

## Cultural and national identity in 18th-century Lwów: three nations - three religions - one art

In many ethnically heterogeneous regions of Europe (in the Netherlands, for instance; in Northern Ireland and in the Balkans) national identity was and still is tantamount to religious identity. This has produced specific effects in religious art in these regions. Differences resulting from religious traditions have been doubled by differences in distinct national art traditions. On the other hand, the traditions would often blend, especially after years of coexistence, leading to a certain unification of religious art forms. An interesting example of this process can be seen in the art of Lwów and its region in the 18th century.

### *National and religious identity in Lwów and its region*

In the Middle Ages Lwów was one of the most important towns in the small Ruthenian Duchy with Halicz as its capital. In the 13th century and at the beginning of the 14th century the duchy was ravaged by Tatars which resulted in its depopulation. When the local dynasty died out in the 1340s, the Polish king Casimir the Great annexed the duchy. The new ruler decided to establish Polish settlements and brought in settlers mainly from central Poland. They found their homes mostly in towns, though sometimes they would set up new villages. Casimir the Great turned the duchy into the Ruthenian province of the Polish Kingdom and moved its capital to Lwów. Besides being the seat of the Orthodox bishop it soon became also the seat of the Roman Catholic archbishop. Lwów's rapid development drew many local Ruthenian and Polish settlers. Furthermore, the town became a haven for the Germans, the Dutch, the Hungarians and the Wallachians, who soon lost their national identity in a new, Slavonic environment.

The Armenians constituted another important ethnic community in Lwów and for a long while they retained their national identity. As yet no reliable evidence has been found to explain the reasons for their arrival in the Duchy of Halicz. According to some historians they settled there as early as during the reign of the Ruthenian princes; others claim that it was Casimir the Great who invited them. As their main occupation was trade and luxury craftwork, they settled mainly in Lwów and in neighbouring towns of some importance. In the 15th century their community in Lwów was large enough for an archbishopric of the Armenian Church to be instituted.

The Ruthenians (who in the 19th century defined their identity as Ukrainians), the Poles and the Armenians belonged to the same guilds and mixed together in everyday life. Almost all inhabitants of Lwów spoke Polish, and the substantial majority of them also spoke Ruthenian. The Armenian language began to disappear in modern times, and by the 18th century it was used only in the liturgy.

It was their religions that were largely responsible for differentiation between the three national groups. The Poles were Roman Catholics, the Ruthenians were Orthodox, whereas the Armenians belonged to the Monophysite Armenian Church. However, at the

turn of 17th century the Orthodox Ruthenians and the Monophysite Armenians came under control of the pope. In 1596 the Orthodox hierarchy entered a union with Rome and in 1630 the Armenian archbishop did the same. It took a long time to implement these acts and the process was sometimes dramatic. It was not until the first years of 18th century that all the Ruthenians and Armenians accepted the union with the papacy. Among other things they hoped they would receive the same privileges as Roman Catholics enjoyed in Poland. The Orthodox who accepted the pope's supremacy were called Uniat. Members of the Armenian Church under the authority of Rome were called Armenian Catholics. According to Canon Law, Roman Catholics, Uniats and Armenian Catholics enjoyed equal rights within the Catholic Church. What distinguished them were different liturgies. Thus they could attend masses and receive the sacraments in any of their churches.

Canon Law allowed for intermarriage between followers of different Catholic denominations. Consequently there were many mixed families in Lwów which naturally blended various ethnic traditions. Uniat clergymen enjoyed a relatively high social status but unlike Roman Catholic clergymen they did not have to observe celibacy. As a result some Poles, who usually came from comparatively poor families, became Uniat clergymen, and quite naturally they introduced elements of Polish culture into the Uniat Church.

As a result of these developments, in the 18th century the differences between the three ethnic communities in Lwów and its surroundings were negligible. Besides possessing elements of vernacular tradition the culture of each community had certain traits borrowed from its neighbours. This cultural fusion replaced national identity with local identity. There were a few people who did not want to declare themselves either Poles, Ruthenians or Armenians, so they would simply claim they were 'locals' (*tutejsi*).

The Jews constituted another sizeable ethnic community. They, however, stressed their total separateness from all Christian communities. They lived in close-knit communities governed by their own laws. Their estrangement was deepened by the antisemitism manifested by some Christians. Thus the Jewish culture remains outside the scope of the present paper.

The development of a specific local identity in Lwów and its region had a major impact upon the development of religious art there. In this respect the Poles, the Ruthenians and the Armenians pursued different options depending on their religion. The convergence of unification of their religions led all three, however, to work from a common set of artistic models. On the whole a consequence of the preferences of the patrons and the artists themselves, this sharing was accepted by the multinational community of Lwów.

### *Roman Catholics and their religious art*

The Poles who settled in Lwów and in the Ruthenian province brought with them a cultural and artistic life shaped in the sphere of the Western European tradition. The churches they built (among others a Roman Catholic cathedral in Lwów, begun 1360) emulated the Gothic style of Central Europe by reflecting the architecture of Bohemia and Bavaria. The models were taken from central Poland and basically were not modified at all. Thus Roman Catholic architecture developed independently of the local tradition created by the Ruthenians before the middle of the 14th century. Likewise, religious

paintings and sculptures of the Roman Catholics had a decidedly Western character. In the following centuries the Western character of the religious art of the Roman Catholic Church did not undergo any substantial transformations. Although in the 17th century Orthodox iconography had some influence on Roman Catholic painting, it was small-scale and negligible.

In the 18th century the Roman Catholic churches built in Lwów and its region were predominantly small parish ones (like, for instance, the churches in Hodowica and Nawaria, designed by Bernard Meretyn, 1751-58). They were modelled after the *Landskirchen* developed in Habsburg countries by Johann Lucas von Hildebrandt, Kilian Ignaz Dientzenhofer and Franz Anton Pilgramm. The architecture of monastic churches was more imposing - as a rule they had twin tower façades. They used motifs borrowed from the late Baroque architecture of Bohemia and Austria, like undulating walls and galleries and architectonically complex vaults: an example is the Missionaries Church in Horodenka, designed by Bernard Meretyn, 1743-60. The Dominican Church by Jan & Witte (1744-64) was the most magnificent Catholic church erected in Lwów in the 18th century. Built on an ellipsoid plan, was probably modelled on the church of St Charles Borromeo in Vienna. The church interiors were provided with columnar altars richly adorned with wooden carvings, very characteristic of Central European Art. Full of drama and pathos, these carvings are considered to be the highest achievements of Lwowian art.

A general survey of its history may, I believe, explain the fact that Roman Catholic art in Lwów was impervious to the influence of Eastern models. Since the fall of Constantinople, the art of Eastern Europe (linked as it was to Byzantine Art) had become stagnant and never showed any creative vigour. It was steadily decreasing in quality and finally went into decline. It should not therefore be surprising that Roman Catholic religious art became a model for other persuasions. However, it is worth pointing out that Polish theologians of the Counter-Reformation praise icons as objects embodying sacredness. Marian icons present in many Roman Catholic churches in Lwów and its region were deeply venerated. However, their modern copies did not possess the same features of Eastern European style.

### *Uniate and their religious art*

Prior to the arrival of the Poles, religious art in the Halicz Duchy followed Byzantine patterns usually substantially modified under the influence of the Kiev Duchy. For instance, religious architecture was dominated by the model of the small Orthodox church in Greek cross form with a central dome, developed in the Byzantine Empire at the end of the first millennium. The situation did not initially change after the incorporation of the Halicz Duchy into Poland, as is demonstrated by the Orthodox Cathedral in Lwów begun in 1363. Elements borrowed from Gothic art appeared very rarely in the late medieval Orthodox churches from the Lwów province (for example, the church in Rohatyn from the turn of the 16th century). In Orthodox church architecture of the 16th and 17th centuries one can also find isolated details characteristic of Renaissance and of Baroque art, like for instance the form of the order and classicising ornamentation (in a Wallachian Orthodox church in Lwów, designed by Paolo Dominici and begun in 1591).

At the same time Orthodox Churches were adorned by traditional Eastern icons which, however, exhibited an increasing number of Western elements - convergent perspective,

chiaroscuro effects and even details borrowed from prints. These icons were still painted on wooden panels using egg tempera, which was however replaced with the technically simpler oil paint towards the end of the 17th century. In the Eastern Church the Divine Liturgy was said behind the iconostasis. As the altars were concealed from the faithful there was no need to provide them with the retables. The religious regulations that forbade the display of any sculptures inside Orthodox churches were strictly observed.

The Union of Brest in 1596 did not alter the character of Orthodox church art in any substantial way. However, the changes in the Uniat liturgy introduced at the Synod of Zamość in 1710 made a considerable impact on art. The reforms endorsed by the Synod were meant to make the Uniat Church *plus catholique que la Pape*. Thenceforth the celebration of the mass was to be seen by the faithful, and the traditional iconostases were removed or made smaller. Monumental architectonic altars frequently embellished with sculptures began to appear in their place, following the tradition of Roman Catholic churches. The altars contained paintings of a decidedly Western character. After the Synod of Zamość the Uniat Church put the main emphasis on pastoral care which demanded the transformation and enlargement of church interiors. Here Western patterns were used, such as the Latin cross plan in particular.

The introduction of certain motifs into the architecture of Uniat churches was a clear call to follow the Western tradition, a trend which in the Polish literature is called 'occidentalization'. Among such motifs one can find, for instance, Il Gesù-like façades, as on the Basilian Uniat church in Pleśnisko Hill near Podhorce, or twin towers enhancing the front elevation, as on the Uniat cathedral in Chełm, designed by Paweł Fontana, 1735-56 and on the Basilian Uniat church in Buczaczy, 1762. The five domes crowning traditional Ruthenian Orthodox churches were believed to symbolise the Five Patriarchs, who according to Orthodox ecclesiology wielded equal power in the Church. In the 17th century the five domes were replaced by one, symbolising the pope's primacy which was acknowledged by the Uniat Church.

The stylistic vocabulary of the Orthodox churches was considerably occidentalized as well. The churches had late-Baroque or rococo forms, borrowed from the Rome or from Habsburg Countries. The new Uniat cathedral in Lwów (designed by Bernard Meretyn, 1743-70) may serve as an example here. Inside, it was enriched with undulating galleries and its slender body was informed with the spirit of the rococo *galanterie*, enhanced by fine stonework.

### *Religious art of Armenian Catholics*

The churches the Lwów Armenians built in the Middle Ages - for example the Armenian Cathedral in Lwów, designed by Doring, 1356-63 - emulated characteristic forms developed in Armenian architecture as early as in the first millennium. When compared with Roman-Catholic Gothic churches they looked foreign and were easy to identify. The same was still true at the beginning of the 17th century. Although the Armenian Church in Zamość (1626-35) was decorated with classical orders, its tower and dome followed the Armenian building tradition. The only feature that identified the church in Jazłowiec (c. 1600) as belonging to the Armenians was the characteristic ornamentation based on motifs foreign to West European Art.

After the Armenian Church was subordinated to Rome specific cultural elements of the Lwów Armenians were soon lost. By subordinating themselves to the pope, the Armenians severed their links with the *katholikos*, the patriarch of the Armenian Church; this soon resulted in a total loss of key elements of their national tradition. The process of denationalisation led to a decisive occidentalization of their art in the 18th century.

Despite its small scale, the architecture of 18th-century Armenian churches shows many obvious borrowings from the West European architecture of the High Baroque. The interior of the church in Stanisławów (1742-62), full of free-standing columns, followed the spatial pattern of S. Maria in Campitelli in Rome. Its concave façade flanked by two cylindrical towers was in turn modelled after the Western elevation of the Cistercian church in Osek, Bohemia. The architect who designed the Armenian Church in Kutý (1748-55) also used Bohemian patterns as a model: he used a sequence of ellipses for the plan he built the church on. Just as in the case of Uniat Churches, Armenian religious art was largely dependent on models borrowed from Habsburg countries.

The interiors of the 18th-century Armenian churches were provided with architectural columnar altars embellished with ornamentation of West European origins (*rocaille* for instance), which superseded the original Armenian embellishments. It is hard to find there any surviving iconographical elements characteristic of Armenian religious art. Only a few Armenian motifs like the images of St Gregory the Illuminator, the *Baptism of Armenia*, or elaborate cycles of Sacred Knights, were preserved.

### Patrons

In the Renaissance and Baroque periods patrons played an important role in shaping art, as they frequently dictated functional models, general compositional patterns or specific motifs to the artists. It is beyond doubt that patrons had a singular influence on the unification of the language of art used by the three ethnic and religious communities in Lwów and its surroundings.

Atanazy Szeptycki, the Uniat bishop of Lwów, and his successor Leon Szeptycki asked the architect Bernard Meretyń to build a new Lwów Uniat cathedral using patterns borrowed from the Western tradition. The results of this request are quite significant. The cathedral was shaped according to a spatial arrangement popular in the architecture of the Baroque, which, according to Wittkower, 'links the centralised plan of St Peter's [in Rome] with an emphasis on the longitudinal axis'. The picture on the high altar of the cathedral, created slightly later (1770-72), was also based on Vatican patterns, as it was a peculiar painted copy of the *Cathedra Petri* by Gianlorenzo Bernini. The ideas behind this choice are clear. The Szeptycki bishops paid homage to the Holy See and they supported the idea of Christian Unity under papal rule.

The desire to announce Uniat ideas can be found in the occidentalization of Uniat architecture. A similar message is probably contained in the Western character of the temples of the Armenian Church which formed a union with Rome. It should be evident that as a rule these ideas are decided upon by particular patrons. However, sometimes patrons would encourage the occidentalization of Uniat and Armenian churches quite unconsciously. This was due to the regulations governing the *fabrica ecclesiae*, shaped in Poland by tradition, as well as to the state and Canon laws. According to Polish law landowners were supposed to be patrons of all Christian churches on their estate. It would

often happen that they maintained churches of different religious denominations than their own.

Wacław Sierakowski, the Roman Catholic archbishop of Lwów, built a Roman Catholic church and Uniat temple close to his summer palace in Obroszyn in the 1770s. These were almost identical in their modelling and both were contained within a carved stone wall. It is likely that they were built by the archbishop's permanent team of architects and master masons. As they were accustomed to building Roman Catholic churches, so they dressed the Uniat Church in Western forms as well. Atanazy Szeptycki, the Uniat bishop of Lwów, was also known for protecting Uniat and Roman Catholic churches on his estate.

The most powerful and affluent noblemen in the Lwów province, such as the Potocki and the Rzewuski, maintained artists at their courts to carry out all their building projects. Thus their architects and master builders would simultaneously build and decorate churches of different Catholic denominations. This would usually happen during periods of expansion in privately owned towns such as Stanisławów and Horodenka. We also know that Mikołaj Bazyli Potocki (1712-82) would freely transfer his artists among the many building sites of Roman Catholic, Uniat and Armenian churches on his vast estate. A tendency to unify architectural style was only natural among court artists working on many churches at the same time.

Although many noblemen were well versed in the theory of architecture, they were not similarly knowledgeable in the history of art (which did not then have the status of a true academic discipline). Their artistic preferences had a universal character and did not differentiate among separate religious and national traditions. This, I believe, made them expect their artists to shape and decorate the churches of different denominations in the same ways, which in turn reflected the artists' skills and attitudes.

### *Artists*

We do not know much about the scope and character of Lwów artists' education. They found a source for their knowledge and skills in local professional guilds which abided by Western ideas and principles. As far as I know there was no school of icon painters connected with the Eastern Church at that time. The Uniat hierarchy preferred more modern methods of teaching artists. To educate Łukasz Dolinski (c. 1745-1824) as a court painter, bishop Leon Szeptycki sent him to Vienna to pursue studies in the Academy of Fine Arts. On the whole the artist's nationality and religion did not preclude his obtaining commissions from patrons of different national and religious backgrounds. The Pole Piotr Polejowski was simultaneously engaged in rebuilding the Roman Cathedral in Lwów (1765-80) and in building a large Uniat Church in the Basilian monastery in Poczajów (c. 1770). His brother Maciej executed numerous carvings in many Roman Catholic and Uniat churches. Franciszek Smuglewicz (1745-1807) produced many paintings for Roman Catholic churches in the Eastern Province of Poland, but he became famous in Lwów thanks to executing an imposing painting for the high altar in the Uniat Cathedral. In turn, the altar carvings were made by the Uniat Michał Filewicz (d. 1804), who at the same time obtained many commissions to decorate Roman Catholic churches. The architect Franciszek Kulczycki equally divided his time between building Roman Catholic and Uniat churches.

The Armenians in Lwów found their vocation in artistic crafts and, among other things, they produced rich liturgical vestments to be used in churches of the three Catholic denominations. It is also worth pointing out that the architect Jan de Witte (1716-85), the builder of the Dominican church in Lwów, had some ancestors of Armenian origins.

However, the artists who had most profound influence on the art of Lwów were born and educated outside Poland. Among them one can count the architect Bernard Meretyn (d. 1759) and the sculptor Jan Jerzy Pinsel (d. 1761/62), who probably came from Bohemia. Their achievements had a major impact on the art of Roman Catholic and Uniat churches. Many artists living in Lwów in the 18th century bore German-sounding names (Hutter, Markward, Fesinger, Stihl) which indicate that they probably came from Habsburg countries or from Bavaria. What is more, some of them - like, for instance, the architect Fryderyk Giesges - were Lutherans, which however never precluded them from obtaining commissions from the hierarchies of the three Catholic denominations.

One can assume that the guest artists had a unifying impact on the art of Lwów in the 18th century. As they did not know the variegated local building tradition, they had to apply a uniform style in designing churches of various religious denominations. It was in Lwów that Czechs, Austrians and Bavarians met with the iconography of the Eastern Church for the first time. It should not be surprising then that some of them made iconographic mistakes when designing the vestments of Uniat or Armenian bishops. However, it is worth noting that Jan Jerzy Pinsel took great care in rendering fine details of the Eastern pontifical vestment when carving the figures of St Athanasius and St Leo that adorn the façade of the Uniat cathedral in Lwów. He must, I believe, have been fascinated by the 'exotic' character of the vestment.

It should be emphasised that the Ruthenians and the Armenians who employed these guest artists accepted the Western attributes and qualities of their work. According to the existing sources, the patrons actually expected the transformation of the art rooted in the Eastern tradition 'iuxta formam moderni saeculi'. The guest artists found the multinational community of Lwów and its surroundings particularly conducive to their work. They learned Polish, established families and often became affluent. Sometimes they would even sever their links with their native countries and adopt the local identity of Lwów as their own.

### *The public*

Polish art historians have always suggest that the occidentalization of the Uniat and Armenian churches in terms of religious art was accepted by believers. However, the assumption is questionable. There was hardly any form of art criticism in Poland in the 18th century. Thus our knowledge about the social impact of church art in Lwów can only be implicit. In 1786 Ewaryst Kuropatnicki praised architecture of the Uniat cathedral in Lwów in his book *Geografia Galicji* (The Geography of Galicja province). What he found particularly appealing was its 'modern' character which, I believe, can be understood as the occidentalization of its form. In 1784 the Carmelite monastery in Przemyśl was dissolved and the church turned into the Uniat cathedral. For almost a hundred years the new owners did not change its interior and the Uniat liturgy was said at Roman Catholic altars.

A very interesting piece of information comes from a monograph on the architecture of the Uniat cathedral in Lwów written by Mykola Siczynskij. He writes that in the 19th century the cathedral became an important symbol of the Ukrainians' aspiration for national independence. The cathedral's outline was used as a logo by various nationalistic organisations. The image of the cathedral displayed in a room in a private house identified the owners as Ukrainian nationals. One should remember that in order to distinguish themselves from the Poles the Ukrainians would stress their Eastern Slavonic roots and the Eastern character of their national tradition. It is equally significant and paradoxical that a cathedral of a decided Western style came to symbolise their Eastern allegiance.



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Tożsamość kulturalna i narodowa we Lwowie XVIII wieku.  
Trzy narody, trzy religie, jedna sztuka

W okresie Rzeczypospolitej Szlacheckiej Lwów był dużym ośrodkiem miejskim zamieszkałym przez liczne narodowości, między innymi Polaków, Rusinów i Ormian. Podstawowym czynnikiem rozróżniającym te narodowości była wyznawana przez nie religia: rzymski katolicyzm, prawosławie lub Ormiański monofizytyzm. Każde z tych wyznań dopracowało się własnej odmiany sztuki sakralnej o specyficznych indywidualnych formach. Zasadnicze zmiany nastąpiły na przełomie XVII i XVIII wieku, kiedy Rusini i Ormianie przystąpili powszechnie do Unii z Rzymem. Owey Unii towarzyszył zdecydowany zwrot ku kulturze zachodniej, którego artystycznym wyrazem była okcydentalizacja sztuki sakralnej obu nacji, polegająca na barokizacji form ich świątyń, upodobnienia ukształtowania przestrzennego tych budowli do kościołów rzymskokatolickich. We wnętrzach tych świątyń budowano ołtarze i umieszczano obrazy i rzeźby o charakterze barokowym. Kluczową rolę w okcydentalizacji sakralnej architektury rusińskiej i ormiańskiej odegrali fundatorzy świątyń, wśród których przeważali wyznawcy rzymskiego katolicyzmu. Zgodnie z przepisami prawa kanonicznego musieli oni łożyć środki na budowę kościołów wszystkich wyznań chrześcijańskich w swoich dobrach, ale nie troszczyli się o rozróżnianie form tych budowli oraz ich wyposażenia. Przy świątyniach trzech wyznań pracowali ci sami artyści, stosujący nieodmiennie formy charakterystyczne dla sztuki zachodnioeuropejskiej.