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Exporting Culture: A Case Study for the
Reception of Rococo Furniture Outside of France

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INTRODUCTION

Excitement in Sotheby's Monaco saleroom was palpable as the auctioneer struck his gavel at \$1.79 million, a winning bid more than three times greater than the previous record for a single piece of furniture. The date was June 25, 1979 and celebrated lot number 60 was a French eighteenth-century corner cabinet manufactured by Jacques Dubois (Figure 1). Instantly famous, the *encoignure* now belonged to the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles.¹ Acquired in memory of the institution's founder and namesake, it was once listed among his twelve favorite pieces of furniture in the world.² More than thirty years later, the corner cabinet is arguably still the *pièce de résistance* within the collection's decorative arts holdings. Expertly rendered in high Rococo style, the imposing cupboard is replete with undulating gilt bronze mounts and luxurious shell and fan motifs. A veneer of floral marquetry further enlivens the decoration while two spiraling candelabra adorn the upper portion of the cupboard with fluidity of form. At last, the ornate design is finished by a monumental clock, on top of which an allegorical figure rests.

French furniture has been the envy of the western world since the late seventeenth century and historically, objects of Parisian manufacture have been deemed the artistic highpoint of decorative arts production. The Getty Museum's corner

¹ Sotheby Parke Bernet, Monte Carlo, June 25 1979, lot 60. An *encoignure* is a corner cabinet or cupboard. The French word literally translates to the angle formed by the joining of two walls.

² Ethel Le Vane and J. Paul Getty, *Collector's Choice: The Chronicle of an Artistic Odyssey through Europe* (London: W.H. Allen P, 1955), 263.

cabinet was born out of this golden age in French design, the result of unparalleled workmanship long recognized and appreciated by illustrious collectors and connoisseurs. For three centuries the *encoignure's* artistic and cultural significance have been continuously acknowledged by each subsequent owner.³ The exorbitant auction price and its fantastic state of preservation are further testaments to the object's innate worth. Just two years before the cabinet's sale in Monaco, it was auctioned as part of an assortment of French antiques once belonging to the Wildenstein family.⁴ The high bidder was Akram Ojeh, a Saudi Arabian entrepreneur who planned to decorate his private ocean liner with luxury antiques. Ojeh floated the yacht as a casino off the west coast of Florida until complications forced him to resell his collection, including the *encoignure*, in the Sotheby's sale of 1979.

The cabinet's history of ownership reads like a salacious novel and yet each generation's experience of the piece underscores its desirability and enduring value. The *encoignure's* earlier provenance included the Viennese branch of the Rothschild family (Figure 2) who owned the piece until Adolf Hitler confiscated it for his personal museum in Linz. In 1744, long before the Parisian cupboard fell victim to twentieth-century tumult, it was commissioned from Paris by Jan Klemens Branicki (Figure 3), a Polish count and grand hetman to the King. He waited eagerly for nearly eight years, at last

³ Jonathan Styles quoted in Frank Trentmann, "Materiality in the Future of History: Things, Practices and Politics," *Journal of British Studies* 48 (April 2009): 297. "Modern consumer goods are cheap, disposable, infrequently repaired and quickly worthless," Jonathan Styles writes, "in the eighteenth century by contrast, goods were in fact, costly, durable much repaired and readily marketed second hand." Indeed, fine furniture was of such value it was often gifted specifically in wills.

⁴ It formed a part of the collections of Barons Nathaniel and Alphonse de Rothschild in Vienna from whose family it was purchased by George Wildenstein for his New York residence.

penning a frustrated letter to his dealer regarding the cupboard's delay.⁵ Finally, in 1753 it was delivered to his Warsaw palace.

Standing nearly ten feet tall, the corner cabinet is larger and more robust than most French *encoignures* of the period; the bold Rococo mounts, liveliness and scale distinguish it from usual examples. A complete typology of the object will be provided in the next section, but for now it is satisfactory to state that the cabinet's aesthetic appearance indicates it was manufactured for a foreign market. Former Getty Museum curator Gillian Wilson first posited the form was "more fitting to the tastes of a member of a farther flung society with perhaps less refined taste than that of a Parisian aristocrat."⁶ She went on to assert that "no Parisian would have had this piece of furniture in his house because of its size and outrageousness."⁷ A less francocentric perspective is to acknowledge that it was, indeed, intended for a different kind of domestic setting than a Parisian *hôtel*. A surviving inventory, which will be analyzed at length in the first chapter, reveals that the cabinet was originally situated within a formal parade room at Count Branicki's Warsaw residence.

Wilson's dismissal of the cabinet as gauche in comparison to refined French examples reflects an earlier formalistic as well as stylistically based mode of scholarship. This methodology has been largely replaced by a more inclusive, interdisciplinary form of art history that seeks to expand the canon beyond traditional examples and media.

⁵ This surviving correspondence will be further addressed in Chapter 1.

⁶ Gillian Wilson, from an unpublished article intended for *Art & Antiques* magazine, 1984.

⁷ Patricia Ward Bierderman, "A Corner Cupboard Opens at the Getty," *Los Angeles Times*, March 22, 1992.

Practitioners of the social history of art have advanced this area of study by contextualizing the ways in which Rococo design informed eighteenth-century cultural values. Such scholars take display, market assessment and ways of seeing into account, recognizing that each informs a more complete understanding of the object's history.⁸

Likewise, cultural transfer has become a fashionable approach to apply both toward scholarly research and at the popular level. Rather than reducing the cabinet to a “garishly ornate”⁹ imitation of Parisian style, the new art historian considers how its aesthetic qualities might actually reflect Polish sentiment.¹⁰ Many wealthy Europeans commissioned local designers or itinerant craftsmen to replicate French fashions; the result was a regional variation vaguely based on Parisian models. By extension, the corner cabinet's outsized dimensions illustrate the Eastern European preference for what has come to be known as the “Monumental Rococo.”¹¹

Applying theories like cultural hybridity and identity formation— or concepts such as center and periphery— allows for a multiplicity of interpretations.¹² Additionally, aesthetic concerns often prove to be a microcosm of the complicated geopolitics of eighteenth-century Europe. In a recent essay Peter Fuhring argues that the Rococo style was “eagerly adopted and adapted in countries and principalities

⁸ I am referring to the work of Leora Auslander, John Brewer, Mimi Hellman, Giorgio Riello, Katie Scott and Michael Stürmer, to name a few scholars who have particularly informed my own methodology.

⁹ Gillian Wilson, unpublished article, *Art & Antiques*.

¹⁰ Here I am referencing the careers of art historians like Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Jan Białostocki, and Calvin Seerveld.

¹¹ Jan Białostocki, *Rokoko: Studia Nad Sztuka 1 Polowy XVIII W.* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1970), 323.

¹² Jan Białostocki, “Some Values of Artistic Periphery,” in *World Art: Themes of Unity and Diversity*, vol 1 (Pennsylvania State UP: University Park, 1989).

habituated to French leadership” and that the decorative mode took on the character of “an epidemic spreading throughout the Western world.”¹³ Fuhring’s assertion holds utterly true when applied to Count Branicki’s native Poland. By 1724, the taste for the Rococo was already well established in Warsaw when Marie, the daughter of Stanisława Leszczyńska, deposed King of Poland, was married to King Louis XV of France. Surely this political arrangement further entangled the two nations and the vogue for the French style is but one manifestation of this complicated diplomatic relationship.

Further analysis of the *encoignure* and its surrounding context will form the crux of my two part discussion which seeks to reassess why the Rococo style was adapted and how it was physically transmitted throughout Eastern Europe. Through the inclusion of primary source materials, such as Count Branicki’s inventory, his surviving letter to a dealer regarding the commission and a widely disseminated engraving for the cabinet, I hope to illustrate how the *encoignure* came to be produced and in turn, shed light on the social world of the time. Chapter 1, “Self Fashioning through Furniture,” will investigate the Polish perspective and the cultural meanings attached to adopting a foreign decorative mode while Chapter 2, “Mechanisms of Cultural Transfer: People Prints, Places,” will outline the three primary modes of design transport; the immigration of workmen, the distribution of prints and the shipment of actual objects. These categories are useful constructs for understanding systems of patronage and the flow of artistic production within Poland. The Dubois corner cupboard will be the

¹³ Peter Fuhring, “Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier and His Patrons,” in Sarah Coffin, *Rococo: The Continuing Curve, 1730-2008*, (New York: Cooper-Hewitt, 2008), 23.

fulcrum from which my archival and contextual based inquiry will originate. Moreover, it will prove to be a case study for a series of larger debates about the style's reception abroad.

The Rococo was widely transported east of the Rhine and yet a review of scholarly texts reveals that serious study of its transmission has yet to be undertaken. Although there are a number of seminal publications that address the dissemination of the style, much of the scholarship is limited to passing acknowledgment of the trend's international expression. Few art historians provide analysis of the social and political reasons for the expansion of the Rococo, instead relegating discussion of taste beyond the borders of France to a few sentences or a footnote.¹⁴ In subsequent chapters, I will directly address how and why styles spread internationally versus remained regional in an effort to determine why the rococo, above all other movements, found such wide international reception at each new port of call. Fiske Kimball states, rather correctly, that throughout Europe we do not find a literal or "slavish copying of individual French examples but a new creation along the general lines established by the French designers."¹⁵ I expect that qualifying such hybridization will be a challenge and that this project will ultimately raise more questions than it will be able to answer. Therefore, I encourage and invite others to conduct further study on this fascinating topic. In turn, it

¹⁴ With the exception of considerable scholarship on François de Cuvilliers and the Bavarian Rococo; albeit written exclusively in French and German.

¹⁵ Fiske Kimball and Edna Donnell, "The Creators of the Chippendale Style," *Metropolitan Museum Studies* 1, no. 2 (May 1929): 122.

is my hope that this thesis will be a decidedly original contribution to the discourse on issues of cultural geography.

The Typology of the Branicki *Encoignure*

In order to trace the sociopolitical impact of the Branicki *encoignure*, it is essential to first situate the object within the context of other known examples. Conversely, what makes the cabinet so unusual is that it eludes simple comparison. French *encoignures* are typically small cupboards veneered in wood or lacquer, affixed with delicate ormolu mounts and topped with a valuable slab of marble. Perhaps because of their petite dimensions, most corner cupboards tend to be found in pairs and function as low-lying places for the display of art objects such as bronze statuettes. By contrast, the Branicki's *encoignure* is a singular, towering, nearly ten foot tall structure with heavy gilt hardware.

In the eighteenth-century, France was the international hub of all things cosmopolitan and to be a member of the cultured aristocracy meant to align with preeminent trends. Count Branicki participated in this vogue to the degree that he ordered an *encoignure* through Monsieur Lullier, a Polish dealer with connections to the Parisian workshop of Jacques Dubois. As discussed, the cabinet's form is illustrative of the tension between the foreign perception of French Rococo style and the way it actually appeared in the country of origin. On the other hand, the sumptuous cabinet is so distinctive, it would be wrong to merely label it a woeful imitation of French

precedents. Instead, its aesthetic eccentricities should be interpreted as fulfilling the unique requirements of a Polish Francophile.

Besides the corner cabinet designed for Count Branicki, Jacques Dubois created several other *encoignures* for French clients. One version is decorated with fashionable Chinese lacquer and sinuous Rococo hardware (Figure 4). The refinement of its gilt bronze decoration becomes evident when compared to the immensity of the mounts on Branicki's piece, yet the two are similar in their essential form. Although the lacquer model is far less imposing, they both stand on three front cabriole legs of nearly identical design.¹⁶ Its diminutive stature makes this cabinet better suited for the small rooms and intimate *appartements* enjoyed by the Parisian elite for whom the lacquer-faced *encoignure* was made. By contrast, the grandiose Polish import was intended for a vast public space within the patron's Warsaw palace. If not for its impressive size and decoration, the object would have been dwarfed by the great dimensions of the room and the majesty of the other objects.¹⁷ Further comparisons include two pairs of corner cupboards by Bernard van Risenburgh, a colleague with a workshop in the same neighborhood as Jacques Dubois (Figure 5), and Jean Pierre Latz (Figure 6). The latter set shares a pattern of floral marquetry similar to Branicki's piece. All but the lacquer example are held in the Getty Museum and stand about three feet tall, presumably with

¹⁶ The fourth leg is concealed at the back of the cabinet and is unadorned.

¹⁷ In the nineteenth century, the cabinet stood in a salon at a Rothschild residence. The scale of the room, like its original setting in the gracious Warsaw palace of Count Branicki, necessitated an object as proportionally large as the Dubois cupboard (Figure 2).

the same decorative purpose of enhancing an interior and providing a place for small bronzes.

Corner cabinets attained international popularity through reproduction in print materials. Understood primarily through these sources, it is possible that scale was misunderstood or lost due to the limitations of that medium. Scholars know that Branicki's commission was based on a popular drawing for a French cupboard by Nicolas Pineau (Figure 7), the dissemination and influence of which will be discussed at length in Chapter 2. Might this discrepancy in scale between Branicki's cabinet and other known examples be the fault of the engraving? It is certainly an interesting possibility when coupled with differences in taste and intended use. Over time, Eastern Europeans may have actually come to prefer larger furniture, knowing full well that French models were in fact much smaller.

A German drawing (Figure 8) offers an additional typological link to Branicki's *encoignure*. The *secrétaire's* size appears to be equally commanding as the cabinet in question. Plus, it too is mounted by an ornate clock. The original design by Franz X. Habermann was later published and distributed by J.G. Hertel in Augsburg. From there it likely found wide audience around the time of Branicki's commission, adding to the ever increasing Eastern European preference for monumental cabinetry. Likewise, the details in the Habermann engraving reveal that it too was used to display small statuary and other *objets d'art*.

A ceramic stove, or *kachelofen*, (Figure 9) in the south wing of Prague Castle appears to be the most comparable extant piece of furniture. Like the Getty *encoignure*, it is large in scale and unapologetically Rococo in form. Probably of German manufacture, some scholars believe the shape of the stove may indicate that it was originally paired with a corresponding *encoignure*. Consequently, it is possible that Branicki's cupboard may have been mated en suite with a stove of this variety. Although no such object is known to survive, the count's inventory does mention a freestanding stove in the vicinity of the corner cabinet: "...over the doors and the stove there are three paintings of figures in carved ornamented gilt picture frames."¹⁸ Whether this object's appearance was meant to echo the design of the Dubois corner cupboard is impossible to determine from this vague mention, but *encoignures* are traditionally paired with another object of like design, and Branicki's may have been no different.

There is one final piece of evidence that suggests Branicki's cupboard was part of a genuine pair, not with the stove, but with another cabinet. In a correspondence from December 6, 1753, M. Koziembrodzki, the administrator of the count's Warsaw Palace writes:

The Honorable General Mokronski arrived here on the evening of St. Andrew's feast, to whom I said that among the commissions given to him with a 'pro memoire,' the Count [Branicki] requests a corner cupboard taller and more

¹⁸"Inventory of Jan Klemens Branicki, 1772." Teki Glinki 320 f 163, The Main Archives of the Ancient Records of Warsaw. Translated from Polish by Dorota Rzymyska, Slavic Language Services, Los Angeles, CA 1992.

beautiful than that obtained from Monsieur Lullier [the dealer]. He promised to try and get it and thus fulfill the commission given to him in writing.”¹⁹

Admittedly, this reference is rather confusing. It implies that a new cabinet would be made even larger than the existing Getty version. If this were the case, the known *encoignure* would not be half of a true pair after all. Unless the Branicki cupboard was indeed mated with the abovementioned stove, then conceivably this record could be interpreted as an order for an additional piece of French Rococo furniture. Former Getty Museum curator Gillian Wilson felt it was highly “unlikely that the Count would have wanted a larger one, no matter how extreme his taste for the rococo was!”²⁰ For the time being, this curious reference will remain among the more puzzling details of the cabinet’s history.

¹⁹ Correspondence of M. Koziębrodzki, December 6, 1753.” The Potocki Archives, Record Teki Glinki 30 f 163, The Main Archives of the Ancient Records of Warsaw.

²⁰ Gillian Wilson, unpublished article, *Art & Antiques*.

CHAPTER 1

SELF FASHIONING THROUGH FURNITURE

Throughout eighteenth-century Europe the acquisition of luxury goods was crucial to the construction and perpetuation of elite identity. Fine objects were a means of social communication, and to that end, readily designated an individual's rank. Likewise, for the nobility of Poland worldly goods were highly valued and "splendor was indulged out of a feeling of self importance and dignity."²¹ Polish aristocrats equated opulence with the importation of fashionable or exotic artwork from abroad, and as the period progressed, those who could afford possessions of this kind became increasingly insatiable consumers of fine and decorative art.²² Collecting was deemed an experimental action and the search for novelty was a motivating force in shaping refined taste of the time. The most important trappings of wealth were heavily adorned military accoutrements, sumptuous attire and furnishings made in Middle-Eastern or French taste. Belongings of this sort reinforced the social hierarchy and became "determinants of prestige on a scale hardly comprehensible today."²³

Count Branicki's *encoignure* perfectly demonstrates the notion of elegance as a way of achieving status and the relationship between art and the socio-political climate.

²¹ Jan K Ostrowski, "Polish Baroque Art and Its Social and Religious Context," *Art In Poland, 1572-1764: Land of the Winged Horsemen*, translated by Krystyna Malcharek (Alexandria, VA: Art Services International, 1999), 37.

²² Charissa Bremer-David, "Introduction: In Defense of Luxury," in *Paris Life and Luxury in the Eighteenth Century* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2011), 2.

²³ Ostrowski, *Art in Poland*, 307.

Fine palaces, such as the grand hetman's, and their contents, like the corner cupboard, provided a venue and a means for self-representation. Further investigation of the cultural significance attached to Rococo taste will invite a more complete understanding of the cabinet and its original environment. This chapter will consider Jan Klemens Branicki and his French import in relation to the increasing internationalism and sophistication of the Polish elite, or *szlachta*. It will then draw upon a posthumous inventory to situate the object within the context of a particular residence. Broader analysis of the motivations for eighteenth-century collecting and patronage of the Rococo will segue into a critical section that posits various reasons for the European Continent's Francophilia. Later, Enlightenment ideology, whose concepts spread east across Europe much in the manner of the Rococo style decades before, will be woven into these larger issues. The final section explores the parallel declines of Rococo style and the *ancien-regime*. Such a holistic investigation of the dissemination of French taste will invite a more complete understanding of the commission of the *encoignure* and its function within an elite Polish household.

Growing Cosmopolitanism: Count Branicki and the Polish Elite

As noted, decorative taste and consumption are inextricably linked to the larger Polish society from which they emerged. In order to consider the cultural implications surrounding the importation of the French *encoignure*, we must first have a sense of the Polish gentry, or *szlachta* to which the object's patron belonged. This group enjoyed

privileges that were unparalleled in eighteenth-century Europe. As a result of the Polish system of elected monarchs, they retained full economic and political power since the close of the Jagiellanian period at the end of the sixteenth century. According to scholar Jan K. Ostrowski in his essay "Polish Baroque Art and its Social and Religious Context," "no institution, be it the crown or church took precedence over the sacred right of the *szlachta* to personal liberty."²⁴ This feature separated the Polish nobility from their contemporaries across Europe in origin, makeup and attitude. What is more, Frederick Augustus II, elector of Saxony (King of Poland 1735-63) was an absentee monarch resident in Dresden.²⁵

The *szlachta* originally derived from a warrior caste whose present standard of living varied dramatically. The extravagance of the wealthiest members, such as Jan Klemens Branicki, can only be compared to the absolutist courts of Europe while the poorest, though afforded all of the advantages of a noble, were often mere subjects of prosperous magnates.²⁶ Nevertheless, together all rungs of the aristocracy developed a distinct culture and point of view that was imitated by lower orders. Out of this environment, a new relationship between people and their belongings was forged and at all levels of society, individuals began spending more of their earnings on possessions than ever before.

²⁴ Ostrowski, *Art in Poland*, 39.

²⁵ From 1696 to 1763, the Saxon kings of Poland imposed foreign rule during an era of political turmoil and economic failings. The Wars of Austrian Succession and Silesia left the kingdom caught between the interests of Prussia, Austria and Russia.

²⁶ Adam Zamoyski, "History of Poland in the 16th-18th centuries" in *Art in Poland, 1572-1764: Land of the Winged Horsemen*, ed. Jan K. Ostrowski (Alexandria, VA: Art Services International, 1999), 28.

Movable wealth in the form of jewelry, furnishings and arms were the primary assets of the *szlachta*.²⁷ Material goods were so important to the formulation of elite identity that for many, the bulk of their wealth was contained within these objects. Adam Zamoyski rightly points out “the chattels of a Polish gentleman differed in quite significant ways from those of his equivalent in England or France, where clothes, jewels, paintings or tapestries tended to be only the tip of the iceberg of wealth.”²⁸

In eighteenth-century Europe, and particularly within Poland, it was deemed entirely proper and advantageous for the nobility to uphold the appearance of luxury in keeping with their status and likewise, it was thought “presumptive and false to dress sumptuously or live in a manner above one’s station.”²⁹ At the time, wealth was believed to not only indicate one’s place among a certain class but also to shed light on a person’s moral character. In essence, riches were an outward extension of inner worth.

By the mid eighteenth century an all powerful oligarchy emerged out of the *szlachta* class. Several magnatial families, among them the Branicki, monopolized government positions and amassed territory greater than that held by the crown itself. In Poland, Norman Davies explains, “they treated the lesser nobles as clients, their private states within states populated by hundreds of thousands of serfs, sustaining self-sufficient economies and private armies...They pursued a lifestyle of luxury amidst the

²⁷ Ibid., 31.

²⁸ Ibid., 36.

²⁹ Charissa Bremer-David, “Introduction: In Defense of Luxury,” 2.

prevailing penury.”³⁰ In addition to this peasant class, poor relatives and landless friends would frequently form a court around the most influential members of the gentry. In turn, the highest nobility felt increasing pressure to outspend other groups in order to maintain their social position. For magnates, wealth was tantamount to power and the acquisition of art was a means of asserting and displaying clout, often at their lavish country estates.³¹

The gentry spent most of their time in the countryside, their bucolic residences frequently imitated Versailles or the Central European examples they had visited on earlier “grand tours” of the continent.³² Travel, diplomacy and trade shaped the relationships between Poles at the far reaches of Europe and the center of cultural life in Paris. Correspondingly, Count Branicki’s palace in Baiłystok was constructed in the French manner. In fact, the residential complex was known in the eighteenth century as Versailles de Podlachie (Figure 10) because of its resemblance to Louis XIV’s chateau; it too was a horseshoe shaped structure replete with gardens, fountains and various outbuildings.³³ Remarking on the wellborn all across Europe who emulated the famous French palace, Frederick II of Prussia (1712-1786) observed, “There is not one of them... who does not preen himself on some resemblance to Louis XIV. He builds his Versailles;

³⁰ Norman Davies, *Heart of Europe: The Past in Poland’s Present* (New York: Oxford University Press USA, 2001), 300.

³¹ Ostrowski, *Art in Poland*, 36.

³² *Ibid.*, 41.

³³ *Nagel’s Encyclopedia-Guide to Poland*, 3rd ed. (Geneva: Nagel Publishers, 1985), 103. Branicki transformed a previous house by architect Tylman Gamerski into this palatial residence starting in 1726.

he has his mistresses; he maintains his standing armies.”³⁴ Frederick II was an ardent admirer of French society, himself. Sanssouci, the King’s country palace in Potsdam, was filled with imported fine and decorative art as well as books, and objects of Parisian manufacture. Moreover, he is remembered for having spoke and corresponded in French, at the time the literal *lingua franca*, better than in his native German.³⁵

According to a surviving inventory from 1772, the corner cabinet was commissioned not for Branicki’s palace in Białystok but instead for display at his urban residence in Warsaw (Figure 11). Designed in Rococo taste, the exterior of this structure, like the Białystok property, reflected French design precedents while the interior was lavished with imported goods.³⁶ Besides the *encoignure*, the inventory (see Appendix and Figure 12) lists many other objects that were obtained from Paris to furnish Branicki’s second home. Archival material of this variety is the basis for the pseudo-scientific methodology that can be employed in researching the eighteenth-century interior. In the upcoming section, such an approach will be directly applied to this inventory.

The named French pieces listed in the Warsaw inventory include a marble chimney piece, gilt metal wall lights, a crystal chandelier, small gilt tables, a sofa and

³⁴ As translated by Alastair Laing, in *Baroque and Rococo: Architecture and Decoration* (New York: Portland House, 1978): 271.

³⁵ This political dimension shaping the international adaptation of the French culture will be emphasized repeatedly in the forthcoming discussion.

³⁶ *Nagel’s Encyclopedia-Guide to Poland*, 73.

chairs.³⁷ In Poland, luxurious decor was generally of greater value than paintings or any other art form. Owning objects of French manufacture readily indicated Branicki's place among an elite group, thus informing his status as a fashionable sophisticate. Imagine the transformative impact these ornate furnishings would have on visitors to the palace. Guests would undoubtedly have marveled at his possessions and in turn associated Branicki with what was appreciated as the highly refined, urbane culture of Western Europe. According to records, the cabinet was situated in the grand parade room, a decidedly public space.

Although his palace and its abundant decoration may not have been wise investments economically, politically the position asserted through the ownership of these items was worth their immense cost.³⁸ More broadly, image and status were privileged above even teeming coffers. Aligning himself with the legacy of Louis XIV and the French elite was one way for Count Branicki to elevate his standing through the acquisition of art. According to Louis-Sébastien Mercier, a French writer of the period, "Furniture had become the most important object of luxury and expense."³⁹ This may explain why the Count was so eager to receive the *encoignure*. A date inscribed on the reverse of the clock dial indicates that the corner cupboard was begun by Jacques Dubois as early as 1744, but in 1752 Branicki was still impatiently waiting for its delivery.

³⁷ "Inventory of Jan Klemens Branicki, 1772." The Potocki Archives, 82f, 536v, The Main Archives of the Ancient Records of Warsaw.

³⁸ At a price of 1,000 livres the cabinet alone was comparable to the salaries of four artisans.

³⁹ L.S. Mercier *Tableau de Paris*, 4 vols. (Amsterdam, 1780), vol 1, 283-284, quoted in Michael Stürmer, "An Economy of Delight: Court Artisans of the Eighteenth Century," *The Business History Review* 35 no. 4 (Winter, 1979): 497.

A surviving note reflects Branicki's frustration with the delay and his high anticipation of the piece. He wrote to his palace administrator on November 23, 1752: "I want the corner cupboard with lights for my room to be ready. I am making M. Lullier [the dealer, a marchand mercier] responsible for this."⁴⁰ It was finally delivered in 1753.

Within this broader atmosphere of conspicuous consumption, Branicki achieved influence by securing the two primary channels of authority: wealth, exemplified by the Dubois corner cupboard that stood ceremoniously in his second home, and political distinction, as leader of the magnates party and grand hetman to the King.⁴¹ The *encoignure* is but one illustration of the value elite *szlachta* placed on possessions manufactured in the latest fashion. It is only through analysis of Count Branicki's social world that one can fully grasp the cultural significance of fine French furniture in eighteenth-century Poland.

***Gesamtkunstwerk*: The Branicki Inventory and the Total Work of Art**

A careful reading of the 1772 inventory prepared at the time of Branicki's death provides primary evidence of the splendor of his Warsaw palace. The *encoignure* was originally displayed in a reception room, and it is possible to reconstruct its general arrangement based on the posthumous document. Clues contained within a surviving

⁴⁰ Jan Klemens Branicki, "Correspondence to a Palace Administrator, November 23, 1752." Teki Glinki 320f, 85 v, Main Archives of Ancient Records of Warsaw.

⁴¹ Additionally, his third wife Izabella, whom he married in 1748, was the daughter of King Stanislaus Poniatowski. In 1763, Branicki ran against him in the election of King of Poland but was beaten by his father-in-law.

print allow for further speculation about the function of the room and the kinds of social practices that may have occurred there. The inventory catalogues every space in the house, and yet, for the purposes of this project, it is necessary to limit the analysis to information relevant to the cabinet's specific location.

In accordance with Roman law, shortly after Branicki's death, wax seals would likely have been placed on containing furniture, doors and entries. The Bailiff often carried out this task within hours of a person's passing in order to guarantee succession to the heirs. Later, during the official lifting of the seals, wills and contracts were formally read and an inventory of the home's contents would be taken in order to appraise the property.⁴² Servants and relatives still inhabited the home and therefore small objects of value would have already been placed in pantries and silver safes in anticipation of the inventory.⁴³ In continental Europe, this widespread practice often makes it difficult for art historians to determine the original arrangement of objects, although some reconstruction is indeed possible.

The Branicki document takes list form and is organized according to room. The objects within each room are then noted in order of their expense, beginning with the most valuable. In the parade room where the cabinet once resided, first a bed is recorded, then plate glass mirrors, upholstered furniture and quite a ways down the list, the *encoignure*: "one Parisian corner cupboard with ornaments, candelabra, two gilt-

⁴² Alden Gordon, "Breathing Life into Inventories Made after Death: Strategies for Decrypting and Correlating Archival Sources with Social Practices of Daily Life," in *Taste and the Senses: Aesthetic Formation and Material Experience in Eighteenth-Century France*, Getty Research Institute, 3 June 2011.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

metal candlesticks, and a Parisian clock on top.”⁴⁴ Art historians are unable to identify any of the other objects in the room based on the inventory, which makes the cabinet’s position within the document all the more interesting. The cabinet, undoubtedly a show piece was surely positioned in such a way that it would have been highly visible to guests and yet it was but one aspect of the gracious interior decorated in the height of French-cum-Polish fashion.

Rococo interiors function as the sum of their parts, an interplay of spectacular pieces of furniture and ornament brought together to create a total work of art, or *Gesamtkunstwerk*. The synergy of gilding, crystal, curvilinear decorative motifs, candlelight, mirrors and glass offered an unmatched design aesthetic; a flickering *papillotage* of sensory delight. Luxurious objects shaped social values and in turn modes of visual engagement, therefore the prominent cabinet would have contributed to the sensory pleasure of the room in which it was situated. The general arrangement of the space was likely determined by the architecture of the palace. The inventory describes furniture lined along an expansive wall of mirrors and windows, surely a nod to the famous *Galerie des Glaces* at the Palace of Versailles. Further proof of the room’s social and ceremonial function is the mention of a surplus number of chairs, which one can assume were used to accommodate guests.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ “Inventory of Jan Klemens Branicki, 1772.” The Potocki Archives, 82f, 536v.

⁴⁵ Ibid. Seating furniture is listed as 2 sofas, at least 6 chairs en suite, 11 tabourets, 12 caned Polish chairs. In total, at least 31 pieces of seating furniture.

Although Branicki was an important patron of the arts, no paintings aside from the overdoors are described in the inventory. One explanation is that the decorated panels were so expensive and ornate that Branicki chose not to have them inset with works of art. Collectively the décor can be understood as formal, even ostentatious: “carved paneling and shutters are gilded and painted in many colors. The stucco ceiling is decorated with gilt ornaments and figures... the sofa has a crimson cover made from Chinese silk.... In the alcove there is a large crimson damask bed with all the pieces which belong to it.”⁴⁶ In keeping with custom, the stately canopied bedchamber was recessed at the center of the grand interior. It is unknown whether this object would have been considered part of the conventional furniture of such a public room or whether someone like the Polish King, a relative and political ally of Branicki, actually slept there on visits. In France, grand reception rooms frequently contained a bed for ceremonial use. The bed described in Branicki’s inventory may have been used in emulation of the French court ritual where guests were received by a host who sat atop an elaborate bed. This routine of the *levée* became fashionable for aristocrats across the continent who indulged the trend in their own homes.

Eighteenth century documents relating to furniture are numerous but they often lack information about the specific arrangement of rooms. Clues about original display must be sought elsewhere, for instance by looking to the work of engravers.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Ibid. *Boiserie*, or carved and gilded wall paneling, is described among the costliest contents of the room.

⁴⁷ Georges Duplessis and Fannie M. Atwell, “The Study of Interior Decoration,” *The Connoisseur* 1, no. 2 (Winter, 1886): 12-13.

Scholarship has revealed that when Branicki commissioned the cabinet, he was likely inspired by a drawing made decades earlier by Nicolas Pineau (Figure 7). An engraving of the sketch by Pierre Mariette circulated widely, illustrating the cabinet within the context of a fashionable French interior (Figure 13). While the precise location of the *encoignure* unknown, one could speculate that Branicki had seen the popular Mariette image and, in keeping with the details of the engraving, situated his cabinet adjacent to an elaborate bed. Another possibility is that it was aesthetically mated with a stove, also listed in the document, as was suggested earlier in “The Typology of the Branicki *Encoignure*.”

Most of the knowledge art historians have about both inventories and period interiors is based on the way Parisian rooms were arranged and therefore it is common to apply that body of scholarship to domestic locations throughout Europe. Although the decoration and use of Polish spaces is largely unknown, it is logical to assume that the French method of furniture organization was imported along with the physical objects. Because the salon was the most lavishly decorated room in a Parisian residence, it can be assumed that the formal reception room in the Branicki palace was a similar kind of space. Nevertheless this parade room was surely informed not just by foreign prints but also by known precedents within Poland, specifically, the celebrated Rococo salon of a fellow magnate and resident of Warsaw, Count Bielinski. Designed by Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier in 1734 (Figures 14-16), this gracious interior will be addressed again under the heading “Center and Periphery: A Model for Understanding Poland.”

Sarmatism: A Storied Lineage Impacts Design

While it is improbable that anything was stored inside the *encoignure*, there were small objects displayed on top of it. The inventory describes “one Parisian corner cupboard with ornaments, candelabra, two gilt metal candlesticks and a Parisian clock on top.”⁴⁸ The entry adds that it was used to display rare and costly objects: “on this cupboard one porcelain figure, one gilt metal piece [possibly a clock] with a face in bronze painted in colors with a vase with porcelain flowers, two smaller similar vases with porcelain flowers, one porcelain small figure on a gilt-metal pedestal decorated with porcelain flowers, with a small gold clock on the front.”⁴⁹ The rest of the inventory describes other items in great detail, including many other mounted porcelain pieces. These ceramics were likely designed in an Oriental vein and in turn are connected to an important aspect of *szlatcha* consumption and cosmopolitanism.

During the eighteenth century, a national foundation myth gained popularity among the nobility. Elite Poles began to see themselves not of the same “Slavic stock as the peasantry but as descendants of Sarmatians, a warrior people from the Black Sea Steppe who had swept through southeast Europe in the 6th century.”⁵⁰ The legend was received with eagerness despite its irrationality. A fabled lineage was an expression of a desire for common identity through the “assumption of ancestors.”⁵¹ As a result of

⁴⁸ “Inventory of Jan Klemens Branicki, 1772.” The Potocki Archives, 82f, 536v.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, “Definition and Self Definition in Polish Culture and Art,” in Ostrowski, *Art in Poland*, 17.

⁵¹ Ibid.

contact with Hungary and Ottoman Turkey, various accoutrement of eastern origin were imported and incorporated into widespread use. Middle Eastern luxury wares were in keeping with the long established Polish taste for the extravagant and gave artistic form to the Sarmatian myth. It is therefore conceivable that the acquisition and display of porcelain bric-a-brac on the grand hetman's cabinet was a nod to this larger concept of Sarmatism. An alternate explanation is that the porcelain pieces were actually Chinese, or were French imports in Chinese taste. A considerable body of scholarly literature is devoted to the widespread fashion for Asian objects at that time. The fad for *chinoiserie* was a fundamental component of the French Rococo, and so it is possible the inclusion of such objects appealed to both Branicki's Sarmatian sensibilities as well as his infatuation with Parisian trends.

Consumption, Sociability and the Creation of Style

Jan K. Ostrowski notes, "Art in Europe, as in Poland, was a means of social communication and determinant of prestige on par with costume and number of servants."⁵² Perhaps the greatest achievement of the Rococo style then, was its ability to spread outward from France to new audiences across Europe. The market for fine and decorative art of this kind originated with the French court and Parisian elite before trickling outward to nations across the continent. Art historian Katie Scott might see this

⁵² Ostrowski, *Art in Poland*, 40.

assimilation of style as indicative of frictions within larger society.⁵³ If we are to apply her methodology beyond competing craftsmen or the rising bourgeoisie in France, key topics in her authoritative publication *The Rococo Interior*, one might consider Branicki's Warsaw and Bailystok palaces as microcosms of French absolutism. Recall that petty nobles and peasants would form a court around Polish magnates, compelling these high ranking individuals to grossly outspend other sectors of the population in order to maintain their social position. Objects were thus important political symbols laden with messaging. Fine and decorative art served as a manifestation of the divisions between the various classes, readily connoting the "haves" versus the "have-nots."

For much of the eighteenth century, Louis XIV's court at Versailles was the preeminent model for leadership across Europe. Monarchs and magnates alike recognized that the French King achieved absolutist control through creating an atmosphere of unmatched splendor and in turn he was widely emulated long after his death. Pierre Verlet notes, "Versailles exerted its influence over rich and poor alike, spread models, diffused royal styles, and fascinated a clientele that was as much French as foreign."⁵⁴ In Poland, tensions among the ruling *szlachta* would necessitate that someone like Branicki acquire more and more costly outward symbols of wealth in order to assert dominance, in essence reaffirming the French king's earlier ideology. Louis XIV recognized that he, and likewise France, had to be *the* arbiter of taste in order to claim a

⁵³ Katie Scott, *The Rococo Interior: Decoration and Social Spaces in Early Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

⁵⁴ Pierre Verlet, *French Furniture and Interior Decoration of the 18th Century*, translated by George Savage (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1967), 13.

prominent position on the world's stage. As the King's Finance Minister, Jean-Baptiste Colbert stated, it is essential "that the work done here clearly surpass in art and beauty the most exquisite work from foreign countries."⁵⁵ The nation's emphasis on art production promoted by Louis XIV at the turn of the eighteenth century had become a national characteristic as the era progressed and the Rococo took shape. Louis XIV's Versailles is in French Baroque or French style and yet, it was the great-grandson, Louis XV, whose time in the palace was contemporary with Count Branicki and the Rococo. Correspondingly, the decorative mode's popularity can be said to have come out of the reputation of French furniture established during the earlier King's reign.

It is somewhat incongruous that it was through appropriating the national style of France that later rulers across Europe would declare their own absolute power. By extension, feelings of cultural inadequacy and insecurity were common reasons for the dissemination and emulation of seemingly more sophisticated foreign taste. Objects of French manufacture continued to be imitated and held in the highest of esteem throughout the continent. Frederick II of Prussia once wrote to Voltaire: "You are right to say that our good Germans are still at the dawn of their knowledge. In the fine arts Germany is still at the period of Francis I. We love them, we cultivate them, foreigners transplant them here, but the soil is not yet propitious enough to produce them itself."⁵⁶

⁵⁵ As translated by Michael Stürmer in "An Economy of Delight: Court Artisans of the Eighteenth Century," *The Business History Review* 35 no. 4 (Winter, 1979): 506.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Adrien Fauchier-Magnan, *The Small German Courts in the Eighteenth Century*, translated by Mervyn Savill (London: Methuen, 1958.): 29.

The King wrote similarly to his sister Sophia Wilhelmina in a letter of 1746: “We are emerging from barbarism and are still in our cradles. But the French have already gone a long way and are a century in advance of us in every kind of success.”⁵⁷ The suggestion that Central and Eastern Europe could not create fine artistic objects of the quality produced in France was widely held opinion within those nations, hence the mania for French imports. Of the Prussian ruler’s self-deprecating attitude, Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann qualifies: “Frederick’s estimation of German culture vis-à-vis the rest of Europe indicates some of the typical feelings of inferiority combined with admiration that contributed to the continuing adaptation of foreign cultural fashions from France.”⁵⁸ While scholars recognize French cultural and intellectual activities reached a pinnacle during this era, the reception of the Rococo style was actually more fervent outside the country than within. A passage from the 1757 *Almanach des Négociants*, describes the immense influence of France, “The sway of Paris over the taste of other nations in jewelry, in fashion, in all works of adornment and luxury is a source of great riches. Fashion alone draws to France millions from abroad every year.”⁵⁹

Sociability and the culture of politeness is another way to explain why and how the Rococo took hold abroad. Fine objects informed the behavior of their elite owners because possessing intricately crafted furniture pieces meant being able to navigate and

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Kaufmann, *Court, Cloister and City*, 394. Ibid., 394.

⁵⁹ *Almanach des Négociants* (Brussels, 1757), 297 quoted in Michael Stürmer, “An Economy of Delight: Court Artisans of the Eighteenth Century,” *The Business History Review* 35 no. 4 (Winter, 1979): 507. It should be made clear that it was not only the sway of Paris that proved influential. Italian models, namely from the Renaissance had been in widespread use across Europe for centuries and many Netherlandish artists worked for an avid market abroad.

operate them with genteel manners.⁶⁰ Appearing constantly at ease was essential to eighteenth-century elite conduct. Winding a clock, snuffing a candle or opening a drawer suddenly became opportunities to exhibit proper etiquette in relation to prized possessions like the *encoignure*. We might for a moment imagine Count Branicki engaged in these performative acts before guests to his parade room. Frank Trentmann affirms that: “Material objects and their polite use as well as ownership were a running thread in the philosophical and advice literature on respectability, manners and civility.”⁶¹ The art of good comportment became increasingly complicated over the course of the century, and thus more difficult for lower orders to mimic. Utmost social distinction was increasingly indicated by those who had not only mastered pose, gaze, gesture, and speech but also certain behaviors for interacting with furnishings in the decorated environment.

Geopolitical relations with France also informed the importation of furniture and emulation of their styles across the continent. In the instance of Poland, Stanisława Leszczyńska, the deposed King, became the Duke of Lorraine after the marriage of his daughter Marie to King Louis XV of France. Surely this direct diplomatic relationship between the two nations accounts for the ready reception of Parisian fashions in Warsaw and beyond. An additional example is the royal commission of a pair of commodes ordered by Louis, the Dauphin of France. He was married to Maria Josepha

⁶⁰ Mimi Hellman, “Furniture, Sociability and the Work of Leisure in Eighteenth Century France,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32 (1999).

⁶¹ Trentmann, “Materiality in the Future of History: Things, Practices and Politics,” 292.

of Saxony, the daughter of Frederick Augustus III, Elector of Saxony and King of Poland (following Leszczyńska's exile). Among the countless examples of French furnishings shipped to German lands, this pair of Parisian commodes designed by the renowned ébéniste Bernard van Risenburgh (fig. 17) are particularly unique because they were decorated with ormolu mounts containing a pastoral deer motif and appear, much like the *encoignure*, to have been made with a foreign market in mind.⁶² In fact, they were ordered by the prince for his father-in-law's hunting lodge.

The culture of the salon, a space for social and intellectual activities played an additional role in the transmission of Rococo taste. French was the preeminent language spoken throughout Europe, which in turn primed foreigners for the spread of Parisian products. This was an era of relative peace on the continent, when to be of royalty or nobility in any number of nations might mean not only conversing in the same language but also reading the same books, and purchasing the same kinds of artwork and furnishings. Intermarriage and freedom of movement destined this international upper class to have more in common with one another than with their own populace.⁶³ In her essay "Ornament of Bizarre Imagination," Gail S. Davidson notes, "the Rococo style of the day dovetailed perfectly with [the] pursuit of pleasure, sensual enjoyment, literature, music, and stimulating conversation."⁶⁴

⁶² The mounts are unusually florid for BVRB's work. It is therefore probable that they were designed especially for the German market.

⁶³ This untenable formula will be further discussed at the conclusion of the chapter.

⁶⁴ Gail S. Davidson, "Ornament of Bizarre Imagination," in Sarah Coffin, *Rococo: The Continuing Curve, 1730-2008*, (New York: Cooper-Hewitt, 2008). In Bavaria, where the elector was particularly fond of

The development and formulation of style is among the most contentious debates within art historical scholarship. It has been established that taste for the Rococo is related to the social and cultural conditions of the era, yet why it manifested and flourished in Central and Eastern Europe is more difficult to definitively ascertain. Mechanisms of transfer, such as traveling craftsmen, luxury dealers, the international shipping of goods and the circulation of prints will provide some insight into the ways in which the style physically spread, and will be discussed in Chapter 2. The question of why, however, is a problematic issue on which we can only continue to speculate. It should be noted that this decorative mode was certainly not the only one to find reception outside its country of origin but it may have been the style received with greatest enthusiasm. According to one text, it was the “last universal style of Western Europe” and “the final phase in a culture of taste... the last style in which ‘beautiful’ and ‘artistic’ are synonymous.”⁶⁵

Center and Periphery: A Model for Understanding Poland

Perceived as a cultural backwater, an excerpt on Poland from an article in Diderot’s *Encyclopedie* erroneously reads, “This state, larger than France, counts only 5 million inhabitants... It has no school of painting, no theatre, architecture is in its

French fashion, François de Cuvilliers’ version of the rococo dominated design. He created grand salons in Rococo taste that were filled with paintings, sculpture and stuccoed ornament where the abovementioned elite lifestyle could commence.

⁶⁵ Arnold Hauser, *The Philosophy of Art History* (Chicago: Northwestern University): 241 and *The Sociology of Art* (Chicago: Northwestern University). Both quoted in Calvin Seerveld, “Toward a Cartographic Methodology for Art Historiography,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 39, no. 2 (Winter, 1980): 144.

infancy, history is treated there without taste...”⁶⁶ The nation was perceived as an exotic location, somehow separate from the rest of continental Europe and in turn exceedingly provincial. Within Poland, inhabitants relished a sense of exceptionalism and, as described, their culture was laden with mythologies of their population as decedents of the chosen Sarmatian people. It has been stated that this widely-held belief influenced the arts of the Baroque era, namely through the taste for Armenian, Persian and Turkic fashions. By the eighteenth century, the diplomatic relationship between France and Poland allowed Parisian style to flourish.

One model for looking at acculturation is through the framework of “center and periphery.”⁶⁷ In essence, Poland becomes a recipient of products or trends from a more dominant, artistically advanced nation. At the popular level, this distinction might be juxtaposed as a cultural epicenter versus a backwater. Art historian George Kubler further frames the notion as follows:

The provincial city is like an organ that usually can only receive and relay messages from the higher nervous centers... and its active elements perennially immigrate to the true centers of happening... where the concentration of power draws together a class of patron for the inventions and designs of the artist.⁶⁸

Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann is quick to assert that “Poland was not merely a place in which influences were passively received,”⁶⁹ but rather, local preferences were fused with international trends, creating something decidedly new. Because of their

⁶⁶ As quoted in Ostrowski, *Art in Poland*, 15.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁶⁸ George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962).

⁶⁹ Kaufmann, “Definition and Self Definition in Polish Culture and Art,” 15.

geographic position, the Polish had always been open to new trends and readily sought out decorative styles that best represented the needs of their ever-evolving culture. Moreover, it was not as if the vogue for Middle Eastern and then French décor was imposed on the nation; instead a natural proclivity developed over time. This gradual formation of style is not unlike what happens under any other set of circumstances where the influences of different nations become mixed or hybridized.⁷⁰ To Croatian scholar Ljubo Karaman, a periphery is when “various influences merge and where no one of them obtains decisive superiority; that allows the artists of peripheral regions to make the choice to develop the independently chosen elements and create out of various influences an art autonomous and original.”⁷¹ By virtue of this definition, outlying locations have a greater sense of freedom than cultural hubs which are frequently controlled by academies with long-standing artistic traditions.⁷² In order for a melding of trends to occur, it is essential however, that some infrastructure exists. Not until the Polish nation created schools of lasting impact did artists from across Europe begin to immigrate there in large numbers, similar to the internationalism of the Bohemian School in the fourteenth century or the Italians at Fontainebleau in the sixteenth century.⁷³

⁷⁰ Ibid., 23.

⁷¹ Ljubo Karaman, *On the Impact of the Local Milieu on the Art of Croatian Regions*, Zagreb 1963.

⁷² Jan Białostocki, “Some Values of Artistic Periphery,” 50.

⁷³ Ostrowski, *Art in Poland*, 23. The Palace of Fontainebleau was a country residence of François I. A nearby art school was founded to provide furnishings and artwork to the chateau and is credited with introducing Italian Mannerism to France. The Bohemian School flourished in Prague under Charles IV. It was comprised of Czech as well as French, Northern Italian and German artists and influences.

Polish furniture styles were altered in emulation of French examples, indicating the deeply rooted perception of supremacy and authority given to Parisian pieces. The French were often highly critical of the ways in which other nations adapted and borrowed their national designs. The displeased Duchess of Orleans once noted that many nations “not only imitate France but also do double what is done here,” in reference to the Monumental Rococo in Eastern Europe.⁷⁴ Another Frenchman lamented the craftsmen who mimicked the oeuvre of Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier, “imitating only his faults and... spread[ing] them across Europe.”⁷⁵ As arbiters of taste, Parisians were quick to ridicule permutations of the Rococo and yet they generally employed the style less seriously than in other nations who made use of it. Several chief artists of the period were better known abroad than at home; again a useful example is Meissonnier. During an exhibition at the Palace of the Tuileries, the artist first displayed his drawings for the proposed Bielinski salon. On this occasion a French reviewer wrote: “The curious have viewed it with much satisfaction, and we are persuaded that this work, in which painting, sculpture and architecture are combined with so much distinction and taste, will carry to Poland, where it is to be installed, a very favorable idea of the progress of the fine art in France.”⁷⁶

Quotations of this sort are further evidence of the political aspect to this transfer of culture. Perhaps it was the French themselves who first set up the dichotomy

⁷⁴ Richard H. Randall, “The French Taste,” *Bulletin of the Museum of Fine Arts* 60, no. 320 (1962): 51.

⁷⁵ Edna Donnell, “Juste Aurèle Meissonnier and the Rococo Style,” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 36, no. 12 (December 1941): 260.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 256.

between center and periphery. Furniture production was at its zenith in France during this era and hence, most of the earliest scholarship about decorative arts is written from an ethnocentric perspective. Historically, France was set apart from other nations because of the extent of her influence. Examples from the broader, international Rococo, including objects from Poland, are surely worth reevaluation and study, particularly through the useful and inclusive lens of cultural hybridity. Yet what distinguishes “Polish centers from those elsewhere is the question of broader impact... outside a limited region and the reciprocal influence they might have had on other European regions.”⁷⁷ While the ethnic multiculturalism of eighteenth-century Poland aided in the development of artistic centers at the time, the decentralized nation yielded regional characteristics that were found only in limited sections of the country, thus a national style of great influence like the French Rococo never fully developed.

After all, even the French Rococo is a compilation of varied influences. Some of the movement’s greatest proponents were in fact Italian and German craftsmen living and working in France such as Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier and Bernard van Risenburgh, respectively. At the same time, the design vocabulary clearly owes much to exuberance of the Italian Baroque as well as to the importation of luxury goods from Asian countries. To a large extent, this cultural borrowing is not unique to Poland—each new era in European history began by looking to the greater world or to the past for new aesthetic inspiration. Proto-Renaissance artists gleaned motifs from Byzantine icons

⁷⁷ Ostrowski, *Art in Poland*, 23.

while High Renaissance sculptors mimicked the achievements of Greek and Roman statuary. Identifying the history and origin of a style is something of a slippery slope for art historians looking to neatly define a given era. Fittingly, some scholars entirely reject the notion of distinct periods as constructs and fictions. “Although in common use today,” explains Calvin Seerveld, “periodization is useless for scientifically precise historiography because of the...uncertain criteria adopted for differentiating them, and the fruitless arguments engendered as to whether modernity began with the Renaissance or Enlightenment.”⁷⁸

Regardless of how we define the origins of the Rococo, Central Europe was an irrefutable point of convergence for artistic trends during the eighteenth century. Netherlandish, Italianate and French elements were all incorporated contemporaneously in the art and architecture of Poland, Austria, Hungary, Bohemia, and the German States during the eighteenth century.⁷⁹ Therefore, the Polish reception of the Rococo should be deemed a deliberate selection of an increasingly cosmopolitan nation. From that perspective, the adoption and appropriation of French models by Polish patrons cannot be diminished as a regional or peripheral matter.

Aufklärung: The Ideology of Enlightenment

The most fashionable Parisian salons, frequented by Enlightenment *philosophes* and prominent figures of the day gave birth to new discourse as well as to style and

⁷⁸ Calvin Seerveld, “Toward a Cartographic Methodology for Art Historiography,” 143.

⁷⁹ Ostrowski, *Art in Poland*, 23.

culture. These ideas were transmitted from elite French circles to the international stage by Frederic Melchior Grimm, a notable individual within this Enlightenment realm. He acted as an art advisor and cultural ambassador to members of the Central and Eastern European nobility, relaying information about the nature of Parisian intellectual life in his publication *Correspondence Litteraire*. The exclusive newspaper, edited by his friend Diderot, was an essential resource for following French literary, social, political and artistic developments. It also functioned as a persuasive political instrument in molding attitudes and winning the support of influential leaders toward Enlightenment ideals.⁸⁰

Correspondence Litteraire was read avidly by ruling families and the courts of Russia, Sweden and Poland; King Stanislaus Augustus II Poniatowski of Poland and Frederick II of Prussia were among the devoted subscribers to the bimonthly journal.⁸¹ Reading the publication and then purchasing the latest styles were advocated as ways of fashioning oneself in the French mode. It is unknown whether Count Branicki had direct access to the clandestine *Correspondence Litteraire*, although we might assume his close working and personal relationship with King Poniatowski would have made him privy to the ideology, if not the publication itself. For the King and *szlachta* magnates like Branicki, owning French furniture not only indicated elite status but also conferred evidence of political enlightenment.

⁸⁰ Ulrike D. Mathies, "Houdon and the German Courts, Serving the Francophile Princes," ed. Anne L. Poulet, *Jean-Antoine Houdon: Sculptor of the Enlightenment* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2003): 42.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

As the century advanced, Eastern European rulers, still entrenched in philosophies of governance from the age of absolutism began looking westward for new economic and political direction. According to Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, “Courts were not the exclusive catalysts for cultural change in the mid and especially the later eighteenth century. Other patrons and social milieus also had an important impact on the visual arts, as they did on literature. What resulted in turn exercised a reciprocal influence on the courts.”⁸² This holds true for Count Branicki and his palatial residence in Białystok. He furthered the development of a thriving town and the area became a well-known and flourishing cultural center where numerous artists and scholars converged.⁸³ The social experiment in Białystok was endemic of a larger, national *zeitgeist*. Appropriately, it was during this *Aufklärung* (Enlightenment) period that Poland created the world's first ministry of education and founded formal academies of art and architecture.⁸⁴

Count Branicki's Warsaw palace was also something of a cultural hub. It came to eventually be called the Mrs. Krakowska Palace because the property was succeeded by his wife Izabella who held fashionable salons following the death of her husband. She lured many artists, intellectuals, and statesmen to Enlightenment era Poland. Meanwhile, in France, Stanisława Leszczyńska, the deposed King of Poland, created a

⁸² DaCosta Kaufmann, *Court, Cloister and City: The Art and Culture of Central Europe, 1450-1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995): 419-20.

⁸³ *Nagel's Encyclopedia-Guide to Poland*, 102.

⁸⁴ Kaufmann, *Court, Cloister and City*, 394. Recall that artists continued to be obtained from Western Europe as well.

similarly enlightened court in Lorraine where he entertained the likes of Voltaire. He may have been a distant model for Polish leaders looking to modernize.⁸⁵ As the father-in-law to Louis XV he was both an important proponent of French Rococo taste as well as a philanthropic founder of schools, a public library, an orphanage and several hospitals in the spirit of the Enlightenment.⁸⁶ Through these examples it becomes apparent that together, patronage of the arts and the preeminent liberal philosophy of the day shaped the courts of Europe even as Poland lapsed into an era of increasing instability. Ultimately, it was these Enlightenment philosophies and liberal ideas that began to underwrite the authority of absolutist rulers.

Fatalistic Optimis: Parallel Declines

“The most confusing aspects of the century of rapid decline,” notes Adam Zamoyski, is the way in which the “huge rickety state lasted so long without falling apart altogether and that it was accompanied by a rich cultural life and a spectacular outburst of spending on buildings, paintings, sculpture, and every sphere of the decorative arts.”⁸⁷ The history of eighteenth-century Poland is one of political and economic decline and yet, as stated, it was also an era of incredible artistic patronage and

⁸⁵ Davies, *Heart of Europe: The Past in Poland's Present*, (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2001): 306-307.

⁸⁶ Penelope Hunter-Stiebel, “Eighteenth-century Nancy: The Good King and the Blacksmith,” in *The Continuing Curve*, ed. Sarah Coffin (New York: Cooper Hewitt, 2008), 92.

⁸⁷ Adam Zamoyski, “History of Poland in the 16th -18th Centuries,” 35.

production. Catastrophic events like the Swedish invasion, Silesian Wars, continual civil unrest and an impending partition seem at odd with a flourishing in the arts. Count

Branicki's *encoignure* was constructed in the midst of this tumultuous period, sometime between 1744, the date inscribed on the reverse of the clock, and 1753 when it arrived in Warsaw. It has been duly noted that the cabinet's immense size (over nine feet tall) and overly wrought hardware reveal Eastern European rather than French taste, particularly because by the time Branicki ordered the piece, the vogue for the Rococo style was already lessening in some fashionable Parisian circles. As early as 1737, architect Jacques-Francois Blondel disparaged the trend as a "ridiculous jumble of shells, dragons, reeds, palm-trees, and plants."⁸⁸ During the 1740s as Rococo decoration became ever more robust, twisted and formed (as in the example of the cabinet), disapproval grew even more widespread.⁸⁹ Madame de Pompadour's brother, the Marquis de Marigny, recommended that the *Academie* should hold competitions in "the interior decoration of grand residences in order to correct the poor taste in ornamental design which prevails today."⁹⁰ In the end, the fates of both Poland and the Rococo proved parallel and terminal.

During the century prior, the population of Poland fell by one third.⁹¹ Wars and diplomatic problems with the Ottoman Empire consumed the nation's energies and resources. Poles increasingly came to see themselves as preordained by God to defend

⁸⁸ Jacques-François Blondel, *De la Distribution des Maisons de Plaisance*, 1737

⁸⁹ Peter Thornton, *Authentic Décor: The Domestic Interior, 1620-1920* (New York: Viking, 1984), 90.

⁹⁰ Quoted in Peter Thornton, *Authentic Décor*, 92.

⁹¹ Kaufmann, *Court, Cloister and City*, 283.

Christianity against Muslim attack. Meanwhile at home, wars devastated towns and movable wealth, ultimately weakening Poland to the degree that the nation fell victim to foreign dynasties.⁹² Russia, Prussia and the Austrian Habsburg Monarchy partitioned Poland and it ceased to exist on the map of Europe by 1772.⁹³ All the while, the *szlachta* upheld their mythologies of a chosen people and maintained an attitude of exceptionalism. In light of these grim circumstances, Zamoycki refers to the delusion of the nobility as “fatalistic optimism.”⁹⁴ Economically, Poles still relied on an agrarian economy rather than updating the production and manufacturing of their raw materials. Socially, an increasingly dramatic division of wealth separated the ranks of the *szlachta* from one another. Elsewhere in Central Europe, the Seven Year’s War put an end to the opulence of eighteenth-century culture. The conflict spurred a lengthy economic depression that made spending on the arts unpopular and inappropriate.⁹⁵

Ironically, it was the pretense of Enlightenment thought that motivated the foreign aggression toward Poland. The philosophy also led to the eventual rejection of the Rococo and an ushering in of *Gout Grec* and Neoclassical design. The style which originally shaped Enlightenment salon culture was now cast off in favor of a pared down, egalitarian aesthetic rooted in Classical sources. It was argued that this new mode was more in keeping with the democratic spirit of the Enlightenment; the ornate excesses of the Rococo now represented the flawed systems of the past. These

⁹² Ostrowski, *Art in Poland, 1572-1764: Land of the Winged Horsemen*, 32.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁹⁵ Stürmer, 525. Bavaria was utterly bankrupt by their earlier ambition.

transformations in the political and social landscape yielded fundamental alterations to the prevailing culture, spurring the demise of both the Rococo and the *ancien regime*. This shift in taste is well encapsulated by the following quotation by Horace Walpole: “[The Rococo] appeared here for a moment as a mode, and consequently it spread itself like wildfire into their snuff-boxes, china, and dress; for whether composed of gauze or marble, no fashion is meant to last longer than a lover.”⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Quoted in Edna Donnell, “Juste Aurèle Meissonnier and the Rococo Style,” 255.

CHAPTER 2
THE MECHANISMS OF CULTURAL TRANSFER:
PEOPLE, PRINTS, PLACES

The appearance of the French *encoignure* in Jan Klemens Branicki's Warsaw residence was the result of a complicated system of taste and production. As with most luxury furniture made for a foreign market, the design of the corner cabinet was originally derived from a widely circulated print. In addition, the unique preferences of the patron, expertise of the Parisian craftsman, and ingenuity of several dealers and liaisons each contributed to the cabinet's manufacture and export. Together, these forces—alliteratively termed here as "People, Prints, Places"—will provide a useful model for understanding the fundamental components of cultural transfer, the subject of this chapter.

In his essay, "Mechanisms of Contact between Polish and European Baroque," Jan K. Ostrowski outlines artistic transmission as occurring through the importation of artwork, the immigration of foreign artists, the circulation of print material, and the activities of Polish artists and tastemakers abroad.⁹⁷ The career of French *ornamentiste*, Nicolas Pineau perfectly encapsulates this model for the diffusion of style. His widely circulated drawing of an *encoignure* (Figure 7) not only gained international audience and ultimately influenced the design for the Branicki cabinet, but Pineau also physically travelled to Russia where he was patronized by a number of Eastern European courts

⁹⁷ Jan K. Ostrowski, "Mechanisms of Contact between Polish and European Baroque," *Art In Poland, 1572-1764: Land of the Winged Horsemen*, translated by Krystyna Malcharek (Alexandria, VA: Art Services International, 1999).

interested in adapting the French style *à la mode*.⁹⁸ In this instance, a single individual is emblematic of several different methods for the transmission of Rococo culture. The following sections will further explore additional influences on taste, production and consumption.

Local Traditions and International Tendencies: Influences on Production

Purchasing imported furnishings from Paris was only feasible for two to four percent of the population of Europe.⁹⁹ Nevertheless, the Francophile interests of this small but culturally significant elite proved integral to Paris' ascendancy to the furniture-making capital of Europe. Finely crafted objects were esteemed by princes and the nouveau riche alike, forging a significant place in their domestic lives and expenditures.¹⁰⁰ The courts of Hesse-Cassel, Berlin, Dresden, St Petersburg, Stockholm, and many others placed extensive orders with Paris *ébénistes*, often through cultural attachés and dealers.¹⁰¹ Widespread travel to France was another factor contributing to the international success of the Rococo. Foreign dignitaries and aristocrats often ventured to Paris with the sole intent of furnishing their homes. Duchess Maria Feodorovna and Grand Duke Paul Petrovich of Russia, later the Czar and Czarina made

⁹⁸ Wilson, "Acquisitions Made by the Department of Decorative Arts, 1979 to Mid 1980," *The J. Paul Getty Museum Journal* 8 (1980): 1. Pineau went to Russia in 1716. The date of his return to Paris is thought to be 1726 as he is recorded as taking commissions from Parisian clients soon thereafter.

⁹⁹ Stürmer, 514.

¹⁰⁰ Formal portraiture often depicted the sitter posed with recognizable pieces of their furniture.

¹⁰¹ Stürmer, 510. As discussed in the first chapter, literary correspondents such as Baron von Grimm also played a vital role in the promotion and production of French luxury goods. The shipment of furniture, as well as its insurance and cost was often handled by a system of financiers and merchants throughout Europe.

one such voyage, visiting fashionable design shops on the Rue Saint-Hon re in order to decorate their Palace of Pavlosk near Saint Petersburg.¹⁰²

In the previous chapter it was determined that the artistic primacy of France on the “cultural map of Europe was not solely the value of their achievement but also a convergence of political, social, and economic phenomena conditioning the wide popularization of the attainments.”¹⁰³ French language and cultural savoir-faire were at the height of influence in the mid eighteenth century, yet the nation’s political might began to wane after the death of Louis XIV in 1715. Ostrowski accounts for this discrepancy by explaining that “a cultural position is usually very stable; changes in it occur more slowly than in politics or the economy.”¹⁰⁴ In fact, even as France’s international authority diminished, the acceleration in foreign patronage and the expanding role of French dealers actually facilitated an increase in the market for luxury furniture.

In order to further investigate the international zeal for French exports, one must once more acknowledge the prodigious career of Juste-Aur le Meissonnier. While he is the designer perhaps most associated with the Rococo, Meissonnier’s reception abroad was generally more favorable than within France.¹⁰⁵ The Parisian iteration of the Rococo is generally somewhat less exuberant than Meissonnier’s own taste, or that of

¹⁰² Gillian Wilson and Catherine Hess, *Summary Catalogue of European Decorative Arts in the J. Paul Getty Museum* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2001): 42.

¹⁰³ Ostrowski, *Art in Poland*, 56.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁰⁵ His primary patrons were in France, Portugal, England and Poland.

Central and Eastern Europeans; therefore, his oeuvre varies considerably depending on his intended audience. Meissonnier's drawings for the salon in the home of Polish Grand Marshal Bielinski (Figures 14-16) are manifestations of his preferred mode of unrestrained imagination. Nineteenth-century writer Lady Dilke said of the room:

We cannot help observing that whilst [Meissonnier] sends to Portugal or to Poland the most recklessly fantastic schemes, his imagination is at once sobered when a Paris patron... has to be considered...this curious difference always distinguishes that which the French design for themselves from that which they make to send abroad.¹⁰⁶

Her analysis in turn begs the question of whether these export objects of unbridled creativity are in fact stylistically superior to the restrained Parisian aesthetic. Installed in 1734, Branicki must have visited the famed Bielinski salon. Perhaps he grew covetous of the elaborate interior belonging to a fellow Warsaw official in service of the crown, and upon seeing Pineau's engraving, placed his commission for an elaborate Rococo cabinet.

The market for furniture was a 'top down' system originating with royalty and the elite and then trickling down to the emerging middle class and possibly below. Cities were the nucleus of decorative trends because objects tended to be produced in urban capitals.¹⁰⁷ Since furniture was designed and manufactured in cities, it is logical that these objects first gained caché within an urban context before spreading to wider society. While Warsaw is a European capital, it was not necessarily a significant tastemaker, and therefore, wealthy Poles such as Branicki had their finest furniture made to order in France. One may recall that the decentralized power structure of

¹⁰⁶ Donnell, "Juste Aurèle Meissonnier and the Rococo Style," 258.

¹⁰⁷ Peter Thornton, *Authentic Décor: The Domestic Interior, 1620-1920* (New York: Viking, 1984).

Poland resulted in a group of magnates who each ruled vast rural territories. Likewise, cities failed to rise in importance or prestige in Poland, and in turn their artistic production and influence was limited. According to Jan K. Ostrowski, Politics further hindered the development of urban areas and in turn the arts: "There was an additional obstacle in the form of the system of democracy of the landed gentry established in the early sixteenth century, with its growing xenophobia and contempt for townspeople's occupations and mode of life, while the later constituted the basis for the modern culture of the west."¹⁰⁸ This provincialism prevented Polish artists from flourishing on the international stage or proving influential beyond national borders. The massive quantity of foreign imports ordered by elites both explains the lack of artistic infrastructure within Poland and the need to self-fashion in line with the international community.

Summoning foreign talent, one of the key mechanisms of contact, proved crucial to the flowering of the Rococo abroad.¹⁰⁹ An exodus of French craftsmen arrived in Eastern Europe after the 1685 revocation of the Edict of Nantes, their religious freedom no longer guaranteed domestically. Later, the international atmosphere of eighteenth-century Europe allowed not only aristocrats but also French artisans and cabinetmakers to move freely about the continent, spreading Parisian techniques and styles as they traveled. Many set up workshops in the provinces or ventured outward to the courts of Europe. Verlet refers to this common occurrence as a "tour de France of *ébéniste*

¹⁰⁸ Ostrowski, *Art in Poland*, 57.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

journeymen.”¹¹⁰ Polish sources indicate that there were indeed French artisans living and working in Warsaw and even in Baiłystok, where Count Branicki’s primary residence was located. It is no wonder then, that the Branicki inventory describes both local furniture manufactured in the French vogue, as well as imported examples like the Dubois corner cabinet.

The rivalrous attitude amongst fashionable Parisian patrons explains the frequent changes in French furniture styles. Meanwhile in Poland, artisans imitating their trends tended to perpetuate existing, popular forms with only slight modifications.¹¹¹ Journeymen and Polish craftsmen relied upon imported furniture books, or the drawings and prints they carried with them from abroad.¹¹² Often these publications were out of date with rapidly changing French style, and yet they were widely imitated. An editorial from 1756 insists that “the French designers of ornaments have been and are at present esteemed the most happy in their inventions... No wonder that all the rest of the European nations take the French patterns of ornaments for their rule and pattern to imitate.”¹¹³

The result of the influx in foreign craftsmen working side by side with Polish artisans was that indigenous styles became “transformed and more or less standardized in imitation of French furniture.” According to Pierre Verlet, such assimilation of the

¹¹⁰ Verlet, *French Furniture*, 19.

¹¹¹ Fiske Kimball, “The Sources of the ‘Philadelphia Chippendale,’” *Bulletin of the Pennsylvania Museum* 21, no. 104 (June 1926): 183.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Trentmann, “Materiality in the Future of History,” 297.

Rococo movement “demonstrates the hegemony of Parisian furniture, even over local production.”¹¹⁴ While in much of Europe fashionability meant alignment with prevailing French trends, foreign products designed in that mode became something entirely innovative. Richard H. Randall Jr. explains that the national expressions of the movement often diverted from anything the French would have recognized as their own: “What may have looked to a German ‘very French’ as it stood, new and unusual in a drawing room of Schloss Bruhl, looks to us today exceedingly German... the details selected in [a designer like] Roentgen’s mind as being characteristically French would have looked like a misunderstanding to a Parisian.”¹¹⁵ This borrowing and adapting is the quintessence of cultural hybridity. Countries that chose to welcome the French Rococo within their borders initially relied on foreign print sources and artisans but later these nations fused their own local traditions with the foreign mode. In the instance of the *encoignure*, the French import is actually quite Polish in feeling. Each of the abovementioned influences on production impacted the perception, adaptation and transmission of French Rococo style and it was out of this context that Branicki’s *encoignure* was ultimately realized. Some scholars argue that commissioned and imported pieces like the *encoignure* influenced contemporary design in Poland; yet the cabinet was contained within a private residence and therefore unavailable for ready inspection by Polish cabinetmakers in search of new ideas. Most elite furniture stood within the walled confines of great palaces. Furniture trends were therefore

¹¹⁴ Verlet, *French Furniture*, 33.

¹¹⁵ Randall, “The French Taste,” 46-55.

promulgated primarily by other forces. The three upcoming sections will more specifically address additional components of cultural diffusion.

Transmission through Prints and Ornament Books

The advent of the printing press in the middle of the fifteenth century was among the most significant factors affecting the dissemination of style. Drawings for decorative schemes and furniture were from then on reproduced, distributed and in turn copied throughout Europe. By the eighteenth century, print houses became essential to the international transfer of French Rococo style. Gabriel Huquier (1695–1772), perhaps the most influential Parisian publisher of the period, created engravings of the work after Nicolas Pineau and Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier, among others.¹¹⁶ With many issues in circulation, ornament books and prints generally served as a style guide for designers and patrons all over the continent.

Two primary types of ornament book existed during this period: those with illustrations serving as records of pieces which had been, or could be, constructed and those with more conceptual designs.¹¹⁷ For example, Pineau's drawing of the *encoignure* serves as a record of an object that could be (and was) actually made, whereas much of Meissonnier's oeuvre tends to be filled with fantastical designs that no cabinet maker could follow literally. Such feats of imagination were just as important, however,

¹¹⁶ Davidson, "Ornament of Bizarre Imagination," 43.

¹¹⁷ William M. Ivins Jr., "Eighteenth-Century Books of Furniture Design," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 13, no. 12 (December 1918): 269.

because they functioned as reference material for cabinetmakers interested in incorporating the latest and most fashionable decorative motifs. These works were intended to inspire an overall impression of a particular style, from which cabinet makers might devise their own, more practical patterns. An artisan would rarely exactly copy the designs from an ornament book, because they frequently possessed inferior skill to those fanciful, highly complex renderings.¹¹⁸ Additionally, most furniture of the time was made to order in accordance with the patron's taste, and therefore one design could rarely be used for more than one customer.¹¹⁹

Tracing the conception of the Branicki *encoignure* begins with the print sources that inspired the Count's commission. It has been stated that sometime in the first decades of the eighteenth century, Nicolas Pineau, a leading interpreter of Parisian style, created a drawing for a corner cupboard in Régence taste (Figure 7). In 1727, Pierre Mariette made an engraving of Pineau's image, situating it within the context of a fashionable French bedroom (Figure 13). This version was later copied and widely distributed by Georg Mertz in Germany.¹²⁰ From there it circulated to capital cities across the continent, including Warsaw, where Count Branicki almost certainly came into contact with the print. Perhaps inspired by the engraving of a French interior as well as the Polish *zeitgeist* for the Rococo, Branicki placed a commission for the cabinet pictured in the illustration. The object was manufactured in Paris with minor stylistic

¹¹⁸ Carl J. Weinhardt Jr., "Ornament Prints and Drawings of the Eighteenth Century," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 18, no. 5 (January, 1960): 145

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ Gillian Wilson, unpublished article for *Art & Antiques*.

updates, provisions that were orchestrated by Lullier, a *marchand-mercier*.¹²¹ The piece was ultimately constructed by Jacques Dubois, a renowned Parisian *ébéniste* who owned an export furniture business. He made the specified modifications to the original drawing in accordance with Branicki's preferences and some eight years later, shipped the completed cabinet to his Warsaw patron.

Pineau's original drawing is comparatively less adorned than the final Rococo cabinet made for Branicki. As explained, engravings were generally a point of influence for designers and patrons but it is rare they would be followed precisely. Dubois modified aspects of the *encoignure's* design so that it would appear more emphatically Rococo than the original drawing. Furthermore, although Pineau's sketch and the corresponding prints were the basis for the Count's commission, they reflect the Régence style which was popular some twenty-five years earlier than the date of the cabinet. By the time the design reached Branicki in Poland, he acknowledged it was somewhat out of fashion and in need of updating. Dubois cleverly retained the basic shape of the Pineau's stately cabinet (both the drawing and final product have an elaborate clock at the top, upper shelves for display, and two doors in the lower section) but added sinuous ormolu hardware to modernize the silhouette. The effect is "a

¹²¹ A *marchand-mercier* is a dealer who sold furniture and luxury wares. They will be discussed in the upcoming section.

writhing mass of curves dominating the underlying structure and transforming its character.”¹²²

The stylistic evolution from Régence to Rococo is typified by the modernization of the encoignure. Improvements to the piece were realized through the size and shape of the new gilt mounts Dubois selected for the cabinet. According to Penelope Hunter-Stiebel, “The design has been altered to reflect the accelerating tempo of the visual arts over the intervening decade as the graciousness of the Règence was supplanted by the exuberance of the Rococo.”¹²³ The *contrecourbe*¹²⁴ forms undulating along the outline of the cabinet were an attempt to align with contemporary Parisian fashions, since Pineau’s model reflected trends that were decades old. The precise mount-maker who contributed these exquisite elements is unknown, but a surviving list of bronze workers who provided pieces to Dubois’ workshop surely contains the answer.¹²⁵ While the original function of metal hardware was to protect the vulnerable corner joins and provide a surface onto which candlelight could reflect, “the best mounts are true sculpture, defining the style of the object to which they are applied.”¹²⁶

¹²² Penelope Hunter-Stiebel, “Exalted Hardware, the Bronze Mounts of French Furniture, Part 1: Baroque, Regence and Rococo,” *The Magazine Antiques* (January 1985), 241.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ S and C shaped scrolling decoration.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 239. Unlike Parisian furniture makers who were required by the guild to stamp their wares, mount-makers did not sign their work. “Struggle between the guild of furniture makers and the guild of bronze casters led to a 1723 police edict preventing cabinetmakers from producing their own mounts. No provision for their attachment had been made, hence the undisguised screws in holes drilled by the *ébéniste*.”

¹²⁶ Ibid. 238.

Among the beautifully crafted mounts, a gilt female figure sits atop the clock (Figure 18) and two highly sculptural putti cavort on either side of the central shelf. The print source details each of these elements and yet it appears the position held by the elegant statuette was altered from Pineau's original conception. Scholars debate her attribution but the most compelling suggestion calls her an allegory of Poland, replete with a pet eagle, the national bird. Perhaps Pineau's original drawing offers a generalized female figure at the top of the clock so that patrons can select their own symbolic character when placing their commission. If she is, indeed, a personification of Poland, how appropriate an emblem for a devoted statesman such as Branicki.¹²⁷ The putti, meanwhile, remain entirely consistent between the print source and cupboard; each rides a tame lion, representative of love's ability to conquer might. The existence of this exquisite object is not "prior to or independent of social practices but codependent."¹²⁸ *Marchands-merciers* were responsible for negotiating subtle additions, such as these, onto the final product. Often they grew wealthy orchestrating customizations between clients and artisans. The cabinet's overall design, for all its updating, was still out of step with Parisian taste by 1740, and yet it was intended to meet the expectations of an international client for whom it was still entirely relevant.

¹²⁷ Other possibilities include the female personification of Astrology because of her headband of stars.

¹²⁸ Trentmann, "Materiality in the Future of History," 297.

***Marchands-Merciers* and the Eighteenth-Century Luxury Market**

It has been determined that the improvements to Pineau's illustration were likely a negotiation between Count Branicki and Monsieur Lullier, the dealer through whom he ordered the *encoignure*. Correspondences written by Branicki and his palace officials¹²⁹ have revealed this individual's identity but beyond these surviving negotiations, one can only speculate about this mysterious Frenchman and the import business he presumably operated in Poland. Lullier may have liaised with other "agents of dissemination"¹³⁰ in Paris. These *marchands-merciers*, were go-betweens who relayed the sometimes unreasonably high expectations of their clients to able French artisans. *Ebénistes* and *menuisiers* eagerly met their challenges, exhibiting an ever impressive level of technical mastery in what they produced.¹³¹

The scope of a *marchands'* enterprise was truly international. They were connected to far-flung clients like Branicki through a network cultural ambassadors and attachés. Besides Lullier in Poland, Branicki had agents in Paris selecting works of art and furniture on his behalf. Inventories name Joseph Rousseau as the trend scout who visited cabinet-makers and tapestry manufactories to purchase French goods for the Count. In fact, some of the Parisian furniture Rousseau shipped to Branicki was later copied by local craftsmen in Poland.¹³²

¹²⁹ Perhaps most notably the Count's the frustrated letter regarding the cabinet's eight year delay which was quoted in Chapter 1.

¹³⁰ Verlet, *French Furniture*, 12.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 26. *Menuisier* is a joiner.

¹³² Wilson, unpublished article, *Art & Antiques*.

While the traditional role of the *marchands-mercier* was to negotiate between craftsmen and elite patrons, as time progressed, they became increasingly involved with other aspects of the furniture trade, sometimes manipulating the market in order to maximize demand. As taste became increasingly rarefied, *marchands* utterly dominated the luxury trade. Novelty, beauty and comfort were the design features they strove to incorporate into each completed object. The consistent, effortless union of those qualities in French objects contributed to the perception of Paris furniture as high art.

Marchands also served as intermediaries between disparate craftsmen, procuring expensive and diverse materials for the completion of a single object. The production of a piece like the *encoignure* included the cooperation of the *menuisier*, *ebeniste*, *bronzier*, chaser and gilder all working under the direction of the *marchand*. They often financed the expensive ormolu mounts like those described on the Branicki cabinet as they were often too great an investment for the cabinetmaker, alone. Finally, luxury dealers likely played a role in orchestrating the transportation of the cabinet from Paris to Warsaw and were therefore essential to the conceptual and literal transfer of the French Rococo to Poland.¹³³

¹³³ Stürmer, 521.

Jacques Dubois: Celebrated *Ebéniste*

Jacques Dubois, the *ébéniste* commissioned to construct the Branicki cabinet, typically sold his furniture through Monsieur Bertin, a *marchand-mercier*.¹³⁴ Craftsmen often preferred not to deal directly with patrons, acknowledging that they lacked the social finesse required to flatter their aristocratic clientele into purchasing new products and investing in expensive materials. Dubois specialized in veneered and lacquered furniture in the fully realized Rococo style. He was probably acquainted with the renowned *ébéniste* Bernard van Risenburgh as they worked in a similar style and were both represented by the same *marchand-mercier*.¹³⁵

Little is known about Jacques Dubois' life, or even the size of his oeuvre, but if the numerous surviving pieces stamped with his name are any indication, his artistic output must have been rather large. The inventory prepared just after his death describes an extensive workshop replete with twelve benches and 127 pieces of furniture still in progress.¹³⁶ His production was tremendously diverse, consisting of bureaus, *secrétaires*, pedestals, clocks, and coffers to name but a few of the objects mentioned in the document. Evidence of his extensive and highly international reputation includes the shop he opened specifically for the export of his furniture, a

¹³⁴ Wilson, unpublished article, *Art & Antiques*.

¹³⁵ Pierre Verlet, "Jacques Dubois," in *French Cabinetmakers of the Eighteenth Century*, (Paris: Hachette, 1965): 101

¹³⁶ Alexandre Pradère, *French Furniture Makers: The Art of the Ebéniste from Louis XIV to the Revolution*, Translated by Perran Wood (Malibu: J.Paul Getty Museum, 1989): 169.

testament to the enduring popularity of the Rococo through mid-century.¹³⁷ Although a historically ambiguous figure, Dubois' contribution to aesthetics of the encoignure cannot be overstated. His artful adaptation of Pineau's drawing demonstrates the craftsman's skill and originality. Pierre Verlet explains that "the alterations he made... [are] more rocaille, more contorted, but also more consistent than [Pineau's] design, the bronze decoration of which is not fully balanced."¹³⁸ Dubois' interpretation was greatly prized not just by Branicki in the mid eighteenth century, but also later admitted by subsequent collectors, connoisseurs, and most recently, scholars of decorative arts. The object's fascinating history rendered it an ideal subject for a focused study such as this one.

¹³⁷ Verlet, "Jacques Dubois:" 101.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

CONCLUSION

With origins in Paris, the Rococo found wide reception throughout Europe. The style's transmission was accelerated through widely circulated print sources, the international export of French furniture, and the frequent travel of artisans and aristocrats. Specific conditions informing the creation of Dubois' *encoignure* are the topic of this thesis, and as such, the object became a case study for how and why the Rococo manifested in the distinct culture of Poland. Among the significant conclusions to emerge from this undertaking was that the dissemination and appropriation of French taste was inextricably linked to identity formation and other socio-political dimensions. Principally, the ways in which the Polish aristocracy utilized Rococo style differed considerably from its first iteration in Paris. The object's unique attributes suggest an intentional adaptation and modification of the Parisian precedent. While this assertion is well evidenced throughout the text, earlier scholarship argued that the decorative mode was passively received by Poland and that its unique exuberance was a misinterpretation of the French models they were trying to imitate.

Such salient debates in eighteenth-century scholarship were addressed and problematized in connection to the *encoignure*. Methodological models— among them the notion of a style center and its far reaching periphery— provided the basis for preceding chapters. All the while, analysis of the cultural meanings connected to the decorative mode and its plausible interaction with indigenous style offered further

historical context for the corner cabinet. Ultimately my thesis sought to illustrate the complex network of influences and theories that can be extrapolated from a single Parisian *encoignure*. Revisionist art history has advanced the study of decorative arts and domestic interiors from an earlier investigation of stylistic shifts to a dynamic field in which all aspects of eighteenth-century society and culture are considered. Contemporary practice now seeks to redefine the discipline through the incorporation of seemingly disparate ideologies. No longer relegated to the subfield of “applied arts,” twenty-first-century art historical study strives to eliminate the hierarchical divisions between fine and decorative arts. This decidedly modern notion posits that furniture can be analyzed and interpreted just as more canonical media have been for centuries. The corner cabinet was the ideal subject for such an investigation because its carefully documented provenance allows for a holistic understanding of the *encoignure*’s original environment. Remarkably, this study is the first complete history written for this important and fascinating object. Cultural transfer, the central topic of this thesis, is rather timely as the world becomes increasingly globalized and the earlier preoccupation with national artistic expressions has given way to an interest in the interconnectedness of outwardly distant cultures.

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APPENDIX

Translation of the Branicki Inventory¹³⁹

Two curtains made from Chinese silk decorated with flames; four metal gilt curtain overlaps; two iron bars for curtains; one porcelain bottle for perfumes; one censer. In the dressing-room there is a single door with a German iron lock; a linen door padding printed in blue flowers; an old oak desk with a brass decorative handle. Near the window there is a table with a shelf, upholstered on the bottom with green fabric and on the top with sackcloth; one small table with a shelf, upholstered on the bottom with green cloth and on the top with sackcloth; one cupboard with a double door and a lock. On the iron bar around the window there are two drawn curtains from green fabric; one carved stone chimneypiece, in which there is one cast-iron plate decorated with a gryphon; tow iron wolves; one firewood box; one stove with wooden legs made from Polish tiles; one chair with wooden legs made in the English fashion. Above the dressing room, on the entresol there are two ordinary small tables, two small simple tables and two couches. In the Grand Room there are double doors with gilt panels, a French brass gilt lock and hinge; five pieces of padding for the door made from crimson damask and braided around with both wide and narrow gold braids. There are gilt garnish stripes around the carved door padding. In the alcove there is a large crimson damask bed with all the pieces which belong to it... belonging, sumptuously decorated with both wide and narrow gold braids. On the bed there are four denim mattresses

¹³⁹ Inventory of Jan Klemens Branicki, 1772." 82f.535-36, The Main Archives of the Ancient Records of Warsaw. Translated from Polish by Dorota Rzymyska, Slavic Language Services, Los Angeles, CA 1992.

stuffed with horsehair; one denim bolster stuffed with horsehair; one double denim mattress stuffed with down and covered with red plush. The covering of the palestra is also made from red plush.

...red, a sofa, chairs, and nine taborets; one Parisian corner cupboard with ornaments, mirrors, a Parisian clock on top, and two metal gilt candlesticks. On the top of the cabinet there are: one porcelain figure; one metal gilt piece- on the... there is a bronze colored... with a vase and flowers; two larger bronze gilt Chinese vases with porcelain flowers; one porcelain figure on a metal gilt pedestal decorated with porcelain flowers, with a small, gold clock on the front. The corner cupboard is covered by a tapestry made from red fabric. Over the doors and the stove there are three paintings of figured in carved ornamented gilt picture frames. There are also there crimson curtains, made from Chinese silk, with silk strings; one carved marble Parisian chimneypiece; three larger porcelain figures set in a similar fashion. In the chimneypiece there is a cast-iron plate decorated with a gryphon. On both sides there are two copperplates; two Parisian wolves with metal gilt horses. Near the chimneypiece there are firetongs, prickers, and a spatula with metal gilt holders; Parisian bellows for the chimneypiece; one box for firewood; one Saxonian cast-iron stove gilded on the bottom, with stone legs; three large glass windows; three iron gilt bars with espagnolettes in the windows; three red cloth mattresses for windows. There is an alcove in this room. Carved paneling and shutters are gilded and painted in many colors. The stucco ceiling is decorated with gilt ornaments and figures.



Figure 1. Cabinet by Jacques Dubois; clock movement by Étienne Le Noir; enamel by Antoine Nicolas Martinière, *Corner Cabinet (Encoignure)*, about 1744-52. Oak veneered with *bois satiné* and rosewood; gilt bronze mounts, 9 ft. 6 in. x 4 ft. 3 in. x 2 ft. 4 ½ in. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

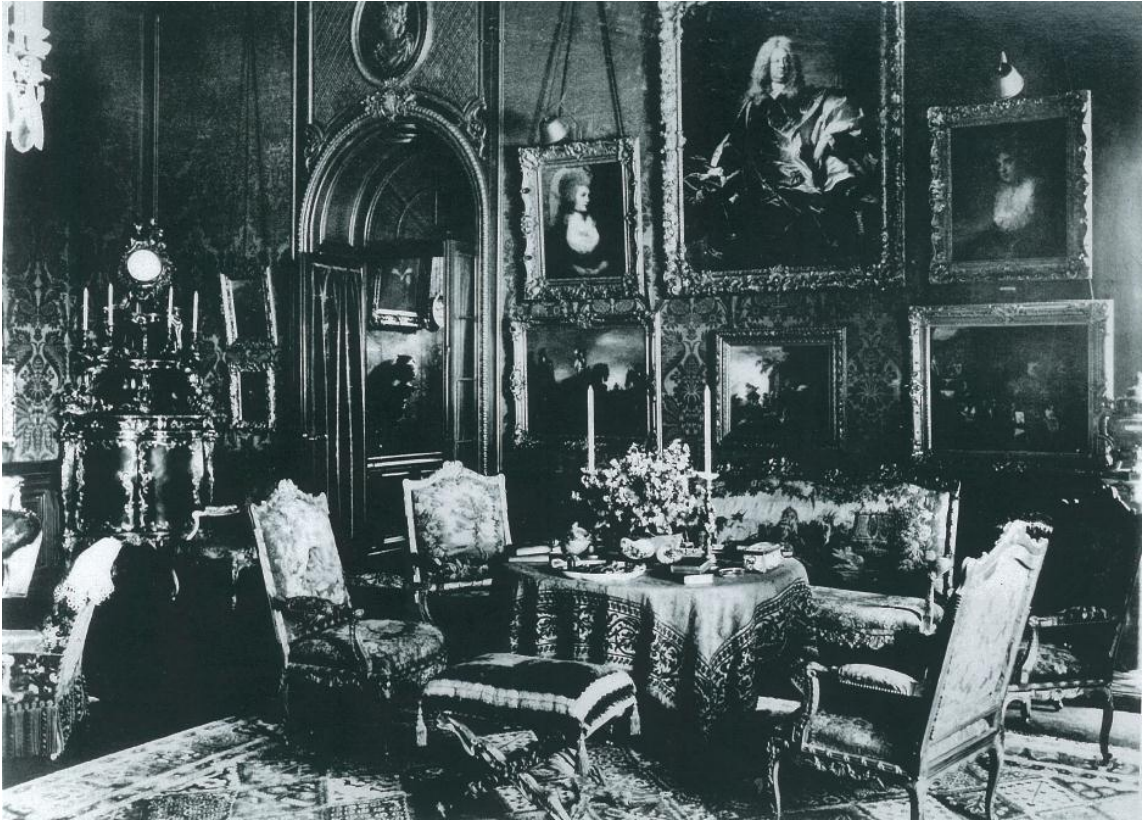


Figure 2. A salon in the house of Baron Alphonse de Rothschild, Vienna as it appeared before World War II. The corner cupboard can be seen in the back left of the room. Photograph courtesy of Rosenberg and Stiebel, New York.



Figure 3. Antoni Tallmann, *Portrait of Jan Klemens Branicki*, c. 1725. Oil on canvas.



Figure 4. Jacques Dubois, *Corner Cupboard*, about 1755. Oak painted with *vernis Martin*, gilt bronze mounts, and *brèche d'Alep* top, 3 ft. 2 ¼ in. x 2 ft. 7 ½ in. x 1 ft. 11 1/8 in. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.



Figure 5. Bernard van Risenburgh II, *Corner Cupboard*, about 1740. Oak and maple veneered with amaranth and cherry, doors set with panels of Japanese lacquer, *vernis Martin*, gilt-bronze mounts, marble tops, 3 ft. 3 1/8 in. x 2 ft. 10 3/4 in. x 2 ft. 1/8 in. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.



Figure 6. Attributed to Jean-Pierre Latz, with floral marquetry by Jean-François Oeben, Corner Cupboard (Encoignure), about 1750 – 1755. Oak veneered with amaranth, maple, walnut, mahogany, sycamore, satinwood, tulipwood, gilt bronze mounts, *brèche d'Alep* top, 3 ft. 2 ¼ in. x 2 ft. 9 ¾ in. x 1 ft. 11 1/8 in. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

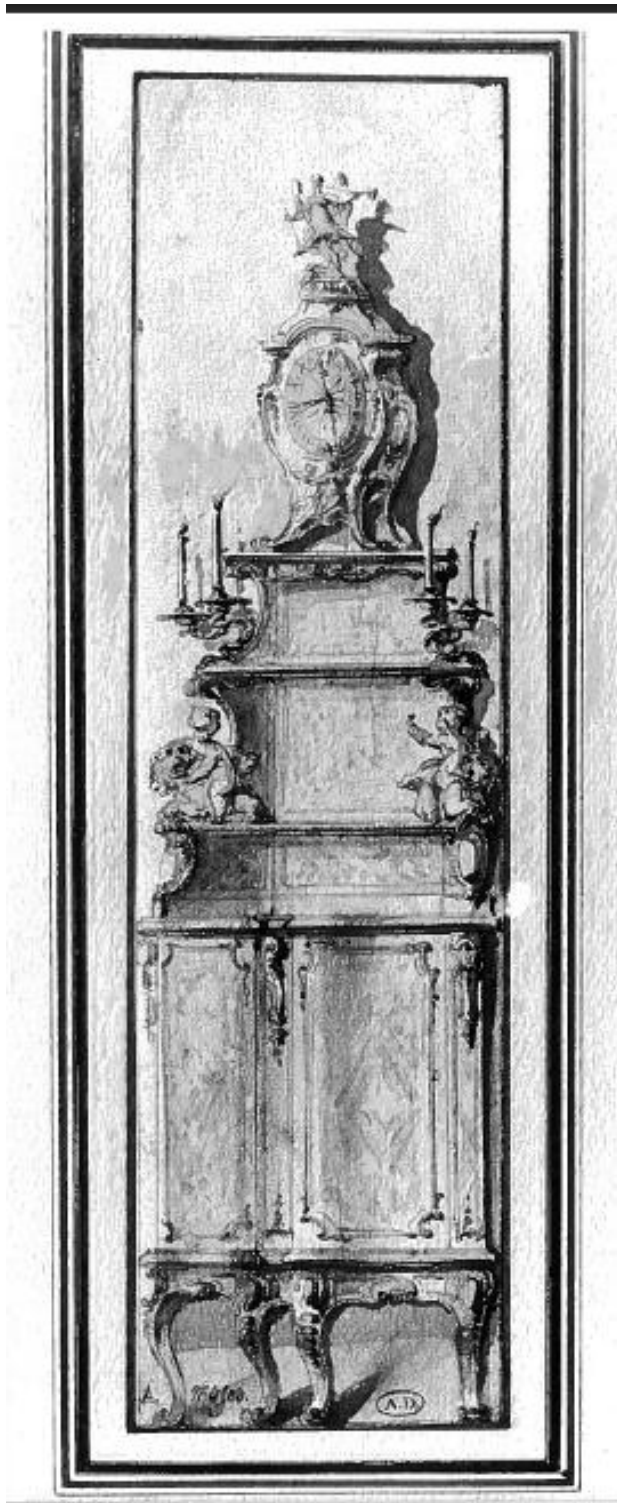


Figure 7. Nicolas Pineau, *Drawing for an encoignure*, c. 1725. Pen and black ink, brush and gray wash, graphite on cream laid paper. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris.

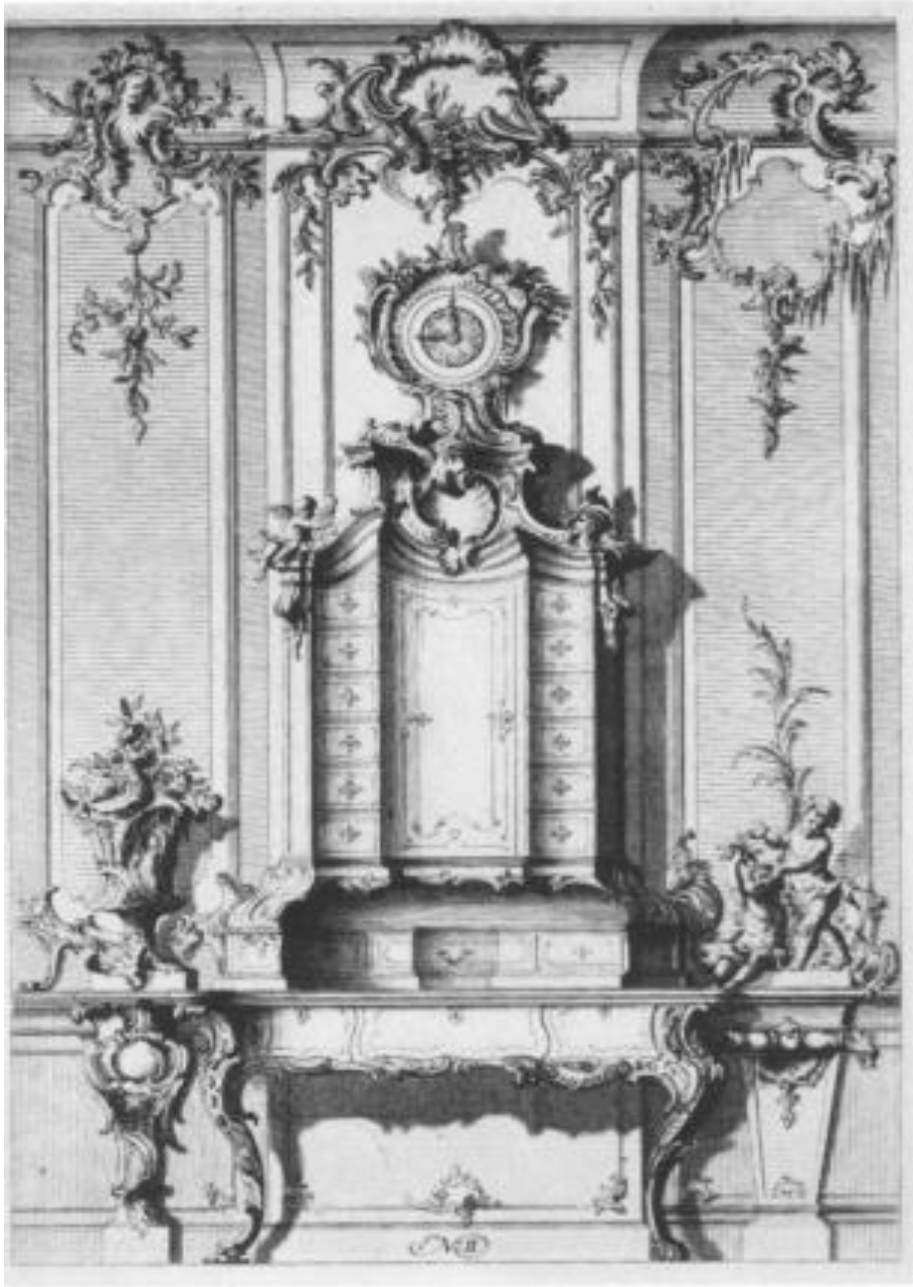


Figure 8. Franz Xaver Habermann, *Design for an Interior Elevation with a Secrétaire*, about 1760. Etching. Published by J.G. Hertel, Augsburg. Height 10 ¼ inches. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

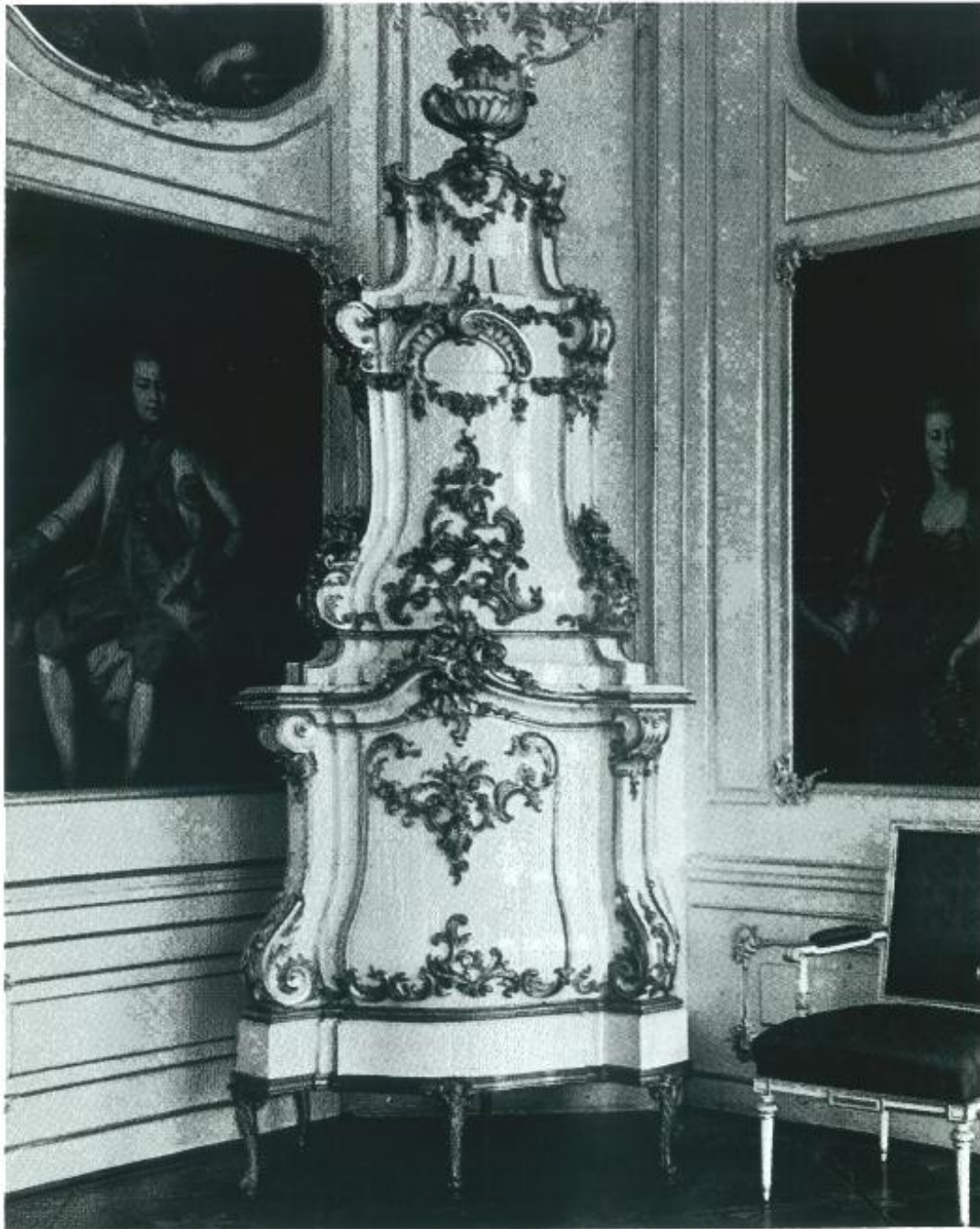


Figure 9. Unknown artist, *Ceramic Stove ("Kachelofen") in the South Wing of Prague Castle, Czech Republic, c. 1750.*

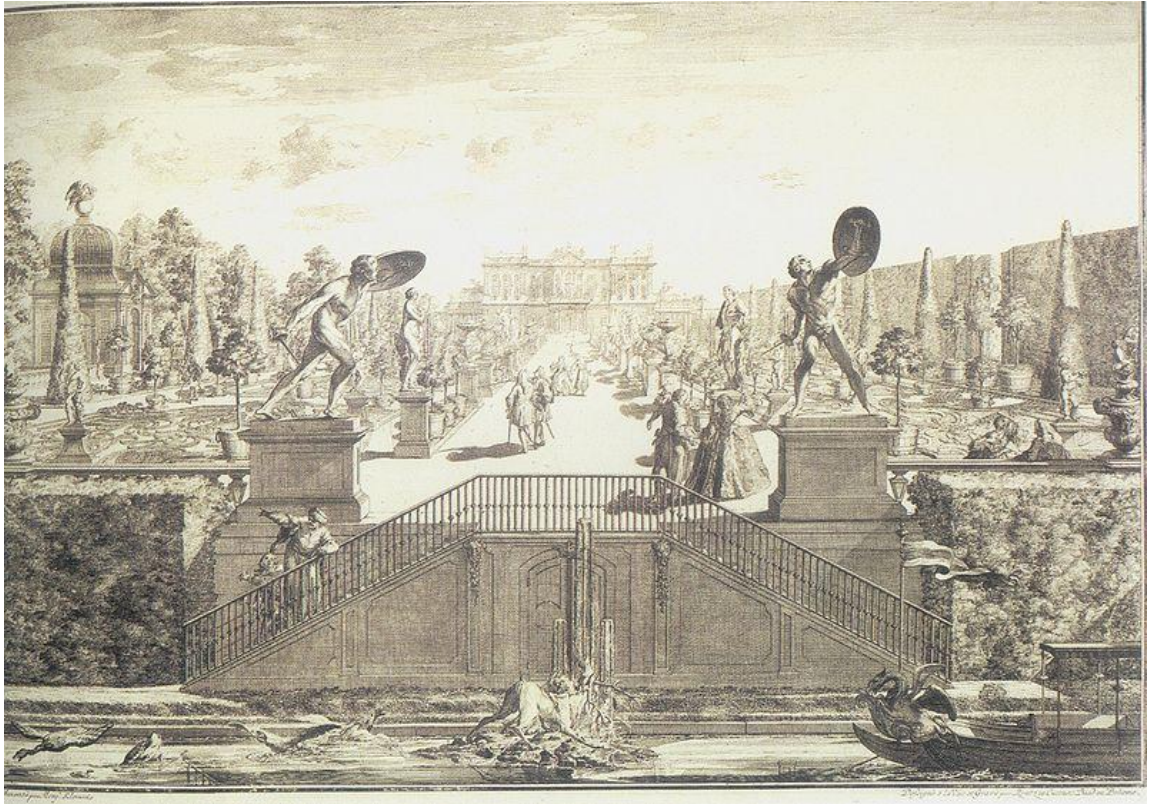


Figure 10. Pierre Ricaud de Tirregaille, *Branicki Palace and Gardens in Bialystok*, 1750s. Engraving. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.



Figure 11. Johann Sigmund Deybel, Branicki Palace in Warsaw, constructed in 1752.

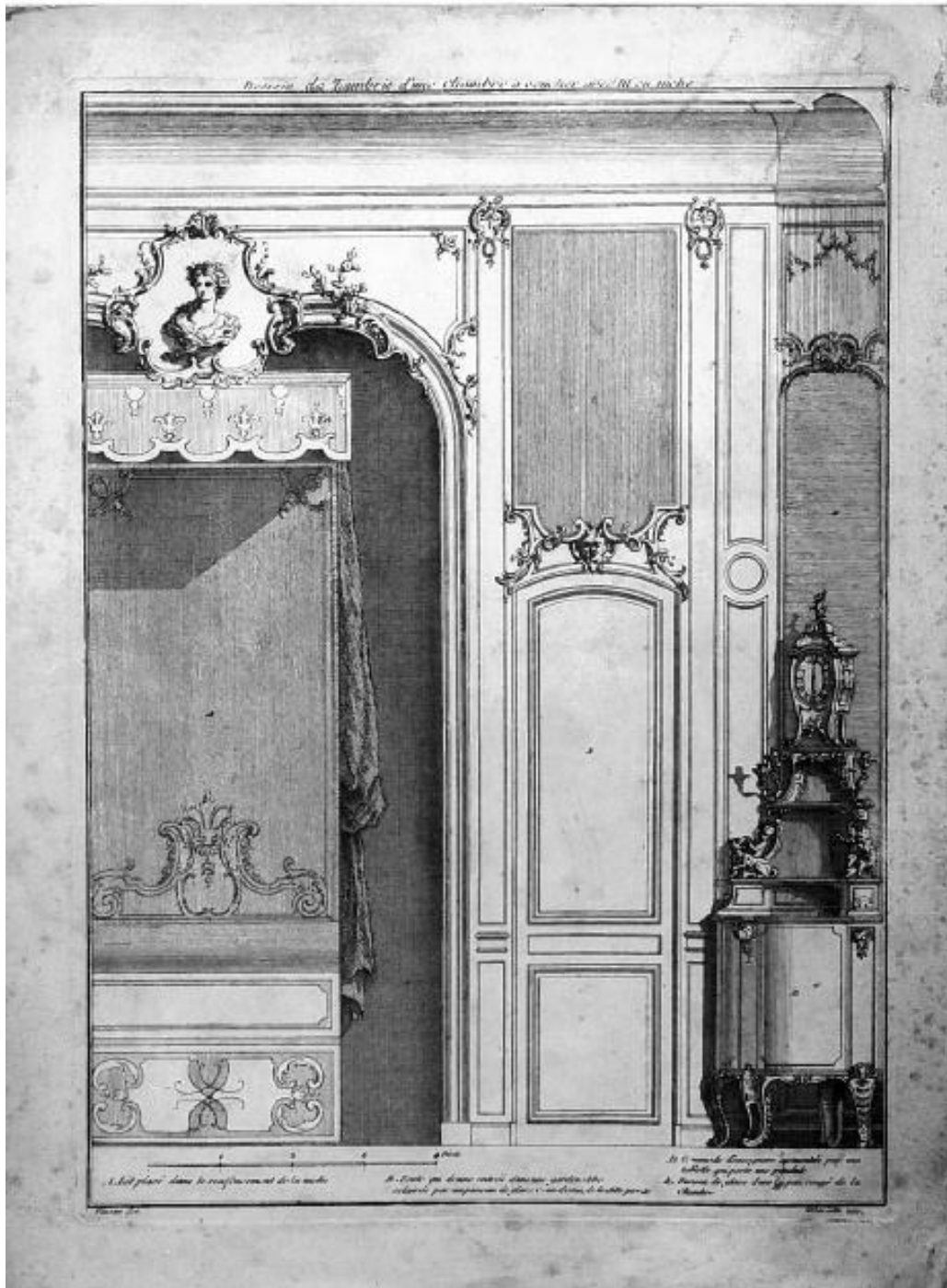


Figure 13. Pierre Mariette, Engraving after a drawing by Nicolas Pineau, *Corner Cupboard in a Bedroom*, c. 1727. Engraving. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.



Figure 14. Pierre Chenu, after drawings by Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier, *The Cabinet of Count Bielinski, Grand Marshall of Poland*, plate 87 in *Oeuvre de Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier*, c. 1738-48 (designed 1734). Etching and engraving on white laid paper. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

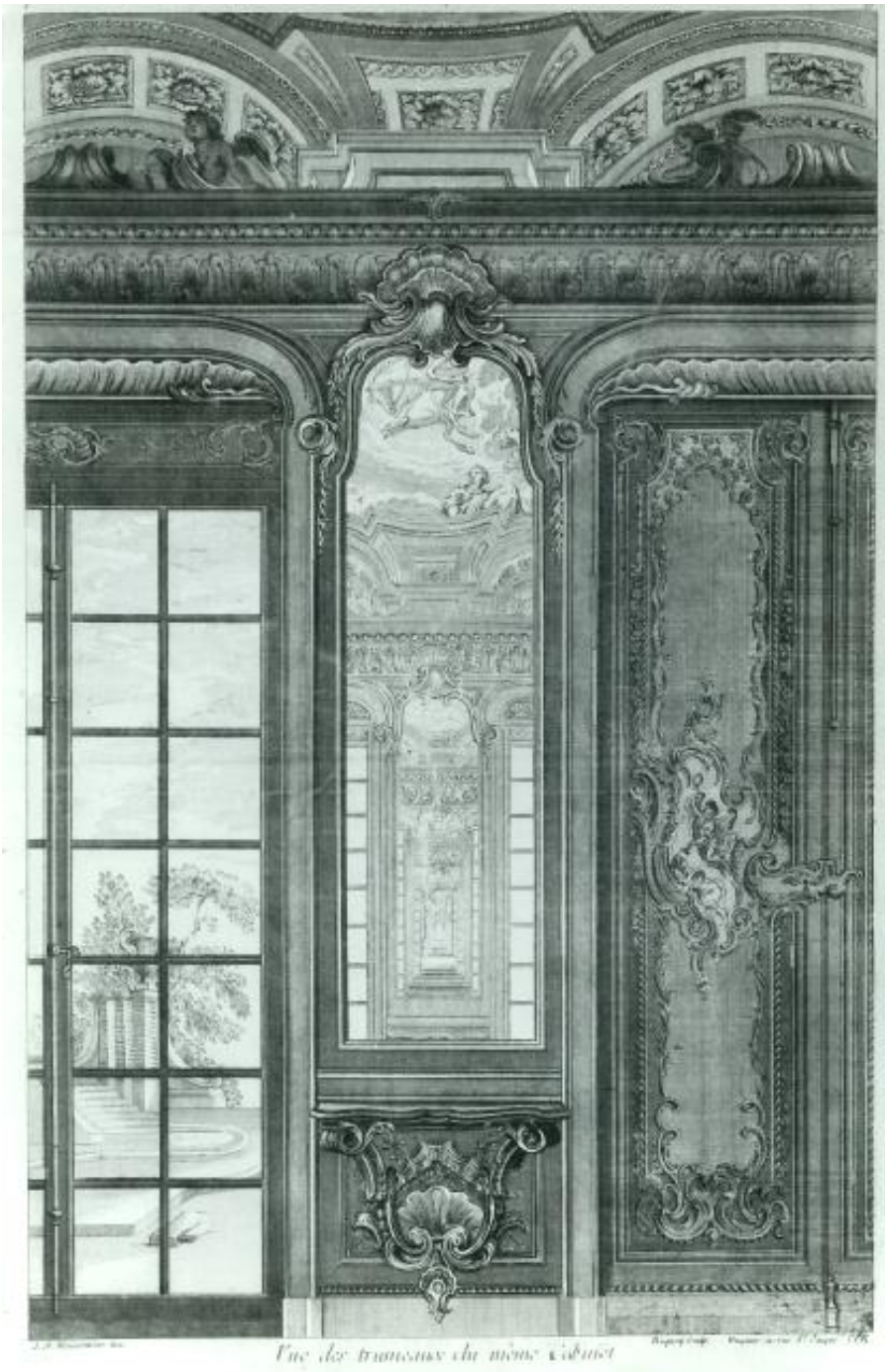


Figure 15. Pierre Chenu, after drawings by Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier, *View of Count Bielinski's Cabinet*, plate 89 in *Oeuvre de Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier*, c. 1738-48 (designed 1734). Etching and engraving on white laid paper. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.



Figure 16. Pierre Chenu, after drawings by Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier, *View of Count Bielinski's Cabinet*, in *Oeuvre de Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier*, c. 1738-48 (designed 1734). Etching and engraving on white laid paper. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.



Figure 17. Bernard van Risenburgh, *Commode*, about 1750. Oak and walnut veneered with *bois satiné*, amaranth, and kingwood, gilt-bronze mounts, and *campan rouge* marble, 33 1/8 x 36 3/8 x 20 in. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.



Figure 18. Cabinet by Jacques Dubois; clock movement by Étienne Le Noir; enamel by Antoine Nicolas Martinière, *Corner Cabinet (Encoignure)* (Detail), about 1744-52. Oak veneered with *bois satiné* and rosewood; gilt bronze mounts, 9 ft. 6 in. x 4 ft. 3 in. x 2 ft. 4 ½ in. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.