

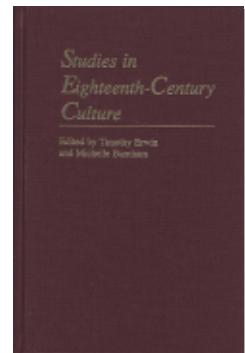


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The Wieskirche: Movement, Perception, and Salvation in the Bavarian Rococo

MICHAEL YONAN

Despite the recent widespread scholarly reassessment of eighteenth-century rococo art, Bavarian rococo churches remain architectural ugly stepsisters. Widely known and unfailingly referenced in every art-historical survey text, rococo religious architecture nonetheless remains virtually unstudied within current Anglo-American scholarship, a situation that persists despite significant advancements in methodological and interpretive schemas helpful for confronting secular rococo design. Perhaps modern viewers continue to perceive these churches' abundantly ornamented interiors as little more than hysterical adaptations of an originally refined, visually seductive decorative mode characterized by the French elite *hôtel*. Raising its head as well is the possibility, implicit in some statements about the Bavarian rococo I have encountered, that to many observers these buildings confirm German bad taste, that they reveal a Teutonic obsessiveness with detail and a tiresome fascination with irrelevant complexity, qualities that obliterate the restrained gracefulness of their Gallic counterparts.

It was not always this way. The 1960s in particular saw a sustained scholarly interest in eighteenth-century German religious architecture among Anglo-American scholars, and during that time a number of

prominent architectural historians directed serious scholarly attention to these buildings. The most surprising among them is Henry-Russell Hitchcock, well known as the documenter of the International Style and a high priest of architectural modernism. Mostly forgotten today is that Hitchcock published two substantial books on eighteenth-century Bavarian churches, one a collection of miscellaneous essays and the other a monographic treatment of the Zimmermann brothers.¹ Hitchcock's legacy in this area has not been great, however, and few modern studies of the rococo even mention his work, let alone build on it. Casting a long shadow over English-language understanding about the religious rococo is Karsten Harries's 1983 study, *The Bavarian Rococo Church: Between Faith and Aestheticism*.² Written by a prominent philosopher of art and architecture, Harries's book is a multivalent thematic analysis, with chapters devoted to individual spiritual and aesthetic qualities typical of the German rococo as a whole. Harries concerns himself less with the outfitting of any single church than with establishing the Bavarian rococo church typologically. It is an important and rich contribution to the scholarly literature, one filled with insights into the interrelationship between meaning, ornament, and space. That said, Harries's book shows its age as well as its philosophical genealogy. It relies on stylistic categories that today feel dated and its integration of aesthetic and historical observations seems insufficient in light of current knowledge about eighteenth-century culture. Nonetheless, Harries's book remains the best-developed investigation of this material in English and my debt to it in this essay shall soon become clear. In German-language scholarship, one finds a multitude of local and regional studies and several classic surveys, but few serious attempts to rethink or recategorize these buildings in new ways, and to my knowledge no scholarship that tries to revisit these churches in light of the many scholarly insights on French rococo art and architecture that have appeared recently.³

Whatever the underlying reasons for this neglect, its consequences are clear: there is no other corner of eighteenth-century European art in which so much important material remains unknown or understudied. I offer this essay as a preliminary contribution to a reengagement with rococo religious architecture, one that seeks to demonstrate its potential for enriching our broadening picture of eighteenth-century art. I shall do so by directing my analysis through perhaps the best known of these buildings, the Wieskirche or "Church in the Meadow." (fig.1) Located in a rural area of southern Bavaria, the Wieskirche was erected as a pilgrimage church between 1745 and 1754; it owes its strikingly beautiful design to the combined efforts of the architect Dominikus Zimmermann (1685–1766) and his elder brother, the painter and stucco carver Johann Baptist Zimmermann



Figure 1. Dominikus Zimmermann, Wieskirche, 1745–1754. Exterior view.

(Photo: Marburg/Art Resource, NY)

(1680–1758).⁴ Scholarly writing about the Wieskirche has emphasized its sophisticated treatment of interior space, in particular the way its masses and voids create a sense of aerated permeability that critics of architecture term “lightness.”⁵ (fig. 2) Indeed, the church’s manipulation of light effects to produce gradations of brightness and shadow, its suffusion of light with spiritual values, and the apparent dematerialization of substance that results, are certainly among the building’s most sophisticated design characteristics. Rather than understand this phenomenon as a purely formalist achievement, as the scholarship has often done, I shall argue that spatial permeability advances an eschatological theology related both to the church’s function as a pilgrimage destination and as a modification of Enlightenment conceptions of sensation and knowledge. For rather than present Catholic doctrine as universal dogma, which one would expect an



Figure 2. Dominikus and Johann Baptist Zimmermann, Wieskirche. Interior.
(Photo: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY)

early modern church to do, the Wieskirche instead presents salvation as a process, one that unfolds metaphorically through the experience of moving through its interior. Movement is more than just a stylistic quality enacted in the church's *rocaille* ornamentation; the *rococo* ornament's incitement of movement stages a particular human relationship to the divine.⁶ In showing this, I shall suggest something more fundamental about Germanic

applications of rococo ornament, namely that the Germans understood the rococo as an essentially spatial decorative mode and that their rococo forms engage issues of place and space differently and to a greater degree than their French counterparts. Indeed, they rely on such qualities intrinsically, and the Wieskirche illustrates how and why that is the case.

To begin, we might acknowledge that it has become cliché in discussions of early modern religious architecture to claim that a striving toward movement is one of its defining characteristics. From this perspective, the Bavarian rococo church appears the inheritor of Counter-Reformational urges in which architects incorporated curving architectural forms, semantic complexities, and spatial illusionism into their buildings to stimulate piety among believers and convince the potentially wayward of the church's sustained vitality. This lineage leads back at least as far as Francesco Borromini's seventeenth-century Roman churches, buildings whose spatial dynamism metaphorically visualizes spiritual passion. Yet the Bavarian rococo derives much from a French-inspired conception of the elite interior, rococo spaces that likewise insist upon movement to register their full visual and semantic content. That most emblematic of Parisian rococo rooms, the Salon de la Princesse in the Hôtel de Soubise, demonstrates how rococo forms permit a fluid relationship between movement and meaning. The shifting planes of the room's material surfaces, which vary from glass to mirrors to painted and gilded woodwork to oil paintings, invite the eye to bounce from surface to surface in unsettled, disruptive, yet potentially highly pleasing sensational permutations. These qualities of spatial malleability, fragmentation, and transformability relate in this context to the intrigues, embarrassments, and pleasures of elite sociability. Following Marian Hobson, art historians have designated this quality *papillotage*, a flickering effect reminiscent of a butterfly's flitting wings that arises from constantly shifting perceptions of light, surface, and space.⁷ Motion is central to how a rococo room such as the Salon de la Princesse achieves *papillotage*, and indeed we can position motion dialectically in relation to such a room's inhabitants and their senses. The room's surfaces invite motion in order for their visual complexity to be perceived, even as motion reveals new combinations of sensations, always unstable, that animate the space. Therefore one might say that the rococo aesthetic principles employed in the Salon de la Princesse both invite movement and rely upon it to achieve their fullest effects.

It may seem a lengthy trip from an urban French elite interior to a rural German pilgrimage church, and indeed formulating the differences and connections between rococo ornamental applications in these two geographical arenas has been a major knot in the scholarly literature.

But the distance may not be as great as it first seems. Many francophone architects and designers relocated to Central Europe's major cultural centers; Parisian and Lorrainian artists and architects were active at all of the major German courts, from Berlin to Vienna, where they found ample patronage due to the Germanic nobility's fondness for French-inspired decorative designs. In Bavaria especially, the ties to French artistic culture were strong and strengthened further after Elector Max Emanuel's decade-long exile in Paris during the Wars of Spanish Succession.⁸ Max Emanuel brought the Belgian-born architect François de Cuvilliés the Elder (1695–1768) back with him to Munich in 1715. After 1725, Cuvilliés held the position of *Hofbaumeister* at the electoral court there and published an extensive series of ornamental print books detailing rococo designs for wall decorations, furniture, and various luxury objects.⁹ Johann Baptist Zimmermann worked alongside Cuvilliés on various projects in Munich, including the justly renowned interior of the Amalienburg, and therefore there is at least one direct link between the Wieskirche and the elite secular rococo.¹⁰ French ornamental prints were likewise avidly collected among the artistically savvy in German-speaking Europe, which indicates that the likely routes of transmission were multiple and diverse.¹¹ For my purposes, it is enough to note that the Wieskirche employs similar shifting spatial complexities in its interior as does the *Salon de la Princesse*, but its function as a place of worship, combined with the specific metaphors and symbolism of its decoration, lends its ornament an entirely distinct purpose and a different effect.

Before we pursue this idea, however, it might help to know a little about how the Wieskirche came to be built. Its construction falls within a larger trend to outfit Catholic southern Germany with parish, abbey, and pilgrimage churches during the eighteenth century. This process resulted in hundreds of newly built or renovated religious spaces, many of them employing a rococo decorative format, that in toto amount to a major campaign to reassert the region's Catholic identity and rearticulate its ecclesiastically based social structure. This occurred both through new church and abbey construction instigated by the region's ecclesiastical class and through the development of new religious edifices to respond to burgeoning displays of popular piety.¹² The Wieskirche represents a mix of both processes in a single site. It was built to commemorate a wooden statue of the flagellated Christ first used in local religious processions. (fig. 3) This marionette-like effigy was cared for by a pious woman named Maria Lory, a widowed innkeeper resident near the Bavarian town of Steingaden, who claimed one day to experience a miracle: while praying before the statue, she looked up to see it crying real tears. We know of this from a chronology prepared by



Figure 3. Balthasar Augustin Albrecht and Egid Verhelst the Elder, High Altar of the Wieskirche. (Photo: Marburg /Art Resource, NY)

a later abbot at Steingaden, Marianus Mayr, written around 1759, in which he asserts that this apparently miraculous event took place on 14 June 1738¹³. As word traveled of Maria Lory's experience, pilgrims flocked to the area to venerate the holy image; many of these were sick or crippled individuals who came to pray for divine intercession against their ills.¹⁴ The site's renown spread quickly, so fast in fact that the local ecclesiastical authorities struggled to monitor and appropriately direct the burgeoning crowds' enthusiasm. A small, simply decorated chapel was erected near Steingaden in the early 1740s; it was consecrated and mass first held there on 17 March 1744. The growing throngs of pilgrims quickly exceeded its capacity, for which reason the local ecclesiastics commenced with plans to

erect a more commodious new church. They did so with the blessing of the presiding abbot, one Hyazinth Gassner, but his death in March 1745 rendered the project an orphan and the religious practices transpiring at Steingaden unsupervised. Mayr succeeded Gassner, assuming control over the new church after obtaining permission from the electoral court in Munich in June 1745.¹⁵ Somewhat later the Steingaden religious authorities realized that the church required diocesan approval as well, and therefore work on it halted until an official commission could visit the site and report on its holiness. That visit took place from 14 to 16 September 1745.

It is worth pausing for a moment to reflect on what this series of events portended. The situation at Steingaden—swelling crowds of worshippers and pilgrims gathering at an only intermittently supervised site, displaying passionate religious fervor toward an unsubstantiated miracle, with chapels being built without proper church authorization—represented a highly problematic constellation of activities for the regional ecclesiastical authorities. Understanding why involves recognizing the complicated intellectual culture that existed within eighteenth-century Bavarian religious communities. The critical literature on Bavarian rococo architecture has tended to caricature the region as a lingering enclave of simplistic medieval piety, its people obstinately devout and dominated by a “peasant mentality” lacking in sophisticated conceptions of human affairs. This view has transmuted into an assessment of Bavaria as somehow anti-Enlightenment in mindset. Harries in particular has described Bavaria in these terms, noting that it lacked a strong middle class of the kind that fueled public discourse elsewhere in Europe, that the Catholic church remained powerful in the region, and that the former continental cultural significance of its major cities like Nuremberg and Augsburg had dwindled. The implication of such a characterization is that social conditions hindered the development of an Enlightenment-friendly culture, and the exuberant spiritualized decoration of Bavarian churches seems to substantiate this further.¹⁶ Yet Bavaria’s ecclesiastical class was involved profoundly in an intellectual reconsideration of religious expression, one parallel to societal reflections promulgated elsewhere and that has been characterized recently as the “Catholic Enlightenment.”¹⁷ The abbeys of the Pfaffenwinkel region, where the Wieskirche ultimately would be erected, were sites of significant inquiry into the interrelationship between theology and Enlightenment natural philosophy, often considered as overlapping intellectual domains whose correspondences enabled modification of divine understanding in light of new, proto-scientific thinking. These perhaps were not the bold speculations of Genevan, Parisian, or London-based philosophers, but neither were they a passive acceptance of outdated

beliefs.¹⁸ A major figure in this movement, one who strove to promote an ecclesiastical Enlightenment in Bavaria, was the Augustinian theologian and priest Eusebius Amort (1692–1775). He was resident at Polling Abbey, located a few miles to the northeast of Steingaden, and was a member of the committee that examined Maria Lory's "miracle" in September 1745. His intellectual pedigree inflected his interpretation of what he encountered there. Amort had befriended Pope Benedict XIV Lambertini while in Rome between 1733 and 1735 and he shared with the pontiff a desire to see devotional excesses curbed in the visualization of Catholic faith, a position he expounded in multiple writings on spirituality and the miraculous. It turns out that Amort's and Benedict's shared view of religious passion as an essentially earthly phenomenon had great implications for the Wieskirche's design.¹⁹

Amort postulated that most of what seemed to be paranormal, extraordinary phenomena like visions or revelations could be explained through recourse to two possible causes: trickery or natural effects. Only a very small number of apparent miracles were actually divine in origin. He developed this idea by extrapolating ideas out of Pope Benedict's lengthy and influential disquisition on the subject, a tract entitled *De Servorum Dei beatificatione et beatorum canonizatione*, in which Benedict provided rules for determining the authenticity of apparently miraculous occurrences and subsequently the beatification of those experiencing them, rules it should be noted that the Catholic Church still employs today.²⁰ Amort had absorbed and applied Benedict's thinking about these issues in his investigations of the German Catholic mystic Crescentia of Kaufbeuren; in a treatise entitled *De revelationibus, visionibus, et apparitionibus privatis*, published just a year before he became involved at Steingaden, Amort explored how personal revelations of God could be explained as the result of logical, earthly sources.²¹ The gist of this process is that no phenomenon can be credited as miraculous until all possible natural or diabolical explanations have been investigated carefully and eliminated. Only then, after all other possibilities have been denied, can an event be deemed a divine intervention.²²

Amort's assessment of divine revelation in his *De revelationibus* served him well when he traveled to Steingaden.²³ Amort regarded the miraculousness of Maria Lory's weeping statue with skepticism, but he simultaneously appreciated it as an incitement to good works. He did not believe that the miracle was real—the statue's teardrops were fake, he surmised, and their traces on the sculpted Christ's face made by a painter.²⁴ He even went so far as to express a wish that the statue remain in storage, brought out for view only on special occasions and at the local abbot's

discretion. But Amort acknowledged that in this instance popular devotion had instigated an efflorescence of piety and public good, and for those reasons he ultimately condoned and authorized worship at the Wieskirche site.²⁵ Further supporting his approval was the pilgrims' focus on a representation of the suffering Christ and not on a relic of dubious origin or on Maria Lory herself. This directed the masses' devotional energies into a proper outlet, one very close to the traditional function of art in Catholic worship. Even Amort himself was moved by the statue's primitive beauty, so much so that he composed a spontaneous Latin couplet on its sentimental impact.²⁶

But Amort's efforts in defining Maria Lory's "miracle" as an actually non-miraculous instigator of good works did not end there. In 1746, after the Zimmermann brothers had begun construction on the new church, it was Amort who supported the publication of the official ecclesiastical record of the "miracle," called in various editions the *Gnadenblum* or *Gnadenbüchlein*.²⁷ In it, the book's anonymous author argues against understanding Maria Lory's vision as miraculous and instead characterizes it and the subsequent outpouring of devotional piety as *Guttaten*, or good works. He further paraphrases Benedict's *De Servorum* directly in despiritualizing miracles generally and subjecting the seemingly miraculous to careful scrutiny.²⁸ As the *Gnadenblum* phrases it:

Es ist derohalben wohl zu mercken, daß ein Miracul oder
Wunderwerck eygentlich seye ein ungewöhnlich wunderliche
Begebenheit wider, oder über die Kräfte der Natur, oder
wenigstens die Arth und Weiß, wie sonsten die Natur zu
würcken pfleget, so beschreibet, und theilet die Miracul ab
der Heil. Thomas von Aquin; zu deme wird eine dergleichen
ungewöhnliche Begebenheit vor ein Miracul offentlich nit
erkennet, es sey dann ein Sach, daß selbe durch öffentlichen
Process von Bischoffen, oder seinem Vicario bewähret; dann
es kan offtermahlen geschehen, daß ein Sach für ein Miracul
gehalten weilen einem oder auch anderen Menschen die natürliche
Ursach nit bekannt, welches nach des gelehrten Pignatelli nit
erklecklich; massen die natürliche Ursach nit nur einen, oder auch
mehreren, sondern nach möglicher menschlicher Wissenschaft
allen unbekannt seyn muß.²⁹

The *Gnadenblum*'s text therefore justifies the role of an educated clergy versed to determine the truly miraculous, and in fact it was exactly this kind of culture that existed in Bavaria's cloisters and that Amort sought to promote in his administrative and educational activities. It also applies natural philosophy to human activity in its call for the ostensibly divine to

undergo tests of human reason and its recommendation that nature explain most occurrences deemed miraculous.

It was this project of de-mystifying the Steingaden miracle that inflected the Wieskirche's design in the year before the laying of its foundation stone on 10 July 1746. The intermittent months between that date and the previous autumn's diocesan assessment are difficult to fill in. At some point the Zimmermann brothers were brought into the project, possibly even before Mayr became abbot, and the exact manner of their involvement there is today only imperfectly understood. Amort's involvement is likewise difficult to confirm, even though several surviving letters attest to his interest in activities at Steingaden and his careful conceptualization of the site's religious character.³⁰ Whether Amort could have influenced the church's design, or whether the design supervision fell to Mayr, or came from the architects themselves, remains unclear. Regardless of how its design came into existence, the church that the Zimmermann brothers built harmonizes remarkably well with Amort's thinking as expressed in his letters, his theological tracts, and the *Gnadenblum* whose publication he supported, and for these reasons his possible direct influence on the church is worth considering. That the architects themselves were likewise drawn to the site's allure has long been known, and Dominikus Zimmermann particularly displayed a strong personal attachment to this architectural project.³¹ He relocated permanently to the area in 1752, built himself a small house there where he lived out his days, and worshipped regularly in the church he built. His son Franz even married the widowed Maria Lory. Yet for all the commitment of the architect to his project and to the devotional significance of the site, the character of the Wieskirche's interior harkens to Amort, since as I shall now demonstrate, something other than a pure expression of miraculous wonder is operational in its design.

It has often been noted that Zimmermann constructed the Wieskirche's interior to present a dramatic effect upon first entering its nave.³² (fig. 2) If the church exemplifies divine wonder, it does so principally from this vantage point. Its decoration and interior organization appear unified there and some commentators have suggested that a perception of spatial coherency occurs at that spot as well. But the church's full complexity cannot be understood from that position, since it is ultimately a deceptive one; too much remains invisible initially and only becomes viewable as one moves into and through the church's interior. The introductory perception of decorative coherency therefore turns out to be false, and the miraculous event it seems to celebrate likewise soon emerges as complicated by the church's spatial arrangement. In the Wieskirche interior, surfaces shift, perceptions of solid and void vary, and new combinations of decorative

data and imagery emerge and partially cohere, a point noted by Harries in his analysis of the church.³³ One might in this respect recall the Salon de la Princesse, whose interior surfaces demand movement as much as do the Wieskirche's, but here movement spiritualizes the interior since spatial progression repeatedly places religiously themed ornamental and pictorial iconography into view. This process achieves its most meaningful coordination in the building's apse, specifically in the relationship of the high altar to the ambulatory that encircles it. Ambulatories are of course a commonplace design element of pilgrimage churches, since they allow visitors to navigate around the altar without disturbing the ceremony of the mass. Zimmermann's design for the ambulatory and apse at the Wieskirche involved constructing a pseudo-arcade; two stories of joined columns and pilasters create a balcony-like effect that surrounds the altar area on either side, while also allowing considerable visual penetration between the apse and its surrounding spaces.³⁴ (fig. 4) This architectural configuration animates the process of walking in front of and around the altar, something pilgrims would typically do, and makes those moments of walking and looking into a false culmination of the entire pilgrimage experience, a point I shall explain further momentarily. In short, what Zimmermann accomplished here is to transform walking and looking into a metaphor for Christian faith and its relationship to a partially discernable yet unquestionably confirmed divine.

To see this, one can begin by noting that the apse arcade separates the altar from the ambulatory, but typically for rococo architecture it does not so much divide these spaces as emphasize their permeability, suggesting transitions and inviting views from one area to the next. This is especially true when one walks through one arm of the ambulatory and looks into the apse proper; when doing this, a surprising thing happens. Here I beg the reader's patience, since still images of a building's interior can never convey the full experience of actually moving through it. Atop the colonnaded balcony that demarcates the apse on either side are three rococo cartouches that frame openings in the apse wall. These voids hang in midair and punctuate the wall's vertical orientation. Looking upward from the ambulatory on the same side they appear simply as abstracted decorative forms; but looking across the apse from one arm of the ambulatory to the other, one sees *through* these freestanding rococo frames onto the church's exterior wall behind them. (fig. 5) Their undulating scrolls, rocaille forms, and waves allow light to pass through, which contributes to the church's complex interior lighting, and again typically of the rococo this involves much indirect and diffused light to create a sense of divinity. This is possible because there are irregularly shaped windows in the ambulatory



Figure 4. Wieskirche, upper choir, looking north. (Photo: Marburg/
Art Resource, NY)



Figure 5. Wieskirche, upper choir, looking north. (Photo: Marburg/
Art Resource, NY)

that correspond exactly to these rocaille-framed openings; as one moves through the space, light from these windows is partially directed through these frames to illuminate areas of the apse's center.³⁵

But these hanging cartouches also act as moving frames for art. Painted on the walls several feet behind them are a series of paintings.³⁶ Three of these scenes appear in each leg of the ambulatory and correspond exactly to the three cartouches on each side. (fig. 6) They depict individual moments from the life of Jesus and illustrate his mercy and charity toward the suffering. These include representations of him healing the sick, the deaf, the paralyzed, the blind, the leprous, and even the dead as exemplified by the raising of Lazarus. They are simply painted and, despite being representations of miracles, are remarkably devoid of supernatural



Figure 6. Wieskirche, choir looking north with view toward windows (Photo: Marburg/Art Resource, NY)

iconography. As one moves through the ambulatory, these scenes come in and out of view; they are not uniformly visible from any single spot, but must be observed while moving in order for their pictorial content to become evident. One first sees the open rococo frame with an empty wall behind it, then as one walks a picture emerges within and behind that freestanding frame, only to subsequently disappear again as one moves further to reveal once again an unadorned white wall. (fig. 5 and 6) The effect is not unlike that of watching a solar eclipse—the optical experience begins at one side and comes into view gradually before disappearing again at the opposite edge. The architecture here frames its pictorial subjects and does so in an exuberantly three-dimensional manner, thereby vitalizing the meanings conveyed in the art by demanding motion as part of the

religious experience. Furthermore the architecture thematizes partiality, fragmentation, and ephemerality as central components of its spiritual experience. In that respect the Wieskirche insists upon a fourth dimension, time, for its message to unfold.

That these scenes frame the apse is significant in that they set up a relationship to the statue of the flagellated Christ, the object of the pilgrim's worship, which is located in a shrine at the high altar and is the *pièce de resistance* of the pilgrim's experience. In arranging scenes of charity around the apse, the church's space three-dimensionalizes the common representation of the object in popular devotional prints. The *Gnadenblum* begins with a picture of the Christ statue surrounded by images of his good deeds, and in that regard the Wieskirche's architecture resembles a devotional print transformed into a three-dimensional space.³⁷ Commentators have repeatedly remarked on how distinctive is this combination of architectural, ornamental, and painted components within the history of architecture, although Zimmermann's design is neither new nor unique. It resembles Piedmontese experiments with permeable space typified by Vittone or Juvarra, and the inclusion of wittily cartouched paintings and spatial play likewise again recalls the *Salon de la Princesse*.³⁸ In explaining them, Harries simply notes their oddness and the element of the unexpected they bring to the experience of the church: "Die Wies is full of surprises—here I only want to call attention to the curious openings in the upper ambulatory, which reappear, fantastically transformed, below the choir vault, providing shifting frames for the ambulatory's small frescoes."³⁹ Carl Lamb describes them as the fitting culmination of the pilgrim's journey, as the realization of all that the pilgrim longed for in their slow perambulation to the holy image.⁴⁰ Yet my observation suggests that this is not the case; the holiest area of the Wieskirche does not provide a resolution to anything, but in a typically rococo way culminates in spatial and semantic complexity. The only possible resolution of this experience will occur in the mind of the pilgrim, and likely after exiting the church. Perception and imagination fleetingly resolve what sensory experience of the church's interior presents as partial and unconfirmed.

Christ's charity is of course an entirely appropriate theme for the decoration of a pilgrimage church, one that attracted sick or ailing worshippers alongside those who sought penance for their sins. But divine mercy is presented to those visitors not as fact, but rather as activity; not as a tangible thing that art illustrates, but as something temporally bound, partially detectable, and ongoing, in other words as an undertaking. In this regard, a strict division between the miracles of Christ's life and our ability to perceive them is put into play. We see these stories illustrated for us in

the church's decoration, but the architectural mode of their conveyance places us at a remove from comprehending them perfectly. The viewer's understanding of the miraculous is therefore moderated or qualified through the Wieskirche's architecture. We can never perceive of these miracles as straightforward representational wholes; they only take on that status when we move, and ultimately in our imagination.

More than one observer has used the metaphor of theater to explain exactly how this process of understanding through art works. Harries has described Bavarian rococo churches in their entirety as reminiscent of the theater in that the pilgrim/worshipper acts as an actor who gives life to the concepts represented in the church's decoration through his presence.⁴¹ That is certainly true, as my discussion above demonstrates, but more to the point is that the divine is presented in them not as comprehensible totally through human sensation, but always remaining to some degree beyond full apprehension, a status that the worshipper's motion activates and seems to resolve, but actually only reinforces as partially perceptible and distant. Salvation is known through representation, here as in any Catholic church, but one can comprehend it only fragmentarily, that is unless one moves. It is knowable, but must be energized by the worshipper's physical transportation through the space.

Harries sees theatrical affects like this as both enforcing and destructive of devotional aesthetics, arguing that "...the rococo, at least in Bavaria, can be understood as a playful potentiation of the baroque that at the same time implies its negation. *In the rococo the baroque destroys itself.*"⁴² Here Harries is arguing against the sometime assertion that the Bavarian rococo represents the waning of religious piety in an Enlightened world, a point with which my earlier discussion concurs entirely. He continues: "Its play with perspective is more than an aesthetic game; it is part of a last successful attempt to create a genuinely religious art that knows about the insufficiency not only of art, but of the visible. The Bavarian rococo's unwillingness to simply adopt illusionism [...] does not stem from an inability to take the theatre seriously. Quite the contrary. Because the Bavarian rococo continues to take the theatre so seriously, because it is unwilling to subject it to the rule of perspective, it cannot accept that pictorialization of the theatre."⁴³ Harries notes here that by shifting away from a perspectival system in which art is viewed from fixed positions to the operational spatiality of the Bavarian church, such churches reveal profound devotion in what appears to be aesthetic play. Harries's argument, couched in abstract philosophical and stylistic terms, enables a valuable conclusion: that a new understanding of the human interaction with and comprehension of the divine is represented through the Wieskirche's theatricalization of

space. That newness is a belief in the human mind's ability to understand the natural world and comprehend it rationally, a procedure that does not invalidate the divine, but redefines its relationship to human sensation. The divine is there, and the Wieskirche makes it apparent, but not through straightforward picturing. Spatial play through rococo ornament and art transforms the divine to a new sensational logic, one in which the actual miraculousness of Jesus' acts are confirmed as inscrutable.

Harries is at pains to show how this change related to a rationalist mindset that nonetheless rests on Catholic conceptions of belief. The seventeenth century, he argues, went too far in its glorification of theatrical effects in religious architecture, to the point of using visual and spatial complexity to recreate the divine in sensual, phenomenal terms.⁴⁴ The Bavarian rococo, in contrast, is aware that the divine can only be known insufficiently and imperfectly, that there are limits to our senses' ability to comprehend it. Harries seems therefore to argue against the predominant deist strain of eighteenth-century religious thought that tried to argue for a knowable, rationally provable God. The Wieskirche's motion-activated interior complicates Harries's view more than he recognizes, since the ambulatory frames promote a sense of a mystical divine yet simultaneously draw attention to our sensory capability for understanding it transitarily. It is not quite right to say that the divine exists either in our world phenomenally or is beyond our understanding; the Wieskirche puts the divine somewhere in between these antipodes in a typically eighteenth-century way, and in fact leaves its exact nature at once sensorily detectable and difficult to locate. It is there, we can sense it partially, but never completely and never as a totally convincing illusion of the real. It is miraculous, yet knowable, and perceptible yet ephemeral all at once.

Seventeenth-century churches, edifices constructed a century closer to Counter-Reformational ardor, reinforce faith through the process of seeing and perceiving. In the Wieskirche, however, vision is divided and partial. The pilgrim must believe that the rest is there, since he knows it and has just seen it, and his perceptions enable him to remember that which he once saw but is now out of view. He acts on faith, and in that respect the Wieskirche's architectural complexity encourages and stimulates belief not through representing before the worshipper, but in the mind of the worshipper after they have moved through the church. The church is not wonder revealed, at least not after the initial moment of entry, but rather wonder ongoing in the sensations of the believer. The pilgrim's movement through the church stimulates that action, but also metaphorizes it. There is therefore a shift here from the Catholic doctrine of art as illustration of Christian truths, as a text for the illiterate believer, to art as a prompt for belief. Art incites faith as action through motion.

Piety is very much the point of this building's decorative program, but that piety is not presented as something finite, coherent, and ultimately clear in its implications. Rather, the actions of the worshipper are required to effectuate it, and I think that message makes particular sense in the context of a pilgrimage church whose congregation may only have worshipped here for a limited period within a much longer spiritual life. The deeper purpose of a religious pilgrimage is not to worship at a holy site, but rather to return home spiritually transformed, altered in one's faith and righted on the path toward salvation.⁴⁵ That transformation requires work through good deeds; it cannot simply occur in the act of being a pilgrim, but must be reenacted continually in a gradual movement toward eternity. The Wieskirche prepares the believer for further activity later in life through emphasizing his role as an active agent in a spiritual journey. The church's ceiling fresco, which represents Judgment Day about to take place and which vertically associates the door to eternal life with the entry vestibule of the church, only makes the connection between future salvation and the worshipper's actions more explicit. For just as life, viewed through a Catholic lens, is a series of choices that bring the believer closer to or farther from salvation, so does the Wieskirche present salvation as a series of changing visions that are not stationary, but become whole or dissolve through passage within its interior. Harries calls this an outgrowth of a rural peasant mentality, one in which the worshipper is "in the grip of higher powers that he could not control and not fully understand."⁴⁶ But to my eyes it simply a reassertion of certain fundamental Catholic beliefs, grounded firmly in a rational sense of self positioned in dialogue with an inexplicable yet only incompletely perceptible divine. Human sensation is rational enough to identify that the divine exists beyond it, and in that sense perhaps there is a trace strain of inadvertent deism in the church's ornamental theology.⁴⁷

I would suggest further that this interpretation of the Wieskirche's effects is fundamentally an Amortian one. The Wieskirche renders the divine inscrutable except for its actuation in human activity. Good works, rather than a straightforward celebration of the miraculous, ultimately is the order of the day. The apparent miraculous unity of the church's interior turns out to be a false perception, one that further exploration and understanding of the church's interior reveals as a misapprehension. Knowledge prevails over uninformed wonder. Likewise, the apparent culmination of the pilgrim's experience at the altar and ambulatory results in ambiguity, inciting further investigation and contemplation in the pilgrim's post-pilgrimage life. The apparently miraculous—be it Jesus' good deeds or Maria Lory's vision—are compromised through the church's rococo indeterminacies, which

draw attention to the pilgrim's ability to perceive of the divine, as well as the limits of doing so. And the miraculous as such becomes an illusion in the mind of the pilgrim, one insistently irresolute in the church's decorative program but attaining fleeting coherency in the pilgrim's imagination. The importance of good deeds through future human activity, and not unchanneled divine intervention, become what this church ultimately celebrates in its rococo semantic and spatial complexity. Furthermore, the existence of the divine is promoted, even glorified, but in terms that recast the passionate baroque miracle into a controlled phenomenon while still acknowledging its unfathomable genesis. Christopher Johns has noticed a similar tension in eighteenth-century Italian painting, which was influenced by teaching missions and religious sermons that desired to "rationalize faith while retaining its revelatory mystique."⁴⁸ The Wieskirche achieves exactly this by locating the miraculous within the worshipper's evanescent imagination. The building represents a hedge between pure belief and pure knowing, and only in the pilgrim's actions can that conundrum, at least temporarily, be resolved.

In conclusion, I'd like to parse out some of the preceding argument's implications. It should be clear that rococo arabesques and cartouches were not incorporated into the Wieskirche solely to be decorative, although they are decoration and function on the level of adorning the interior and pleasing viewers with their beauty. They also act as intermediaries between the worshipping inhabitant and the concepts at work in the church's spiritual content.⁴⁹ That intermediary role exceeds simply framing or accompanying; it dislocates the viewer's previous psycho-spatial sense of his relationship to the sensate world and whatever lay beyond. It is in this respect that the rococo church can be understood as intervening into the believer's place within a larger spiritualized cosmos. Many churches do this with their interior decoration, but the Wieskirche emboldens the worshipper's process of psychic regeneration more than most; it requires and celebrates the worshipper's inner perceptions of the divine, and the result is greater devotional agency that relates, I have tried to demonstrate, to Enlightenment Catholicism. Speaking more broadly, rococo spatial and semantic ambiguity is used here for a specific set of concerns emergent from the spiritual, social, political, and doctrinal concerns of this site. Other eighteenth-century rococo churches may display similar characteristics, but the flexibility of rococo aesthetics permitted a wide range of applications and implications that operated on the level of the individual building. Positing a general set of tenets for all rococo religious architecture, or worse, lumping these buildings together into an undifferentiated mass, glosses over the precise concerns that rococo forms illuminated for a

society that saw in them an opportunity to express profound spiritual and social matters. It is my hope that future scholarship will view Bavarian and Central European rococo churches not simply as reckless derivatives, but as buildings where rococo ornamentation's full potential was understood and put to work.

NOTES

1. Sincere thanks to Jeffrey Collins, Christopher Johns, and Alistaire Tallent for their contributions to my thinking about this subject. Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *Rococo Architecture in Southern Germany* (London: Phaidon, 1968); and *German Rococo: The Zimmermann Brothers* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968). These volumes collect diverse essays that Hitchcock published in 1950s and 1960s. A current summary of the field is Ulrich Leben, "German Rococo: From Cuvilliés in Munich to Nahl in Potsdam," in *Rococo: The Continuing Curve*, ed. Sarah D. Coffin, et al. (New York: Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, 2008), 136–49.

2. Karsten Harries, *The Bavarian Rococo Church: Between Faith and Aestheticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

3. The classic survey being Norbert Lieb, *Barockkirchen zwischen Donau und Alpen* (Munich: Hirmer, 1953). Noteworthy as well are the studies of Hermann Bauer, including *Rocaille: Zur Herkunft und zum Wesen eines Ornament-Motivs* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1962); *Der Himmel im Rokoko: Das Fresko im deutschen Kirchenraum im 18. Jahrhundert* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1965); *Rokokomalerei* (Mittenwald: Mäander, 1980); and *Johann Baptist und Dominikus Zimmermann: Entstehung und Vollendung des bayerischen Rokoko* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1985). A most welcome recent exception to this situation, focusing on sculpture, is Christiane Hertel, *Pygmalion in Bavaria: The Sculptor Ignaz Günther and Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Art Theory* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011).

4. Carl Lamb, *Die Wies* (Munich: Süddeutscher Verlag, 1964), remains the reference monograph on the building. See also Bauer, *Zimmermann*, 58–63.

5. See, for example, the lengthy disquisitions on light provided by Lamb, *Die Wies*, 84–85 and 101–106, and the interpretative analysis of space and light offered by Hermann Bauer, "Zur Bedeutung der Wieskirche," in *Die Wies: Geschichte und Restaurierung*, ed. Michael Petzet (Munich: Bayerisches Landesamt für Denkmalpflege, 1992), 73–80.

6. This sense of eighteenth-century interior space as a promulgator of movement is explored in a recent collection of essays: *Architectural Space in Eighteenth-Century Europe: Constructing Identities and Interiors*, ed. Denise Amy Baxter and Meredith Martin (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), especially 1–4, albeit with a focus on secular architecture.

7. Marian Hobson, *The Object of Art: The Theory of Illusion in Eighteenth-*

Century France (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 47–61; and for *papillotage* as metamorphosis, see Mary D. Sheriff, “Seeing Metamorphosis in Sculpture and the Decorative Arts,” in *Taking Shape: Finding Sculpture in the Decorative Arts*, ed. Martina Droth (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2009), 158–65.

8. During which Max Emanuel participated in the building boom that took place in and around Paris in the 1710s and 1720s. For his palace at Saint-Cloud, see Max Tillmann, “*Très belle, agréable et bien meublée*: The Electoral Palace at Saint-Cloud in the Early Eighteenth Century,” in Baxter and Martin, *Architectural Space*, 35–55; and Tillmann, *Ein Frankreichbündnis der Kunst: Kurfürst Max Emanuel von Bayern als Auftraggeber und Sammler* (Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2009).

9. Wolfgang Braunfels, *François Cuvilliés: Der Baumeister der galanten Architektur des Rokoko* (Munich: Süddeutscher Verlag, 1986), 111–15.

10. Braunfels, *François Cuvilliés*, 210–11. See also Horst Mellenthin, *François Cuvilliés' Amalienburg: Ihr Bezug zur französischen Architekturtheorie* (Munich: Tuduv, 1989).

11. Alastair Laing, “French Ornamental Engravings and the Diffusion of the Rococo,” in *Le stampo e la diffusione delle immagini e degli stile*, ed. Henri Zerner (Bologna: Editrice Clueb, 1979), 109–27. Laing argues that craftsmen transmitted rococo forms to Germany in advance of prints. For recent assessments of this subject, see Sarah D. Coffin, “Radiating Rococo: The Dissemination of Style through Migrating Designers, Craftsmen, and Objects in the Eighteenth Century,” in *The Continuing Curve*, 102–35; and Philippe Poindront, “Augsbourg, centre de reproduction de gravures d’ornement parisiennes au XVIIIe siècle,” *Histoire de l’art* 61 (October 2007): 27–37.

12. Mary Lee Nolan and Sidney Nolan, *Christian Pilgrimage in Modern Western Europe* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 106–7. The authors note that the largest number of new pilgrimage sites created in post-reformation Europe was not in Italy or Spain, but rather Catholic Central Europe. Forty-nine new religious sites appeared there between the middle-sixteenth and late-eighteenth centuries, which exceeds thirty for the same period in Italy, twenty-six in Iberia, and twenty-one in France. They likewise note that the Germanic lands developed a particular inclination toward shrines devoted to images of Jesus, a point made in connection to the Wieskirche by Thomas and Helene Finkenstaedt in two related publications: *Der Wies-Heiland. Seine Devotional-Kopien und verwandte Andachtsbilder des Christus an der Geisselsäule* (Würzburg: Bayerische Blätter für Volkskunde, 1981); and *Materialien zur Wies-Wallfahrt* (Würzburg: Bayerische Blätter für Volkskunde, 1981), both published in association with the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum.

13. Thomas Finkenstaedt, “Das Gnadenbild des Gegeißelten Heiland auf der Wies und sein Rahmen: Wallfahrt und Baugeschichte,” in Petzet, *Die Wies*, 45–46. See also Finkenstaedt, “Zur Baugeschichte der Wieskirche.” *Jahrbuch des Vereins für christliche Kunst in München* 11 (1980): 109–15.

14. Thomas and Helene Finkenstaedt, *Die Wieswallfahrt. Ursprung und Ausstrahlung der Wallfahrt zum Gegeißelten Heiland* (Regensburg: Verlag F. Pustet, 1981), 86–89. The pilgrimage began as a mostly local and regional phenomenon, but

after the first prints of the Wies statue were produced in the middle 1740s, pilgrims began flocking to the site from across continental Europe. One source, dating from 1779, describes them as hailing from Germany (including Austria and Switzerland), Bohemia, Hungary, and the adjacent provinces of eastern France and northern Italy. Surviving documentation also permits an understanding of their number. The Wies parish kept records on communicants, whose yearly total peaked at 39,000 in 1762. This indicates that by the 1760s, Wies had developed into a pilgrimage destination of international stature and significance.

15. Lamb, *Die Wies*, 29. Mayr obtained consent in June, and there survives a letter dated 7 December 1745 that mentions Dominikus Zimmermann's plan for the church choir, indicating that the architect was involved in the project by that date and building underway. A nearly contemporary letter from Amort likewise mentions the choir area under construction in fall 1745.

16. Harries, *Bavarian Rococo Church*, 197.

17. Christopher M. S. Johns, "Gender and Genre in the Religious Art of the Catholic Enlightenment," in *Italy's Eighteenth Century: Gender and Culture in the Age of the Grand Tour*, ed. Paula Findlen, Wendy Wassyng Roworth, and Catherine M. Sama (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 331–33, with additional bibliography.

18. Finkenstaedt, *Die Wieswallfahrt*, 49.

19. On Amort, see Georg Rückert, *Eusebius Amort und das bayerische Geistesleben im 18. Jahrhundert* (Munich: Verlag Franz X. Seitz, 1956); and Karin Precht-Nussbaum, *Zwischen Augsburg und Rom. Der Pollinger Augustiner-Chorherr Eusebius Amort (1692–1775). Ein bedeutender Repräsentant katholischer Aufklärung in Bayern* (Paring: Augustiner-Chorherr Verlag, 2007).

20. Benedict, *De Servorum Dei beatificatione et beatorum canonizatione* 4 vols (Bologna, 1734–38).

21. Eusebius Amort, *De revelationibus, visionibus, et apparitionibus privatis* (Augsburg, 1744). The book subsequently appeared in Italian editions, including a Venetian one in 1750. See Finkenstaedt, *Wieswallfahrt*, 51, and for Amort's interest in mysticism generally see Rückert, *Eusebius Amort*, 21–31.

22. Such caution may have been necessitated by the German predilection for religious shrines associated with seemingly spontaneous miracles. See Nolan and Nolan, *Christian Pilgrimage*, 241–49. Almost half of the 459 miracle shrines documented in Europe are located in predominantly German-speaking regions. A detailed historical study of later German holy apparitions, demonstrating their remarkable tenacity across the centuries, is David Blackbourn, *Marpingen: Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994).

23. Finkenstaedt, *Wieswallfahrt*, 62.

24. To some degree, Amort's statements evoke the tradition of having an ecclesiastical official play devil's advocate during the authentication of spiritual occurrences; such a figure was deemed essential in processes of canonization. It should be noted, however, that Amort's thoughts about the apparent worldliness of the Wies "miracle" are not isolated comments, but emerge from a sustained critique

of the miraculous that began with Benedict and that Amort developed in his writings over decades.

25. Finkenstaedt, *Wieswallfahrt*, 52.
26. Finkenstaedt, *Wieswallfahrt*, 62–64. Amort’s couplet reads: *Tam grato Capiti, nur membra informia sponsas?/Nam Caput es nobis, nos tibi membra sumus.*
27. The anonymous publication’s proper title is *Neu-entsproßene Gnadenblumen auf der Wis* (Augsburg: Anton Maximilian Heiss, 1746). A modern reprint appeared in 1999 from Verlag Anton H. Konrad, Weissenhorn.

28. *Gnadenblum*, 16–17. The book’s anonymous author then directly references Benedict XIV on the subject of converting sinners. *Gnadenblum*, 17 forward.

29. “It is therefore good to recognize that a miracle or wondrous event could simply be an unusual, rare occurrence, or be driven by the powers of nature, or at the least through the art and manner that nature tends to work; so are miracles related to us and described by St Thomas Aquinas. Furthermore we cannot easily distinguish an unusual occurrence of this kind from a true miracle, and therefore it is a matter that can be determined only through the public inquiry of bishops or their deputies. Then again it sometimes occurs that something is taken for a miracle when people don’t know its natural causes, which after the understanding of the educated Pignatelli [Pope Innocent XII], we know happens considerably often. One must assess natural causes not only by one or by several possibilities, but instead by all possible human knowledge, before something is declared to have a miraculous origin.” *Gnadenblum*, 14–15. The translation is mine.

30. Transcribed in Finkenstaedt, “Das Gnadenbild,” 49; and Finkenstaedt, *Wieswallfahrt*, 62–65.

31. Lamb, *Die Wies*, 17.
32. Lamb, *Die Wies*, 49.
33. Harries, *The Bavarian Rococo Church*, 155.
34. Lamb, *Die Wies*, 91–95 and 102–05.

35. Perfecting the mechanics of this spatial arrangement appears to have preoccupied the Zimmermanns to a special degree. Few architectural drawings survive from their studio, but one that can be traced to them with reasonable certainty is a drawing of the interior apse wall looking into the ambulatory, in other words precisely the view analyzed here, now housed at the Städtisches Museum Weilheim, Germany. The drawing illustrates how the three open rococo cartouches relate to the windows and paintings in the ambulatory behind them, as well as to the apse interior below. For an illustration, see Petzet, *Die Wies*, 190; and for a discussion, Alois Epple, ed., *Dominikus Zimmermann: Zur 300. Wiederkehr seines Geburtsjahres* (Munich and Zurich: Schnell & Steiner, 1985), 38–39.

36. On the Wieskirche’s interior imagery, see Anna Bauer-Wild, “Das Bildprogramm der Wieskirche,” in Petzet, *Die Wies*, 53–58. The inventor of the church’s program, which Bauer-Wild notes was conceived with unusual semantic coherency, remains unknown, but likely was a representative from the nearby Steingaden abbey. Likewise is the precise authorship of these six paintings unclear, but that they were made under Johann Baptist Zimmermann’s direct supervision is beyond doubt.

37. Lamb, *Die Wies*, 69–70.
38. Richard Pommer, *Eighteenth-Century Architecture in Piedmont: The Open Structures of Juvarra, Alfieri, and Vittone* (New York: New York University Press, 1967). Pommer, 68, notes that this conception of “open architecture” had parallels and legacies in central European architecture, particularly in Kassel and Vienna.
39. Harries, *The Bavarian Rococo Church*, 139.
40. Lamb, *Die Wies*, 70.
41. His argument is actually considerably more complex than this, since he finds in Bavarian churches multiple overlapping layers of stages. Harries, *The Bavarian Rococo Church*, 120–21.
42. Harries, *The Bavarian Rococo Church*, 121, emphasis in the original.
43. Harries, *The Bavarian Rococo Church*, 149–50.
44. Harries, *The Bavarian Rococo Church*, 154.
45. The literature on pilgrimage has characterized spiritual transformation in varied ways. One influential perspective comes from Victor and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), who stress the concept of *communitas* as the mental and social state that provides the desired spiritual self-understanding. A contrasting view appears in John Eade and Michael J. Sallnow, eds, *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage* (London: Routledge, 1991), where the authors argue that pilgrimage is a more individually motivated experience and that the holy shrine is a site of contestation and conflict.
46. Harries, *The Bavarian Rococo Church*, 201.
47. Which is not to say that the church or its builders espoused such deistic possibilities knowingly. German theology flirted with deism for much of the eighteenth century, and some German thinkers sought to meld the results of modern natural philosophy with theology into what Thomas P. Saine has termed an “astonishing syncretism” of divergent intellectual strains. This “physicotheology” thrived despite persistent public resistance against anything openly termed deism. See Saine, *The Problem of Being Modern, or The German Pursuit of Enlightenment from Leibniz to the French Revolution* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997), 187–89 and 193–98.
48. Johns, “Gender and Genre,” 339.
49. On rococo ornament as pictorial intermediary, see Bauer, *Rocaille*, 61–63.