

A LITTLE MORE THAN A FAÇADE?  
EARLY MODERN TOWN HALLS IN CENTRAL EUROPE

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The history of town halls might be told as the history of a civic and urban symbol, described by earlier research primarily as an architectural expression of civic self-understanding and as an expression of civic autonomy opposing the town ruler (*Stadtherr*). Town halls start appearing as a typical and representative form in late medieval towns in the 13th century in northern and central Italy, and are also found soon afterwards in the Holy Roman Empire. Town halls represent the first post-classical political functional buildings in ancient Europe,<sup>1</sup> emerging well before the creation of the so-called *Landhäuser* (meeting place of the Estates), where the members of the Estates of a province gathered for their assemblies. According to the great encyclopaedias of the 18th century,<sup>2</sup> town halls were buildings in which the elected town authorities gathered at certain times in order to deliberate on the welfare of their respective town. In addition to their political significance, town halls were also administrative buildings where town clerks, bailiffs, administrators of the “dungeons”, civil servants, etc. had their workplace, while not actually residing in them. The multifunctional town hall connected many different communication channels. Exclusivity and virtually free access, council chamber secrecy – applying to every inhabitant of the town – could all be found here. This is where citizens met with the council or the ramified administration of the town to express their concerns, hold elections and regular community meetings; petitioning citizens and serfs sought “mercies” from the town council; insurgencies of citizens and the lower classes found the physical opponent of a “just” cause and also a place to deride “blind” justice at the town hall. Besides their function as a place to assemble and to hold council meetings, town halls

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<sup>1</sup> Gerd SCHWERHOFF, Verortete Macht. Mittelalterliche und frühneuzeitliche Rathäuser als institutionelle Eigenräume städtischer Politik, in: Franz J. FELTEN/Annette KEHNEL/Stefan WEINFURTER (eds.), Institution und Charisma. Festschrift für Gert Melville zum 65. Geburtstag, Köln 2009, pp. 215–228, especially p. 219.

<sup>2</sup> Johann Heinrich ZEDLER, Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexicon, Bd. 30, Leipzig 1741, column 953 [<http://www.zedler-lexikon.de>, Stand: 05.07.2017].

were also “magnificent public buildings”<sup>3</sup>, a town symbol intended to reflect the wealth and prestige of the town both to the outside and the inside world. It was quite common, already for town halls of the early modern period, to have a tower as a representative sign. While earlier research interpreted town halls as a “crystallisation nucleus of civic identity”<sup>4</sup>, more recent research considers town halls primarily as the intent of the bourgeois elite to prevail over the rest of the townspeople, but also to oppose the ultimately victorious local ruler (*Landesfürst*). However, town halls may also be understood as a compensation of urban governments in view of the formation of the early modern state during the early modern period. Depending on the financial strength of the town, town halls of the early modern period opposed the castle and residential properties of the monarchs, but also their aristocratic “fellow competitors” from within the town. Clearly visible, town halls attempted to imitate noble palaces with their opulent furnishings and decoration to stress the leadership claim of the urban elite. Town halls visualised a bourgeois self-conception almost bordering that of the nobility, which grew further during the 19th century as town halls evolved into gigantic stone castles. Until the beginning of the 20th century, in many towns, especially residential ones, town halls expressed great praise for the rulers in addition to their visualisation of civic pride and can therefore also be understood as an indirect mark of loyalty to the local ruler.

Many town halls depicted the feudal and especially aristocratic world of the pre-modern era: the Perpetual Diet of Regensburg met from 1663 in Regensburg’s “old town hall”; banquets for newly elected Roman-German kings were held in the civil town hall of Frankfurt; peace negotiations in Münster in 1648, at the end of the Thirty Years’ War, came to their solemn end at the Münster town hall. Town halls with their massive towers still stood during the 19th century between the noble palace, the castle and the civic administration centre and only turned into sometimes nondescript commercial buildings during the 20th century, as practicality and economical functionality gradually became the trend in town hall building. The “thrifty” town hall is also to be understood as a message to townspeople. Some towns still continue to invest a lot of money into the construction of new town halls: Austrian architect Wilhelm Holzbauer, for example, designed an opera-town hall for Amsterdam in 1988, and the new London city hall building by Norman Foster, inaugurated in 2002, is a frequently photographed landmark on the banks of the River Thames.

Mystery, exclusivity and low-threshold access are often simultaneous features of town hall buildings. Town halls, as a place of secrecy for town council meetings and a place of publicity for town administration and events, have time and again acted as political platforms to visualise political system failures. Town halls, and especially the large areas in front of them, have also enjoyed a long-standing history in the tra-

<sup>3</sup> Leonhard Christoph STURM, Vollständige Anweisung Regierungs-, Land- und Rath-Häuser / Wie auch Kauff-Häuser und Börsen starck / bequem und zierlich anzugeben, Augsburg 1718, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Bernd ROECK, Reichsstädtische Rathhäuser in der frühen Neuzeit und ihre Bildprogramme, in: Rainer A. MÜLLER (ed.), Bilder des Reiches (Irseer Schriften 4), Sigmaringen 1997, pp. 275–296, especially p. 276.

dition of civic festival culture: processions, tournaments, inspections of soldiers and militia forces, and over time balls, soccer club championship celebrations, receptions for guests of honour or events taking place on the town hall square (circus performances, Christmas markets, bicycle races, political events like May parades) are all inextricably linked to town halls.

### 1. The origin of town halls

According to documentary evidence, town halls have also been established in small Austrian provincial towns since the 15th century, at the latest during the 16th century. Major local rulers' towns had a head start in this process compared with the smaller towns subordinate to a landlord (*Grundherr*): Vienna at the beginning of the 14th century, Innsbruck in 1363, Klosterneuburg in 1396, Korneuburg's first town hall in 1417, Bolzano in 1420, Krems' second town hall in 1452; during the 15th century: Hainburg, Wiener Neustadt.<sup>5</sup> In earlier times, sources indicate that houses were already used occasionally and temporarily as meeting places for the council. Town councils of small Austrian towns with an average population of about 2,000 inhabitants received the consent of their respective town ruler, mostly during the 15th century, to use a certain building as the town hall.<sup>6</sup> This concession by the town ruler also illustrates the growing competence of town councils. Town rulers even occasionally gifted houses to "their" towns, which were then converted into town halls, or else they earmarked large sums of money for this purpose. In several cases it can be observed that the construction of a town hall does not necessarily arise from a functional necessity but from a "representative will of self-representation by the council".<sup>7</sup> The appointment of a collegiate council was an important prerequisite, but a significant time lag can often be observed between the creation of a town council and that of a town hall – the introduction of the mayor's office, however, appears to have been a more important indicator in the establishment of town halls.

In the early modern period, the construction of new town halls did not play a significant role in light of the diminishing role of Austrian towns during the early modern state compaction; larger town halls were created only in great imperial and

<sup>5</sup> Summarised in: Martin SCHEUTZ, *Die Multifunktionalität der Rathäuser in langer Perspektive – Versuch eines Überblickes*, in: Susanne Cl. PILS/Martin SCHEUTZ/Christoph SONNLECHNER/Stefan SPEVAK (eds.), *Rathäuser als multifunktionale Räume der Repräsentation, der Parteilungen und des Geheimnisses* (Forschungen und Beiträge zur Wiener Stadtgeschichte 55), Vienna 2012, pp. 19–64, especially p. 23.

<sup>6</sup> Klaus BRANDSTÄTTER, *Rathäuser im westlichen Österreich in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, in: PILS/SCHEUTZ/SONNLECHNER/SPEVAK, *Rathäuser* (see note 5), pp. 95–118, especially p. 97; for Vienna, Ferdinand OPLL, *Das älteste Wiener Rathaus*, in: *Jahrbuch des Vereins für Geschichte der Stadt Wien* 46 (1990), pp. 107–122.

<sup>7</sup> Stephan ALBRECHT, *Mittelalterliche Rathäuser in Deutschland. Architektur und Funktion*, Darmstadt 2004, p. 25.

trading towns. The imposing Augsburg town hall (evoking the Doge's Palace) built between 1615 and 1620 by Elias Holl (with its centrepiece "Golden Hall")<sup>8</sup> or the town halls seen in some residential towns distort this perception, because in the small-town Austrian region the conversion of medieval town halls and their adaptation in early modern times appears to have been more typical.<sup>9</sup> Buildings such as the Leipzig town hall<sup>10</sup> designed in 1556 by Hieronymus Lotter in the thriving 1550–1600 Saxon town hall landscape (39 thick-walled town halls!) are not found in the Austrian region.<sup>11</sup> Only a few new town hall buildings emerged in the Danube region against the background of medieval town halls and large tax arrears (such as in the local rulers' towns), if new buildings after the Ottoman year 1683 are disregarded: the examples of Klosterneuburg (1730),<sup>12</sup> Stockerau (1738–1740, see fig. 1)<sup>13</sup> or the long drawn-out construction of the town hall of Steyr (1765–1778)<sup>14</sup> as a result of financial problems clearly support this fact. Efforts were instead invested in the structural transformation of representative town hall rooms or town hall façades, in an attempt to copy and imitate noble palaces and the noble festival culture (town hall of Mödling, see fig. 2).

The second half of the 19th century can be considered the peak of town hall construction, a true town hall mania. The years of rapidly growing and increasingly industrialised urban centres (the so-called "Gründerzeit" at the end of the 19th century) and the government of the liberal and later national bourgeoisie from 1880 until the First World War provided the conditions for this process. The abundance of tasks of the towns' administration had grown and town governments sought to place all possible town functions and tasks under the umbrella of a "new town hall". Jurisdiction or market functions were no longer of any importance for the "town hall question" of the 19th century, as opposed to the Middle Ages and the early modern period. In contrast, meeting and banquet rooms abounding in iconography, large entrance halls or representative stairwells were of central value. After the fire of Hamburg in 1842, George Gilbert Scott's "Gothic" Hamburg town hall of 1854 became an important model for town hall buildings of the 19th century, based on

<sup>8</sup> Hermann KIESSLING (ed.), *On the rebuilding of the hall: Der goldene Saal und die Fürstenzimmer im Augsburger Rathaus: Eine Dokumentation der Wiederherstellung*, Munich 1997.

<sup>9</sup> Sergiusz MICHALSKI, *Der Dogenpalast und die Rathäuser in Augsburg und Mitteleuropa um 1600*, in: Klaus BERGDOLT/Jochen BRÜNING (ed.), *Kunst und ihre Auftraggeber im 16. Jahrhundert. Venedig und Augsburg im Vergleich (Colloquia Augustana 5)*, Berlin 1997, pp. 83–94.

<sup>10</sup> Doris MUNDUS, *Das Alte Rathaus in Leipzig*, Leipzig 2003.

<sup>11</sup> Hubert Georg ERMISCH, *Sächsische Rathäuser. Beiträge zur Baugeschichte der Rat- und Kaufhausbauten aus dem Gebiet zwischen Saale und Neiße*, Borna/Leipzig 1920, pp. 93–125.

<sup>12</sup> Floridus RÖHRIG, *Klosterneuburg in der Neuzeit bis 1848*, in: DEMS./Gustav OTRUBA/Michael DUSCHER (eds.), *Klosterneuburg. Geschichte und Kultur. Volume 1: Die Stadt, Klosterneuburg 1992*, pp. 225–260.

<sup>13</sup> Simon FISCHER, *Das Rathaus Stockerau zwischen bürgerlichem Selbstverständnis und landesfürstlicher Herrschaftslegitimation. Ein Fallbeispiel für die neuzeitliche Rathäuserlandschaft in Niederösterreich*, diploma thesis, Vienna 2013.

<sup>14</sup> Josef OFNER, *Das Rathaus der Eisenstadt Steyr*, in: *Oberösterreichische Heimatblätter* 24, issue 3/4 (1970), p. 3–10.



Fig. 1: A town hall built in the 18th century – the town hall of Stockerau (west of Vienna).

The town council bought an old noble palace, converting it into a town hall following a modernisation process in 1738/40.

A statue of Justitia is the entrance centrepiece

Source: Photo by Martin Scheutz.

the Flemish town hall model (Cloth Hall of Ypres).<sup>15</sup> The medieval town hall served as a “paradigm for type and style”<sup>16</sup> of the new town halls of the 19th century, as the citizens of the 19th century wished to connect to the idealised “bourgeois” of the Middle Ages.

In the western half of the Habsburg monarchy, towns received new functional assignments towards the end of the 18th and mid 19th century, turning the towns of the 19th century into independent, fast-growing administrative units and creating several new urban tasks for the municipal self-government of towns.<sup>17</sup> The transformation of town citizens to state citizens (and the electoral reforms) caused town

<sup>15</sup> Jürgen PAUL, Das „Neue Rathaus“ – Eine Bauaufgabe des 19. Jahrhunderts, in: Ekkehard MAI/Jürgen PAUL/Stephan WAETZOLDT (ed.), Das Rathaus im Kaiserreich. Kunstpolitische Aspekte einer Bauaufgabe des 19. Jahrhunderts (Kunst, Kultur und Politik im Deutschen Kaiserreich 4), Berlin 1982, pp. 29–90, especially pp. 34–38.

<sup>16</sup> PAUL, Das „Neue“ Rathaus (see note 15), p. 41.

<sup>17</sup> Peter URBANITSCH, Functions and Tasks of the Municipal Government in the Monarchy, in: PURCHLA (ed.), Mayors and City Halls. Local Government and the Cultural Space in the Late Habsburg Monarchy, Krakow 1998, pp. 11–23.





Fig. 2: A typical construction for the Austrian Danube area – the town hall of Mödling (south of Vienna), which has undergone several alterations: the core late Gothic building alterations were carried out during the mid 16th century (roof dates back to 1669 according to dendrochronological investigations). In the wake of the Ottoman siege of Vienna in 1683, several building alterations took place around 1700 with further conversions during the second half of the 19th century.

Source: Photo by Martin Scheutz.

halls in the following centuries to move more strongly in the direction of broad functional administrative centres. The agendas of the administrative jurisdiction of towns expanded considerably to include fields such as health care, transportation or the diverse public utility companies, compared to the old administrative and financial tasks managed by towns. The embodiment of these new competences (such as infrastructure services like water supply, disease control, establishment of educational institutions) created a new layer of administrative leaders: dynamic, energetic mayors hailing mostly from the wealthy bourgeoisie of the 19th century and residing in the town hall as a stronghold of “bourgeois liberalism”, seemingly personally responsible as a “bourgeois emperor” for the innovative advances of a town.<sup>18</sup>

The town hall design of the late Habsburg monarchy<sup>19</sup> was also significantly influenced by the nationalist conflict, which also expressed itself in matters of style. Competition winners who were awarded town hall projects adhered to one of the national styles in their competition entries: the Graz town hall completed in 1893/94 and designed by Alexander Wielemans and Theodor Reuter was specifically built in the “German Renaissance” style.<sup>20</sup> Many town halls in the Hungarian Danube-Tisza basin, however, were consciously not designed in the neo-Gothic style, but either in the Italianate Renaissance Revival, the neo-Baroque or the Hungarian National Romanticism styles.<sup>21</sup> The creation of the new town halls caused the old town halls dating back to the Middle Ages and the early modern period to disappear, although resistance to the demolition of the old building structure was sometimes found, as demonstrated by the disputes over a planned new Innsbruck town hall (in front of the “*Goldenes Dachel*” [golden roof]) in 1891.<sup>22</sup>

The controversial question of style of the new town hall intended to reflect above all the town’s importance: the Aachen town hall, until 1562 the location of the coronation ceremony of German kings, was consciously rebuilt in the 19th century (construction work 1840–1901) in the Gothic style<sup>23</sup> as a “reminder of past glory”. Major cities such as Vienna and Graz built new town halls as bourgeois “role models” for other towns. The fierce competition among towns could also be observed in town halls of smaller towns: in the case of Korneuburg’s town hall, built in 1894/95,

<sup>18</sup> As examples: Dana BOŘUTOVÁ, *The Impact of the Mayors on Architecture in Bratislava*, in: PURCHLA (ed.), *Mayors and City Halls* (see note 17), pp. 77–82; an especially good example is Cajetan Felder’s monumental autobiography, Felix CZEIKE, *Cajetan Felder. Erinnerungen eines Wiener Bürgermeisters*, Vienna 1984.

<sup>19</sup> PURCHLA (ed.), *Mayors and City Halls* (see note 17).

<sup>20</sup> Heidemarie UHL, *Der Rathausbau als urbane Selbstdarstellung der Jahrhundertwende*, in: Herwig EBNER/Paul W. ROTH/Ingeborg WIESFLECKER-FRIEDHUBER (ed.), *Forschungen zur Geschichte des Alpen-Adria-Raumes. Festgabe für em. o. Univ.-Prof. Dr. Othmar Pickl zum 70. Geburtstag* (Schriftenreihe des Instituts für Geschichte 9), Graz 1997, pp. 391–402, especially p. 396.

<sup>21</sup> Ilona SÁRMÁNY, *Rathausbauten in Ungarn um die Jahrhundertwende. Bürgerliche Selbstdarstellung*, in: Hanns HAAS/Hannes STEKL (ed.), *Bürgerliche Selbstdarstellung. Städtebau, Architektur, Denkmäler* (Bürgertum in der Habsburgermonarchie 4), Vienna/Cologne/Weimar 1995, pp. 99–115, especially pp. 105–106.

<sup>22</sup> Ingrid BARTMANN-KOMPA, *Das Berliner Rathaus*, Berlin 1991, pp. 73–76.

<sup>23</sup> Carola WEINSTOCK, *Die Regotisierung des Aachener Rathauses*, in: Mario KRAMP (ed.), *Krönungen* Vol. 2, Mainz 2000, pp. 775–784.

models such as Vienna and Graz clearly played a major role, as well as the nearby Kreuzenstein Castle, rebuilt in 1874. The old town tower of Korneuburg was included, with the style fluctuating between Renaissance and Gothic ornamentation.<sup>24</sup> Famous town hall architects such as Graz-born Georg von Hauberrisser (1841–1922) [town halls of Munich 1867, Kaufbeuren 1879, Wiesbaden 1882, Saarbrücken 1896] or architect Karl Roth (1875–1932) [town halls of Kassel 1905, Dresden 1905, Bremen 1912, Bochum 1927] were able to establish themselves in the highly competitive market of castle-like town halls (usually also in the field of churches). Vienna's cathedral architect Friedrich Schmidt (1825–1891) submitted a Gothic design for the Viennese town hall, while other town halls of the second half of the 19th century often adhered to “German” Renaissance principles as an expression of the “large” urban culture of the Reich; a greater pluralism in styles only became evident towards the end of the century (see fig. 3).

The town hall with a central tower, a common type of building in the 19th century, gradually fell out of fashion in the 20th century. Already in the 1920s and 1930s, a new town hall type developed, in which several different-sized components of rectangular shape were grouped around a courtyard (one of these buildings would often evolve into a tower, as seen in the example of Hilversum 1924–1929).<sup>25</sup> These multi-component asymmetrical town halls evolved during the 1920s to 1950s – when compared to the 19th century – into non-specific town hall functionalist administrative buildings which, in addition to the “large” multi-functional hall, often had no outward town hall features (such as a tower). An example of this is the reconstruction of destroyed town halls, like the new town hall in Villach (1952), which was erected after the destruction during the war of the Khevenhüller town palace.<sup>26</sup> New town hall buildings like the Leoben town hall by Kurt Thornton inaugurated in 1974, or the four-sided and five-storey town hall in Linz designed by Rupert Falkner and Anton Fürtler, operating since 1985 and consisting of 6,700 precast concrete pieces and 2,210 windows<sup>27</sup>, took into account new spatial requirements. On Austrian territory, it repeatedly came to adaptations of former historic buildings in the sense of creating a regional tradition: former noble areas were conquered due to the increasing space requirements of the space-hungry town administrations, such as the Mirabell Palace in Salzburg. In the 1980s, some new and renovated buildings appeared in Austria as part of the transformation of town halls into “citizen service centres” (keyword “open town hall”): the town hall in Waidhofen/Ybbs renovated by Ernst Beneder in 1993/95 can be mentioned as an example of this. Although today historic “town halls” are still the administrative “face” of a town in many instances, the actual management often works hidden away in a great variety of buildings (“new town hall”).

<sup>24</sup> Barbara RESCHENHOFER, *Das Korneuburger Rathaus*, diploma thesis Vienna 2004.

<sup>25</sup> Martin DAMUS, *Das Rathaus: Architektur- und Sozialgeschichte von der Gründerzeit zur Postmoderne*; Schwerpunkt: Rathausbau 1945–1986 in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Berlin 1988, pp. 71–82.

<sup>26</sup> Jakob SEREINIGG (ed.), *Das Rathaus von Villach*, Villach 1952.

<sup>27</sup> Ulrike STEINER/Theodor BRÜCKLER/Gabriele ROITHNER (ed.), *Die profanen Bau- und Kunstdenkmäler der Stadt Linz* (Österreichische Kunsttopographie LV/3), Horn 1999, p. 383f.





Fig. 3: The new town hall of Korneuburg (west of Vienna), designed in 1894.  
Stylistic pluralism of neo-Gothic and early Art Nouveau styles.  
Several portrait busts immortalised the mayor Schaumann of Korneuburg.

Source: Photo by Martin Scheutz.

## 2. Situation of town halls and their financing

Before town halls were established, the residence of the town judge, an inn or a church building served as a meeting place for council members. As town halls generally appeared in Austrian towns only in the 15th century, town councillors had to decide whether to construct a new building, located away from the densely populated centre, or to acquire and adapt a centrally located town house (or the house of a nobleman) as a town hall. In almost all cases, the town council opted for the second, representative solution. Both Innsbruck and Salzburg decided, in 1363 and 1407, to purchase a centrally located house, situated on the busy main thoroughfare, which was subsequently enlarged. In towns founded during the Middle Ages, however, the town hall was always strategically located on the marketplace.<sup>28</sup> The fortress and city architect of Ulm, Joseph Furttenbach, in his architectural treatise of 1640, already advocated that the town halls of the 17th and 18th century, increasingly inspired by palace architecture, be centrally located in a prominent place within the town, much like the Roman Capitol.<sup>29</sup>

A central location on a market square (such as the grain market) is a characteristic of town hall construction. In most cases in the 15th century and more often still in the 16th century, several town houses on the main square were interconnected structurally to ultimately serve, after the conversion, as polyaxial representative town halls. The town hall in Wels, for instance, which resembles a palace, consists of two tri-axial Gothic town houses.<sup>30</sup> In 1587, the town purchased the eastern adjacent house, and construction of a new, four-storey, six-axial building, featuring stucco and wrought-iron window baskets with the town's arms above its portal, commenced in 1738. These town halls underwent repeated conversions over time, with neighbouring houses being purchased, for example, to erect a tower (as in the case of Innsbruck in the mid 15th century). Newly built town halls originated mostly in the wake of town fires: the fire provided an opportunity for a new conception of the building.

Many town halls in Central Europe, especially new buildings of the Late Middle Ages, are today located on the central (market) square of the town, important evidence of the interconnection between town economics and town government within the urban space. In the 15th and 16th century, the pillory still stood in front of the town hall, often replaced in the late 17th and early 18th century by a confessional space statement (such as Trinity columns, Marian columns, etc.): the court function of the town council lost ground against the salvation of the soul.

<sup>28</sup> ALBRECHT, *Mittelalterliche Rathäuser* (see note 7), p. 29f.

<sup>29</sup> Christa SCHREIBER, *Rathäuser des Barock in Franken, Schwaben und Baden*, Berlin 1973, p. 261.

<sup>30</sup> Martin SCHEUTZ, *Herrschaft oder doch nur „arme“ Ratsherren in mickrigen Rathäusern? Wahl, Prestige und Machträume in den frühneuzeitlichen österreichischen Kleinstädten*, in: Ferdinand OPLL/Christoph SONNLECHNER (eds.), *Europäische Städte im Mittelalter* (Forschungen und Beiträge zur Wiener Stadtgeschichte 52), Innsbruck 2010, pp. 281–312, especially p. 296f.

The financing history of Austrian town halls has been poorly researched to date; how medieval and early modern town halls were financed (subscription of bonds by citizens, nobles, the town ruler) is still unclear. In Klagenfurt, Emperor Frederick III gifted the town a house to use as a town hall, but at the same time he retained the right to continue to use this house as lodging when travelling.<sup>31</sup> Town rulers, who favoured a complaint-free administration of the town, always donated money to allow the citizens of the town to construct their town hall.

### 3. Functional facilities of town halls

Roman and late medieval and early modern construction theoreticians (like Vitruvius in his “Ten Books on Architecture”) already saw the town hall as the successor of the “public square” of antiquity.<sup>32</sup> The structural fabric of the early modern town is also found in the plans of ideal towns, as presented for example by Joseph Furttenbach the Younger (1632–1655) in 1650. In his idealised “commercial town”, the central square of a town is equipped with a church, a “Latin school”, the armoury as well as the town hall.<sup>33</sup> Each of these types of sacred and secular public buildings has a specific function in urban society. Architecture has the function to adequately reflect these idealised perceptions of the buildings in ornamentation and decoration, in their design (for example their shape) and in their urban spatial location. The town hall building type generally requires the following components: a large “lordly” room and sufficient “comfort” for all advisory bodies (town council, chamber of finance, town court). In addition, besides the prisons, several vaults (for storage of goods), the residence of the bailiff and the prison master as well as other necessities (such as fire extinguishing equipment, the town’s weights and measures) should be housed in the basement of the town hall.<sup>34</sup>

Town halls and council meetings are closely connected; before the advent of town halls, council meetings took place in private houses (such as that of the town judge), the administrative seat of the town ruler, church buildings or in public places such as a tavern. The jurisdiction of the town council over citizens and non-citizens was limited in the Middle Ages and the early modern period to a total of six key areas<sup>35</sup> with no separation of executive and legislative branches: (1) legislative and

<sup>31</sup> BRANDSTÄTTER, Rathäuser (see note 6), p. 101f.

<sup>32</sup> Cited from Bernd ROECK, Rathaus und Reichsstadt, in: Bernhard KIRCHGÄSSNER/Hans-Peter BECHT (eds.), Stadt und Repräsentation (Stadt in der Geschichte 21), Sigmaringen 1995, pp. 93–114, especially p. 98f.

<sup>33</sup> Hermann HIPPEL, Public Buildings in the Early Modern Period, in: Konrad OTTENHEYM/Monique CHATENET/Krista DE JONGE (eds.), Public Buildings in Early Modern Europe (Architectura Moderna 9), Turnhout 2010, pp. 3–12, specifically 10f.

<sup>34</sup> ZEDLER, Universal-Lexikon (see note 2), column 953.

<sup>35</sup> Herbert KNITTLER, Die europäische Stadt in der frühen Neuzeit: Institutionen, Strukturen, Entwicklungen (Querschnitte 4), Vienna 2000, p. 124.

regulatory authority (including voluntary jurisdiction), (2) defence of the town and military organisation of the defence (militia forces), (3) financial and economic administration, (4) church and school administration, (5) maintenance of internal order and, finally, (6) the lower and ultimately the high courts. Early council meetings, mandatory for council members, took place only at irregular intervals in the small Central European towns and markets as shown by council minutes from the mid 16th century onwards. In small Austrian towns, regular meeting days were held at least from the 16th century onwards, with council meetings sometimes occurring very early in the day.

The small-sized town halls of Austrian small and medium-sized towns can be compared to their rich cousins of Dutch, imperial city and Swiss origin only to a limited extent; a sizeable heated council chamber and a spacious meeting room for the large/external council (*Äußerer Rat*) or for the election meeting (also used as a ballroom) were also standard here, though sometimes spread over two floors due to a lack of space.<sup>36</sup> There was also a small or town clerk office and an inner vault, usually secured with an iron door to protect it from theft, fire and unauthorised use, containing the registry and the archives (also called the “secret vault”). In some cases the town hall also included rooms for the mayor<sup>37</sup> and, depending on the size of the town, premises for the upper chamber, the tax office, etc. This way, the executive, legislative and judicial powers of a town were all based at the town hall. In addition to the town council, the town judge and the executive town clerk usually held office at the town hall during the early modern period.

The town hall of the Late Middle Ages and the early modern period represents the seat of the town council and also serves as a courthouse, with the halls of justice, trade and “proclamation” arbours in northern Germany and the southern Baltic Sea region playing an essential role in the High Middle Ages, in a similar way to town halls. Austrian town halls established later in time featured a balcony suitable for proclamations. The town hall, until the loss of jurisdiction on the part of the citizens (after 1848 in the Habsburg monarchy), was also the place to administer justice and execute punishment, as the high court, the pillory as well as various prisons (citizen’s arrest, normal arrest) were also often located at or near the town hall.

The officials of the town’s public sphere of the respective town had to be present at the town hall for the election of the town’s officials, as well as for the mandatory assembly of all the citizens<sup>38</sup> held several times a year. But this building also provided

<sup>36</sup> Kurt HELLEINER, *Zur Geschichte des St. Pöltner Rathauses* [reprinted 1934], in: Thomas KARL (ed.), *500 Jahre Rathaus St. Pölten*, St. Pölten 2003, pp. 217–241, especially p. 219f.; for Salzburg Peter KRAMML, *Das Rathaus. Zentrales Bauwerk, Symbol der Stadtoberkeit und Sitz der Stadtverwaltung*, in: Gerhard AMMERER/Thomas WEIDENHOLZER (eds.), *Rathaus. Kirche. Wirt. Öffentliche Räume in der Stadt Salzburg* (Schriftenreihe des Archivs der Stadt Salzburg 26), Salzburg 2009, pp. 11–33, especially p. 19.

<sup>37</sup> Gertrud GERHARTL, *Das Wiener Neustädter Rathaus*, in: *Jahrbuch für Landeskunde von Niederösterreich* 38 (1968–1970), pp. 295–312, especially p. 309.

<sup>38</sup> For Baden: Rudolf Maurer testifies at least since the 17th century, 525 years of service to citizens, Rudolf MAURER, *525 Jahre Bürgerservice. Das Badener Rathaus 1480–2005* (Katalogblätter des Rollett-Museums Baden 54), Baden 2005, p. 8.

a meeting place for the political public of the towns (for instance when paying tribute to the new town ruler or the advent of the local ruler). These great halls attracted not only citizens interested in festive events (such as weddings, carnivals), but also the town's noblemen on occasions marking extraordinary celebrations (such as festive banquets and weddings). To this day, the town hall and the multifunctional square in front of it – especially in big cities with their large town hall ballrooms – represent an important cultural location (for example, from balls to public lectures at the Vienna town hall). From the Late Middle Ages onwards, the accessible *Ratskeller* (town hall basements) of some town halls provided not only entertainment to the diverse Estates, but were also an important source of revenue for the town.

Town halls gained special significance as administrative buildings, with some of the town officials – like the town clerk as the stable pillar of the town administration alongside the ever-changing town judges and mayors – using it as their residence from the 15th century onwards in Central Europe, not only in the sense of work, but also as a “home”. In addition to the town clerk, occasionally the town doctor, the midwife and in some towns the mayor also lived in the town hall, which sometimes acted as the town's bank, too. The town hall as the largest building of a town was therefore not only seen as a festive and technical administrative urban centre, but also served as a business building or as “the most important store in the town”<sup>39</sup> and as a warehouse.<sup>40</sup> The town's bread tables (“bread banks”) and meat banks were sometimes located at or outside the town hall, where the town baker and/or butcher had to sell their goods. Town hall images from the 19th century still show the historic town hall building surrounded by wooden shacks and market stalls. The weekly market also often took place within sight of the town hall. The visualisation of the applicable measuring units or the setting up of the town's scales was closely linked to the council's market authority. Regionally stipulated capacity and length measurements were checked here and the seller thus controlled.

The tower was considered a central element of many town halls in the sense of a symbol of rule, also representing the rule of the council on the economy of time (town clock, chimes) and the fire station. Many town halls also equipped themselves with their own weapons store for the town's defence, so that town halls often acted as small armouries. Muskets, spears and cannons, which had to be operational at all times, were stored in the armoury chambers. Over time, these armoury chambers became museums, another function of the town hall as the nucleus of the town's museum landscape, but also as a place of urban memory (such as high water marks, plaques, ignominy monuments, etc.).<sup>41</sup> Central objects of the town's history were kept at many town halls: the memory of a town has its seat not only structurally, but also as a museum at the town hall of Salzburg.

<sup>39</sup> ALBRECHT, *Mittelalterliche Rathäuser* (see note 7), pp. 22–24.

<sup>40</sup> Arabella Maria SEILER, *Die Entwicklung der Rathäuser in Nieder- und Oberösterreich von den Anfängen bis 1848*, diploma thesis Vienna 2001, pp. 53–59.

<sup>41</sup> For example the Eighty Years' War: Marloes HUISKAMP, „... tot eere ende reputatie van deeser stad ende loff sijner nakomelingen“ – Krieg und Friede in den Rathäusern der Niederlande. in: Karl BUSSMANN/Heinz SCHILLING (eds.), *1648 – Krieg und Frieden in Europa*, Vol. 2, Munich 1998, pp. 547–554.



#### 4. Representative aspects of town halls

Research concerning town halls concentrates less on functionalist or urban spatial analysis than on art and architectural historical issues, with the decoration of the relevant town hall by means of paintings and sculptures making up the focus of historical research, besides architecture. In addition to the tower, the façade design of town halls served as an instantly perceptible feature to distinguish them from the adjacent town houses on the town square: distinctive decorations gracing the town hall above the level of the citizens were common. In many towns the decoration of the town hall clearly illustrated the specific position of each town in the overall context of town – local ruler – historical territory. The painting of the town hall emphasised the closeness to the local ruler (and to the Emperor), but conversely also led to “emphasising the autonomy of the municipality as a political subject”.<sup>42</sup> Image cycles from the Old Testament often arranged antithetically, but also allegories of virtue (Justice, Constance) are frequently found as wall decorations on town hall façades. Although the artistic decoration of the exterior seemed to be a variable dependent on the economic power of a town, the representative design of council meeting halls was almost a must. Only in small towns did town hall façades occasionally feature little decoration, such as a Mother of God resting on a globe and a crescent moon or a representation of Lady Justice. But defamatory images were also occasionally depicted at the town hall, as noted by the philosopher of the Enlightenment Johann Pezzl (1756–1823) in his 1784 travelogue, when he mentions a “Judensau” (Jewish sow) as an anti-Jewish symbol at the town hall<sup>43</sup> (see fig. 4).

The precisely calculated visual effect of the interior and exterior design of town halls in Austrian small towns since the Late Middle Ages and early modern period usually included three iconographic areas, which could appear either individually or ideally bundled together, as in the Old Town Hall of the Vienna “metropolis”<sup>44</sup>, which was renovated at the beginning of the 18th century:

(1) Town halls and council meeting rooms were transformed during the early modern period into imperial and “local ruler” halls,<sup>45</sup> where on the one hand homage was paid to the Habsburgs and on the other hand the legal position of

<sup>42</sup> For example: Prague, Breslau, Krakow and Posen shown in Arnold BARTETZKY, *Die Beziehungen zwischen Stadt und Krone im Spiegel von Rathausdekorationen des Spätmittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit* (Prag, Breslau, Krakau, Posen), in: Marina DMITRIEVA/Karen LAMBRECHT (eds.), *Krakau, Prag und Wien. Funktionen von Metropolen im frühmodernen Staat* (Forschungen zur Geschichte und Kultur des östlichen Mitteleuropa 10), Stuttgart 2000, pp. 45–58.

<sup>43</sup> Alfred Stefan WEISS, *Reiseberichte – der Blick auf Mittelstädte*, in: Josef PAUSER/Martin SCHEUTZ/Thomas WINKELBAUER (eds.), *Quellenkunde der Habsburgermonarchie* (16.–18. Jahrhundert). Ein exemplarisches Handbuch (Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung Ergänzungsband 44), Vienna/Munich 2004, pp. 741–752, specifically p. 747.

<sup>44</sup> Géza HAJÓS, *Das Alte Rathaus im 18. Jahrhundert*, in: *Wiener Geschichtsblätter* 27 (1972), pp. 466–475.

<sup>45</sup> Friedrich POLLEROSS, *Auftraggeber und Funktionen barocker Kunst in Österreich*, in: Hellmut LORENZ (ed.), *Barock* (Geschichte der Bildenden Kunst in Österreich Bd. 4), Munich 1999, pp. 17–50,



Fig. 4: The statue of Justitia at the heart of the town hall and the self-image of the Austrian citizen. The town hall of Langenlois (north of Vienna) is situated near the church, in 1522 the citizens of Langenlois purchased “their” town hall, building alterations around 1728 (statue of Justitia with chronogram from 1728).

Source: Photo by Martin Scheutz.

the imperial city versus the non-imperial town or that of the local ruler’s town versus the patrimonial cities and markets in the area was implicitly negotiated. Large-scale portraits of local rulers were to a greater or lesser extent found in almost every town hall. A portrait of Charles VI was purchased for at least 150

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especially p. 43.

guilders for the Stockerau town hall, which was completed in 1740, as well as a painting of Francis of Lorraine and Maria Theresa by Johann Martin Schmidt for 60 guilders.<sup>46</sup>

(2) The second central thematic bundle of civic iconography of town halls is that of “fair” rule, a painted or sculpted allegory of “good” and “bad” government and the visualisation of the civic sense of community.<sup>47</sup> The allegory of Justice, in addition to Constance or Fortitude, was a popular motif for town halls, but less for the outer walls of bourgeois houses. Many council rooms were adorned with scenes of the judgment of the world and of judicial settings as the town hall was established as a place of judgment and lawful order (in addition to the warning to the members of the council to live righteously).

(3) The third branch of the municipal iconography of Austrian town halls comprises bourgeois-genealogical portraits of the officeholders and depictions of the coats of arms of the officeholders or of important town families from the Middle Ages to the 19th century. The series of officeholders’ portraits in particular not only place the depicted individuals in the foreground, but above all legitimate their function within the community. In some council rooms, under the imperial eagle on the stucco ceiling, flanked by the obligatory depiction of Justice, officeholders are depicted in their official attire and holding a sword. The paintings apply the standards of his predecessors to the portrayed individual (or to a fictional type from “earlier times”) and line him up to join the “lawful” order and tradition of previous officeholders.<sup>48</sup> The respective local rulers often preside over these series of paintings in council halls.<sup>49</sup> The juxtaposition of the “lawful” town and territorial rule order was depicted in this manner before the public of the town.

Still mostly disregarded, given they are not really relevant for the history of art, but more so for the history of town ceremonials, are town houses’ collections of pewter mugs, salt vessels, ordinary seats (chairs with and without backrests, benches with or without padding), stairs (for example spiral staircases), railings and grilles, carpets, clocks, tin and brass chandeliers, iron and tiled stoves, council chests or council silver (if not melted during Napoleonic times), etc. Pewter mugs and drinking glasses started to replace Hafner ware (earthenware products) during the early modern pe-

<sup>46</sup> FISCHER, *Das Rathaus Stockerau* (see note 13), p. 38f.

<sup>47</sup> For the iconography of good and bad government: Susan TIPTON, *Res publica bene ordinata. Regentenspiegel und Bilder vom guten Regenten. Rathausdekorationen in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Studien zur Kunstgeschichte 104), Hildesheim et al. 1996, pp. 87–183.

<sup>48</sup> For the market judge portraits from 1699: Silvia PETRIN, *Stukkateur und Maler der Perchtoldsdorfer Rathausstuben*, in: *Unsere Heimat* 45 (1974), pp. 93–104.

<sup>49</sup> MAURER, *Badener Rathaus* (see note 38), pp. 6.

riod, with towels and tablecloths made available for the hygiene of councillors.<sup>50</sup> It can be safely assumed that council offices were appointed with representative pewter jugs from the 16th century onwards, as well as with tin inkwells for the town clerk.<sup>51</sup>

The already partially edited inscriptions at the town hall and the glass panes have barely been investigated in comparison. For example, image scenes on numerous octagonal tower stoves – as shown by the well-researched example of the town hall stoves of the Swiss city of Winterthur – reveal much of the bourgeois identity, as stoves began to conquer large and small council offices in the early modern period: emblems of civic unity, but also references to history (e.g. battle scenes), the Old Testament and Antiquity alongside illustrations of virtue can be regarded as standard. One town actually blatantly copied the models of other towns (the town hall stove of Chur, 1632, follows the example of Winterthur 1624/28).<sup>52</sup> Besides a representative entrance portal (pilasters) indicating the importance of the splendid room lying beyond, wooden wall panelling, often with elaborate designs and drawers, also featured in the council room.<sup>53</sup> While masterpieces such as the depiction of the imperial Estates of the Holy Roman Empire by Jacob Russ (1494) at the town hall of Überlingen survived the change of style unscathed,<sup>54</sup> we know very little about the probably more modest wall panelling and seating accommodations of Central European town halls, because they did not survive the passage of time. Counting boards and payment desks with inlaid figures and money symbols occasionally survived changes of style. Little is known about early modern town hall cabinets: the “Electors’ cabinet” at the town hall of Schweinfurt, featuring the coats of arms of the Emperor and the seven Electors is about the only 16th-century cabinet that has been preserved.<sup>55</sup> The decoration of council chapels or council altars has barely been studied either in comparison.

<sup>50</sup> Summarised in SEILER, Rathäuser (see note 40), pp. 74–77.

<sup>51</sup> Georg WACHA, Zinngießer in Niederösterreich im Mittelalter und in der frühen Neuzeit, in: *Jahrbuch für Landeskunde von Niederösterreich* 62/1 (1996), pp. 345–366, especially p. 360f.

<sup>52</sup> Margrit FRÜH, Winterthurer Kachelöfen für Rathäuser (Sonderdruck aus *Keramikfreunde der Schweiz. Mitteilungsblatt* Nr. 95), Rüschlikon 1981, pp. 8–20.

<sup>53</sup> Als Darstellung einer Ratsstube Evelyne SPERLING, Die Ratsstube im Rathaus zu Marktbreit, in: *Mainfränkisches Jahrbuch für Geschichte und Kunst* 52 (2000), pp. 65–109.

<sup>54</sup> Guntram BRUMMER, Reich und Recht im Überlinger Rathaussaal. Altes und Neues zum Verständnis des Schnitzwerkes von Jakob Russ, in: Louis CARLEN (ed.), *Forschungen zur Rechtsarchäologie und Rechtlichen Volkskunde* 16, Zürich 1996, pp. 51–76.

<sup>55</sup> Hubert SCHÖFFEL, Das Rathaus zu Schweinfurt erbaut 1569–1572 von Nikolaus Hofmann aus Halle an der Saale (Mainfränkische Studien 36), Würzburg 1985, p. 43.

## Conclusion

The first municipal palaces appeared in northern Italy as early as the late 12th century. Shortly thereafter, this typically mediaeval phenomenon also established itself in German law cities as a specific meeting place of the council.<sup>56</sup> While in Switzerland and in southern Germany town halls were already created in the 13th and in particular the 14th century, town halls in the Austrian territory are found only in the 14th and mainly in the 15th century. The increasingly frequent office of mayor appearing in the 15th century probably accelerated the “invention” of Austrian town halls. In many cases, old and centrally located town houses or the houses of town rulers were converted and often gradually enlarged (for example through the addition of neighbouring houses). Although the early modern period cannot be considered a widespread construction phase, the second half of the 19th century emerges as an intensive phase in the new conception of town halls. These new town halls, equipped with a tower and a banquet hall, were intended to clarify the political ambitions of the bourgeoisie in the creation of national states in the context of the revolution of 1848. Functionalist town house buildings are only found increasingly in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

While the architectural history of town halls and certain specific town halls have been the subject of relatively extensive research (e.g. by Stephan Albrecht), the level of knowledge regarding many functions of town halls and their functional differentiation is still quite limited, and the diverse European town hall landscapes with their characteristics have barely been researched. The town hall includes a ceremonial room for holding elections, the rule of the council, the participation of the citizens or the clarification of the claim to power. From a spatial viewpoint, the town hall can be considered as lying between the sacred space of the church and the secular space of taverns: town halls with their chapel and meeting room combined both functions to a certain degree. The town hall served as a place of exchange, as a communicative space between secret and public affairs – in its quality as a space located between the secrecy of Council work and the town-specific public. Exclusivity and public accessibility are newer approaches to research, which take a different look at the town hall in the context of spatial developments and the socio-political field of forces of each town.

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<sup>56</sup> ALBRECHT, *Mittelalterliche Rathäuser* (see note 7), p. 25f.