

Article

Hubert Goltzius's *Lebendige Bilder Gar Nach Aller Keysern*, Emperor Maximilian II, and Renaissance Cycles of Fresco Portraits of Emperors in Palaces in Silesia

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Abstract: At the beginning of the 21st century, there were sensational discoveries in two palaces located in Ciechanowice and Struga in Silesia (Poland). During their renovations, Renaissance fresco cycles of portraits of emperors from the Roman, medieval, and early modern times appeared under the layer of plaster in the representative dining rooms (27 in the palace in Struga and about 50 in the palace in Ciechanowice). They were painted in the 1580s (in Ciechanowice, the date is 1588) by the same unknown artist. This article is the first to attempt to establish the most important facts related to the creation of both fresco cycles. The frescoes were founded by representatives of influential Silesian Protestant nobility: Heinrich von Reichenbach (Ciechanowice) and Abraham von Czettritz und Neuhaus (Struga). Both nobles attended the funeral of Emperor Maximilian II, which took place in Prague in 1577. This is where they purchased a work by the Dutch printmaker, painter, and numismatist, Hubert Goltzius, *Lebendige Bilder Gar Nach Aller Keysern* [...] (published in Antwerp in 1557), whose specially prepared copy had been solemnly presented to Emperor Maximilian II in 1562. The book contains 133 monochrome woodcut illustrations with portraits of emperors in circular frames by the Dutch artist Joss van Gietleughen, which—together with accompanying inscriptions—were used as models for fresco paintings in both Silesian palaces. The foundation of the cycles of portraits of the emperors of the Roman Empire and the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation in the representative halls of the palaces in Ciechanowice and Struga, which ended with a joint representation of Emperor Maximilian II and the King of Spain, Philip II Habsburg, was a way to show the gratitude of both prominent and wealthy Protestant nobles towards Emperor Maximilian II. During his reign, imperial power was the source and guarantee of religious freedoms for Protestants in Silesia. It is significant that both cycles left out the person of emperor regnant, Rudolf II, who soon after assuming the imperial throne abandoned his father's tolerant policy towards Protestants. Although the author of both series of frescoes was probably a local painter, they are a unique artistic realization not only in Silesia but also in the whole of Central Europe, and they can only be compared to the popular Renaissance portrait galleries of “famous men” (*uomini famosi*).



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1. Introduction

Undoubtedly, the last two decades have been a period of sensational discoveries of hitherto unknown early modern painting decorations in residential buildings in Silesia (Poland). The discoveries usually happened when old plasterwork and painting layers were removed during comprehensive renovations, which were carried out thanks to the unprecedentedly generous funding allocated to the restoration of historic buildings. For example, in 2012, a comprehensive early Baroque fresco decoration was discovered on the ground floor of the former Cistercian rectory in Cieplice Śląskie-Zdrój with a cycle of as many as 54 depictions of the legend of St. Bernard of Clairvaux painted on the walls of

the cloisters (see [Kozieł 2012, 2013](#)). Similarly in 2017, tempera paintings were uncovered in the rooms of Domanice Palace. Created at the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries, they imitate stucco and fresco decorations on wooden ceilings (see [Kozieł 2024](#)).

The most spectacular discoveries, however, include the uncovering of Renaissance paintings from under the plasterwork in the representative rooms of the former noble seats in Ciechanowice and Struga. In 2008, fresco paintings in Ciechanowice Palace were discovered on the walls of almost all the rooms on the first floor and on the vaults of two rooms on the ground floor. They were revealed during the palace's renovation, which had begun two years prior, and their comprehensive conservation and restoration took place from 2013 to 2016 ([Projekt konserwatorski 2013](#)). In 2019, the painting decoration in Struga Palace was uncovered from under plaster in the rooms on the first floor during a renovation that had been carried out since 2003. The paintings have now also undergone preliminary conservation and restoration.

In both palaces, the most interesting and prominent parts of the newly discovered fresco decorations are the cycles of half-length portraits of the emperors of the Roman Empire and the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. In Struga Palace, the cycle consists of 27 portraits located in the dining room on the first floor, which is now known as the Imperial Hall (Figure 1).



Figure 1. General view, dining room, first floor, palace, Struga. Photo by Andrzej Kozieł.

In Ciechanowice Palace, the emperors' portraits are now located in three rooms on the first floor—which once formed one representative dining hall—and they consisted of approximately 50 representations (Figure 2).

They were created in 1588, as confirmed by the date placed between the portraits of Emperors Frederick III and Maximilian I. Meanwhile, the undated paintings in Struga Palace were most probably created slightly earlier, which will be discussed in more detail below.



Figure 2. General view, hall, first floor, palace, Ciechanowice. Photo by Andrzej Koziel.

Due to the fact that the paintings had remained under a layer of plaster for many years and were discovered only at the beginning of the 21st century, they have not yet become the subject of any academic study. In 2010, they were briefly mentioned by Krzysztof Eysymontt in his study on Renaissance manors and palaces in Lower Silesia (Eysymontt 2010, pp. 229–30). Tomasz Okoński mentioned them in 2010 in his BA thesis (Okoński 2010, pp. 18–19) and again in 2012 in his MA thesis (Okoński 2012, p. 93), both of which are dedicated to the wall and ceiling painting decorations in Renaissance mansions in Lower Silesia.

This article is the first monographic study of both series of imperial portraits in the palaces in Struga and Ciechanowice. It is based on the research carried out at both palaces and the results of the library and archive searches conducted in 2023–2024. I want to sincerely thank Andrzej Meller and Krzysztof Wiczorek, who are the owners of the palaces, for the invaluable help and support I received during my research. I am also very grateful to Małgorzata Turowska, the curator of the Old Prints Department at Wrocław University Library, for her help in identifying the graphic prototypes of the paintings.

2. Results

The fresco series of the imperial portraits in both palaces start with a portrait of Julius Caesar and end with a joint image of Emperor Maximilian II and Philip II of Spain. The depictions form a continuous painted frieze about 1.5 m wide, with its lower edge positioned about 3 m above the floor. The frieze is filled with colourful half-length portraits of the emperors, which are placed inside wide, oval frames with an inscription written in black capital letters using Renaissance antiqua typeface (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Unknown painter, Wenceslaus IV, late 1570s or early 1580s, fresco, dining hall, first floor, palace, Struga. Photo by Andrzej Koziel.

At the top and bottom, each oval is cut off by inscription plaques in the form of a horizontal rectangle with rounded corners filled with inscriptions in Renaissance minuscule. The depictions of the emperors are either separated from each other by an ornamental decoration in the form of scrollwork (Struga), or they are closely connected through the edges of their oval frames, with the free space between them filled with a floral ornament in the form of three-leaved rosettes (Ciechanowice) (Figure 4).

The state of the Ciechanowice paintings is poor. Out of approximately 50 images of emperors, only 24 survived to the present day on the southern, northern, and eastern walls of the former dining hall. They are mostly faded, blurred, and cut off at the top by the ceiling and sometimes also at the side by the wall or the ceiling beams (Figure 5).

Only four of the paintings—the portraits of Wenceslaus IV, Sigismund of Luxembourg, Albert II Habsburg, and Frederick III—have remained in relatively good condition, though their inscriptions are practically illegible. Currently, it is possible to identify only the emperors depicted on the eastern and northern walls of the former dining hall, starting from the image of Emperor Arnulf of Carinthia, as his name is the only one that can be read in the central part of the cycle. We can identify the following emperors: Arnulf of Carinthia, Henry XII, Otto II, Otto IV, Henry II, Henry V, Frederick Barbarossa, Henry VI, Frederick II, Rudolf II, Albert, Henry VII, Frederick III, Charles IV (northern wall), Wenceslaus IV, Sigismund of Luxembourg, Albert II Habsburg, Frederick III, Maximilian I, Charles V, Ferdinand I, and jointly Maximilian II and Philip II of Spain (eastern wall).



Figure 4. Unknown painter, *Albert II Habsburg*, 1588, fresco, hall, first floor, palace, Ciechanowice. Photo by Andrzej Koziel.



Figure 5. Unknown painter, *Arnulf of Carinthia*, 1588, fresco, concert hall, first floor, palace, Ciechanowice. Photo by Andrzej Koziel.

The paintings in Struga Palace have been preserved in a much better state. Out of the original 27 paintings, as many as 25 (located on all four walls) have survived to our times in relatively good condition, and only 8 of them are faded and devoid of most of their original inscriptions. The following emperors were portrayed in the former dining hall: Julius Caesar (no portrait), Octavian, Tiberius, Germanicus, Claudius, Nero (western wall), Galba, Otho, Vitellius, Vespasian (northern wall), Henry V, Frederick Barbarossa, Henry VI, Frederick II, Rudolf II, Albert (eastern wall), Henry VII, Frederick III, Charles IV, Wenceslaus IV, Sigismund of Luxembourg, Albert II Habsburg, Frederick III, Maximilian I (no portrait), Charles V, Ferdinand I, and jointly Maximilian II and Philip II of Spain (southern wall) (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Unknown painter, *Maximilian II and Philip II Habsburg*, late 1570s or early 1580s, fresco, dining hall, first floor, palace, Struga. Photo by Andrzej Koziel.

Although significant deterioration and extensive conservation works have largely obliterated the original form of the Renaissance paintings in both palaces, we can assume with high probability that both imperial cycles were created by the same painter. This is evidenced by the striking similarities in the depiction of the emperors, the use of ornaments and inscriptions accompanying the portraits, and the selection of portrayed persons. Unfortunately, we do not know the artist's name. In the paintings, there are no inscriptions or signatures that could help us identify their creator. The archive searches did not yield any historical accounts related to the various phases of the creation of the painting decorations. The comparative analysis of the Ciechanowice and Struga paintings with other similar works in Silesia also proved unsuccessful. However, there is no doubt that the creator was not an outstanding painter of international importance but rather a local artist who was active in the Duchy of Świdnica and Jawor and the Duchy of Legnica. He (or she) probably came from the local guild of painters that operated in such cities as Jelenia Góra, Świdnica, or Legnica. This is evident from the mediocre artistic level of the paintings. The

oval images of the emperors are painted rather clumsily, with numerous errors in depicting the human figure and the accompanying ornaments.

The hypothesis that both fresco cycles were created by the same artist is also supported by the fact that they are modelled after the same graphic illustrations included in the work of the Dutch graphic artist, painter, and numismatist, Hubert Goltzius, *Lebendige Bilder Gar Nach Aller Keysern* [...], which was published in Antwerp in 1557.¹ This book contains 133 monochrome woodcut illustrations with portraits of emperors in round frames designed by a Dutch artist, Josse van Gietleughen, accompanied by the emperors' biographies (Strauss 1973, no. 113; Le Loup 1983, p. 47) (Figures 7 and 8).

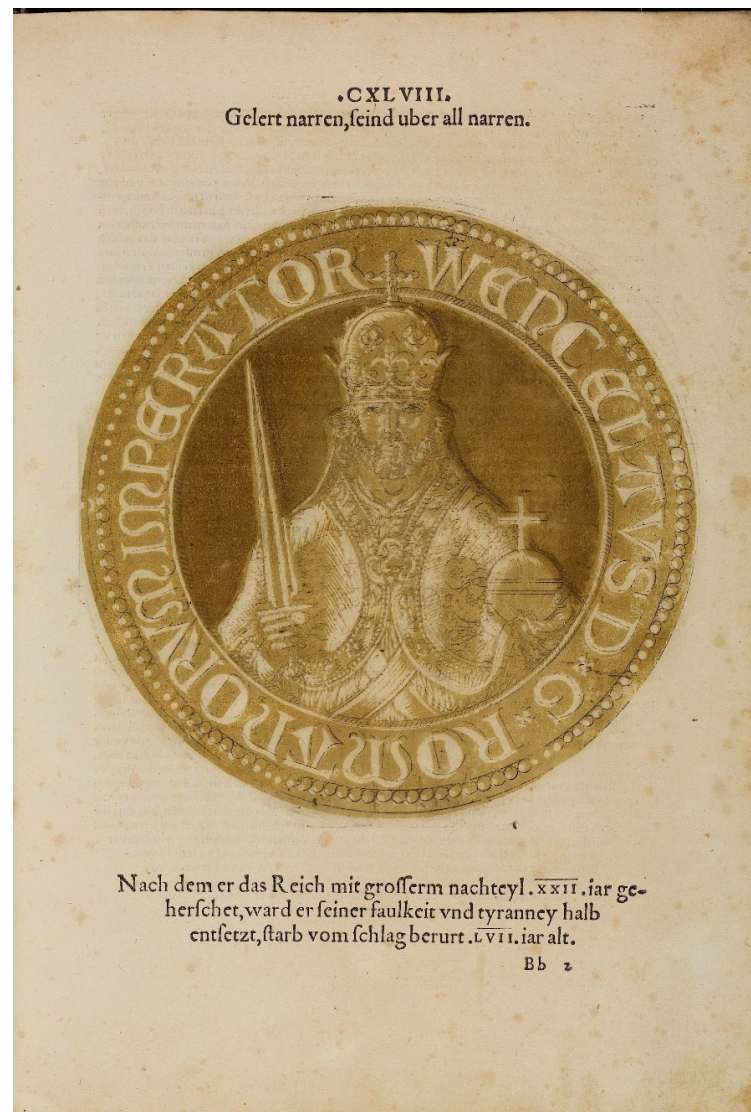


Figure 7. Josse van Gietleughen, *Wenceslaus IV*, woodcut, in Hubert Goltzius, *Lebendige Bilder Gar Nach Aller Keysern* [...], Antwerpen 1557. Photo from <https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.32333>.

These graphics were based on Goltzius's research on ancient and medieval coins and medals. Whenever he was unable to find a satisfactory portrait representation of a given emperor—for example, in the case of several rulers from the Carolingian and Ottonian eras—he included a graphic illustration with a blank portrait. Each image of the emperor is accompanied by a brief inscription: his name and title (on the round frame), the motto that guided him during his reign (above the portrait), and the most important information about the period of his reign (below the portrait). The creator of both fresco series used the

1557 German edition of this work. Latin and Italian versions were published in the same year, while a French translation was printed in 1559 and Spanish a year later.



Figure 8. Josse van Gietleughen, *Albert II Habsburg*, woodcut, in Hubert Goltzius, *Lebendige Bilder Gar Nach Aller Keysern [...]*, Antwerpen 1557. Photo from <https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.32333>.

The painter exactly followed the order of the graphic originals in Goltzius's work, omitting only the emperors for whom there were no illustrations and skipping over some portraits to match the length of the cycle to the size of the room. For example, in Struga Palace, he made a leap from the portrait of Emperor Vespasian to the images of the medieval rulers. Moreover, for the portraits of Roman emperors, he used graphic prototypes illustrating early modern rulers (half-length portraits), rather than the corresponding graphic prototypes illustrating ancient emperors (busts), which allowed him to apply the same half-length formula to all the images in the series. We can assume that the closer the emperor was to the artist's times, the more faithful his image was to the graphic model from Goltzius's work. A comparison of the graphic prototypes with the partially preserved inscriptions accompanying the relatively well-preserved frescoes on the eastern wall of the

dining room (now the hall) in Ciechanowice Palace indicates that the painter was also quite faithful in copying the inscriptions from the book—both regarding the motto that each emperor followed during his reign (the inscription above the portrait) and the details about his reign (the inscription below the portrait). Unfortunately, the inscriptions accompanying the paintings in the former dining room in Struga Palace were remodelled at a later time and now differ from Goltzius's original.

Certainly, using graphic illustrations from Goltzius's work as prototypes was not the artist's own initiative, but this was the idea hatched by the founders of these two fresco cycles and the owners of the estates in Struga and Ciechanowice: Abraham von Czettritz und Neuhaus and Heinrich von Reichenbach. Both were wealthy representatives of influential noble families, which had been present in Silesia for centuries and adopted the Lutheran faith.

Abraham von Czettritz und Neuhaus was the son of Georg Czettritz von Kinsberg and his wife Dorothea, who came from the family of Counts zu Dohna ([Czettritz und Neuhaus 1907](#), pp. 406–8). The date of his birth is unknown, but we know that when his father died in 1545, he was already of age. In all documents signed at the end of 1545, in which the landowners from the Duchy of Świdnica and Jawor confirmed his ownership rights, he is already mentioned as the owner of the Struga estate and its villages. His judicial rights in Grzęda and Lubnów were also approved. Soon after his father's death, Abraham von Czettritz und Neuhaus married Maria von Nimptsch. In 1546, their eldest son Adam was born, and in total, six children were born from this union. In addition to son Adam—who took part in the war against the Turks in 1566 and died in 1576 or 1577—they had daughter Magdalena, who was born in 1549 and died in 1617 as the wife of Hans von Tschirnhaus; daughter Eva, who married Siegmund von Waldau; son Abraham, who was born in 1559 or 1560 and died in 1598; daughter Anna, who married Fabian von Reichenbach in 1590; and their youngest son Georg, who started the Czarny Bór family branch.

In the 1560s, Abraham von Czettritz und Neuhaus started remodelling the manor house in Struga, as evidenced by the stone plaques with his and his wife's coats of arms placed at the main portal and the column with a "Tuscan" capital with the date 1565, which is located in the corner room adjacent to the new gate passage ([Eysymontt 2010](#), p. 338). This project was possible thanks to his considerable wealth, as confirmed by the treasury register of the Duchy of Świdnica and Jawor from 1579. Abraham von Czettritz und Neuhaus was also a generally respected man. On multiple occasions, he acted as a witness confirming the legitimacy of the wills of the local noblemen, including Conrad von Hochberg (1554) and Andres von Tschirnhaus (1582). Furthermore, together with his seventeen-year-old son Abraham and two other relatives, he represented the Silesian nobility at the funeral of Emperor Maximilian II, which was held in Prague on 22 and 23 March 1577.

Abraham von Czettritz und Neuhaus died before August 1585. After his death, the estate was divided between his two surviving sons. Abraham received Struga, Lubomin, Cieszków, Boguszów-Gorce, Nowy Lesieniec, the lower part of Boguszów, and Dzikowiec, while Georg, inherited Czarny Bór, Grzędy, Jabłów, and Jasin.

Heinrich von Reichenbach was the eldest son of Heinrich von Reichenbach called Bieler from his first marriage (see [von Reichenbach 1907](#), vol. 2, pp. 128–32) (Figure 9).

Heinrich von Reichenbach was born in 1530 and was mentioned as a witness on 1 July 1556 while his father was still alive. Since he was the only adult descendant at the time of his father's untimely death in 1557, for many years, he managed all his family estates and acted as a guardian for his minor brothers from two later marriages: Christoph von Hochberg of Książ, Hans von Schaffgotsch of Kreppehof, Melchior von Seidlitz of Barcinek, Heinrich von Nimptsch, and Christoph von Czettritz und Neuhaus.



Figure 9. Tombstone of Heinrich von Reichenbach, after 1595, former Reichenbach Chapel, parish church of St. Augustine, Ciechanowice. Photo by Andrzej Koziel.

Heinrich von Reichenbach was married to Anna von Reibnitz. Most probably, he died without issue, as Anna von Reichenbach was listed as a childless widow in 1604. On

2 October 1598, she remarried Joachim Buchta von Buchtitz, an imperial councillor and landowner. She died in 1616 and was buried in the parish church in Wiadrów near Bolków. The estate managed by Heinrich von Reichenbach must have been highly profitable, as evidenced by numerous loans he granted to the representatives of the Silesian nobility and by the further expansion of his estate. He also managed to secure the repayment of a loan of 4100 Hungarian gulden, which his father had granted to Emperor Ferdinand I in 1555 shortly before his death.

The considerable legacy from his father was divided between Heinrich von Reichenbach and his younger brothers Conrad, Fabian, and Christoph as late as 24 June 1594. Heinrich kept his paternal estate of Ciechanowice, worth 15,099 thalers. Conrad received Pastewnik worth 10,420 thalers. Fabian received the Jaczków estate worth 11,639 thalers. Finally, Christoph inherited the estate of Wierzchosławice and Półwsie, valued at 11,832 thalers. The annuity for the widow and the dowry for their sister Margaretha were to be collected in cash, provided in equal parts by all the brothers. The mines—which their father Heinrich von Reichenbach obtained in 1554 in Radzimowice near Jelenia Góra—were to remain the joint property of all the brothers. According to the record in the parish registers, Heinrich von Reichenbach died on 16 July 1595 in Ciechanowice and was buried in the parish church there. His share of the family estate was divided between his brothers Fabian and Christoph von Reichenbach in 1604.

Although Heinrich von Reichenbach did not achieve the same rank as his father—who had become the governor of the Duchy of Świdnica and Jawor—he also held many important offices. In 1573, he became a judge of the Court of the Twelve (Zwölfterrichter) in Świdnica, and three years later, he was put forward to the emperor as a candidate for an imperial commissioner in the context of the visitation of the monastic estates in Silesia. He was also a commissioner of the Cistercian monastery in Krzeszów and performed many legal actions in this capacity. His social and financial position must have been high, as he represented the Silesian nobility at the funeral ceremonies of Emperor Maximilian II held in Prague from 22 to 23 March 1577.

Heinrich von Reichenbach continued his father's artistic patronage. He began with a comprehensive reconstruction of the parish church of St. Augustine in Ciechanowice, which—according to the date on the stone portal of the tower—was completed in 1577. As a result, the former Late Gothic church received a new tower, new portals and plasterwork, and a late Renaissance painted decoration (Frankowska 1973; Ulanecki 1998). In 1601—already after Heinrich von Reichenbach's death—a small burial chapel for the von Reichenbach family was added to the eastern side of the church, where many of his family members found their final resting place. Heinrich von Reichenbach also continued work on the new painted decoration of the most important rooms on the second floor of the Renaissance palace in Ciechanowice.

3. Discussion

What connected Heinrich von Reichenbach of Ciechanowice with Abraham von Czettritz und Neuhaus of Struga so that they decided to fund almost identical fresco cycles depicting emperors in their palaces? Certainly, their families knew each other, as Christoph von Czettritz und Neuhaus was appointed the guardian of Heinrich von Reichenbach's underage brothers. They also had direct family ties, since Heinrich's brother Fabian remarried in 1590, and his second wife was Anna von Czettritz, the daughter of Abraham von Czettritz und Neuhaus (Czettritz und Neuhaus 1907, p. 407). However, far more important for the creation of these unique fresco decorations in both palaces was the fact that their founders were Protestants and, as representatives of the Silesian nobility, took part in the funeral ceremonies of Emperor Maximilian II held in Prague on 22 and 23 March 1577.

Maximilian II died on 12 October 1576 in Regensburg, where he had attended the Imperial Diet² (Figure 10).



Figure 10. Workshop of Nicolas Neufchatel, *Maximilian II*, 1566, oil on canvas, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. Photo from public domain.

The embalmed body was placed in a coffin and on 6 November 1576 transported by the Danube to Wilhering near Linz. As the plague had broken out in Vienna, Rudolf II, Maximilian II's eldest son and successor, decided that the funeral ceremony would take place in Prague. The emperor's body reached the capital of the Kingdom of Bohemia on 6 February 1577, and it was laid to rest in the Church of St. James in the Old Town. Finally, on 22 March 1577, a procession set off from the church to St. Vitus Cathedral in Hradčany, where the proper funeral ceremony took place. It lasted until the evening, and the mourners returned to the cathedral the following morning to attend a mass for the soul of the deceased, after which the coffin with his body was placed in the tomb next to the mortal remains of his parents, Ferdinand I and Anna Jagellonica.

Among the numerous guests who came to Prague to bid farewell to Emperor Maximilian II, there was also a delegation of Protestant nobles from Silesia (Czettritz und Neuhaus 1907, p. 406). Abraham von Czettritz und Neuhaus, who had come to Prague with his son Abraham, was among those Silesian noblemen who followed the coffin containing the body of the late emperor in the funeral procession. He was accompanied by Heinrich von Reichenbach of Ciechanowice, who had come to the emperor's funeral with his relative, Fabian von Reichenbach of Stoszowice, later the governor of the Duchy of Ziębice

(von Reichenbach 1907, vol. 2, p. 131). It was during their stay in Prague that Abraham von Czettritz und Neuhaus and Heinrich von Reichenbach were able to purchase Hubert Goltzius's work *Lebendige Bilder Gar Nach Aller Keysern* [. . .]. This book was popular at the imperial court, and a specially prepared copy had been ceremonially presented to Emperor Maximilian II in 1562 (Dwyer 2006).

This significant presence of the Protestant nobility from Silesia at the funeral of Emperor Maximilian II was caused not only by the duty that the subjects had to fulfil towards their deceased ruler. It was also an expression of great respect and gratitude to Emperor Maximilian II for his tolerant policy towards his Protestant subjects (Bibl 2017, pp. 219–26; Piecuch 2023, pp. 61–63). Although Maximilian II—in order to inherit the throne from his father—swore allegiance to the Catholic faith in 1562, he did not continue the Counter-Reformation policy of Ferdinand I. He applied the principle of equality of all faiths, for he considered himself a Christian, maintaining his independence from any denomination. For the Protestants in Silesia, this meant such considerable religious freedom as they had never before or never after experienced from a Habsburg ruler.

Although Emperor Maximilian II did not issue any new provisions in favour of the Silesian Protestants, he actually respected the principles of the Peace of Augsburg of 1555. In practice, the scope of religious freedoms Silesian Protestants could enjoy was even broader than the settlement had envisaged. In fact, Protestant communities—including churches and schools—thived not only in areas governed by Protestant rulers but also in estates owned by Catholics, including bishops and monasteries (Czapliński et al. 2002, p. 155). When the provisions of the Peace of Augsburg were violated, the emperor would intervene. For example, in 1572, he issued a rescript demanding the observance of religious freedom in Głogówek, where Hans von Oppersdorf had begun to persecute Protestants, and in 1574, he defended a Protestant preacher active in Trzebnica, who had been attacked by the Bishop of Wrocław, Martin von Gertsmann (Piecuch 2023, p. 62).

Clearly, the foundation of the series depicting the emperors of the Roman Empire and the Roman Empire of the German Nation in the dining halls of the palaces in Ciechanowice and Struga—which culminated in the joint depiction of Emperor Maximilian II and King Philip II of Spain—was an expression of the pride that Heinrich von Reichenbach and Abraham von Czettritz und Neuhaus felt after representing the Silesian nobility at the funeral of Emperor Maximilian II in Prague in 1577. First, the painting decoration of the dining room in Struga Palace was created in the late 1570s and early 1580s, followed in 1588 by a series of fresco paintings in the dining room of Ciechanowice Palace. It was probably from Prague that the two founders of these fresco decorations brought Hubert Goltzius's work *Lebendige Bilder Gar Nach Aller Keysern* [. . .], whose graphic illustrations served as models for the fresco depictions and accompanying inscriptions in both palaces.

It was also an expression of gratitude of these two prominent and wealthy noblemen of the Protestant denomination to Emperor Maximilian II, during whose reign imperial power was the source and guarantor of the religious freedoms for the Protestants in Silesia. Indeed, the omission in both cycles of the currently reigning Emperor Rudolf II was very telling. As we know, soon after assuming the imperial throne, Rudolf II abandoned his father's tolerant policy towards Protestants. Although he did not revoke the Peace of Augsburg, in practice, he used political means to restrict the religious freedoms of Protestants, trying to impose Catholicism as the main religion across Silesia (Czapliński et al. 2002, p. 158). Following the provisions of the Peace of Augsburg to the letter, he ordered the removal of all Protestant clergy in the parishes located in the areas under the direct rule of the King of Bohemia. This order was ruthlessly enforced, including the brute force of the army, for example, in Opava in 1607. This caused great concern among Protestants throughout Silesia, for whom hard times were coming.

4. Conclusions

Although the creator of the fresco cycles depicting the emperors in the palaces in Struga and Ciechanowice was not an eminent painter from a leading artistic milieu in

Silesia but probably a local anonymous artist of mediocre talent, these paintings are notable for their unusual iconographic programme and ideological significance. These two cycles of half-length portraits of the emperors of the Roman Empire and the Roman Empire of the German Nation—modelled on the graphic illustrations and accompanying texts from Hubert Goltzius's work *Lebendige Bilder Gar Nach Aller Keysern* [...] from 1557—are unique works of art not only in Silesia (see [Steinborn 1993](#), pp. 7–56) but also in the whole of Central Europe. Indeed, nowhere can we find fresco cycles consisting of so many imperial portraits, which are also a visual expression of the gratitude of the Protestant noblemen for the tolerant religious policy of the late Emperor Maximilian II. In this respect, the paintings in Struga and Ciechanowice palaces are unprecedented.

We can compare them only to the portrait galleries of “famous men” (*uomini famosi*) popular during the Renaissance, which in Silesia were turned into the cycles of oil paintings on canvas, such as the one from the former collection of the Wrocław patrician, Thomas Rehdiger ([Steinborn 1977](#), pp. 29–65). However, in neighbouring Bohemia and Moravia, they were also turned into fresco paintings, with the best example being a cycle of 24 medallions representing well-known personalities of the 16th century—including church dignitaries and rulers, such as the Tsar and the Turkish Sultan—created at the end of the 16th century on the townhouse number 106 in Slavonice ([Krčálová 1989](#), p. 64).

We do not encounter any other galleries of imperial portraits decorating Silesian palaces until the Baroque era. This is when we can find the *Personifications of Prudence and Truth* painted by an unknown artist on the vault of one of the representative halls of the Württembergs' castle in Oleśnica at the end of the 17th century, complemented by the depictions of four busts of Roman emperors in the window splays ([Katalog zabytkó 1983](#), p. 68, figs. 217, 218). Similarly, the fresco decoration (which was destroyed around 1800) of the Knights' Hall in the Oppersdorffs' castle in Głogówek depicted a gallery of Habsburg rulers, a Roman eagle, and personifications of the virtues ([Kalinowski 1973](#), p. 98). However, these works were by no means on par with the imperial series at the palaces in Ciechanowice and Struga. The only work to which they can be compared is the fresco decoration of the Ballroom in Luboradz—created for Count Christoph Wenzel von Nostitz in 1692—with a series of 53 oval bust paintings, not of emperors but of the members of the Nostitz family ([Rudnicka 2015](#)) (Figure 11).

This gallery starts with an image of the legendary family ancestor Johannes, who lived around 965, and the dozen or so portraits depicting the subsequent von Nostitz members in chronological order. Towards the end of the gallery, there are portraits of prominent representatives of the von Nostitz family from various lines who were the founder's contemporaries (Figure 12).

The portraits are accompanied by inscriptions which—in addition to basic biographical information about the portrayed—highlight their merits in the service of the Habsburg emperors and list important positions and titles they held at the imperial court in Vienna. The entire painted decoration of the ballroom is tied together by the climactic image of Christoph Wenzel von Nostitz himself, with a glorifying inscription. He is portrayed in a fresco oval medallion above the fireplace, located opposite the ballroom's main entrance.

The portrait gallery of the von Nostitz family at Luboradz Palace is undoubtedly the largest series depicting the members of the noble family not only in Silesia but also in the whole of Central Europe, and it is the only fresco cycle of this kind to have been executed on such a monumental scale. So far, researchers have not been able to find convincing models or analogies for this work. But today, we know that they were most likely the Renaissance fresco cycles depicting imperial portraits in the palaces in Struga and Ciechanowice. Unfortunately, as early as 1732, the paintings in Ciechanowice were completely covered with new plaster during the baroque reconstruction of the palace. Soon after, a similar fate befell the fresco decoration in Struga Palace. And they had to wait until the beginning of the 21st century to once again become the object of admiration of art lovers and to spark academic interest.



Figure 11. Luboradz, palace, the Hall of Ancestors, the view of the interior, the state in the 1970s. Photo from the archive of Andrzej Koziel.



Figure 12. Johann Georg Greiner (?), *Ferdinand von Nostitz and Otto von Nostitz*, 1690–1692, frescoes, the Hall of Ancestors, palace, Luboradz. Photo by Andrzej Koziel.

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Notes

- ¹ (Goltzius 1557). Hubert Goltzius was the great-uncle of the now better-known engraver and painter Hendrik Goltzius. On the circumstances of the creation of this work, see (Dekesel 1987, pp. 11–67).
- ² On the death and funeral ceremonies of Emperor Maximilian II, see (Vocelka 1976, pp. 105–36; Bůžek 2005, pp. 260–73; Bůžek 2021, pp. 91–155).

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