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Images of St Henry II, St Cunigunde, and Imperial Holiness used in the Political Communication of Emperor Frederick III (1440-1493)

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Abstract

The cults of the German emperor Henry II (973-1024) and his spouse Cunigunde (c. 980-1033) had been established for three centuries when their images entered the symbolic language utilized by Frederick III of Habsburg (r. 1440-1493). This article analyzes several visual representations devoted to Saint Henry and Saint Cunigunde, all commissioned at the end of the fifteenth century by or under the auspices of Emperor Frederick III and his successor Maximilian I. These items of medieval heritage, namely the murals from Aachen Cathedral and two altarpieces from Nuremberg and Flanders, have not previously been analyzed in relation to each other in the context of the political communication of the late-medieval Holy Roman Empire. In this paper, they are studied in their iconographic and performative contexts – as inanimate participants in imperial ceremonies and devotional actions. It is argued that these representations featuring Henry II and Cunigunde together

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with other holy rulers not only performed a personal devotion to the sacred rulership on the part of Frederick III but also promoted a symbolic continuity of imperial rule and conveyed a specific political agenda. This agenda, being pursued from 1471 onwards, revolved around the establishment and grounding of Frederick's imperial authority in the German principalities.

Il culto dell'imperatore tedesco Enrico II (973-1024) e della sua sposa Cunegonda (980-1033 ca.) era iniziato da tre secoli, quando le loro immagini entrarono nel linguaggio simbolico utilizzato da Federico III d'Asburgo (1440-1493). In questo articolo vengono analizzate diverse rappresentazioni visive dedicate a Sant'Enrico e Santa Cunegonda, commissionate alla fine del XV secolo da o sotto gli auspici dell'imperatore Federico III e del suo successore Massimiliano I. Questi elementi del patrimonio medievale, vale a dire i dipinti murali dalla cattedrale di Aquisgrana e due pale d'altare di Norimberga e delle Fiandre, non sono mai stati analizzati in relazione l'uno con l'altro nel contesto della comunicazione politica del Sacro Romano Impero tardo-medievale. In questo articolo essi vengono studiati nei loro contesti iconografici e performativi – come partecipanti inanimati a cerimonie imperiali e azioni devozionali. Queste immagini raffiguranti Enrico II e Cunegonda, insieme ad altri santi sovrani, rappresentarono non solo la devozione personale di Federico III al sacro dominio, ma promossero anche la continuità simbolica del dominio imperiale e trasmisero una specifica agenda politica. Quest'ultima, perseguita dal 1471 in poi, ruotava attorno alla fondazione e alla affermazione dell'autorità imperiale di Federico nei principati tedeschi.

Introduction

The dynamics of building and maintaining political legitimacy and national identity using royal or other “national” saints have been widely researched in the last decades. Those studies paved the way for investigations of the introductions of saints to the political discourse, both medieval and contemporary, and of the transformations of saintly cults¹. Tightly connected to renewed nation-building efforts and self-discovery in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the research on royal sanctity and its “national” character has been conducted with regards to England, France, Scandinavia, or Central Europe as well as for Byzantine Christianity².

However, the same dynamics have remained understudied when it comes to the medieval German lands, embedded in the Holy Roman Empire, when compared to the other cultural areas of Europe³. However, the Holy Roman Empire was not devoid of royal sainthood. Not only should the disputed

¹ The key studies on the holy rulers, among others, are Folz 1984, 1992; Ridyard 1988; Klaniczay 2002; DuBois 2008; Gaposchkin 2008. For recent studies on medieval Serbia and Ancient Rus, for example see Paramonova 2010; Popović 2016.

² Samerski, Zach 2007.

³ Here the terms “German lands” and the “Holy Roman Empire” are not used interchangeably for the historical and political differences between the parts of the empire (e.g. between the Austrian hereditary lands and other German principalities) should be minded.

canonization of Charlemagne be taken into account, but so too should the case of German Emperor Henry II (973-1024) and his spouse Cunigunde (c. 980-1033), who were canonized in 1146 and 1200 respectively⁴. This saintly couple gained regional prominence in Bamberg, Merseburg, Basel and other urban or monastic localities⁵. Due to the key roles that Saints Henry II and Cunigunde played in the mentioned ecclesiastical centers, accounting for the recurring attempts of medieval rulers to utilize the cults and images of the holy imperial couple for their own political aims is a somewhat arduous endeavor. Conrad III, Philip of Swabia, Charles IV, Friedrich III, and Maximilian I all showed their devotion to St Henry and Cunigunde and used them for their political promotion and self-fashioning, though not always consistently and successfully so. Another reason for the lacuna in scholarly research on the saintly couple is a common understanding of the canonization as being the final step in the formation of a cult. This has sometimes led to scholarly inattention regarding the subsequent transformations of a given saintly cult and the late medieval devotional practices connected to it.

The paper examines a tangible “revival” of Henry II’s and Cunigunde’s cults during the reign of Frederick III of Habsburg (r. 1440-1493) and the first decades of Maximilian’s rule (r. 1486-1519). The perception and significance of these saints as holy rulers is studied by questioning the devotional practices, royal ceremonies, and artistic patronage behind specific objects that bear Henry’s and Cunigunde’s images and are related to Frederick III or the imperial court. I argue that the appearance of Henry II and Cunigunde in the imperial symbolic language at the end of the fifteenth century corresponds not only with Emperor Frederick III’s personal devotion for saints, but also – and more importantly – with his political quest for authority in the German territories from 1471 onwards, especially in the face of the calamities and changes that the 1480’s brought to the empire. Consequently, the appeal to the canonized emperors, that of Henry and Cunigunde together with Charlemagne, and the assertion of a symbolic continuity with them, pronounced through visual media, ensured a relatively prominent place for Henry’s and Cunigunde’s cults within the visual ideology of the late-fifteenth-century Holy Roman Empire.

⁴ Other instances of imperial sanctity include contemporary Ottonian saints, namely three queens (Eadgyth, Adelheid and Matilda) and Bishop Bruno of Cologne, a son to King Henry I, analyzed, for example, in the following publications: Corbet 1986; Gilsdorf 2004; MacLean 2017.

⁵ Some of the studies on the establishment of the cults and their spreading are: Klausner 1957; Guth 1986; Hess 2002; Schneidmüller 2004, 2015.

1. *The Holy Roman Empire and its Royal Saints*

The majority of the research done in the field of royal sanctity in the Holy Roman Empire has concentrated on the figure of Charlemagne, his cultural and political importance together with the canonization catalyzed by Friedrich Barbarossa in 1165⁶. Although Charlemagne as a historical and mythologized figure was omnipresent in medieval political and eschatological discourses, his medieval cult in the German lands was restricted mostly to Aachen, although Emperor Charles IV (*r.* 1346-1378) reinvented his sanctity at a later date⁷. Henry II and Cunigunde, whose saintly figures are at the center of the present analysis, constitute another example of imperial holiness personified in “German” rulers. The canonization procedure for Henry II, the last emperor of the Ottonian dynasty, was initiated by clerics from Bamberg – Henry’s key memorial site – and supported by King Conrad III (*r.* 1138-1152), all of which finally led to the acknowledgement of Henry’s sanctity by Pope Eugene III in 1146. The saintly status of Henry was later transferred to his spouse Cunigunde; in the second half of the twelfth century, the legends about her passionate devotion, generosity, and virginity started to accumulate, all triggering her canonization in 1200 by Innocent III, promoted by a circle of clerics and abbots and by King Philip of Swabia (*r.* 1198-1208)⁸. Both canonizations were supported by the German rulers. Hence, for a brief period, the saints entered the political agenda and were utilized to promote or legitimize specific values attached to their saintly images. While Conrad III was possibly attracted by the image of Henry II as a militant Christian leader, convenient in the face of the commencing Crusade⁹, Philip of Swabia resorted to St Cunigunde in order to support his own aspirations for the imperial throne against those of Otto IV (*r.* 1198-1218)¹⁰. Although these two cases of the utilization of royal sanctity were not devoid of immediate political meaning in the Holy Roman Empire, they never gave rise to any long-lasting traditions.

Therefore, it is generally accepted that these saints were seldomly viewed as holy rulers after their canonizations and that their veneration was restricted to local communities; moreover, even regional formations of Henry’s and Cunigunde’s cults have been inconsistently analyzed for the later medieval period¹¹. Jürgen Petersohn, for example, has studied the veneration of saints

⁶ For example, see Stuckey 2006; Görich 2015; Latowsky 2013. The Bohemian saints are not included in the present discussion.

⁷ On Charles IV’s promotion of saints see Rosario 2000; Mengel 2004; Bauch 2015.

⁸ On their canonisations see Klauser 1957, pp. 22-68; Petersohn 1977; Krafft 2005, pp. 90-97, 227-238.

⁹ Phillips 2001.

¹⁰ Petersohn 1994, esp. pp. 114-115, 132-133.

¹¹ Several studies that considered regional late-medieval developments of the royal couple’s cults are Hess 2002; Meyer 2003; Schneidmüller 2015.

(Charlemagne, Bishop Otto of Bamberg, the cult of the Magi in Cologne, Cunigunde and Elisabeth of Hungary) as a political strategy of the Staufeu rulers of the twelfth-thirteenth-century empire¹². Not observing a direct continuity in the imperial signification of these cults from the canonization processes onwards, Petersohn explains the suggested lack of political propagation of saints in the Holy Roman empire by the impossibility of creating an imperial-wide cult due to the political disjunction of the German territories and due to the power of centrifugal movements and local cults¹³. However, as Len Scales has noticed, the notion that the Empire was “lacking a site of concentrated imperial memory” is a common misconception about medieval Germany, which betrays a disregard for the intricate mixture of topography, narratives, architecture, and urban iconography that transmit both the presence and remembrance of the empire, also through the cults of imperial saints¹⁴.

A thorough look at visual representations of saints, imperial topography, and ceremonies can reveal some instances when royal saints, including Henry II and Cunigunde, were utilized as “holy rulers” to convey some aspects of imperial memory within the political communication during Frederick III’s rule. Although “political communication” is a term used so widely that it risks losing significance¹⁵, I still find it useful for my purposes if employed in the sense proposed by Jan Dumolyn, namely as a “form of communication in which power is the central element” that belongs to the public sphere and produces discourses about power¹⁶. Used this way, it makes it possible to distinguish the imperial use of Henry’s and Cunigunde’s images from those belonging to other spheres and different circumstances. Any saint is a multivalent figure, representing a mode of salvation for their devotees, a communal symbol or an edifying story – the same goes for the way they are represented visually. Moreover, it is worth noting that the meanings layered in any of their visual representations are constructed by a commissioner, an artist, an audience and that they are also influenced by the circumstances of its display. Hence defining the communicative situation in which each of the studied objects were used is an important interpretive tool for the study of the depictions of saints and the media through which they are depicted.

For this reason, I study the possible meanings and significations that the saintly images could convey. I do so by interpreting unanimated objects, architectural elements or spaces bearing their representations and memories, used in the political communication of Frederick III. Analyzing performative, commemorative, and pragmatic functions of depictions from the late fifteenth century in their relation to the imperial (self-)representation and contemporary

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ Ivi, pp. 144-145.

¹⁴ Scales 2010, p. 74.

¹⁵ Mostert 1999; for criticism and reevaluation of this term see Dumolyn 2012.

¹⁶ Dumolyn 2012, p. 41.

political discourse is the initial analytical step undertaken in the paper. Informed by the performative turn, its triumph and achievements in medieval studies since the 1990's, I acknowledge the role of visual representations in a commemorative web of meanings and symbols and within a specific ceremony, which is in turn created and remembered by its participants and onlookers¹⁷. Afterwards, I discuss whether these representations of Emperor Henry and Cunigunde can be described as a programmatic appeal to royal sanctity, similar to some of Frederick's and Maximilian's other actions in the sphere of saintly politics. Finally, I ask what the reasons were for activating the memory of the holy royal couple and whether it had any broader appeal for the court and subsequent imperial representational practices.

2. *Saintly Politics of Frederick III*

Frederick III (1415-1493, crowned 1440, emperor from 1452) from the house of Habsburg has notoriously been known as a "Reichserzschlafmütze" (roughly "imperial arch-nightcap") due to a seeming lack of political agency during his half-a-century long reign¹⁸. However, a new strand of research reevaluating Frederick's political persona has highlighted his involvement in different levels of the imperial administration and his successful international and domestic policies¹⁹. Yet, for the sake of the present study it is valuable to review his attempts to enhance the political prestige of some of the existing saints and to promote the canonizations of new ones – whether due to his personal interest or in order to secure his rule and integrate different parts of the empire. Frederick III's devotion to saints, viewed either as a reflection of the overall Habsburg piety (later transformed into *Pietas Austriaca*) or as his sensibility to mysticism and devotedness, has only been the subject of few studies²⁰. This phenomenon is also mentioned in the context of Frederick's involvement in two canonization processes – that of Leopold III of Babenberg and Hemma of Gurk, both of which are briefly discussed here. Elisabeth Kovács was one of the

¹⁷ On the images and their performativity see a collective volume by Wulf, Zirfas 2005. For the influence of the performative turn on medieval studies see Martschukat, Patzold 2003, as well as numerous works by Gerd Althoff, Geoffrey Koziol, Philippe Buc and others.

¹⁸ For example, in Rill's summative biographic study of Frederick III, the emperor is portrayed as literary sleeping throughout most of his reign: Rill 1987, pp. 110-126; about the revisionist approach see e.g. Heinig 1997.

¹⁹ The impetus for this reevaluation and more intensive research of Frederick's reign and policies was given by the launch of the publication of his *Regesten* (first volume in 1982; volume 33 in 2018); some of the main researchers of Frederick's reign (the list is not meant to be exhaustive) are Alphons Lhotsky, Heinrich Koller, Paul-Joachim Heinig, Alois Niederstätter, Jörg Schwarz.

²⁰ Zisler 1972; Kovács 1992; on the later phenomenon of *Pietas Austriaca* see Coreth 1959; Ducreux 2011.

first to question the medieval roots of the dynastic spirituality of Habsburg, of which the devotion for holy kings was among the cornerstones²¹. A scarcity of studies devoted to the political employment of saints by “medieval” Habsburg rulers, especially evident when contrasted to the abundance of similar research done on the neighboring regions, might be related to the large amount of such practices employed by Maximilian I (1459-1519), whose grand scale actions shadowed those of his father and predecessor Frederick III. Maximilian I is known for his overwhelmingly complex genealogical projects, in which saints of royal descent played a crucial role in his imperial self-fashioning by being invoked as holy predecessors of his dynasty and of the imperial office²². Of this handful of projects on Habsburg saints and predecessors, only a few were actually realized during Maximilian’s reign; nevertheless, the scholarship is continuously astonished by the scope of these project, which employed numerous scholars and the best artists of the age. The question of rupture or continuity between Maximilian’s and Frederick’s practices and views has rarely posed, however (and only hinted at by Kovács).

Frederick’s most recognized achievement in the sphere of “saintly politics” is the canonization of Leopold III of Babenberg in 1485 – the margrave who ruled over Austria from 1095 to 1136, and who had been able to unite its territories under his crown and secure a stable dynastic succession²³. The memory of Leopold, harbored in Klosterneuburg Monastery and other foundations connected to his figure, was not deprived of liturgical overtones, although the margrave would not have been officially canonized had it not been for an active interference of Frederick III²⁴. The emperor not only instigated and supported the canonization by his mere word, but actually interfered in the protracted curial decision-making process by writing to Pope Paul II in 1466, hoping for the «frid, glück und seligkait» that St Leopold III would bring for the Austrian lands²⁵. Through this canonization, Frederick desired to establish a continuity between the house of Habsburg with its hereditary lands in Austria, on the one hand, and Margrave Leopold, a holy ruler and patron of the Austrian lands, on the other, which was later performed in political ceremonies and dynastic devotion even into the modern period (though not without disruptions and only in some parts of the Austrian lands). Notably, Frederick III was also involved in the attempt to canonize another Austrian ruler – Hemma of Gurk. The eleventh-century duchess of presumably royal pedigree had already been

²¹ Kovács 1992; although reviewing more than two centuries of ducal and royal activities in a mere ten pages inevitably led to a very sketchy analysis, her contribution in bringing this topic up is, to my knowledge, rather unique.

²² Laschitzer 1887a and 1887b; Silver 2008.

²³ A recent monography on “historical” Leopold: Brunner 2009.

²⁴ The first attempt to canonize Leopold III was instigated from Duke Rudolf IV in 1358.

²⁵ Cited according to Kovács 1985, p. 69; on the circumstances of the canonization and Leopold’s cult in late medieval and modern Europe: Röhrig 1985; Finucane 2011, pp. 71-116.

venerated for several centuries in Gurk in Carinthia, notable for her exceptional piety and ecclesiastical foundations in the region²⁶. In 1465, the initiative of a local bishop to gain a saintly status for Hemma was supported by Frederick III; it was, however, refuted by Pope Paul II as it was an ill-timed request amidst the Turkish threat following the establishment of Ottoman rule in Constantinople. Despite the failure of the official canonization, this imperial attempt to support the cult is adding to the evidence of Frederick III's instrumentalization of saints' cults for his self-fashioning and for his attempts at establishing connectedness with specific parts of the empire – with his hereditary Austrian lands in this case.

Henry II and his spouse Cunigunde also found their place as objects for imperial attachment and devotion, as was revealed already in the first regnal years of Frederick III. For example, the office of Henry II, accompanied by an elaborated initial with his royal image, is found in a luxurious prayer book made exclusively for the king; an invocation to Henry II, as well as for other holy rulers, is present in another smaller manuscript of royal provenance²⁷. This indicates Frederick's regularly exercised devotion for the saint; the evidence of Frederick's three pilgrimages to Bamberg (in 1471, 1474 and 1485) supports this assumption²⁸. In the following, I focus on the visual manifestations of Frederick's veneration of Henry II and Cunigunde. That is, I examine three images of the saintly couple, commissioned by Frederick III and Maximilian I themselves or under their auspices, and discuss the possible reasons and implications of this propagation of two Ottonian rulers in the imperial political communication of the late fifteenth century. The murals and altarpieces in question are dated after the 1480's, hence they are analyzed in the light of contemporary events and the challenges of Frederick's reign, shared with Maximilian I from 1486 onwards and then inherited by the latter in 1493. These include Frederick III's "return" to the "inner empire" (*Binnenreich* – the empire excluding Habsburg hereditary lands) in 1471 and his renewed active engagement with local politics, the Turkish threat, the election and coronation of Maximilian I, and the takeover of the Austrian territories by the Hungarian king Matthias Corvinus (r. 1458-1490).

²⁶ Tropper 1988; Till 1999.

²⁷ Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 1774, f. 191v-196r; and Cod. 1104, f. 15v.

²⁸ Mentioned in Häutle 1875.

3. Murals of the Aachen Glass Choir

One of the central places of the empire is Aachen Cathedral – a traditional coronation place for the “King of the Romans”, a memorial space for Emperor Charlemagne, and a well-established Marian devotional center²⁹. At the beginning of the fifteenth century, a glass choir was added to the cathedral’s Carolingian octagon at its eastern end – a tremendous, though fragile, Gothic polygonal construction which was aimed at preserving the cathedral’s relics and was built in the similitude of Sainte-Chapelle³⁰. The choir was connected to the octagon with a nave. The five-meter-high walls of the nave and the walls below the stained glass windows are decorated with murals, which have been painted and repainted several times since their construction. Some of the depictions are barely preserved or present in their baroque forms, others have been discovered only due to the most recent restorations completed in the early 2000’s³¹. The first cycle to appear around 1430 was devoted to the Virgin – the western arcade depicted the Annunciation – while other walls of the nave and the polygon were covered with decorative ornamental paintings³². In 1486, another pictorial cycle was added to the glass choir as a visual decoration for the ceremonial coronation of Maximilian I – the son and co-ruler of Frederick III.

In this new pictorial program, the twelve wall sections of the choir’s nave visualized the legends of the cathedral’s patroness, from the Annunciation to the Coronation of the Virgin³³. The northern polygonal walls hosted the images of five saints and depictions of Aachen chapter’s coat of arms: these saints are Heribert of Cologne, Henry and Cunigunde (fig. 1), and Charlemagne with St Helen (fig. 2). The frescoes of the eastern end of the polygon, however, are only extant in their sixteenth-century form and are thus not relevant for the current analysis. In this visual cycle from 1486, its commissioner Frederick III evoked persistently the idea of sacral kingship, already omnipresent in the cathedral through the memory of Charlemagne, although novel visual forms were used to create a pantheon of imperial holy rulers. In what follows, the composition and iconography of these murals are analyzed together with the purpose of their commission and their initial pragmatic use as part of the coronation ceremony.

The saint-cycle opens on the northern nave wall with the depiction of St Heribert, an archbishop of Cologne from the early eleventh century. St Heribert was venerated locally in his diocese, which means that his appearance in this

²⁹ The most recent series on Aachen Cathedral: Müller *et al.* 2014; Steinhauer-Tepütt 2019; on the coronations, e.g.: Kramp 2000.

³⁰ The building started probably in 1355 and finished before 1414: Knopp 2002.

³¹ Heinen *et al.* 2002.

³² Ivi, pp. 231-232.

³³ The Marian cycle on the southern nave wall is not preserved, except from the Coronation, though the content is known from later descriptions, see Ivi, pp. 232.

cycle could certainly reflect local veneration preferences³⁴. Simultaneously, this depiction can indicate the leading role that the Cologne archbishop had in the royal coronation ceremony traditionally held in Aachen for six centuries: the archbishop of Cologne was the one administering the ceremony, assisted by the archbishops of Mainz and Trier³⁵. Moreover, St Heribert's red attire presents him as a *Kurfürst*, which anachronistically reflects on the role of Cologne archbishops as imperial electors.

Next to St Heribert, already on the polygonal wall, Henry II and Cunigunde are depicted together as a pair of royal donors standing against an architectural background. They are dressed in the imperial vestments, each holding a church model: Cunigunde has a model of the Aachen glass choir while Henry II holds a tower, which might be associated with the church of St Adalbert – Henry's foundation in Aachen. Traditionally, Henry and Cunigunde have been visualized holding a model of Bamberg Cathedral, though this iconography was adapted to the local scenery of Aachen. In his other hand, Henry II holds an imperial scepter whereas in Cunigunde's hand an elongated red ploughshare figures as a sign of her ordeal. To a contemporary spectator, these elements signify the identities of the saints – at least, they convey the imperial status of the depicted pair. Although the cults of Henry II and Cunigunde flourished mostly in Southern Germany, St Henry was familiar to Aachen clerics and parishioners: there is evidence of Henry's relics being sent to Aachen from Bamberg at the dawn of Henry's cult, triggered by Charlemagne's canonization³⁶. Moreover, in 1414 the newly built choir and its altars were consecrated to a number of renowned saints, including Emperors Charlemagne and Henry³⁷. Therefore, the link between the two holy emperors had already been established by the end of the fifteenth century, although only within the liturgical and memorial space of Aachen.

The other imperial pair, occupying the polygon's second unit, is an ahistorical one – Charlemagne in imperial attire is depicted together with St Helen, the mother of Emperor Constantine, holding the holy cross. They are both represented as donors with church models in their hands in a way similar to the representation of Henry and Cunigunde; Charlemagne has the octagonal Aachen cathedral in his hand while the prototype for Helen's model is hard to

³⁴ On Archbishop Heribert and his later cult see, among others, Müller 1996; Carty 2000.

³⁵ Militzer 2000.

³⁶ Waitz 1841, p. 815.

³⁷ Cited according to Knopp 2002, p. 10: «Anno Domini milesimo quadringentesimo quarto decimo dominica proxima post festum conversionis beati Pauli apostoli (28 January 1414) consecratus est chorus iste cum suo altari summo a Reverendissimo Domino in Christo Patre Hendrico Dei Gratia episcopo Sindoniensi, vicario in pontificalibus Reverendi in Christo Patris ac Domini Domini, Johannis de Bavaria eadem gratia Apostolica confirmati Leodiensis in honorem omnipotentis Dei et in memoriam sanctorum Apostolorum Petri et Pauli et aliorum Apostolorum, sancti Adalberti episcopi et martyris, et sanctorum imperatorum Caroli et Henrici.» The consecration document was found in 1803 when breaking the altar of St Peter.

discern. The appearance of Charlemagne's image in Aachen is conventional, which cannot be said about St Helen. The grouping together of Charlemagne with St Helen is unusual; the same iconography appears only in one other image commissioned by Frederick III, which is to be discussed in the next section. This constellation of Charlemagne and Helen, I assume, could be intentional, communicating a specific set of values and reflecting an attempt to make the depiction of Charlemagne appear symmetrically to the one of Henry II and Cunigunde. Due to the lack of a canonized "pairing" to Charlemagne, St Helen was chosen as an appropriate consort. As St Helen is closely associated with her famous son Emperor Constantine, I suggest that this grouping might be interpreted as the visualization of an existing association of Charlemagne with Emperor Constantine, originating already in the eighth century from a letter by Pope Adrian I and appearing concurrently in the eschatological discourses of the "Last World Emperor"³⁸. Simultaneously, St Helen stands for the veneration of the Holy Cross – one of the cornerstones of western spirituality. This relic functioned as an imperial insignia in Byzantine, German, and French contexts³⁹. According to Gottfried of Viterbo, in the Holy Roman Empire by the end of the twelfth century the complex of *insignia imperialia* consisted of the Holy Cross, the Holy Lance with a particle of the Holy Nail, the crown, the scepter, the orb, and the sword⁴⁰. The veneration of the Holy Cross is also tightly associated with several imperial traditions: for example, with Ottonian devotion for the cross or that of Charles IV, who visualized his worship of the relic in the mural cycle of the Holy Cross chapel in Karlštejn⁴¹. These rows of associations between the True Cross, the imperial regalia, the coronation ceremony, and royal devotional traditions enriched the interpretation of Charlemagne standing together with St Helen in the Aachen frescoes.

Both images of holy pairs are accompanied by the emblem AEIOV that points to the commissioner of these murals – Frederick III. The mystical anagram, the exact meaning of which has been impossible to establish (Lhotsky gathered more than 80 possible interpretations), presupposes Frederick's personal involvement in the commissioning and shaping of the object carrying it⁴². «Whichever building or whichever silver plate or liturgical garment or other precious objects that bear the device AEIOV, consisting of the line and the five letters, either belongs to me, Duke Frederick the Younger, or I have myself built or commissioned it»⁴³ reads a paragraph in Frederick's notebook, written

³⁸ Reeves 1969, pp. 293-392; Emerick 2017.

³⁹ On the history of the relic see Frolow 1961, pp. 76-79 and 101-104 for imperial usage of the Holy Cross. For a recent study on late antique and medieval legends of the Cross see Baert 2004.

⁴⁰ Petersohn 1998, pp. 49-58, 87.

⁴¹ Rosario 2000, pp. 19-26; Boehm, Fajt 2005, pp. 12-16; Bauch 2015, pp. 384-396.

⁴² Lhotsky 1952.

⁴³ Cited according to Ivi, p. 161: «Pei belhem pau oder auff welchem silbergeschir oder kirengbant oder andern klainaten AEIOV der strich und die funff puestaben stend, das is mein, herzog Fridreis des jungern, gebessen, ich hab das selbig paun oder machen lassen».

at a time before his ascension to the throne. In the mural of Charlemagne and Helen the completion date (1486) is inscribed with a later note of renovations held in 1622. Frederick's agenda in these murals is also conveyed through other compositional elements: for example, Archbishop Heribert is depicted next to Frederick's coats of arms of Austria and Lower Austria. Frederick III is himself represented in the mural cycle: in the Coronation of the Virgin scene on the southern wall of the choir, the emperor is pictured as a donor, dressed in his imperial attire kneeling in front of the Virgin⁴⁴. When the multidimensional composition of these murals is treated in ensemble, Frederick III appears as a supplicant not only in front of the Virgin, but in front of the saints represented in the murals and also in front of the relics that were safeguarded in the glass choir. Subsequently, this visual composition would be echoed in the coronation ceremony, when the newly crowned king knelt in front of the main altar devoted to Virgin Mary.

Although there is no documentation concerning the execution of the murals, there is a plausible date when the commission order might have been issued: in December 1485 Maximilian I and Frederick III met in Aachen, seeing each other for the first time since 1477⁴⁵. Their meeting was clearly timed to be in conjunction with the forthcoming election of Maximilian in Frankfurt as a co-ruler (16 February 1486) and his subsequent coronation (9 April 1486). Frederick III carefully arranged both events; though speculative, it is possible that the emperor made orders concerning the refurbishment of the ceremonial space and chose the iconography himself while residing in Aachen.

Because of the problems related to the preservation of the murals, nothing can be suggested about a workshop or specific artists commissioned for their painting. However, the inscriptions and further details of the survived images provide a clear link to Frederick III and the coronation ceremony of 1486, which allows us to locate the primary performative function of this visual cycle within its ceremonial context⁴⁶. I assume that this iconography of an imperial pantheon of two holy rulers paired with holy queens placed between the Cologne archbishop and the Marian scenes can be considered a consciously devised visual program and not a mere reflection of Charlemagne's or Henry's liturgical veneration and commemoration in Aachen. One of the ideas conveyed through these depictions is that of a divine continuity between the current anointed ruler and the commemorated past, presented to multiple secular and ecclesiastical representatives of the empire gathered for the ceremony. The idea of a continuity between the office-holders and a semi-divinization of an anointed king was present in the coronation ritual, which actively evoked the image of Charlemagne through the insignia used, his head-reliquary, the throne and the

⁴⁴ Kramp 2000, pp. 626-627; Heinen *et al.* 2002, p. 242.

⁴⁵ Wiesflecker 1971, p. 187.

⁴⁶ On the coronation: Ivi, pp. 194-199; Kramp 2000, pp. 564-566.

space itself. With these depictions another dimension was added, namely that the imperial sanctity resided not only in the patron of Aachen, but also in other rulers of the Holy Roman Empire – Henry II and his spouse, who stood in line with antique Roman emperors that were in turn evoked through the image of St Helen. It is of course impossible to know with any certainty whether this idea was indeed intended and then successfully understood by the onlookers. Yet, there is reason to believe that it served as an additional divine legitimation at the ceremony of 1486. Maximilian's election and coronation as king of the Romans happened while the existing king, his father Frederick III, remained an active ruler; this practice did not conform to the constitutional text of the Golden bull, and therefore gave rise to a certain amount of suspicion among the electors and nobility⁴⁷. Altogether, this unique iconographic cycle, developed for the coronation of Frederick's successor, draws a continuity between the holy kings of the past and the newly ordained king – a continuity depicted in the images of canonized imperial saints and reproduced in the coronation ritual.

4. *Decorations of the Upper Imperial Chapel in Nuremberg Palace*

A remarkably similar iconography of the canonized imperial saints appeared at the same time in another part of the empire, namely in Nuremberg. This city became an important space in the imperial topography of the Luxemburg and Habsburg dynasties, often hosting Imperial Diets and safeguarding the imperial insignia from 1423. The royal palace in Nuremberg can be traced back to the eleventh century, when a fortified residence was built at the northern end of the city⁴⁸. A number of living quarters with a double-chapel, capable of offering a dwelling place and liturgical services for a ruler, his family and retinue, were constructed at the beginning of the thirteenth century; the latter consisted of two interconnected levels, the Lower Chapel and the Upper Imperial Chapel. This architectural construction, typical for twelfth-thirteenth-century royal and ducal residences, allowed the separation of spaces during a service: the Upper Chapel was reserved exclusively for nobility and for the king, who actually stood in the gallery, which was connected directly to the royal rooms⁴⁹. Therefore, the architecture of the chapel and its inner decorations were meant to construct a power hierarchy while accommodating the exclusive use of the chapel for imperial services: indeed, the space was active liturgically only when the ruler resided in Nuremberg.

⁴⁷ Wolf 2005, pp. 25-127.

⁴⁸ Heinemann 2013, pp. 72-73.

⁴⁹ Ivi, p. 75.

Nuremberg palace was used as Frederick's residential space during his trips through the inner empire. He resided in the palace at least five times (in 1442, 1471, 1474, 1485 and 1487)⁵⁰; moreover, when the emperor fled from the Austrian lands, his personal treasury was also moved to Nuremberg and kept in the Lower Chapel of the palace – a fact that emphasizes the personal and familial importance of this space for Frederick III after 1485⁵¹. His stay in 1487 was particularly long, as it lasted for nine months. The palace went through multiple reconstructions just as additional decorations were commissioned in order to accommodate the emperor and his retinue. A winged altarpiece consisting of four wooden figures, tempera paintings, illustrated predella, and a carved ornamental spandrel was consecrated in the Upper Chapel in 1487, coinciding with Frederick III's stay in the city. The side panels are devoted to Christological and Mariological scenes, while the four figures in the central part are Saints Henry with Cunigunde flanked by Charlemagne and St Helen – the figures are still to be seen in the Upper Chapel (fig. 3). After being damaged during the Second World War, the altarpiece could not be reassembled (only the carved figures remained). However, late-19th-century photographs of this altar along with other photos of the chapel's decorations reveal the appearance of the altarpiece and its iconographic program, even if these photos might still not reflect the original state of the altarpiece⁵².

In the altarpiece, Henry and Cunigunde are depicted as royal donors holding a church model, which is easily identifiable as Bamberg Cathedral – a cathedral with four towers was the symbol of the Bamberg diocese, to which Nuremberg also belonged. The representations of Henry and Cunigunde were common in the area, especially in the later medieval period when multiple images of the holy couple were commissioned by local nobility and clerics and were on display in the churches and streets of the city (e.g. in the stained glass from the Church of St Lawrence or in the Ehenheim's epitaph from the same church)⁵³. Hence, the royal pair would be immediately recognizable for contemporary onlookers, probably in their capacity as patrons of the diocese. The figure of Charlemagne should also be a familiar sight in the cityscape of Nuremberg: not only his mythologized persona was well-known throughout the empire, but from 1423 also the imperial jewels, recognized in the period as Charlemagne's relics, were kept in Nuremberg. St Helen with a cross in her hand would also have been easily identified as she was a widely venerated saint; her image, as

⁵⁰ Based on the chronological table of Frederick III's itinerary from Heinig 1997, pp. 1347-1389.

⁵¹ Heinemann 2013, p. 76.

⁵² The recent study of Nuremberg Palace edited by Katharina Heinemann brings this evidence together: Heinemann 2013.

⁵³ According to the study by Heinrich Linke, there were six medieval dedications and more than twenty visual representations of either Henry II or Cunigunde in Nuremberg: Linke 2007; on the epitaph: Schleif 1990, pp. 155-167.

noted above, could therefore bring forth a connection to Emperor Constantine, the relationship between the Church and the Empire, and devotion to the Holy Cross. The statues of the altarpiece were only revealed to onlookers when the painted wings were open, probably during services or for private prayers. In the latter case, when a supplicant was kneeling in front of the shrine, his or her devotional thoughts would also be guided by the iconography present on the altarpiece. The images of holy rulers, then, could mediate an individual devotional practice.

In short, although depicted in a different medium which presupposes different circumstances of display and contact with the saints, the composition and the iconography of the Nuremberg altarpiece is reminiscent of the Aachen murals: Henry II and Cunigunde are depicted together with St Helen and Charlemagne, the latter also forming a holy pair. I assume that the compositional similarity between the Aachen murals and the side-altarpiece from the Imperial chapel is not coincidental – both visual programs reveal a similar imperial agency behind them.

The iconographic and spatial contexts in which these figures are found in Nuremberg Palace, as well as the data on the commission of this altarpiece, suggest that this object was used as a tool for imperial self-fashioning. The top of the altarpiece is decorated with ornamental carvings, between which Frederick III's imperial coat of arms – a two-headed eagle with the Austrian shield – is placed. This feature might suggest that this altarpiece served to establish the continuity of the imperial office, not only embodied in a lineage including Charlemagne, Henry II or the Constantinian Empire, but also embraced by the contemporary dynasty, as signified by the coat of arms.

We may also rely on indirect information about the consecration of the altarpiece: in 1878, August Ottmar Essenwein, the director of the German National Museum in Nuremberg, found in the sepulcher of the left altarpiece, along with a sachet with relics, a piece of parchment that appeared to be a consecration note in Latin from 1487. Unfortunately, the note itself cannot be located in any of the Nuremberg archives and the information about this finding is related only by Ernst Mummenhoff in his book on the Nuremberg palace, first published in 1895⁵⁴. According to Mummenhoff, the content of the note was as follows: «In the year 1487, on Laetare Sunday (27 March) the altar was consecrated by the Bishop of Seckau at the request of Frederick III for the following saints: Charlemagne, Helen, King Henry and Cunigunde, and Christopher»⁵⁵. Although the evidence is not contemporary, it is plausible that Frederick III commissioned the altarpiece and, probably, participated in

⁵⁴ I am thankful to Katharina Heinemann who pointed me at this publication.

⁵⁵ Mummenhoff 1926, pp. 56-57. At that point Matthias Scheit was Bishop of Seckau (1481-1512), who before served as a chaplain for Frederick III and was eagerly involved in courtly politics; see Kramml 1985.

its consecration while spending a considerable amount of time in Nuremberg in 1487. The emperor arrived in Nuremberg on 13 March and already two weeks later the altarpiece was consecrated – apparently, the altarpiece had been commissioned immediately upon Frederick's arrival and then promptly manufactured by local masters or the commission could have predated the emperor's arrival in Nuremberg⁵⁶.

The consecration of the altarpiece coincided with the Imperial Diet running in Nuremberg from March till July⁵⁷. Frederick's agenda for the Imperial Diet was to find allies to fight the war against Matthias Corvinus; while this was a dynastic rather than imperial problem, Frederick III had to rely on his authority and promote his imperial charisma in order to achieve his goal. In this, he could also draw on the examples of his holy royal predecessors. It might have been also a political disaster that caused Frederick III to urgently seek out the divine assistance of the holy rulers: these were the times when most of the Austrian territories were captured by Matthias Corvinus and when Frederick had to reside in the inner empire with his court⁵⁸. The date of the consecration also suggests an affinity to Frederick's rule: twenty-five years earlier, on the same day of Laetare Sunday, he was crowned emperor in Rome (19 March 1452), therefore this altarpiece might as well have been commissioned to commemorate the coronation anniversary. The coat of arms as well as the consecration note from the altarpiece clearly suggest agency on the part of Frederick III, who, I suggest, influenced the composition and the meaning of this artwork – in a way similar to the murals of the Aachen glass choir.

Moreover, another side-altarpiece from the Upper Chapel also contained the figures of St Henry and Cunigunde, this time surrounding Virgin Mary. These three carved figures have different dating (the end of the fifteenth and the mid-fourteenth century respectively) and were assembled along with side panels representing St Martin and probably St Wenceslas at the end of the fifteenth century⁵⁹. Therefore, the presence of the imperial saints was a well-established tradition in the Upper Chapel at the time of Frederick's reign, confirmed not only through visual representations on the two altarpieces, but also through the yearly services made in honor of the altars' patron saints. Traditionally, the day of an altar's consecration was also liturgically commemorated, hence

⁵⁶ Although it is hard to evaluate the amount of time needed for manufacturing such an altarpiece, it is not unconceivable that this commission could be handled in a short period of time: Frederick's altarpiece corresponded to the most common format widespread in Nuremberg (with carved wooden figures and painted wings, see Kahsnitz 1986, pp. 62-63) and local sculptors and painters often collaborated on such projects; see Huth 1967 for general observations and Brandl 1986 on Nuremberg craftsmen.

⁵⁷ See Seyboth 2001.

⁵⁸ Szende 2008.

⁵⁹ Heinemann 2013, pp. 82-83.

Frederick's impetus for the consecration of the left side-altar might have been present in the local liturgical memory at least for some time.

These representations and commemorations of royal saints might also have served to confirm the power hierarchy of the chapel's architecture, where the upper level was reserved for the royal services. The entrance portal to the chapel from the ceremonial hall (*Rittersaal*) is embellished with the images of Frederick III and Maximilian I kneeling in front the Christ in Majesty, Mary, and John the Baptist (fig. 4)⁶⁰. The composition, designed at the same time as the imperial altarpiece, highlights the new constellation of the imperial power with two ordained rulers of the same dynasty, sanctioned by the hierarchically represented divine order. Simultaneously, the two kings perform their devotion to the saints of the chapel, situated behind the entrance, also highlighting the privileged function of this sacred space and its connectedness with the imperial house.

This multidimensional composition of the Nuremberg Upper Chapel, involving the rulers kneeling in front of the titular saints surrounded by their royal patrons, is reminiscent of two earlier famous artworks, created at the times of Charles IV of Bohemia (r. 1346-1378) and Richard II of England (r. 1377-1399) respectively. The first of these, known as the Votive Panel of Jan Očko of Vlašim was made for the chapel of the archbishop's palace in Roudnice (now in the National Gallery in Prague). In its upper part, it depicts Charles IV and Wenceslas IV kneeling in front of the Virgin Mary, while their royal saints St Sigismund and St Wenceslas stand behind them; the lower panel depicts the Prague archbishop Jan Očko before four Bohemian saints⁶¹. The second, the so-called Wilton diptych, was most probably commissioned by Richard II himself: Richard's royal patrons John the Baptist, Edward the Confessor, and Edmund the Martyr stand behind the kneeling king and present him to the Virgin⁶². These two paintings are indeed exquisite works of art; hence, unlike the two artworks studied in the present article, their style, iconography, composition, and function have drawn much scholarly attention – the Wilton diptych is described as being «amongst the most studied paintings in the history of European art»⁶³. Since, I believe, all these images have certain similarities in the content and circumstances of their commissioning and display, our contemporary prejudices against style and quality should not hinder the recognition of objects' symbolic and pragmatic functions. These two famous paintings exemplify the public visual expression of royal devotion to certain saints (often of royal descent) promoted by an individual ruler, his family, and the court – much like the Aachen murals and the Nuremberg altarpiece commissioned by Frederick III.

⁶⁰ Ivi, p. 75.

⁶¹ Boehm, Fajt 2005, pp. 92-93.

⁶² Gordon *et al.* 1997.

⁶³ Ivi, p. 19.

In other words, the promotion of royal saints was among the common tools used for royal political communication and representation, often through visual depictions of royal devotion and performative veneration of the chosen saints. Frederick's devotional acts towards the royal saints discussed in this essay fall into the same category of representational and performative tools.

The pronounced citation of St Henry and his spouse in the places directly connected with the imperial ideology invoked these saints almost as participants in the imperial ceremonies and liturgies. This suggests that it was indeed the imperial nature of these saints that made them the objects of Friedrich's piety and which was visualized in the artworks he commissioned. Although Frederick III or his court did not promote the veneration for Henry II or Charlemagne on a large scale, the increased value attached to the royal saints became rather prominent by the end of the century. This intensification of the veneration of Henry and Cunigunde corresponded, first of all, to the overall change in Frederick's politics, whose «return to the inner empire under new circumstances» in the 1470's ended this region's two-decade long absence from the royal itinerary⁶⁴. The inclusion of these territories and their political, religious, and commemorative centers into the royal ceremonies influenced the appearance of the new iconographic programs discussed in this essay. Frederick's representational strategy in the inner empire included promoting his connection to the imperial saints of the region: Henry II, Cunigunde, and Charlemagne with St Helen; this veneration surely reflected Frederick's understanding of his imperial role and his prototypes. The events following 1485, namely the coronation of Maximilian I as a co-ruler and Vienna's seizure by Matthias Corvinus, might also have prompted Frederick to seek legitimation and consolation from his holy predecessors. Moreover, these two visual programs, devoted to Henry II, Cunigunde, Charlemagne, and Helen, are located in places intrinsically connected with the idea of the empire: Aachen and Nuremberg. I argue that the commissions of these representations are connected with Frederick III's attempts to root his authority among local elites after a prolonged absence, as well as his attempts to place himself within the imperial *memoria* and secure the legitimacy of the double-rulership of himself and Maximilian I.

5. *Imperial ambitions in the Heinrichstafel*

The iconography of the imperial “pantheon” discussed above was not the only visualization of the imperial interest in the figure of Henry II. There is another devotional artwork, commissioned presumably by Frederick III,

⁶⁴ Moraw 1993, p. 9. About this change in the politics see also, among other studies: Heinig 2002.

Maximilian I, or their closest retinue, devoted to Henry II, though in a slightly different modality as compared to the Aachen murals and the Nuremberg altarpiece. The altarpiece in question, known as the *Heinrichstafel*, now in Münster's LWL-Museum, brings the hagiography of St Henry to the foreground and narrates his legend as that of an emperor and a militant king. This artwork was made in the last decades of the fifteenth century in Brussels (during the active Habsburg presence in Brabant and Flanders) and is accredited to the hand of the anonymous master of the Barbara-Legend⁶⁵. The altarpiece's subject has only recently been attributed to the legend of St Henry as the four panels were first believed to represent events from the reigns of Friedrich III and Maximilian I. Until 1977, the panels of the altarpiece had been preserved separately in Münster and Nuremberg, which hindered the precise attribution; when assembled together, the narrative cycle was linked to the legends of St Henry II.

The first panel depicts the imperial coronation of Henry II by the pope in 1014; the second panel depicts Henry receiving St Adrian's sword; the third is devoted to the veneration of the cross; and the fourth piece portrays Henry's victorious battle against the Poles, presented in the narrative as pagans, with St George, St Lawrence and St Adrian, also depicted as participants in the battle. Apart from the depicted Holy Cross, which might appear on the altarpiece for purely devotional reasons or in order to correspond to an intended sacral space of its display, the three scenes are based entirely on three consecutive scenes from Henry II's hagiography⁶⁶. Although the provenance of the altarpiece is unknown up until the nineteenth century, the style and the subject betrays that it was probably commissioned for a person or an institution in close relation to the Habsburg royal court, if not by the emperor himself. Based on the stylistic analysis, the proposed dating is around 1490 – it corresponds with the period when Maximilian I spent considerable amount of time in Brabant (c. 1470-1490), where several manuscripts are linked to his patronage⁶⁷. Supporting this hypothesis is the fact that the legends of Henry II and Cunigunde were being spread in Flanders and Brabant in the same period, preserved in two hagiographic collections and an early print from Brussels (from 1484), the latter devoted solely to the royal couple⁶⁸. While the sanctity of Henry II and Cunigunde was unknown to the local religious landscape before the end of the fifteenth century, their legends were presumably introduced into this new milieu

⁶⁵ Schreiner 1985; Hermann *et al.* 2014, pp. 88-89.

⁶⁶ These episodes (apart from the veneration of the cross) in Henry's *vita*: Stumpf 1999, pp. 227-228, 235-240. Klaus Schreiner was the first to claim this attribution, see Schreiner 1985.

⁶⁷ See the article by Kren 2003 and the catalogue in the same publication.

⁶⁸ Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique, MS 219-221, f. 108v-114r; and MS 3391-99, f. 172r-180v. The early print: *Legenda Sanctorum Henrici imperatoris et Kunigundis imperatricis* 1484.

due to the intensified cultural connections between the empire and Flanders and the subsequent presence of the Habsburg court and its devotional practices.

Although the attribution of these panels to the events of Frederick and Maximilian's reigns proved erroneous, it was not entirely unreasonable. The episodes are indeed executed so as to closely correspond to the Habsburg reign – one can interpret the same three panels as depicting the imperial coronation of Friedrich III, the receipt of the sword sent by Pope Alexander VI to Maximilian I in 1494 (which could then be a *terminus post quem*), and the envisaged Turkish crusade of Maximilian I (as led by St George, one of his holy patrons). There is even some representational similitude between the portrait of Henry II in the coronation image and both Friedrich and Maximilian; hence this depiction has often been used in contemporary historiography as an illustration of Frederick's imperial coronation of 1452⁶⁹. It is thus plausible that the intended audience would recognize the double-reading of the visual cycle, in which the deeds and ambitions of Maximilian I or his father are praised in the disguise of Confessor-Emperor Henry II. Maximilian had a practice of acquiring saints' attributes in order to increase his own charisma as, for example, in his portrait executed in likeness of St George, his patron saint⁷⁰. Schreiner has argued that this altarpiece had a similar function, especially taking the political context of the Turkish crusade into account, an event that was extremely relevant for Maximilian in the 1490's⁷¹. The inherited ambiguity of these depictions in the *Heinrichstafel* testify to the actualization of the image of a Christian military leader, favorable to Maximilian I due to his own crusading aspirations, who apparently wished to create a historical continuity with his holy predecessor and confessor. If the commissioning of this altarpiece is attributed to Maximilian I alone, the perception of St Henry as an idealized ruler through the prism of imperial history is indeed one he inherited from Frederick III, who drew actively to the memory of imperial saints.

6. Conclusion

The analysis of the murals from the Aachen glass choir, of the Nuremberg altarpiece, and of the *Heinrichstafel* suggests that Frederick III utilized the images of saints in his political communication as a vehicle for establishing his authority within the empire, consciously choosing different visual “languages” for the hereditary lands and the inner empire. While the Habsburg patron

⁶⁹ E.g. in Kramp 2000, p. 556.

⁷⁰ These are: Daniel Hopfer, *Maximilian as St George* (1519) and Hans Daucher, *Maximilian as St. George*, ca. 1522. For the discussion see Silver 2008, pp. 109-120.

⁷¹ Schreiner 1985, pp. 62-64; on Maximilian's crusading ideas see: Wiesflecker 1971, pp. 345-349.

saints (St Quirinus), local patrons (St Coloman), and local rulers (Leopold III) were promoted within the Austrian lands, the imperial sanctity of Henry II and Cunigunde together with Charlemagne was especially useful for grounding Frederick's image in the German principalities. In this article, I have argued that the visual promotion of the imperial holiness is connected with the reorientation of Frederick's politics towards the German principalities from 1471 onwards. This political change is also reflected in the royal itinerary, religious ceremonies, and the visual language, signified by the inclusion of the imperial saints (such as Henry II and Cunigunde) into Frederick's political communication and visual representations. Subsequently, Maximilian I "inherited" the image of Henry II and, in his turn, employed the saint as a Christian militant leader and a prototype for his own crusading ambitions. As my analysis of the visual cycles from Aachen and Nuremberg has shown, imperial authority was established in two ways. Firstly, through the actualization of the memory of the royal saints as a group (the imperial "pantheon") and the imperial past they embodied in imperial memory. Secondly, through the establishment of symbolic continuity between the saintly rulers and their imperial donor Frederick III, whose agenda is revealed through the visual representation of himself or his symbols and through the contexts in which these artworks were displayed.

Additionally, this article has demonstrated that St Henry and Cunigunde, due to their identity as saintly rulers, were often used to signify imperial power in various legitimation efforts of medieval rulers, especially of the Habsburg dynasty. It is thus important to not only probe the success of medieval royal cults, often put on the scholarly agenda by our post-medieval understandings of their importance, but also recognise attempts of creating cults of holy rulers-as-predecessors that were not taken up as a long-lasting tradition, as might have been the case for Frederick III and St Henry and Cunigunde. Although royal charisma was a part of their cults from the very beginning of their veneration, it failed to sustain a continuous presence and longevity. Therefore, the repetitive appeals to these saintly figures made by some German rulers, foremost Friedrich III, have long been overlooked. However, further investigation of the mechanics of this imperial propagation of St Henry and Cunigunde, along with the continuation of this specific type of royal devotion by Frederick's heirs and children, Maximilian I and Kunigunde of Austria, and the reasons for their cults fading into oblivion could surely provide much insight into the nature of late medieval cults and the cultural, social, and political dynamics conditioning the success – or failure – of their propagation.

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Appendix

Fig. 1. Henry II and Cunigunde in the mural on the northern wall of the choir, Aachen Cathedral, 1486. Photo by the author



Fig. 2. Charlemagne and Helen in the mural on the northern wall of the choir, Aachen Cathedral, 1486. Photo by the author



Fig. 3. Charlemagne, Henry II, Cunigunde, and Helen: statues from the altarpiece in the Upper Chapel of the Nuremberg Palace, 1487. Photo by the author



Fig. 4. Frederick III (on the left) and Maximilian I (on the right) in the mural over the portal towards the Upper Chapel of the Nuremberg Palace, after 1485. Photo by Müller und Sohn (1943/1945), available at SLUB/ Deutsche Fotothek, URL: <<http://www.deutschefotothek.de/documents/obj/70701264>> (accessed on 12.10.2019)

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