Charles IV: Religious Propaganda and Imperial Expansion

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KEY WORDS

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ABSTRACT

The Bohemian Charles IV (1316 – 1378) was crowned King of Bohemia in 1347, King of the Romans in 1349, and Holy Roman Emperor in 1355. At the time of his death, he had successfully expanded the borders of the Holy Roman Empire to include the Kingdom of Bohemia, the Kingdom of Burgundy, the Duchy of Pomerania, and he had himself crowned King of Lombardy. The artwork Charles IV commissioned played a major legitimizing role in this imperial expansion. My study investigates the artistic program of Charles IV in relation to his active promotion of religious cults devoted to three carefully selected saints; St. Wenceslas, St. Charlemagne, and St. Sigismund. I argue that the emperor employed a widespread and calculated artistic program to lay the foundations for his dynasty by creating strong visual ties between himself, his heirs, and the aforementioned royal saints while simultaneously promoting local devotion to those saints. In a detailed examination of the Crowned Reliquaries of Charles IV, the Holy Cross Chapel, and the Madonna of John Očko of Vlašim, I will prove the effectiveness of the emperor’s expansive artistic campaign in shaping the way he was perceived in contemporary society, despite his contested ascent to the Bohemian and imperial thrones. I argue that the widespread artistic program of Charles IV was ultimately successful because, by the end of his rule, propagandistic themes common to artwork commissioned by the emperor were present in privately commissioned artwork as well.
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CHARLES IV: RELIGIOUS PROPAGANDA AND IMPERIAL EXPANSION

By

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CH. 1 – INTRODUCTION

Charles IV of Bohemia (1316 – 1378) is referred to as the ‘Father of the Czech Nation’ in Prague to this day, and rightfully so. He was crowned King of Bohemia in 1347, King of the Romans in 1349, and Holy Roman Emperor in 1355.\(^1\) At the time of his death, the emperor had successfully expanded the borders of the Holy Roman Empire to include the Kingdom of Bohemia, the Kingdom of Burgundy, the Duchy of Pomerania, and he had himself crowned King of Lombardy (Fig. 1). In this expansion, the artwork Charles IV commissioned played a major legitimizing role. The Emperor’s dynasty building policies transformed the city of Prague into a flourishing imperial capital to rival Paris. Charles IV oversaw vast architectural renovations and additions to the city, commissioned countless works of art to decorate his new imperial capital, and donated myriad relics and reliquaries to his newly completed St. Vitus Cathedral and to chapels throughout Prague.\(^2\)

\(^1\) Charles IV was crowned on six separate occasions: First as King of Romans – Bonn, 26 November 1346; Second as King of Bohemia – Prague, 2 September 1347; Third as King of Romans (again – after death of Ludwig the Bavarian) Aachen, 25 July 1349; Fourth as King of Lombardy – 6 January 1355; Fifth as Holy Roman Emperor – Rome, 5 April 1355; and Sixth as King of Arles – 4 June 1365. Charles IV created two new crowns; one for his coronation as King of Bohemia and another for his Aachen coronation as King of Romans. After his coronation, Charles IV placed these crowns on the reliquary busts of St. Wenceslas and St. Charlemagne respectively, a highly symbolic and meaningful gesture that will be investigated throughout the course of this thesis. For more on the multiple coronations of Charles IV, see Iva Rosario, Art and Propaganda: Charles IV of Bohemia, 1346-1378 (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2000), 23.

\(^2\) Charles IV also wished to transform Prague into one of the greatest pilgrimage sites in Europe. His efforts can be seen in the construction of St. Vitus Cathedral, the emperor’s donation of hundreds of relics to holy sites throughout Prague, and the emperor’s correspondence with the pope requesting the granting of indulgences for visitors to Prague’s holy sites. Charles IV succeeded in establishing a feast day for his newly acquired Holy Lance and Nail after he became Holy Roman Emperor in 1355. A pilgrimage badge was created to commemorate the event, and indulgences were granted to those who participated in the feast, those who visited the Royal Chapel in Karlstejn Castle, and those who visited the Holy Cross Chapel in Karlstejn Castle. For an image and discussion of the Pilgrimage Badge see Barbara Drake Boehm and Jiří Fajt, Prague: The Crown of Bohemia 1347-1437 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 205. For more on Charles IV establishing the feast day of the Holy Lance and Nail, see Rosario, Art
My study investigates the artistic program of Charles IV in relation to his active promotion of religious cults devoted to three carefully selected saints; St. Wenceslas, St. Charlemagne, and St. Sigismund. In this paper, I argue that the emperor employed a widespread and calculated artistic program to lay the foundations for his dynasty by creating strong visual ties between himself, his heirs, and the aforementioned royal saints while simultaneously promoting local devotion to those saints. The artistic propaganda of Charles IV will be examined in relation to the emperor’s multiple coronations and commissioning of new crowns which he placed on the reliquary busts of St. Wenceslas and St. Charlemagne. In a detailed examination of select works of art commissioned by the emperor and his courtiers, I will prove the effectiveness of the emperor’s expansive artistic campaign in shaping the way he was perceived in contemporary society, despite his contested ascent to the Bohemian and imperial thrones. I argue that the widespread artistic program of Charles IV was ultimately successful because, by the end of his rule, propagandistic themes common to artwork commissioned by the emperor were present in privately commissioned artwork as well.

To argue these points, I will investigate the themes found in the Crowned Reliquaries of Charles IV (the St. Wenceslas Reliquary and Crown, c. 1347 (Fig. 3), and the Charlemagne Reliquary and Crown, c. 1350 (Fig. 4)), the Holy Cross Chapel (1347 – 1365(Fig. 5)), and the Madonna of John Očko of Vlašim (c. 1370 (Fig. 6)). The artistic programs of the reliquaries and chapel demonstrate how Charles IV visually asserted his

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*and Propaganda*, 113. For more on the indulgences granted by the pope and the correspondences between the pope and the emperor, see Jiri Fajt, ed., *Magister Theodoricus: Court Painter to Emperor Charles IV* (Prague: National Gallery of Prague, 1998). 95.
imperial legitimacy within his court and throughout his empire, and the Madonna of John Očko of Vlašim illustrates the ultimate effectiveness of the emperor’s artistic program.

Charles IV emphasized the importance of saints Wenceslas, Charlemagne, and Sigismund, all of whom were royal warriors during their lifetimes, at different periods during his rule and in different regions of his empire to suit his political needs. Before ascending to the Bohemian throne, Charles IV zealously promoted the cult of St. Wenceslas, a Bohemian duke from the Přemyslid Dynasty of which Charles’ mother, Elizabeth Přemyslid, was a descendant (Fig. 2). The young Prince’s emphasis on his ancestral link to St. Wenceslas served to bring the foreigner king-to-be closer to his subjects, and the decapitated martyr served as a local counterpart to St. Denis. After being crowned King of Bohemia in 1346, Charles IV was elected King of the Romans in 1347. Charles’ election to this status was highly contested, as he was elected in opposition to the reigning Holy Roman Emperor, Ludwig the Bavarian.3 Due to his questionable rise to power as King of the Romans, Charles IV worked to promote the cult of St. Charlemagne and connect himself with that mythic, first Holy Roman Emperor. Toward the end of his rule, Charles IV promoted the cult of St. Sigismund, a martyred Burgundian king, after his Arlesian coronation. I posit that Charles IV’s promotion of St. Sigismund and the introduction of his cult in Prague was an illustration of the emperor’s imperial expansion after being crowned in this French region that had not been under control of the Holy Roman Emperor for nearly two centuries.4

3 Also referred to as Louis IV of Bavaria. For more on this imperial rivalry, see Rosario, Art and Propaganda, 4.

4 The last Holy Roman Emperor crowned with the Arlesian Crown was Frederick I Barbarossa in 1178. For more on this see Ibid., 28. For territorial expansion of Charles IV, see Fig. 1.
Charles IV felt the need to artistically proclaim his legitimacy as King of Bohemia due to the largely negative public perception of his father, Bohemian King John of Luxembourg, and to their status as foreign kings. The people of Bohemia commonly referred to John of Luxembourg as the ‘absentee ruler’ due to his frequent journeys from the kingdom. This, combined with his practice of selling parts of the Bohemian royal estate to various barons in order to fund his extensive military expeditions, resulted in the fragmentation of the Bohemian Kingdom. After a prolonged campaign in northern Italy, King John of Luxembourg sent his son, Charles IV, to Bohemia in 1333 to administer the realm in his father’s absence. As described by Charles IV in his autobiography, *Karoli VI Imperatoris Romanorum Vita*, he returned to Bohemia to see the results of his father’s prolonged absences from the kingdom;

“this kingdom we found so devastated that we could not find one castle that had not been pledged with all of its lands so that we did not have anywhere to reside… Prague castle was so ruined that it had crumbled almost to the ground… The barons had become tyrants and did not fear the king, but had already divided the kingdom amongst themselves”.

Charles IV worked quickly to regain the authority of the Bohemian kingship and recover both land and power from the tyrannical barons. The young prince embarked on a project of renovating Prague to illustrate the return of royal authority, and commissioning works of art was a major part of his program.

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The reign of Charles IV is generally considered a ‘Golden Age’ for Bohemia and, as previously noted, he is locally referred to as the Father of the Czech Nation. Despite the historic and artistic significance of Charles IV, the scholarship surrounding his rule is limited and is almost exclusively written in Czech or German. Beyond central Europe, scholastic interest in Charles IV has been infrequent at best, with the most significant research in English published within the last decade.

Balázs Nagy and Frank Schaer edited the first English translation of the autobiography of Charles IV and the emperor’s Legend of St. Wenceslas in 2001. The introduction, written by Ferdinand Seibt, outlines the historical and social contexts surrounding Charles’ rule beginning with the emperor’s Parisian upbringing and ending with his architectural renovation of Prague. He also discusses the connection between Charles IV and St. Wenceslas as it pertained to the Wenceslas crown and the Legend of St. Wenceslas, however he fails to discuss how this association with the saint was depicted in the vast amount of artwork commissioned by the emperor.

Aside from this autobiography the scholars I have relied on most often during my research include Iva Rosario, Jiří Fajt, Barbara Drake Boehm, David C. Mengel, and Paul Crossley. In her book Art and Propaganda, Rosario aims to identify and discuss the images of Charles IV in relation to his political agenda. She focuses on portraits of Charles IV found within the Kingdom of Bohemia that were commissioned either by the emperor himself or by prominent court advisors. Her book provides an in-depth look at the court and artistic patronage of Charles IV, but she makes no reference to the

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8 Seibt, Introduction to Autobiography, xv.
emperor’s artistic promotion of different saints during different periods of his rule and in specific regions to suit his political needs.

Another important text pertaining to my research is *Prague: The Crown of Bohemia 1347-1437*, co-authored by Boehm and Fajt. This book is a catalogue of a 2005 exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York that featured over 200 works of Bohemian art produced during and shortly after the reign of Charles IV. The many essays within the catalogue provide useful insights into the reign of Charles IV and the development of Prague under his rule. Jiří Fajt in particular investigates the emergence of Charles IV’s new imperial artistic style. He discusses how the aesthetic trends in the courtly artwork in Prague changed during the reign of Charles IV, and he attributes this stylistic change to the numerous foreign artists who traveled to Prague at the emperor’s behest. Fajt’s research outlines the evolution of artistic styles in Prague during the emperor’s rule, but he discusses this artistic evolution in reference to contemporary military and political events and does not discuss the impact of the growing religious cults in the changing Bohemian artwork.

Fajt was the editor of another book regarding the artistic programs in the court of Charles IV, *Magister Theodoricus: Court Painter to Emperor Charles IV*. This project provides a detailed examination of the pictorial decoration of Karlštejn Castle as it chronicles the works of Charles IV’s most celebrated court artist, Magister Theodoricus. This text provides the most detailed investigation of the paintings decorating the Holy Cross Chapel published in English to date and, as such, was a vital source for my research pertaining to the richly decorated chapel. Fajt discusses each of the 130 votive paintings separately and indicates where each one is located within the chapel. Fajt’s
research focused on the art produced by Magister Theodoricus and his workshop, and the
influence of this new style of courtly artwork throughout Europe. While he discussed the
Holy Cross Chapel in detail, he leaves the analysis of the overall significance for later scholars.

Mengel has written a number of essays on Charles IV and his influence on the local religion in Prague, as well as the impact of his promotion of religious movements and dynamic preachers. He discusses the introduction of the cult of St. Sigismund in Prague, the miracles associated with Prague’s new patron saint, and the liturgical veneration that soon followed, but he does not discuss the artistic promotion of St. Sigismund’s cult or how this was fostered in images commissioned by the emperor.

Lastly, Crossley, in his essay “The Politics of Presentation: The Architecture of Charles IV of Bohemia” investigates the architecture of St. Vitus cathedral in relation to Charles IV’s artistic patronage. He posits that seeming inconsistencies in the architecture of the cathedral reflect Charles IV’s personal intervention and modification of the building plans during the construction of St. Vitus. As discussed by Rosario, Seibt, and other scholars, Crossley detailed how Charles went to great lengths to ensure the new cathedral, as well as the concurrent renovation of Prague itself, would result in the establishment of Prague as a spectacular imperial capital.

Aside from these sources that explicitly discuss the court and artistic patronage of Charles IV, I have relied on the works of several other scholars for information pertaining to medieval society, medieval courts, relic discovery, reliquaries, and the development of saint’s cults. In investigating medieval courts and society, I have consulted works by János M. Bak, Seeta Chaganti, Charles Little, Conrad Rudolph, and Vaclav Mudroch and
G.S. Couse. My research on relic discovery, reliquaries, and cults celebrating individual saints focused on the works of Barbara Drake Boehm, Caroline Walker Bynum, Paula Gerson, Cynthia Hahn, Thomas Dale, Lisa Victoria Ciresi, Scott Bradford Montgomery, and Peter Brown.

Although these scholars and others have investigated the court of Charles IV, and some have made specific reference to the artistic programs of the emperor, none have focused explicitly on the artistic programs found in the crowned reliquaries of Charles IV, his Holy Cross Chapel, or the Madonna of John Očko of Vlašim in relation to the particular saints included. I intend to build upon earlier research in order to show how Charles IV created an intricate cult of his own crown and dynasty via an intentional, calculated, and widespread artistic program aimed at promoting the cults of saints Wenceslas, Charlemagne, and Sigismund, and how the emperor visually situated himself and his successors in the ranks of these venerated royal saints. I argue that, due to this prolonged artistic campaign, the emperor successfully shaped the way the Bohemian royal family was presented and perceived in contemporary society.
CH. 2 – THE MONUMENTS

I - THE CROWNED RELIQUARIES OF CHARLES IV

The early rule of Charles IV was marked by uncertainty and questions of his regal legitimacy. Not to be deterred by his critics and opponents, Charles IV responded to these attacks to his claims to power in a carefully executed artistic program. I argue that, in order to proclaim his legitimacy and bolster support for his Bohemian and Roman coronations, Charles IV commissioned new crowns for his ascension to these new thrones and placed them on reliquary busts of saints Wenceslas and Charlemagne in order to create physical as well as visual ties between himself and these revered royal saints.\(^9\)

In order to bolster support and proclaim his legitimate election as King of Bohemia, Charles IV visually connected himself to St. Wenceslas in numerous public works of art.\(^10\) The emperor promoted the cult of St. Wenceslas by writing the Legend of St. Wenceslas himself and dedicating a lavish chapel to the saint in St. Vitus Cathedral. The king worked to strengthen devotion to the cult celebrating St. Wenceslas while simultaneously creating close visual ties between himself and the saint in the artwork he commissioned. In the Legend of St. Wenceslas, Charles IV emphasizes the legendary piety and nobility of the saint and he documents numerous miracles associated with

\(^9\) Charles IV commissioned crowns and reliquaries to declare his legitimacy for these first two and most contested coronations (King of Bohemia – 1347, King of the Romans – 1349). Later in his rule Charles IV had more or less resolved any issues of his legitimacy and he therefore did not need to proclaim his legitimacy so overtly. For this reason, Charles IV did not feel the need to create new crowns for his coronations as King of Lombardy (1355), the Holy Roman Emperor (1355) and King of Burgundy (1365). In these coronations the King used the traditional crowns of the kingdoms; the Iron Crown of Lombardy, the Imperial Coronation treasures, and the Arlesian Crown, respectively.

\(^10\) For example, Charles IV ordered the construction of a lavish chapel dedicated to St. Wenceslas in St. Vitus Cathedral. He appeared alongside St. Wenceslas in the seal of the University of Prague. He also included St. Wenceslas in his genealogical fresco that decorates his castle walls. For more examples of artwork connecting Charles IV to St. Wenceslas, see Rosario, *Art and Propaganda*, 47 – 51.
devotion to the saint’s relics. As a result, the cult celebrating St. Wenceslas rose in prominence in Prague. By connecting himself so closely with this increasingly popular saint in the artwork he commissioned, there was a concurrent elevation in the Bohemian people’s perception of their king. I argue that Charles IV refuted attacks on his legitimacy and gained public support as King of Bohemia when he created the St. Wenceslas Crown (Fig. 3) that he ceremoniously placed upon his newly created St. Wenceslas reliquary bust.

Although the St. Wenceslas reliquary bust has since been destroyed, it was recorded along with the Bohemian Royal Crown (commonly referred to as the St. Wenceslas Crown) in a 1355 inventory of St. Vitus Cathedral. The remaining crown displays a lavish royal wealth. The crown is a golden circlet with four large fleurs-de-lis protruding upwards at even intervals, and it is studded with huge, ostentatious gemstones. It has been suggested by previous scholars that the form of the crown resembles ancient Přemyslid crowns in an allusion to Wenceslas’ own dynasty.\(^{11}\)

The full gravity of the King placing his own crown on a reliquary bust of St. Wenceslas can only be completely understood within the context of a medieval viewer’s perception of a reliquary bust. Only recently has the significance of the medieval body part reliquary gained adequate scholarly attention. Hahn asserted in her article “The Voices of Saints: Speaking Reliquaries” that a reliquary is not always a formal parallel of the relic it contains.\(^{12}\) Simply put, a reliquary in the shape of an arm does not necessarily hold the arm of a saint. Hahn investigated the arm reliquary as a medium, and concluded that they most often celebrated sainted bishops, who were considered to be the arms of

\(^{11}\) Rosario, Art and Propaganda, 27.

the church during their lifetimes. Similarly, St. Wenceslas' reliquary bust acquires new significance due to its form. The reliquary, which held a fragment of the saint's skull, functioned as an allegory. It represented a saint who was, in his time, the head of the state.

In her book, *The Medieval Poetics of the Reliquary*, Chaganti stated that bust reliquaries are unique in their ability to simultaneously gesture towards heaven (with their priceless, otherworldly materials) and earth (with their forward gaze).\(^{13}\) As a result, bust reliquaries serve as a visual affirmation of the saint's role as intercessor between the devout and the divine. Montgomery further underscored the importance of the bust reliquary in his claim that devout medieval audiences accepted the bust reliquary as the relic itself and that, consequently, it served as the vessel through which the saint interacted with the community.\(^ {14}\)

This understanding of the medieval perception of reliquary busts emphasizes the significance of Charles IV placing his own crown onto a reliquary bust of St. Wenceslas. This reliquary is far more than a sculpture holding bone fragments; it was understood as an embodiment of St. Wenceslas himself. The reliquary bust rested on the altar of St. Wenceslas Chapel in the cathedral that, according to the legend written by Charles IV, Wenceslas himself founded. Charles IV quite consciously placed his crown as the King of Bohemia on the reliquary bust of St. Wenceslas in this space where devotion to the saint would have been at its strongest. By placing his crown on the reliquary bust of the

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\(^ {14}\) Scott Montgomery, “The Use and Perception of Reliquary Busts in the late Middle Ages.” (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers The State University of New Jersey, 1996), 52.
patron saint of Bohemia and duke of the Přemyslid dynasty, Charles IV bolstered regal support by calling on the aid of a widely celebrated Bohemian saint.

Charles IV employed the same tactic when proclaiming his legitimate election as King of the Romans by visually connecting himself to St. Charlemagne. The Charlemagne Reliquary Bust (c. 1350) was designed to illustrate the imperial legitimacy of Charles IV, and it was commissioned in response to, and in justification of, Charles IV’s highly contested election as the King of the Romans (Fig. 4). The Charlemagne Reliquary Bust, located in Charlemagne’s palatine chapel in Aachen, visually proclaimed the legitimate election of Charles IV as King of the Romans, and its location in Germany helped to diffuse his message of authority throughout the eastern regions of his empire.

The burnished bust of St. Charlemagne rests atop an octagonal blue enamel base emblazoned with gold-leaf fleurs-de-lis. The garment above this is decorated with Imperial Eagles, and golden bands encrusted with jewels and precious stones accent the reliquary and make visual reference to the reliquary’s bejeweled crown. Individual locks of St. Charlemagne’s hair and beard are carefully detailed, as are the faint lines

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15 One must first be elected King of the Romans by the prince electors of the empire before they can proceed to Rome to be crowned Holy Roman Emperor by the Pope. Pope Clement IV, Charles IV’s childhood mentor and tutor, wanted to place Charles on the imperial throne in the place of Ludwig the Bavarian, and in a highly contested 1346 election Charles IV was elected King of the Romans. Charles emphasized his rival’s lack of legitimacy due to his coronation as Holy Roman Emperor by a Roman senator, and not by the pope. Ludwig likewise contested Charles’ election as King of the Romans as illegal due to the exclusion of prince electors related to Ludwig. The two vied for authority until Ludwig died unexpectedly on the eve of a battle between the two rulers. After Ludwig’s death, a second election was held, and Charles IV was again elected king of the Romans. For more on this see Rosario, *Art and Propaganda*, 4.

16 In an earlier paper I proposed the inclusion of these fleurs-de-lis as a heraldic reference to the French Kingdom, whose loyalty as allies and vassals Charles IV relied upon to maintain the legitimacy of his rule. As mentioned briefly in this paper, Charles IV spent seven years of his youth in the French courts with his family there. For more on Charles’ Parisian upbringing and familial ties in France, see Rosario, *Art and Propaganda*, 37 – 38 and Taissa L. Bushnell, *Thronis meis benis: Validation Through History in the Court Art of Charles IV* (McGill, 2001), 34. For a genealogy of Charles IV highlighting his Přemyslid origins and French family ties, see Appendix 2.
delineating his furrowed brow. His eyes look forward in a calm, regal stare from under the golden crown atop his head. Charles IV commissioned this crown for his 1347 coronation as King of the Romans, which he later ceremoniously placed on the reliquary bust of St. Charlemagne. In so doing, the crown that elevated Charles IV from Bohemian King to King of the Romans, the transitory phase before one can be crowned Holy Roman Emperor, was used to directly connect Charles IV to the first Holy Roman Emperor. This highly symbolic gesture was a bold proclamation of Charles IV’s imminent rise to power inferring that he was an emperor of mythic proportions, paralleled only by the great Charlemagne.

Charles IV donated the reliquary bust to the Royal Church of St. Mary, the palatine chapel of the first Holy Roman Emperor and the location of Charlemagne’s tomb, where devotion to the saint would have been at its strongest. The reliquary, which indeed houses a fragment of the “crown” of Charlemagne’s skull, again functions as an allegory. It represents another royal saint, one who was, in his lifetime, the royal founder of the Holy Roman Empire. By placing his own crown on this allegorical bust in Charlemagne’s own palatine chapel, Charles IV refuted any attacks to the legitimacy of

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17 Rosario briefly mentions that Charles IV placed his own crown on this reliquary bust in a footnote of her book, *Art and Propaganda*, yet she does not investigate the significance of this act in any detail. See Rosario, *Art and Propaganda*, p. 60, fn. 48.

18 This is not the only instance when a crown was used to directly connect Charles IV to saint Charlemagne. As a part of his extensive artistic program, Charles IV commissioned a genealogical fresco to decorate the main reception hall of Karlstejn castle. In this frescoed genealogy, Charles IV is shown with such illustrious ancestors as ancient gods, biblical patriarchs, and St. Charlemagne himself. Charles created a more direct visual tie between himself and St. Charlemagne when, in the entire frescoed genealogy, only Charles IV and St. Charlemagne are shown wearing the same imperial crown. Unfortunately, this fresco was destroyed in a 1487 fire in Karlstejn castle, but the genealogy survives in the illustrations of Matthew Ptacek-Ornys of Lindperk’s sixteenth century manuscript. For more on the frescoed genealogy of Charles IV, see Ibid., 28.
his election as King of the Romans and his future ascent to the status of emperor with the aid of St. Charlemagne.

This insertion of his political agenda is quite significant because this reliquary is a religious object used in liturgical celebrations that honor a celebrated saint. Charles IV even wrote a new liturgical mass to be read aloud during the saint’s octave, or eight-day cycle of feasts. St. Charlemagne had a well-established relic-cult in Aachen that was also recognized in Charles V’s French court, and Charles IV endeavored to extend the recognition of this cult throughout his kingdom and empire.

Charles IV’s adaptability in regards to the saints he aligned himself with illustrates how the king gained popular favor in as many regions of his empire as possible by harnessing the drawing power of regionally celebrated patron saints.

These reliquary busts and their accompanying crowns were commissioned to legitimize the rule of Charles IV and lay the foundation for a cult of his crown and dynasty. Similarly politically driven images of Charles IV were commissioned by the emperor and displayed throughout Prague from St. Vitus and the Royal Palace to the Old Town bridge tower and Karlštejn Castle. The culmination of the legitimizing artistic program of Charles IV can be seen in the Holy Cross Chapel in Karlštejn Castle.
II - THE HOLY CROSS CHAPEL

Soon after his return to Bohemia in 1333 Charles IV re-built Prague castle, oversaw the completion of St. Vitus Cathedral and the construction of New Town, the new economic and urban center of the city. After his ascension to the throne of Bohemia in 1347, the new king ordered the construction of Karlštejn castle and its Holy Cross Chapel (Fig. 5) to emphasize his regal legitimacy, solidify his standing within his court, and allude to the predestined grandeur of his dynasty.

The construction of the Holy Cross Chapel began in 1347, and it was consecrated after its completion in 1365. The chapel is a shining jewel located in the Great Tower of Karlštejn Castle, covered in gemstones and gold, and decorated with votive paintings of 130 saints. Quite significantly, the main reliquary niche in the altar wall of the chapel served as a sacred cache for the Bohemian Reliquary Cross (Fig. 7), commonly referred to as the Holy Cross, as well as the imperial coronation treasures (Fig. 8), all of which drew significant numbers of pilgrims after papal indulgences were granted to visitors in 1354 at the emperor’s request.19

This lavish, richly decorated chapel was designed as a vision of the Heavenly Jerusalem, with the inhabitants of that holy city represented in the panel paintings that line the walls.20 To a medieval viewer, the physical presence of the saints’ relics

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19 At Charles’ request, the pope granted indulgences for participants in an annual feast day of the Holy Lance and Nail (part of the Imperial treasures), and for visitors to the Holy Cross. Additional pilgrims were drawn to Prague when the imperial jewels and relics were publically displayed every year in a ceremonial procession to Charles Square in New Town. For more on the papal indulgences, see Fajt, ed., *Magister Theodoricus*, 95.

20 Previous scholars have discussed the idea that the Holy Cross Chapel existed as an earthly replica of the Heavenly Jerusalem. For more on this, see Rosario, *Art and Propaganda*, 28., and Fajt, *Magister Theodoricus*, 107.
indicated the saints’ actual presence in this sacred space.\textsuperscript{21} The ornate decoration of the chapel served as a visual proclamation of Charles’ regal authority and legitimacy as King of Bohemia, and its location within the walls of his castle ensured that access to this holy space was mediated by the emperor.

Shimmering gold glistens from every corner of this chapel. The vaulted ceilings are covered in gold leaf and dotted with convex glass stars, designed to glimmer and reflect the muted lamplight.\textsuperscript{22} The windows are made of thin sheets of alabaster, which enhance the golden glow of the room by letting in warm, soft light. Below the sumptuous gold ceiling, framed paintings of 130 saints line the walls in rows. Relics belonging to those saints depicted are encased within the wooden frames surrounding that saint’s image, with others housed in ornate reliquaries stored in the niche in the altar wall, and some are even hidden beneath the plaster on the walls. The lower portion of the walls is covered in gilt stucco encrusted with slabs of jasper and amethyst. The precious stones are polished, left in their original shapes, and arranged to form crosses. These jewel crosses are interspersed with heraldic emblems stamped into the stucco including the Bohemian lion, the imperial eagle, the Bohemian royal crown, and the imperial crown. A large golden chancel screen crosses through the center of the chapel. The altarpiece is

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\textsuperscript{21} According Peter Brown in his investigation of \textit{The Cult of Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity}, the medieval viewer saw a relic as a “privileged place, where the contrasted poles of Heaven and Earth meet.” Indeed, Brown states that, through the presence of a saint’s relics, “the saint in Heaven was believed to be ‘present’ at his tomb on earth.” Furthermore, Fajt investigated the role of the \textit{Libri Carolini}, an “eighth century Carolingian treatise on the role of images [. It] explains that while pictures will be burned at the Last Judgment, the saints will be resurrected from their relics”. Thus, the presence of the relics denoted the actual presence of the saints in the chapel. For an investigation of medieval saints’ cults and more on the medieval role of relics, see Peter Brown, \textit{The Cult of Sts.: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 3-4. For more on the Libri Carolini and the role of relics on the Last Judgement, see Fajt

\textsuperscript{22} Fajt proclaims this space was lit entirely by natural and oil lamp light due to original oil lamps still suspended from the ceiling. For more on this see Fajt, \textit{Magister Theodoricus}, 187.
\end{flushright}
decorated with a crucifixion scene (Fig. 9). This panel painting, like those surrounding it, holds relics embedded in the surface of the panel. These relics relate directly to the underlying painting - a thorn from the crown of thorns is placed in a relic niche in Christ’s halo, fragments of the true cross are arranged to form a cross on Christ’s chest, and next to the wound on Christ’s side is a relic of the vinegar sponge.

In his investigation of the artistic program of the Holy Cross Chapel, Fajt discusses how the votive paintings of the saints represent the inhabitants of the Heavenly Jerusalem, and he concludes that the registers were carefully arranged to illustrate the hierarchy of heaven. His evidence lies mainly in his analysis of the arrangement of the panels on the altar wall (Fig. 10). He identifies the panels to each side of the crucifixion scene as evangelists and apostles, with archangels flanking these holy figures. Fajt’s understanding of this hierarchical arrangement of holy figures is reasonable, yet he neglects to mention the two uppermost figures on this altar wall (Fig. 11) who are in line with Christ’s head and the passion relics embedded in the altarpiece. Two angels flank the crucifixion scene. The angel at Christ’s right hand holds a shield adorned with the imperial eagle in his right hand and the imperial crown in his left hand. The angel at Christ’s left hand lifts a shield emblazoned with the Bohemian Lion in his left hand and the Crown of St. Wenceslas commissioned by Charles IV in his right hand. These neglected figures are much more than decorative bookends that frame the crucifixion panel. I argue that if these figures are interpreted within the context of Fajt’s understanding of this space as a depiction of the hierarchy of the Heavenly Jerusalem,

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23 Ibid.
24 His main argument lies in the hierarchical arrangement of the angels and archangels framing the altar wall. To read Fajt’s argument, see Ibid.
this altar wall visually proclaims the terrestrial as well as heavenly preeminence of Charles IV, his kingdom, his empire, and his dynasty.

This bold proclamation is repeated in the Holy Cross Chapel, with the heraldic imagery of Charles IV stamped on the gilded walls between the jasper and amethyst crosses. These jewel-laden walls are a clear allusion to the Heavenly Jerusalem and the bejeweled foundations of the heavenly city. In the Book of Revelations, the Heavenly Jerusalem is described as being laid on twelve foundations that “were garnished with all manner of precious stones.”25 The first foundation was made of jasper, and the twelfth was of amethyst. I posit that the use of these particular gemstones, the first and the last listed, was a reference to Christ’s proclamation, earlier in the same chapter of Revelations, that “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.”26 This, combined with the multitude of relics associated with Christ housed in the Holy Cross Chapel, truly establish this sacred space as an earthly representation of the Heavenly Jerusalem. In this manner, Charles IV utilized the elevated status of this sacred space as an intricate canvas upon which he could display the glory of his rule and dynasty.

Charles IV justified this bold claim by creating and reinforcing parallels between himself and saints Wenceslas and Charlemagne who were presented, among others, as celebrated inhabitants of the Heavenly Jerusalem. This image of St. Wenceslas (Fig. 12) is the left-hand panel in a triptych above the reliquary niche on the altar wall. Here St. Wenceslas is shown in Bohemian armor, as he typically appears in Bohemian artwork,

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25 The full verse reads “And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst.” the Bible, King James Version, Rev. 21.19

26 Rev. 21.6
and he holds a shield emblazoned with the imperial eagle. The complete triptych features
panel paintings of St. Wenceslas, the Madonna and Child, and St. Palmatius, a saint from
Trier, martyred at some point during the third century, whose relics Charles IV obtained
in 1354. 27 Both St. Wenceslas and St. Palmatius are shown in military garb, standing at
attention with spears in hand. Because this triptych is situated directly above the
reliquary niche holding (along with the Bohemian Reliquary Cross) the imperial
coronation treasures, these warrior saints appear as vigilant protectors of Charles’ empire.

The presence of the imperial treasures within the castle of Charles IV had great
symbolic meaning. According to Rosario, “it was the physical possession of the imperial
treasure which made Charles IV a legitimate ruler of the Holy Roman Empire in the eyes
of his contemporaries.” 28 In this manner, the all-important symbol that proved the
emperor’s legitimacy was eternally protected by the holy Germanic warrior, St.
Palmatius, and by the Bohemian duke and patron saint, Wenceslas. Additionally, the
privileged relationship the emperor perceived between himself and St. Wenceslas was
illustrated with the inclusion of the imperial eagle on the saint’s shield (Fig. 12), nearly

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27 Fajt, ed., *Magister Theodoricus*, 128, provided the identification of the saints in this triptych. References to St. Palmatius in early Christian martyrologies such as the eighth century Bede Martyrology and the ninth century Usuard Martyrology are brief, and the details of his life and martyrdom differ in various texts. The *Acta Sanctorum* makes multiple references to St. Palmatius and his feast day is cited as either May 2nd, May 7th, October 3rd, or October 5th. The exact number of companions martyred alongside St. Palmatius differs among the various manuscripts, yet there are certain consistencies throughout the texts. St. Palmatius is always referred to as a Roman Consul, a political and military role that would have been in line with Charles IV’s promotion of royal saints having military careers, and that explains St. Palmatius’ appearance in military garb. The exact reason for the inclusion of St. Palmatius in this triptych is unclear, and will a topic for future research on the artistic programs of Charles IV. For more on St. Palmatius and the early martyrologies, see Société des Bollandistes. *Acta Sanctorum* (Brussels, Antwerp, 1643 – 1940). Information on St. Palmatius and the early martyrologies were graciously translated from the Latin *Acta Sanctorum* by Dr. Paula Gerson.

identical to the heraldic shield at the emperor’s knees in the Madonna of John Očko of Vlašim (Fig. 6).

Farther down the nave of the chapel, the first Holy Roman Emperor Charlemagne is presented as another glorious inhabitant of the Heavenly Jerusalem (Figs. 13 & 14). St. Charlemagne appears on the western wall of the nave of the chapel, and is thus on the wall at Christ’s right hand. The saint’s panel is centered in the bottom-most row, with the Apocalyptic Lamb shown above the saint in a panel painting in the highest row (Fig. 15). By placing St. Charlemagne, the first Holy Roman Emperor whose status as a saint was not universally recognized, among the inhabitants of the Heavenly Jerusalem and in such proximity to the Apocalyptic Lamb, Charles IV proclaimed the validity of the saint’s role in heaven.

St. Charlemagne is given a privileged, central location on a wall decorated with bishops and holy sovereigns. While all of the rulers on this western wall hold wooden shields that were attached to the painted panels, St. Charlemagne alone was shown

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29 St. Charlemagne appears on a wall decorated with abbots, bishops, and holy sovereigns. The eastern wall of the nave, facing the image of St. Charlemagne, is decorated with panel paintings of unidentified holy knights and prophets. For a thorough analysis of the panel paintings in the Holy Cross Chapel and their relative locations, see Fajt, *Magister Theodoricus*, 298-548.

30 The other figures who appear on this wall with St. Charlemagne have not all been identified. Of the six figures in the bottom-most row with St. Charlemagne, four have yet to be identified, and are generically labeled “Holy Soverign”. The panel directly to the right of St. Charlemagne’s painting has tentatively been identified as St. Henry, and St. Stephen of Hungary is shown next to St. Henry. In the row above St. Charlemagne’s painting, only the figure in the central painting (the one directly above St. Charlemagne’s) has been identified as St. Nicholas. The two panels on either side of St. Nicholas have been labeled “Holy Bishop”, and the two outermost panels in this row are simply called “Prophet”. In the next row up, the central figure is again the only identifiable saint, St. Benedict. The panels to either side of St. Benedict are labeled “Holy Abbot”, and the two outermost panels are again labeled “Prophet”. The uppermost row shows the Lamb of God, and the panels to either side have been labeled “Angel with Censer”. For an illustration of the entire West wall of the nave with labeled panels, see Fig. 10. For more on the identification of the panel paintings in the Holy Cross Chapel, see Ibid
wearing a crown. The crown itself has since been lost, but indentations in the gold leaf have left a ghostly outline on the panel that show where the crown once lay. Records indicate that this crown was, like Charlemagne’s shield, made of gilt wood attached to the surface of the panel. This emphasis on the tactile nature of St. Charlemagne’s crown is significant to Charles IV’s cultivation and promotion of the cult of his own crown and dynasty, and it makes reference to the crown that connected the two rulers in the Charlemagne Reliquary Bust.

The Holy Cross Chapel illustrates the culmination of the targeted artistic programs of Charles IV. The heraldic imagery of the emperor appears on the foundations of the Heavenly Jerusalem. Additionally, angels holding the emperor’s crowns and heraldic shields occupy a coveted position on either side of Christ on the altar wall. Charles IV includes prominent depictions of saints Wenceslas and Charlemagne in a continuation of his legitimizing artistic program. The emperor further negates any questions of legitimacy by storing and protecting the imperial coronation treasures in this sacred space within his castle walls.

The fresco cycle that decorates the stairwell leading to the Holy Cross Chapel illustrates the role of Charles IV in establishing this holy space. The staircase is decorated with scenes from the lives of St. Wenceslas and St. Ludmila, Wenceslas’ grandmother who is a traditional saint of Prague. The scenes from the lives of these saints were taken directly from the Legend of St. Wenceslas written by Charles IV himself. The frescoed scenes are arranged chronologically and displayed in opposite directions. When ascending the staircase, the left-hand wall is decorated with the

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31 See Ibid., 344-345.
Wenceslas cycle arranged from bottom to top, and the right-hand wall shows the Ludmila cycle arranged from top to bottom.\textsuperscript{33} St. Wenceslas and St. Ludmila were presented as divine intercessors guiding pious visitors to and from the Holy Cross Chapel. Since Charles IV wrote the Legend of St. Wenceslas and commissioned this sacred space within his castle walls, he effectively proclaimed that access to the heavenly space above was mediated by St. Wenceslas and facilitated by the emperor.

The confluence of imperial coronation regalia, holy relics, and the Bohemian Reliquary Cross designated this space as one of the most significant holy sites in the empire. Charles IV worked to ensure that as many people as possible were witness to this culmination of his artistic efforts by establishing Prague and the Holy Cross Chapel itself as pilgrimage destinations. In an effort to draw as many pilgrims as possible, the emperor obtained a number of papal indulgences for visitors to specific holy sites in Prague. At the request of Charles IV, Pope Innocent VI granted “indulgences of seven years … to penitents and confessors who visit and see the golden cross with the relics of Christ’s Passion and other relics, which is deposited in the collegiate chapter of Karlštejn.”\textsuperscript{34} The granting of papal indulgences would have ensured a high volume of visiting pilgrims. The artistic representation of Charles’ political message would thus have effectively reached pious subjects from all corners of his empire.

\textsuperscript{33} When discussing this fresco cycle, Fajt theorized that the “layout of opposing directions may have been based on Jacob’s dream and the ladder of heaven with its angels also of God ascending and descending by it”. A contemporaneous audience with a comprehensive knowledge of biblical imagery would likely have recognized this reference, and how the staircase grants symbolic access to the Heavenly Jerusalem. For more on this, see Fajt, “Charles IV: Toward a New Imperial Style” Bohem & Fajt, eds., \textit{Prague: Crown of Bohemia}, 14.

\textsuperscript{34} The Holy Cross Chapel was not christened as such until the mid 1900s. For more on this, see Rosario, \textit{Art and Propaganda}, 20-32. For more on the correspondences between emperor and pope regarding indulgences granted for Bohemian relics, see Fajt, \textit{Magister Theodoricus}, 97.
The Crowned Reliquaries of Charles IV created close visual ties between the emperor and saints Wenceslas and Charlemagne, and they laid the foundations for the emperor’s legitimizing artistic program. The Holy Cross Chapel marked the culmination of the emperor’s long-standing artistic campaign to legitimize his reign, and served as an illustration of the territorial expansion of Charles IV’s empire. The ultimate success of this campaign is illustrated in the Madonna of John Očko of Vlašim.

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35 The earliest artwork commissioned to glorify and assert the legitimacy of Charles IV was completed in 1347 (St. Wenceslas Crown). The Holy Cross Chapel was not completed until 1365. In this manner, we see similar legitimizing tactics employed throughout the emperor’s nearly two decade long artistic campaign.
III - THE MADONNA VOTIVE

The Madonna of John Očko of Vlašim (1370) was commissioned towards the end of Charles IV’s rule (Fig. 6). This work of art presents an image of imperial authority and the dynastic legacy of Charles IV. Charles IV is shown as a glorious ruler protected by the Kingdom of Heaven, whose piety and imperial authority effectively transformed Prague’s bishopric into an archbishopric. This illustration of the emperor’s political agenda is quite significant because it was commissioned not by the emperor himself, but by the second archbishop of Prague, John Očko of Vlašim, as an altarpiece for his episcopal palace chapel in outlying Roundice.36

It has been theorized that this painting functions as an illustration of the loyalty of Charles’ courtiers and their dedication to his political mission.37 While I believe this to be a valid point, it appears that there is a deeper meaning to be gleaned. Charles IV’s continual presentation of himself as an emperor of mythic proportions through close association with select patron saints was so widely diffused throughout his empire that, by the end of his rule, the emperor and his successors were presented as such even in artwork commissioned by others.38

This painting visually links the dynasty of Charles IV to their privileged relationship with carefully selected patron saints. On a background of shimmering gold leaf, the lower register shows the archbishop John Očko of Vlašim in his episcopal robes

37 Ibid.
38 Another example of the effectiveness of the emperor’s widespread artistic program on the perception of Charles IV by his subjects and courtiers can be seen in a letter from the emperor’s chancellor, John of Streda, in which he referred to Charles IV as the “new Charlemagne”. For more on this see Ibid., 29.
kneeling before St. Adalbert, the patron saint of the Prague diocese, and behind a shield emblazoned with his familial coat of arms. St. Procopius, a martyred abbot and a traditional saint of Prague, stands behind St. Adalbert while St. Vitus, the patron saint of Bohemia, stands behind Archbishop John Očko, presenting him to St. Adalbert. St. Ludmila stands behind St. Vitus holding up the ends of her veil by which she was martyred.

The upper register shows the enthroned Virgin and Child in majesty, attended by two angels. Emperor Charles IV is shown with hands clasped in prayer, kneeling at the enthroned Virgin’s right hand, making eye contact with the heavenly mother. A shield emblazoned with the imperial eagle lies at the emperor’s knees. Charles IV wears his imperial robes and it appears that he is wearing the crown he commissioned for his coronation as King of the Romans, the same crown he had placed on the Charlemagne bust reliquary. St. Sigismund, the emperor’s personal patron saint during the latter part of his life, is standing behind the emperor, presenting him to the Virgin and Child. The emperor’s son Wenceslas, heir to the Bohemian throne, is shown with a Bohemian lion on the shield at his knees, and with his patron saint and namesake St. Wenceslas presenting the young prince. The prince is shown in royal garb complete with crown, and St. Wenceslas is shown in his traditional warrior’s armor.

Charles IV aligned himself with St. Sigismund and introduced the saint’s relic-cult to Prague after his 1365 coronation as King of Arles. The emperor acquired relics of

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39 Earlier in his life, Charles IV saw St. Charlemagne as his patron saint. This resulted in his adoption of the name Charles and his creation of reliquaries and artwork celebrating St. Charlemagne that have been discussed earlier in this paper. This votive painting was commissioned later in Charles’ life when he adopted St. Sigismund as his patron saint. For more on this see Rosario, *Art and Propaganda*, p. 82 fn 29.
St. Sigismund on two occasions, in 1354 and again in 1365. Despite having possessed relics of the saint for over a decade, Charles IV did not attempt to introduce or promote the saint’s relic-cult in Prague until he translated a number of the saint’s relics to an apsidal chapel in St. Vitus Cathedral in 1365.\textsuperscript{40} Many scholars attribute Charles’ adoption of St. Sigismund as his patron saint to the emperor’s miraculous recovery from a potentially mortal illness, and they use the presence of St. Sigismund as patron saint in the Madonna Votive painting as evidence for this theory. I find this causal relationship rather hard to believe because Rosario states the miraculous recovery occurred in 1371, and the Madonna Votive was completed a year earlier, in 1370.\textsuperscript{41} I posit that Charles’ adoption of Sigismund as a personal patron saint, his introduction of the saint’s relic-cult in Prague, and the saint’s 1366 election as a Bohemian patron saint all serve as evidence of the emperor’s continuing, politically-motivated artistic program. I argue that the promotion of St. Sigismund, a martyred Burgundian King, was an overt celebration of the emperor’s imperial expansion to the Kingdom of Arles in Burgundy, an area that had not been under control of the Holy Roman Empire since Frederick I Barbarossa ruled in 1178.\textsuperscript{42}

Motivating factors behind the inclusion of St. Sigismund aside, this painting is a clear continuation of the imperial artistic campaign. The significance here has less to do with the painting itself, and more to do with the private patron, Archbishop John Očko of Vlašim. The archbishop illustrated his allegiance to Charles IV by placing the emperor in the most prestigious position in the painting, at the enthroned Virgin’s right hand. He

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 82.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 82, fn. 29.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 82, fn. 28.
also illustrated the imperial family’s privileged relationship with the divine by placing Charles and his son Wenceslas in the upper register, on either side of the Virgin and Child. The archbishop, then, is shown kneeling amongst holy figures, but also kneeling before the emperor and his son.

This painting illustrates the ultimate success of Charles IV’s artistic program; through close and continual association with specific patron saints, Charles and his dynasty were presented as harbingers of a golden age in Bohemia, even in privately commissioned artwork.
The artistic programs of Charles IV are vast and have yet to be fully explicated. Previous scholars have investigated the individual works of art and architecture commissioned by the emperor and the themes found therein, but few have attempted to identify unified motives in the imperial artwork. While some scholars claim the emperor’s artistic program was an effort to establish a cult of his crown, none explain this concept in any detail. Furthermore, no scholars to date have investigated the evolution of the artistic programs of Charles IV over the course of his rule. I have attempted to shed some light on this aspect of the emperor’s artistic programs. Through my analysis of the Crowned Reliquaries of Charles IV, the Holy Cross Chapel, and the Madonna of John Očko, I illustrate how Charles IV was able to establish a cult celebrating his own crown and dynasty by promoting the cults of St. Charlemagne, St. Wenceslas, and St. Sigismund and artistically connecting himself and his sons to these venerated holy rulers.

After his first coronation as King of Bohemia, Charles IV consistently presented himself alongside St. Wenceslas in the artwork he commissioned. This was done in an effort to gain support and identify himself with his Bohemian subjects. Charles IV felt the need to proclaim his legitimacy as Bohemian King so overtly because of the largely ineffective rule of his father, and because of his Luxembourgian lineage. The king selected St. Wenceslas to associate himself more closely with his people, because Wenceslas had long been accepted as a patron saint in Prague and throughout the Bohemian Kingdom. In order to win over public favor and identify himself more closely with his Bohemian subjects, Charles IV commissioned a new crown for his coronation as King of Bohemia and he placed this on his newly created St. Wenceslas reliquary bust.
Aligning himself with this traditional Bohemian patron saint won local support for Charles IV, and placing this work in the lavish St. Wenceslas chapel in St. Vitus Cathedral ensured that the king’s message would have been met by a large and devout audience.

Later in his rule, when the Bohemian King ascended to the throne of King of the Romans and prepared for his rise to power as Holy Roman Emperor, Charles IV added a layer of complexity to his artistic program in order to align himself more closely with St. Charlemagne. His reasons for doing so were twofold; first, presenting himself as like the first Holy Roman Emperor in Charlemagne’s own palatine chapel helped to bolster local support for the newly (and questionably) elected King of the Romans, and second, this positive association fostered between Charles IV and Charlemagne served to set the stage for Charles’ imperial role. I argue that the emperor visually and symbolically linked himself to St. Charlemagne by placing his own crown onto the Reliquary Bust of Charlemagne. This reliquary bust, located in Charlemagne’s palatine chapel in Aachen, visually proclaimed the legitimate election of Charles IV as King of the Romans, and its location in Germany spread the emperor’s message of authority throughout the western regions of his empire.

The culmination of the emperor’s artistic efforts can be seen in the Holy Cross Chapel. Here Charles IV justified his artistic proclamation of the supremacy of his kingdom and dynasty in the Holy Cross Chapel by aligning himself with St. Wenceslas and St. Charlemagne. Fajt theorizes that the stairwell leading to the Holy Cross Chapel served as an allegory for the ladder to heaven.\(^3\) St. Wenceslas is then shown as a divine

\(^3\) This idea was mentioned briefly in a footnote in the above paper. See p. 22, fn. 33 above.
intercessor guiding pious visitors to the earthly representation of the Heavenly Jerusalem. Because the scenes in the stairway cycle are taken directly from the Legend of St. Wenceslas written by the emperor himself, and because the chapel is located within the emperor’s own castle walls, Charles in effect proclaimed that he, with the aid of his saintly entourage, mediated access to the Heavenly Jerusalem.

Toward the end of his rule, Charles IV aligned himself with St. Sigismund and he introduced the saint’s relic-cult in Prague. The emperor’s emphasis on St. Sigismund began after his Arlesian coronation in 1365 when he returned to Bohemia with the saint’s relics. While some scholars claim that the emperor’s adoption of St. Sigismund as his personal patron saint was a direct result of the emperor’s miraculous recovery from an illness after obtaining relics of the saint, I believe that there is another meaning as well. I posit that the emperor’s introduction of the relic-cult celebrating St. Sigismund to Prague served as a celebration and illustration of the imperial expansion of Charles IV, who was the first Holy Roman Emperor to be crowned in Arles for nearly two hundred years. This positive association fostered between the emperor and St. Sigismund can be seen in the Madonna Votive of John Očko.

This Madonna votive painting illustrates the overall effectiveness of Charles IV’s widespread and persistent program in support of his political agendas. This painting showcases all of the elements common to works of art commissioned by the emperor, but it was commissioned by the archbishop of Prague for his own palace chapel. The archbishop presents Charles IV and his heir as glorious and pious rulers capable of ushering the Kingdom of Bohemia into a new golden age.
By investigating these works of art, I have illustrated how the emperor proclaimed his legitimacy and gained local support in the different regions of his empire by aligning himself with carefully selected patron saints. I have discussed how the specific saints chosen evolved over time and in different regions to suit his political needs. Furthermore, the names of Charles’ two sons coincide with his continued and evolving interest in patron saints; his first son was named Wenceslas (1361 - 1419), and his second son Sigismund (1368 – 1437). The emperor attempts to ensure the legitimacy and longevity of his rule and his dynasty by connecting himself and his successors to these carefully selected royal saints.

While the rise to power of Charles IV may have been plagued with issues of legitimacy, the emperor effectively negated his opponents’ attacks on his claims to power. The rule of Charles IV was successful and is celebrated in Prague and in the Czech Republic to this day. I posit the ultimate success of the emperor’s rule depended, in large part, on his use of art to associate himself with a select group of saints. While Charles IV was indebted to his spiritual guides, it is possible that the emperor modeled himself too closely on the revered Charlemagne, whose empire suffered a similarly fragmented fate under his heirs.
Territorial Expansion of Charles IV

Figure 1. *Territorial Expansion of Charles IV*. MAP: Europe c. 1370, boundary of the Holy Roman Empire (map courtesy of Shepherd, *Historical Atlas*, 24.)
Figure 2. Genealogy of Charles IV
Figure 3. *St. Wenceslas Crown* c. 1347. Gold, precious gems, pearls. Prague, St. Vitus Cathedral Treasury. (Rosario, *Art and Propaganda*, plate 38.)
Figure 4. *Reliquary Bust of Charlemagne* c. 1350. Gilt Bronze, gems, enamel. Aachen, Aachen Cathedral Treasury. (ARTstor)
Figure 5. Master Theodoric and Workshop. View of the Last Judgment Altar. *Holy Cross Chapel*. Prague, Karlštejn Castle. (Fajt, *Magister Theodoricus*, 163.)
Figure 7. *Bohemian Reliquary Cross (Holy Cross)*. C. 1357. Gold, cameos, gems. Prague, St. Vitus Cathedral Treasury. (Rosario, *Art and Propaganda*, plate 42)
Figure 9. Workshop of Magister Theodoricus. Crucifixion Scene Altarpiece, Holy Cross Chapel. det. Relic niches in panel painting. 1364. Oil tempera on beech panel, 210 cm X 151 cm. Prague, Karlštejn Castle. (Fajt, Magister Theodoricus, 320.)
Figure 10. Workshop of Magister Theodoricus. *Altar Wall, Holy Cross Chapel.* Labeled panel paintings. 1364. Oil tempera on beech panel. Prague, Karlštejn Castle. (Fajt, *Magister Theodoricus*, 282.)
Figure 11. Workshop of Magister Theodoricus. Altar Wall, *Holy Cross Chapel*. det. Angels flanking crucifixion scene holding heraldic emblems and crowns of Charles IV. 1364. Oil tempera on beech panel. Prague, Karlštejn Castle. (Fajt, *Magister Theodoricus*, 466 - 467.)
Figure 12. Tomaso da Modena. *St. Wenceslas*. 1355 – 1359. Tempera on poplar panel, 86 cm X 117.3 cm. Prague, Karlštejn Castle. (Fajt, *Magister Theodoricus*, 305 - .)
Figure 13. Workshop of Magister Theodoricus. *St. Charlemagne, Holy Cross Chapel.* 1364. Oil tempera on beech panel. Prague, Karlštejn Castle. (Fajt, *Magister Theodoricus*, 344.)
Figure 14. Master Theodoric and Workshop. View of Entrance wall and St. Charlemagne painting (right-hand wall, center of the bottom row). *Holy Cross Chapel.* Prague, Karlštejn Castle. (Fajt, *Magister Theodoricus*, 174.)
Figure 15. Workshop of Magister Theodoricus. West Wall of Nave, *Holy Cross Chapel*. Labeled Panel Paintings. 1364. Oil tempera on beech panels. Prague, Karlštejn Castle. (Fajt, *Magister Theodoricus*, 325.)
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