

Tamara Łempicka – between facts and creation

Introduction

The life and work of Tamara Łempicka raises many questions among scientists dealing with history, art history, biography, communication and sociology. The Art Deco icon left approximately 600 paintings and drawings, which were created between the 1920s till the of 1970s. She has also left a lot of unanswered questions related to the place and year of birth, her origin or family issues.

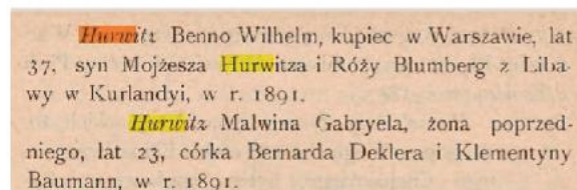
Without a doubt, the first and most important researcher of Tamara Łempicka is the Italian art historian Gioia Mori, who published numerous scientific articles about the artist and was the curator of her numerous exhibitions¹. She identified and discovered Łempicka's work, accumulating an impressive archive devoted to the artist over the years. Alain Blondel, who published the first catalog of her works in 1999, should also be mentioned here². Łempicka has had several biographies, the most important of which is Laura Claridge's publication entitled *Tamara de Lempicka. A life of Deco and Decadence*³.

This article is an attempt to supplement knowledge and source data regarding the most obscure

facts from the artist's life. Due to the scarcity of source documents, much information has so far been misinterpreted.

Jewish roots

One of the most protected pieces of information by Tamara Łempicka until the end of her life was the issue of the family's Jewish origins. Tamara Łempicka's parents were of the Jewish faith, but only in 1891 did they change their faith to Protestant. The census of neophytes made in 1905 by Teodor Jeske-Choiński shows that the artist's father, Benno Wilhelm, was the son of Moses Hurwitz and Róża Blumberg. Benno, from Liepāja in Courland (Latvia), was 37 years old at the time and worked as a merchant. In turn, his wife Malwina Gabryela Hurwitz, daughter of Bernard Dekler and Klementyna Baumann, was 23 years old⁴.



Hurwitz Benno Wilhelm, kupiec w Warszawie, lat 37. syn Mojżesza **Hurwitza** i Róży Blumberg z Libawy w Kurlandyi, w r. 1891.
Hurwitz Malwina Gabryela, żona poprzedniego, lat 23, córka Bernarda Deklera i Klementyny Baumann, w r. 1891.

Figure 1. Fragment of the census of Polish neophytes

¹ Among others: G. Mori, *Tamara Łempicka*, Warszawa 2003; *Tamara de Lempicka: La regina del moderno*, red. G. Mori, Roma 2011.

² A. Blondel, *Lempicka Catalogue Raisonne 1921–1979*, Paris 1999.

³ L. Claridge, *Tamara Łempicka. Sztuka i skandal*, Warszawa 2022.

⁴ T. Jeske-Choiński, *Neofici polscy, Materiały historyczne*, Warszawa 1905, p. 252.

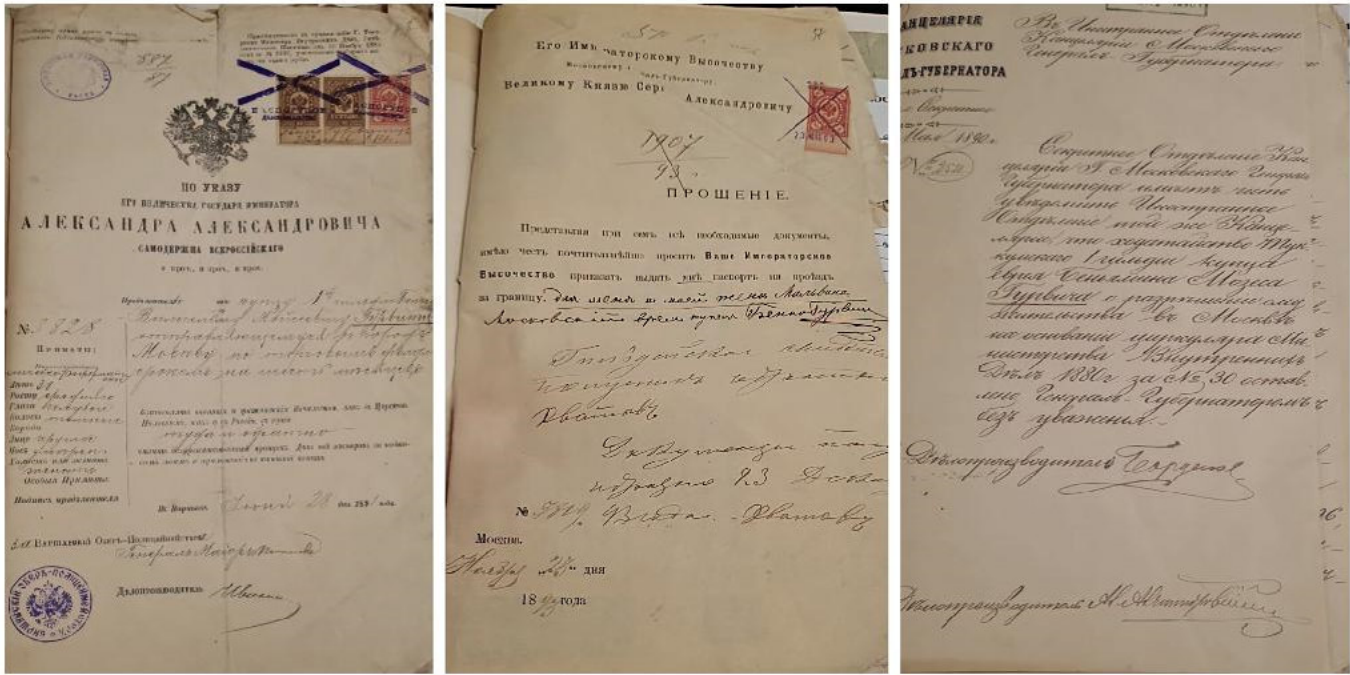


Figure 2. Applications from years: 1890, 1891, 1893

Everything indicates that the couple initially lived together in Warsaw. Documents in the State Archive of the Russian Federation in Moscow show that Tamara's father, Benno Hurwitz, applied for permission to enter Moscow in May 1890 and was refused. He renewed his application to the Moscow authorities a year later (after joining the Reformed Church), as a result of which he received a six-month pass to enter Moscow in June 1891. Finally, Łempicka's parents received the so-called internal passports authorizing them to enter Moscow indefinitely and move freely, in November 1893. On this basis, it is difficult to say clearly in what year they moved to Moscow and whether they did it at the same time. It is also worth mentioning that the reason for the refusal of Mr. and Mrs. Hurwitz to enter Moscow in 1890 was most likely the issue of Jewish origin (they submitted their first application as Jews). The tsarist authorities at that time closely regulated the movement of Jews and especially their undertaking of economic activities. Based on this, it can be concluded that the issue of origin was hidden in the family from Tamara's early childhood. Below are the applications submitted by Benno Hurwitz to the Russian authorities - to "Your Tsarist Majesty", in order to obtain permission to enter Moscow. These documents are kept in the State Archive of the Russian Federation in Moscow.

Birth and youth

The issue of information about Tamara Łempicka's place and date of birth has not been confirmed or proven in any research so far. The artist herself repeatedly changed information on this subject and made incorrect dates of birth public. The Hurwitz couple had three children, including Tamara, who were baptized in the Protestant church on November 2, 1897 in Moscow. Among the archival documents from the Saints Peter and Paul Lutheran Church in Moscow there are lists of people born and baptized in the years 1892-1916. It is in this list that information about the dates of birth of the artist and her siblings can be found. The oldest of them was Stanisław Juliusz, born on April 25, 1892 (entry on page 54, item 43), then Tamara Rosa, who was born on June 16, 1894 (entry on page 54, item number 44), and the youngest was Adrianna, born on August 31, 1895 (entry on page 55, item 45). Below are photos of the register containing the mentioned entries⁵:

⁵ State Historical Archive of the Russian Federation in Moscow (branch of the State Archive of the Russian Federation in Moscow, list of those born and baptized in 1892-1916, No. 1477, 1/3, register no. 349.



Figure 3. Photographs of the register of people born and baptized in the years 1892–1916

As can be seen from the photos presented above, all children of the Hurwitz family were entered in the parish register and were baptized by Pastor Georg Pavlovich Bruschweiler, who was born in 1870 in Switzerland. At the age of 24, in 1894 he moved to Moscow, where he served as parish priest/rector of the Evangelical Reformed Church until 1914. Then in 1919 he returned to Switzerland, where he died in 1947⁶.

Therefore, it should be assumed that Stanisław – Tamara’s brother was certainly born in Warsaw, because in 1892 the parents did not yet have permanent passes entitling them to move freely between Warsaw and Moscow. Tamara’s place of birth is still questionable. Based on the above findings, neither Moscow nor Warsaw can be excluded from consideration. It also appears that the birth certificate itself

was never prepared, as it was a common practice to link the „registration” of born citizens with the fact of their baptism. Parishes thus served as registry offices and often kept double books – their own church books and those which they then transferred to state archives.

Another issue never explained by the artist is the life story of her father and brother. According to the stories quoted by Laura Claridge, the artist herself claimed that her brother died during the Bolshevik Revolution. The father’s presence in the family’s life was shrouded in even greater mystery, and the artist claimed that he left the family or died very early⁷.

Meanwhile, from archival entries dating back to 1897, which constitute a kind of collection of his professional activities, we can learn that Benno Wilhelm

⁶ <https://refchurch.ru/index.php?id=9> [accessed: April 19, 2024].

⁷ More on this subject by L. Claridge, op. cit., p. 28–29, 90.

Hurwitz lived in Moscow. At that time he was a merchant who ran a haberdashery shop⁸. His wife, Malwina, was listed in the Warsaw address register in 1908⁹. She lived at 1 Żórawia Street (today spelled Żurawia), everything indicates that she was the owner of the property at this address¹⁰.

Thanks to a query carried out in the parish registers of the Russian Orthodox Church in Moscow, it was possible to establish that Tamara's father Benno Wilhem was re-baptized in the same church in 1915. From that moment on he began to bear the name



Figure 4. Tenement house at Żurawia Street in Warsaw around 1939, source: the State Archives in Warsaw

Boris. Thus, he once again converted to Eastern Orthodoxy and abandoned the Evangelical and Reformed Church. Documents indicate that at the time of baptism he was a citizen/resident of Warsaw¹¹.

His son Stanisław, Tamara's brother, converted to the Orthodox Church and was baptized there in 1916. He was then a student at the Tsarist Technical University in Moscow. From that moment on, he started using a slightly different sounding name and surname – Sergey Borisovich¹².

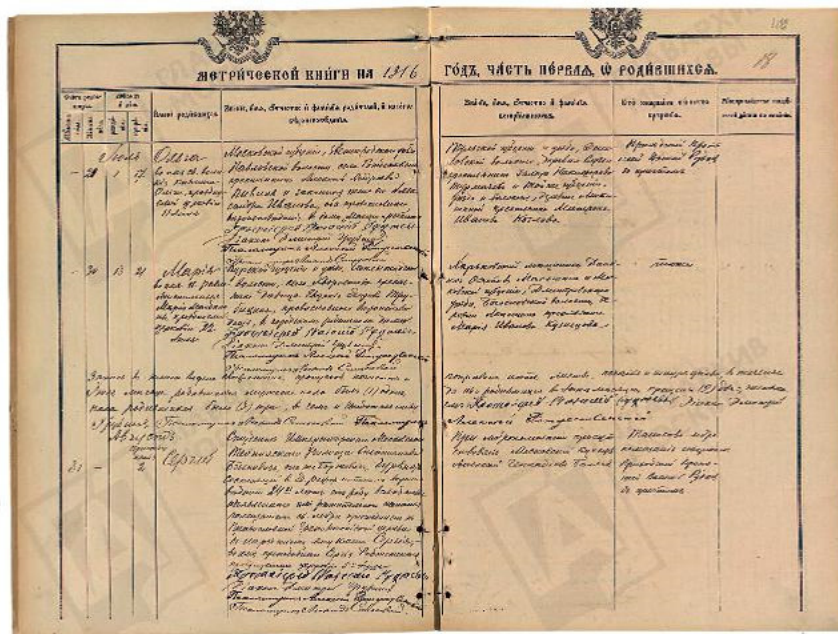


Figure 6. Entry in the baptismal register Benno Hurwitz

⁸ <https://viewer.rsl.ru/ru/rsl01003882146?page=725&rotate=0&theme=white> [accessed: April 21, 2024].

⁹ *Adresy Warszawy na rok 1908*, <https://crispa.uw.edu.pl/object/files/408951/display/Default?pageNumber=471> [accessed: April 20, 2024].

¹⁰ *Żurawia 1*, fotopolska.eu [accessed: October 1, 2024].

¹¹ <https://ya.ru/archive/search?text=%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%81%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%B2+%D0%B3%D1%83%D1%80%D0%B2%D0%B8%D1%86&index=archive> [accessed: April 15, 2024].

¹² https://ya.ru/archive/search?text=%D0%BC%D0%BE%D0%BD%D1%81%D0%B5%D0%B5%D0%B2+%D0%B3%D1%83%D1%80%D0%B2%D0%B8%D1%86&docType=sheet&specType=%D0%9C%D0%B5%D1%82%D1%80%D0%B8%D1%87%D0%B5%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%8F+%D0%BA%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B3%D0%B0&is_digitized=0&index=archive [accessed: June 3, 2024].

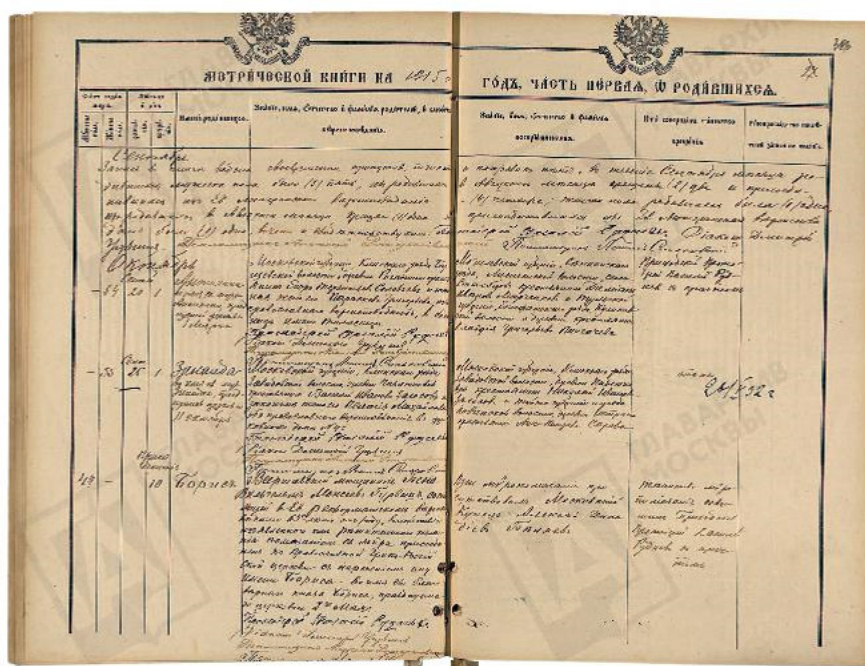


Figure 5. Entry in the baptismal register of Benno Hurwitz

Stannislav/Sergey was a teacher in the Mathematics Department and in 1924 he worked at the Saint Petersburg State University. At that time he lived in the house of the Nobel family at 15 Samsoniewska Street (waterfront in Saint Petersburg)¹³. The above information can be found in the document presented below, which is a type of acceptance/referral to work issued by the University on October 16, 1924 for Sergey:

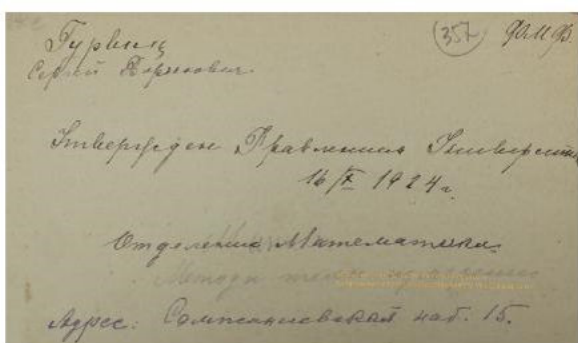


Figure 7. Work referral

Therefore, it should be considered that Tamara's parents could have lived separately already in the initial period of their life together. It can be assumed that Tamara and Adrianna were under the care of

their mother, while their brother Stanislaw was under the care of their father. It is also puzzling why only Benno and Stanislaw joined the Orthodox Church. It is also worth mentioning that the baptism of father and son was witnessed by the same person – Alexei Gennadyevich Bilaev (a Moscow merchant). The baptism certificate was also given by the same priest – Vasily Rudniew.

Relationship with Tadeusz Łempicki

Despite numerous questions and speculations, Tamara Łempicka never publicly announced the date and place of her wedding to Tadeusz. Meanwhile, a copy of the marriage certificate of Tamara and Tadeusz, which is located in the State Archive of the Russian Federation in Moscow in Tadeusz Łempicki's personal file, shows that they got married on December 30, 1915 in the Roman Catholic Church of Saint John the Baptist in Tsarskoye Selo (Pushkin, currently part of St. Petersburg). Only the ceremony took place there, while the document certifying the marriage was drawn up in the main St. Petersburg Roman Catholic Church of Saint Stanislaw (the document was prepared on December 24, 1915, under number 7843). The ceremony was witnessed by Maurice Stifter (Tamara's uncle – husband of her

¹³ https://history.museums.spbu.ru/files/Arhivnaya_kollekciya/357.pdf [accessed: April 24, 2024].

mother's sister - Stefania)¹⁴) and Jury Stifter (Tamara's cousin – son of Maurycy and and Stefania). The copy of the marriage certificate presented below also contains information that Tamara was 21 years old on the day of her marriage, which is further confirmation of her date of birth in 1894¹⁵.

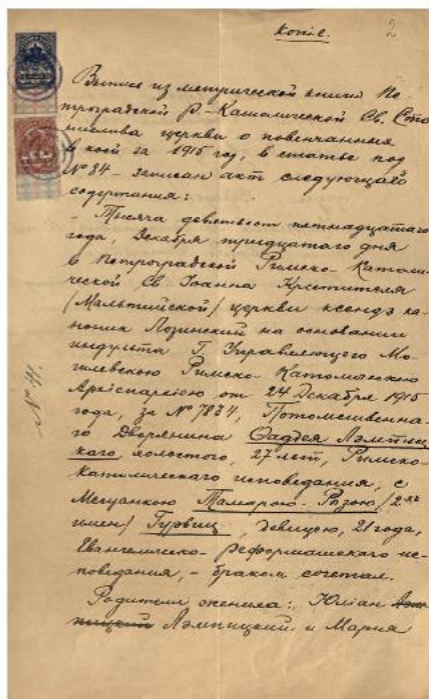


Figure 8. A copy of the wedding certificate of Tamara and Tadeusz Łempicki

After her marriage to Tadeusz Łempicki Tamara was issued a passport on January 20, 1916 in St. Petersburg, in which on page 2 further confirmation of the artist's date of birth, June 16, 1894, can be found. The mentioned identity document was issued to Łempicka on the basis of a previously held passport, which she received in Warsaw on June 23, 1911. On page 6 of the document there is also the original signature of the passport holder¹⁶.

¹⁴ Maurice (born near Kalisz in Stawiszyn in 1865, uncle's original name was Mosiek) and Stefania (née Decker) Stifter converted from the Mosaic faith to Christianity on September 15, 1902 in a reformed church in Vilnius.

¹⁵ Tadeusz Łempicki's personal files: 1918 CGA SPB 80-1-7919 Faddey Lempicki; pages 2, 2v, 3. Extract from the parish register of the Roman Catholic Church of St. Stanisław in St. Petersburg regarding weddings for 1915, act 84. Personal files were created in 1918 for all Russian citizens who declared they would stay or leave the then federation.

¹⁶ The passports of Tadeusz and Tamara Łempicka are in the Central Historical State Archive of St. Petersburg.

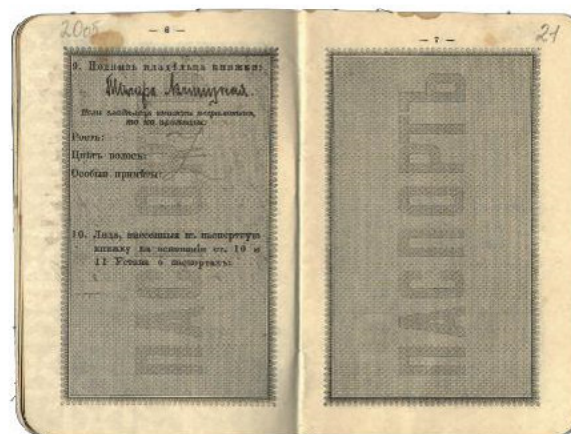
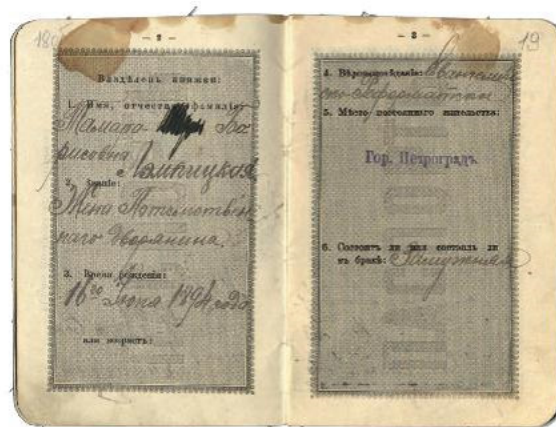


Figure 9. Passport of Tamara Łempicka from 1916–1918

There are also several stamps in the passport, which prove Tamara's movements within the Russian Empire, and even within St. Petersburg, between different addresses. In Tadeusz and Tamara's passports, the last stamp comes from September 12, 1918 (page 18 in Tamara's passport, page 9 in Tadeusz's passport). It should also be noted here that in both passports, in a specially created section, there are no entries regarding the Łempicki family having children. Therefore, the couple's only daughter, Maria, was not born in St. Petersburg¹⁷.

In 1918, the peace of the couple living in St. Petersburg was disturbed by events related to the Bolshevik Revolution. There has also been a lot of speculation and not entirely clear information in publications on this issue. Tadeusz was allegedly

¹⁷ The information contained in Tadeusz Łempicki's passport shows that he was born in Warsaw on November 16, 1888 and was baptized in the church of St. Barbara on February 21, 1889.

arrested in St. Petersburg¹⁸ as a result of his opposition activities, but no such information can be found in his files in the State Archive.

The personal files of Tadeusz Łempicki show that on October 21, 1918, the Commissariat of Internal Affairs /Foreign Department/ in Petrograd (now St. Petersburg) received from a Polish citizen Faddey /Tadeusz/ Julian Łempicki and his wife Tamara Borisovna Łempicka a statement personally signed by both of them: “We hereby inform you that we are Polish citizens, therefore we ask you to exclude us from the citizenship of the Russian Federation”¹⁹.

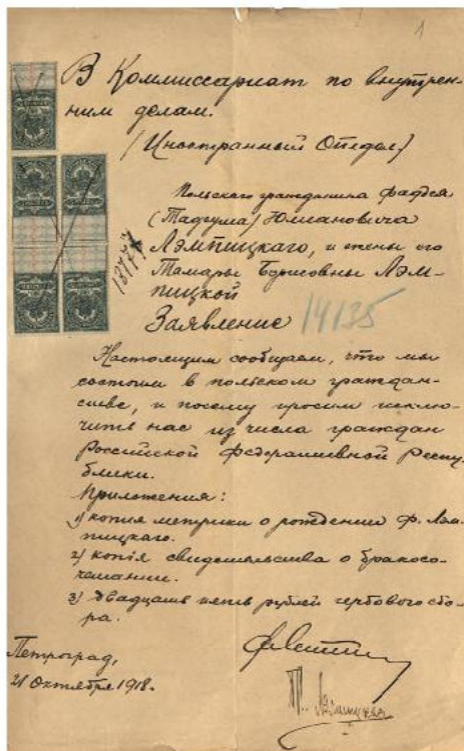


Figure 10. Declaration of Polish citizenship signed by the Łempicki family in 1918

Therefore, the family lost their Russian citizenship and received new travel documents for repatriation to Poland. The previously valid passports they used were taken away from them and that is why they are now in Russian archives. It should be assumed that this was the reason why Tamara “obtained” Warsaw as her place of birth from that moment on.

Archival documents show that they left St. Petersburg together, and their next destination was Warsaw, where they lived for about 6 months, and then Copenhagen, where they arrived as Polish citizens. Upon entering Denmark, they received police registration forms (politiets registerblade), which are still kept on loose sheets of paper in the Copenhagen City Archives. It is worth mentioning that the said archives contain not only the form of Tamara and Tadeusz, but also, for example, documents of the Stifter family (Tamara’s mother’s birth sister, her husband and children)²⁰.

The document below shows that the Łempicki family entered Copenhagen on May 1, 1919 and lived at Bredgade Str, 51 apt #1 for a period of 6 months. It is worth emphasizing that the form contains information that the place of birth for both of them was Warsaw. They most likely left Denmark on November 1, 1919, which was confirmed by an appropriate stamp. In addition, in the box informing about the date of birth in Tamara’s case it is written “in 1896”, which, as we already know from earlier documents, is not true.

The image shows a yellow registration form titled "Registerblad." with the date "Udfærdiget den 5/19" and "Bog II". The form is filled out with handwritten information. The main entry is for "Fulde Navn" "Łempicki, Tadeusz". Below this, "Livsstilling" is "Kjæmpe", "Fødested" is "Warschau", and "Aftenskabelig Stilling" is "Gift". The "Hustru" section lists "Fulde Navn og Fødested" as "Tamara" and "Warschau". The "Børn" section is empty. The "Meldt Bopæl" section shows "Aar" "1919", "Dag" "15", "Gade No. Etage no. no." "Bredgade 51-1", and "Udtr" "18. 1-11".

Figure 11. Registration form of Tamara and Tadeusz Łempicki issued in Copenhagen in 1919

²⁰ Each police district (Kreds) had its own registration forms, sorted alphabetically by surname. The registers were constantly updated. Each time a new resident arrived in the district, a child turned 14, or a married woman was divorced or widowed, a new registration form was prepared. If a resident was from another police district in Copenhagen, the registration form followed the resident from the previous district to the new district. When a resident left Copenhagen, the registration form remained in the police district where he or she last resided. If a resident returned to Copenhagen, the police found the old registration form and added new addresses.

¹⁸ L. Claridge, op. cit., p. 76.

¹⁹ The State Archive of the Russian Federation in Moscow, 1918 CGA SPB 80-1-7919 Faddey Łempicki.

Documents were drawn up by the Copenhagen police for each citizen in the period from 1890 to 1923. Married women and young children aged 10 to 14 were registered on the husband/father form. Youth over 14 years of age received their own form, while children under 10 years of age were not subject to registration²¹. Therefore, if the Łempicki family had a child at that time, its existence would not have to be recorded in the document presented above.

As we know from the artist's biography, the couple had one child – a daughter, Maria Krystyna (Kizette – called that by her parents). According to the artist's accounts quoted by the previously mentioned Laura Claridge, Łempicka was to come to Paris in 1918 with a small child²². It is already known that this information is not true, because Kizette was not yet born when she left St. Petersburg in 1918. However, the American death index includes Maria Krystyna Foxhna (married name) – the daughter of Tamara and Tadeusz Łempicki, who according to records, was born on October 16, 1919²³. If this information can be confirmed, it would mean that she was born in Denmark. This topic requires in-depth and further findings. The above facts also put the moment and circumstances in which Tamara Łempicka started her career in France in a completely new light.

Summary

The creation of Tamara Łempicka as an icon of modernity, luxury and scandal seems to be a deliberate attempt to build an aura of mystery and uniqueness around her, which undoubtedly influenced her artistic success. Facts about Tamara Łempicka are intertwined with her own legends, which makes her an even more fascinating and multidimensional figure, and attempts to find the truth are a challenge for modern scientists. This study is an attempt to deepen knowledge about this extraordinary figure, but her life and work are still open to further research and interpretation.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Archival sources

- Parish register of the Roman Catholic Church of St. Stanisław in St. Petersburg.
 State Historical Archive of the Russian Federation in Moscow (branch of the State Archive of the Russian Federation in Moscow), list of those born and baptized in 1892–1916.
 The State Archive of the Russian Federation in Moscow, 1918 CGA SPB 80-1-7919 Faddey Łempicki.

Publications

- Blondel Alain, *Łempicka Catalogue Raisonné 1921–1979*, Paris 1999.
 Claridge Laura, *Tamara Łempicka. Sztuka i skandal*, Warszawa 2022.
 Jeske-Choiński Teodor, *Neofici polscy. Materiały historyczne*, Warszawa 1905.
 Mori Gioia, *Tamara Łempicka*, Warszawa 2003.
Tamara de Łempicka: La regina del moderno, red. Gioia Mori, Roma 2011.

Netography

- Adresy Warszawy na rok 1908*, <https://crispa.uw.edu.pl/object/files/408951/display/Default?pageNumber=471> [accessed: 20.04.2024].
https://history.museums.spbu.ru/files/Arhivnaya_kollekcija/357.pdf [accessed: 24.04.2024].
<https://kbharkiv.dk/brug-samlingerne/soeg-i-indtastede-kilder/post/17-727033> [accessed: 24.04.2024].
<https://kbharkiv.dk/brug-samlingerne/soeg-i-indtastede-kilder/post/17-361614> [accessed: 24.04.2024].
<https://kbharkiv.dk/brug-samlingerne/soeg-i-indtastede-kilder/post/17-361613> [accessed: 24.04.2024].
<https://refchurch.ru/index.php?id=9> [accessed: 19.04.2024].
<https://viewer.rsl.ru/ru/rl01003882146?page=725&rotate=0&theme=white> [accessed: 21.04.2024].
<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:V9TX-765> [accessed: 24.04.2024].
https://ya.ru/archive/search?text=%D0%BC%D0%BE%D0%BD%D1%81%D0%B5%D0%B5%D0%B2+%D0%B3%D1%83%D1%80%D0%B2%D0%B8%D1%86&docType=sheet&specType=%D0%9C%D0%B5%D1%82%D1%80%D0%B8%D1%87%D0%B5%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%8F+%D0%BA%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B3%D0%B0&is_digitized=0&index=archive [accessed: 3.06.2024].
<https://ya.ru/archive/search?text=%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%81%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%B2+%D0%B3%D1%83%D1%80%D0%B2%D0%B8%D1%86&index=archive> [accessed: 15.04.2024].
Żurawia 1, <https://www.warszawa1939.pl/obiekt/zurawia-1> [accessed: 9.05.2024].

²¹ <https://kbharkiv.dk/brug-samlingerne/soeg-i-indtastede-kilder/post/17-727033> [accessed: April 24, 2024].
<https://kbharkiv.dk/brug-samlingerne/soeg-i-indtastede-kilder/post/17-361614> [accessed: April 24, 2024].
<https://kbharkiv.dk/brug-samlingerne/soeg-i-indtastede-kilder/post/17-361613> [accessed: April 24, 2024].

²² L. Claridge, op. cit., p. 84.

²³ <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:V9TX-765> [accessed: April 24, 2024].