3/ The Prague Belvedere in the context of Ferdinand's symbolism and architecture

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3.1 The power of images: Ferdinand's symbolism

3.1.1 The coat of arms in Wiener Neustadt arsenal, 1523–1524

After Ferdinand I took power in the Austrian lands in 1521–1522, the arsenal building in Wiener Neustadt, erected in 1523–1524, became the first new architectural creation of the young archduke. It was damaged in 1945 and subsequently torn down. The new buildings constructed between 1952 and 1955 on its site integrated the two remaining portals.[1] The inscription on the second portal is identical to that on the main portal and expresses Ferdinand's intention of building the arsenal: To protect the fatherland and threaten the enemies.[2] As one of several arsenals built by Ferdinand I, it was positioned opposite the castle to serve its dual function as both a military

3.1. Wiener Neustadt, main portal of the former arsenal of Ferdinand I, 1523–1524. Photo Federal Monuments Authority Austria / Bundesdenkmalamt 2001.

1 Buttlar 1993, 28.
2 Buttlar 1993, 35.

3.2. Wiener Neustadt, side portal of the former arsenal of Ferdinand I, 1523–1524. Photo Renate Leggatt-Hofer 2007.

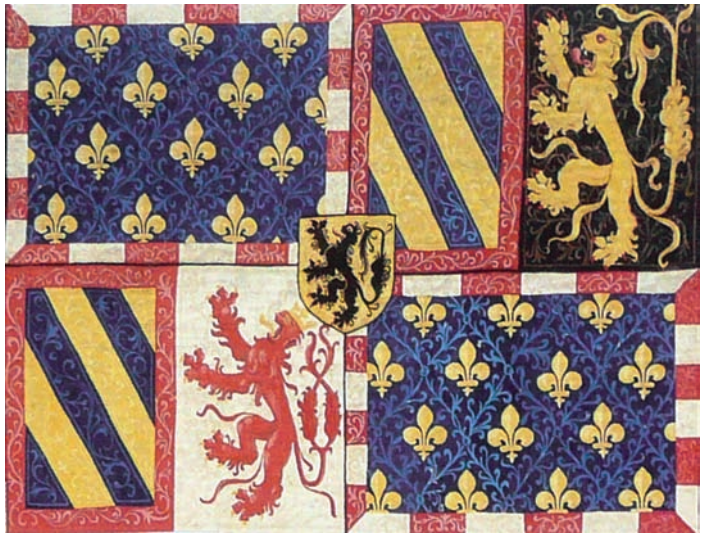
3.3. Wiener Neustadt, main portal of the former arsenal of Ferdinand I, 1523–1524, coat of arms of Ferdinand I. Photo Renate Leggatt-Hofer 2007.

and representative building. The two remaining splendid Renaissance portals were among the earliest of their kind in Central Europe (**3.1–2**).

With their rich sculptural decoration, they stand without directly related examples. However, they echo Renaissance forms attributed to northern Italian artists from the Jagiellonian, Hungarian and Moravian circles, who were already working in Vienna under Maximilian I.[3] In particular, the steep monumental triangular gable holding Ferdinand's huge coat of arms is of a unique design. Compared to the outline and proportions of the portal architecture, the gable and the coat of arms are visibly oversized (**3.1** and **3.3**).

The stunning coat of arms clearly shows how strong the political reference to Ferdinand's Burgundian ancestors was from the beginning of his reign.[4] Two fields display the golden lilies on a blue background of the French royal Valois dynasty. The lilies disappear in a continuous pattern behind the edge, just like the coat of arms of the four Burgundian dukes: since 1363, the Duchy of Burgundy had been bestowed upon Philip the Bold. The "disappearing lilies" point to the dukes of Burgundy as the secondary line of the House of Valois (**3.4–5**). In contrast, Ferdinand's Wiener Neustadt coat of arms lacks an important detail: it does not

3 Vancsa in Holzschuh-Hofer / Vancsa 2003, 271.
4 Holzschuh-Hofer 2014d, 539–540. – Leggatt-Hofer 2024a.



3.4. Wiener Neustadt, main portal of the former arsenal of Ferdinand I, coat of arms of Ferdinand I, 1523–1524, detail with French Valois lilies. Photo Renate Leggatt-Hofer 2007.

3.5. Coat of arms carpet with the Burgundian full coat of arms, c. 1470.

contain the red and white frame around the golden lilies that was present in the coats of arms of his Burgundian predecessors. This had to be added by all his later-born sons. He confidently ignored the rules, boldly expressing a direct closeness to the French royal family.

The young archduke's understanding of the power of pictorial symbolism is reflected in the very specific composition of the coat of arms, which signals highly ambitious political goals, very much in the tradition of his ancestors, particularly his grandfather, Emperor Maximilian I, and his great-grandfather, Emperor Frederick III. The latter built a new chapel (1450–1460) with a facade facing the inner courtyard of Wiener Neustadt Castle, the famous Coat of Arms Wall, dated by an inscription to 1453, but possibly no completed until 1457. This wall can be regarded as a sophisticated heraldic pictorial programme celebrating Frederick's reign in Austria (**3.6**).

It specifically depicts Frederick's imperial act of 1453 declaring the legitimacy of the *Privilegium maius*,[5] legitimising the title of "Archduke" and thereby conferring rights of the Electors to the Habsburgs.[6] The Coat of Arms Wall in Wiener Neustadt is one of the most stunning political monuments in Central European history, and it was one of the first impressions that Ferdinand encountered at the very beginning of his Austrian rule, giving him the inspiration and impetus for his architectural political representation.

The newly built arsenal, together with the modernisation of the Wiener Neustadt city and castle fortifications,[7] was part of Ferdinand's first pre-emptive defensive actions against the Ottoman threat during his rule. As early as September 1521, he gave the order to prepare the city, which he called the *key and heart of our House of Austria*,[8] for defence. An evaluation report on the fortification, written in 1523 by the builder Georg de Spatio,[9] among others, provides detailed information. A source from April 1524 mentiones Italian bricklayers working in Wiener Neustadt.[10] A most interesting document dated May 1524[11] offers insight into Ferdinand's knowledge

5 The *Privilegium maius* is one of the most famous medieval document forgeries. It was an attempt by duke Rudolf IV of Habsburg in 1358–1359 to elevate the Habsburg family's rank by inventing the title "Archduke" combined with Elector's rights. At the time, it was not accepted by Emperor Charles IV.

6 Kohn 2019, 121–124.

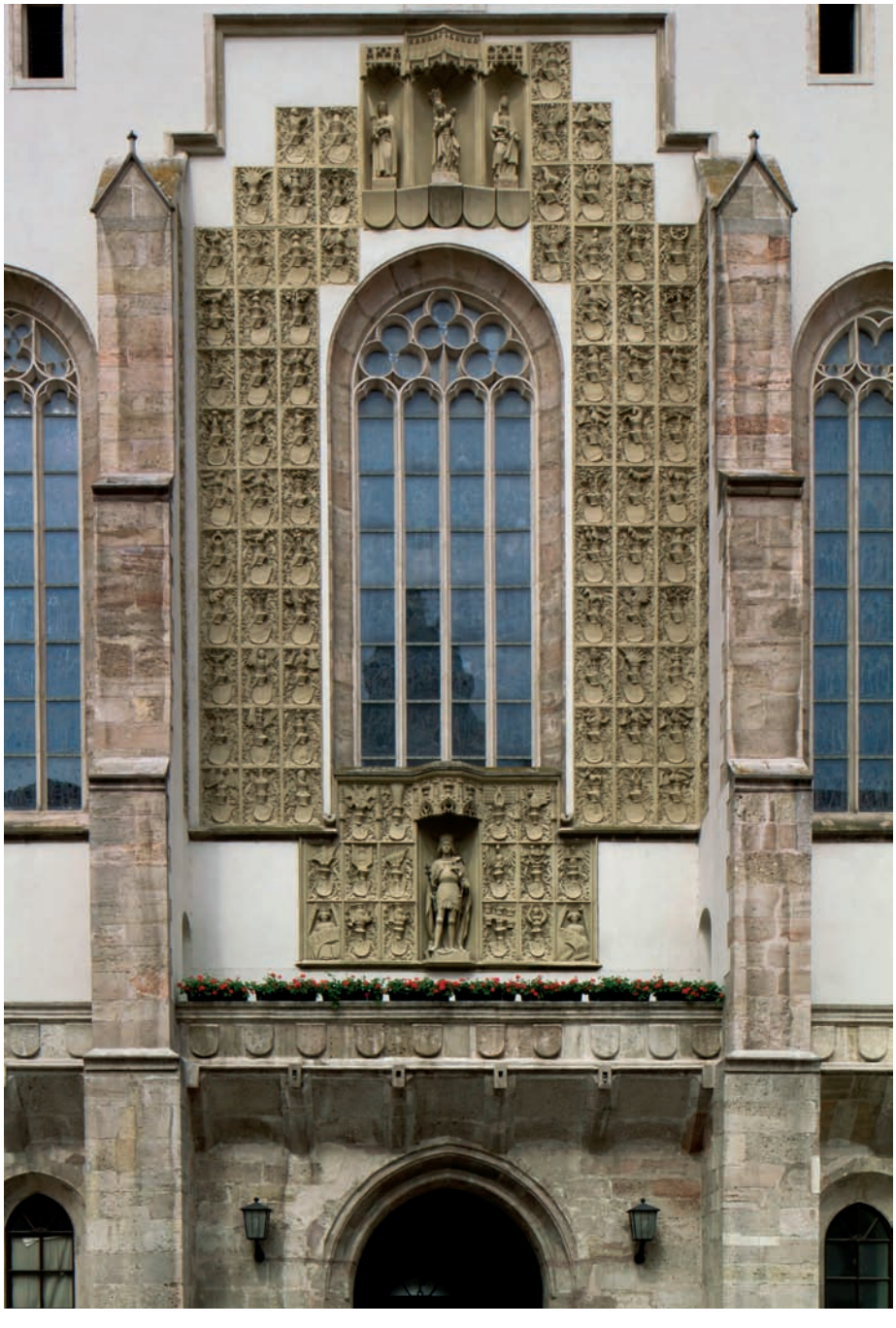
7 Wagner-Rieger 1959, 467.

8 Buttlar 1993, 29.

9 Zimerman/Fiedler 1885, JKS III, XCII–XCIII, Reg. 2978; Buttlar 1993, 30: "*baumeister zu Maran Georg Spatn* [Spatio]".

10 Zimerman/Fiedler 1885, JKS III, LIV, Reg. 2795.

11 Zimerman/Fiedler 1885, JKS III, CXXIII–CXXXV, Reg. 2981: "*gedingnus* [contract for]... *Walhischen maureren maister Francisco und Pangrätzen*".



3.6. Wiener Neustadt Castle, so-called Coat of Arms Wall of Emperor Frederick III, between 1453 and 1457. Federal Monuments Authority Austria / Bundesdenkmalamt, photo Bettina Neubauer-Pregl 2012.

and involvement in his commissioned architecture. It contains contracts with two Italian bricklayer masters, Francisco and Pangratz,[12] regarding construction work on the arsenal and the castle. Another contract names the builders Pangratz and Anton from Milan, who were also commissioned to construct the main arsenal portal based on the provided draft.[13] The details in these contracts are exceptionally precise, even defining the dimensions of each wall. They went so far as to prescribe the composition of the mortar in order to ensure high-quality masonry.[14] Witnesses to these

12 Buttlar 1993, 31.
13 Buttlar 1993, 31.
14 Zimerman/Fiedler 1885, JKS III, CXXIII–CXXXV, Reg. 2981: "*den mörter recht und woll abrueren, damit derselb in ainer masz nit zu faist noch zu mager gebraucht werde; so beleiben di mewr all in ainem wesen.*"

3.7. Sandstone all'antica portrait bust of Ferdinand I, 1524–1526. Castle Staré Hrady u Libáně. Photo Renate Leggatt-Hofer 2008.

3.8. Sandstone all'antica portrait bust of Ferdinand I, 1524–1526, rear side with the relief of the rising phoenix. Castle Staré Hrady u Libáně. Photo Renate Leggatt-Hofer 2008.

contracts included Johann Tscherte and Georg de Spatio. In June 1525, Ferdinand ordered Venetian glass for Wiener Neustadt.[15] In 1526 and 1527, the stonemason Jakob de Spatio was paid for his work at the buildings.[16]

3.1.2 Ferdinand's imperial bust, 1524–1526

One of Ferdinand's early commissions was a 95 centimetres high sandstone bust in the all'antica style, dated to 1524/1526, which shows him in his young years, dressed as a Roman emperor with the characteristic lion-headed shoulders invoking the strength of Hercules, and wearing a substantial collar of the Order of the Golden Fleece.[17] Its rear side features a relief of the rising phoenix (**3.7–8**), the symbol of invincibility or, from a Christian perspective, the sign of resurrection and eternal life, a motif also found at the Prague Belvedere (**N6**). This stunning piece of art was unique in its formal shape at the time, not only for its iconology but also for its function as an impressive propaganda item for Ferdinand's imperial political aims. The lions on the shoulders express the omnipresent Habsburg-Hercules reference, standing for invulnerability and strength. This bust has survived in Czech private ownership[18] to the present day.

3.1.3 The Burgundian fire steel: Ferdinand's logo

The Burgundian symbols, particularly the firesteel-flint-sparks combination, were used in an elitist and intense way under Ferdinand I in all his art commissions, especially in his residential architecture, such as the Prague

15 Zimerman/Fiedler 1885, JKS III, LIX, Reg. 2855: "*zwen säm Venedigisch glasscheiben.*"
16 Zimerman/Fiedler 1885, JKS III, LXVII, Reg. 2895; Zimerman/ /Fiedler 1885, JKS III, LXVIII, Reg. 2898.
17 Holzschuh-Hofer 2014d, 535–536; Leggatt-Hofer 2018, 91.
18 Fučíková 2003. For the restoration of the bust in 1969–1970, see Lejsková-Matyášová 1973; Chlíbec 1998; Holzschuh-Hofer 2010b; Holzschuh-Hofer 2010a, here 261–64 and fig. 443–444. On the reception of classical antiquity in the art of Charles V and Ferdinand I, see Polleroß 2006, especially 207–214.