The Other Baroque….

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Exploring the Baroque from the Protestant World in Europe

1. The “other” baroque
   1. 17th century Amsterdam was arguably the best-known city in the world.
   2. In Europe, it compared to Rome, Paris, Venice, and London
   3. In the far regions of the Pacific and Indian oceans, Asia, Africa, and even South America, people who had heard of Europe knew of Amsterdam
   4. Amsterdam was a major city of commerce with a hugely busy port
   5. The city’s businessmen traded Indian spices, furs, grain, sugar from the Americas, Persian silk, Turkish carpets, Venetian mirrors, Japanese lacquerware, saffron, lavender, and tobacco.
   6. Tea from china, coffee from the middle east, and chocolate from south America introduced the west to caffeine
   7. However, despite being a major hub of trade and international commerce, Amsterdam as a city still had a pretty conservative culture
   8. Geographically, the Amsterdam of this time was very bland.
      1. Between 1590 and 1640, nearly 200,000 acres of land (intersected by canals and dikes) were created by windmills that pumped water out of the shallows and into the sea, creating a very flat landscape
      2. This was necessary because over a quarter of the Netherlands is below sea level…
      3. The resulting landscape was also very geometric, with lots of right angles and straight lines
      4. Similarly, the homes of the rich merchants were also very conservative and understated.
      5. The people of Amsterdam, even the wealthy merchants, did not like the lavish displays of the Vatican in Rome and went to great lengths to not flaunt their wealth and success.
2. The culture of Amsterdam
   1. Amsterdam’s religious life was guided by the Dutch Reformed Church, which was formed by Calvinist leaders.
      1. Jean Calvin—French church reformer (1509-1564); originally he and Martin Luther were “colleagues” of sorts, or at least had mutual respect for one another. But doctrine disagreements ended any sort of shared vision or partnership the two would ever have.
      2. Church was created in 1571 by 23 Calvinist leaders who gathered in Germany and created the church in direct response to pressure from Spain to conform to Catholic doctrine
      3. The Calvinist sect did not, however, become a state religion
      4. However, the church did require that anyone employed in public service become a church member
      5. The church itself was split over central issues:
         1. in the saving of souls, could good deeds overcome the doctrine of predestination?
            1. This became a heated and bloody battle, leading to treason trials and executions
      6. In direct contrast to the overtly detailed and ornate baroque movement of the Catholic church, the Dutch Reformed   
         Church took extra steps to remain austere
      7. The churches had no artwork, and the insides were often empty of furniture and whitewashed…. It was meant to reflect purity and propriety.
   2. In accordance with Calvinist doctrine, religious artwork was seen as a form of idolatry so art was banned from the churches
   3. however, secular art thrived
      1. Dutch baroque period art had a very distinctive attention to detail
      2. artwork reflected religious beliefs and also scientific discovery
   4. The Dutch also developed an interest in the close observation of nature. Scientific and philosophical inquiry flourished
      1. invention of the telescope (Galileo of Italy improved the design, but the original concept was invented by a Dutch eyeglass maker named Hans Lippershey)
      2. invention of the microscope (compound microscope invented by Antoni van Leeuwenhoek (1632-1723), another quasi-Dutch lens maker…but it was made possible by lensmakers Hans Lippershey and Zaccharias Janssen.
      3. Francis Bacon (1561-1626)—he was an Englishman; leading pioneer of the empirical method of inductive reasoning, which involved scientific experiment. Bacon believed the greatest obstacle to human understanding was “superstition, and the blind and immoderate zeal of religion” (Novum Organum Scientiarum [New Method of Science], 1620). Although he respected Aristotle’s teachings about the importance of studying natural phenomena, he believed that relying only on our senses to understand the natural world would lead to errors. Bacon felt that to truly understand the world around us we had to try and be as objective as possible.
      4. Rene Descartes (1596-1650)—French born guy who lived in Holland for many years. Proposed the opposite of Bacon, which was a process called “deductive reasoning”. This method began with clearly established general principles and moved outward to the establishment of particular truths. However, like Bacon, Descartes believed that our thoughts and observational senses were fallible and inaccurate for coming to true conclusions about the nature of the world. Truth is, essentially, an intellectual product.
      5. Desiderius Erasmus(1466-1536). He was a very influential writer and champion of learning; he asked questions about Catholic theology which would be used during the Protestant Reformation; he exposed church impropriety and wrote about religious doctrine, and was a champion of both Latin and Greek knowledge. But, he was Catholic and remained a dedicated Catholic his entire life. Erasmus began with healthy respect for Luther’s writings, but eventually stark disagreement over the idea of man’s free will drove a wedge between the two. Luther basically argued that man doesn’t have free will and can’t choose to do good works because man is wicked and held in bondage by that wickedness. Erasmus essentially argues the opposite, that although man is inherently wicked he can still choose to not sin and choose to do good works.
   5. Antwerp was a major banking center (Antwerp was part of the Netherland provinces which was controlled largely by Spain during the 1600’s).
   6. 17th century Amsterdam was a city of contradictions
      1. The society was obsessed with the acquisition of goods of all kinds
      2. Rigidly austere and conservative in its spiritual life
      3. Intolerant of what was viewed as religious heresy among protestants
      4. Tolerant of Catholics and Jewish people
      5. People avidly collected art for their homes
      6. Art within churches was strictly forbidden
3. Politics
   1. during most of the 16th century, the provinces of the Netherlands (roughly modern-day Belgium and Holland) were ruled by Spain
   2. the monarchy in Spain tried to impose catholic rule in the northern Netherlands, and tried to impose the tenets of the Council of Trent and reorganize the churches under catholic hierarchy
   3. however, the Calvinists strongly rejected this
   4. the heaviest protestant settlements were in the north, whereas most of the Catholics were in the southern provinces.
      1. Through inheritance and conquer, the “low countries” (these are not necessarily the boundaries of modern Netherlands) became essentially owned by Spain during the early-mid 1500’s under the rule of Charles V (he ruled the Holy Roman Empire, which included Spain and other European locations; it was a fiercely catholic rule). In 1549, Charles issued a sanction that basically said the Netherlands provinces could only be negotiated as a whole, involving north and south together.
   5. in 1567, ten thousand Spanish soldiers arrived near Amsterdam in order to subdue the Calvinist uprising
   6. however, the Dutch opened the dikes and flooded the countryside in order to make the Spanish turn back
   7. then, in 1576, the Spanish soldiers rioted over lack of pay and killed 7,000 citizens in the streets of Antwerp in a four-day battle that became known as the Spanish Fury.
   8. Appalled by the slaughter, the southern 10 provinces of the Netherlands (there were about 17 provinces total), which had been catholic up to this point, united with the northern provinces to form the United Provinces of the Netherlands
   9. However, the union only lasted a few years and after that the 5 southernmost provinces made peace again with Spain
   10. During this time there was a mass-migration of Protestants out of the southern provinces, and out of Antwerp. A good deal of intellectuals and merchants also fled the south as well.
   11. In 1581 the northern provinces declared independence from spain
   12. In 1585, the Spanish army officially conquered and claimed the city of Antwerp. In retaliation, the northern provinces blockaded the River Scheldt (which marked the definite partition between the northern and southern provinces).
   13. After what was called the “80 years war”, the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) sealed independence. (sort of; the 30 Years War between Germany, France, and several other European nations ended in 1648 also; the peace of Westphalia was the combination of the two treaties).
   14. The treaty finally freed the northern provinces
   15. Consequently, the wealth that had flowed through the port of Antwerp was now diverted to Amsterdam, leading to a large increase in economic prosperity and re-enforcing the city’s status as a major hub.

References

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