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Maulbertsch's "Liberation of the Virgin" in the Moravian Gallery in Brno

On the relationship
of Franz Anton Maulbertsch
to Peter Paul Rubens

Ivo Krsek

The question of the theme of this small painting¹ has yet to be definitively clarified. The designation *Liberation of the Virgin*, [Fig. 1] to which we are inclined, describes the nature of the scene only in general terms, just like other titles suggested by the existing professional literature (*Abduction, A Scene from a Legend*). It is highly probable that the picture depicts a specific event. An attempt to concretize – but at first sight unsuccessful – was a proposal to understand it as “The Rape of Proserpine”. Closer to the truth seemed to be the assumption by Klára Garas that this was a scene from the legend of Saint Ladislaus. Nevertheless, serious doubts remain² and a more satisfactory interpretation is likely to emerge in the future. In particular, it cannot be ruled out that the theme of the painting is hidden in late Renaissance or Baroque heroic poetry, although this has yet to be demonstrated.

Since its discovery *The Liberation of the Virgin* has awakened attention due to its unusual artistic qualities. It is a manifestation of the same unleashed fantasy as manifested on a monumental scale in the frescoes in Heiligekreuz-Guttenbrunn (1757), Sümeg (1757–1758), Mikulov and Kroměříž (1759).³ The fact that the painting dates to the same period as these murals is also indicated by an important detail: the motif of a white rider appears in the above-mentioned frescoes. In particular, the centurion in the central scene of the church fresco in Heiligekreuz-Guttenbrunn and the same figure from the Crucifixion fresco scene in Sümeg are very similar to the Brno painting. In both cases, not just from the attitude of the horse with its sloping neck, but also by the strange inclination of the centurion, in Sümeg moreover through the emphasis on the horse, a dazzling white which becomes the artistic focus of the painting, while the rider and in particular both protagonists, Mary and the Crucified Christ recede into the background, the painter allowed himself similar licence in the *Liberation of the Virgin*, when he let only part of the



1 – Franz Anton Maulbertsch, **Liberation of the Virgin**, cca 1759. Moravian Gallery in Brno

whole group shine, the head and neck of the high-spirited white stallion and the girl's figure, while he immersed her knightly liberator, carrying a flag and lifting the girl up to him, completely in the gloom. [Fig. 2]

The stylistic structure of the painting is extremely interesting. Its closer study necessarily leads to the conclusion that in this cabinet picture there are several colouristic views, under which the history of European painting of the previous two and a half centuries played out.

Even the basic contrast between the warm brown chiaroscuro sphere and the silvery-light figures is characteristic. A Nordically intimate softly flowing chiaroscuro enlivened by mysterious lights and reflections, a horse and a woman emerging from it as if radiating their own light – all this evokes memories of Rembrandt. Beyond this distinctive Rembrandt motif we cannot overlook, especially in the manner of the light illusive modelling of the girl's body and her kind of special spicy physiognomy, a relationship to the Venetian Settecento.⁴ The girl's light incarnation, which materially is by no means unambiguous, is also characteristic of its stylistic style, on the contrary: iridescent milky yellow, vivid pink and bluish tones and whitish glitter and their brush treatment resembling mother-of-pearl rather than skin. The Mannerists treated human skin in a similar way, revelling in colour variability and in the refined handling of the material structure of things; They likened the surface of the human body to precious metals, enamels, pearls, etc. This very striking tendency, which Maulbertsch was able to recognize and appreciate especially in Spranger's works, reflected the fascination of Mannerist painting with a artistic craft that dealt with the processing of rare materials into exclusive creations. Even the skin of the horse of Maulbertsch's painting in Brno, warm white on the chest, silvery bluish with white lustre on the neck, reminiscent of silk, and the wavy mane, vividly evoking the idea of a crystal-blue waterfall, after all, fall into this context.

A concern with the sensory qualities of things, the painter's interpretation of their surface and fabric, also draws attention, however, to another component of the artistic structure of the *Liberation of the Virgin*. It is a lesson from 17th century Flemish painting. From Rubens' experience, from his fascination with sensory qualities and flowering corporeality, as well as from his essential tendency to create a festive vision of the world as if from precious matter, one can deduce not only the girl's incarnation and with his Settecento Venetian intonation and Mannerist colourist tension,⁵ but also a painterly discourse on her robe, the knight's shining armour, the white-shining horse, and, in the end, chiaroscuro in its sensual suppleness. Rubens is thus the most important inspirer of the colour organism of the image: it is referred to by the overall colour, based on the basic chord of warm brown and red and the range of silvery and bluish tones – of brown chiaroscuro and the terrain, graded into the flaming red rid-



2 – Franz Anton Maulbertsch, **Liberation of the Virgin**, detail, cca 1759. Moravian Gallery in Brno

er's cloak, silvery and bluish nuances in the figures of the horse and the virgin. Resonant of Rubens' painting is also the sensitive guidance of the brush, creating a manuscript which is richly and attractively differentiated into paste and glaze parts, into continuous material coatings and virtuoso sketching, in places kneaded from thick coloured paste and only indicated in the details by translucent intangible deposits.

This Rubenesque interpretation of being is transformed into a artistic celebration full of magical poetry and delusional beauty by the refined and sharpened sensibility of this Central European painter of the late 18th century. It is a brilliant lyrical transposition of Rubens' colourism, which captivates with its stylistic syncretism, as well as with the unprecedented sensory intensity with which the materiality of things is presented, rendered suggestively present and at the same time irritatingly ambiguous – when human skin is mother of pearl, horse skin is silk, its mane a stream of water. This stylistic ambiguity intertwines and combines with the ambiguity of meaning into a single whole.

Let us also add that the main figural motifs of the painting are also drawn from Rubens' work. The shining horse undoubtedly takes its basic pattern from the white



3 – Peter Paul Rubens, *The Medici Cycle – The Triumph at Juliers*, 1622–1625. Paris, Louvre

horse scene of *The Triumph at Juliers* from Rubens' *History of Mary of Medici* (Louvre) [Fig. 3]; the figure of a virgin is very probably inspired by a female nude from *The Triumph of Truth* from the same famous cycle, [Fig. 4] or the figure of Orithyia from Rubens' painting *The Rape of Orithyia by Boreas* (Vienna, Gemäldegalerie der Akademie der bildenden Künste). [Fig. 5] Maulbertsch knew the Medici Cycle, which adorned the Luxembourg Palace in Paris until the early 19th century, from the graphic reproductions that have been preserved in his estate.⁶ [Fig. 6] The image of Boreas and Orithyia could have been available to him in the original. Until 1779, it was part of the richly endowed Kaunitz château picture gallery in Slavkov, which Maulbertsch could have visited during his travels to Moravia in the 1750s. His contacts with the prince Kaunitz would also be indicated by the fact that Maulbertsch's sketch of the Přemyslid scene in the fresco in the Feudal Hall in Kroměříž (1759) has been preserved to this day, in the Kaunitz collection of the Slavkov château.⁷

We have showed that the *Liberation of the Virgin* is a complex artistic organism. The painter is here presenting a kind of retrospective of a great tradition. He draws from almost all the main components of European 16th–18th century painting, with the exception of the French: from the Mannerist, from the Venetian, from the Dutch (Rembrandtesque) and especially from the Flemish component, as defined by Rubens.

Rubens was no less inspiring for the 18th century than he was for his own time. After discussions at the Paris Academy, which resulted in a triumph for modernists favouring colour, Rubens, after the previous domination of Raphael and Poussin, became attractive for much of European painting in the 18th century. He was also relevant in a field of Austrian painting as important as Giovanni Battista Tiepolo's Venice. Rubenism meant breaking free of the pressure of dogmatic theories, developing colourism and freeing up space for a painter's temperament. Rubens' tuning of Maulbertsch's *Liberation of the Virgin* therefore is not surprising. The other stylistic elements of the painting, which give the Rubenesque component a strong lift in expression, were also alive during the 18th century. A certain affiliation with Mannerism is typical of all Rococo painting of the later 18th century; it became a characteristic feature of specific Austrian expressive Rococo thanks to a teacher of Maulbertsch's generation, Paul Troger, so it is right to consider a form of neo-Mannerism in Austrian painting of the second and third quarters of the 18th century.⁸ Likewise, in German and Austrian, but also in Italian painting of the 18th century, sympathy for the luministic and expressive values of Rembrandt's work was expressed, either in direct contact with his work or in connection with the work of his successor Leonard Bramer. If "neo-Mannerism" and "Rembrandtism" were reminiscences, then the last, Settecento component of the *Liberation of the Virgin* is a response to the contemporary



4 – Peter Paul Rubens, *The Medici Cycle – The Triumph of Truth*, 1622–1625. Paris, Louvre

outbursts of Venetian painting, without whose stimulating illusionism the art of Troger's pupils is hard to imagine.

The individual components of Maulbertsch's retrospective are therefore period-conditioned. However, their presentation is the original act of a genius who here created a unique artistic cosmos, overflowing with creative tension and the stylistic authenticity of the present historical moment. In particular, the combination of Rembrandt elements with the Rubenesque component is extremely impressive in its unique naturalness and organic nature. We have before us one of the masterpieces of the Viennese painting of the Troger school, a suggestive composition, which does not lack grotesque features in the figure types and in the overall contoured jaggedness, playfully colourful, sparkling, strikingly contrasting in its light and colour composition and extravagantly ornate in its uneasy smudges and nervous brushstrokes. With great skill, this great Central European fresco painter benefits from oil painting technique, the possibilities of which he is able to put to use in the widest possible registers of expressions.

The sudden ghostly emergence of the horse and girl that is the output of this supremely authentic imagination is also – if we look at the *Liberation of the Virgin* with a larger historical overview – a result of that branch of Baroque painting, the radical Baroque, to which Caravaggio supplied one of the basic impulses with his innovative visualisation of the depicted subject, which seemed to take place with powerful sensory urgency in the immediate vicinity of the viewer, “here and now”. It was an exaggerated view, based on immediate experience, distancing itself from any theory and clearly different from the other branch of Baroque painting, the classicising Baroque of the Bologna masters, completed by the classicism of Nicolas Poussin. The great French painter submitted his rich sensibility to vigilant control by his intellect, and he disciplined his imagination by the rule of order. The result was an artist's meditation that was not subject to the dictates of the moment and place and opened up to the realm of universal ideas and dreams, free from the diabolism of the present.

Maulbertsch's unleashed sensualism, which added the “I” to Caravaggio's present and dramatic “here and now”, was the answer to subjectivism, an unfettered artistic fantasy.⁹ This gesture, a late manifestation of Baroque radicalism, was fully in line with the current intentions of the expressive Troger's Rococo, releasing the individual from the ties of any kind of orthodoxy. Moreover, it is possible that Maulbertsch's extreme formulation did not lack a polemical edge. The *Liberation of the Virgin* originated at a time when the theory of neoclassicism – to which Maulbertsch later succumbed – was already forming within the environment of the Enlightenment intellectual layer. In 1755 Winckelmann published his influential anti-Baroque treatise *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerei und Bildhauerkunst*. Theresian Vienna did not shut itself away from new ideas.

More information about Maulbertsch's *Liberation of the Virgin* can be derived from an analysis of its iconographic theme. However, the iconography of the painting may be made more specific in the future, it is clear in its main outlines. This is the story of the liberation of a defenceless being put in violence's way: The fragile woman and the horse carrying the victorious liberator, both emerge from the darkness in which the huge prone body of the defeated conqueror remains. In the mirror of the sensory-spiritual dualism of Baroque art, which considered physical action to be a parable of a higher spiritual reality, the symbolic meaning of this story can be interpreted as the victory, or more exactly, the triumph of good over evil. If we go even further and accept measures of purely religious interpretation (“*interpretatio christiana*”), the story of the image appears to us as a parable of the liberation of the human soul from the power of the devil: The fluttering red cloak and the blue sash of the rider on his blindingly white horse, a kind of mythical steed, are the heraldic colours of religious majesty attributable to Christ and the Virgin Mary; the rider's golden banner could be understood as a reminder of the banner held by the risen Christ as the victorious Saviour of mankind.

From the tradition of triumphant riders, as codified by the older, especially Veronese presuppositions of Rubens, and as embodied in the 18th century, for example, by Tiepolo in the important painting *Saint James of Compostela on a white steed in front of a humbled Saracen nobleman* (Budapest) or Maulbertsch himself in the famous battle scene of the same saint in the fresco at Schwechat,¹⁰ the *Liberation of the Virgin* however differs in one key detail: the victorious rider with the banner is not flooded in light – and light is an essential part of the idea of triumph. This undoubtedly confirms one of our initial remarks, that immersing the rider in the shadows is artistic licence. This brilliant idea, motivated purely artistically, significantly disturbs the traditional symbolic context of the story and testifies to the striking predominance of artistic considerations, to a growing indifference to the topic. This destructive goal probably is pursued by the grotesque formation of the rider's physiognomy, undoubtedly inspired by Nordic mannerism.

The painter is here apparently playing with the traditional content, as well as subjecting the entire artistic structure of the painting, the painter's interpretation of the qualities of the material, light, colour, the painter's brushwork, to his artistic play. The Old Master love of splendour and the handwritten calligraphy, the typically Old Master processing of painting matter; these form the fundus instructus of Maulbertsch's painting; however, it seems that the jewel-like painting no longer wants to be a kind of foil through which the ceremonial and the sacred shine, set over all the human and artistic side of the world, as was



5 – Peter Paul Rubens, *The Rape of Orithyia by Boreas*, 1620. Vienna, Gemäldegalerie der Akademie der bildenden Künste

undoubtedly the case with Rubens.¹¹ The artistic beauty of Maulbertsch's painting has a different meaning. It lacks Rubens's emotional warmth and sensory involvement, his philosophy of a life benefit based on extensive humanistic education, on the intellectual and artistic legacy of antiquity and the classical renaissance, on an ideal of an heroic human generation; it is heavily mixed with neo-Mannerist bizarreness; it has something expressly personal, even challenging, about it. Rather than referring to a higher reality, it builds

on admiration of itself, as a creation of self-sufficient artistic fantasy. This predominance of purely painterly and personal considerations,¹² which, however, is not in the field of late Baroque painting without analogues and without precursors, is, we believe, also included in Maulbertsch paintings of the period, the subject matter of which is expressly sacral. However, let us recall that this need not necessarily mean that their author has already departed the ground of traditional Baroque religiosity. The creative act is subject to



6 – Jean Marc Nattier and Charles Louis Simonneau after Peter Paul Rubens, **The Medici Cycle – The Triumph at Juliers**, 1709, engraving. Williamstown, Mass. (USA), The Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute

a dialectic of the intended and the involuntary, it submits to the risk of unwanted and unanticipated results, which is certainly doubly true for turning points at the boundary between social epochs. We have ample indications and evidence that Maulbertsch, as a man, was pious.¹³ However, Maulbertsch the creator had already touched the boundaries of new horizons.

In conclusion, let us return to one of the main theses of our treatise, to Rubenism as an important inspiring factor in Maulbertsch's painting. We have already stated that for the 18th century, the cult of Rubens meant breaking out of the boundaries of binding aesthetic theories and confirming the tendencies towards a more personal and distinctively tuned form of painting. Although there was less understanding for



7 – Peter Paul Rubens, *The Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus*, 1618. Munich, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Alte Pinakothek

Rubens' pathos and pomp, the improvising fantasies and sensuality of the great Flemish master did arouse admiration and interest. Especially the late paintings and wonderful sketches provided an abundance of stimuli. Rubens's dynamic delivery, in which the brush strokes reflected an immediate spontaneous movement and the living rhythm of the painter's imagination, was undoubtedly one of the important factors in the process of releasing the painter's skill and in the path to the painter's fantasy and lyricism. In the *Liberation of the*

Virgin Rubens – despite all the originality of this excellent painting – played this role without a doubt.

The freeing up of brush delivery is one of the essential moments of modern art history. After an overture in 16th-century Venetian painting, by the later Titian and Tintoretto, there was a sketch-like way of painting, "*pittura di tocchi e di macchia*", legitimized by a number of Italians of the following age, starting with the masters of the so-called neo-Venetian school Liss, Fetti and Strozzi, from the Spaniards namely Velázquez, from

the Dutch with Hals, Rembrandt and the most influential of them, Rubens. This was the expression of efforts born in late renaissance Italy as part of a wider movement for human emancipation, a higher place for visual artists, especially painters, in the estates and social hierarchy. In his *Dialogue on painting* (1577) Lodovico Dolce exhorted painters – relying on a new model of the scholar and man of the wider world, as created by the influential creator of public opinion Baldassare Castiglione in his *Book of the Courtier* (*Il Libro del Cortegiano*, 1572) – to avoid excessive care in execution.¹⁴ Dolce's voice was far from unique. Elegant ease of painting was to obscure the hard work and drudgery of the craft and was to become an expression of the mind and talent of an independent personality, thus elevating painting from the shackles of a guild craft to the “artes liberales”. The eighteenth century then became its own field of pure painting, namely in the field of medium- and small-format paintings, addressing private feelings and moods, intended for a selected audience able to appreciate the originality and the magic of invention and presentation. Maulbertsch's *Liberation of the Virgin*, one of the best cabinet pictures of European painting in the second half of the 18th century, met these demands most marvellously.

It seems as if in the artistic maximalism of Maulbertsch's painting there was the revival and culmination of an ancient inclination in the Danube region's art culture, a tradition dating back to the late Middle Ages. In the *Lib-*

eration of the Virgin we have to deal – as we have already indicated – with the response to the difficult situation of the end of a style and an era. The colour atmosphere of this excellent work testifies to the enchantment of the perceptive heir with the inexhaustible wealth of a great past. However, this is not just about using and exhausting the possibilities of a style which is fading away. In the decisive subjectivism of Maulbertsch's bold romantic historicising syncretism, one can already sense a foreshadowing of the future, when fine arts will become a distinctive universe that sets out its own tasks.¹⁵ The same anticipation of the future is to be found in the large paintings and frescoes of Maulbertsch's mature period in the second half of the 1750s and the first half of the 1760s – although their creator is still an integrated member of society, and although the ideological and economic ties and certainties of the “old order” still persist, even if an Enlightenment critique of the Baroque is already developing. All these works, together with the *Liberation of the Virgin*, undoubtedly signal a certain marginal situation, even though they are still the fruit of an era in which art played a key role in creating binding human ideas about the world and still drew on captivating story fantasies fed by the living, inexhaustible sources of antique and Christian myth, which then disappeared in the autonomous artistic reflection of the 19th century.

Translated by Stuart Roberts

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Notes:

¹ Moravian Gallery in Brno, Inv. No. Z 1644, oil on canvas, 73.5 × 52.4 cm. The author briefly discussed the Brno painting by Franz Anton Maulbertsch (1724–1796), which was acquired in 1946, in his older Maulbertsch publications, especially in the catalogue of the exhibition entitled *Maulbertsch's Works* (Franz Anton Maulbertsch. *Ausstellung anlässlich seines 250. Geburtstages*, Wien – München 1974, p. 91, Cat. No. 39, “Entführung”) and in a short article entitled *Bemerkungen zum Katalog der Franz Anton Maulbertsch-Ausstellung, Sborník prací Filozofické fakulty brněnské univerzity F 19–20*, 1975–1976, p. 138.

² Klára Garas expressed this hypothesis at the Vienna Maulbertsch exhibition in 1974. She was referring to a motif appearing on medieval murals in Hungary and Slovakia (Velká Lomnica, Kraskovo, Rimavská Baňa, etc.): St Ladislaus, a knight, often with a royal crown (missing on the Brno rider) defeats Kumán and frees Ladiva; cf. Vlasta Dvořáková – Josef Krása – Karel Stejskal, *Středověká nástěnná malba na Slovensku*, Praha – Bratislava 1978, pp. 108, 135, 162. However, since this motif is not documented in later painting, the relationship of the Brno painting to the St Ladislaus legend is vague, even though it is known that Maulbertsch otherwise drew on it (Győr, Cathedral 1773; Bratislava, Primate's Palace, 1781; Szombathely, sketch, 1791: mostly about the scene *St Ladislaus draws water from the rock with his spear*). It was for this reason that Klára Garas eventually dropped her assumption.

³ Klára Garas, *Franz Anton Maulbertsch, 1724–1796*, Budapest 1960, p. 51, p. 207, Cat. No. 116, fig. 125 does not deal with the Brno painting in any more detail. She assigns it “zu den Werken um und nach Krenzier”. Peter Canon-Brookes (The Oil Paintings of F. A. Maulbertsch in the light of the 1974 Exhibition, *Burlington Magazine* 119, 1976, No. 886, p. 26), which also gives the picture only a passing mention (“The superb *Abduction from [...]* Brno [...] is closely related in spirit and execution to the *Sumeg frescoes [...]*”).

⁴ The features of the girl's face could be considered a kind of echo of the faces of the girls or more exactly the young people in the works of Giovanni Battista Pittoni (cf. for example, Pittoni's paintings *Bacchus and Ariadne* and *The Sacrifice of Polyxena* from the early 1730s in the National Gallery in Prague, reproduced in the catalogue of Eduard A. Šafařík, *Benátské malířství 18. století*, Praha 1964, figs. 28, 29), or in the works of Pittoni's pupil from Central Europe, Anton Kern; see, for example, *The Virgin Mary at Prayer* at the National Gallery in Prague or *The Holy Family* from the same collection, reproduced in the above-cited catalogue, figs. 16, 17.

⁵ The skin, coloured pink and yellowish with white gleams and bluish reflections, is of Rubenesque origin. Cf. Rubens' traditional statement on the method of painting the incarnate, quoted by Max Doerner, *Malmaterial und seine Verwendung im Bilde*. Neu herausgegeben von Toni Roth und Richard Jacobi, 11. verbesserte Auflage, Stuttgart 1960, pp. 321–326, 335–346. The mannerist expressive re-evaluation of this Rubens colourist element in Maulbertsch's painting consists mainly of emphasizing the colour vibrations and variability (through enhancing the colour contrasts, in particular the

intensity of the blue tone) and of the striking fabric ambiguity, as we have already mentioned in this text.

⁶ Cf. Garas (note 4), p. 284, Document CLXVI: 2 August 1797: “*Licit. Maulbertschische Verlassenschaftseffekten [...] Die ganze Luxemburggalerie [...]*”

⁷ It was added to the literature in 1961 by Miloš Stehlík, K restauraci díla F. A. Maulbertsche, *Umění IX*, 1961, p. 408. However, it was already known to Franz Martin Haberditzl (1882–1944), as evidenced by the recently posthumously published manuscript of his monograph on F. A. Maulbertsch; see Franz Martin Haberditzl, *Franz Anton Maulbertsch*, Wien 1977¹, p. 196.

⁸ Cf. Pavel Preiss, Der Neomanierismus in der Kunst des 18. Jahrhunderts, in: *Évolutions générale et développements régionaux en histoire de l'art* (Actes du XXIIe Congrès International d'Histoire de l'Art, Budapest 1969), vol. II, Budapest 1972, pp. 595–601.

⁹ This is indeed a fundamental change in the structure of Baroque subjectivism, a transition from the plural subject “we”, characteristic of the earlier stages of the Baroque, to the individual subject “I”. The author has already touched on this issue in earlier articles on Maulbertsch, especially in the study *Zur Interpretation der Kunst zwischen zwei Epochen. Skizze einer Monographie über F. A. Maulbertsch, 1724–1796*, *Sborník prací Filozofické fakulty brněnské univerzity F 17*, 1973, pp. 102, 103, notes 8, 8a.

¹⁰ A sketch for a lost fresco in Schwechat; cf. Hans Aurenhammer, in: *Die goldene Palette*, Stuttgart – Hamburg 1968, p. 278. – Ivo Krsek, in: *Franz Anton Maulbertsch. Ausstellung* (note 1), p. 95, Cat. No. 57.

¹¹ Let us recall that for example Rubens' bright light mother-of-pearl coloration for the human complexion was interpreted as “*die farbige Verherrlichung des menschlichen Leibes als lumen naturale und irdischer Spiegel des Himmels*” (Hans Sedlmayer, *Bemerkungen zur Inkarnatfarbe bei Rubens*, *Hefte des Kunsthistorischen Seminars der Universität München* 1964, Heft 9–10, p. 54).

¹² This shift in values, as we have just outlined it, can also be documented by comparing Maulbertsch's painting with Rubens's *The Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus* (Munich, Alte Pinakothek). [Fig. 7] This famous work by Rubens, which Maulbertsch knew from graphic reproductions (as can be judged, among other things, from a certain important detail in the Kroměříž fresco) was undoubtedly a prototype for Maulbertsch's Brno composition (I would like to thank Jaromír Šíp for pointing this out). When compared to Rubens' Italianizing constructivity and voluminosity, Maulbertsch's scene (deprived of a spatially developed stage and sinking into an uncertain darkness) is rather flat, as if it were spread out in a single plan forming an extremely picturesque and in terms of spatial connections a very loosely, even arbitrarily shaped, relief. The composition of the girl's body, which lacks the buttocks, ignores constructive logic and continuity, and its relationship to the horse and rider is dictated primarily by the rhythm of colour and light. The schedule of resonant colours also serves to emphasize the painter's flat values: while red, which is always known to appear in the foreground, is concentrated in the mass of the fluttering cloak in the depths of the scene, cold receding blue appears more in the foreground, on the sash on the rider's chest, and especially in the details of the girl's robe.

¹³ Garas (note 4), p. 164.

¹⁴ Rudolf Wittkower, *Masters of the Loaded Brush. Oil Sketches from Rubens to Tiepolo*, New York 1967, p. XVII.

¹⁵ The extremely artism orientation of the *Liberation of the Virgin* already has within it something of the position of “beyond good and evil”, characteristic of a certain part of the art of the following epoch. This also suggests how penetratingly this late Baroque painter reshaped his initial Rubenesque inspiration.

Editorial note

Lubomír Slavíček

We publish Ivo Krsek's study practically without change in the form in which it was first published in *Umění XXVII*, 1979, pp. 59–66, with a more extensive German summary. Only in the notes have minor adjustments been made in accordance with the text editing principles by which *Opuscula historiae artium* is governed. Next, we correct the name of the Rubens picture from *The Medici Cycle*, [Fig. 3] traditionally referred to as *The Voyage of the Queen Marie de' Medici to Pont-de-Cé*, to the more precise *The Triumph at Juliers*. The original black and white pictorial attachment has been extended with two more comparative images [Figs. 6, 7].

In view of the position that the painting from the collections of the Moravian Gallery in Brno has due to its exceptional artistic quality within the Maulbertsch *œuvre*, it received considerable attention after the publication of Krsek's article. Of the many publications, we would point out the following catalogue entries: Vlasta Kratinová, *Barock in Mähren* (130. Wechselausstellung der Österreichischen Galerie), Wien 1988, p. 47, Cat. No. 24; LR [Luigi Ronzoni], in: Helmut Lorenz (ed.), *Geschichte der bildenden Künste in Österreich 4. Barock*, München – London – New York 1999, pp. 443–444, Cat. No. 180; L. S. [Lubomír Slavíček], in: Jiří Kroupa (ed.),

La Moravie à l'âge Baroque 1670–1790. Dans le miroir des ombres, Paris – Rennes – Brno 2002, pp. 220–222, Cat. No. 78; Zora Wörgötter, in: *Franz Anton Maulbertsch und sein Umkreis in Mähren. Ausgewählte Werke aus tschechischen Sammlungen*, Langenargen 2006, pp. 32–33, Cat. No. 5 (with further literature); Z. W. [Zora Wörgötter], in: Anna Jávor – Lubomír Slavíček (edd.), *Késő barokk impressziók. Franz Anton Maulbertsch (1724–1796) és Josef Winterhalder (1743–1807)*, Budapest 2010, p. 41, Cat. No. 1.6; LK – MK [Lenka Kalábová – Michal Konečný], in: Petr Tomášek (ed.), *Obrazy / sochy / objevy / příběhy. Moravská zemská obrazárna 1817–1961*, Brno 2022, pp. 197–198, Cat. No. 116. Cf. also Zora Wörgötter, “*The Abduction*” in “Discover Baroque Art”, Museum With No Frontiers, 2022 (https://baroqueart.museumwnf.org/database_item.php?id=object;BAR;cz;Mus11;37;en). A different position on the authorship of the Brno picture was taken by Monika Dachs-Nickel, who in her habilitation thesis *Franz Anton Maulbertsch und sein Kreis. Studien zur Wiener Malerei in der zweiten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts* (1. Hauptband), Universität Wien, Wien 2003, p. 341, Cat. No. 18 designated it a direct copy or interpretation after Maulbertsch (Anonymous or Felix Ivo Leicher). Hubert Hosch reasoned similarly in his review entitled *Alles Maulbertsch oder was? Franz Anton Maulbertsch und sein Umkreis in Mähren*, Museum Langenargen vom 9. April – 15. Oktober 2006, p. 4 (available at <https://www.freieskunstforum.de/>

hosch_2006a_maulbertsch_maehren.pdf), when he proposed the authorship of Felix Ivo Leicher (1727–1812) or the somewhat enigmatic Anton Schuncko (1712–1770). Despite such sporadic doubts, the authorship of the painting can be considered indisputable thanks to the convincing analysis of its impressive visual structure by Ivo Krsek. However, the questions about the older provenance of the painting remain unresolved, about which we know today only that it was confiscated in 1946 from the villa of the Václav Čermák (1876–?), director of the Montana stock company in Veverská Bítýška, whose possible collecting activities we know nothing about. On the other hand, despite several attempts, it has not yet been possible to satisfactorily clarify its rather enigmatic iconography. It is only hypothetically possible to refine the Ivo Krsek's assumption that it could be a scene from Renaissance or Baroque "heroic poetry", specifically a scene from Ludovico Ariosto's chivalric epic *The Frenzy of Orlando* (*Orlando furioso* 10, 78–95), in which the Saracen knight Ruggiero rescues the pagan princess Angelica. A detailed bibliography of works dedicated to Franz Anton Maulbertsch up to 2006 was published by Anna Mader in: Franz Martin Haberditzl, *Franz Anton Maulbertsch. 1724–1796*, edd. Gerbert Frodl – Michael Krapf, Wien 2006, pp. 418–426. Of later works, in addition to many individual contributions in professional journals, proceedings and exhibition catalogues, one might mention: Agnes Huslein-Arco – Michael Krapf (edd.), *Franz Anton Maulbertsch. Ein Mann von Genie*, Wien 2009 (here in particular the study by Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *Maulbertsch der Exzentriker und andere Charakterisierungen. Betrachtungen zum Künstler und seiner Rezeption*, pp. 23–33). – Eduard

Hindelang – Lubomír Slavíček (edd.), *Franz Anton Maulbertsch in Mitteleuropa. Festschrift zum 30-jährigen Bestehen des Museums Langenargen*, Langenargen – Brünn 2007. – Anna Jávor – Lubomír Slavíček, *Késő barokk impressziók* (op. cit.). – Monika Dachs-Nickel – Andreas Gamerith, *Maulbertsch! Junger Meister – altes Testament*, St. Pölten [2011]. Using the example of the work of Franz Xaver Wagenschön (1726–1790), the relationship between the Austrian Baroque painters and Rubens and his circle was explored *inter alia* by Hartwig Garnerus (*Zeichnungen von Franz Xaver Wagenschön 1726–1790 in der Tradition von Rubens und Jordaens*, *Die Kunst und das schöne Heim* 92, 1980, pp. 297–304) and Lubomír Slavíček (*Franz Xaver Wagenschön, Pictor Viennensis Austriae Discipulis P. P. Rubenius. Copia und Imitatione in seinem graphischen Werk, Barockberichte. Informationsblätter aus dem Salzburger Barockmuseum* 11/12, 1995, pp. 435–444). Deserved attention was also paid to the influence of 17th century Dutch painting on the work of Austrian Baroque painters; cf. here in particular the dissertation by Elisabeth Herrman-Fichtenau, *Der Einfluss Hollands auf die österreichische Malerei des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Böhlau Dissertationen zur Kunstgeschichte 20), Wien – Köln 1983 and *Gerson Digital: Germany. Dispersal and After-Effect of Dutch Painting of the 17th Century: Germany, Austria and Bohemia – The 18th and 19th Centuries* (2018), 4th volume of the renewed, illustrated and annotated English edition of Horst Gerson's *Ausbreitung und Nachwirkung der holländischen Malerei des 17. Jahrhunderts* (1942/1983), 5.3 Martin Johann Schmidt and Frans Anton Maulbertsch, edited by Rieke van Leeuwen; available at <https://gersongermany2.rkdstudies.nl/5-austria/53-martin-johann-schmidt-and-frans-anton-maulbertsch/>.