

## Article

# Color in Medieval Castle Architecture in Present-Day Poland and Czech Republic

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**Abstract:** Colors were ubiquitous in the medieval world, and castles were no exception. While in the eyes of most people their rich color schemes manifested power and wealth, some could also read the more nuanced messages these colors conveyed. The main objective of this paper is to discuss the use and role of color in the interiors of castles of medieval Bohemia and Poland. The picture is complemented by the analysis of color decorations of defensive residences of the Teutonic Order. The discussion takes into account the varying states of preservation and draws from the available written accounts. To present the most complete picture possible, we discuss royal residences, for which unfortunately limited data are available, as well as the better-preserved castles of dukes and knights. We discuss the identified iconographic programs and their chivalric, heraldic, and hagiographic motifs. Within the scope of our discussion are late forms of floral decorations, known as “green chambers”. The numerous examples presented in the paper prove that color was an important tool of visual social communication in castle architecture: it complemented the symbolism, and sometimes carried an independent message.

**Keywords:** castles; paintings; colors; decoration; Poland; Bohemia; Teutonic Knights



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## 1. Introduction

According to an eyewitness account of the famous chronicler Janko of Czerneków, the funeral of Polish King Casimir the Great in 1370 was a highly ceremonial event. The procession included coachmen, horses, and carts covered in black cloth, and forty knights rode on horses dressed in scarlet cloth. They were followed by colorful banners and shields with the emblems of the principalities of the Kingdom of Poland. Then, a knight in a golden robe, on a horse dressed in purple, followed. Next were the clergy in their gold and multicolored garb, preceding the bier with the body of the deceased king (Żerbillo 1996, p. 36). There is little doubt that this ceremony must have appeared to the people of those times as a colorful spectacle, fascinating them with the richness of information it carried. While probably not all observers could read this symbolism in every detail, most of the participants must have understood the functions of individual colors to accurately interpret the scenes of the funeral spectacle. The chronicler intentionally emphasized the colors accompanying the particular people and groups. The focus in this passage is precisely on the enumeration of colors, a clear signal that they were important tools of visual social communication at that time.

This understanding of the function of colors appeared in the studies of European medievalists almost 100 years ago (Huizinga 1938). Detailed research has long been conducted, albeit often in parallel and in many fields, from heraldry and material culture to literature, linguistics, and theology.

The aim of this text is thus to draw attention to color in the medieval castle architecture of Poland and Bohemia, within the present-day borders of Poland and Czech Republic. This territorial scope allows us to demonstrate the phenomenon of color and its function in the architecture of Teutonic castles as well. The attempt to understand these phenomena stems from our conviction about the importance of color in conveying visual messages, with colors either carrying independent messages in themselves or, quite often, being used as a means to complement or strengthen the meaning of a message.

Our task was not made easier by the profile and number of the surviving accounts. The relevant written sources often have the character of excerpts, and information on colors is rare and laconic, as if on the margins of other data. The analysis of objects preserved in situ encounters problems of a different kind. Color is an impermanent element, one which has survived to the present day to varying degrees. It is prone to changes, with the effects of the passage of time, exposure to environmental conditions, conservation work, and repainting accumulating over centuries. Therefore, what remains today are often only fragments of the original color, and sometimes even only underpaintings without a finishing layer. This results in a whole series of methodological difficulties. We are aware that the study of color in castle architecture may be overshadowed by potential errors of presentism. Researchers often “decolorise” medieval buildings, lacking understanding and knowledge of both the ephemerality of aesthetics and the consequences of the evolution of the technological means of obtaining pigments. Moreover, it seems that “colorlessness”, an effect of leaving the building material raw, might sometimes have been a deliberate approach meant as a manifestation of restraint. Availability and cost often dictated the choice of certain materials and pigments. The appreciation of contrast and harmony also differed from that of today. Finally, matte and gloss, as well as light and shadow, played a special role, as they not only carried specific symbolism, but also drew out a wider range of tones from the colors (Pastoureau 1999, pp. 120–25; Adamska 2015, pp. 12–13). Conclusions on the role of color must therefore be based on a limited number of examples, which may make this text more of a case study than a comprehensive, detailed and exhaustive analysis of the problem. The subject of this analysis is only the secular interiors of the residences of kings, dukes and knights. Therefore, chapels at castles were intentionally left out of the field of our research.

## 2. The Colorful World of Charles IV and Wenceslas IV

The surviving medieval painted decorations in Czech royal castles make up a very modest set. Unfortunately, the state of preservation of those from the first half of the 14th century, from the time of John of Luxembourg, is generally very poor. In fact, the only evidence of decorations from this period are the paintings in the House at the Stone Bell (U kamenného zvonu) in Prague’s Old Town, which of course was not a castle but served as the municipal residence of King John (Všetečková 2010, pp. 144–49) (Figure 1). The projects associated with the sons of this monarch, Charles IV and John Henry, are better preserved.



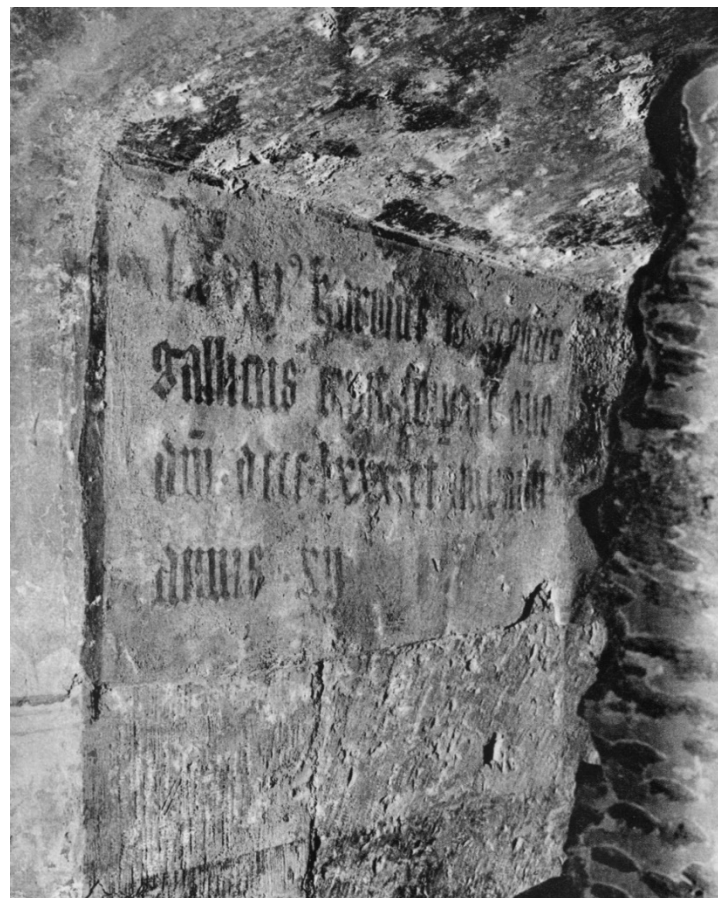
**Figure 1.** Prague, House at the Stone Bell, Lower Chapel. Cycle of paintings with the legend of St. Wenceslas. 1st third of the 14th century. Photo by František Záruba, the author's own work.

Of the paintings associated with Charles IV, the oldest are probably the decorative and heraldic murals discovered at Veverí Castle (Bolina et al. 2002; Záruba 2021a, p. 105), unfortunately preserved only in fragments. These adorned the walls of the castle Charles built while he was still the Margrave of Moravia (the building was not fully completed until the reign of John Henry). The former main hall was also decorated with figural representations, of which only an image of the head of Christ dated to the second quarter or around the middle of the 14th century, has survived to the present day. Charles IV was beyond any doubt an outstanding patron of the arts and an extremely broad-minded man. This was fully reflected in the spectrum of painted decoration associated with him. The most outstanding were the paintings at Prague Castle (Old Royal Palace), Karlštejn Castle, and also at Vyšehrad Castle. Worth mentioning, too, is the heraldic decoration partially preserved to this day in one of the rooms of Lauf an der Pegnitz Castle (Růžek 1988, 2006) (Figure 2). Undoubtedly, special attention should be paid to Prague's Old Royal Palace, which was thoroughly reconstructed, an ambitious project initiated by Charles IV in 1333, and completed sometime between 1340 and 1345. Unfortunately, the palace was substantially rebuilt in the late Gothic style in the following century, so in discussing the original appearance of the painted decoration all we have to rely upon are a few fragments discovered by Karel Fiala in the 1920s and very scarce written sources. The murals uncovered in the window recesses of the Great Hall were later transferred to the Prague Castle collection and thus preserved to this day. Unfortunately, they have not been publicly exhibited since 1946.



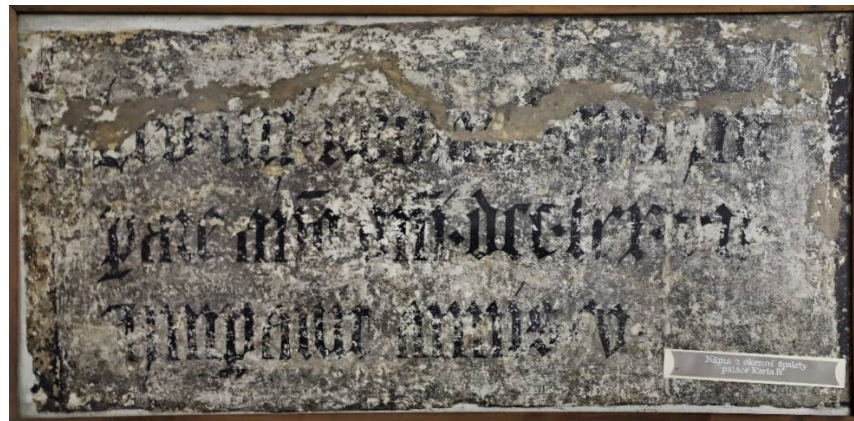
**Figure 2.** Lauf an der Pegnitz castle (Wenzelsburg), Vladislav Hall. Hall of arms. 1356–1360. Photo by František Záruba, the author's own work.

The main decorative motif of the Great Hall was an extensive series of panel paintings depicting Roman and Byzantine emperors along with inscriptions. Two inscriptions have survived, those of Leo IV and Charles III (Figures 3 and 4). The beginning of this cycle was perhaps captured by Petrus Apianus in his *Inscriptiones Sacrosanctae Vetustatis* of 1534, in which he mentions inscriptions concerning the rulers of four ancient empires known in the Middle Ages: Nimus, Alexander, Tola, and Romulus (Apian 1534, p. 452). They were followed by the above-mentioned emperors, and the cycle closed with Charles IV's grandfather Henry VII, as evidenced by an entry in the *Universal Chronicle*, which Charles IV received in 1355 from a burgher from Rimini: "emperors up to him (Henry) are painted in the royal palace at Prague Castle" [authors' translation]. There was probably also a representation of Charles IV himself, who liked to be depicted in such contexts. We do not know exactly how many paintings made up the whole cycle. Antonin Saláč gave an estimate of 120 paintings, while Petr Uličný put the number at 104 (Salač 1962, p. 306; Uličný 2018). The set described above was accompanied by decorative painting found in the great hall and also in the chapel. Their description by Dobroslava Menclová and Václav Mencl reads: "The edge of the niche and the edges of the side walls of the windows were decorated with illusionistically painted architectural profiles in brown-red, with white and red bands, which in the middle part of the lining turn into brown bands; the background of the window was black, with French lilies and palmettes alternating. The lower part was then conceived as a carpet, with a pattern of alternating brown pomegranates and cobalt blue scorpions against a purple-red background" [authors' translation] (Menclová and Mencl 1947, p. 272; Záruba 2015, p. 149). The transferred parts rediscovered in the storehouses of Prague Castle confirm the veracity of this description (Figure 5).

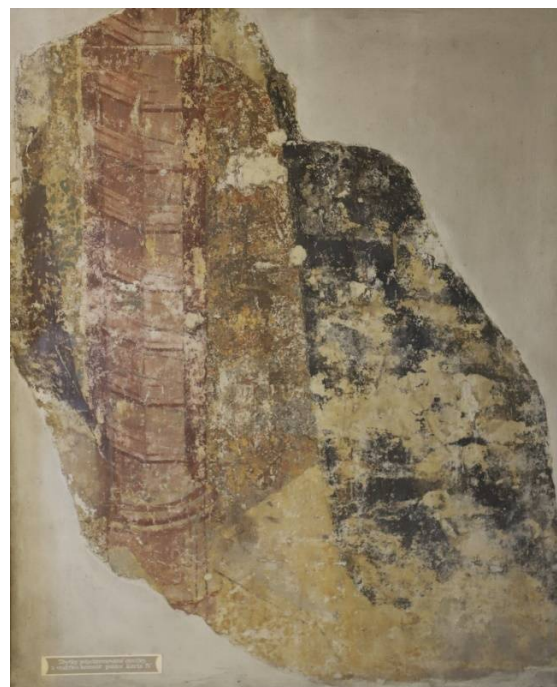


**Figure 3.** Prague Castle, Vladislav Hall. Fragment of inscription mentioning Charles III, from the cycle of emperors. Third quarter of the 14th century. Published by (Borkovský et al. 1946, unpaginated, public domain).





**Figure 4.** Prague Castle, transfer of the inscription from Vladislav Hall, today in the depository of Prague Castle. Photo by František Záruba, the author's own work.



**Figure 5.** Prague Castle, transfer of decorative paintings Vladislav Hall, today in the depository of Prague Castle. Photo by František Záruba, the author's own work.

Undoubtedly, the most splendid painted decorations were created at Karlštejn, in both sacral and secular areas of the castle. The murals in the chapels and on the grand staircase leading to the Chapel of the Holy Cross are relatively well preserved, while the paintings in the castle itself have survived in much worse condition. The castle was founded in 1348, and five years later we find the first mention of the painting of wall decorations, when Charles IV supposedly witnessed the miracle of the finger of St. Nicholas, and “this story was also depicted by the famous Emperor Charles in his chamber in the royal palace at Karlštejn Castle near Prague with beautiful paintings in eternal memory of the saint” [authors’ translation] (Bláhová 1987, p. 457). Unfortunately, these paintings have not survived. They may have been located on the second floor, where the chamber of Emperor Charles IV is traditionally located today, or one floor beneath it, in the Great Hall, adjacent to St. Nicholas’ Chapel. Incidentally, the arch of this chapel, which has been moved to the ground floor of the great tower of the Holy Cross, has preserved relics of the original painted decoration (Figure 6). On its northern side are very modest remains

of the decoration, in the form of painted fields. Slightly better-preserved paintings can be found in window scuncheons in a chamber on the second floor of the palace, adjacent to the suite of Emperor Charles IV mentioned above. In the eastern recess there is a coat of arms with the inscription 'S.P.Q.R.' surrounded by red floral ornamentation (Figure 7). In the window recess to the west are the coats of arms of Moravia and Luxembourg (the present appearance of this room results from a mid-15th century reconstruction and changes made in the 19th century).



**Figure 6.** Karlštejn, relic of painted decoration on the triumphal arch of the chapel of St. Nicholas. Between 1350 and 1360. Photo by František Záruba, the author's own work.



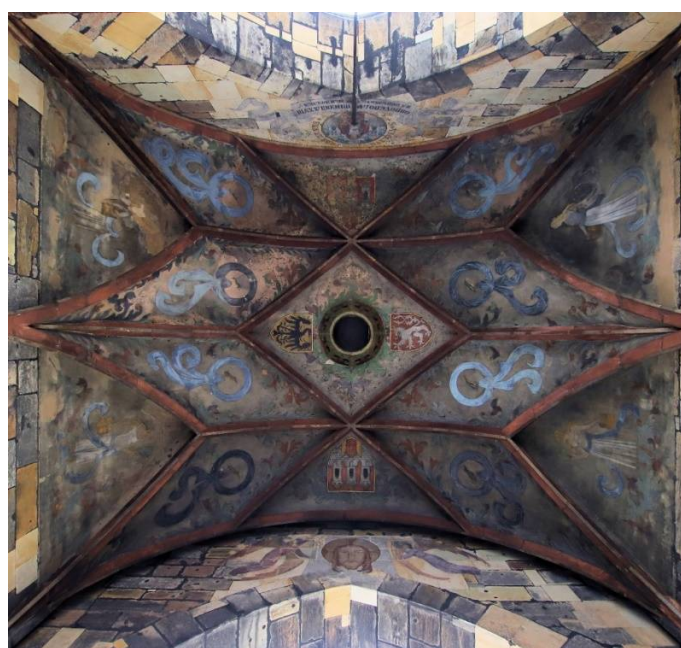
**Figure 7.** Karlštejn, coat of arms with the inscription 'S.P.Q.R.'. Mid-14th century. Photo by František Záruba, the author's own work.



Another series of representations adorned the neighboring hall, where “the family of Emperor Charles was painted”. This is of course the famous family tree of the Luxembourgs, to which a very rich body of literature is devoted (Neuwirth 1897; Friedl 1956; Krofta 1958; Krofta 1975; Stejskal 1976; Homolka 1997, pp. 99–108). The paintings remained there until the second half of the 16th century (1598 at the latest), when the hall was renovated and plastered anew. Fortunately, their artistic program, and probably the range of colors as well, are known from 16th-century “copies” (although unfortunately inaccurate) created by Matouš Ornys, and from the so-called Heidelberg Manuscript.

Another family cycle, that of the Přemyslids, may have existed at Vyšehrad Castle. Václav Hájek of Libočany mentions it in his Chronicle of Bohemia from 1539. Notorious for his exaggerated accounts of Bohemian history, he dated this cycle deep into mythical times: “Prince Neklan had a very wide and high tower built on Vyšehrad, beautifully decorated with the paintings of his family starting from Přemysl, which then stood there for a long time and has since been called Neklanka” [authors’ translation] (Hájek z Libočan 1541, p. 51r). This tower of Neklanka is most probably identical to a tall tower from the times of Charles IV located in the south-eastern corner of the Vyšehrad palace grounds, and which may have housed the above-mentioned cycle (Kašička and Nechvátal 1979, p. 116). Charles IV certainly attached great importance to this residence.

Even fewer examples of painted decorations have survived from the times of Wenceslas IV. No traces remain of his residences in the capital Prague, and his favorite castles of Žebrák and Nový Hrad near Kunratice have been completely ruined. Točník Castle has survived in the best condition, with partially preserved original interiors, but unfortunately no detailed research has yet been carried out on them. In the few places where plaster has been removed from the walls of the buildings, a grey-blue color is discernible. These places have also proved that the original plasterwork has survived practically intact, which gives hope for establishing the original decoration and color of the walls. The appearance of the secular interiors of the castles of Wenceslas IV can also be indirectly deduced from the paintings in the passage of the Old Town Bridge Tower in Prague, where we find emblems of kingfishers with wreaths and scantily dressed maidens (Figure 8). Contemporary sources also mention the painted decoration of Prague’s Hankův dům in Celetná Street, then owned by Wenceslas IV and used by his court, where “in parvo aestuario, ubi nudaе lixae sunt depictae” (Tomek 1866, p. 136).



**Figure 8.** Prague, Old Town Bridge Tower, paintings from the late 1380s or 1390s. Photo by František Záruba, the author’s own work.

The only well-preserved decorations that we can—albeit cautiously—associate with Wenceslas IV are at Loket Castle. The paintings there were discovered on the first floor of the palace built by this king. Their lower strip shows walls topped with battlements, to which a curtain decorated with stenciled patterns is attached (Figure 9). Above the walls are a colorful garden with a flowering meadow and spreading trees in which colorful birds are perched. In the 15th century these paintings were supplemented with coats of arms and figural scenes.



**Figure 9.** Loket, the first floor of the palace of Wenceslas IV, today called the Governor's House, probably the end of the 14th century. Photo by František Záruba, the author's own work.

### 3. Colors of Royal Dreams

The corpus of wall paintings of royal residences comprises a mere two small fragments known from the residence of the kings of Poland on Wawel Hill in Kraków. Both come from a tower added to the northern wing of the castle, called the Hen's Foot Tower (*Kurza Noga*), which was the core of the royal apartment and is one of the better-preserved medieval elements of Wawel Castle. The first fragment is preserved on the western wall of a room on the ground floor. As a result of its cross-ribbed vault supported on the central pillar, this room is now called the Gothic Hall or Casimir's Hall (Figure 10), in reference to King Casimir the Great, who had the vault built in the later 14th century. The aforementioned painting depicts the initials MM in Gothic minuscule, interlaced at right angles, rendered using red and ochre in a dark grey outline (Figure 11). They are traditionally interpreted as identifying Queen Jadwiga of Anjou. She also used this in the decoration of her other foundations, symbolically referring to her life motto, which reflects her attempts to combine an active and contemplative life (*Marta-Maria*) or as a reference to the patroness of her native Hungary (*Mater Maria*) and the battle cry of the Angevins (*Montjoie Sainte-Marie*) (Labuda and Secomska 2004, p. 50). This provided grounds for suggesting this chamber as the location of the queen's bedroom. In this view, it formed a two-room suite along with the adjacent room decorated with the coats of arms of the Angevins and Jagiellons on the keystones of the stone vault (Mossakowski 2021, pp. 72–73). Without deciding at this point to what extent such a reconstruction of the functional program of the Wawel residence is justified, one can emphasize the undoubtedly exceptional role of the colorful monogram, whose decorative function was, however, secondary to the symbolic.

Perhaps of greater value (mainly in terms of decoration) was the painted decoration of the room above Jadwiga's presumed bedroom, regarded as a sleeping chamber in the royal suite of her husband Władysław Jagiełło (Mossakowski 2021, pp. 73–74). The high room, closed with an ornamental palm vault supported by a single pillar, was later divided into



two stories during a modern-period reconstruction of the Royal Castle at Wawel. What we know about the colors used in its decoration comes solely from a small relic found during early 20th-century restoration works in the so-called Bird Room (Sala pod Ptakami), the former upper part of the Gothic room. A fragment of a fresco with geometric and plant motifs in pink color tones has survived there, framed by a grey border with white plant scrolls. Unfortunately, this small fragment is not enough to determine what the non-extant parts of the decoration looked like, and we could stop at a general statement of the presence of a painted decoration of the castle hall, were it not for the intriguing source information which prompted researchers to consider the possible character of the painted decoration of the royal bedroom.

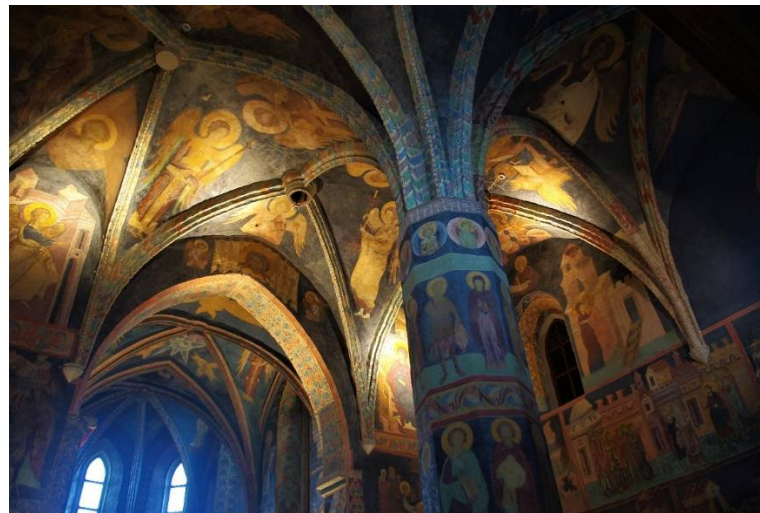


**Figure 10.** Kraków, Wawel castle, Ground floor of the Hen's Foot Tower (now called the Casimir Hall). General view. Photo by Tomasz Ratajczak, the author's own work.



**Figure 11.** Kraków, Wawel castle, Casimir Hall. Fragment of paintings. Between 1384–1399. Photo by Tomasz Ratajczak, the author's own work.

Royal accounts from the end of the 14th century inform us about expenditures on painted works in the royal bedroom at Wawel (*depingendum dormitorium d(omi)ni Regis in castro Cracoviensi*) carried out by painters from Ruthenia (*Ruthenis pictoribus*) (Piekosiński 1896, pp. 202, 211). On this basis, it is assumed that the monarch's bedroom was decorated with murals in the Byzantine–Ruthenian style (as in the chapel of Lublin Castle) (Figure 12), which would make it part of a larger group of similar works created on the initiative of the king, who was brought up in Orthodox culture and was fond of Eastern painting (Walkowiak 2020, pp. 253–80, with older references). The fragment of the painting preserved in the chamber of the royal suite, believed to have been the said bedroom, does not reveal stylistic features characteristic of the paintings of Byzantine provenance known from Lublin and other royal foundations, although some researchers claim this is due to the chronology and composition of the decoration. The fragment from the royal bedroom is associated with the late period of the reign of Casimir the Great (post mid-14th century), at whose initiative the vaults in the residential tower and probably its decoration were created (Labuda and Secomska 2004, p. 50). This would indicate that the original decoration was retained in the upper parts of the room, while Byzantine–Ruthenian decoration was introduced only on the lower part of its walls (Mossakowski 2021, p. 73). However, an alternative interpretation posits that the royal bedroom was located in another part of the castle, no longer extant, in the vicinity of the pre-Romanesque rotunda renovated and incorporated into the walls of the residence by Casimir the Great (Walkowiak 2020). Although this hypothesis is based on an enigmatic account of the coronation rite of Polish kings, its author is inclined to believe in the homogeneous Byzantine–Ruthenian style of the paintings decorating the walls of the monarch's bedroom, and even tries to reconstruct its alleged iconographic program in very general terms (Walkowiak 2020, pp. 258–76). However, most of the scarce archival information concerning the functional program of the Wawel residence definitely points to the Hen's Foot Tower and the adjacent buildings as the location of the royal suite, leading us to assume that the frescos of eastern provenance were created in the above-mentioned high hall with a vault on one pillar, where they coexisted with earlier Gothic murals.



**Figure 12.** Lublin, castle. Byzantine–Ruthenian frescoes in the castle chapel. 2nd decade of the 15th century. Photo by Tomasz Ratajczak, the author’s own work.

In the context of our deliberations on the meaning of color in the architecture of medieval castles, the location of the royal bedroom decorated with Byzantine paintings within the residence and the unsolvable problem of reconstructing its iconography are not key issues. Much more important is the role of the color decoration of one of the most important rooms in the castle and its reception by contemporaries. The frescos in King Jagiełło’s bedroom must have made a deep impression, since the chronicler’s account, which probably recorded the usual toponymy of the residence, consistently refers to this room as the “painted bedroom” (*camera picta, cubiculum pictum*), or “malowanka”, and the sources from the period note the importance of color in the decoration of the Wawel interiors only in relation to this room ([Przeździecki 1877](#), p. 319; [1878](#), pp. 34, 553; [Chmiel 1913](#), p. 7). Since this decoration has not survived, it is impossible to say whether the impact of the frescoes, which have been perpetuated in the name of the room, resulted from their specific style and color range, or from their exceptional iconography. It is also possible that the royal bedroom was not the only interior of Wawel Castle whose colorful décor was preserved in the nomenclature, as the accounts of the court record a payment for tables and sideboards in *albo palatio* in 1461 ([Chmiel 1913](#), p. 7). This term refers to a large room adjacent to the royal bedroom, part of the monarch’s suite, used for ceremonial receptions and feasts ([Mossakowski 2021](#), p. 74). Although it has been proposed in the subject literature to translate the term as “white palace”, which would allude to the coloring of the stone walls of this part of the residence, or its plastered facades ([Pianowski 2001](#), p. 84), another account allows us to state precisely that the name of the room originated from its light-colored plaster interior. In 1434, secular and clerical dignitaries attending the coronation of Władysław Jagiełło’s son and successor, Władysław Warneńczyk, gathered in *salam albam castri Cracoviensis*, confirming that the ‘white’ in the name referred strictly to the main room of the building and not its entirety ([Mossakowski 2021](#), p. 74). At the same time, it is intriguing that this bright room was adjacent to the painted bedroom of the monarch. Perhaps the etymology of the distinctive names of both rooms of the royal suite, referring directly to their colors, can be derived from this contrast.

#### 4. Dazzling Splendour of the Grand Masters

It seems appropriate to culminate our considerations of color in the medieval residences of rulers in the present-day territory of Poland and the Czech Republic with a discussion of the palace of the Grand Masters in the capital city of the State of the Teutonic Order, Malbork. Towards the end of the 14th century, work was completed on extending the complex which occupied the western wing of the erstwhile Malbork bailey. The seat of the Teutonic Order’s superiors had become one of the most spectacular and sophisticated



examples of medieval residential architecture in terms of its form and functional program, and it can take its place alongside palaces of the popes and French kings (Herrmann 2019). It emerges from archival iconography and architectural research that the seat of the grand masters was originally plastered, in stark contrast to the brick walls of the remaining part of the castle (Mierzwiński 2016, pp. 29–30; Herrmann 2019, p. 289). Of the original painted decoration of the grand masters' palace, murals have survived in the interiors of the Grand Refectory, the grand master's chapel, and the main story of the tower-like projection where, among other things, the grand master's suite was located. In the Grand Refectory (Figure 13), a spacious representative hall for official ceremonies, a large scene of the Coronation of Mary features above the main entrance (Figure 14), with the purple mantle of Christ and the blue mantle of Mary, against the background of a green curtain behind them, as the main color accents. The slightly differently composed scene of the Coronation of Mary in the main hall of the Warmian Bishops' Castle in Lidzbark Warmiński provides an interesting regional analogy for this representation (Domasłowski 1983; 2004, pp. 126–27; Labuda and Secomska 2004, pp. 65–67). It is worth noting a controversy in the literature regarding the chronology of the Malbork fresco, which is dated broadly between the 1330s and about 1400 (Jakubek-Raczkowska and Raczkowski 2016, pp. 46–66; Herrmann 2019, pp. 292–93).

The introduction of a monumental sacral painting with intensive contrasting colors into the secular space reflects the sacral character of the whole complex, which was after all a monastic castle, a castle of Mary, and this emphasized her patronage over the Teutonic Knights. From this religious perspective, the Order had a mission of converting pagans, which at that time took the form of armed raids on the lands of the Lithuanians, and the specific setting of these expeditions was also associated with the Grand Refectory. In this largest hall of Malbork Castle, western European guests of the Order there to support the Teutonic Knights in their crusades were received at feasts (Jóźwiak and Trupinda 2019, pp. 300–1). They admired the magnificent fresco depicting the patroness of the order and their mission of pursuing the ideal of the Christian knight. On the northern wall of the refectory, they could view another painting, now preserved only fragmentarily, a multi-level composition depicting a procession of knights with banners (Herrmann 2019, pp. 292–93). This element of visual propaganda displayed the purpose of the mission, which included the guests of the Order setting out from Malbork on an armed expedition against the pagan Lithuanians in a military procession similar to the knights in the fresco, all under the patronage of Mary.



**Figure 13.** Malbork, Marienburg castle, Grand Refectory. Photo by Tomasz Ratajczak, the author's own work.





**Figure 14.** Malbork, Marienburg castle, Grand Refectory. Coronation of Mary, probably the second half of the 14th century. Photo by Tomasz Ratajczak, the author's own work.

The paintings in the grand master's small private chapel exploited standard religious iconography on a monumental scale. The walls of the chapel featured life-size images of the apostles, of which those of Peter and Thomas have survived to this day (Herrmann 2019, pp. 298–300). However, for our considerations on the color scheme of the secular rooms of Malbork Castle other paintings are more important. Relatively well-preserved, they adorn the representative and private interiors on the main floor of the tower-like projection in the residence of the Grand Masters. The colorful decorations were only present on this floor, which is significant in this context. The other floors of the lofty building, intended for the apartments of the Grand Master's companions, the chancellery, and the guest rooms for the dignitaries of the Order, were only covered with light-colored plaster devoid of paintings, which additionally emphasized the hierarchical nature of the functional program of the residence. By contrast, the interior decoration of the main, highest story took an elaborate, intensive color scheme, dominated by the contrast between a strong red-orange and a dark

green, now partially hidden under a whitewash applied during restoration of the palace in the 19th century. The walls of the Summer and Winter Refectories and the High Vestibule were covered with a red-orange paint layer, while the vaults were adorned with paintings, with a dominant dark green color (Figure 15), depicting plant scrolls in two variants: the motif of acanthus leaves predominated, but some rooms took a vine motif. The interiors of the grand master's private apartment, which were kept in a similar color scheme, were distinguished by illusionistic green curtains on a red background (Figure 16), hanging from a rod over the lower part of the walls (Herrmann 2019, pp. 293–305). They were probably more than decorative and referred to real tapestries hung on the walls of the living chambers to provide extra comfort to their users (original ornamental wrought-iron nails for hanging such tapestries have recently been identified in Siedlecin, Silesia, preserved in situ and tentatively dated to the late Middle Ages). Such a composition of painted decoration in the interior of a private room finds a direct analogy, half a century earlier, in the decoration of the papal bedroom in the Tower of Angels in the Palace of Avignon (Herrmann 2019, p. 304). The Malbork decoration, mainly abstract in character, can be dated to the last years of the fourteenth century. After a few years, it was supplemented by figural elements in the form of a gallery of grand masters in the Winter Refectory and four female saints in the grand master's study (Herrmann 2019, pp. 295–305). Undoubtedly, the intense, almost garish colors of the most important interiors of the Grand Master's residence left a dazzling impression of courtly splendor on the most important guests at Malbork, who were received for audiences and feasts in the palace interiors. In this way the colors breaking the monotony of brick walls became the main theme, programming the utilitarian functions and the ideological message of the premier castle of the Teutonic Order.



**Figure 15.** Malbork, Marienburg castle, Grand Master's Palace, High Vestibule, probably 1380–1385. Photo by Tomasz Ratajczak, the author's own work.



**Figure 16.** Malbork, Marienburg castle, Grand Master's bedroom, probably 1380–1385. Photo by Tomasz Ratajczak, the author's own work.

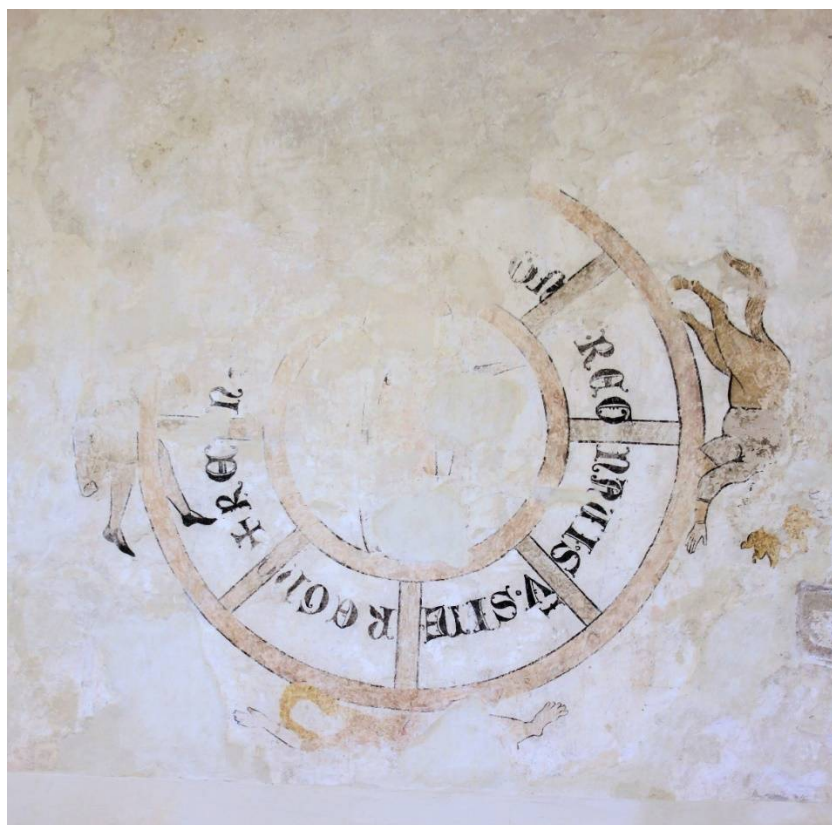
### 5. Coats of Arms, Tournaments, and Knights

Colorful decoration of chambers, especially of those with representative functions, was undoubtedly a manifestation of elitism, a reflection of the capabilities and horizons of the founder. Minor noblemen and knights also decorated their interiors, often in imitation of their rulers. As shown above, it is important for further considerations that paintings from royal residences have survived in rudimentary form (except for Malbork, which is still stunning in its wealth). Therefore, to gain the fullest possible understanding of the phenomenon of color in the architecture of medieval defensive residences, it seems necessary to turn to the decoration of those residences which were lower in the hierarchy of medieval castles.

What is likely the oldest known painted decoration in Bohemian castles was created at Strakonice Castle, which belonged to the powerful Bavor family (Bavorové z Strakonice). The then owner, Bavor III of Strakonice, had a Wheel of Fortune painted in the main residential spaces (Pavelec 1999, pp. 169–74) (Figure 17). This may have been inspired by his conflict with the newly elected Bohemian King Rudolf Habsburg, who died in 1307 during the siege of Horažďovice, a town under Bavor III (the Lord of Strakonice emerged victorious from the armed conflict). In an adjacent room, remains of a slightly younger decoration (including in the form of a curtain) have survived, dated broadly to the 14th century.

The paintings at Velké Meziříčí probably date from the first third of the 14th century (Konorová and Knorr 2016; Záruba 2021a, pp. 102–5). At that time, the castle there belonged to Jan of Meziříčí, who held high provincial offices and belonged to the elite of the Moravian knighthood. The murals are located in the palace, or more precisely in one of its smaller rooms, covered by an early Gothic vault dating back to the last third of the 13th century. Prior to the recent restoration (2015–2017), it was thought that the paintings originally depicted a tournament or a battle scene from an unidentified chivalric epic. However, when fully uncovered, it became clear that the paintings depicted the legend of St Margaret, presented in two strips and accompanied by a text with the legend of this saint (based on the legend of St Aurelia by Jacobus de Voragine) (Figure 18). The discovery of such an extensive text is unique in the context of this area. The adjacent north wall features a representation of St Christopher, while opposite the legend of St Margaret, significant fragments of a tournament scene have survived. In this scene, the better preserved of the two knights holds a shield with a coat of arms featuring a wing, the emblem of the lords of Meziříčí (Figure 19); perhaps it is a depiction of Jan of Meziříčí himself. To the left of the tournament scene is a crucifixion scene, painted somewhat later, around the middle of the 14th century.





**Figure 17.** Strakonice, castle, Wheel of Fortune, around 1300. Photo by František Záruba, the author's own work.



**Figure 18.** Velké Meziříčí, castle. Western wall with the cycle of St. Margaret of Antioch, first quarter of the 14th century. Photo by František Záruba, the author's own work.





**Figure 19.** Velké Meziříčí, detail of a knight with the coat of arms of the lords of Lomnice on the east wall, first quarter of the 14th century. Photo by František Záruba, the author's own work.

The paintings in the Moravian castle of Kunštát are slightly younger. At the time of their creation, the castle was owned by a member of the Moravian elite of the period, Gerhard of Kunštát (Beránek et al. 2017, pp. 401–16; Záruba 2021a, pp. 100–2). Again, the painting cycle was created in the palace building, more specifically in a vaulted chamber. The paintings originally covered all four walls, including window and door recesses (Figure 20). However, today the decorations are largely destroyed; only about half of the original cycle has survived. The representations are arranged in three horizontal strips with the individual scenes not clearly separated. They undoubtedly illustrated some courtly epic, perhaps scenes from Wolfram von Eschenbach's chivalric romance *Parsifal*, or more precisely motifs from its first two books, devoted to Parsifal's father Gahmuret. This identification is possibly indirectly supported by the representation of an anchor, a motif which played an important role in *Parsifal* (Figure 21).



**Figure 20.** Kunštát, castle. The northern wall of the room with the knight's cycle (probably the Knight's Ride of Gahmuret with the Battle of Batellamunt). 1st half of the 14th century. Photo by František Záruba, the author's own work.



**Figure 21.** Kunštát, castle. The northern wall of the room with the knight's cycle, detail of a knight with anchor in the coat of arms—probably Gahmuret, the father of Parsifal. First half of the 14th century. Photo by František Záruba, the author's own work.

Undoubtedly, the most outstanding example of wall painting of this period is found in Jindřichův Hradec (Figure 22). This is the cycle of St George, accompanied by extensive heraldic motifs (Krčálová 1956, pp. 311–21; Pešina et al. 1958, pp. 229–47; Nový 1971, pp. 179–97; 2002, pp. 34–47; Lechner 2002, pp. 48–63; Dinzelbacher 2002, pp. 64–68; Gerát 2011, pp. 175–83). The preserved inscription confirms the paintings' date to 1338; the inscription also identifies Oldřich of Hradec as commissioning the paintings: “diez gemel h'(err) ulr'(ich) von den neienhausse hat haisen malen nach cristus geburt dreuzehn cdert iar im acht und dreisigiste iar” (Figure 23). As in the cases described earlier, we find these paintings in the building of an early Gothic palace, on its first floor, in a small room which was originally covered with a flat ceiling. The paintings in the cycle of St George are arranged in two horizontal strips, below which there is an additional one with heraldic decoration. It seems that the coats of arms depicted there could have represented the participants in John of Luxemburg's crusade against Lithuania in 1337 (Nový 1971, pp. 179–97). This would also explain the choice of the legend of St George: in the Middle Ages this saint was considered, among other things, a patron of the fight against the pagans (although he was primarily perceived as the ideal of knighthood, making his story very popular among knights).



**Figure 22.** Jindřichův Hradec, castle. St. George's cycle in the palace. Paintings dated to 1338. Photo by František Záruba, the author's own work.





**Figure 23.** Jindřichův Hradec, castle. St. George's cycle, detail of St. George fighting the dragon, with inscription identifying the patron of the paintings and their dating to 1338 in the lower part. Photo by František Záruba, the author's own work.

Very close to this trio of painting cycles from Bohemia are paintings from Siedlecin in Silesia. Dendrochronological research precisely dates the construction of the mighty residential tower in this village on the banks of the River Bóbr to 1313–1315, which allows us to link its foundation to Duke Henry of Jawor (Nocuń 2016, 2019; Konieczny 2016). The walls of the Siedlecin Great Hall, located on the second floor of the tower, were covered with murals (Figure 24) shortly after the completion of the construction works (although the paintings were fully completed only on the southern wall). According to the current state of knowledge, these paintings were created between ca. 1320 (Marek and Nocuń 2013, p. 119) and the 1340s (Witkowski 2001, p. 49). Therefore, they can be associated either with the activity of Henry (married to Agnes of the Přemyslids, the daughter of the Bohemian king) or that of his nephew and heir, Bolko II the Small of Świdnica (married to Agnes von Habsburg). The central part of the composition is a representation of St Christopher. With the spread of the “Golden Legend” in court circles of the late Middle Ages, St Christopher, whose devotion and fidelity to Christ made him a symbol of obedience and faithfulness, became (alongside St George and St Martin) one of the main patrons of knights. To the left of St Christopher, in the south-east corner of the Great Hall, two couples are depicted, below which figures of the dead are emerging from four tombs, originally likely as a warning against bad behavior and its consequences. The two couples depicted above—a knight and a maiden and a knight and a married woman—are accompanied by banderoles with texts that are unfortunately now illegible.

The scenes to the right of St Christopher have been identified as the legend of one of the most famous knights of the Round Table, Lancelot du Lac (Witkowski 2001). The two strips of polychrome depict two very important episodes in the history of this knight, providing a kind of a frame spanning the beginning and the end of his knightly glory. Blue, the color of the background, is overwhelmingly predominant here. The use of *bleu royal* should be read as emphasizing the elitism of the decoration (Pastoureau 2000; Adamska 2015, p. 14). The lower strip illustrates the expedition of Lancelot and Lionel, whose goal was to earn the knight's belt and experience all the adventure that involves. The first of the scenes depicts a mounted knight leading another horse. In the next scene we see Lancelot resting under a tree, over whom a second figure, identified as Lionel, is leaning. Next to him we can see a shield and a helmet (with a white dog in a jewel), set on the front part of the saddle of one of the mounts grazing nearby. Further on we notice a sword stuck in the ground. This is important because of the next scene, where we can identify it with

the sword on which Lionel, sleeping on guard, rests his head. The final scene before the window recess that separates the narrative depicts the duel between Lancelot and Tarquyn (Figure 25). It is difficult to clearly identify the last scene (on the other side of the window recess). It is highly probable that it shows Kay thanking his savior, Lancelot, although to logically close this thread one would expect to see here instead a scene showing the homage of the newly knighted Lancelot. However, the lack of a crown on the head of the standing figure (thus not likely Arthur), and the fact that the hands of the kneeling figure are held by only one hand of the standing knight, do not allow such an interpretation. The upper strip illustrates the events that led to the downfall not only of Lancelot, but consequently of Arthur's entire kingdom: the affair between Lancelot and Queen Guinevere. It opens with a scene depicting the queen and her ladies of the court seated against the backdrop of Camelot Castle. In front of Arthur's wife stands Lancelot, surrounded by knights and squires. This is most probably the moment of the queen's invitation to a spring picnic (as clearly indicated in the next scene by the green dresses of the ladies, with the literal treatment of color as a carrier of this information, allowing identification with a specific episode of the Arthurian legend). The final representation is that of Guinevere and Lancelot, shown as a pair of lovers, holding each other's left hands, a gesture which demonstrates the betrayal of Arthur by both the unfaithful wife and the traitorous knight. It must be asked whether, apart from the above-mentioned form (gesture), the negative overtones of the scene are not also evidenced by the arrangement and set of colors used. Lancelot wears clothes in horizontal stripes of white and brown/red. Was this to create a sense of chromatic dissonance for the viewer? According to [Pastoureau \(2004\)](#), this striped pattern carries a clearly negative charge. After all, a guest in the Great Hall of the princely residence in Siedlęcin was looking at a knight who had violated the sacred bond of marriage and caused the fall of Arthur's kingdom. Or perhaps this representation was never meant to fit into the earlier chromatic codes, and the viewer, after all among the elites of the period, was aware that this was merely a "new" court fashion. After all, similar attire (without negative connotations) can be found as early as in the Codex Manesse (which slightly predates the creation of the Siedlęcin polychromies), where an obliquely striped garment is even worn by Wenceslas II, King of Bohemia ([Adamska 2015](#), p. 19). Such an interpretation would be corroborated by the fact that these paintings, touching thematically on Arthurian legends, functioned in the space of the Grand Hall of the residence of a ruler who moved among courtly elites of Europe and must have already been familiar with new trends.



**Figure 24.** Siedlęcin, ducal tower, Great Hall. Paintings on the southern wall. First half of the 14th century. Photo by Przemysław Nocuń, the author's own work.





**Figure 25.** Siedlecin, Siedlecin, ducal tower, Great Hall. Detail of legend of Lancelot (Lancelot in a duel with Tarquyn). First half of the 14th century. Photo by Przemysław Nocuń, the author's own work.

The sketches visible on the plasterwork of the northern part of the western wall of the tower are generally considered to be an unfinished work by the same artist (e.g., Witkowski 2001, p. 69). They depict a clash between two armed horsemen, whom Jacek Witkowski identifies as Lancelot and Sagramour le Dessrez. The duel is observed by three mounted knights depicted below: Ywain, Gawain, and Hector. The sketch next to them is assumed to depict Lancelot healing Urry de Hongre. The room was also decorated with two window recesses with trefoil stone windows and stone sedilia (window seats). The window in the southern wall, surrounded by paintings of the Lancelot cycle, is itself decorated with polychromies as well. The walls of the recess, above the sedilia, feature saints and prophets, while the trefoil window frames are flanked by figures of the Old Testament kings Solomon and David, identifiable not only by their crowns, but also by fragmentarily preserved signatures in banderoles. The intrados of the niche features elements of urban architecture, which should probably be regarded as an image of heaven, or “heavenly Jerusalem”. Among all these paintings, those in Siedlecin stand out even today for their captivating richness and variety of details and colors, although this is probably only a shadow of their original coloring. For the audience of the period the multitude of colors used must have raised associations with the material wealth of the founder and owner of the tower, available only to the elite.

It is worth mentioning here that from a similar period (shortly before the middle of the 14th century) also come painted decorations from a house in Prague's Old Town (No. 144/I Malé náměstí) (Všetečková 2007, pp. 171–92; 2010, pp. 126–31, 152–57) (Figure 26). Although it is obviously not a castle, this house should be invoked here because of the similarity of the subject matter: tournament scenes (most probably from a knightly romance).



**Figure 26.** Prague, House No. 144/I on Malé náměstí. Knightly scenes. End of the 1st half of the 14th century. Photo by František Záruba, the author's own work.

The collection of paintings preserved in the castles of Bohemian knights from the second half of the 14th century is very poor, a result of the state of preservation of the buildings of this period. Paintings from around 1400 can only be found in Divice ([Záruba 2015](#), p. 148; [Dienstbier 2015](#), p. 384). The decorations in question are located in a residential tower, where a series of coats of arms was painted under the flat ceiling. This heraldic cycle was further supplemented by a representation of a man in a pillory, in front of whom stands a woman. This scene bears resemblance to the bordure decoration of manuscripts of Wenceslas IV.

A heraldic cycle was also discovered in 1917 at Lipnice (nad Sázavou) Castle, on the second floor of the residential tower called Samson. Unfortunately, the paintings have not survived, and we know about them only from a description left by Karel Herein, who also mentions a battle scene under the coat of arms. The creation of the paintings may be cautiously associated with Čeněk of Vartenberk (died in 1425), whose coat of arms is also depicted here ([Záruba 2021b](#)).

## 6. Garden in the Chamber

When it comes to the domination of one color in decorations, there are few phenomena that can match the fame of the “green chambers”. Josef Krása introduced this term into Czech specialized literature on the basis of contemporary written sources ([Krása 1964](#), p. 289). There is no similar definition in English or French literature (in German, the terms “Rankenmalerei” or “grünmonochrome Wandmalerei” are used—although in relation to decorations in both secular and sacred spaces ([Möller 1995](#), pp. 223–29; most recently [Dienstbier 2019](#), pp. 204–6)). The “green chambers” first appear in European architecture and art in the second half of the 14th century (especially at its end), but they become popular only at the end of the Middle Ages, in the 15th and 16th centuries. The paintings commissioned by Pope Clement VI for his private rooms in the Avignon palace can be considered a harbinger of this phenomenon ([Vingtaine 1998](#), pp. 87–179; [Vítovský 2008](#), p. 60; [Anheim 2008, 2015](#)). Charles IV was certainly familiar with the rooms of the papal palace in Avignon, and a similar “green chamber” is also confirmed to have existed in the Palais de la Cité in Paris, where Charles IV and Wenceslas IV stayed on a visit to France in late 1377 and early 1378 ([Šmahel 2006](#), p. 169). A very early “green chamber” with knightly scenes from the mid-14th century can be found in the aforementioned house No. 144/I in Prague's Old Town ([Všetečková 2007](#), pp. 171–92; [2010](#), pp. 152–57). Green predominates there, although without the parallel occurrence of floral motifs typical of “green chambers”. The first “green chambers” in Central Europe began to appear before the end of the 14th century ([Krása 1977, 1978, 1984](#)). Probably one of the oldest green rooms can be found at Forchheim Castle in Germany ([Beckett 2007](#); [Machilek 2007](#)). The paintings were commissioned by the Bishop of Bamberg, Lamprecht von Brunn, a close counsellor of Wenceslas IV. More examples can be found in burgher houses in Prague ([Dienstbier 2019](#), pp. 204–25). The ornamental decoration of Malbork is also dated to the



end of the 14th century. In the first half of the 15th century, such decorated interiors appear in Piedmontese castles, and similar examples can be shown in Central Europe around that time. The painted decoration of one of the rooms of Kriebstein Castle is dated around 1425, while wall paintings in the Great Hall of Poděbrady Castle in Bohemia are slightly younger (around 1450). They were commissioned by George of Poděbrady, the future King of Bohemia (Záruba 2016, pp. 380–81). Green chambers reached the peak of their popularity at the end of the third quarter of the 15th century. The two “green chambers” in Blatná Castle are the best-known examples, and perhaps the model for subsequent projects (Figure 27). They were founded by Jaroslav Lev of Rožmitál, who traveled around Western Europe in 1465–1467 (Nejedlý 1993, p. 206). The creation of a slightly younger “green chamber”, in Žirovnice Castle, is associated with Václav Vencelík of Vrchovišť (Krása 1964, p. 293) (Figure 28). In both cases, the painted decoration included founders’ coats of arms, scenes of hunting or dueling, and vedute of towns or castles. The common feature of these interiors was the combination of secular motifs with a dominant green acanthus ornamentation.



**Figure 27.** Blatná, castle, “green chamber” on the second floor of the entrance tower. View of the southeast wall with the large coat of arms of the Lords of Rožmitál (located directly opposite the entrance to the room). Around 1485. Photo by František Záruba, the author’s own work.





**Figure 28.** Žirovnice, castle. Hunting scene from a “green chamber”. Around 1490. Photo by František Záruba, the author’s own work.

The fashion for “green chambers” also reached the south of present-day Poland, in Silesia and the Kłodzko region. Within the same time horizon as in Bohemia, several similar decorations were made, most of them non-extant. A chamber in the ducal residence in Kłodzko was decorated in this way at the end of the 15th century. Described as “extraordinary”, it was covered with green paintings and featured a coat of arms. Similar motifs once decorated a chamber on the ground floor of Opole Castle, recorded at the end of the 16th century ([Chorowska 2003](#), p. 221; [Witkowski 2013](#), p. 16).

The best-preserved example is a very interesting, although slightly younger, decoration at the castle in Legnica. The construction of a green chamber on the top floor of the tower was commissioned in 1508–1510 by Frederick II, Duke of Legnica. The walls and vaults were covered with a thicket of plant scrolls. On the splays of the window openings a cycle of “nine heroes” was painted: three triads of historical, biblical, and legendary figures of ideal knights ([Gumiński 1989](#)). The idea of creating a green chamber in Legnica should be linked to the broad horizons of the then still-young Duke Frederick, a reformer and patron of the arts. Significantly, he spent his childhood at the Prague court of Vladislaus II and was the son of Ludmila of Poděbrady. In 1507–1508 he made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land ([Kaczmarek-Löw 2007](#)). The Legnica chamber may have been where meetings of the knightly Hound Collar Order (Rudenband), established as early as in 1413 by the Duke of Legnica Louis II, took place (more in [Kaczmarek 1991](#)). If this was indeed the case, then the visual message would have been intended not only for the private reflection of Frederick II and his closest entourage, but also for the members of an elite lay order. The figures on the walls embodied the qualities of chivalry: the legendary King Arthur, the Emperor Charlemagne, the leader of the First Crusade Godfrey of Bouillon, and hero of German-language poems Dietrich of Bern ([Karłowska-Kamzowa 1991](#), p. 71; [Witkowski 2013](#)).

Several colors were used to decorate the chamber: white, red, black and yellow, and, most importantly, the predominant malachite green, an expensive dye imported to Silesia from Central Asia. It gave the plant scrolls their characteristic deep green color, juxtaposed with the red of the flowers and the white of the armor of the heroes. It should be remembered that the room was well-lit by four windows, according to the cardinal directions, which may have influenced the perception of the color and satin glow of the malachite, although the pigment darkened with time. Illusionistic floral decoration created an impression of an open but secluded and shaded pavilion. It may have raised associations with hortus conclusus and invoked reflections on the virtues of a knight and a Christian. The location of the chamber in the tower was also significant, as the unreal garden found continuation in the natural landscape outside the windows ([Karłowska-Kamzowa 1991](#), p. 71; [Witkowski 2013](#), p. 10). Together with the plants (as in a garden), the color green can

also be a symbol of nature, which provided relaxation. In the late Middle Ages, the gardens at residences also often served primarily as places of recreation. As in typical Annunciation scenes, the space was intimate and demarcated, and the message was strengthened by roses, the symbol of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Greens, but bright or intense and luminous ones, were the colors most preferred in this part of Europe in the late Middle Ages, as they were regarded as embodying vitality and youth (Nadolski 1973, pp. 305–13). The choice of colors complemented the symbolism of plant motifs: bindweed (symbol of ideal love and humility), acanthus (symbol of the passion of Christ, triumph over death) and the rose (symbol of the beauty of the Virgin Mary, perfection and purity) (Kobielus 2014, pp. 24, 180, 188). Color accents were provided by the gold and black used on the coat of arms of the Duchy of Legnica; with these colors the attention of the public was directed to the symbol of the heraldic identity of the Duke. The coat of arms corresponded with an older portrait of St Jadwiga, the guardian of the Silesian dynasty, also hanging there.

## 7. Yellow Dwarfs and a Blue Rose

It is fitting to conclude our discussion on representations and colors in knightly residences with a broader analysis of the decoration of the first-floor chamber of the tower in Witków in Silesia. Murals have survived there in three window recesses. The first is filled with a stylized floral ornament. The second recess features St. George fighting a dragon, St. Christopher carrying Jesus, and a praying hermit (these saints also appeared in the Bohemian paintings discussed above). Depicted in the archivolt is a Crucifixion Group and the monogram IHS. In the last recess we have images of St. Peter and Paul and a representation of the tree of life with a wedding scene. A dove sits atop the tree. Above the window there is a scene of two dwarfs hunting a peacock. A third dwarf is aiming a crossbow at a dove, and another one, with a dog at his side, is pointing at the married couple. The decoration was commissioned by Nicolas von Warnsdorf, a landowner from 1446, in 1474 mentioned as the heir of the residence in Witków (Nowakowski 2017, p. 459). The paintings date to the mid-15th century, probably after 1453.

The most elaborate message is carried by the representation of the wedding, probably of von Warnsdorf and his wife (Figure 29). A lady and a knight are depicted, right hands clasped. The woman is handing him a ring, on the man's chest hangs a chain with a blue rose, and the message is completed by a fragmentarily preserved inscription: "Love me, as I love you, I want nothing more" ([Lieb mich] als ich dich, nicht mehr [begehre] ich). It is a rhyme from a folk love song, popular in German-speaking countries from the second half of the 15th century (Merzdorf 1870, p. 38; Kopp 1902, pp. 41–42). The nuptial scene, together with the depiction of Saints Peter and Paul and the motifs of the dwarfs hunting the peacock and the dove (Figure 30), form an iconographic whole symbolizing the strength of the sacrament of marriage, contracted in the presence of holy patrons, with purity of intention and faith in its permanence. The dwarfs with their grotesque faces are personifications of the devil, who leads people into temptation and lies in wait to claim their eternal souls. Next to one of them, a fragment of an inscription in a banderole has survived: *ich affe ich halte (...) ich herre ich (...)*, which should probably be understood as their vices: I deceive, I hold, I wield. It is also worth noting the rosette with the IHS monogram, an attribute of St Bernard of Siena. Bernardine piety, with its Christological cult, was at that time gaining popularity in Central Europe. In Bohemia, Hungary, and Poland, these ideas mainly appealed to knights: a renewal of the concept of crusades, the ideal of miles Christi and the clear anti-Turkish stance of John Capistrano, founder of the Bernardine Order. It seems that it was a sermon of this charismatic monk in nearby Żagań, in January 1453, that possibly inspired von Warnsdorf to commission the Witków paintings (Kostowski 1991, pp. 42–43; 1995, p. 126; Maciszewska 2001, pp. 62–63).



**Figure 29.** Witków, tower. Wedding scene. Around 1450. Photo by Dagmara Adamska, the author's own work.



**Figure 30.** Witków, tower. Dwarfs hunting peacock and dove. Around 1450. Photo by Dagmara Adamska, the author's own work.



Presumably the whole chamber was covered with polychromies, and the painted recesses bear only their preserved fragments. Colors used in the interior played a very important role, as they complemented and helped to decipher the iconographic code of the complex scenes. Although the paintings are multi-colored, blue predominates (the robes of the Blessed Virgin Mary, John the Evangelist and St Peter, the helmet of St George, the IHS rosette, the peacock, the rose on von Warnsdorf's chest). This color was considered a symbol of sacrum and the color of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The role of yellow, considered negative and devoid of glamour, was different. This color, introduced into the costumes of the dwarfs, was used to signal the functions of the figures, who lay in wait to break the permanence of the sacrament. Thus, distinguishing characters by the colors of their costumes, was a deliberate act. The importance of color can be seen in the dichotomous symbolism of the dog. In the Middle Ages, the dog could represent either faithfulness or evil (as a devilish animal). In this second variant, the dog was represented in the color black, and this is probably the best way to interpret its image in Witków (on the other hand, the crest of Lancelot's helmet in the polychromies from Siedlęcín discussed above was depicted in the form of a white dog).

The chamber served as a representative interior; here Nicolas von Warnsdorf could receive guests, and here the marriage may have taken place. The role of the sedilia in the recesses, which were intimate places intended for pious reflection, was probably different (they played a similar role in Siedlęcín). It is worth emphasizing that the iconographic program of the paintings from Witków is complicated, and certainly required specific visual competences from the spectators, including literacy and the ability to decipher the meaning of attributes, theological knowledge, and knowledge of color symbolism.

## 8. Conclusions

In our opinion, castle interiors of the time had multicolored décor. Color was also present on elements which are more difficult to grasp, such as furnishings (e.g., tiled stoves, furniture), structural elements (windows, portals, shutters, doors), and walls (apart from the paintings analyzed here, they were also decorated with tapestries and panel paintings). All this combines into a picture of color as a marker of elitism, and the use of many colors could stand as a testament to the financial means of the owner of the building, his horizons and ambitions. Of course, this conviction is also influenced by the nature of the surviving sources, which show a clear focus on the elite of the time. The osmosis of ideas observed in medieval architecture from the highest social groups (rulers and nobles) to the lower but aspiring classes (petty knights, but also the burgers and even village leaders) reinforces our assumption that color was used in practically every household, but only where the financial means of the family allowed it.

As we have shown on the example of Czech and Polish kings, the world of rulers was colorful, with the walls of both representative interiors and private apartments covered in paintings. The color palette at the court of the Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights was also impressive. Wall paintings, often bearing complex iconography, adorned chambers in the manors of less wealthy knights as well. A variety of colors were used, with the choice determined by cost and availability of pigments, but also by the changing fashion, as shaped by the founder's horizon and his individual preferences. The use of vivid and luminous colors, as well as contrast and harmony, may also have been influenced by the lighting of the rooms, as for parts of the year they had only candlelight for illumination.

It is entirely possible that the interiors of medieval defensive-residential buildings might have sometimes been dominated by one color. This is at least suggested by the names of chambers such as the "white room" in the bishop's manor in Wrocław (Lutsch 1894, p. 31) or the "white room" of Wawel Royal Castle. Without doubt, "green chambers", decorated in malachite pigment, also became popular in the late Middle Ages.

Researchers of castles rarely pay attention to color, focusing mostly on understanding the iconographic message of the preserved representations. Meanwhile, color often complemented or strengthened the symbolism, and sometimes even constituted an independent

and dominant element, while in other cases its choice was dictated by other rules (e.g., heraldic). Thus, color created a sometimes-sophisticated visual code which required certain competences on the part of the viewers. As with iconography, the understanding of color was limited to a certain group, characterized by knowledge and the ability to read the intentions of those who commissioned the decoration.

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