

Town Halls in Europe – Ceiling and Wall Paintings 1500-1800

03.09.-05.09.2025, Nuremberg

A conference of the Corpus of Baroque Ceiling Painting in Germany (CbDD) from Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich and the Bavarian Academy of Sciences, in cooperation with the City of Nuremberg.

Town halls as seats of urban authority are well-known and have been extensively researched. However, they have rarely been examined from a comparative, pan-European perspective. It is now widely accepted that they were central locations for urban self-representation, and that town fathers were inspired by the buildings of other cities – for example, the Augsburg or Nuremberg council by Venice. This conference addresses this gap by focusing on a previously neglected aspect of town hall architecture: ceiling and wall paintings. These played a decisive role in the representative design of early modern town hall rooms.

The Corpus of Baroque Ceiling Painting in Germany considers ceiling and wall paintings as media of visual representation. Their complex iconographic programs shaped interior architecture and were integral components of the respective image-space ensemble. While research for a long time mainly focused on sacred rooms and iconographies, the last decade has seen a growing attention to the profane sphere. Thus far, the focus has primarily been on castles and noble residences, while town halls and bourgeois buildings have been comparatively little researched.

The independent history of the development of ceiling and wall paintings, their artistic principles, and the often highly complex iconography justify an in-depth study. These paintings were a central medium for power representation in interiors. In the European context, ceiling and wall paintings should not only be understood as fresco or secco paintings: the use of oil painting, the integration of canvas pictures into stucco and wooden ceilings, or the painting of beamed and planked ceilings were widespread.

The functional orientation of a room was given a thematic complement through ceiling and wall paintings that iconographically defined it. Beliefs, ethical postulates, and claims to power were impressively visualized. However, it was only in combination with other visual arts that the decor developed its full impact. The conference therefore examines not only the aesthetic mechanisms of these image-space ensembles, but also their communicative functions.

In public spaces such as town halls, where political, economic, and social interests were negotiated under the eyes of the city community, image-space ensembles not only constituted social spaces – they also visualized and defined them. The contributions to the conference will explore the role that ceiling and wall paintings played in these processes: What religious or political messages were conveyed? How were successes staged, conflicts addressed, or solutions (allegorically) visualized? Was the focus on the glorious past or a promising future? Did the imagery serve self-assurance or the construction of an ideal? It can be assumed that the various media aimed, in terms of rhetoric, to persuade the viewers.

What interests, therefore, did the commissioners pursue regarding the active agents and the passive audience?

For the first time, town halls from all over Europe will be compared at the Nuremberg conference. A distinction will be made between free, largely sovereign cities such as Gdansk or Venice, and regional cities that were subject to a territorial ruler – which applied to the majority. In addition to general allegories like faith and justice, the diligence of citizens as the foundation of the common good was often depicted. Also widespread were tributes to the city ruler. The focus will be on the political message of ceiling paintings in connection with the iconographic program of the respective space.

Researchers from various countries will gather from September 3 to 5 in the historic Nuremberg Town Hall in the Beautiful Hall to exchange their findings. Guests are warmly welcome! Due to limited seating, prior registration is required.

Program

Wednesday, 09/03/2025

13:30 Opening of the conference office

14:00 Welcome by the organizers

Greetings from the City of Nuremberg, Bürgermeisterin Prof. Dr. Julia Lehner mit dem Geschäftsbereich Kultur.

14:30 Introduction to the conference

Prof. Dr. Stephan Hoppe (Corpus der barocken Deckenmalerei in Deutschland (CbDD), Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München (LMU))

PD Dr. Matteo Burioni (CbDD, LMU)

Dr. Heiko Laß (CbDD, LMU)

15:00 Section I

Chair: PD Dr. Matteo Burioni (CbDD, LMU)

15:00 A Royal Painter for the Seat of the Municipality: Antonio Palomino at the Old Madrid Town Hall (1692)

Dr. Sara Fuentes Lázaro (Universidad a Distancia de Madrid)

15:39 Discussion

16:00 Break

16:30 The 'quadratura' in the rooms of the palace of Accursio, Bologna, with related images

Prof. Dr. Marinella Pigozzi (Alma Mater Studiorum – Università di Bologna)

17:30 Lokale Räte in den Städten der Terra Ferma der Republik Venedig: die Sala del Parlamento in Udine

Prof. Dr. Martina Frank (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia)

17:30 Discussion

18:30 Visit to the Germanischen Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg with a nine-part ceiling painting by Isaak von dem Block from the Gdansk Town Hall

20:00 Possibility to have dinner together at the “Das Steichele”

Thursday, 09/04/2025

08:00 Opening, possibility to visit the hist. hole prisons in the town hall
(Meeting point: Ehrenhalle)

09:00 Section II

Chair: Prof. Dr. Andrea Gottdang (Universität Augsburg)

09:00 Bilder des Gemeinwesens. Überlegungen zu einer Typologie des Rathausschmuckes
in der Frühen Neuzeit

PD Dr. Matteo Burioni (CbDD, LMU)

09:30 Bildprogramme in Rathäusern souveräner Städte

Dr. Heiko Laß (CbDD, LMU)

10:00 Discussion

10:30 Break

11:00 Das Nürnberger Rathaus und seine beiden Hauptbauphasen in der Frühen Neuzeit

Prof. Dr. Stephan Hoppe (CbDD, LMU)

11:30 Besuch des Historischen Rathaussaals im Nürnberger Rathaus

12:00 Discussion

12:30 Lunchbreak

14:00 Section III

Chair: Prof. Dr. Stephan Hoppe (CbDD, LMU)

14:00 Bürgermeisterliches Selbstverständnis in den Reichsstädten Augsburg und Kempten
in der Mitte des 18. Jahrhunderts

Dr. Angelika Dreyer (CbDD, LMU)

14:30 Götterhimmel und Hellebarden: Die malerische Ausstattung von Rathäusern in der
Schweiz vom 16. bis 18. Jahrhundert

Dr. Matthias Oberli (Schweizerisches Institut für Kunstwissenschaft – SIK-ISEA, Zürich)

15:00 Discussion

15:30 Pause

16:00 Early Modern Town Halls in Poland-Lithuania

Prof. Dr. hab. Barbara Arciszewska (Instytut Historii Sztuki Uniwersytetu
Warszawskiego)

16:30 Deckenmalerei in holländischen Rathäusern und Regierungsgebäuden (1650-1700)

Prof. Dr. Konrad Ottenheim (Universiteit Utrecht)

17:00 Le décor de plafonds de l'hôtel de ville de Lyon : formes et fonctions

Prof. Dr. Olivier Bonfait (Université de Bourgogne-Europe, LIR3S, Institut Universitaire
de France)

17:30 Discussion

19:00 Possibility to have dinner together at the “Heilig Geist Spital”

Freitag, 05.09.2025

08:30 Opening

09:00 Sektion IV

- Chair: Dr. Thomas Eser (Museen der Stadt Nürnberg, Stadt Nürnberg)
- 09:00 „Sub Umbra Alarum“. Das Wiener Rathaus und das Haus Habsburg
Prof. Dr. Herbert Karner (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften Wien)
- 09:30 „angenehm blühende Aufklärung“. Die Wandmalereien im Alten Rathaus von Brunn
Mgr. Michaela Šeferisová Loudová, Ph.D. (Masarykova univerzita Brno)
- 10:00 Discussion
- 10:30 Break
- 11:00 Der Ratssaal im Rathaus Ödenburg/Sopron (1615) und Pressburg/Bratislava (1695)
Dr. Szabolcs Serfözö (Nemzeti Múzeum Budapest)
- 11:30 Die Glorifizierung eines Beamten. Das Deckenbild des Rathauses in Ödenburg/Sopron
Dr. János Jernyei-Kiss (Pázmány Péter Katolikus Egyetem, Budapest)
- 12:00 Discussion
- 12:30 Lunchbreak
- 13:15 Section V
- 13:15 Die originalen und translozierten Deckenmalereien im Fembo-Haus
Jana Stolzenberger M.A. (Stadtmuseum im Fembo-Haus, Stadt Nürnberg), Daniela
Gäbisch M.A. (Stadtmuseum im Fembo-Haus, Stadt Nürnberg)
- 14:30 End of the conference

Venue: The conference will be held in the Schöne Saal (Beautiful Hall) of the Nuremberg Town Hall. Its ceiling painting is an exemplary example of urban self-representation from the early 17th century.

Schöner Saal im Rathaus Wolffschen Bau

Room 208, 2nd Floor

Rathausplatz 2, 90403 Nuremberg

Registration and Information:

The conference languages are German and English. Please register by August 1, 2025, at:

Corpus der barocken Deckenmalerei in Deutschland

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You will receive a confirmation. If seats are no more available on-site, you can attend the conference online via Zoom.