, revestem as partes esculturais e arquitectônicas das sancas. O uso da escultura na área da cornija revela-se decisivo enquanto agregador da arquitectura das paredes e das pinturas do tecto. Schlüter combina essencialmente arquitectura e escultura na Grande Escadaria (V). Através desta feliz fusão, a arquitectura esclarece e realça a mensagem esculturica e vice-versa.

O conceito das Paradekammern é virtualmente a expressão artística de uma pessoa, o escultor e arquitecto Andreas Schlüter (IV). Enquanto na grande parte dos casos a Gesamtkunstwerk é o resultado final, e mesmo fortuito, de um longo processo, a aparência destas salas parece ter sido alvo de uma concepção exacta desde o seu início. Schlüter executou pessoalmente a decoração em estuque no seu estúdio, sendo também responsável pelas pinturas do tecto, precisamente adequadas ao seu projecto cuidadosamente estudado. Como se pode deduzir por uma série de documentos sobreviventes, os pintores foram o ponto sensível na “luta pela sin-

Before its destruction in 1945-1950, the Paradekammern in the Royal Palace (Schloss) in Berlin was one of the most outstanding suites of state rooms in Central European Baroque architecture. The rooms, designed ca. 1700 to 1706, were an integral part of Andreas Schlüter’s complex transformation of the Elector’s residence into a king’s palace (II). A brief glance, which gives the impression of deliberately confounding abundance, shows that Schlüter found suitable solutions for the fusion of architecture, sculpture and painting into a unified whole.

In the first part (III), this study will show in detail the technical devices Schlüter used to move from one form of artistic expression to another. In the Rittersaal (Knights’ Hall), for example, he used gold, silver and white to provide an ornamental pattern that covered and unified the room. More subtle still, is the way in which the fresco on the ceiling overflows its frame, which is made possible by layers of stucco being used to cover the three-dimensional sculptural and tectonic parts of the coving. The use of sculpture in the cornice area is decisive in linking the architecture of the walls and the painting on the ceiling. Schlüter primarily combines architecture and sculpture on the Grand Staircase (V). Through this successful fusion the architecture explains and highlights the sculptural message and vice-versa.

The concept of the Paradekammern is virtually the artistic expression of one person, the sculptor and architect Andreas Schlüter (IV). Whereas in most cases Gesamtkunstwerk is the final, even casual result at the end of a long process, it would seem that from the very beginning there was a precise concept of how the rooms in Berlin should look.

Schlüter personally executed the stucco decoration in his studio and was also responsible for the ceiling paintings which fitted into his well-thought out plan. As can be deduced from a number of surviving documents the painters were something of a sore spot in Schlüter’s “struggle for synthesis”. If Schlüter wished to be uncompromising in his ideas he had to insist on the painters following his instructions so, eventually, In desperation...
I. The Paradekammern in the Berlin Schloss, the official state chambers of the Elector of Brandenburg and King in Prussia, offer somewhat unfavourable conditions for art historical research. During an air attack on Berlin on February 3rd 1945, the interior decoration of the Paradekammern was almost completely destroyed. In 1950 the whole Schloss was blown up by the socialist government in East Berlin, although the ruins could have been restored. Today the former site of the Schloss is partly occupied by the Palast der Republik, a reminder of the perished German Democratic Republic. Fortunately in 1943 colour slides were taken of the ceilings of some rooms, which were completely published only a few years ago. The colourfulness element which is very important for the homogeneous room-impression (Raumwirkung) can therefore be partially included.

The Paradekammern, especially the decoration systems of their ceilings as well as the Grosses Treppenhaus (Large Staircase) in the wing facing the River Spree, belong to the masterpieces of the sculptor and architect Andreas Schlüter (ca. 1660-1714). Already a short glance, which catches the impression of intentionally confounding abundance, suggests that Schlüter found convincing solutions for the fusion of architecture, sculpture and painting into a unified whole (Fig. 1, 2). This study wants to show in detail, which devices Schlüter used for crossing the boundaries between the arts. Further it will focus on the creation of these interior decorations. Was the homogeneous impression of these rooms – that what art history tends to call a total work of art (Gesamtkunstwerk) – the result of one homogeneous total plan (Gesamtkonzept)? And if so, how was the realization of this plan organized?

II. The Paradekammern are the direct result of one of the key events in Brandenburg-Prussian history. Since the Elector of Brandenburg Frederick III had come to the throne in 1688, he had tried to get a king’s crown for himself and his dynasty. His efforts proved successful, when, on...
January 18th 1701, he made himself King in Prussia in the East Prussian city of Königsberg. Frederick I — as he was called from then - was sovereign in East Prussia, as the dukedom had gained complete independence from Poland in 1657-1660 and as it did not belong to the *Heiliges Römisches Reich Deutscher Nation* (Holy Roman Empire of German Nation) either. In the years before, Frederick’s claims for elevation of his rank were not only expressed by diplomatic means, but also by supporting art, architecture and science. He wanted Berlin to change from a rather provincial German city into a metropolis fit for a king’s residence. The construction of a new arsenal at the entrance of the boulevard Unter den Linden made for part of his achievements as well as the foundation of the Academy of the Arts in 1696, which was the third one in Europe after Rome and Paris (“EVROPAE TERTIA, GERMANIAE PRIMA”). One year before his coronation, in 1700, he had founded the Academy of Science with the philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz as its president.

In 1694 Andreas Schlüter had come from Warsaw to Berlin and was appointed court sculptor. During the following years he created the bronze statue of Frederick and the famous equestrian monument of his father, the Great Elector, the model of which was finished in 1697. In 1703 the bronze version of the monument was erected on the *Lange Brücke* (Long Bridge) near the Schloss. Although prior to 1698 Schlüter had probably never worked as an architect and had little experience as a construction manager, he was awarded director for the renovation of the Schloss in Berlin. He had designed a convincing and striking model for the transformation of the Schloss, which until then largely still presented as a building of the 15th and 16th centuries. With his official appointment as the *Schlossbaudirektor* in the end of 1699, Schlüter became chief organizer of the building site.

First he concentrated on the modernization of the façades. The baroque façade facing the Schlossplatz in the south with its projected triumphal-arch-like entrance could be set immediately in front of the Renaissance structure and was finished in 1701, just in time for King Frederick’s festive return from Königsberg to his residential city. In the north, towards the Lustgarten, a small, two-storied wing had therefore to be raised to the level of the neighbouring wings. On the second floor some of the most important rooms of the new state apartment were arranged. Already around 1698-1699 the transformation of the courtyard was undertaken. At the latest in 1700, Schlüter began work on the interior decoration of the rooms. No longer under Schlüter’s direction, in 1706 the Palace was enlarged towards the west by a second courtyard and finished in 1715. Only the façade facing the River Spree
kept its heterogeneous and, if you will, old-fashioned appearance until the destruction of the Schloss.

After their completion around 1705-1706, the Paradekammern formed a suite of ten rooms (Fig. 3). It began with the Schweizer Saal, the Gard’s Hall, on the second floor of the Large Staircase in the Spree-wing, and extended towards north up to the Königszimmer, the ceremonial sleeping room. On the right was the access to the Elector’s and King’s private rooms, on the left the suite of the Paradekammern continued up to the Chapel. The genesis of these few rooms and its decoration already provides a good insight into the complicated history of the construction and transformation of the Schloss. The Large Staircase with the Schweizer Saal came only into being after 1701, during the King’s solemn entrance there was at the same site still the old-fashioned pair with a winding stair and a smooth, spiralling staircase made such that horses can be ridden up, both dating from the 16th. The three adjacent rooms up to the Königszimmer, as well as the Drap d’or-Kammer, dated from the 15th and 16th centuries and were already used as state rooms at the regency of the Great Elector. The private rooms of the Elector and King had been built and arranged in the 1680s. Only the suite ranging from the Brandenburgische Kammer to the Chapel was constructed from 1698-1699 and most of its decoration was finished in 1703.

III. The five rooms in the Lustgarten-wing, ranging from the Drap d’or-Kammer to the Rote-Samt-Kammer, excelled in quality. Schütter not only bound them together by formal repetitions and variations, but also by one dominating theme, which serves as a kind of Leitmotiv: the acquisition of the Prussian crown in 1701. In the center of these five rooms, there was the Rittersaal (Knights’ Hall), finished perhaps already in 1701, with a ceiling painting by Johann Friedrich Wentzel (1670-1729), celebrating the deeds of Frederick as Elector and King (Fig. 1, 2).

The Rittersaal was higher than the adjacent quarters by a mezzanine, thus resulting in the task to shape a cove twice as large. In this zone, Schütter had to make sure that the ceiling painting and the walls, which were architectonically structured by Corinthian pilasters, were bound together homogeneously. Schütter used different devices to reach a complete unification of the room. For
example, he concentrated on the colours gold, silver and white, which dominate the room under the plafond. These three colours helped to clarify the architectonic system and the sculptural parts. Besides, gold and white mean different levels of reality, as the white sculptures were to create the illusion of immediate presence, whereas the gilded reliefs showing the deeds of Hercules provided the antique reference to the actual achievements of Frederick. Gold, silver and white formed an ornamental pattern that covered and unified the room and found its continuation in the macchie of the ceiling painting, that are the red, yellow and white colour shades.

Another device helps Schlüter to fuse the tectonic structure of the cove with the ceiling fresco. When the crowning balustrade is not worked out in stucco any more, but in painting, Schlüter shows his knowledge of Quadratura painting which became widespread also north of the Alps in circa 1700. But this is not the point. What is quite decisive for the integration of the room, is the overflowing of the plafond’s fresco out of its frame (Fig. 2). Painting deeply meshes with the plastically created zone of the cove. On all the four sides layers of stucco are put onto the three-dimensional parts of the cove, which created the painter’s surface for the polychrome clouds and figures pouring down from the ceiling’s heaven. Schlüter employed a technique which was implemented for the first time in a larger extent by Gian Lorenzo Bernini (for example in the Cappella Cornaro in Santa Maria della Vittoria)\(^6\). Schlüter, whose visit in Rome can be proved for 1696, had probably studied Bernini’s methods in front of the originals.

This important device is worth while being illustrated more in detail. Above the gilded cornice the body of the goddess Flora is completely held in the plain surface of the vault (Fig. 4). Only the parts of her body and garment beneath are painted on layers of stucco shaped to the contours of her body. Finally her naked foot is given completely plastically. By this mean, two-dimensional painting is able to cover real reliefs and architectural moldings like consoles or cornices. With the effect that the beholder concedes to the painting a higher degree of plausibility and plasticity. If Schlüter had only cut out the stucco for the penetrating painting, the result would not have been the same. There would of course have been a flowing transition to the scenes on the ceiling. But shadow casts of the cornice would have destroyed the impression that the allegorical figures and gods were floating into the hall right at the moment. Also a single detail such as the garland of flowers, which from two-dimensionality changes step by step into stuccoed roses, demonstrates Schlüter’s eager for overcoming the boundaries between painting and sculpture.

The painted groups of figures on the ceiling have the dynamics of cascades, which seem to pour into the room in the center of each of the four sides (Fig. 2). In the north side, painting is even continued in a group made of stucco showing three figures which have left the heaven. The falling direction of painting is contradicted by the white stucco sculptures in the corners of the hall (Fig. 1). The allegories of the four continents above the doorways continue into the allegories of the winds in the corner cartouches. Above, couples are laying, probably symbolizing the times of day, finally cherubs are pushing into the painted heaven. The uniform white colour links these groups together on a curved line, which vigorously presses into the plafond. In the Rittersaal, sculpture – in form of tectonical, ornamental or figural stucco – takes the part of the decisive mediator in the unification of the arts. Sculpture’s role is underscored by a comparison with the interior decoration of the Schweizer Saal where the ceiling paintings immediately follow
the architectural structure of the walls. The unification of the room is only reached by illusionistic trompe-l’oeil-painting. It is therefore — in my opinion — rather doubtful, if Schlüter can be made responsible for a solution like that.

Principally sculpture as painting is able to portray concrete figures and persons. The depiction of a complex iconographical program is therefore not limited to the ceiling’s paintings, but can partly be conferred to groups of sculpture and reliefs, as can be seen in the Rittersaal. With architecture, sculpture has in common the quality of three-dimensionality. So it can transfer the two-dimensional and only sham story of the paintings into the real architecture. In the reverse case, the actual, three-dimensional reality of the room’s architecture makes the painting more convincing with the help of sculptural elements. Due to his great talents in both sculpture and architecture, Schlüter was sensitized to the possibilities of sculpture within the interior decoration system. Considering his artistic origins, we can understand, that he liked giving sculpture a more prominent role.

IV. The concepts for the interior decoration of the Paradekammern, of which we unfortunately don’t have any sketches or drawings, can be almost completely (apart from the Schweizer Saal) attributed to Schlüter. Only in questions of the iconographical program would he have had to have followed precise prescriptions. More important is the fact that as the Schlossbaudirektor he could organize and manage the realization of these concepts. The significance of his mighty position cannot be overestimated. It allowed him to set his decoration systems into being without having to suffer any interferences from outside, which would have damaged the integrated spatial effect. This was only done by the renovations of the following decades and centuries.

All the stucco sculptures in the Paradekammern can be ascribed to Schlüter and his workshop. As its manager and as Schlossbaudirektor he had — so to say — double disposal. His ability to require a great number of artists and artisans to an integrated style — that is his personal style — can be appraised as an important partial success within his “struggle for synthesis”. Abraham Humbert, who in the 18th century wrote on the fine arts in Berlin, hands down that stucco groups like the four continents in the Rittersaal or the Jupiter in the Large Staircase were formed by Giovanni Simonetti, but at the same moment he emphasizes that “all of them testify Schlüter’s genius”. On the other hand, Schlüter came into conflict with the painters, as we can deduce from altogether seven documents, that are two letters by Schlüter and five Electorial orders. The example of the Rittersaal may have shown, how strict and precise Schlüter’s instructions for the painting had to be that it would fit into his well thought out system. After in April and May 1700, the Elector had already twice ordered the painters to follow Schlüter’s concepts — obviously without much resonance —, in the late springtime Schlüter saw himself enforced to write a letter to the Elector. Some parts may be quoted in a modern English translation:

“As the construction of the Schloss has proceeded so far that the rooms have to be decorated without hesitation, among which the hall has to be arranged in a very requisite and artificial way, so it will be necessary that the painters are ordered that any of them, who call themselves historical painters, makes a drawing that will be discussed in the Academy of the Arts and that His Electoral Serene Highness will be informed in detail about it, but these drawings must be definitely finished within four weeks, what is expected to be dimension and size («massgrösse») as well
as the history, I will give it to them on paper, in the way, as His Electorial serene Highness has approved it.

The Elector complied with Schlüter's request in a letter dated the 30th of June 1700 and put, for the third time, the leading painters of Berlin, first and foremost the director of the Academy of the Arts, under Schlüter's charge:

"to instruct especially the director of Our Academy of the Arts, Werner, the Rectors Terwesten and Probner, and all Our painters of historical paintings in Our name, that any of them within four weeks should make and provide a design, the dimension and size («maass und grösse») of which, and also what is intended to be the story, will be given them by Schlüter on paper, due to Our order."

The document reveals also what kind of instructions Schlüter was interested in. Apart from the themes he instructed the painters "maass und grösse" (dimension and size), which should be related to the composition of the painting: Just as in the Rittersaal where the painted configurations of the groups on the ceiling in their close relation to the stucco works proved to be one of the decisive factors of the room's integration.

Nevertheless, and this may seem rather astonishing, Schlüter had to repeat his entreaty in the end of November or the beginning of December 1700:

"After that His Electorial Serene Highness has given me the order to make the plafonds of His rooms as soon as possible, which I am trying to do as much as I can; but works like that need not only stucco workers, but also painters are very necessary and this is why I want to ask His Electorial Serene Highness, that he would like to order to all his painters, that they, when they are needed, would execute without hesitation anything that I prescribe."

The painters were the sore point in Schlüter's "struggle for synthesis". If Schlüter wanted to realize his ideas without any compromises, if he wanted to create an integrated whole, he would have to insist that the painters would follow every direction, that they — as he wrote to the Elector — "would execute without hesitation anything that I prescribe". Here it becomes obvious that the idea of the Gesamtkunstwerk quite often inherits authoritarian tendencies.

The stucco workers were Schlüter's own employees. In order to gain similar authority with the painters, he saw himself forced to turn directly to the Elector. The painters tried not only to evade Schlüter's concepts, but even the command of the absolute ruler: There had to follow even another two orders by Frederick — a fact that reveals the painters' lasting obstinacy. Unfortunately, we don't have further documents that could give us a concrete hint in which manner the conflict was solved. But considering the result of the Paradekammern and especially the Rittersaal in their perfection, it is legitimate to assume that Frederick finally broke the resistance of the painters against Schlüter's extensive dirigisme.

V. The Large Staircase in the Spree-wing finished in 1705-1706, formed the ceremonial prelude within the state chambers. It demonstrates how Schlüter knew to intermingle architecture and sculpture to a unique, visually and conceptionally convincing symbiosis. In the staircase, as if in a theater-performance, Schlüter depicts the scene of the Fall of the Giants (Fig. 5, 6). The visitors could see the performance from the stairways like from a gallery. Jupiter sending out his flashes and Minerva with shield...
and spear – allusions to King Frederick I and his wife Queen Sophie Charlotte – are pushing off Mount Olympus to defeat the attacking opponents. Both of these gods shaped in stucco plaster were organically linked to the ceiling’s heaven and could therefore also provide the fusion of painting with architecture. This is another example of Schlüter’s usage of combining painting and sculpture as previously described in the Rittersaal.

What however is quite original, is how Schlüter assigned to sculpture concrete functions within the architectural system in the lower zone of the staircase. Schlüter equalizes the Ionic order with the Gods and the Doric order with the Giants. Thus he emphatically reminds of the classical-antique conception that relates form and genesis of the orders to different types and characters of gods or men. The two Giants laying on the cornice of the pair of Doric half-columns intend to hide the “mistake”, that the Doric frieze, which raises smoothly along with the stairway, reaches up to the Ionic order. Both with irony and sovereignty, Schlüter disregards and jokes of the rules of classical architecture. The raising stairway in Doric style is an impressive formulation in the abstract language of architecture for the revolt of the Giants against the power of the Gods. Vice versa, the two consoles which support the projecting balcony might be read as a metaphor for the victory of the Gods, as they sharply and vigorously cut into the Doric frieze. (Provided that one is ready to attach the volute-like consoles to the Ionic sphere).

On the other hand one cannot help feeling that the two Giants probably will not be able to keep their position much longer. Elsewhere, the defeated Giants, like in a metamorphosis, grow directly into architecture. There, they have to carry the weight of the architraves, and their legs have already transformed into pilasters. The canonical subordination of the Doric order under the Ionic order visualizes the definite defeat of the Giants. Due to Schlüter’s successful fusion of both arts, architecture is able to explain and even to intensify the message of sculpture, and reverse. (Also on the façades of the Schloß, Schlüter granted to sculpture this expressive role. What is, by the way, one of the main arguments against any rebuilding of the Berlin Schloss in our days, used especially by those who at the same time favour the reconstruction of Karl Friedrich Schinkel’s nearby Bauakademie).

VI. The examples of the Rittersaal and the Large Staircase might have demonstrated how subtle and various the devices were that Schlüter employed for overcoming the boundaries between the arts. Without doubt, the idea of fusing the arts into an integraded whole existed already in the baroque epoche. Beyond that, these interior decorations were based on a perfectly thought out concept, which originates from Schlüter’s ingenium. All the more, Schlüter had the strong will – as shows his conflict with the painters – to realize his artistic ideas without any concessions. If we presuppose that a Gesamtkunstwerk has to be the result of a homogeneous concept that was not altered by later interferences, the Paradekammern in the Schloss in Berlin can even stand up to this strict definition. However, to describe Schlüter’s work on the Paradekammern, one would prefer bel composto or maraviglioso composto – notions which the biographers of Bernini used for characterizing his conception of the fine arts. Due to Schlüter’s strong understanding of Roman baroque architecture, one would assume that he would have known and even used this baroque term as well.
Notes

1 Liselotte Wiesinger, Deckengemälde im Berliner Schloss, Frankfurt/Main and Berlin, 1992. The colour photographs were all taken by Peter Cürils/Berlin.

2 For Frederick I, see last Werner Schmidt, Friedrich I. Kurfürst von Brandenburg, Berlin, König in Preussen, 1996.


6 For some hints on the genesis of this device and especially its use by Bernini, see Lavin (n. 17), pp. 54-57, n. 3-7.

7 For some aspects on the paragone between the arts, see Preimesberger (n. 17), pp. 193-198.

8 "Schlüter bediente sich seiner [that is Simonetti], als eines künstlichen Stuccaturarbeiters, zu den Figuren über den Türen des großen Rittersaales, und über der großen Treppe: als da sind der donnernde Jupiter, die Gruppen so die vier Theile der Welt vorstellen; [...] welche alle von Schlüters Genie ein Zeugnis ablegen" (Abraham Humbert, Nachrichten von Künstlern und Kunsttachen, Leipzig, 1768, S. 84). Besides, see Ladendorf (n. 4), p. 75.

9 For a complete indication of these documents, see Ladendorf (n. 4), p. 171, n. 99.

10 "Weil es nunmehro mit den Bau des Schlosses so weit gekommen dass die Zimmer ohne Verzug müssen verfertigt werden, unter welchen der Sahl dass allernothwendigste und auf dass Künstlichste gemacht werden muss, so wird höchst nöthig seyn das ein Befehl an die Hn. Mahler dergestalt erginge, dass allesambt so viel alsss sich nur Historienmahler nennen, ein jeder besonders davon einen abriss nehmen anzudeuten, dass ein jeder von ihnen absonderlich einen abriss, wovon die maass und grosse, auch was eigentlich die Historie seyn soll, will ich ihnen schriftlich geben, auf die Weise, wie es S. Ch. D. beliebet haben" (quoted in Ladendorf [n. 4], p. 79).

11 "zuvordrist dem Directori Unserer Kunst Academie, Werner, dann denen Rectoribus derselben Terwesten und Probner und ferner allen und jeden Unseren Historienmahlern insbesondere an Gericie, Labenietsky, Leügebl and Wentzel von Unsertwegen und in Unserm namen anzuzeuden, dass ein jeder von ihnen absonderlich einen abriss, wovon die maass and grösse, auch was eigentlich die Historie seyn soll, Unser p. Schuyter, von Uns empfangenen Befehl gemaes, ihnen schriftlich zustellen wird, längstens innerhalb 4 Wochen verfertigen und bey Euch einbringen solle..." (quoted in Geyer [n. 5], vol. 2, p. 16).


15 For some aspects on the paragone between the arts, see Preimesberger (n. 17), pp. 193-198.


18 For this widespread interpretation, see already Peter Walle, "Nachrichten aus Schlüters Leben", Zentralblatt der Bauverwaltung, 1898, 18, p. 28.
