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Polish Art Of the 18th Century Towards the History

The dissertation I work on treats about different perspectives of the history in the Polish art of the 18th century. Because the theme is outstandingly broad, it requires to be limited to a number of case studies. They should be shown on a vast European background of historical reflection within the artistic theory, dating back to the famous *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes* as well as on the Polish historical consciousness among. The implied methodology of this part, based on texts of Western art critics and aestheticians allowed me to trace in Poland influences of French theoreticians, especially since the last Polish king, Stanisław August Poniatowski has ascended the throne in 1764. In France the ground for new approach to depicting the past and the question of its form had been already prepared by such elaborate publications as Etienne Baluze's *Capitularia regum Francorum* or *Les monuments de la Monarchie Française* by Bernard de Mountfacon who in the preface wrote that these souvenirs of the past "help in enlightening the history and customs of the first kings". French need for the historical truth (*Refléxions critiques* by Dubos) converged with deep changes of the role of art in the society (Diderot's commentaries on the *Salons*) was soon followed by official state commissions in other countries.

In Poland however, the situation was more complicated since the attitude towards the history immediately determined one's political orientation. In my dissertation I form a thesis of a dualistic concept of the history in Poland, based on chosen artworks (paintings, sculpture as well as architecture) and historical reflection. During Poniatowski's reign it can be clearly viewed that the king and its supporters used the past not only to reconstruct the glory of the nation, but also to reinterpret it in order to justify necessary institutional changes of the falling country. Apart from the art there were many battlefields in which the historiography was the leading one. Intellectuals from the court like Naruszewicz, Albertrandi or Krasicki described the political system in Medieval Poland as better

organized than its degenerated contemporary state overcome with the concept of *złota wolność szlachecka* (the Golden Liberty of each nobleman).

The historical and artistic policy of the last king of Poland was not unique in the Commonwealth. His political opponents, gathered around a few magnates under banner of the Republican party, used to express their own interpretation of the past. These initiatives operated in the same field of ideological criteria and used similar means of expression (although not so cohesive). As it has been already mentioned above, the “official” or “state” art of the court focused on carefully chosen stories which were then shown in a sublime, sophisticated narrative being a modern interpretation of old virtues. Different aims can be found in artistic foundations of those magnates who wanted to underline their skepticism towards royal reforms. In their perspective the tradition did not need to be interpreted. The key was to show its strength and stability. This could be done in many fields, sometimes the same for two sides of the conflict. I would even risk to say that in the second half of the 18th century in Poland occurred the ideological “War of Saint Stanisław” since this figure of the saint martyr was an extremely attractive patron for both the king and the Republicans. For opponents of Poniatowski the parallel between the oppressive ruler who wants to break ancient liberties by implementing revolutionary novelties and his Medieval, tyrannical predecessor who dared to kill the bishop was rather obvious.

I seek in the International Forum some tips indicating new fields of perspectives for my research which would allow me to broad my reflection and present it in a multicontextual light. One of them should be to show them in comparison with the “historical” art of German countries, as well as of Russia.