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Atanazy Raczyński and his contribution to Portuguese art historiography

In the year 1846 Parisian publishing house Jules Renouard issued a book by Count Ahtanasius Raczyński (1788-1874) entitled *Les Arts en Portugal. Lettres adressées à la Société Artistique et Scientifique de Berlin*. Accompanied by its second volume - *Dictionnaire historico-artistique du Portugal*, it formed an unprecedentedly advanced and modern account of historical critic in the context of Portuguese art historical research. Their author, a Polish aristocrat and a Prussian diplomat, was a respected collector, connoisseur, and an art critic, well established in the flourishing artistic circles of Berlin. His earlier publication *Histoire de L'Art Moderne en Allemagne* (1837-1841) demonstrated scholarly erudition and gave him the reputation of one of the main proponents of the German romantic painting movement.

The position of Raczyński as an ambassador at the court of Lisbon (1842-1848) enabled him to conduct pioneering investigations on variety of problems related to the history and the current state of fine arts in Portugal. As opposed to earlier works in the subject, Raczyński expanded the field of research and introduced a number of new topics connected with i.a. diversity of original and typical phenomena of artistic production and specific expression of national style in painting, architecture, and applied arts, which made his account a valuable source of knowledge and a groundwork for following generations of scholars.

Nevertheless the truly revolutionary input and his most important and innovating achievement in the context of Portuguese art historiography relies on the attention Raczyński brought to the empirical attribution method, and the introduction of critical documentary and source study. Raczyński openly displayed a strong familiarity with the connoisseur practice of authentication and attribution of art objects, and at the same time his German-oriented intellectual affiliation gave him skills and competence drawn from the achievements of early academic history of art evolving in scientific and artistic circles, especially so-called Berlin School of Art History. The epistolary literary structure chosen by Raczyński for his publications was at that time a common narration form used by German scholars like e.x. C. F. von Rumohr, G. F. Waagen, or K. Schnaase, but a conscious inclusion of numerous long

quotations from archival documents, additional comments, and footnotes shows an extraordinary endeavour to present and to emphasise the process of research, consisting of gradual collection of information, formulation, frequent changes, and revisions of theories. He openly manifested a sharp, critical approach to general opinions and dubious customary convictions, constantly confronting them with empirically and documentary verifiable data. In attempt to base his findings concerning distinguished artist and the most important Portuguese monuments on objectively proven facts, Raczyński studied written sources, profited from knowledge passed him on by a network of well-informed native savants, and also personally visited and examined for himself countless churches, monasteries, public and private collections of art all over the country.

The comprehensive interpretation of Count Raczyński's activities and his involvement in the development of Portuguese historiography, which combines information about his intellectual background, methodology and the outcome of his investigations leads to the analysis of early art historical practise not only in Portugal, but also contributes to the knowledge about a general European context of tradition of artistic writing.