

SACRED SPACE, MATTER, AND PERFORMANCE: THE APOCALYPSE CYCLE IN THE CHAPEL OF THE VIRGIN MARY, KARLSTEIN CASTLE

by

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(Under the Direction of Asen Kirin)

ABSTRACT

Of the many palaces built by Charles IV of Luxembourg, Karlstein Castle is the sole structure which bears his name. Infused with the political and religious ideologies of its namesake, Karlstein stands as the physical manifestation of the emperor's desire for legitimacy and eternal salvation. Among the three structural units, a graduation of elevation is created to symbolize the progression from the earthly plane into the heavenly realm. The middle structure, the Lesser Tower, serves as the intermediary location of the complex and houses the Chapel of the Virgin Mary. An apocalypse cycle decorates the walls of the chapel, depicting the events of the eschaton per the Book of Revelation. Moving into the Chapel of the Virgin Mary is a crucial component within the ideological design of Karlstein and is a necessary step towards achieving eternal salvation.

INDEX WORDS: Karlstein, Chapel of the Virgin Mary, Charles IV, Book of Revelation,

Apocalypse Cycle, Relics, Semi-Precious Stones, Medieval Bohemia

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Bachelor of Art, The University of Alabama, 2022

A Thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2024

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Introduction

Morality is a universal reality faced by humans, a condition which leads one to question their eternal fate after death. Answers are sought and created to rationalize this notion of ephemerality and used to soothe feelings of uncertainty. During the Middle Ages, this anxiety would be translated into visual programs, commonly viewed on cathedral facades, or decorating the interior of sacred spaces. Charles IV of Luxembourg (1316-1378) manifested this concern throughout his private residence, Karlstein Castle (Figure. 1).¹ Located thirty kilometers southwest of Prague, Karlstein was built atop a lush, hilly landscape, an ideal topography that acts as a natural fortification for the complex, thereby making it a practical location to house Charles IV's personal relic collection.

Designed as a tripartite structure, the units of Karlstein are configured to follow the natural terrain, where a sense of gradation is created throughout the varying heights of the buildings. As one moves through the complex, they begin in the lowest unit, the Imperial Palace, progress upwards into the Lesser Tower, and complete the act of procession in the Great Tower. Placed in the middle of the structural complex, the Lesser Tower is inherently an intermediary location, providing an opportune space to build the Chapel of the Virgin Mary that gestures to her status as an intercessor. Indeed, Karlstein is a deeply symbolic and theatrical structure, via the necessitation of movement and the themes encoded within the structural space, which are complimented and supported through the visual programs found across each structural unit.

¹ This paper will refer to the German spelling of Karlstein instead of the Czech spelling "Karlštejn." Charles IV was coronated as king of Bohemia in 1346 and as Holy Roman Emperor in 1355.

Decorating the Chapel of the Virgin Mary, the frescoed walls depict a cycle of the apocalypse according to the visions of John in the Book of Revelation (Figures. 2-5). In this paper, I will provide a comprehensive and interpretive reading of the chapel's visual program through investigating the presence of precious objects, the architectural space, the hermeneutical influences, and the performative quality of the images. By examining these various elements, I intend to define the role of the Chapel of the Virgin Mary and underscore its importance within castle complex. This space, and its significance, has not been written about in great detail, and though scholars have discussed the chapel, its relevance becomes diminished when compared to the chapel in the Great Tower, the Chapel of the Holy Cross. Nevertheless, the *Apocalypse Cycle* and the Chapel of the Virgin Mary more generally, is worthy of a focused analysis due to its ability to project the mindset of the emperor and his personal fate, being the only Apocalypse Cycle that he commissioned throughout his vast patronage, alongside its role as a reliquary and how the imagery aids the interpretation of the sacred objects.

History of the Castle Complex

In 1348, Charles IV founded Karlstein just one year after his coronation as King of Bohemia. Benesch von Weitmühl (d.1375), chronicler of Charles IV, briefly mentions the event of Karlstein's foundation along with the other occurrences from that year.² In the same year, a deed issued by Jan Jindrich, Charles IV's brother, gave the nearby village of Žebrákova to the dean of Karlstein in exchange for daily mass at the newly built Church of St. Palmatius, located in the nearby village of Karlstein; to validate this decree, Charles IV sign a document to approve

² Benes Krabice of Weitmil, *Cronica ecclesie Pragensis*, ed. Josef Emler, *Fontes rerum bohemicarum*, iv (Prague, 1884), 516.

this donation, also in that same year.³ Each of these records are recognized as verifying sources for the castles foundation date.

In celebration of his new castle, Charles IV has been cited as stating, “Nostri proprii nominis adiectione pro nostra maiori memoria duximus appellandum, ut uidelicet karlstein a karolo nominetur,,” proclaiming his intention for bestowing his name onto the structure.⁴ Naming a physical location after oneself evokes the longstanding tradition of a ruler infusing their identity with a place as a means to memorialize their legacy as a ruler; an act by Charles IV which calls upon the past while simultaneously anticipating renaissance humanism and the resulting surge of individualism stemming from that period. Identifying himself with the rulers of the past was part of the political strategy employed by Charles IV to establish and project his legitimacy throughout his reign as King of Bohemia and eventually, Holy Roman Emperor.

As King of Bohemia, Charles IV inherited a state recovering from the instability which marked the first quarter of the fourteenth century; namely, the aftermath following the assassination of Wenceslaus III (1289-1306) and the dissolution of the five-century rulership of the Přemyslids. With no heir to ascend to the throne, Bohemia searched for a new monarch and relied upon the husbands of Wenceslaus’ sisters to lead the country. After two failed kingships, John the Blind (1296-1346), husband of Elizabeth of Bohemia and father to Charles IV, was selected to become King of Bohemia in 1310 and ruled until his death in 1346. Although his reign was long and successful, John the Blind’s status as a foreign king was apparent. In an effort to avoid this distinction, Charles IV associated himself with his Přemyslid heritage and placed

³ František Kavka, “The Role and Function of Karlstein Castle as Documented in Records from the Regim of Charles IV, in *Magister Theodoricus, court painter to Emperor Charles IV: the pictorial decoration of the shrines at Karlštejn Castle*, ed. Jiří Fajt (Prague: National Gallery, 1998), 17.

⁴ Quote translated as "with the addition of our own name for our greater memory, we have decided to call it Karlstein, so that it is named after Charles." Cited by Josef Neuwirth, “Karlstein und die Schicksale seiner Gemälde,” in *Mittelalterliche Wandgemälde Und Tafelbilder Der Burg Karlstein in Böhmen* (Prag: J.G. Calve, 1896), 1, and Dobroslava Menclová, *Karlštejn* (Prague: Pražské nakladatelství V. Poláčka, 1965), 20.

himself as the earthly successor to his ancestor, St. Wenceslaus. With this, Charles IV established his status as a spiritual authority and strengthened this tie by amassing an impressive relic collection of over three hundred objects.⁵ In utilizing the religious and political powers of relics, Charles IV elevated the prestige of both his rulership and Prague by intensifying the cultic topography in the city through dispersing his collected relics. Nevertheless, this was not solely a political maneuver, as Charles IV retained a personal relic collection which was kept across the chapels of Karlstein castle.

Relics are stored within the sacred spaces of the Karlstein. Specific to the Chapel of the Virgin Mary, the relics are incased in the window niche located on the western wall and includes the pieces of stones collected from the locations of Christ's tomb, the Virgin's gravestone, Christ's manger, Virgin's death location, the last supper, where the doubter Thomas touched the wounds of Christ, and Christ's ascension.⁶ These relics are identified by the explanatory text which delineates the sepulcher that holds the sacred objects in the space.⁷ Formerly, the Reliquary Cross of Bohemia was housed in the Oratory of Saint Catherine, the space accessed through the door on the western wall, but was moved into the Chapel of the Holy Cross in 1360. Inside the Coronation Cross are relics from Christ's Passion, including pieces of the crown of thorns, the true cross, and the sponge, and are identified and verified through the imagery of the

⁵ David C. Mengel, "Bohemia's Treasury of Saints: Relics and Indulgences in Emperor Charles IV's Prague," in *Les saints et leur culte en Europe centrale au Moyen Âge: (xie-début du xvie siècle)*, ed. Marie-Madeleine de Cevins, Olivier Marin, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), 61.

⁶ Jaromír Homolka, "The Pictorial Decoration of the Palace and Lesser Tower of Karlštejn Castle," in *Magister Theodoricus, court painter to Emperor Charles IV: the pictorial decoration of the shrines at Karlštejn Castle*, ed. Jiří Fajt (Prague: National Gallery, 1998), 84.

⁷ Neuwirth, "Die Wandgemälde der Karlsteiner Marienkirche," 41, Neuwirth provides the Latin inscription which reads: In • hoc sepulcro • domini • hee • reliquie • retinentur • primo • de • lapide • sepulcri • domini • per • angelos • amoto • || Item • de • lapide • sepulcri • marie • posito • Item • de • statua • ad • quam • Christus • fuit • ligatus • Item • de • presepe • domini • Item • de • || loco • ubi • Christus • vidit • irhusalem • et fleuit • Item • de • j • [monte dje quo christus • predicauit • Item alia particula de statua • predicta • || Item de • loco • ubi • christus • fecit • cenam • cum • discipulis • suis • Item • de loco ubi sanctus • thomas • christum • palpauit • || Item de • loco • ubi • beata • virgo • mortua fuit • Item • de • loco • ubi • christus • ad • celum • ascendit • Item • de • loco • ubi • christus • stetit •

Relic Cycle on the southern wall of the Chapel of the Virgin Mary. The eminence of Charles IV's relic collection located in Karlstein led to his request for indulgences to be granted upon one's visiting and venerating the holy objects in the Coronation Cross and was approved by Pope Innocent VI in 1359.⁸ Although it is unknown if Charles IV's initial intention was for Karlstein to take on the role of containing his relic collection, but this became its adopted function throughout its forty year construction period.⁹

Constructing Karlstein was a continuous project throughout the reign of Charles IV, and was finally completed in 1372, just four years prior to his death. Therefore, the oscillating functions of the castle complex can be understood as a part of the process of the building project. This mutability is viewed in the Chapel of the Virgin Mary as well. It is believed by scholars that the space may have originally been a residential chamber prior to the foundation of the chapel in 1357, due to the peculiar layout of the space and the seeming discontinuity in the imagery.¹⁰ Undeniably, Karlstein has had several modifications to its original design and function over the course of its existence, but these changes have ensured the castle's survival in the centuries after the death of Charles IV.

By the late sixteenth century, Karlstein was in a dilapidated state. Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II (1552-1612) renovated the space to prevent it from falling into a state of complete desolation. Over the course of the refurbishing, several alterations such as additional staircases were added to the structure which diverge from the logical, hierarchical flow initially found across the complex.¹¹ Within the Chapel of the Virgin Mary, the window on the south wall was

⁸ Paul Crossley, "The politics of presentation: the architecture of Charles IV of Bohemia," in *Courts and Regions in Medieval Europe*, ed. S. Rees Johns, R. Marks, and A. J. Minnis (New York: Woodbridge, 2000), 140.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 142.

¹⁰ Jaromír Homolka, "The Pictorial Decoration of the Palace and Lesser Tower of Karlštejn Castle," in *Magister Theodoricus, court painter to Emperor Charles IV: the pictorial decoration of the shrines at Karlštejn Castle*, ed. Jiří Fajt (Prague: National Gallery, 1998), 97-99.

¹¹ Menclová, *Karlštejn* (Prague: Pražské nakladatelství V. Poláčka, 1965), 40.

affixed into the space, alongside the demolishing of the northern wall and the whitewashing of the imagery in 1596.¹² Rudolf II's intentions were likely not to efface the imagery but to preserve and lighten them after years of staining caused by candle smoke, but the damage from this process has resulted in the loss of the complete program and rendered parts of the existing imagery illegible.

Statement of the Literature

Karlstein has been a topic of interest throughout scholarly discussion for over a century. Many of these studies primarily concentrate on the ideological function of the castle complex and the iconographic program of the Chapel of the Holy Cross. Analyses of the Chapel of the Virgin Mary are commonly included amongst these sources; however, these texts typically concern the *Relic Cycle* instead of the *Apocalypse Cycle*. Josef Neuwirth began the art historical discourse surrounding Karlstein in his 1896 book, *Mittelalterliche Wandgemälde und Tafelbilder der Burg Karlstein in Böhmen*, or “Medieval Mural Paintings and Panel Paintings of Karlstein Castle in Bohemia.”¹³ Within Neuwirth's book, the different phases of the castle complex are established, including the periods of construction, renovations, and restoration efforts. In his focused chapter on the Chapel of the Virgin Mary, Neuwirth distinguishes the various scenes of the *Relic* and *Apocalypse Cycles* and transcribes the text that appears on the wall surfaces.¹⁴ Furthermore, Neuwirth indicates that the *Apocalypse Cycle* was rediscovered merely thirty-nine years prior to the publication of his book, making his source of the first to acknowledge the presence of the cycle within the modern era. Neuwirth's discussion is positivistic and

¹² Josef Neuwirth, “Die Wandgemälde der Karlsteiner Marienkirche,” in *Mittelalterliche Wandgemälde Und Tafelbilder Der Burg Karlstein in Böhmen* (Prag: J.G. Calve, 1896), 22.

¹³ Josef Neuwirth, *Mittelalterliche Wandgemälde Und Tafelbilder Der Burg Karlstein in Böhmen* (Prag: J.G. Calve, 1896).

¹⁴ Josef Neuwirth, “Die Wandgemälde der Karlsteiner Marienkirche,” in *Mittelalterliche Wandgemälde Und Tafelbilder Der Burg Karlstein in Böhmen* (Prag: J.G. Calve, 1896), 21-42.

historiographic in nature and remains a foundational source for the subsequent authors who engage with the chapel and Karlstein at large.

Dobroslava Menclová applies the knowledge from Neuwirth's account and uses it to interpret Karlstein as the projection of Charles IV's political ideology in her 1957 article, "Karlštejn a jeho ideový obsah," translated as "Karlstein and its Ideological Content."¹⁵ Menclová explains that Karlstein exemplifies Charles IV's desire to project his status of being a pious and individualistic ruler, and one who is worthy of dedicating his memory to a structure. As such, Menclová describes the political significance of the Passion relics and their accompanying imagery in the Chapel of the Virgin Mary and how they helped facilitate this ideological function of Karlstein. Additionally, Menclová notes that the space of the Chapel of the Virgin Mary was likely a residential chamber initially which was later converted into a chapel space, hence the difference of imagery viewed between the *Relic Cycle* and the *Apocalypse Cycle*. Menclová follows up her article with her 1965 book, *Karlštejn*, where she analyzes the complex at greater length, but does not include an extended discussion of the *Apocalypse Cycle*.¹⁶ Nonetheless, Menclová's reading of Karlstein remains a fundamental source and has shaped later dialogues concerning the role of the castle.

Several decades later, František Fišer writes on the Karlstein chapels in his 1996 book, *Karlštejn: vzájemné vztahy tří karlštejnských kaplí*, or in English, "Karlstein: Mutual Relations Among the Three Karlstein Chapels."¹⁷ Fišer introduces and connects the hermeneutical influences of the *Apocalypse Cycle*, identifying Alexander of Minortia and Nicholas of Lyra as the key theologians whose commentaries on the Book of Revelation shaped the visual elements

¹⁵ Dobroslava Menclová, "Karlštejn a jeho ideový obsah," *Umeni/Art V* (1957): 277-300.

¹⁶ Dobroslava Menclová, *Karlštejn* (Prague: Pražské nakladatelství V. Poláčka, 1965).

¹⁷ František Fišer, *Karlštejn: vzájemné vztahy tří karlštejnských kaplí* (Kostelní Vydří, Czechia: Karmelitánské nakl., 1996).

of the cycle. Fišer designates the particular scenes which connect to the commentaries of the previously mentioned theologians; however, his analysis does not account for the greater themes found throughout these hermeneutical texts and their relationship to the *Apocalypse Cycle*.¹⁸ Following Fišer's book, an edited volume, *Magister Theodoricus, Court Painter to Emperor Charles IV: the Pictorial decoration of the Shrines at Karlštejn Castle*, was published by the National Gallery Prague in 1998.¹⁹ Jaromír Homolka writes the chapter, "The Pictorial Decoration of the Palace and Lesser Tower of Karlštejn Castle," which provides a historiographic description of the various components that comprise the Chapel of the Virgin Mary's space and includes a transcription of the chapel's foundational charter.²⁰ Homolka's translated chapter continues to be the key source in English that examines the Chapel of the Virgin Mary at length. Paul Crossley too contributes to the English scholarship of Karlstein, and more particularly the *Apocalypse Cycle*, in his chapter "The politics of presentation: the architecture of Charles IV of Bohemia" from *Courts and Regions in Medieval Europe*, published in 2000.²¹ Crossley provides a condensed and concise examination of the chapel and the significance of its program, although this is not the main focus of the chapter as several of Charles IV's commissions are analyzed.

More recent publications have discussed the Chapel of the Virgin Mary in relation to the *Relic Cycle* and the metaphorical themes of the castle at large. Jan Royt argues the dating of the

¹⁸ Specifically discussed in the chapters: "Apokalypsa" pg. 160-183 and "Apokalyptickálitanie Všetich Svatých" pg. 184-197

¹⁹ Jiří Fajt, ed., *Magister Theodoricus, court painter to Emperor Charles IV: the pictorial decoration of the shrines at Karlštejn Castle*, (Prague: National Gallery, 1998).

²⁰ Jaromír Homolka, "The Pictorial Decoration of the Palace and Lesser Tower of Karlštejn Castle," in *Magister Theodoricus, court painter to Emperor Charles IV: the pictorial decoration of the shrines at Karlštejn Castle* (Prague: National Gallery, 1998), 46-105.

²¹ Paul Crossley, "The politics of presentation: the architecture of Charles IV of Bohemia," in *Courts and Regions in Medieval Europe*, ed. S. Rees Johns, R. Marks, and A. J. Minnis (New York: Woodbridge, 2000), 99-172. Pages 140-158 concern the Chapel of the Virgin Mary.

Relic Cycle in his chapter “The Dating and Iconography of the So-Called Relics Scenes in the Chapel of Our Lady at Karlštejn Castle,” published in the 2003 book, *Court Chapels of the High and Late Middle Ages and Their Artistic Decoration*.²² Royt contends that the *Relic Cycle* was a part of a secular space and would have been completed around 1357, thus establishing the timeline of the Apocalypse Cycle to be around 1363-1365. On a broader scale, Milada Studničková examines the various metaphorical themes of Karlstein in her chapter, “Karlstein as a Theological Metaphor,” from the 2009 edited volume, *Prague and Bohemia: Medieval Art Architecture and Cultural Exchange in Central Europe*.²³ Studničková identifies the Mariological themes encoded within the Chapel of the Virgin Mary and interprets this quality as functioning within the greater design of the castle complex. This chapter stands as the most recent source that interprets the Chapel of the Virgin Mary beyond a basic identification of the imagery and themes found across the space. As of 2024, the latest source that engages with contents of the Chapel of the Virgin Mary is a 2023 article, “Blood in Stone and the Second Coming: On the Meaning of the Wenceslas Chapel in St. Vitus’s Cathedral in Prague and the Karlstein Chapels,” written by Petr Uličný.²⁴ Uličný briefly describes the *Apocalypse Cycle* and the symbolism of the *crux gemmata* in the window niche but does not expand upon existing ideas concerning the imagery in this article.

Previous sources concerning Karlstein has established the ideological and theological significance of the castle complex more broadly. These existing texts are invaluable and provide a significant foundation for an interpretation concerning the space to be made. In spite of this,

²² Jan Royt, “The Dating and Iconography of the So-Called Relics Scenes in the Chapel of Our Lady at Karlštejn Castle,” in *Court Chapels of the High and Late Middle Ages and Their Artistic Decoration*, ed. Jiří Fajt (Prague: National Gallery of Prague, 2003), 64-67.

²³ Milada Studničková, “Karlstein as a Theological Metaphor,” in *Prague and Bohemia : Medieval Art Architecture and Cultural Exchange in Central Europe*, ed. Zoë Opačić (Leeds: Maney, 2009), 168-182.

²⁴ Petr Uličný, “Blood in Stone and the Second Coming: On the Meaning of the Wenceslas Chapel in St. Vitus’s Cathedral in Prague and the Karlstein Chapels,” *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 86, 2023: 145-194.

concentrated analyses relating to the *Apocalypse Cycle* remain sparse. This absence in the literature is commonly associated with the lack of significance of the chapel, whether due to its size or placement within the castle complex. Nevertheless, the abundance of symbolism encoded within the chapel's space participates with the greater ideological function of the castle complex and allows for an extended interpretive analysis to be made. Over the course of this text, I intend to elucidate how the Chapel of the Virgin Mary fulfils a component of the ideological function of Karlstein and demonstrate its significance within the larger program of the castle complex.

Visual Analysis

Karlstein is designed for one to experience a journey of upward progression when moving amongst the structural units. One must begin in the Imperial Palace and encounter a series of stairways to access the higher structures, the Lesser and Great towers. This movement is both theatrical and symbolic, as one starts from the earthly plane, into an intermediary space, and finalizes their tour in the heavenly realm. When exiting the Imperial Palace, one enters into first floor of the Lesser Tower from its northern end. On the east side of the first floor, the secondary staircase is found and leads into the Chapel of the Virgin Mary (Figure. 6).

Upon entering the Chapel of the Virgin Mary, the viewer immediately encounters the imagery that decorates the west wall. Each wall in the chapel is delineated by three or four registers: an upper register inclusive of votive imagery, the middle register(s) containing the narrative of the apocalypse, and a fictitious architectural landscape in the lowest section. Read from left to right, the narrative that occupies middle register of the west wall begins with a scene of the Woman standing on the moon as she cradles her infant under a canopy (Rev. 12:1) and ends with the Woman fleeing from the Dragon as the beast expels a flood from its mouth (Figures. 7-8) (Rev. 12:14-16). Traditionally, the Woman of the apocalypse has been interpreted

as an allegorical representation of the Virgin and as a symbol of the church.²⁵ Her explicit predominance within this cycle instills her importance and is visually articulated through the immediacy of her imagery and emphasized through the size of these narrative scenes when compared to the remainder of the cycle.

Within the first scene, the Madonna and Child type is referenced, as the infant grasping for his mother and her directs her gaze towards her child, similar to Duccio's panel that bears the same name as this visual type (Figure. 9). Each of the two figures possess a notable sense of individuality by the manner their facial features are rendered; this, alongside the delineation of the scene, underscores their significance within the scene and the overall program. Scholars have theorized that the facial characteristics of the Woman emulate those of Anna von Schweidnitz, Charles IV's third wife, due to the similarities found between her depiction in the *Apocalypse Cycle* and her appearances in other frescos as well as illuminated manuscripts (Figures. 10-11).²⁶ Including Anna von Schweidnitz's countenance may indicate a sense of grief and devotion from Charles IV following her death from childbirth one year before the *Apocalypse Cycle* began, and serves as an attempt to both honor her memory and ensure her salvation.²⁷ In addition, the depiction of the child, a conduit of Christ, may be a reference to Charles IV's firstborn son and heir, Wenceslaus IV, who was born to the king and Anna von Schweidnitz prior to the cycle's commission.

A rocky, seemingly treacherous terrain occupies the majority of the background of the second scene on the west wall. Bestowed with a set of wings, the Woman flies away from the

²⁵ Sergi Doménech García "The Woman and the Dragon—The Formation of the Image of the *Mulier Amicta Sole* in the Revelation of St. John in Western Medieval Art" *Religions* 14, no. 1: 18 (2023): 3.

²⁶ Barbara Brauer, "The Prague Hours and Bohemian Manuscript Painting of the Late 14th Century," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 52. Bd., H. 4 (1989), 520. Examples include the frescoed donor portrait in the oratory of St. Catherine and the *Prague Hours* manuscript.

²⁷ Anna von Schweidnitz died during the birth of their third child, who was stillborn.

dragon and seeks shelter. An encircled cross is rendered in the composition beneath the right side of the Woman, seemingly acting as an amulet that guides her into safety. This seal is also viewed on the left side of the dragon right before its tail, again possibly acting as a protective emblem within the narrative sequence. Connected to the left side of the west wall, the window niche reiterates this theme of protection through its imagery and the precious objects that comprise the space of the architectural unit.

Within the window niche, scenes from the lives of Christ and the Virgin decorate the walls, including Christ's Resurrection and the Harrowing of Hell on the left side, the death and Coronation of the Virgin in the vault, and the Pentecost on the right side (Figure. 12).²⁸ In scene of Christ's Resurrection, the savior emerges from a tomb ornamented with semi-precious stones and outlined with gold and is the space that shelters the relics from the locations of Christ and the Virgin's lives are situated in the wall (Figure. 13). Beneath the reliquary is a *crux gemmata* (Figure. 14), a cross adorned with seventeen red and purple semi-precious stones and is also outlined in gold. From the left side, the niche is connected to the east side of the west wall, the space that includes the entrance to the Oratory of St. Catherine.

Over the doorway to the Oratory of St. Catherine is the depiction of a choir of angels that are flanked by two figures robed in red garments, likely being the donor portraits of Charles IV and Anna von Schweidnitz. This section of the west wall has been understood as the imagery which signifies the contents of the oratory rather than participating with the sequence of events from the *Apocalypse Cycle* (Figure. 15); although these portraits correspond with the oratory, they also follow along with the theme of devotional imagery formerly viewed across the upper

²⁸ Crossley, "The politics of presentation: the architecture of Charles IV of Bohemia," 149. Due to the various amounts of damages within the chapel's space, many of the paintings in the niche are illegible. Additionally, there are limited, if any, images of the right side and the vault.

register on the walls. When looking towards the upper register of the west wall, one would see the votive imagery that contained the images of saints and the family members of Charles IV. Though these images are currently illegible, the figures have been identified from the surviving text on the walls and include the names of Anna von Schweidnitz, listed as Anna Regina, St. Ludmila, St. James, St. Andrew, St. Simon and Judas, St. John the Evangelist.²⁹

Turning to the left, the viewer faces the south wall where the *Relic Cycle* and the beginning of the *Apocalypse Cycle* is rendered. On the east side of the south wall, the imagery of the *Relic Cycle* presents Charles IV's accrual of the Passion relics which appears on a projected wall (Figure. 16). Due to the abrupt shift in thematic narrative, the *Relic Cycle* has been speculated to have been a decorative feature of a residential room or a hallway, and was likely preserved to serve as a historical documentation of the events of Charles IV's relic collecting.³⁰ In the first scene of the *Relic Cycle*, Charles V of France hands Charles IV pieces of the crown of thorns and the true cross.³¹ The second scene features a nobleman passing Charles IV a piece of the sponge; however, their identity also remains unknown, and have been speculated to be Louis I of Hungary, Pierre de Lusignan, or Ludovico Gonzaga.³² Charles IV

²⁹ Chorus prophetarum Anna regi[na Ludmi]la S. Jacobus S. Petrus S. Andreas S. Simon et Judas S Johannes evangelist Anna impera[trix]

³⁰ Ibid, 292. Menclová is the first scholar to propose that the Chapel of the Virgin Mary was formerly a part of the residential space and was later transformed into a chapel. In its original context, the Relic Cycle likely had a similar function as the Luxembourg Genealogy cycle, which was located in the hallway space in the Imperial Palace,

³¹ Jan Royt, "The Dating and Iconography of the So-Called Relics Scenes in the Chapel of Our Lady at Karlštejn Castle," in *Court Chapels of the High and Late Middle Ages and Their Artistic Decoration*, ed. Jiří Fajt (Prague: National Gallery of Prague, 2003), 64. The identity of this monarch is debated throughout scholarship, with attributions varying between John II (r. 1350-1364) or his son, Charles V (r. 1364-1380). Royt clarifies in this chapter both the dating of the Relic Cycle (1357) and the identification of the French monarch who is depicted. Namely, the gifting of the relics was prior to Charles V's coronation as king, a point in which would make his depiction in the royal crown both inappropriate and inaccurate and is confirmed by other depictions of him crownless prior to 1364 in manuscripts.

³² Ibid; Petr Uličný, "Blood in Stone and the Second Coming: On the Meaning of the Wenceslas Chapel in St. Vitus's Cathedral in Prague and the Karlstein Chapels," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 86, 2023, 155. It is difficult to ascertain who exactly gave the relic of the Holy Sponge to Charles IV, as many different theories have been produced. Most recently, Uličný has stated that the figure is possibly Byzantine Emperor John V Palaiologos.

places his gifts into the golden Coronation Cross of Bohemia in the final scene. Similar to the west wall, votive imagery was previously found above the *Relic Cycle* and included the image of Charles IV and his first wife, Blanche of Valois, and the holy trinity.³³ Similar to the west wall, these figures are known from the remaining text.

On the left side of the projected wall is text from the Book of Revelation indicated the former altar space (Figure. 17) (Rev. 8:3-4); there is, however, no accompanying imagery with this text, as the first scenes of the *Apocalypse Cycle* begin on the west side of the south wall. Moving one's sightline to the left, one views the west side of the south wall where the initial scenes of the *Apocalypse Cycle* are depicted. Commencing the apocalyptic imagery is the scene of the Four Horsemen of the apocalypse, with only three of the figures remaining visible (Figure. 18) (Rev. 6:2-8). Once more, an encircled cross is rendered, and appears over the horsemen who are engaged in an act of movement, progressing towards their destruction of humanity. When turning left again, the viewer encounters the east wall, where the narrative sequence continues and depicts the disastrous events of the eschaton.

Presented from left to right, the sequence of events follows the traditional form of how western script is read. In the upper middle register of the left side, an angel blowing his trumpet commences the opening of the sixth seal in the first scene (Rev. 9:13) (Figure. 19). Below the winged figure, an additional angel releases the four angels of the Euphrates to kill one third of mankind (Rev. 9:14-15). The second scene is conjoined with the first and shows a rider on a horse with a lion's jaws and snake tails who strides towards the humans to terrorize them in the final days of the world (Rev. 9:16-17). Separated by a strip of text that explains the second scene, the third scene jumps to chapter ten verse one, where John is depicted kneeling and consuming

³³ karolus • Hilus • imperator | Bianca • Regina | sajuncta • trinitas

the scroll (Figure. 20). Next to this image is the fourth scene that showing John measuring the temple (Rev. 11:1). Elijah and Enoch are presented as the witnesses who stand before the crowd in scene five (Figure. 21) (Rev. 11:3). Subsequently, scene six displays the beast rising from the abyss and the deceased bodies of Elijah and Enoch appear in scene seven (Figure. 22) (Rev. 11:7-8). The bodies of Elijah and Enoch are given the spirit of life in scene eight (Figure. 23) (Rev. 11:11) and is joined with scene nine where the onset of the earthquake is depicted (Rev. 11:13).

Following the progression of the events from the eleventh chapter, the lower middle section of the eastern wall also begins with an angel blowing their trumpet to open the seventh and final seal in the first scene (Figure. 24) (Rev. 11:15). Christ emerges out of the golden ark in the second scene (Rev. 11:19) (Figure. 25) and is positioned under a canopy. Thunder, lightning, and destruction dominate the imagery of the third scene (Rev. 11:19), with the aftermath of the earthquake conveyed through the crumbling of the building (Figure. 26). Scene four transitions into the twelfth chapter where the Woman of the apocalypse is displayed laying down as the seven-headed Dragon looms over her body (Figure. 27) (Rev. 12:1). Again, an encircled cross is rendered over the Woman, protecting her from the imposing serpentine. The narrative jumps to the latter verses of the twelfth chapter in scenes five and six where Michael and his angels fight the Dragon and the spirits of hell (Rev. 12:8-9) amongst the rejection of the brothers in hell (Figure. 28) (Rev. 12:10-12). Although the narrative seemingly skips around, the twelfth chapter is completed on the east side of the west wall.

Rotating one final time to the viewers left, one faces the north wall. In its present state, the north wall is bare, only maintaining the architectural imagery painted during the nineteenth century renovation and a small wooden altar space. Due to the amount of damage the frescos

suffered, parts of the chapel's program are left up for debate and presumption, including the north wall. Scholarship has surmised that the north wall would have featured imagery from the thirteenth chapter of the Book of Revelation, and though this theory is plausible, it remains unclear what the original narrative would have contained. Nevertheless, the entrance into the sacristy and the eventual access into the great tower granted from the north wall allows a sense of plausibility to this theory, ending the apocalyptic sequence and transferring one into a new space.

Precious Object and Architectural Space

Height became a matter of importance within medieval architectural development. Cities pushed their building projects, mainly sacred structures, to new extremes to convey their prestige and forge their proximity to God. This ideology was translated into palatial structures such as Karlstein, where one moves from the temporal plane into the heavenly sphere; echoing the three divisions of time: past, present, and future.³⁴ Amongst each structure, the visual programs decorating the space instills this notion of the varying periods of time.

Representing the mortal plane and the historical past, the Imperial Palace establishes the mortal predecessors of Charles IV. Previously decorating the great hall, the Luxembourg Genealogy presented the mythologized ancestry of Charles IV, including biblical patriarchs, ancient Greco-Roman heroes and gods, Germanic kings, and culminated with the members of the Luxembourg dynasty (Figure. 29).³⁵ Known currently from a sixteenth century manuscript which illustrated the various figures featured in the cycle, the Luxembourg Genealogy cycle was damaged due to the plaster on the wall chipping away as soon as the fifteenth century.

³⁴ Asen Kirin, "Contemplating the Vistas of Piety at the Rila Monastery Pyrgos," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 59 (2005): 98.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 51.

Nevertheless, this cycle established the eminence, albeit mostly fictitious, of Charles IV's predecessors and visually instilled his legitimacy as the rightful heir to these past monarchs. As one travels upward into the Lesser Tower, they are greeted with the images of the eschaton in the Chapel of the Virgin Mary, the location in which serves as the mediator location between the mortality and divine realms, the symbolization of the present time.

Progressing upwards into the Chapel of the Virgin Mary, the flow of movement within the space directs one to view and become immersed with the entire cycle. Standing as the representation of present time, the *Apocalypse Cycle* depicts the ending of the world, a moment in which one must face their final judgment. After intaking the contents of the entire cycle, the viewer will return back to the west wall. A window set in west wall niche illuminates the entire space in its original design, both giving life to the imagery and inviting the viewer to sit on the stone benches set in this architectural unit.³⁶ Sitting in the niche, the viewer is prompted to consider the imagery which shelters them and contemplate their contents in relation to the remainder of the program that they face, guiding one to reflect upon their eternal fate; however, this would not have been such a daunting, threatening moment because of the protective qualities emanated from the collocated relics and semiprecious stones that are set within the niche.

Relics inherently provide a sense of spiritual protection for the devotee and define the space that they occupy. Placed within an arched shape niche, the viewer's attention is drawn to this structure, one that differs from the remainder of the chapel space. In this arrangement, the relics are given a sense of corporality when placed in an arched form, as the structural form signals their presence.³⁷ Moreover, the materiality of the relics themselves further support this

³⁶ Neuwirth, "Die Wandgemälde der Karlsteiner Marienkirche," 21.

³⁷ Ann Marie Yasin, "Sacred Installations: The Material Condition of Relic Collections in Late Antique Churches," in *Saints and Sacred Matter: The Cult of Relics in Byzantium and Beyond*, eds. Cynthia J. Hahn and Holger A. Klein (Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2015), 143.

notion. Stones collected from the sites of Christ and the Virgin's lives are able to physically connects a person to the devotional location from which the relic is obtained from, in turn, breaking the boundaries of time past and present.³⁸ Though the ability to tactility engage with these relics' cannot be attained by this arrangement, the metaphysical qualities of the stones become imbued within the space and are given a new form of visibility through the defining text and the interpretive quality of the surrounding narrative imagery; thus enabling viewers to access the divine through this sense of semiotic visibility.³⁹ In addition, the semi-precious stones that are set within the niche also indicate their existence and add a supplementary element of protection to the space.

The symbolic value of semi-precious stones is multifaceted. In the beginning stages of pilgrimages, semi-precious stones became embroiled with the same significance held by relics by possessing the same capacity to summon the presence of a Christian events or figure.⁴⁰ Adorning sacred spaces with semi-precious stones during the Middle Ages in Europe would be understood as a device to evoke the heavenly realm and function as a protective emblem through the mystical qualities that were attributed to them.⁴¹ The metaphysical qualities of semi-precious stones also bolstered the sacred qualities of relics. When luxuriously framed, the relics enclosed are seemingly given an increased sense of spirituality through the "performativity of ostentation," as described by Jaś Elsner, a theatrical element viewed in the scene of Christ's Resurrection, the scene which delineates the sepulcher, and is reiterated by the *crux gemmata*.⁴²

³⁸ Holger A. Klein, "Materiality and the Sacred: Byzantine Reliquaries and the Rhetoric of Enshrinement," in *Saints and Sacred Matter: The Cult of Relics in Byzantium and Beyond*, eds. Cynthia J. Hahn and Holger A. Klein (Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2015), 231.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴⁰ Barry Fabio, "Relics, Tabernacles, Throne Rooms," in *Painting in Stone: Architecture and the Poetics of Marble from Antiquity to the Enlightenment*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 210.

⁴¹ Ciulisová, "The Power of Marvelous Objects: Charles IV of Luxembourg, Charles V of Valois and Their Gemstones," 9.

⁴² Elsner, "Relic, Icon, Architecture," 17.

Referencing the cross erected by Theodosius II on Mount Golgotha, the *crux gemmata* engages with the history of imperial Christian rulers and the thematic narrative across the chapel space.⁴³ Surrounding the cross are delicate tendrils sprouting around the space of the *crux gemmata*. This configuration symbolizes the tree of life, the life-giving powers of the cross, and through the inscription of the relics, the redemption of mankind from Christ's sacrifice.⁴⁴ Additionally, the *crux gemmata* has also been inferred to be a representation of Christ's grave in Jerusalem and as a visual element which corresponds to the trinity imagery that was formerly viewed above the south wall.⁴⁵ When placed into a sacred structure, these objects can participate and support with the themes communicated through the architecture and its accompanying imagery.

From its namesake, the Chapel of the Virgin Mary evokes the intercessory and protective powers of the Virgin, and subsequently functions within the architectural space. Namely, the Chapel of the Virgin Mary and its transitional function is an allegory for the womb of the Virgin, a space where one is incubated prior to their progression into the heavenly realm.⁴⁶ This assigned purpose of the space underscores the mortality of humans they face in the present period, thus showcasing the start and ending of life, and in turn, the beginning and ending of church history. Charles IV held a lifelong devotion to the cult of the Virgin, a sect in which he both fostered and followed throughout his lifetime, stemming his visionary experience on the feast day of the Assumption of the Virgin in 1333.⁴⁷ Therefore, naming the chapel after the Virgin not

⁴³ Robin M. Jensen, "Adoratio Crucis: Monumental Gemmed Crosses and Feasts of the Cross," in *The Cross: History, Art, and Controversy*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2017), 101.

⁴⁴ Homolka, "The Pictorial Decoration of the Palace and Lesser Tower of Karlštejn Castle," 84; Petr Uličný, "Blood in Stone and the Second Coming: On the Meaning of the Wenceslas Chapel in St. Vitus's Cathedral in Prague and the Karlstein Chapels," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 86, 2023, 156.

⁴⁵ Vlasta Dvořáková, *Gothic Mural Painting in Bohemia and Moravia 1300-1378*, (London: Oxford University Press), 58.

⁴⁶ Milada Studničková, "Karlstein as a Theological Metaphor," in *Prague and Bohemia: Medieval Art Architecture and Cultural Exchange in Central Europe*. (Leeds: Maney, 2009), 173.

⁴⁷ Charles IV, *Karoli IV Imperatoris Romanorum Vita Ab Eo Ipso Conscripta; et, Hystoria Nova de Sancto Wenceslao Martyre*, 61-65.

only showcases his reverence for the mother of Christ, but also instills the importance of the space within the architectural program, as the Virgin acts as the figure who aids one's progression to the heavenly realm through their passage in Chapel of the Virgin Mary.

Stepping into the Oratory of St. Catherine (Figure. 30), one crosses the threshold into the heavenly realm which is invoked through the semiprecious stones adorning the walls and the light from window that causes the embedded stones to shine. Portraits of Charles IV and Anna von Schweidnitz decorate the south wall, functioning as a device to ensure the salvation of the emperor and his late wife in his private space of contemplation. However, the apex of the heavenly sphere and the castle complex as a whole is viewed in the Chapel of the Holy Cross. To access the space, one must travel through the drawbridge located in sacristy of the Lesser Tower and climb the staircase to reach the highest point of the castle complex. Decorating the walls of the staircase is *the St. Wenceslaus cycle* (Figure. 31), the genealogical cycle of Charles IV's Přemyslid ancestry, a sanctified lineage which contains two saints, Ludmila and Wenceslaus. The act of climbing up the stairs draws upon the Byzantine type of the *The Ladder of Divine*, where upon reaching the final destination, one is granted access into the heavenly realm as one enters into its earthly manifestation, the Chapel of the Holy Cross.⁴⁸

The Chapel of the Holy Cross is the earthly representation of Heavenly Jerusalem and the time of the future (Figure. 32). Byzantine styled paintings of saints with their relics adorn the walls of the chapel space, facilitating the holy presence in the chapel, which is underscored through the golden arched ceilings. The spatial position of the Great Tower permits one to be in closer proximity to God through the elevation of the structure, and is the most fortified location of the entire complex, making it the ideal location to hold Charles IV's personal relic

⁴⁸ Studničková, "Karlstein as a Theological Metaphor," 175.

collection.⁴⁹ This location, upon Christ's second coming, symbolizes where he will descend from heaven, in this case from the Chapel of the Holy Cross, and back to earth to play his role in the final judgment of the universe.⁵⁰

This act of procession amongst the various structures of Karlstein echoes the ceremonial rituals which took place across royal buildings on the morning of a king's coronation and the transition between private and public spaces.⁵¹ Karlstein, too, emulates the design of Benedictine apartments in Avignon that incorporated spaces for public use and the hierarchical design in which lead towards the spaces to be utilized for moments of solitude, a period of time where one can participate in the act of inward reflection in a sacred space.⁵² At its core, Karlstein's architectural design serves an ideological purpose for the emperor, and critically engages with contemporaneous architectural design patterns as well as theological writings to elucidate the piety of Charles IV.

Hermeneutical Interpretation

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the Franciscans were the primary group writing commentaries pertaining to the Book of Revelation. This concentration of writers is a result of their belief that St. Francis obtained an apocalyptic role due to his message of poverty, aligning his preaching with the messages from the Gospel, as well as the stigmata he received; thereby marking him a modern conduit of Christ, a figure who is conscious of the events during the ending of time.⁵³ Alexander of Minortia, a thirteenth-century German theologian, provided the

⁴⁹ Crossley, "The politics of presentation: the architecture of Charles IV of Bohemia," 154.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 177.

⁵¹ Richard Němec, "Solitude or Performance? The Papal and Royal-Imperial Residences of Benedict XII and Charles IV in Avignon, Prague and Karlštejn," *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 170 (January 1, 2017): 140.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Nicholas of Lyra and Philip D. Krey, "Acknowledgments," in *Nicholas of Lyra's Apocalypse Commentary*. (Kalamazoo, Mich: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997) 1-4.

ideological framework for the primary commentaries from the fourteenth century in the *Expositio in Apocalipsim* (1249).⁵⁴ Alexander read the Book of Revelation as a source of Christianity historiography and used this theoretical lens to interpret the history of salvation in the periods of the past, present, and future.⁵⁵ Five decades later, Peter Olivi (1248-1298) wrote his commentary, a source in which both questions the ideas of Franciscan obedience and advocated for the strict following of the vow of poverty within his apocalyptic timeline.⁵⁶ Olivi's writings and his posthumous followers were deemed as heretical which led to the renouncement and burning of his writings.⁵⁷ Following the fallout from Olivi's controversial writings, there was a reversion back to the tenets of Alexander of Minortia's commentary in the fourteenth century, beginning with Petrus Aurioli.

Petrus Aurioli (1280-1322) wrote his commentary on the Book of Revelation sometime between 1319-1320. Though Olivi and his writings were not officially condemned by the church until 1326 by John XXII, Petrus was mentored by John and became aware of the increasingly negative responses in which Olivi's text was receiving; therefore, his commentary of the Book of Revelation explicitly strays from the ideas of Olivi and returns to the interpretation of biblical text set forth by Alexander Minorita.⁵⁸ Petrus' writings convey that the progression of the Book of Revelation is a narrative of Christian history, from its advent, persecution, and the torment

⁵⁴ Felicitas Schmieder, "Inscribing the Orient into a historiography of the past, present, and future of Latin Europe: Alexander Minorita's *Expositio in Apocalipsim*," in *Collection de l'Ecole française de Rome*. (volume title: *Les récits historiques entre Orient et Occident (XIe-XVe siècle)*) (Rome: École française de Rome, 2019), 253.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 254.

⁵⁶ Nicholas of Lyra and Krey, "Acknowledgments," 5-6. Olivi included an overlapping period during the fifth and sixth periods of church history which assigned a negative role to the papacy as persecuting those, the group dubbed the "Spirituals," who observed St. Francis' teachings most strictly. Additionally, Olivi believed the sixth period surpassed all others, an idea which also enticed controversy amongst theologians.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 186.

⁵⁸ David Burr, "Petrus Aurioli," in *The Book of Revelation*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2019), 207

from the anti-Christ.⁵⁹ In his commentary, Petrus places an emphasis on the sevenfold pattern which corresponds to John's six visions of the future events apocalypse in order convey the historical timeline of the church; a form of repetition found throughout the Book of Revelation, with the ending of the world in chapter 7 and beginning once again in chapter 8.⁶⁰ In other words, Petrus allocates the various apocalyptic visions to historical times, for example, the Woman and the Dragon who appear in the sixth vision is equated to the third period of time which involved the persecution of Christians.⁶¹ In short, historical narrative is a continuous factor within the writings of Petrus and is a components which influenced the commentary written by Nicholas of Lyra.

Nicholas of Lyra (1270-1349) followed the historical technique of Alexander Minorita and Petrus in his commentary that was completed in 1329, and is featured in his book, *Postillae perpetuae in universam S. Scripturam*.⁶² Nicholas treats the Book of Revelation as a historical document of the past, and after chapter 17, he interprets the text as the events of the present and future; however, amid his text he begins to essentially revise his stance at several points of his interpretations.⁶³ The commentary by Nicholas is written from a realistic and literalistic perspective where he embroils the diametrical opposites of the villains and heroes of the church's history with a sense of ambiguity; this was a result of the power struggles he witnessed throughout the Franciscan order and did believe the Book of Revelation should function as a propagandistic mechanism.⁶⁴ In essence, Nicholas wanted to leave room for interpretation

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ Ibid, 208-209, I believe this may also be resembled in the choice of chapters which are depicted in the Chapel of the Virgin Mary (6-13).

⁶¹ Ibid, 210.

⁶² David Burr, "Nicholas of Lyra," in *The Book of Revelation*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2019), 212.

⁶³ Ibid, 213.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 214.

following the events of chapter 17 due to the limits that arise if the entirety of the Book of Revelation is to account for all of historical time; therefore, the literalness in his writings does not constrict the possibilities of historical time for the present or future.⁶⁵

Evidentially, the commentary writings of the Book of Revelation during the fourteenth century concentrate on the cyclic aspect of the continuous narratives. Though used as a visual device within artistic practice, the longitudinal emphasis placed on the continuation of the apocalyptic narrative in fourteenth century writings may also have influenced this aspect of continuation within artistic renderings of the event. Here, I believe there that the writings of Nicholas of Lyra contributed to the visual formatting and theological basis of the *Apocalypse Cycle*. Shortly after its completion, the *Postillae perpetuae in universam S. Scripturam* was widely disseminated across Europe, with excerpts found in over ninety Czech manuscripts, making this a plausible influence.⁶⁶ Additionally, Charles IV held relationships with Franciscan scholars such as John of Marignola, who was given the position court chaplain in 1353 by Charles IV prior to his promotion as Bishop of Bissignana.⁶⁷ Though his tenure in Prague was short, Charles IV commissioned Marignola to write a history of Bohemia, a project in which would keep the two in contact for the following seven years.⁶⁸ It is likely that Charles IV or members of his clergy would have been exposed to these commentaries and could have contributed to the composition of the apocalyptic program.⁶⁹ In particular, the visual continuity

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ N.A, "Výklad Mikuláše Lyry na evangelium sv. Matouše," *Museikon. A Journal of Religious Art and Culture* vol. 3, no.3 (2019), 188; Sharon Hermon, "Illuminated manuscripts of the court of king Wenceslas IV of Bohemia," *Scriptorium, Tome 9* no.1 (1955), 118, Hermon catalogues Lyra's psalter as a part of the collection of Wenceslas IV, son of Charles IV.

⁶⁷ Thomson, "Learning at the Court of Charles IV," 11

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Paul Crossley, "The politics of presentation: the architecture of Charles IV of Bohemia," in *Courts and Regions in Medieval Europe*, ed. S. Rees Johns, R. Marks, and A. J. Minnis (New York: Woodbridge, 2000), 151. Crossley notes that František Fišer found Lyra's writings, amongst other theologians, to be an influence within the chapel spaces across Karlstein and the *Apocalypse Cycle*.

of the narrative within the *Apocalypse Cycle* elucidates the theological ideology of viewing the Book of Revelation as a continuous narrative, an intentional device implemented to support the iconographic program. This is seen mostly clearly on the east wall where the narrative continues in each scene, and the background color, for the majority of the scenes remains consistent, thus presenting a sense of visual continuity. Furthermore, the scenes of the Woman fleeing from the Dragon expelling the river on the west wall further instills this notion from the manner in which the environment appears unchanging between the two scenes. When engaging with this arrangement, viewers understand that the events which follow each other follow are progressive instead of episodic. Other fourteenth century depictions, however, do not follow this same logic in their interpretations of the Book of Revelation, oftentimes depicting the various scenes of the biblical story as distinctly separate.

More than ten years after the completion of the *Apocalypse Cycle* in the Chapel of the Virgin Mary, the *Angers Apocalypse Tapestries* (1373-1380) (Figure. 33) and the *Apocalypse Cycle* (1378-1379) (Figure. 34) frescoes in the Westminster Abbey Chapter House were commissioned making them the contemporaries to the Karlstein cycle. Louis I, Duke of Anjou, ordered the tapestry cycle for his castle in Angers, France. Monumental in size, the tapestries would only be used for special occasions, including weddings and other ceremonies.⁷⁰ The narrative sequence is segmented due to the framing which delineates the space of the tapestry, losing the sense of continuity that is otherwise seen in the Karlstein example. This is also viewed in the frescoes in the Westminster Abbey Chapter House, where the configuration of the cycle is separated amongst the various scenes of the narrative. Although the Karlstein *Apocalypse Cycle*

⁷⁰ Natasha O’Hear, “The *Angers Apocalypse Tapestry*: A Fourteenth-Century Walking Tour of the Book of Revelation,” in *Contrasting Images of the Book of Revelation in Late Medieval and Early Modern Art: A Case Study in Visual Exegesis*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 43.

does have a moment in which the narrative breaks on the west wall, this was a device employed for emphasis, and does not discount the flow of the imagery on the east and west walls. When compared to the contemporaneous examples, though different in context and disposition, the *Apocalypse Cycle* in the Chapel of the Virgin Mary resembles the idea of narrative continuation conveyed in the written commentaries and becomes an intentional component of the iconographic program.

Performance of Images

The iconographic program of the Chapel of the Virgin Mary is based off the ideological design of the castle complex and is theologically anchored in the language from the foundation charter. Namely, the castle complex is a tripartite structure which is representative of the three ages of time, the past, present, and future; the Chapel of the Virgin Mary acts as the embodiment of the present, where the present-day religious crises become visualized through the *Apocalypse Cycle*.⁷¹ The foundational charter guides the thematic program of the space in its extensive preamble which cites the mystery of Christ's salvation and the redemptive qualities of the relics contained in the space.⁷² Throughout the iconographic program of the chapel, there is an overarching theme pertaining to the religiosity and salvation of Charles IV, as well as his family members, formulating a complex narrative sequence which articulates the "predetermined" fate of the emperor and his devotion to the Cult of the Virgin.

Within the apocalyptic program in the Chapel of the Virgin Mary, the events of chapters six through twelve from the Book of Revelation are visually manifested and showcase the beginnings of the apocalyptic chaos and the eventual defeat of evil. Across the imagery, the

⁷¹ Crossley, "The politics of presentation: the architecture of Charles IV of Bohemia," 144-147.

⁷² Homolka, "The Pictorial Decoration of the Palace and Lesser Tower of Karlštejn Castle," 97-99, Homolka provides the transcription of the text.

viewer is faced with the possibilities of spending their eternal fate in either heaven or hell, which are conveyed through the juxtaposing narratives on the west and east walls. However, neither of these locations are explicitly rendered, rather, the hellish landscape of the eschaton and the triumph over wicked powers of the devil allude to the locations where one may spend their afterlife. In this arrangement, the imagery does not imply a certain finality and the absences in the program allow for an interpretive quality which extends beyond the visuals, thereby aligning with the theological writings of Nicholas of Lyra. In other words, the ending of the world is established by the apocalyptic cycle, but one's fate remains susceptible to redemption per the Marian and Christological imagery.

Throughout the *Apocalypse Cycle*, the Woman is the focal point throughout the images, viewed through both the scale of her depiction on the west wall and the visual devices used to portray her importance. In particular, the introductory narrative of the Woman and the Dragon is featured on both the east and west walls (Rev. 12:1) to underscore her importance in the story and her role as the prefiguration of the Virgin and is reiterated through the visual break of the first scene from the second and third on the west wall. The program is designed to leave no trace of doubt in the relationship between the Woman and the Virgin, including her presented in the same typological manner as the Assumption of the Virgin in the first scene on the west wall, and the blatant connection from the imagery on the west wall conjoined with the right splay of the window niche that includes the scenes of the death and Coronation of the Virgin. With this, Charles IV declares his dedication for the holy mother by invoking his visionary experience which occurred on the feast day of the Assumption and channels her intercessory powers in the scheme of the program and through the relics encased in the window niche.

The holy powers of the relics are activated through this iconography and confirm the veracity of the images within the chapel. Ultimately, the space becomes a literalized, corporealized reliquary chamber, an environment where one becomes kinetically intertwined with the sacred objects and the imagery which interprets them. Indeed, the Chapel of the Virgin Mary does not align with the traditional model of a reliquary but works as an apparatus to prepare the mortal subject for the heavenly sphere. Therefore, the space necessitates a form of performativity invoked from the movement and visual engagement by the subject to understand this dynamic, thus producing a psychological and sensorial effect upon the viewer.

Contemplating fate is inherently a psychological experience, provoking one to parse through their virtuous and sinful behaviors, and prompting the feeling of uncertainty to linger. Within the Chapel of the Virgin Mary, both the imagery and the performance enacted in the space construes a psychological quality beyond this act of rumination. Specifically, the function of the chapel served as the location where, per the foundation charter, the cantorial hours would be recited, chanted, and sung by members of the chapter at sunrise and sunset, while interchangeably sitting and standing during the recitation.⁷³ Here, the sensuous duet amongst the visuals and acoustics activates the imagery, allowing for the elicitation of revelatory moment.⁷⁴ Put otherwise, a revelation is an experience inherently bound to the sense of sight, and through stimulation of the senses in conjunction with the imagery and relics, one is able to achieve this moment of clarity.⁷⁵

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ D.V. Gladkova and D. Yu Dorofeyev, "A Visual-Acoustic Duet of Painting and Music in Medieval Aesthetics," *E3S Web of Conferences* 266 (January 1, 2021): 3-7.

⁷⁵ Natasha O'Hear, "Hermeneutical Reflections and Visual Exegesis" in *Contrasting Images of the Book of Revelation in Late Medieval and Early Modern Art: A Case Study in Visual Exegesis*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 200.

Conclusion

Apocalyptic doom was a frequent subject depicted in medieval artistic practice. Such imagery would prompt the viewer to internalize the potent messages displayed, and incited period of reflection concerning their eternal fate. The *Apocalypse Cycle* in the Chapel of the Virgin Mary is no different, but instead of directly confronting the viewer, the space acts as an intercessor to protect and guide one into the heavenly realm. Thus, the Chapel of the Virgin Mary acquires the functional role as a reliquary, where the images interpret the items of sacred matter enclosed in the wall. Charles IV's devotion to the Virgin is apparent throughout his patronage; therefore, the Chapel of the Virgin Mary, a chapel space in his private residence, must be considered in this framework. This paper has discussed the role of the relics and the semi-precious stones, the architectural space, the hermeneutical influences, and the iconography to convey the symbolic significance of the Chapel of the Virgin Mary and its role within the ideological scheme of the castle.

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Figures

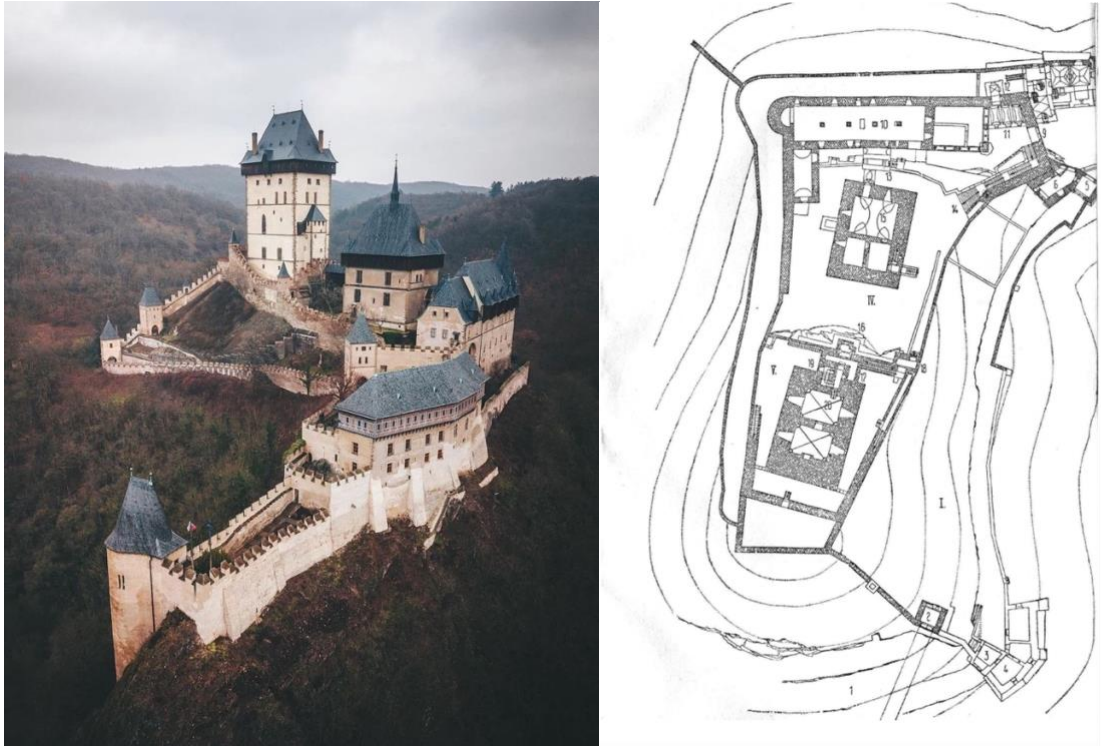


Figure 1. *Karlstein Castle Complex and Floor Plan of the Complex (viewed from the North), Karlstein, Czechia, 1348-1372*



Figure 2. *North Wall in its Current State, Chapel of the Virgin Mary, Lesser Tower, Karlstein Castle, 1363, original destroyed in 1567*



Figure 3. South Wall, Chapel of the Virgin Mary, Lesser Tower, Karlstein Castle, 1363



Figure 4. East Wall, Chapel of the Virgin Mary, Lesser Tower, Karlstein Castle, 1363



Figure 5. West Wall, Chapel of the Virgin Mary, Lesser Tower, Karlstein Castle, 1363

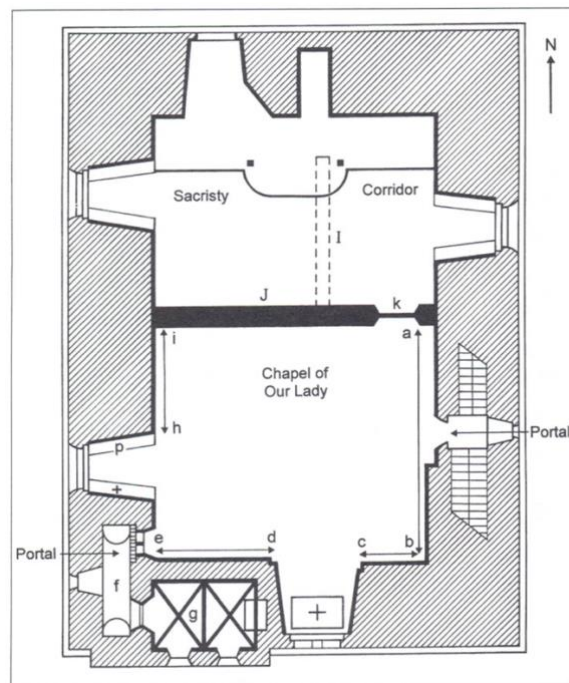


Figure 6. Floor Plan of the Chapel of the Virgin Mary



Figure. 7 *The Woman Clothed with the Sun and Standing on the Moon with Her Child* (Scene 1), Lower Register of the West Wall, Chapel of the Virgin Mary, Lesser Tower, Karlstein Castle, 1363

Explanatory Text: Rev. 12:1, 12:5



Figure. 8 *The Woman Withdrawals into Shelter* (Scene 2), *Dragon Expels the River Causing the Flood* (Scene 3) Lower Register of the West Wall, Chapel of the Virgin Mary, Lesser Tower, Karlstein Castle, 1363

Explanatory Text: Rev. 12:3-4



Figure 9. Duccio di Buoninsegna, *Madonna and Child*, Tempera and gold on wood, 1290–1300



Figure. 10 Donor Portrait of Charles IV and Anna von Schweidnitz, Oratory of St. Catherine, Karlstein Castle, 1357



Figure. 11 *Queen in Prayer* (fl. 77r.), Prague Hours (Prague, National Museum, Ms. V.H. 36), late fourteenth century



Figure. 12 West Wall Window Niche, Chapel of the Virgin Mary, Lesser Tower, Karlstein Castle, 1363

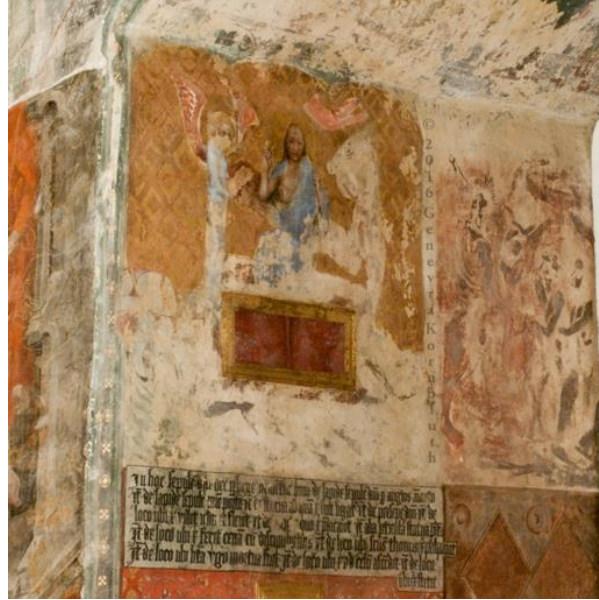


Figure. 13 *Christ's Resurrection* in the West Wall Window Niche, Chapel of the Virgin Mary, Lesser Tower, Karlstein Castle, 1363

Explanatory Text Below (Identification of Relics): In hoc sepulcro domini hee reliquie retinentur primo de lapide • sepulcri • domini • per • angelos • amoto • || Item • de • lapide • sepulcri • marie • posito • Item • de • statua • ad • quam • Christus • fuit • ligatus • Item • de presepe • domini • Item • de || loco • ubi • Christus • vidit • irhusalem • et fleuit • Item • de • j • [monte dje quo christus • predicavit • Item alia particula de statua • predicta • || Item de • loco • ubi • christus • fecit • cenam • cum • discipulis • suis • Item • de loco ubi sanctus • thomas • christum • palpavit • || Item de • loco • ubi • beata • virgo • mortua fuit • Item • de • loco • ubi • christus • ad • celum • ascendit • Item • de • loco • ubi • christus • stetit •

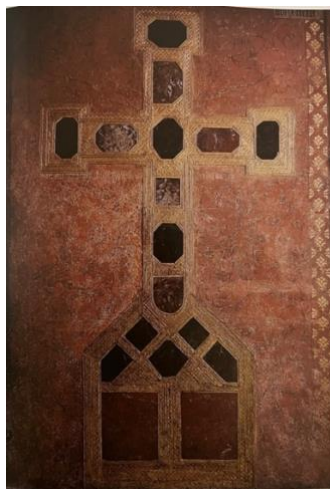


Figure. 14 *Crux Gemmata* in the West Wall Window Niche, Chapel of the Virgin Mary, Lesser Tower, Karlstein Castle, 1363

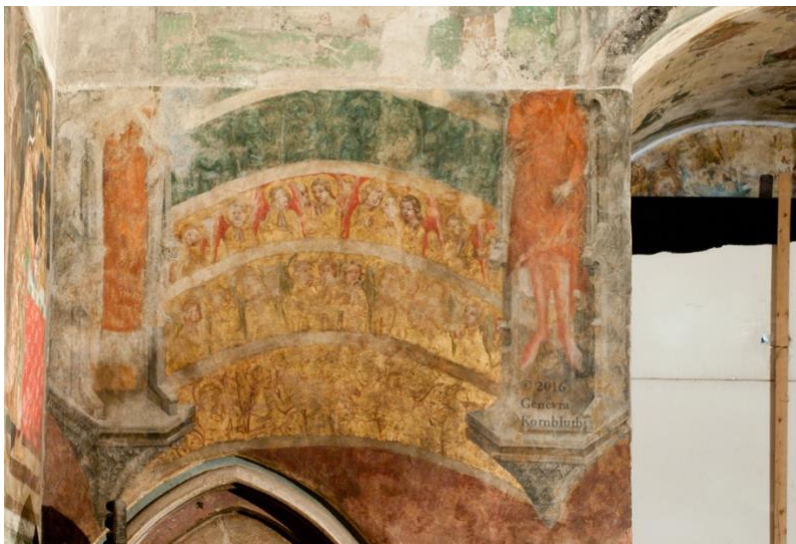


Figure. 15 *The Choir of Angels and Donor Portraits of Charles IV and Anna von Schweidnitz (?)*, West Wall, Chapel of the Virgin Mary (West Corner), Karlstein Castle, 1363



Figure. 16 *The Relic Cycle*, Lower Register of the South Wall (East Corner), Chapel of the Virgin Mary, Lesser Tower, Karlstein Castle, 1357

Upper Text: karolus • Hilus • imperator | Bianca • Regina | sajncta • trinitas



Figure 17. Text from the Altar, South Wall, Chapel of the Virgin Mary, Lesser Tower, Karlstein Castle, 1363

Explanatory Text: Rev. 8:3-4



Figure. 18 *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, Lower Register of the South Wall (West Corner), Chapel of the Virgin Mary, Lesser Tower, Karlstein Castle, 1363

Upper Explanatory Text (Lost Scenes): Rev. 5:9

Lower Explanatory Text: Rev. 6:7-8



Figure. 19 *The Sixth Angel Blows Trumpet Unleashing the Sixth Seal (Scene 1) and Horsemen Charge Towards Humans Seated on Horses with Lion's Jaws and Snake Tails (Scene 2)*, Upper Register of the East Wall, Chapel of the Virgin Mary, Lesser Tower, Karlstein Castle, 1363

Explanatory Text: Rev. 9:13-14

Separating Strip: Rev. 9:15



Figure. 20 *John Eating the Scroll (Scene 3) and John Measuring the Temple (Scene 4)*, Upper Register of the East Wall, Chapel of the Virgin Mary, Lesser Tower, Karlstein Castle, 1363

Explanatory Text: Rev. 10:1, 11:1

Separating Strip: Rev. 10:3 (not related to scenes)



Figure. 21 *Elijah and Enoch as the Witnesses Standing Before the Crowd* (Scene 5), Upper Register of the East Wall, Chapel of the Virgin Mary, Lesser Tower, Karlstein Castle, 1363

Explanatory Text: Rev. 11:3-5



Figure. 22 *The Beast Rises from the Abyss* (Scene 6) *The Dead Bodies of Elijah and Enoch* (Scene 7), Upper Register of the East Wall, Chapel of the Virgin Mary, Lesser Tower, Karlstein Castle, 1363

Explanatory Text: Rev. 11:7-8

Separating Strip: Rev. 11:9



Figure. 23 *The Spirit of Life Enters Elijah and Enoch* (Scene 8) and *The Beginning of the Earthquake* (Scene 9), Upper Register of the East Wall, Chapel of the Virgin Mary, Lesser Tower, Karlstein Castle, 1363

Explanatory Text: Rev. 11:11, 11:13

Ending Strip: Rev. 11:14



Figure. 24 *The Seventh Angel Blows Trumpet Unleashing the Seventh Seal* (Scene 1), Lower Register of the East Wall, Chapel of the Virgin Mary, Lesser Tower, Karlstein Castle, 1363

Explanatory Text: Rev. 11:15-17



Figure. 25 *The Temple and The Ark are Opened, Christ Emerging Out of the Golden Ark* (Scene 2), Lower Register of the East Wall, Chapel of the Virgin Mary, Lesser Tower, Karlstein Castle, 1363

Explanatory Text: Rev. 11:19



Figure. 26 *Thunder and Lightning, Destruction from the Earthquake* (Scene 3), Lower Register of the East Wall, Chapel of the Virgin Mary, Lesser Tower, Karlstein Castle, 1363

Explanatory Text: Rev. 11:19

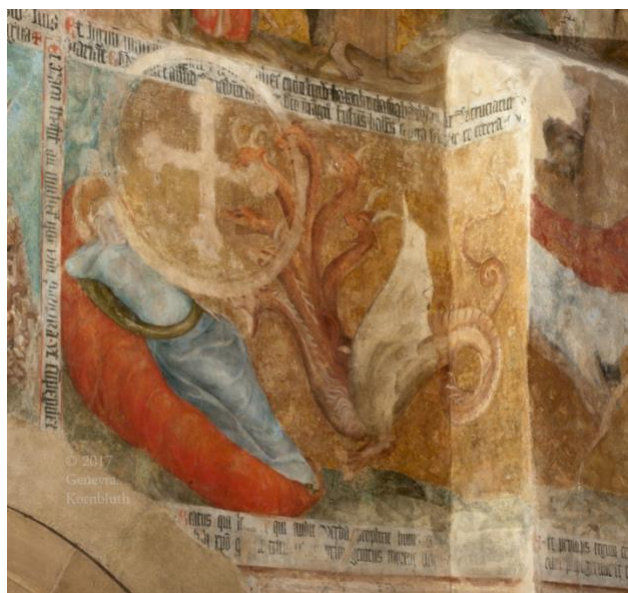


Figure. 27 *The Woman and the Dragon* (Scene 4), Lower Register of the East Wall, Chapel of the Virgin Mary, Lesser Tower, Karlstein Castle, 1363

Explanatory Text: Rev. 12:1-3

Separating Strip (to the left): Rev. 12:4



Figure. 28 *Michael Fighting the Spirits of Hell* (Scene 5) and *The Rejection of the Brothers in Hell* (Scene 6), Lower Register of the East Wall, Chapel of the Virgin Mary, Lesser Tower, Karlstein Castle, 1363

Explanatory Text: Rev. 12:7-10, 12:12



Figure 29. Noah, drawing, Codex Heidelbergensis, 1574-1575. Archives of the National Gallery, Prague, 14 2015



Figure 30. Oratory of St. Catherine, Chapel of the Virgin Mary, Lesser Tower, Karlstein Castle, 1363



Figure 31. Mural depicting the Legend of St Wenceslas, St Wenceslas bakes the Host and takes it into the temple, Great Tower Staircase, Karlstein Castle, 1365

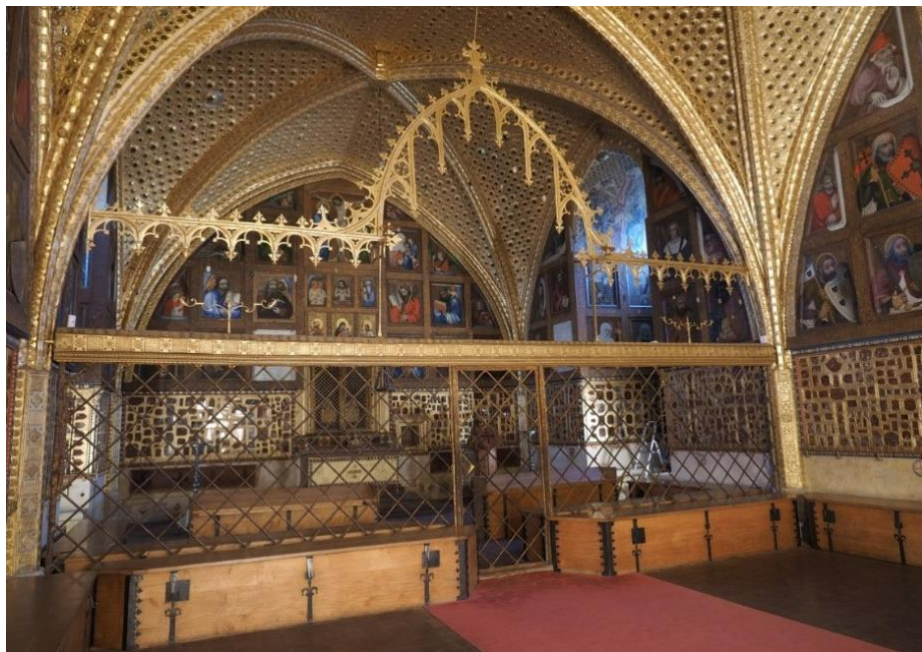


Figure 32. Chapel of the Holy Cross, Great Tower, Karlstein Castle, 1365



Figure 33. *Angers Apocalypse Tapestries*, Musée de la Tapisserie, Château d'Angers, Angers, France, 1373-1380



Figure 34. *Apocalypse Cycle*, Fresco, Westminster Abbey Chapter House, London, England, 1378-1379