

‘Ribald man with a cranky look’. The Sarmatian portrait as the pop-cultural symbol of Baroque art in Poland¹

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Figure 1 Cover, *Wprost*, no. 44, October 2007.

A bald-headed man with an exotic-looking moustache looks out at us from a magazine cover. The face, taken from a Baroque period portrait, is shown wearing a modern white-collar shirt. ‘How Polish is a Pole?’ the heading asks.² Clearly, the ugly, round, bewhiskered face is meant to represent a stereotypical native of Poland (Figure 1). This cover of the popular weekly *Wprost* provides a perfect example of the use of a Sarmat figure in the twenty-first-century mass media. Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann observed that the Sarmatian idea of Poland is not just a simplistic vision of Polishness abroad, but also an image of the nation accepted and reproduced by the Poles themselves.³ Despite of its popularity, the term ‘Sarmatism’ still remains

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² Front cover of *Wprost*, 44, October 2007.

³ Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, ‘W oczach własnych i cudzych. Polska kultura i sztuka 1572–

without a clear definition.⁴ As Hans-Jürgen Bömelburg has noticed, the concept is broad enough to allow Polish authors to overuse it constantly. At the same time, foreign researchers tend to avoid use of the term on grounds that it is simply untranslatable outside Poland.⁵

While the term Sarmatism is widely recognized in Poland, it will probably be unfamiliar to most foreign audiences because, as the product of a separate culture and philosophy, it is often avoided in general publications. Yet one may assume that every Pole understands the term intuitively and harbours specific visual associations with it.⁶ Sarmatism has always been closely related to the idea of the Polish Baroque and it can safely be assumed that the Sarmatian portrait remains a basic connotation of the Polish Baroque for the general public in Poland.

This article analyses how the Sarmatian portrait became the epitome of Polishness and to what extent mediation by the discipline of art history influenced this pop-cultural vision of the 'Polish Baroque' under the conditions of socialism. The article begins with a definition of Sarmatism and its initial recognition by the Polish art history community. We then go on to analyse a number of exhibition catalogues and publications on Baroque art and Baroque portraiture published during the Cold War era. It concludes with an examination of the origins of the great popularity of the Sarmatian Baroque portrait, despite its direct connection to the ideologically problematic history of the Polish ruling class – the *szlachta* or gentry.

Sarmatism is often described as a specifically Polish phenomenon.⁷ It was first introduced as an academic term at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁸ Yet there is still no clear definition of the concept. Bömelburg proposed four different

1764', in Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Jan K. Ostrowski, Piotr Krasny and Kazimierz Kuczman, eds, *Kraj skrzydlatych jeźdźców. Sztuka w Polsce, 1572–1764*, (exhib. cat.), Warszawa: Zamek Królewski w Warszawie, 1999, 15–26, here: 17.

⁴ Martin Faber, 'Das Streben des polnischen Adels nach dem Erhalt seiner Privilegien. Zur ursprünglichen Bedeutung des Wortes 'Sarmatismus'', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas. Neue Folge*, 57: 3, 2009, 374–401, here: 374.

⁵ Hans-Jürgen Bömelburg, *Frühneuzeitliche Nationen im östlichen Europa. Das polnische Geschichtsdenken und die Reichweite einer humanistischen Nationalgeschichte (1500–1700)*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 2006, 411–413.

⁶ Piotr O. Scholtz, 'Introductio. Warum Sarmatismus versus Orientalismus?', in Magdalena Długosz and Piotr O. Scholtz, eds, *Sarmatismus versus Orientalismus in Mitteleuropa/Sarmatyzm versus Orientalizm w Europie Środkowej*, Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2013, 19–28, here: 23.

⁷ The literature on Sarmatism is extensive: the most important publications include the following: Tadeusz Mańkowski, *Genealogia sarmatyzmu*, Warszawa: Tow. Wydawnicze 'Łuk', 1946; Tadeusz Dobrowolski, *Polskie malarstwo portretowe. Ze studiów nad sztuką epoki sarmatyzmu*, Kraków: Polska Akademia Umiejętności, 1948; Stanisław Cynarski, 'Sarmatyzm – ideologia i styl życia', in Janusz Tazbir, ed., *Polska XVII wieku. Państwo – społeczeństwo – kultura*, Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1969, 220–243; Zbigniew Kuchowicz, *Człowiek polskiego baroku*, Warszawa: Wydawn. Łódzkie, 1992; Andrzej Borowski, ed., *Słownik sarmatyzmu. Idee, pojęcia, symbole*, Warszawa: Wydawn. Literackie, 2001; Janusz Tazbir, *Kultura szlachecka w Polsce. Rozkwit, upadek, relikty*, edn 5, Poznań: Wydaw. Nauka i Innowacje, 2013.

⁸ Bömelburg, *Frühneuzeitliche Nationen im östlichen Europa*, 410.

interpretations of 'Sarmatism'. Firstly, it can be understood as a geographical construct. The term 'Sarmatia' described a region between the Baltic Sea and the Dnieper. In the seventeenth and the eighteenth century this area was within the territory of the Lithuanian-Polish Commonwealth. The concept also makes reference to the ancient origin of the Polish gentry. Polish noblemen believed that they were the descendants of the Sarmatians, an ancient warlike folk described by Ptolemy⁹. It was then believed that the Sarmatians were brave, warlike and honourable and that freedom was the value that they held most highly. Members of the Polish gentry saw themselves as natural heirs to the Sarmatians. But this theory of the Polish gentry's ancient origins is, of course, historically incorrect. It was rather a unique combination of European and Oriental culture that distinguished the Polish gentry from the rest of European nobility and served the purpose of creating a collective historical tradition for the Polish nobility in a fast developing country.¹⁰ Hence, the term 'Sarmatism' is used to describe the dominant current of cultural formation in Poland in the seventeenth and the eighteenth century.¹¹ The expression combined within a single concept the political, religious and social system of values of that current. In the end, the concept can be seen as a political statement that crystalized in the second half of the eighteenth century. The neologism 'Sarmatism', invented in 1765, symbolized the traditional, conservative gentry and carried a clear derogatory connotation.¹²

The image of the Sarmatian and the Baroque portrait has been considered an important part of Polish Baroque heritage ever since its initial recognition and appreciation in Poland (Figure 2). It had a presence in the first Polish exhibition to celebrate the Baroque era. A public show of various objects from the time of Jan III Sobieski was held in 1884 in Kraków at the National Museum only three years after the inauguration of this institution, which is considered the first public museum in Poland.¹³ Many Baroque portraits were displayed in the exhibition, in the role of

⁹ Tadeusz Chrzanowski, *Wędrowki po Sarmacji europejskiej. Eseje o sztuce i kulturze staropolskiej*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 1988, 7. It is difficult to say when precisely the myth of Sarmatian origin of Polish gentry was first conceived. The hypothesis was initially formulated by Polish chronicler Jan Długosz in the fifteenth century. He based it on the 'Cosmographia', by the great Roman astronomer, geographer and mathematician Ptolemy in the second century after Christ.

¹⁰ In spite of its dominant position in Poland, Sarmatism existed alongside a supranational 'eastern European' Baroque culture. Some representatives of the monarchy or the highest echelons of the nobility were portrayed both in the 'Sarmatian' and in the 'western European' manner. The choice of manner depended on the function intended for the representation. See, for example, the two portraits of king John II Casimir (Jan II Kazimierz) painted by Daniel Schultz, as discussed in Bożena Steinborn, *Malarz Daniel Schultz. Gdańszczanin w służbie królów polskich*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Zamku Królewskiego, 2004.

¹¹ The term 'formacja kulturowa' has been connected to 'Sarmatism' since 1974. See: Martin Faber, 'Das Streben', 374.

¹² Hans-Jürgen Bömelburg, *Frühneuzeitliche Nationen im östlichen Europa*, 417.

¹³ Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius, 'Museums and national identity in Poland', in Anna Kwilecka and Francis Ames-Lewis, eds, *Art and national identity in Poland and England: papers delivered at the University of London history of art conference, April 1995*, London: Dept. of History of Art, Birkbeck College, 1996, 157–171, here 161.



Figure 2 Unknown artist, *Portrait of a nobleman without an ear*, c. 1750, Tarnów, District Museum.

objects that 'speak and give life to the silent relics of the past'¹⁴ – these silent relics being a selection of memorabilia of the seventeenth century, including armour, clothing and craft objects. The author of the exhibition catalogue, Marian Sokołowski, attempted to distinguish what he perceived as the shared feature that unified the paintings: a feeling of 'spiritual predominance' and of 'theatrical gravity'.¹⁵ His efforts can be seen as the first attempt to create a separate stylistic category reserved especially for the Baroque portrait in Poland.

This visual paradigm was supported by contemporary literature, especially in the works of 1905 Nobel Prize laureate Henryk Sienkiewicz, with the image of the Polish gentry portrayed in his trilogy of novels set in seventeenth-century Poland: *Ogniem i mieczem* (With Fire and Sword) (1884), *Potop* (The Deluge) (1886), and *Pan Wołodyjowski* (Fire in the Steppe) (1888).¹⁶ The character of Jan Onufry Zagłoba, depicted as a typical Sarmat, was to become much loved among Sienkiewicz's

¹⁴ Marian Sokołowski, *Wystawa zabytków z czasów Jana III w Sukiennicach krakowskich*, Kraków: w Drukarni 'Czasu' Fr. Kulczyckiego i Sp. pod zarządem Józefa Łakocińskiego, 1884, 4, Wojewódzka Biblioteka Publiczna w Krakowie, accessed 14 May 2015 <http://mbc.malopolska.pl/dlibra/docmetadata?id=17419&dirids=1&tab=1>.

¹⁵ Sokołowski, *Wystawa zabytków*, 71.

¹⁶ Henryk Sienkiewicz, *Ogniem i mieczem*, Warszawa: Władysław Szulc i S-ka, 1884; Henryk Sienkiewicz, *Potop*, Warszawa: Edition daily newspaper 'Słowo', 1886; Henryk Sienkiewicz, *Pan Wołodyjowski*, Warszawa: Edition daily newspaper 'Słowo', 1887–1888.



Figure 3 Unknown artist, *Portrait of Kazimierz Boreyko*, 18th century, Tarnów, District Museum.

readers. While many books and studies have been written about the character, Maureen Mroczek-Morris gave a short and precise description of him: 'Zagłoba has been said to be a cross between Homer's Ulysses and Shakespeare's Sir John Falstaff because of his propensity for drinking and the exaggerated tales of his youthful adventures. He is portrayed as a lover of food and wine, and a great braggart.'¹⁷ It can be assumed that readers perceived Baroque portraits against the background of Sienkiewicz's popular books and that people would project some of the features of Zagłoba's character onto the individuals dressed in Sarmatian style who were depicted in the paintings (Figure 3). Before Sienkiewicz, though, other Polish writers of the nineteenth century had already been interested in creating a literature of the life of the gentry. Such books as the Polish national epic poem *Pan Tadeusz* (Sir Thaddeus) (1834)¹⁸ by Adam Mickiewicz or *Pamiętki Soplicy* (The memoirs of Soplica) (1839–41, 1844–45)¹⁹ by Henryk Rzewuski appealed to a hankering for lost times in an effort to keep the memory of ancestors and national traditions alive. Many plots and motifs described in *The memoirs of Soplica* – one of the most popular and enthusiastically received books in nineteenth-century Polish literature – was to

¹⁷ Maureen Mroczek Morris, 'In Search of Sienkiewicz's Zagłoba: Clues from Genealogy Records', *Polish-American Historical Association Newsletter*, 68, 1, 2011, 8–9, Polish American Historical Association, accessed 23 May 2015

<http://www.polishamericanstudies.org/newsletters.html>.

¹⁸ Adam Mickiewicz, *Pan Tadeusz, czyli ostatni zajazd na Litwie. Historia szlachecka z roku 1811 i 1812 we dwunastu księgach wierszem*, Paris: Aleksander Jełowicki, 1834.

¹⁹ Henryk Rzewuski, *Pamiętki Soplicy*, Paris: Jełowicki i S-ka, 1839.

become the source for Henryk Sienkiewicz's trilogy.²⁰

The role of the Baroque portrait after 1945

So what happened to the myth of Sarmatism during communist times? Was there a place for the Baroque portrait in the new periodization and systematization of art in accordance with the principles Marxist-Leninist doctrine? The official position during the Stalinist time, the most dogmatic period of the era, was clear: Baroque art was a reactionary and ideologically incorrect creation produced in an era of 'aristocratic oligarchy'²¹. It was seen as an instrument of propaganda used by the ruling class and the forces of the counter-reformation. The art itself was criticized for preferring idealism to the realism favoured by Marxism-Leninism. Nonetheless, some works received the socialist stamp of approval thanks to elements they were deemed to contain, including such properties as their 'indigenoussness' and 'contestation of cosmopolitanism'.²²

That situation was to change in the aftermath of the de-Stalinization process from 1956 on. The first nationwide conference on Baroque art was held in Poznań just a year later (on 21 and 22 November 1957). The conference contributors repudiated the previously dominant radical and one-sided vision of art history.²³ Władysław Tomkiewicz proposed a new periodization (based on the fundamental role of the court of the king in art patronage) and presented a new set of research objectives for the art historical activities. He expressed appreciation of the role of the Church and the gentry in the creation of the new style and emphasized the realist strands contained within it.²⁴ Refraining from referring to the entire period as the 'Polish Baroque', he did use the term to refer to the trend common at the time towards excessive decoration, rich ornamentation and to the ancestral galleries of the nobility in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century residences, which he saw as being overloaded with portraits.²⁵ In the second part of his presentation, Tomkiewicz pointed to an urgent need for research on the neglected period. He

²⁰ Tadeusz Ulewicz, *Zagadnienie sarmatyzmu w kulturze i literaturze polskiej*, Kraków: Collegium Columbinum, 2006, 233–238.

²¹ Władysław Tomkiewicz, 'O sztuce 'barokowej' w Polsce', *Biuletyn Historii Sztuki*, 20, 1958, 37–47, here 38. See also: 'Referat przewodniczącego Ogólnopolskiego Komitetu Frontu Jedności Narodu Edwarda Ochaba', in: *Tysiąclecie Państwa Polskiego. Materiały z Plenarnej Sesji Ogólnopolskiego Komitetu Frontu Jedności Narodu*, Warszawa 1966, 5–25, here 8.

²² Juliusz Starzyński, 'Zadania historyków sztuki w świetle konstytucji polskiej Rzeczypospolitej ludowej', *Biuletyn Historii Sztuki*, 14, 1952, 3–9; Elżbieta Gieysztor-Miłobędzka, 'Polska Historia Sztuki – konserwatyzm i próba jego przewyciężenia', *Kultura współczesna. Teoria, interpretacje, krytyka*, 4, 26, 2000, 58–76, here 71.

²³ 'Sesja naukowa stowarzyszenia historyków sztuki poświęcona sztuce baroku', *Biuletyn Historii Sztuki* 20, 1958, 5–6.

²⁴ 'Ale teraz właśnie obserwujemy zdecydowane zmiany. Podniesione z letargu malarstwo dźwiga się niezwykle szybko i zdobywa sobie w krótkim czasie pozycję czołową. Podźwignęły je cztery silne ramiona: kościół potrydencki, dwór królewski, mecenat municypalny i snobizm szlachecki.' Tomkiewicz, 'O sztuce 'barokowej'', 38.

²⁵ He proposed the term 'Court Art of Vasa Dynasty' ('styl Wazów') to apply to the art the first half of the seventeenth century. Tomkiewicz, 'O sztuce 'barokowej'', 40–41.

declared that the task of inventorying, cataloguing and preserving moveable artworks from the period should become the primary and fundamental objective of Polish art historians. Once that job had been done, the research effort should then be oriented towards the creation of a permanent museum exhibition for the general public.

This need to create an inventory of such portraits led to the foundation of the Centre for Research on the Polish Portrait (*Ośrodek Badań nad Portretem Polskim*) in 1962. It was set up as a separate department of the National Museum in Warsaw, and was managed by Janina Ruszczycówna.²⁶ The initial tasks of the institution were to systematically document and inventorise the portraits held in the National Museum collection. In the 1970s, its field of activity broadened out to the galleries, museums and private collections the entire Mazowsze region. Ruszczycówna and the staff still based at the Centre were responsible for the restoration of the portraits, new acquisitions and the search for the portraits of interest available on the art market. It also served as an information centre for people searching for portraits of specific persons, including family members and important historic figures. Over the years of its existence the institution created a huge bibliographical database in which the information to answer such questions was stored.²⁷ The exhibitions that the Centre organised both in Poland and abroad on the Polish Baroque portrait were among its most important achievements (see the table at the end of this paper). However, Ruszczycówna retired in 1984 and within year the institution had closed down.²⁸

It should not be forgotten that the emphasis placed on the need to inventory, catalogue and present the moveable artworks of the period may have had an ulterior motive – i.e. the nationalisation of private art galleries. Indeed a huge number of portraits from the aristocratic residences were confiscated and transferred to publicly owned museums. As Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius wrote on the subject:

The Warsaw collections grew fourfold in the first ten years after 1945. This rapid expansion was due to a large extent to the nationalisation of the private property in the wake of the decree on agricultural reform of 1944. [...] A comment in a leaflet distributed by the Silesian Museum in Wrocław in 1951 put the matter more bluntly: Works of art that were once kept in the houses of the aristocracy have now become the property of the whole nation. The People's Republic has put them into museums,

²⁶ Janina Ruszczycówna was the founder and the manager of the institution. She was in charge of the Centre from its beginnings right up until its closure. A second person was working with Ruszczycówna as an assistant all through that time (1962–1971 Bożena Fabiani; 1971–1980 Janina Waniewska; 1982–1985 Monika Szcześniewska-Ochnio). In the 1960s, restoration expert Herakliusz Lubomirski was also a member of the team. See: *Ośrodek Badań nad Portretem Polskim – plany pracy i sprawozdania*, l. 1963–1985, AMNW (Archiwum Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie – The Archive of the National Museum in Warsaw), sign. 3557 VI B.

²⁷ *Ośrodek Badań nad Portretem Polskim – korespondencja*, l. [1953] 1967–1979, AMNW, sign. 3558 VI B.

²⁸ AMNW, sign. 3557 VI B.

where they are accessible to the whole of society.²⁹

It is also possible that the exhibitions organised during the period on the Baroque portraits may have served the same purpose: that of returning of the riches of the commonwealth to the people, opening the palaces to the public and returning the country's cultural heritage to its proper owner – the Polish people. However, with these newly 'regained' art collections a new problem had to be solved: in what way were the numerous Baroque portraits of the now disfavoured ruling class to be presented to the public? In the official version of the history the country's gentry and aristocracy remained disrespected and deprecated³⁰. In the 1950s, Tomkiewicz had already tried to justify the art historians' interest in the patronage of the aristocracy ('which is of no significance *per se*'³¹). He argued that a research effort on art patrons would equip one to understand the presence of a single artist or of specific artistic forms in places widely separated geographically from one another. And the concept of 'Sarmatism' served the same purpose. Historians used the term often, underlining the sense it carried of an opposition to the culture of western Europe. Taking advantage of the ambiguity of the concept, they were able to conduct research into the Polish Commonwealth and its elites using it as their cover. For art historians the term 'Sarmatian' may have seemed less politically charged and thus probably 'safer' than the ideologically problematic term 'Baroque', and this may explain why the former expression tended to prevail.³² But how was the display of the ancestral galleries to be justified?

The answer to these questions can be found in the numerous exhibitions and books that were written on the Polish Baroque portrait during communist times. There is certainly no doubt that the Baroque portraits were exhibited surprisingly often during the period. In the larger cities such exhibitions were organized with the greatest frequency, but many displays were also organised in smaller towns. Some of them took the form of travelling exhibitions, a form that attracted large audiences. The table lists exhibitions involving the genre for each year of the period from 1947 to 1989. From it one can see that such shows became more frequent during the 1970s and 1980s. The 1977 exhibition *Portret Polski XVII i XVIII w.* (the Polish Portrait of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century), originally shown in Warsaw, was to travel on to at least five other Polish cities afterwards. The Cracow exhibition *Polaków portret własny* (Self-Portrait of the Nation) was an enormous

²⁹ Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius, 'Museums and national identity in Poland', 164.

³⁰ In Poland the word 'gentry' (*szlachta*) was used to describe the privileged families who had the right to bear a coat of arms. The large number of members in the group resulted in the differentiation between the lower class of gentry, and the higher social class which was called 'aristocracy' (*arystokracja, magnateria*). See: Andrzej Zajączkowski, *Szlachta polska. Struktura i kultura*, Warszawa: Semper, 2006.

³¹ 'Rzecz jasna, że te badania nie miałyby dostatecznym powodów same w sobie, gdyby nie pomagały nam do poznania twórców i odcyfrowania zawitych spraw atrybucji.' Tomkiewicz, 'O sztuce 'barokowej'', 44.

³² Hans-Jürgen Bömelburg, *Frühneuzeitliche Nationen im östlichen Europa*, 410.

success as well.³³ The year 1983 is also worth noting. It was the year in which the 300th anniversary of the Battle of Vienna was celebrated. That year saw the opening of at least five huge exhibitions dealing with the times of the Polish king Jan III Sobieski and his victory in the Battle of Vienna.



Figure 4 Unknown artist, *Portrait of Łukasz Węgliński (Węgleński)*, 18th century, Tarnów, District Museum.

A number of elements are notorious for the fact that they were repeated in every introduction on the catalogues for such exhibitions. The authors of such texts admitted straight away that the Polish Sarmatian portrait was generally of low artistic quality in comparison to the court and royal portrait genre of the same period. The artists responsible for the former were usually unknown guild members or local artists. But it was thanks to this very fact that the originality and unique qualities of the portraits were preserved. The paintings were always shown in opposition to the idealized portraits created for the royal and aristocratic courts, which, though they were of higher artistic quality, lacked the values of realism.³⁴ It was said that the Polish noblemen depicted in the Sarmatian portrait preferred to be presented with all their real details, including war scars and other physical defects (Figure 4). Any artificial idealism and courtliness would have deprived them of the most important values: their individuality, personality, and character. Provincial painters were in a position to emphasize such details because, so the argument went, they had a better sense of observation. The Sarmatians as depicted in the images were introduced by means of the anecdotal descriptions, pointing out their

³³ 'Polaków portret własny', Muzeum Narodowe w Krakowie, 8 October 1979–3 February 1980.

³⁴ Michał Bohdziewicz, 'Portret sarmacki XVII–XVIII wieku', in: *Wystawa polskiego portretu XVII i XVIII wieku*, (exhib. cat.), Muzeum w Łowiczu, 1962, 1–4, here: 1–2.

idiosyncratic features with expressive – sometimes harsh – formulations such as 'whiskered fatty', 'ribald man with a cranky look', 'grotesque with his ugly bald head', the 'fat face of the brawler', or 'red nose of the drunkard'.³⁵ The noblemen were usually portrayed in impressive poses *en pied* or to the waist with faces posed in a proud, majestic expression. One hand rested on the hip, which added an extra emphasis on the self-confidence, dignity and position of the portrait subject in the hierarchy of the state. The other hand reposed on the subject's sword, which was often a standard sabre or a weapon of Turkish origin called a *karabela* hilt. This symbolized the subject's readiness to fight for his country and its laws, especially against 'the infidels' of the Ottoman Empire, or in defence of 'true' Christianity against orthodox Russia, and protestant Sweden and Prussia. In this regard, the Polish gentry was depicted in accordance with the medieval image of the *miles christianus*. As was often the case in the wider genre of contemporary European portrait painting, their status was highlighted by a column or by heavy drapery depicted in the background. Physical defects and the external imperfections of the body were of no importance in comparison with noble birth, which was represented in the portraits in the form of long, elaborate inscriptions listing state offices and all other services for the country in detail. The Polish gentry clearly had a notion that their dignity and grandeur went beyond the traditional categories of aestheticism or ugliness (Figure 5).



Figure 5 Unknown artist, *Portrait of a nobleman the Wieniawa coat of arms (from the Libiszowski family?)*, after 1750, Sieradz, District Museum.

³⁵ Dobrowolski, *Polskie malarstwo portretowe*, 20–25.

The noblemen portrayed in these pictures usually wore the clothes typical of their class. They displayed many of the trappings of military power, and wore a hairstyle and moustache characteristic of their position. For this reason, it was common for exhibitions to present the portraits in juxtaposition with the armour or costumes of the epoch. Ordinary life and the local customs formed the leitmotifs of these displays. The typical formal *strój kontuszowy* or *kontush* dress of the period was exhibited with particular frequency. This style of dress developed in the seventeenth century following the model of Turkish and Persian dress. Because of its markedly exotic features, it clearly distinguished Polish gentry from the noble classes of western countries. It consisted of a long-sleeved gown, the *żupan*, and the *kontusz* or *delia*, a long overcoat or jacket. The *kontusz* was always tied by decorative sash, the *pas kontuszowy*.³⁶

Coffin portraits were often also displayed in such exhibitions. In fact, this peculiarly Polish genre of the Baroque was exhibited at art shows quite as often as the Sarmatian portrait. It was a phenomenon completely incomparable to anything that might be found outside the country. Coffin portraits had a close connection to Polish funeral customs of their time. They were exhibited as some of the best examples of the realist tendencies in the local art of the period and as one of the most important elements in the rich cultural heritage of the Baroque era.³⁷

Exhibitions abroad

Between 1961 and 1975, the Warsaw museum organized a series of exhibitions abroad to celebrate the millennium of the Polish state.³⁸ The Sarmatian and coffin portraits formed a significant part of the artworks selected for these shows. Such works were presented as being indigenous elements of the Baroque art heritage of Poland. But, as Maria Krzemińska recalls, during the first shows in France Polish art was presented as part of the Western European tradition and, as such, was not

³⁶ *Broń i uzbrojenie polskie okresu baroku*, (exhib. cat.), Muzeum Śląskie we Wrocławiu, May–June 1959; *Pasy polskie gdańskiej produkcji*, (exhib. cat.), Muzeum Pomorskie w Gdańsku, 1962; *Polski pas kontuszowy*, (exhib. cat.), Muzeum Śląskie we Wrocławiu, November–December 1964; *Pasy kontuszowe*, (exhib. cat.), Muzeum Narodowe w Poznaniu, 1967; *Pas ozdoba był Polaka*, (exhib. cat.), Muzeum Śląskie we Wrocławiu, January–February 1970; *Polski pas kontuszowy*, (exhib. cat.), Muzeum Narodowe we Wrocławiu, May–October 1979; *Polski portret wojskowy XVII–XIX w.*, (exhib. cat.), ed. Wanda Bigoszevska, Muzeum Okręgowe w Toruniu, 1979; *Decorum życia Sarmatów w XVII i XVIII wieku*, Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie, July–September 1980; *Polski portret wojskowy od XVII do XIX wieku*, (exhib. cat.), ed. Teresa Libucha, Muzeum Okręgowe w Lublinie, 1981; *Polski portret wojskowy XVIII i XIX wieku*, (exhib. cat.), Muzeum w Grudziądzu, December 1981–February 1982.

³⁷ Stanisław Wiliński, *U źródeł portretu staropolskiego*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Arkady 1958, 29–44; *Portret trumienny, czyli dawny konterfekt Polaków*, ed. Stanisław Kowalski, (exhib. cat.), Muzeum Regionalne w Chojnowie, 1986.

³⁸ The state millennium celebrations are often juxtaposed against the ‘Millennium of the Christianisation of Poland’ organized by the Church in 1966. See: Daniel Gucewicz, *Próba sił? – rok 1966 w Gdańsku: Milenium kontra Tysiąclecie*, Gdańsk: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2014; Bartłomiej Noszczak, ed., *Milenium czy Tysiąclecie*, Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2006.

received well. The curators therefore decided to change strategy and, while preparing the exhibition *1000 years of art in Poland* to be displayed in London in 1970, they included more craft objects and Baroque portraits in their exhibits. Instead of making an effort to highlight similarities with European art, the display focused on the 'indigenous origin' and individuality of the Polish culture that the objects represented.³⁹ It is thought that this change of perspective resulted in the enormous success of the exhibition in London and in other cities in Europe, North America and Japan.⁴⁰ In both catalogues contributions and reviews of the exhibitions, the Sarmatian and coffin portraits are always spoken of as an important part of Polish heritage.⁴¹ A coffin portrait is the first and only picture used to illustrate the introduction to the catalogue for the exhibition's Norwegian showing,⁴² as well as in many reviews in French and German newspapers.⁴³ A German review of the London display focused on the works' orientalism and its connections to the East. According to the author, a gigantic richly decorated Turkish tent seized by the Polish king Jan III Sobieski during the Battle of Vienna was the object that made the biggest impression on the viewers.⁴⁴ Interestingly, although no retrospective of Baroque art was displayed in Poland, an exhibition devoted to Polish Baroque opened in Braunschweig in 1974.⁴⁵ The first pieces mentioned in the introduction of the catalogue are the 'typical of the Baroque representative portrait *en pied* and of the coffin portrait, which is to be found almost nowhere outside Poland'.⁴⁶

Needless to say, there was also an intense cultural exchange going on between Poland and the Soviet Union during the period. In 1975, Russian and Soviet portraiture was exhibited side-by-side in the National Museum in Warsaw.⁴⁷

³⁹ Helena Blum, ed., *1000 years of art in Poland*, (exhib. cat.), London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1970.

⁴⁰ Marta Krzemińska, 'Szlachta. Nie tylko w muzeum', in: Stefan Bednarek, ed., *Nim będzie zapomniana: Szkice o kulturze PRL-u*, Wrocław: Wydawn. Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1997, 112–122, here 117.

⁴¹ Wojciech Fijałkowski, 'Barocco', in: Direzione generale per le antichità e belle arti, ed., *Polonia: arte e cultura dal Medioevo all'Illuminismo*, (exhib. cat.), Firenze: Centro Di Scala, 1975, 67–119, here 69, 84; Peter Winter, 'Zwischen Orient und Okzident. Polnischer Barock in Braunschweig', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 133, 11 June 1974, 25; Ursula Bode, 'Porträts ohne Allongeperücken. 'Begegnung mit Polen. Zu drei Ausstellungen in Hannover'', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 230, 7 October 1975, 24.

⁴² Jerzy Zanoziński, ed., *Polsk maleri: med 52 illustrasjoner*, (exhib. cat.), Oslo: Nasjonalgalleriet, 1961.

⁴³ Jerzy Banach, 'Mille ans d'art en Pologne. Le génie créateur polonais', *Nouvelles Littéraires*, 47, 24 April 1969, 1; Author unknown, 'Das Sargporträt', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 127, 4 June 1974; Winter, 'Zwischen Orient und Okzident. Polnischer Barock in Braunschweig', 25; Author Unknown, 'Kunstkalender', *Die Zeit*, 23, 31 May 1974, 18.

⁴⁴ Ewald Behrens, 'Tausend Jahre bildende Kunst in Polen. Umfassende Ausstellung in der Royal Academy in London', *Geist und Leben, Blätter für Wissenschaft, Kunst und Kultur*, 56, 8 March 1970, 1.

⁴⁵ Wojciech Fijałkowski, ed., *Kunst des Barock in Polen aus dem Nationalmuseum in Warschau*, (exhib. cat.), Braunschweig: Herzog-Anton-Ulrich-Museum, 1974.

⁴⁶ Stanisław Lorenz, 'Introduction', in: Fijałkowski, *Kunst des Barock in Polen*, 6.

⁴⁷ *Portret rosyjski i radziecki: ze zbiorów muzeów ZSRR*, (exhib. cat.), Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie, 19 April–20 May 1975, Warszawa 1975.

In return, the Centre for the Research on the Polish Portrait put together an exhibition to be presented in Moscow: *Polish Portrait of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*. Thanks to the exhibitions' great success and the huge popular interest it inspired, the portraits were also shown in Leningrad, Minsk, Lviv and Kiev. According to Ruszczycówna, the show received numerous positive reviews and an enthusiastic reception from both art critics and the general public. In Leningrad, the paintings were displayed in the most prestigious spaces of the Hermitage Museum.⁴⁸

Reception of the exhibitions



Figure 6 From the exhibition *Polaków portret własny* [Self-Portrait of the Nation], Kraków 1979, in: Marek Rostworowski, *Polaków portret własny*, V. 2: *The descriptions of the illustrations*.

How then were the presentations of the Polish Baroque portraits generally received by the wider public? Can they be looked upon as an instrument of an overarching government strategy? Or was their reception simply a matter of personal interpretation (Figure 6)? The *Polish Portrait of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* exhibition was widely commented upon in the Polish press. It was reported on by at least eighteen national and local newspapers. Articles included long critical reviews and richly illustrated reports. Almost every one of them started with an account of the exhibition's travels in the Soviet Union and its huge success there.⁴⁹ Art historian Andrzej Oseka, in his review 'Portrait with a face' in the magazine *Kultura*, underlined the distinction between Polish Baroque painting and

⁴⁸ 'Wystawy własne organizowane na terenie Muzeum: Portret polski XVII i XVIII wieku, 24 May–23 July 1977', AMNW, sign. 2578.

⁴⁹ AMNW, sign. 2578; Wystawy w MNW. 'Portret Polski XVII i XVIII w.' 1977 r., AMNW, Scrapbook Collection, sign. W-81.

'European art'. He described the portraits as being full of truth and dignity, standing in stark opposition to what he called the 'French theatrical masquerade'. He praised the strongly provincial and 'honest' portrayals as showing no sign of 'artificial dandyism' or conventional empty faces. Oseka concluded his enthusiastic review by declaring that the exhibition contained 'the most Polish of Polish painting we have ever had'.⁵⁰ The same magazine contained another review of the exhibition by Krzysztof Teodor Toeplitz. Unlike Oseka, the journalist did not see the portraits as the emanation of a timeless Polish spirit. He complained of the absence of Baroque art from the Polish collective imagination, despite the numerous examples of Baroque architecture in its cities. Toeplitz stated that the nineteenth-century masters remained the first association of Polish painting that sprung to the popular mind. Hence, the author believed that the portrayals of personages displayed at the exhibitions were perceived by the visitors as being a strange people from bygone times. He described the paintings as portraits of the 'representatives of the ruling class, accustomed to giving orders, self-reliant and self-assured'.⁵¹ He claimed that 'those generations of an independent Poland are separated from us by a sharp caesura, a thick glass'.⁵² One could read this as a subtle allusion to the dependent, fearful and repressed society in the Polish People's Republic.

Zbigniew Florczak was fascinated by the popularity of the exhibition. The reviewer described *Polish Portrait of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* as the perfect illustration of Sienkiewicz's trilogy, and of historical novels by other authors.⁵³ For him, the Sarmatian faces represented an alternative to the familiar art of Europe. He referred to the huge number of paintings created during the relevant period as the 'Baroque mass production'. Florczak praised the wonderful diversity of 'fat, stupid, pug-nosed' faces of people who seemed to be 'always in a stormy mood'.⁵⁴

However, some of the press reviews were negative: in *Literatura*, for example, Stanisław Lechódowski criticized the selection of portraits, which he felt had undervalued important factors in the evolution of the Polish 'indigenous' painting.⁵⁵ For his part, Aleksander Małachowski noticed an interesting problem of the decontextualisation of the artworks by the exhibition:

What a huge mistake! This collection of objects was created for families, sometimes for the sake of snobbery and personal pride, but mostly for the remembrance of loved ones. Despite this, in the museum [...] the portraits must pretend to be works of art, and they play that role miserably, comically even. They are like provincial bumpkins lost in the

⁵⁰ '...jest to najbardziej polskie malarstwo, jakie kiedykolwiek posiadaliśmy'. Andrzej Oseka, 'Sytuacje. Portret z twarzą', *Kultura*, 24, 12 June 1977, 14.

⁵¹ Krzysztof Teodor Toeplitz, 'Kuchnia Polska. Społeczeństwo', *Kultura*, 24, 12 June 1977, 16.

⁵² 'te pokolenia niepodległej Polski oddzielone są od naszych czasów ostrą cezurą, niczym grubą szklaną szybą'. Toeplitz, 'Kuchnia Polska. Społeczeństwo', 16.

⁵³ Zbigniew Florczak, 'Konterfekt', *Express Wieczorny*, 123, 1 June 1977, 4.

⁵⁴ 'Wspaniałe studia fizjonomii: opasłych, głupich, zadartonosych, garbonosych, rozumnych, orlich, zawsze w buńczucznym nastroju'. Florczak, 'Konterfekt', 4.

⁵⁵ Stanisław Lechódowski, 'Poloneza czas zacząć', *Literatura*, 23, 9 June 1977, 1, 14.

big city, scared, outmoded, unfashionable and confused in the crowd,
deprived of all meaning.⁵⁶

The most unfavourable review of all was by Tadeusz Chrzanowski in *Tygodnik Powszechny*. He criticized the selection of artworks, their method of presentation and the form of the catalogue. He started his article with a humorous remark he had overheard at the exhibition. A group of teenagers was discussing some women portrayed in some of the works: 'What awful hags!' ⁵⁷ said someone. This crude quote set the tone of the entire review. Chrzanowski emphasized the 'botchery' ⁵⁸ in the paintings, using vocabulary that included 'daubs', 'mugs', 'vulgarity' and 'incompetence', among other taunts. While Osęka associated the coffin portraits with the ancient Roman veristic tradition, Chrzanowski was reminded of Ukrainian icons and the sacred art of Greek orthodoxy.

As seen above, the various authors of the reviews saw a variety of influences in the paintings' style and in the contrasting emotions on the faces of the personages portrayed in them. However, the portraits were always perceived as a Polish phenomenon, as something incommensurable with 'European art'. However, the authors did not simply steer clear of the subject of the paintings' low artistic quality, they merely approached it differently: alternately praising or criticizing the 'disturbing honesty' of the portraits.

There was, however, a very thin line between the production of a 'safe' presentation of the portraits on the one hand and an ideologically suspicious one on the other. A few of the original descriptions accompanied by the new contextualisation that were produced for *Self-Portrait of the Nation* were to change the way in which very many people perceived them. The thoughtfully arranged display certainly seems to have impressed visitors deeply. The initial print run of the exhibition catalogue (of 5,000 copies) was sold out within the first few days, leading its publishers to print an additional 10,000 copies. Newspapers reported that on Wednesdays, when admission was free, people would begin queueing in front of the Museum more than an hour before opening time.⁵⁹ On the last day of the exhibition the queue was one kilometre long and militia had to be called in to control the crowd.⁶⁰

The modernisation in the way in which the portraits were assessed can be seen as the key factor in the tremendous success of *Self-Portrait of the Nation*. Even the exhibition's title itself suggested a close connection between the viewers and the viewed. A mirror left hanging at the very end of the display served as a reminder that everyone formed part of the history of the nation. The well-chosen quotations from Polish literature and significant historical documents (including, for example, excerpts from texts by Cyprian Kamil Norwid, Stanisław Staszic, Ignacy Krasicki,

⁵⁶ Aleksander Małachowski, 'Pamiętnik współczesny', *Kultura*, 25, 19 June 1977, 12.

⁵⁷ 'Ale brzydkie baby!' Tadeusz Chrzanowski, 'Polski portret', *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 29, 7 October 1977, 6.

⁵⁸ 'Knotowatość'. Chrzanowski, 'Polski portret', 6.

⁵⁹ Andrzej Wróblewski, 'Nasz Portret', *Życie Warszawy*, 12, 15 January 1980, 3.

⁶⁰ Author unknown, 'Zakończenie wystawy 'Polaków portret własny'', *Trybuna Ludu*, 29, 4 February 1980, 1.

Tadeusz Kościuszko, Józef Wybicki, Adam Mickiewicz, and Juliusz Słowacki) appealed to the need to fight for national freedom, cautioned against destroying Poland through self-indulgence and indiscipline, and mentioned a number of shining examples of patriotic figures.⁶¹ Unverbalised parallels with the contemporary political situation turned the exhibition into a patriotic manifesto that had a huge impact on the wider society. In her article to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the exhibition, Renata Radłowska quotes one of the visitors: 'Everybody went. If you didn't, it meant you were with them. With communism.'⁶² The majority of the exhibition reviews highlighted the great impression made by the Sarmatian room (Figures 7–8), one wall of which was completely covered by portraits.⁶³ The Polish director Kazimierz Kutz described the room as follows:

Sarmats! Those awful, monstrous mugs! [...] One could see everything written on those faces: immense drunkenness, arrogance, stupidity. We went to see the display as if we were visiting a zoo housing the genuine Polish behemoth, in its true clothes, character, features. And to compare it with the contemporary monstrosity. It was a wonderful presentation of the Polish raw, unpolished emotions and personalities, real flesh, no artificial colour, no pretence.⁶⁴



Figure 7 *Coffin portraits of noblemen, 17th–18th century*, from the exhibition *Polaków portret własny* [Self-Portrait of the Nation], Kraków 1979, in: Marek Rostworowski, *Polaków portret własny*, V. 1: *Illustrations*, Warszawa 1983, il. 136.

⁶¹ Marek Rostworowski, ed., *Polaków portret własny*, Vols 1–2, Warszawa: Arkady, 1983–1986. The Baroque Portraits were accompanied by quotations from works by Szymon Starowolski, Józef Baka, and Wespazjan Kochowski.

⁶² Renata Radłowska, 'To było lustro. 25 lecie wystawy 'Polaków portret własny'', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 22 October 2004, accessed 28 May 2015
<http://krakow.gazeta.pl/krakow/1,42699,2351505.html#ixzz3bQQ1PUUR>.

⁶³ Andrzej Wróblewski, 'Nasz Portret', 3.

⁶⁴ Radłowska, 'To było lustro'.



Figure 8 Coffin portraits of noblewomen, 17th–18th century, from the exhibition *Polaków portret własny* [Self-Portrait of the Nation], Kraków 1979, in: Marek Rostworowski, *Polaków portret własny*, V. 1: Illustrations, Warszawa 1983, il. 137.

In the same time, the press offered an ideologically correct interpretation of the exhibition. Jerzy Madeyski described the changeover from the Baroque to the Rococo in the following words:

The look of the countryman suddenly changes. The pink of the Sarmats' noses moves to their cheeks, their stiff hair transform into the curls of their wigs, their small eyes become bigger and dumber. Slowly, from above, the Rococo destroys the clarity of the Baroque image with its powdery falsity.⁶⁵

The film industry was crucial to reinforcing the power of the 'ribald man with a cranky look' in the collective imagination. A number of film adaptations of Sienkiewicz's trilogy were produced during the 1960s and 1970s. The public television broadcaster produced a series based on *With Fire and Sword*, with Mieczysław Pawlikowski cast as the charismatic fictional Sarmat Jan Onufry Zagłoba.⁶⁶ *The Deluge* – made in 1974 – was an outstanding success.⁶⁷ It received the Golden Lions Award for the best domestic film at the Polish Film Festival and was nominated for an Oscar. One can see the resemblance to Polish seventeenth- and eighteenth-century portraits in the characters' costumes and make-up. In the 1970s in the Soviet Union, cinema goers could watch the adaptation of *The Deluge* by

⁶⁵ Jerzy Madeyski, 'Polaków portret własny', *Życie literackie*, 1443, 23 September 1979, 11. See also: Marek Jaworski, 'Polaków portret własny. Dokument zbiorowej świadomości', *Trybuna Ludu*, 275, 22 November 1979, 6.

⁶⁶ *Przygody Pana Michała* directed by Paweł Komorowski, Telewizja Polska, 1969–1970.

⁶⁷ *Potop* directed by Jerzy Hoffman, Poland 1974.

Henryk Sienkiewicz, so it is possible that they may have seen the *Polish Portrait of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* exhibition as a sort of complement to the best-selling film.⁶⁸

So, as the above suggests, exhibitions on the Polish Baroque portrait were organised frequently and were very popular. These shows produced a very specific vision of Poland in the Baroque era. Poland was seen as a country rich in culture, interesting artistic phenomena and authentic indigenous art. The image of Sarmatian portraits slowly developed to become the easiest recognizable symbol of this form of Baroque art supposedly original to Poland. Just as the ideology of Sarmatism had served to unify the gentry of the country in the Early Modern Era, after the 1939–1945 war it was to help in the process of reintegrating the Polish people inside the new borders of the state and into the new political system. The part played by the Sarmatian portraits in that process was not one that could hope for the direct support of the government. Officially 'in the People's Republic of Poland one should not write positively about gentry; it was even better not to mention it at all'⁶⁹. Nonetheless, it played an important role in the Polish society. Books on the traditions of the Polish gentry and exhibitions on Baroque art were very successful.⁷⁰ Affirmation at the time of the provincial, indigenous tradition of portrait painting was often founded on its contrast with the western-oriented art of the royal and aristocratic courts. The disturbingly honest and realistic coffin portraits especially were presented and affirmed in opposition to foreign influences in the art of that time, which were characterized as dishonest, artificial and idealized.⁷¹

However, some of the ideas of historians on the Sarmatian portrait were subjected to a level of criticism that meant they failed to reach a wider public. In the 1985 conference proceedings for *Portret typu sarmackiego w wieku XVII w Polsce, Czechach, na Słowacji i na Węgrzech*, whose subject matter was the Sarmatian portraits of seventeenth-century Poland, Bohemia, Slovakia and Hungary, a number of articles include a comparison of the Polish Sarmatian portrait with the corresponding depictions of Hungarian and Russian nobility.⁷² Such work

⁶⁸ AMNW, sign. 2578.

⁶⁹ Marta Krzemińska, 'Szlachta. Nie tylko w muzeum', 112. There were however the tendencies in history writing to describe the gentry in the positive light. One of the best examples are the scientific publications of Jarema Maciszewski (especially the book *Szlachta polska i jej państwo*, Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1969). On the one hand he supported the communist authority (he was the member of the Polish United Workers' Party), on the other hand he recognized Polish sixteenth-eighteenth gentry as the source of people's democratic and revolutionary thinking.

⁷⁰ Marta Krzemińska, 'Szlachta. Nie tylko w muzeum', 117.

⁷¹ Elżbieta Gieysztor-Miłobędzka, 'Polska Historia Sztuki', here: 59. The difference between the Sarmatian portrait on the one hand and the western European portrait on the other is revealed as a consequence of two meanings attached to the term 'Baroque' – a positive one, referring 'our own' tradition, 'native' to Poland; and a negative one: a decadent and cosmopolitan culture from in western Europe. For this point we are grateful to Professor Hans-Jürgen Bömelburg.

⁷² Lech Kalinowski and Ewa Zawadzka, eds, *Portret typu sarmackiego w wieku XVII w Polsce, Czechach, na Słowacji i na Węgrzech*, (Seminaria Niedzickie 2), Kraków: Muzeum Narodowe w

emphasised the similarities in culture between the Polish and Hungarian gentry. It was claimed that Polish fashion and customs had provided a model for the Russian upper class.⁷³ Art historians made attempts to link the phenomenon of the Sarmatian portrait with Baroque art from all over the Soviet Bloc. This may have been an attempt at historical justification of the new geographical and political order using the myth of the Sarmatian folk that had inhabited Eastern Europe in ancient times. According to Elżbieta Gieysztor-Miłobędzka, such ideas were combined in a sophisticated manner with the communist instrumentalisation of nineteenth-century Pan-Slavism.⁷⁴

Conclusions

In the catalogue of an exhibition on the Polish Baroque portrait in Hamburg in 1975 Janusz Wałek writes: 'The portraits of the gentry were democratized – in Baroque times they were no longer reserved for the richest and wealthiest, they became popular.'⁷⁵ Through exhibitions of crafts and portraits the Sarmatian culture was presented as the Baroque equivalent of contemporary mass culture. The portraits were shown together with drinking vessels, armour and decorative carpets as if illustrating the everyday life of the period. They were understood as a subject of research into folk traditions, customs and fashion. The Sarmats portrayed in the pictures were identified using by anecdotal descriptions based on their visible features using such evocative and harsh characterizations as 'whiskered fatty', 'ribald man with a cranky look', 'grotesque with ugly bald head', the 'fat face of a brawler' or 'red nose of a drunkard'.

'Why of all Baroque art was it the portrait that was chosen for the exhibition?' asks Zbigniew Florczak in his review of *The Polish Portrait of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* exhibition.⁷⁶ He does not provide an answer, but it seems there were no huge exhibitions devoted to sacred Baroque art held at the time. One may see this fact as the result of the individual decisions and efforts of the relevant cultural institutions and those who worked in them. For instance, a worker at the Centre for the Research on the Polish Portrait, Bożena Fabiani, claimed that Janina Ruszczycówna

[...] never missed a chance to fight for the continued existence of the

Krakowie, 1985.

⁷³ Gizella Cenner-Wilhelmb, 'Stilprobleme der ungarischen provinziellen Porträtmalerei im 17. Jahrhundert', in Kalinowski and Zawadzka, *Portret typu sarmackiego*, 103–111; Larisa Tananajeva, "'Portret sarmacki" na ziemiach rosyjskich', in Kalinowski and Zawadzka, *Portret typu sarmackiego*, 113–121.

⁷⁴ Gieysztor-Miłobędzka, 'Polska Historia Sztuki', here: 70–71.

⁷⁵ 'Demokratisierung des Porträts, das im 16. Jahrhundert meist den Hofkreisen vorbehalten war, jetzt aber auch bei Adeligen immer mehr an Popularität gewann'. Janusz Wałek, 'Malerei', in *Das polnische Portrait: Eine Ausstellung aus Anlaß der polnischen Woche zusammengestellt durch das Nationalmuseum in Kraków*, (exhib. cat.), Hamburger Kunsthalle, 12 August–7 September 1975; Historisches Museum am Hohen Ufer, 16 September–26 October 1975, ed. Irena Grabowska, Barbara Miodońska and Janusz Wałek, Hanover 1975.

⁷⁶ Florczak, 'Konterfekt', 4.

Centre. But she was never permitted to expand the institution. It was always paralysed by precarious and under-paid posts, despite the fact that it was a department of one of the most significant museums in Poland.⁷⁷

However, the mere fact that such an institution actually existed is significant. In the same time as running the Portrait department, Ruszczycówna was also preparing a book on Baroque sacred art, but she was never to finish it.⁷⁸ It may be assumed that, despite intermittent problems, research on the portraits was better financed than the religious art of the period, which in turn indicates a stronger interest by officialdom in this aspect of the Baroque era than in others.

On the one hand, the history of the Polish nobility remained the butt of strong criticism from the communist authorities, who characterised it as an example of genealogically-based snobbery and ideologically incorrect upper-class pride. On the other hand, the genre of portrait of the gentry was treated as an emanation of Polishness, the voice from the people, the purest connection back to the traditions the country. This affirmation of the provincial portrait was often built upon its contrast to western-oriented art from the courts of royalty and the higher aristocracy. The disturbingly 'honest' coffin portraits of the period especially were conceptualized in opposition to 'foreign art'. Due to the oriental garments depicted on the portrait subjects, they were compared with Russian and Hungarian paintings and represented as integrating elements from different countries of the Soviet Bloc. Critics of the time emphasised the 'eastern' character of so-called Sarmatian features'. This geographical contextualization of this very specific genre can be understood as a historical justification of the Soviet sphere of influence in the Cold War era and as forming part of a strategy to integrate 'dubious' artefacts into Polish cultural heritage. As a result, the face of the ribald, robust man with a cranky look was to become the pop-cultural 'face' of Polish Baroque art – and remains so to this day. It appears frequently on book covers, in the press and in advertisements (Figure 9). The number of new books and exhibitions on Sarmatism in Poland is no less than astonishing. It continues to occupy the Polish collective imagination, as can be seen in its newest forms of expression on the internet. For instance, one of the memes created just after the first round of presidential elections in 2015 uses an image of Sarmats taken from Sienkiewicz's books. On 10 May 2015, Andrzej Duda won the first round of elections against Bronisław Komorowski. The meme uses a frame from the 1974-film *The Deluge*. The men depicted in the image are Sarmats wearing long moustaches and showing the typical 'cranky look'. Jan Onufry Zagłoba, represented in the middle of the scene, is captioned as declaring 'Duda has 34,76 % votes? To arms, Gentlemen!' (Figure 10). It is hard to tell which of the candidates the author of the meme means to support, but it is clear that the Sarmatian figures are meant to represent a typical Pole, and that the purpose of the meme was to encourage such Poles to vote in the second round of the elections.

⁷⁷ Bożena Fabiani, 'Wspomnienie pośmiertne – Janina Ruszczycówna', *Biuletyn Historii Sztuki*, 50: 3, 1988, 307–313.

⁷⁸ Fabiani, 'Wspomnienie pośmiertne', 310.

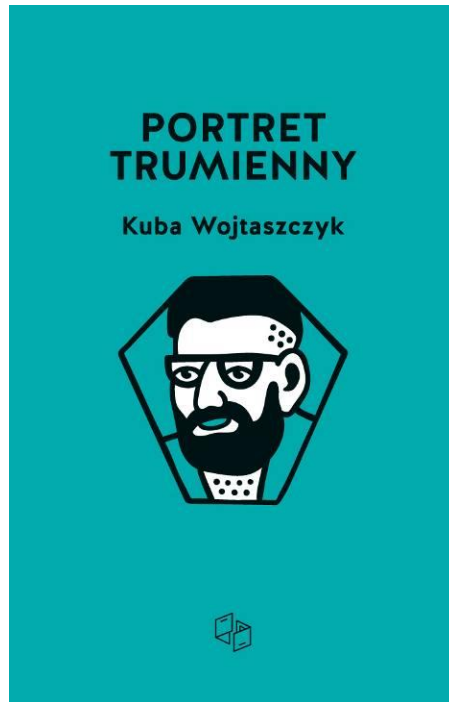


Figure 9 Cover, Kuba Wojtaszczyk, *Portret trumienny*, Poznań, Simple Publishing, 2014.



Figure 10 Internet Meme, accessed 11 May 2015 <http://www.dziennikbaltycki.pl/arttykul/3856979,wybory-prezydenckie-2015-memy-po-pierwszej-turze-wyborow,id,t.html>.

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Appendix of exhibitions follows on pages 23-27.



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Year	Exhibitions about Polish Baroque portraits	Exhibitions including Polish Baroque portraits
1947	<p><i>Portret polski XVII i XVIII wieku</i> [Polish Portrait of the seventeenth and eighteenth century], Muzeum Ziemi Tarnowskiej, Tarnów 1947</p> <p><i>Wystawa portretu polskiego z XVII i XVIII wieku</i> [Polish Portrait of the seventeenth and eighteenth century], Muzeum Narodowe, Kraków.</p>	
1948	<p><i>Portret polski XVII i XVIII wieku</i>, [Polish Portrait of the seventeenth and eighteenth century] Muzeum Wielkopolskie, Poznań</p>	
1955	<p><i>Toruński portret mieszczański: 1500-1850</i> [Toruń Burgher Portrait], Muzeum Okręgowe, Toruń</p>	
1958		<p><i>L' âge d'or des grandes cités</i>, Abbaye Saint-Pierre, Gand</p>
1959		<p><i>Broń i uzbrojenie polskie okresu baroku</i> [Polish Weapon and Armour in the Baroque Era], Muzeum Śląskie, Wrocław</p>
1961		<p><i>Polsk maleri</i>, Nasjonalgalleriet, Oslo</p> <p><i>Trésors d'art polonais: chefs d'oeuvre des musées de Pologne</i>, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Bordeaux</p>
1962	<p><i>Wystawa polskiego portretu XVII i XVIII wieku</i> [Exhibition of the Polish Portrait of the seventeenth and eighteenth century], Muzeum w Łowiczu</p>	<p><i>Pasy polskie gdańskiej produkcji</i> [Polish Sashes from Gdańsk], Muzeum Pomorskie, Gdańsk</p> <p><i>Miniatury portretowe z dwóch stuleci</i> [Portrait Miniatures from the two centuries], Muzeum Narodowe, Kraków</p>
1965		<p><i>Polski pas kontuszowy</i> [Polish Kontush Sash], Muzeum Śląskie, Wrocław</p>

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1966		<i>Treasures from Poland</i> , The Art Institute of Chicago, Philadelphia Museum of Art, the National Gallery of Canada, 1966-1967
1967	<i>Portret sarmacki XVII-XVIII w.</i> [Sarmatian Portrait of the seventeenth and eighteenth century], Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź	<i>Polski pas kontuszowy</i> [Polish Kontush Sash], Muzeum Narodowe, Poznań <i>Kunsthandwerk aus Polen</i> , Kunstgewerbemuseum der Stadt Köln
1969		<i>Mille ans d'art en Pologne</i> , Petit Palais, Paris
1970		<i>Zabytki Polskiej kultury artystycznej XVII-XVIII w.</i> [The Monuments of the Polish artistic Culture] Muzeum Narodowe, Kraków, Muzeum, Częstochowa <i>Pas ozdobą był Polaka</i> [The sash as the Polish Clothing Decoration], Muzeum Śląskie, Wrocław
1972		<i>Pologne: Theatre et Societe</i> , Neuchatel
1974		<i>Polskie malarstwo portretowe</i> [Polish Potrait Painting], Muzuem Miejskie, Zabrze <i>Kunst in Polen von der Gotik bis heute</i> , Kunsthaus, Zürich <i>Kunst des Barock in Polen: aus dem Nationalmuseum in Warschau</i> , Herzog-Anton-Ulrich-Museum, Braunschweig

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		<i>Masterpieces of the Polish culture</i> , Tokyo
1975		<i>Das polnische Portrait</i> , Historisches Museum am Hohen Ufer, Hannover
1976		<i>Pol'skij portret: iz sobranij muzeev Pol'skoj Narodnoj Respubliki</i> [travelling exhibition] Moskow, Leningrad, Minsk, Kiev, Lviv <i>Sztuka dworu Wazów w Polsce</i> [Art of the Waza Royal Court], Zamek na Wawelu, Kraków
1977	<i>Portret polski XVII i XVIII wieku</i> [Polish Portrait of the seventeenth and eighteenth century], Muzeum Narodowe, Warszawa <i>Wielkopolski portret trumienny</i> [Coffin Portrait in the Greater Poland], Muzeum Narodowe w Poznaniu, Wschowa <i>Portret sarmacki</i> , Muzeum Narodowe, Kielce	
1978	<i>Portret polski XVII i XVIII wieku</i> [Polish Portrait of the seventeenth and eighteenth century], Galeria BWA, Katowice <i>Portret polski XVII i XVIII wieku</i> [Polish Portrait of the seventeenth and eighteenth century], Muzeum Zamkowe, Malbork <i>Portret sarmacki z terenu ziemi wieluńskiej</i> [Sarmatian Portrait from the Wieluń Region], Muzeum Ziemi Wieluńskiej, Wieluń	<i>Portrety polskie w galerii wilanowskiej</i> [Polish Portrait from the Wilanów Gallery], Wilanów, Warszawa
1979	<i>Polaków Portret Własny</i> [Self-Portrait of the Nation], Muzeum Narodowe, Kraków	<i>Polski pas kontuszowy</i> [Polish Kontusz Sash], Muzeum Narodowe, Wrocław

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	<i>Polski portret wojskowy, XVII-XIX w.</i> [Polish Military Portrait], Muzeum Wojska Polskiego, Warszawa; Muzeum Okregowe, Toruń	<i>Sarmatskij portret: iz istorii pol'skogo portreta èpohi barokko</i> , Akademiâ nauk SSSR, Moskva
1980	<i>Portret polski XVII i XVIII wieku</i> [Polish Portrait of the seventeenth and eighteenth century], Olsztyn; Gorzów Wielkopolski; Międzyrzecze Wielkopolskie <i>Portret Polski</i> [Polish Portrait], Biała Podlaska	<i>Portret rodzinny w sztuce polskiej od schyłku XVI do XX wieku</i> [Polish Family Portrait], Muzeum Narodowe, Warszawa <i>Decorum życia Sarmatów w XVII i XVIII wieku</i> [Life Decorum of Sarmats], Muzeum Narodowe, Warszawa
1981	<i>Polski portret wojskowy, XVII-XIX w.</i> [Polish Military Portrait], Muzeum Okręgowe, Lublin	
1981	<i>Polski portret wojskowy XVIII i XIX w.</i> [Polish Military Portrait], Muzeum w Grudziądzu, 1981-1982.	<i>Portret na ziemi chełmińskiej</i> [Portrait of the Chełm Region], Toruń
1982	<i>Portret polski XVII i XVIII wieku</i> [Polish Portrait of the seventeenth and eighteenth century], Muzeum Okręgowe, Radom	
1983		<i>Prowincjonalny portret Polski XVIII-XX w.</i> [Provincial Polish Portrait], Muzeum Okregowe Ziemi Kaliskiej, Kalisz <i>Chwała i sława Jana III w sztuce i literaturze XVII-XX w.</i> [The Fame and Glory of John III Sobieski in Art and Literature], Muzeum Narodowe, Warszawa <i>Rzeczpospolita w dobie Jana III</i> [Poland at the time of John III Sobieski] Zamek Królewski, Warszawa Jan III Sobieski i jego czasy, [John III Sobieski and his Era],

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		<p>Muzeum Narodowe, Wrocław</p> <p>Jan III Sobieski w Gdańsku [John III Sobieski in Gdańsk]. Muzeum Historii Miasta, Gdańsk</p> <p><i>Odsiecz wiedeńska 1683</i> [Battle of Vienna 1683], Zamek na Wawelu, Kraków</p>
1984	<i>Portret polski XVII i XVIII wieku</i> [Polish Portrait of the seventeenth and eighteenth century], Piotrków Trybunalski	
1986	<i>Portret trumienny czyli Dawny konterfekt Polaków</i> [Polish Coffin Portrait], Muzeum Regionalne, Chojnów	
1988		<i>Portret kobiety</i> [Female Portrait], Muzeum Okręgowe, Zamość
1989	<i>Portret polski</i> [Polish Portrait], Muzeum Ziemi Kujawskiej i Dobrzyńskiej, Włocławek	<i>Sztuka XVIII wieku w Polsce</i> [The eighteenth century art in Poland], Muzeum Ziemi Wałeckiej, Wałcz



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