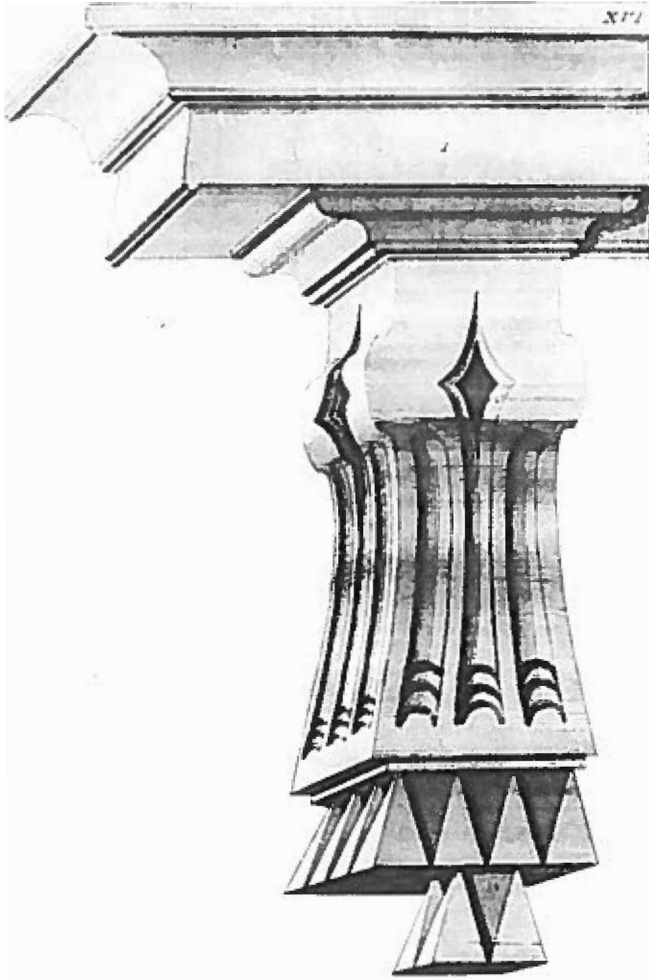


# Baroque & Rococo

Architecture & Decoration



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Dedication  
To the memory of Rudolf Wittkower

BAROQUE & ROCOCO: ARCHITECTURE AND DECORATION  
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Designed by Harold Bartram

*Half title* Cartouche from J. B. Probst's *Schilder oder Cartouches der neuesten Fason*, c. 1735

*Title page* Borromini, engraving of a detail of the window from the façade of the Oratory of S. Filippo Neri, Rome (see plate 45)

to be applied in a more restricted sense, though most writers at the present time continue to apply it to the architecture of Apulia and the Spanish colonies—in my opinion wrongly.

Other writers in the 1920s and 1930s held different views of the Baroque. Certain nationalist German writers, such as Hamann<sup>8</sup> for instance, held that it was something fundamentally Germanic and related to Gothic art. One Spanish critic, Eugenio d'Ors,<sup>9</sup> reversed the 'restrictive' tendency of the time and maintained that Baroque was a phase which occurred in all epochs as a reaction from the art of Classical periods towards a style which was lively, vigorous, and irregular. In all he defined twenty-two different Baroque phases in the history of art, from prehistoric times to the architecture of cinemas and hotels of his own day. This application of the word, which makes it practically meaningless, has not been generally accepted, but the term can reasonably be applied by extension to one phase of ancient art, which produced Pergamene sculpture, the Temple of Baalbek, the rock-tombs of Petra, and the cities of Sabratha and Leptis Magna.

The word Rococo was also first used in a derogatory sense.<sup>10</sup> It was coined in the studios of the French Neo-Classical painters of the 1790s to describe the art of the type of which they most strongly disapproved, to which the terms *marquise* and *Pompadour* were applied—unfairly, since the marquise was a keen supporter of the Classical movement inaugurated by her brother, the marquis de Marigny. The word Rococo is probably—though not certainly—derived from *rocaille*, a term used to describe the shell-incrusted rocky surface of artificial grottos, but it has slight echoes of baby-talk in the repetition of the second syllable *ro-co-co*. These overtones would fit with the attitude of superiority which Neo-Classical artists adopted towards the art of the previous generation. French art-historians prefer the phrase 'Louis XV', but this has disadvantages. It emphasizes the French origin of the style, but would be awkward if applied to the German version of the art. Further the various styles current in France during the eighteenth century do not coincide with the political phases. The *Régence* style, which is named after the Regent for Louis XV during the minority (1715–21), in fact originated well before the death of Louis XIV, and the origins of the Rococo go back to before 1721. The discrepancy is even more marked in the later part of the century, because the style called by common consent 'Louis XVI' originated at least two decades before the death of Louis XV. Unfortunately no better stylistic term has so far been suggested for this important phase of French taste.

Some critics have attempted to spread the use of the term Rococo beyond the visual arts. Indeed the plays of Marivaux and the verse of some French poets of the early eighteenth century seem to qualify for inclusion, but when Voltaire is described as a typical *Rokokomensch* the term seems to burst. It could cover some of his verse and the lighter *contes*, but Voltaire, the reformer and fighter for the rights of man, cannot be regarded as Rococo; not that everyone who appreciated the art of the Rococo need have been Rococo in his life. One of its greatest admirers was Frederick the Great, who certainly showed no Rococo delicacy in his conduct of war or politics!

So far I have only discussed the senses in which I personally believe the words Baroque and Rococo can most usefully be employed, but something must be said about the origins of the terms and the varying meanings which have been attached to them.<sup>4</sup>

The word Baroque originally meant fantastic or misshapen and it was used in two quite different contexts. The Portuguese used it to describe a natural, irregular pearl, and the Italians applied it to rhetoric, using it to describe a far-fetched or fanciful argument. It was first applied to architecture by French critics of the mid-eighteenth century and, as was the case with Gothic, it was originally used as a term of abuse but stuck as a stylistic description. Francesco Milizia<sup>5</sup> and his Neo-Classical followers in France and Italy used the term to describe the architecture of Borromini and his contemporaries because they regarded it as malformed and as breaking all the laws of Classical architecture. The term continued to be used in this sense till the 1880s, when certain German art-historians began to use it to describe a definite phase in the evolution of architecture.

They were driven to defining this phase by the realization that art after the middle of the sixteenth century did not, as their predecessors believed, simply represent a decadence from Renaissance ideals, but a style with its own principles, quite different from those of the Renaissance itself. These pioneers in the definition of the Baroque—Burckhardt, Lübke, Gurlitt, and above all Wölfflin<sup>6</sup>—applied the term to art in all European countries, roughly from the middle of the sixteenth century to the middle of the eighteenth, but their successors realized that this definition was too wide. Chronologically these later critics—Dvořák and Walter Friedlaender<sup>7</sup>—divided the period into two parts and called the first Mannerism, a word of which the exact application is now subject to much discussion and disagreement. It was originally used to describe painters rather than architects and was applied to the phase after the generation of 1520 (Raphael and the young Michelangelo) but was later extended to cover the architecture of Michelangelo himself and his followers, such as Buontalenti and Tibaldi, as well as that of Giulio Romano and others. At the same time critics came to see that Wölfflin's bold attempt to apply the term Baroque to the art of the whole of Europe in the seventeenth century would not work, and that it was not generally valid for French and Dutch art, which was conditioned by quite different intellectual and political atmospheres. As a result the term came

13 *Opposite* Vienna, Karlskirche designed by J. B. Fischer von Erlach, interior of dome, frescoes by J. M. Rottmayr, 1725–30