

# HISTORY OF ART HISTORY IN CENTRAL, EASTERN AND SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE

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## A review of Polish research into Rococo with special emphasis on architecture

### Introduction

Polish research into Rococo constitutes a part of the global discussion on style categories such as Renaissance, Mannerism, Baroque and Rococo. However, in the contemporary Polish research into the 18<sup>th</sup> century art, one might observe a departure from using the term Rococo. This fact provides evidence of the closure of a certain stage of scholarly investigations. For this reason, it seems justified to make an attempt at presenting the to-date Polish research into Rococo. The essential problem for the researchers was posed already by the term Rococo itself and by its connotations. In Polish academic research, similarly as at the international level, the term Rococo has been understood either in a broad or narrow sense. The scope of the following article is restricted mainly to architectural issues, without discussing the research into painting and sculpture<sup>1</sup>.

### Rococo as a broadly defined culture and as an epoch

Before it was actually introduced into scientific discussions, the term Rococo had been used in lit-

erature to denote a broadly defined culture of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. On the Polish ground, the perception of Rococo as a cultural and socio-customary phenomenon is exemplified by Kazimierz Chłędowski's book, published in 1915, titled *Rokoko we Włoszech: ludzie, literatura, sztuka*<sup>2</sup>. Already the title of the book indicated the main direction in which the author's interests would drift. It is very characteristic that the term Rococo was used to encompass the whole of the culture and customs of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, constituting the name of the epoch – a name for the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, it is a tale presenting a customary and anecdotal panorama of the cultural and social life of Italy. Seen from this perspective, the issues of art are merely components of culture. It should be remembered that Chłędowski's publication is valued mainly as a work for the general public. Analyzing the issue from the socio-customary point of view, Chłędowski carried on Anton Springer's thought about Rococo from 1867, already popular at the time<sup>3</sup>. However, one should stress the fact that Chłędowski's book had been published four years before the publication in 1919 of a German

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<sup>1</sup> A separate problem is the phenomenon of the "Lwow Rococo Sculpture", extensively analyzed in Polish research.

<sup>2</sup> Chłędowski (1915). Friedrich Brie (1927), English Rococo historian, similarly extends the notion of Rococo into the field of English literature.

<sup>3</sup> Springer (1867: 226–227, 242).

researcher, Max von Boehn<sup>4</sup>, who discussed French Rococo culture in a similar vein.

The tendency to encompass almost all cultural phenomena of the 18<sup>th</sup> century with the term Rococo, inspired by Springer's views, led to the consolidation of the common conviction about the existence of a Rococo epoch. Such conviction was held, among others, by Tadeusz Mańkowski<sup>5</sup>, Władysław Tatarkiewicz<sup>6</sup>, Maria Łubieńska<sup>7</sup>.

The perception of Rococo as a broad cultural phenomenon found its proponents also in the 1970s, in the works of Władysław Tomkiewicz and Jan Białostocki. At the time, Władysław Tomkiewicz called for the integration of the research into Rococo, and suggested a special name for the area of such investigations – artistic culture<sup>8</sup>. The result of those guidelines was a book, published already after his death, analyzing the issue comprehensively, looking at it from various points of view, with the application of broad knowledge from all fields of culture: from customs, etiquette, fashion, artistic handicraft in interior design, through painting, sculpture and architecture, to literature and music, with a special emphasis on the role of ballet and theatre<sup>9</sup>. Tomkiewicz was also evidently inspired by Springer's publication brought out more than a century before<sup>10</sup>. Like the German scientist, Tomkiewicz connected Rococo with the political and social situation in France, and stressed the role of boudoir in inspiring the new character of art<sup>11</sup>.

A similarly broad perspective, like the one assumed by Tomkiewicz, is the vision of Rococo as attitude, suggested by Jan Białostocki in his article published in 1970<sup>12</sup>. Apart from this meaning of the term Rococo, Białostocki – inspired by Wilhelm Boeck's question – distinguished also Rococo as ornament and style, recognizing the *raisons d'être* of all three categories<sup>13</sup>.

The perception of Rococo as culture has not been challenged. It is evidenced by the contempo-

rary opinion of Tadeusz Chrzanowski who speaks about Rococo (in separation from its formal characteristics) as a cultural and social phenomenon different from the 17<sup>th</sup> century customs<sup>14</sup>.

The researchers, on the other hand, departed from the perception of Rococo as an epoch. And thus, Białostocki claims that only some cultural phenomena and some artistic trends of the 18<sup>th</sup> century can be described as Rococo<sup>15</sup>. The term cannot be used for characterizing the whole 18<sup>th</sup> century culture. Białostocki's stand was approved by Tomkiewicz, who rated selected components of the 18<sup>th</sup> century culture as Rococo. However, in practice, his too broad selection might in many cases give rise to justified objections<sup>16</sup>.

### Rococo as an artistic phenomenon – architecture

The most problematic issue with respect to Rococo has been its relation to Baroque and – more rarely – Neoclassicism, namely the question whether Rococo was an independent style, or rather a part of Baroque. The debate over this issue took place already at the ground of the proper history of art, mainly architecture.

### Rococo as an independent style

The pioneering work on the Rococo architecture, perceived as a separate stylistic formation, was the article by Maciej Lorek, devoted to an architect, unknown up to that point, called Filippo Raguzzini (1680–1771)<sup>17</sup>. In his study published in 1933, Lorek wrote daringly about the Rococo issue, calling Raguzzini the first representative of the Roman Rococo architecture<sup>18</sup>. It is of no small importance that the article was published in Italian, in a Roman periodical. It was conducive to the dissemination of the outcomes of the research conducted by this Polish scientist, and to the continuation of his research on the international plane<sup>19</sup>. Lorek's contribution to the research into the Rococo architecture was emphasized later by Zbigniew Hornung<sup>20</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Boehn (1919).

<sup>5</sup> Mańkowski (1937).

<sup>6</sup> Tatarkiewicz (1932: 23).

<sup>7</sup> Łubieńska claimed even that the Rococo epoch was stylistically homogeneous: Łubieńska (1932: 311–313).

<sup>8</sup> Tomkiewicz (1972: 123).

<sup>9</sup> Tomkiewicz (1988).

<sup>10</sup> Springer (1867: 226–227, 242).

<sup>11</sup> Tomkiewicz (1988: 19–36).

<sup>12</sup> Białostocki (1970). 2<sup>nd</sup> edn: Białostocki (1978).

<sup>13</sup> Wilhelm Boeck asked a question: Is Rococo a French decorative form or an epoch of style in Europe?: Boeck (1951: 271–273); Białostocki (1978: 165).

<sup>14</sup> Chrzanowski (1998: 243).

<sup>15</sup> Białostocki (1978: 176).

<sup>16</sup> Tomkiewicz (1988).

<sup>17</sup> Lorek (1933: 313–321).

<sup>18</sup> Lorek characterizes the Roman Rococo as more connected with Baroque than the Venetian or Neapolitan Rococo: Lorek (1933: 320).

<sup>19</sup> Rotili (1951); Mallory (1977); Rotili (1982).

<sup>20</sup> Hornung (1972: 35–36).

Hornung, on the other hand, relying to the Polish church architecture, wrote distinctly about the stylistic autonomy of Rococo already in his article published in 1948<sup>21</sup>. With this characterization of the Rococo style, Hornung greatly foreshadowed the paper of Hans Seldmayr<sup>22</sup> delivered in 1960 in Rome, during the international conference on terminology of the modern history of art. The fact that Hornung anticipated tendencies in international research should be strongly emphasized since, thus far, it has not been given due attention – even by Jan Wrabec who writes about the scientific achievements of his teacher<sup>23</sup>. After the aforementioned conference, Hornung also published further articles proving the otherness of the Rococo style in European architecture<sup>24</sup>. Such an opinion was in line with the contemporary international trend to classify the Rococo art as a separate historical unit<sup>25</sup>.

Hornung adopted a precise method of distinguishing the Rococo style. He separated the definition of Rococo from that of *rocailles*<sup>26</sup>, thus rejecting the position of Łubińska and Jaroszewski<sup>27</sup>. Looking for a stable basis for differentiating between the Rococo and other styles, he decided that the most decisive factors were the characteristics of the architectural composition. The most important criterion of classification became the wavy line visible in the plane of the building, on its facade and in its interiors. According to Hornung, the Rococo church architecture derived from the works of Francesco Borromini and Guarino Guarini<sup>28</sup>. Equally important characteristics were the exceptional refinement of the means of artistic expression, and passionate determination to invoke the feeling of lightness and gracefulness<sup>29</sup>. Hornung defined the Rococo architecture basing merely on church buildings, without taking into consideration palaces, whose interiors were characterized by

straight walls, devoid of any architectural orders<sup>30</sup>. This fact, among others, decides about the questionability of Hornung's opinion about the autonomy of the Rococo style. Hornung's research, constituting a major demarcation point in Polish research into Rococo and, moreover, an important opinion on the plane of the international academic research, did not meet with direct response<sup>31</sup>. It was the result of the lack of broad dissemination of the outcome of his work<sup>32</sup>.

Differently from Hornung, Tomkiewicz saw the possibility to distinguish the Rococo first of all by means of its guiding idea (*i.e.* its feministic character) – a common denominator of all fields of culture; secondly, by means of its antagonistic attitude towards the style of Louis XIV<sup>33</sup>. Also in this respect, Tomkiewicz referred to Springer's research as well as to the views of Seldmayr and Bauer<sup>34</sup>.

### Rococo as a part of Late Baroque

Meanwhile, simultaneously with the aforementioned attempts to grant autonomy to the Rococo, a considerable number of researchers perceived it as merely a part of Baroque, indicating various types of interrelationships between the two styles.

One of those researchers was Władysław Tatarkiewicz, who in the 1930s applied two terms to describe the co-existence of the Rococo with other style formations: Rococo Baroque<sup>35</sup> and Rococo Classicism<sup>36</sup>. The first was treated as a separate form of Baroque, whereas the latter was a French variant of Classicism, *i.e.* the style of Louis XVI, perceived as a transitional form leading to pure Classicism.

Other researchers, like: Maria Łubińska<sup>37</sup>, Tadeusz Jaroszewski<sup>38</sup>, Jan Białostocki<sup>39</sup>, Mariusz Karpowicz<sup>40</sup>, Tadeusz Chrzanowski<sup>41</sup> were unanimous in their perception of Rococo as an ornament deco-

<sup>21</sup> Hornung (1948: 216–242). Hornung had presented interest in the 18<sup>th</sup> century sacred architecture already earlier: Hornung (1931: 14–15).

<sup>22</sup> Sedlmayr (1962: 343–351).

<sup>23</sup> Wrabec (1983: 99–102).

<sup>24</sup> Hornung (1965: 92); Hornung (1970: 37–59); Hornung (1972).

<sup>25</sup> H. Seldmayr, H. Bauer characterized Rococo as a true style, with Late Baroque phenomena constituting its elements: Seldmayr, Bauer (1963: 627).

<sup>26</sup> Hornung (1972: 80).

<sup>27</sup> Łubińska (1932: 311–321); Jaroszewski (1970: 286).

<sup>28</sup> Hornung (1970: 37–52).

<sup>29</sup> Hornung (1970: 52–54); Hornung (1972: 49–70).

<sup>30</sup> Sedlmayr (1962: 343–349); Białostocki (1978: 171).

<sup>31</sup> Hornung's research, especially his investigation of the works of Bernard Meretyn, was continued first in Piotr Krasny's doctoral dissertation: Hornung (1931); Hornung (1972); Krasny (1994).

<sup>32</sup> Wrabec (1983: 101).

<sup>33</sup> Tomkiewicz (1988: 5).

<sup>34</sup> Springer (1867: 226–227, 242); Sedlmayr (1962: 343–351); Białostocki (1978: 167).

<sup>35</sup> Tatarkiewicz (1934: 104); Tatarkiewicz (1932: 21)

<sup>36</sup> Tatarkiewicz (1932: 26).

<sup>37</sup> Łubińska (1932: 311–321).

<sup>38</sup> Jaroszewski (1970: 286).

<sup>39</sup> Białostocki (1978: 174–175).

<sup>40</sup> Karpowicz (1985: 76, 122).

<sup>41</sup> Chrzanowski (1998: 200).

rating the Late Baroque architecture. According to Łubieńska, it was precisely decoration that determined the style. However, such treatment of the issue was too superficial<sup>42</sup>. Białostocki, on the other hand, admitted that Rococo was an ornament, but not merely that.

The aforementioned researchers stress the existence of a multitude of trends in the 18<sup>th</sup> century art, e.g. Tatarkiewicz expresses the opinion about the intertwining of Baroque, Rococo and Classicism<sup>43</sup>. His views were in accordance with the contemporary tendency to perceive Rococo as a non-autonomous phenomenon, or even as Late Baroque, or merely its component<sup>44</sup>. Tatarkiewicz's classification should be praised for its modern attempt at a precise description of the relations of Rococo to other styles in art.

### Rococo as one of the trends in the 18<sup>th</sup> century art

Similar opinions were also expressed by Białostocki, who wrote about the intertwining of Rococo with Baroque and Classicism, as well as about its autonomous existence<sup>45</sup>. This stand seems the most balanced and multifaceted one, refraining from simple schematization. Measured opinions and the attempt at reconstructing the real picture of the complicated relations decide about the significance of Białostocki's views. This compromise approach to the issue, however, did not obstruct the researcher in accentuating the otherness of Rococo, as seen against the backdrop of Baroque and Neoclassicism, nor in narrowing its scope to only some of artistic phenomena<sup>46</sup>.

Similarly, Tomkiewicz admitted that in the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Baroque, Rococo, Classical, and Sentimentalist, the trends co-existed<sup>47</sup>. Jaroszewski also drew attention to the co-existence of various movements in architecture. At the same time, he makes a sharp distinction between the Baroque and Rococo features<sup>48</sup>. It seems that his stand was influenced by Tatarkiewicz's classification method.

The aforementioned ways of perceiving the 18<sup>th</sup> century as an epoch of co-existence of many intertwining trends and movements gave rise to the clarification of the scope of Rococo in the field of architecture. A significant role in this respect was played by Jerzy Kowalczyk. While discussing mainly secular architecture, he treats Rococo as the second phase of Late Baroque, not as an autonomous style<sup>49</sup>. According to Kowalczyk, the period of Late Baroque was multifaceted, with Rococo being one of its currents pertaining rather to interior decoration than to architectural construction.

### Abandonment of the term Rococo

Narrowing of the term Rococo resulted in the currently observable tendency to refrain from using it for the sake of a broader and less-disputable one, namely Late Baroque. It is manifested by removing the label "Rococo" from a considerable number of works, once characterized in this way, e.g. monuments from the Eastern Borderlands of the late Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, called once by Hornung Rococo, are perceived by Kowalczyk as Late Baroque<sup>50</sup>. Jan Wrabec, in turn, while analyzing the works of Dientzenhofers, presented yet another solution when he rejected the term Rococo, replacing it with the name "the language of the Dientzenhofers"<sup>51</sup>.

### Conclusion

The common denominator of Polish research into Rococo, especially with respect to architecture, were the attempts at a precise description of its position in the 18<sup>th</sup> century art. Those investigations took different directions, sometimes contradictory, at times complementary, and put emphases on different aspects. The most important opinions in the discussion were those of Władysław Tatarkiewicz, Zbigniew Hornung, Jan Białostocki and Jerzy Kowalczyk. Tatarkiewicz treated Rococo as a variant of other styles – Baroque and Classicism. Hornung, on the other hand, was the most zealous apologist for the autonomy of Rococo. Defining the Rococo style, he distinctly accentuated its equal position with respect to Baroque. Białostocki perceived the

<sup>42</sup> Łubieńska (1932: 312).

<sup>43</sup> Tatarkiewicz (1932: 23).

<sup>44</sup> Such opinion was presented by Hans Rose (1922), Werner Weisbach (1929), Nikolaus Pevsner (1943): after Białostocki (1978: 166–167); Tomkiewicz (1988: 5).

<sup>45</sup> Białostocki (1978:167, 176).

<sup>46</sup> Białostocki (1978: 176).

<sup>47</sup> Tomkiewicz (1970: 1289)

<sup>48</sup> Jaroszewski (1971: 43–70).

<sup>49</sup> Kowalczyk's assessment of the *status quo* was most similar to the point of view of Jaroszewski: Kowalczyk (1995: 196).

<sup>50</sup> Kowalczyk (1997: 179–201); Kowalczyk (2006).

<sup>51</sup> Wrabec (2004).

issue from the broadest perspective, issuing a balanced opinion that Rococo was simultaneously an ornament, a style, and an attitude. Kowalczyk, in turn, specified the term as the last phase of Late Baroque – one of the many artistic trends of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Within the Polish research, one might observe a gradual narrowing of the scope the term Rococo: from style, through trend, to the abandonment of the term for the sake of a broader one, *i.e.* Late Baroque.

It is significant that some of the researchers (Tomkiewicz, Jaroszewski, and specifically Białostocki) pointed out to the autonomy of Rococo as well as to its dependence on other style formations. It reflects the complexity of the problem, the complicated nature of the 18<sup>th</sup> century art, and the difficulties in classifying its works of art.

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