

ABSTRACT

The Rococo in Sicily: Assimilation of a Style

Sicilian palazzi, built and decorated during the eighteenth century, serve as the focus of this study. Utilizing an object-based material culture study of the rococo elements existing within the Palazzo Biscari in Catania, Sicily, it explores the transmission and assimilation of the rococo style. The social and cultural motivation of Sicilian nobility is examined, as they looked towards the North and appropriated a style removed from its Parisian source. It focuses on Ignazio Paternò Castello, 5th Principe di Biscari (1719-1786). Using examples within the Palazzo Biscari, including public rooms and intimate spaces, the text explores the development of the decorative style known as rocaille or bizzaro in the eighteenth century, now identified as rococo. Additional examples are drawn from Palazzo Zappalá Gemelli in Catania and the Palazzo Butera and Palazzo Comitini in Palermo.

Sicily's position as a nexus between Continental and Middle Eastern influences guaranteed a rich and diverse artistic dialogue. The circulation of artistic designs and impulses was dynamic, especially with Naples and Florence. Design sources from the book, *La Storia degli Uccelli*, compiled by Saverio Manetti, Lorenzo Lorenzi and Violante Vanni, published in Florence between 1767 and 1778, are examined as they appear in several locations in Catania. *Chinoiserie* elements in the private rooms of Palazzo Biscari are analyzed. The arrival of rococo ornamental prints, produced in Bavaria, also invigorated the design vocabulary of the island and served as a design source for the artisan-craftsmen. In the Palazzo Biscari, similarities are noted between

these designs and the interior decoration. The influence of Luigi Mayer (d. 1803) and his position as *dessinateur* is examined.

Documents studied in the Paternò Castello family archives and the Biscari archives held in the Archivio di Stato di Catania, in Sicily, include correspondence, inventories and account ledgers. The research reveals Ignazio, 5th Principe di Biscari as an intellectual, collector, excavator of classical ruins, promoter of Sicilian culture and a Freemason.

Appendices include a floor plan of Palazzo Biscari: a comparison of the bird images of *La Storia degli Uccelli* and a list of the accomplishments of Ignazio, 5th Principe di Biscari.

Elite and artisan patrons of Sicily employed the rococo style in aristocratic palazzi of the period. Realized in local materials of marble, stucco, wood and stone, this usage reveals a distinctively Sicilian variant.

Kathleen M. Bennett
The Rococo in Sicily: Assimilation of a Style



Musician's gallery, Ballroom, Palazzo Biscari, Catania, Sicily – frescoes by Sebastino Monaco and Matteo Desiderto, design by Luigi Mayer, c. 1780.



Ballroom, Palazzo Biscari, Catania, Sicily - north wall, c. 1760-1772, ceiling frescoes, c. 1780.

Comparison of Images



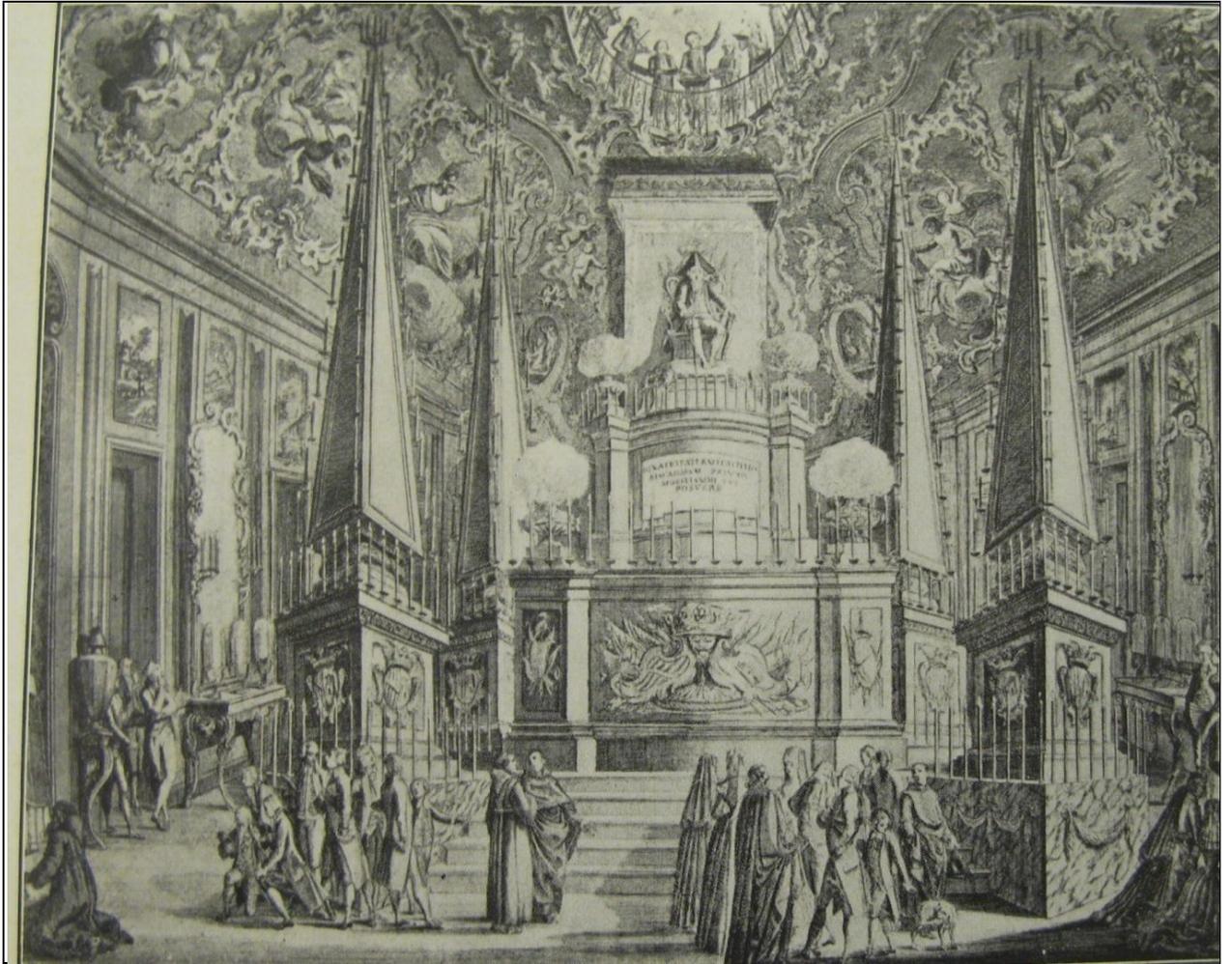
“Pappagallo cremisi dell’Isole Molucche”, plate CVI, *La Storia degli Uccelli*, vol. 1, Manetti, Lorenzo, Vani: Florence, 1767. Academy of Natural Sciences, Ewell Sale Steward Library.



“Pappagallo Isole Malucche”
Painted wood panel in the Galleria degli Uccelli, Palazzo Biscari, Catania, Sicily, c. 1770



“Pappagallo Isole Molucche”
Painted silk panel in the Grand Ball Room, Palazzo Zappalá - Gemelli, Catania, Sicily, c. 1770.



Engraving, Luigi Mayer, 1789, Catafalque of Ignazio, 5th Principe di Biscari. Private collection.