Biedermeier as a style of architecture and a style of European life in the first half of the XIX century

Nina Kazhar¹

¹Dąbrowskiego 69, 42-201 Częstochowa, Poland

kozharnina@rambler.ru

Abstract. Biedermeier originated in the German-Austrian culture in the first half of the XIX century and was widespread in many European countries. The article is devoted to the analysis of the peculiarities of the style and its influence on the urban culture of the considered era. After the victory over Napoleon in 1814-1815, the German Union was created at the Congress of Vienna. The industrial revolution unfolded there in full, the bourgeoisie was ideologically determined. The discoveries of science and technology actively influenced all areas of life. In this era of rapid development of natural science, technology and political change a contradiction arose: the desire to create a "new" and "modern" was accompanied by an interest in the "individual", in the "own little world" of the citizen-burgher. The name "Biedermeier" was formed only in the middle of the XIX century, when the style exhausted itself. In 1848 V. von Sheffel published in «The Flying Leaflets» two poems, in which the names Biederman and Bummelmeier were used. By combining these names, the poet Ludwig Eichrodt published the poem "Biedermeier" in 1850 and the later cycle of poems "Biedermeiers Liederlust". As a category of art history, as a designation of "style" the term began to be used at the turn of the XIX and XX centuries (August Sches tag, Georg Hirth). For the art industry since the middle of the 1890s Biedermeier was a stylistic concept. At the same time, it began to be interpreted both as a principle of "bourgeois shaping in the housing area", as well as a "style of use and functional justice" (A. Shestag). In the architectural science of the XX century it was believed that the "Biedermeier" did not create its own monumental architecture. Today it is considered as a feature and advantage that the main theme of the style was the creation of a living environment for the "burgher", the coziness and comfort of private housing. The article discusses the elements of architecture and art, which determined the integrity of artistic culture of "Biedermeier". The role of the style in creating prerequisites for the development of a number of ideas of artistic culture of the XX century is noted.

1. Introduction.

The industrial revolution caused in the early XIX century changes in all areas of life. The architect began to see his task in creating a new "material environment" that takes into account the achievements of technical progress. At the same time, the romantic notion of "individuality" required attention to a person’s private life. This attention was manifested in the housing culture of the Biedermeier style, which was formed in 1815 in Germany and Austria and until 1948 remained popular in several European countries.

2. The origin of the name Biedermeier

The name "Biedermeier" appeared, when the style had already exhausted itself. In 1847 the "revolutionary" poet Ludwig Pfau wrote a poem “Mister Biedermeier” (“Herr Biedermeier”), in which he condemned the "bourgeois lifestyle and double morality" [1, p.21]:

Schau, dort spaziert Herr Biedermeier
und seine Frau, den Sohn am Arm;
sein Tritt ist sachte wie auf Eier,
sein Wahlspruch: Weder kalt noch warm

Look, there walks Mr. Biedermeier
and his wife, the son by the arm;
his step is as gentle as on eggs,
his motto: neither cold nor warm

In 1848 the poet V. von Sheffel published two poems “Biedermann's Evening Coziness” (“Des Biedermanns Abendgemütlichkeit”) and “Bummelmeier's complaints” (“Bummelmeiers Klage”) in «The Flying Leaflets» (Munich). By combining these names, the poet Ludwig Eichrodt created the pseudonym “Gottlieb Biedermeier” and in 1850 published the poem "Biedermeier" in the same «The Flying Leaflets» (Figure 1). In 1869 together with Adolf Kussmaul (under the same pseudonym) he published the cycle of poems "Biedermeiers Liederlust". The collection contained poetic parodies of the poetry of the real rural teacher Samuel Fridrich Sauter.
Figure 1. The image of the fictional Gottlieb Biedermeier in a magazine “The Flying Leaflets”, Munich [2]

However, since 1850s the ironic meaning of the term has disappeared. Biedermeier began to mean the symbol of bourgeois integrity. And at the beginning of the XX century in Western European art history a tradition has been established by the Biedermeier concept to denote the “common life style of the era from the Congress of Vienna to the Revolution of 1848” [2, p.12].

3. Conditions for the emergence of style.
After the victory over Napoleon in 1814-1815, the German Union was created at the Congress of Vienna. After the Napoleonic wars everyone enjoyed a peaceful life. People have learned to appreciate the warmth of their own home and communication with the loved ones. In addition, not all the technical achievements have entered the everyday life, and people lived in unification with nature. All the heroic, pathetic, that was characteristic of the Empire style, went out of fashion. There was a desire to return "the beautiful measured time of the fathers." This desire was expressed in the wish to have “a little world of its own”, a simple and convenient housing (Figure 2). Enlightened circles of society sought to the "spiritual ideals", the city dweller - "Biderman" was looking for comfort and quietness in his secluded world, creating his own style - Biedermeier.

4. The main features of the Biedermeier architecture
In the XX century in Russian-language publications one could come across a statement that Biedermeier did not create its own architecture [3]. Today, it is generally accepted that Biedermeier is not only a style of architecture, visual and decorative arts, but also the “style of life” of a townsman - “burgher” in 1815-1848 [4]. It should be noted that the name “burgher” at the beginning of the XIX century united capitalist entrepreneurs and bourgeois landowners, artisans and traders, clergymen and teachers, middle and small-scale employees. The “burghers” also included representatives of the liberal professions: doctors, lawyers, artists, writers, journalists. All these social groups gladly accepted the emergence of the Biedermeier style. A new style of architecture combines the features of the late classicism (Empire), the style of George III and the German-Austrian "Zopf style" (Stil Zopf).

After the war, the burgher needed shelter from the hardships of life. He found it in the embodiment of the dream of "own house" with an indispensable "garden", adjacent to the gate or located behind the house. Mandatory attributes of the garden were benches and flower beds. A small piece of nature “entered” into the houses through high windows and doors, through the obligatory terrace (the tradition of the XVIII century was revived) (Figure 3).
Figure 2. Family of the Biedermeier era, Friedrich von Amerling “Rudolf von Arthaber with Children”, 1837 [5]

Figure 3. Garden in the Biedermeier era, Karl Spitzweg “Reading the newspaper in the garden”, 1847 [6]

The residential building was decorated with a small gable, the entrance was underlined by a pair of columns, and the roof was supported by a massive eaves (Figure 4). Plastered brick walls often imitated expensive stone. The ground floor often housed a workshop, office or parlor of the owner.

An example of a mansion in the Biedermeier style is considered to be a small two-story Tegel castle (1824), rebuilt by Karl Friedrich Schinkel by the order of Wilhelm von Humboldt (Figure 4). The "blue" drawing room of the castle is a typical interior of the style (Figure 5).
The main features of Biedermeier were in the interior. The aristocratic "salon" was replaced by the "living room", in which the hostess provided the "warmth of life", creating a family atmosphere and a home comfort. This change in the role of the main room of the house led to its multifunctionality, the appearance in the interior of several separate zones, isolated visually or with the help of screens and jardinières. The group of furniture with a table for needlework, where households gathered around the hostess, became the symbol of the "style". Small pieces of furniture, low ceilings, geraniums, pets and cages with canaries, wallpaper in flowers, round shapes, warm fabrics are all characteristic elements of the style (Figure 6).
Biedermeier period appreciated comfort and convenience, simple homely joys. Herbarium compilation was very popular, and dried flowers within the framework were the best decoration for the walls. It was a time when cooking became an art (many cookbooks were published), and special attention was paid to cleanliness and accuracy.

In the arrangement of furniture almost devoid of decor, it was sought to maintain the symmetry. In addition to rectangular shapes, curved lines and the shape of the lyre were used (for mirrors, furniture, door handles and armrests), embroidery was widespread.

Preference was given to the light wood of domestic species (maple, birch, cherry and pear). The sofa was replaced by “canapés” and corner benches. The interior was decorated with indispensable screens, decorated with flowers and birds, a round table with a powerful base, harpsichord or piano. Two new fashionable forms appeared - a “sideboard” ("home museum"), where family silver and porcelain were exhibited, and a “secretaire” (Figure 7).
The integrity of Biedermeier was due to the obligatory attributes, "business cards" of the style. They were described in literature and present in the painting. For example, the “window theme” was very important. Through it the “blue distance” of the surrounding world entered the family world. The window was also a "barrier" from the harsh everyday life, creating a closed world of the family. In Biedermeier’s literature and painting windows often acted as “romantic symbols” (Figure 7, 8).

Biedermeier appeared in the town planning as well. The city dweller “Biderman” contrasted the “coziness” of nature and the “sweet little town” with new spaces of rapidly developing urbanization. He sought to give comfort to his own garden and the street on which his house is located, the city square, the main square of the city and the embankment (Figure 9).
The Biedermeier theorist Rudolf von Eitelberg asserted in 1845, that the style was distinguished by “artistic feeling”, “lack of dryness and correctness, peculiar to imitation”. And this allows you to create "original works of art" [2, p. 216].

This "originality" is widely used in modern architecture. Houses are being built "in the Biedermeier style" (Figure 10). In the architecture of interiors, decorative and applied art the “fashion for style” was preserved both in the XX and XXI centuries (Figure 11, 12).
5. Conclusions

Biedermeier style was born thanks to the desire of the burgher society to escape from the social problems and global cataclysms, to restrict a comfortable and peaceful life in his "cozy world." As a result, a special culture emerged, which became not only a new phenomenon in the field of architecture and art, but also a certain “lifestyle” of 1815-1848. This style represented a kind of compromise between the tradition and new technical advances.

The concern of the architect, who designed houses and, especially, interiors in the Biedermeier style, was the interrelation of function, design and material. Often, “expediency” became a form-building factor. A new aesthetic of an “economical” individual house was created, innovative options for zoning living space and types of furniture were developed. Created by the Biedermeier culture, new methods of aestheticizing the living environment had an undoubted influence on the future course of development of the art of the XX and XXI centuries. They are relevant today.

References
[1] E. Günther. “Vertonte Gedichte von Ludwig Pfau”. Bibliographie. Heilbronn, p. 37, 1994.
[2] R. Krüger, “Biedermeier”. Ein Lebenslauf zwischen 1815 und 1848. – Leipzig, p. 239, 1979.
[3] N.Y. Berkovsky, “Romanticism in Germany - Leningrad: Fiction Literature”, p. 568, 1973 (in Russian).
[4] N. Kazhar, “The world of "little man" in the artistic culture of Biedermeier”. Questions of art history, ethnology and folklore, Issue 11, (622p.) p. 58-68, 2011 (in Russian).
[5] E.D. Fedotova, Biedermeier. Masters. Styles. Directions. Moscow: White city, p.50, 2005 (in Russian).
[6] C. Spitzweg, „Katalog zur Ausstellung im Haus der Kuns“ München Gebundenes Buch, p.512, 1987.
[7] S. N. Kondakov „Anniversary reference book of the Imperial Academy of Arts”. 1764-1914. - SPb.: Partnership R. Golike and A. Vilborg, - N. 2 - p. 196. – (459 p.) 1915.
[8] E.F. Petinova and V. A. Tropinin. “Leningrad”, p. 216, 1987.
[9] J. M. Voltz, „Ein Hausbuch aus dem Biedermeier“, Woldemar Klein Verlag, Baden-Baden, p.26, 1957.