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Restoration of the Emmerich Family Vault on the Nikolaikirchhof in Görlitz

Renowacja grobowca rodziny Emmerichów na cmentarzu Nikolaikirchhof w Görlitz

Keywords: Emmerich tomb, Görlitz, restoration, coat of arms, Nikolaikirchhof, Baroque sepulchral culture, Emmerich family, heritage conservation

Słowa kluczowe: grobowiec rodziny Emmerichów, Görlitz, renowacja, herb, Nikolaikirchhof, barokowa kultura sepulkralna, rodzina Emmerichów, konserwacja zabytków

Historical context and significance

The burial vault of Georg Emmerich is located in the Nikolaikirchhof in Görlitz, northwest of today's old town, outside the former city walls (Fig. 2). The burial ground is mentioned in Görlitz city records as early as the beginning of the fourteenth century. Its origins, however, can be traced back to the first quarter of the twelfth century, when the Diocese of Meissen founded the Nikolaikirche near a homestead. Despite the later relocation of the settlement to a hill above the Neisse River and the construction of the Church of St. Peter and Paul, the parish rights of the "old" Nikolaikirche remained in effect. In the mid- and late fifteenth century, two endowments for lamps in the charnel houses within the churchyard were recorded, indicating intensive use of the site as a burial ground. At this time, Urban Emmerich, father of Georg Emmerich, had already served multiple terms as mayor. Through his marriage to the daughter of Görlitz mayor Rinkengießer (after 1422), the family acquired wealth and influence. Urban Emmerich died in 1470 at the age of 91. His son Georg, a respected and affluent merchant, served repeatedly as mayor between 1483 and 1502. The family first developed into a patrician dynasty and later into the noble Emmerich family, documented until the early nineteenth century. Following his pilgrimage to Jerusalem, Georg Emmerich commissioned the construction of the Holy Sepulcher from 1481 onward—a religious Gesamtkunstwerk extending from

the Church of St. Peter and Paul to the Holy Sepulcher. A few years later, he founded a hospital opposite the Frauenkirche. Martin Luther referred to him as the "King of Görlitz." The history of Görlitz is closely intertwined with his life, and his significance to the city cannot be overstated. The burial vault, rebuilt in 1721, continues this family legacy and stands as an important testimony to Baroque funerary culture.

Objectives of conservation

The restoration aimed to record and preserve the building's authentic architectural character. The facade was to be restored to its original coloration based on the findings. The existing exterior plaster, presumably cement-based, was retained due to its solid execution and only repaired where necessary. No negative impact on the building itself or its fittings was expected, even in the medium term. Moreover, repairing the few damaged areas was the most economical and ecologically sensible option, taking environmental protection into account. The interior contains several epitaphs that did not belong to the original furnishings. Among these were four burial slabs located in the center of the building, which apparently covered the descent to the burial chamber. The origin of these memorial stones, slabs, or epitaphs is unclear. No alternative placement was possible or feasible. Only for the slabs lying on the floor was a different location considered, as they created a visually awkward situ-

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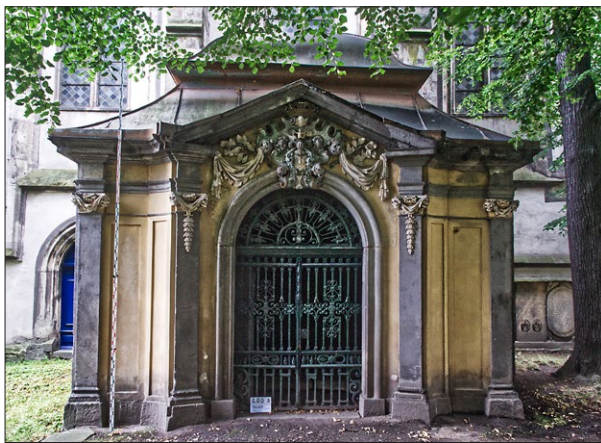


Fig. 1. View of the Emmerich family vault, as seen before the restoration, 2021; all photos by S. Hübner

Ryc. 1. Widok krypty rodziny Emmerichów przed renowacją, 2021; autorem wszystkich zdjęć jest S. Hübner

ation, restricted the spatial perception of the interior, and could compromise visitor safety as foot traffic increased. Remnants of ceiling plaster with stuccoed decorations were still present on the vault, originally dividing the ceiling into mirror-like panels.

However, the surviving plaster fragments did not provide sufficient reference for reconstructing the original ceiling design. The plan was therefore to restore the original plaster structure according to historical models and incorporate the remaining fragments. Several floral decorative elements, presumably punched metal ornaments, had been lost on the exterior of the entrance grille due to corrosion. A historical photograph from 1888 still shows these elements, although progressive corrosion was already evident. The strike bar of the leaf panel is decorated with vertically arranged studs, only four of which remained in the upper area, some already loosened and at risk of falling. For the planned restoration and preservation of the structure's authenticity, these important decorative elements were to be reconstructed, especially as renewing the strike bar was also necessary for the functional operation of both grille wings. On the inside, part of the former wooden barrier behind the leaf panel was still present. For protection against weather, particularly in late autumn and winter, reconstructing the missing parts of the wooden barrier—the transom and passage wing—was considered both sensible and necessary. Several small losses were observed on the coat of arms above the entrance, caused by mechanical stresses such as falling branches. As the coat of arms conveys the most significant message of the overall design of the tomb, all necessary stone restorations were carried out. Restoring the original facade coloration, based on the results of the investigations, was a key objective. By establishing representative test areas for all planned measures, the goal of preserving and maintaining the authentic architectural character could be approached. This approach ensures that the

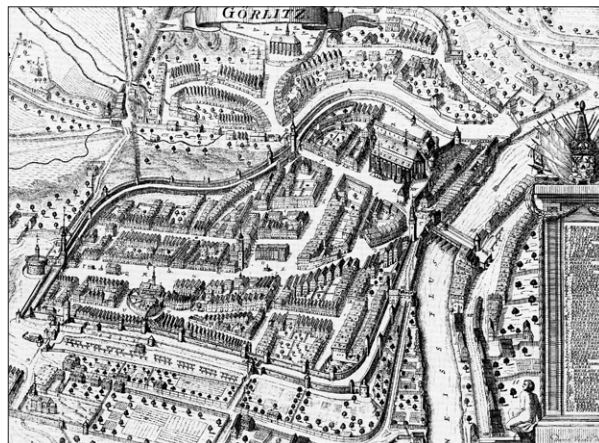


Fig. 2. Daniel Petzold, Görlitz, 1714, copperplate engraving; https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AKupferstich_Goerlitz_1714_Petzold.jpg? (accessed: 20.01.2025)

Ryc. 2. Görlitz, 1714 r., miedzioryt autorstwa Daniela Petzolda; https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AKupferstich_Goerlitz_1714_Petzold.jpg? (dostęp: 20.01.2025)



Fig. 3. Site plan, 2007; created as part of a diploma thesis in the Surveying degree programme at Dresden University of Applied Sciences; reproduced with the kind permission of the Lower Monument Protection Authority of Görlitz

Ryc. 3. Plan sytuacyjny, 2007; opracowany w ramach pracy dyplomowej na kierunku geodezja na Uniwersytecie Nauk Stosowanych w Dreźnie; zamieszczono za uprzejmą zgodą Dolnego Urzędu Ochrony Zabytków w Görlitz

high heritage value of the Emmerich Tomb as a Baroque memorial and part of Görlitz's funerary culture is preserved for the long term.

Architectural description

Building structure

The Emmerich burial house is a rectangular, house-like structure directly attached to the north wall of the Nikolaikirche (Fig. 3). The actual burial chamber is located underground and served as a family or hereditary tomb. An inscription on the main epitaph indi-



Fig. 4. South wall with the main epitaph, previous condition, 2021
Ryc. 4. Ściana południowa z głównym epitafium, stan przed renowacją, 2021

cates that the structure was “renovated and expanded” after a fire in 1717, suggesting that an older family vault previously stood on the same site. The Baroque facade gives the building a prominent position within the Nikolaikirchhof. Its appearance is defined by an ochre-colored paint with grey architectural elements, articulated by wall pilasters, cornices, and a plinth zone. The north facade is particularly striking: pilasters frame the arched entrance portal, which is crowned by a large family coat of arms. Georg Emmerich’s coat of arms features a siren as the central motif—both on the shield and as the crest. Flanked by laurel branches and draperies, it was originally polychromed and gilded. The pilaster capitals combine classical ornamentation with Baroque memento mori symbols, including skulls with funerary cloths and leafy garlands. The entrance portal is closed by a richly decorated wrought-iron grille. Above, a convex-concave Mansard roof with a zinc covering emphasizes the facade’s Baroque dynamism.

Interior

The interior has a rectangular floor plan of approximately 5.70×4.80 m and is covered by a brick barrel vault. On the side walls, two diagonal spandrels each divide the surface into wall panels with central wall pilasters. The corner pilasters on the entrance wall carry capitals in the impost zone, and the vault reaches a height of about 3.50 m at its apex. Dominating the rear wall is the large main epitaph made of Silesian sandstone, featuring five larger three-quarter figures and two relief figures in the lower section. The inscription refers to Georg Emmerich and his descendants (Fig. 4). On either side, burial slabs have been placed, which, however, do not belong to the Emmerich family. Additional epitaphs are located along the side walls, with the pieces set into the masonry representing the original furnishings. The floor consists of sandstone slabs, with four burial slabs temporarily positioned in the center—presumably covering the access to the underground burial chamber. Additionally, remnants of a former wooden barrier are preserved in the reveal of the leaf panel.



Fig. 5. East facade, previous condition, 2021
Ryc. 5. Elewacja wschodnia, stan przed renowacją, 2021

Condition

Facade

The facade of the Emmerich family tomb is in good condition overall, with no structurally significant damage apparent. Investigations revealed that the plaster surface had been renewed in a later renovation phase. Because no written records exist, the exact date can only be estimated. Eyewitness accounts and photographs that surfaced in early 2025 suggest that the work dates to the early 1980s and was carried out in parallel with voluntary efforts on the Nikolaikirchhof and restoration campaigns inside the church. On the east facade, four epitaphs are mounted on a granite block in front of the wall and plastered at the sides. They are protected from rain by overlapping “beaver-tail” roof tiles set in mortar. On the ochre-colored plaster, a conspicuous brown stain with splashes is visible—presumably roof paint that was not removed after a tipped-over paint bucket (Fig. 5). Salt damage is evident up to a height of around 1.00 m, causing blistering and weathering of both the ochre limewash and the dark gray pilaster washes. The show facade exhibits similar damage, including a pronounced dirt band at the moisture horizon up to approximately 70 cm above the current ground level. The original ground level lay about 20 cm lower, as inferred from the varying plinth height and the domed pavement in front of the entrance.

The dark grey washes on the Silesian sandstone cornices also show heavy weathering from splash water. The blackened surface of the joint mortar indicates cement-based mortars with elevated sulfate content. Mechanical damage is visible on the capitals: the left skull motif of the inner western capital is damaged, possibly by a falling branch. Repair work on an outer skull motif of the western capital was carried out using cement-based mortar. The exposed position at the northwest corner has caused significant weathering, making repairs necessary. The round-arched sandstone entrance portal similarly shows blackened joint mortar; in the lower left section of the reveal, an earlier mortar repair has been displaced by corrosion pressure from



Fig. 6. West wall, previous condition, 2021

Ryc. 6. Ściana zachodnia, stan przed renowacją, 2021

the grille hinge. On the west wall, as on the east wall, four epitaphs or tomb slabs are plastered into place. Moss growth on the plinth indicates persistent dampness. Beneath the eaves cornice, two small semicircular ventilation openings are present, which serve as nesting sites for birds or bats. The convex-concave Mansard roof is clad in brown-painted zinc sheets, presumably dating from the 1970s/80s renovation. Although the paint is heavily weathered, the roof itself remains intact. No signs of moisture ingress were detected in the interior vault.

Interior

Within the interior of the tomb, larger remnants of what is presumably the original plaster survive only in the front third of the room, on both the walls and the vault surfaces. Stratigraphically, the plaster diminishes toward the center of the space. In particular, relatively stable lime plaster is still preserved in the reveals of the entrance opening. On the other wall surfaces, however, the plaster layer is progressively deteriorating (Fig. 6):

- beginning with flaking of the paint layer and blistering of the fine finishing coat, followed by superficial sintering,
- and culminating in the exposure of the coarse undercoat and complete loss of plaster.

The bedding mortar of the mixed masonry, composed of rubble stone and brick, has lost structural cohesion. In the front part of the room, larger coherent plaster areas still survive on the vault, where the arrangement of articulated plaster fields and remnants of stucco profiles remains legible. In the rear sections of the vault, plaster remnants are considerably reduced. Due to the weakened mortar, surface-parallel cracks have developed in these few fragments, and in some cases the plaster has detached up to 2 cm from the substrate. The bedding and joint mortar of the brick vault surfaces is likewise severely weakened. In some areas, mortar loss extends to half the width of a brick joint, creating a risk of individual vault bricks becoming loose. The cause of these damage patterns most likely lies in air turbulence at the entrance,

which caused the damp plaster to dry more rapidly. By contrast, in the rear section of the building, weathering-related alteration of the mortar continued unhindered under persistent damp conditions, leading to premature plaster loss. In the southern lunettes of the rear vault section, concrete patches reinforced with iron were identified, presumably dating from the renovation phase around 1980. Whether these concrete fillings close former ventilation openings, or whether individual bricks were removed and replaced during roof repairs, cannot be conclusively determined. Their position, however, suggests that they cover former ventilation openings. From a building-physics perspective, their significance for air exchange within the structure is minimal.

Findings

On and within the building, only a few findings could be recorded that can be attributed to the time of construction in the early eighteenth century, due to the state of preservation and the renovation phases carried out.

Facade

The original facade design is evident in certain areas, where the plastic structural elements show differentiated coloration. Around the coat of arms, sandstone forms the substrate of the ashlar masonry. Localized remnants of a light ochre paint layer were found directly on the white-primed plaster surface. Additional traces were observed in a few areas where the sandstone portal surround meets the adjoining plaster. Due to weather-related discoloration, further identification of ochre traces was not possible. No historic plaster remains were preserved at the junctions with the sandstone pilasters. On the sandstone portal surround, remnants of a grey paint layer survive in shaded, weather-protected areas. Similar traces were also found on the grey-coloured pilasters and cornices. All other facade surfaces were completely reworked with a fine, cementitious hard mortar and coated with an ochre-colored limewash.

Coat of arms

The book *Old Görlitz Families and Their Coats of Arms* depicts three coats of arms of the Emmerich family. The coat of arms located on the Emmerich Crypt belongs to the “Emerich-Georg Line.” It differs from the Emmerich family’s ancestral coat of arms in that the siren in the central or heart shield sits on a checkered shield base. The coat of arms of the “Emerich-Wenzel Line” is very similar to that of the “Georg Line”; only a crown on the siren’s head and a mirror in her right hand were added. The coat of arms was also reworked polychromely during the final renovation phase. Examination revealed it to feature a white pall and white laurel leaves. The supporting shield appeared blue to green due to paint and pigment residue.

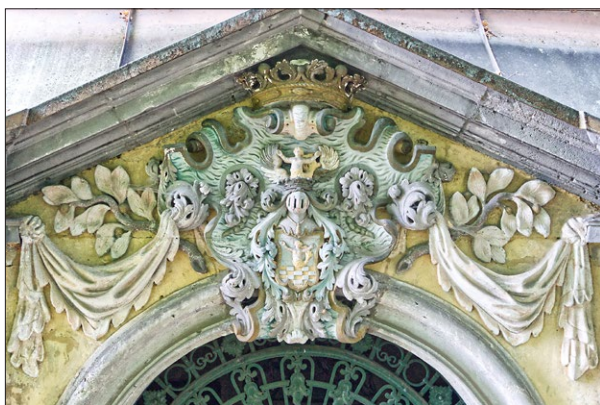


Fig. 7. Coat of arms, previous condition, 2021

Ryc. 7. Herb, stan sprzed renowacji, 2021

This is presumably the first version, as no other paint variations were found that could be attributed to the renovation layer. Scientific examinations of the blue-green pigment confirmed the suspicion of the use of azurite. This blue pigment can transform over time into the green pigment malachite through weathering processes—pseudomorphism. Furthermore, several indications of gilding of various design elements were found. These now appear greenish-dark because they were bronzed during the last renovation phase. Gold bronze consists of metallic pigments from a copper-tin alloy, which loses its metallic luster over time. Due to the corrosion products of both metals, the surface now appears gray-green. The acanthus leaves were all painted gray. Structurally, the coat of arms consists of six assembled, sculpturally worked stone blocks, which are attached to the masonry via iron anchors. The three lower stone blocks also form the round-arched portal jamb. All iron anchors are heavily corroded; as a result, the lime mortar covering has become loose and has already been blown off in places. The upper large crown of leaves and pearls, a so-called crown of leaves, is missing the central leaf tip, apparently due to mechanical influences. (Fig. 7)

Interior

Severe weathering has left only a few remnants of the original paint layer on the historic plaster. The currently visible paint layer appears light grey to greenish due to surface discoloration. In the recesses of the surviving profiles, the same paint layer appears light blue. Scientific pigment analysis confirmed the use of smalt, indicating that this paint layer belongs to a historical renovation phase, probably dating from the nineteenth century. As the original paint layer, only a white limewash was identified on the surviving wall and vault surfaces. To the sides of the main epitaph on the south wall, remnants of an intense blue paint layer were found, as well as traces of red paint running from the upper wall into the vault. These likely represent a painted drapery associated with the epitaph. Such decorative painting

was common and can still be observed in other tomb buildings on the site.

On the left epitaph of the northwestern shield wall, which belonged to the original furnishings, traces of stucco remain. Above the sandstone panel, clouds with rays of sunlight were modeled in lime mortar as applied stucco. Remnants of a light yellow paint layer were detected on the stucco. The crown at the center of the epitaph was painted in a similar yellow. Scientific analysis confirmed the use of lead-tin yellow. Overall, the interior was originally white-washed, with richly painted drapery around the main epitaph and colored crowning elements on the west-side epitaphs. No polychromy or stuccoed crowning was detected on the eastern epitaph. Investigating the historic polychromy of the fixed epitaphs was not part of this study, but such analyses are recommended before conservation work begins. Nine additional epitaphs are preserved, each set about 5 cm in front of the surrounding walls. They are anchored with iron clamps embedded in cement plaster and secured against tipping. These do not belong to the original furnishings of the tomb building.

The main epitaph

The main epitaph is essentially well preserved. Only the cloud motif, which is executed as a stucco application in lime mortar next to the crowning angel figure, has detached from the substrate, with some fragments already lost. Traces of a yellow or ochre paint layer remain on the cloud motif. Remains of a paint layer, presumably a light oil paint, are preserved over the entire surface of the epitaph and on the figures. This paint layer is heavily soiled, weathered, and largely flaked off, lying loosely on the sandstone. Investigations show that the polychromy consisted of only a few colors. Black or dark gray dominated the architectural elements. The inscription panel was also painted black or dark gray, while the gilded lettering and the gilded braided border with floral corner ornaments were the most important decorative elements. Due to heavy soiling, the figures appear dark gray overall. However, lighter gray remnants of the paint layer are visible in the depressions of the folds of the robes. This was confirmed by carefully removing surface dirt with a fiberglass eraser. No flesh tones could be detected; only one figure shows minimal contour traces at the eye and hints of a contoured pupil. The hair shows no color differentiation; the paint layer remnants are too unstable. The skeleton separating the upper central section from the crowning angel is painted a slightly more colorful grey. Brushstrokes in the recesses of its slab show distinct color variations despite heavy soiling. Considering the light grey of the garments and funerary cloth, the skeleton was likely depicted in an ivory-like tone. Between its legs, the skeleton holds an hourglass, which was originally gilded.

Additional gilding can be found on:

- the hems of the garments at the lower skirt edge
- the revers of the collars

- the sleeve hems
- the neck ornaments of the figures
- the lamb held by the right-hand figure
- the two large volutes beside the inscription panel
- the anchor in the hand of the right-hand figure
- the book held by the left-hand figure

The plinth zone is dominated by two lateral figure reliefs. Only minimal, loosely adhering dark grey remnants of the paint layer remain here, and their analysis was not possible (Fig. 8).

Restoration of the coat of arms

In May 2024, the restoration of the coat of arms was commissioned. Before the work began, additional tests of submitted pigment samples were carried out by IDK Sachsen. The results provided valuable information on the original coloration of the coat of arms. The blue pigment azurite was clearly identified on the cartouche. Since the surface is heavily chalking, a water-based binder is assumed; an oil paint layer can be ruled out, as azurite in oil would turn a dark greenish tone. The resulting intense blue corresponds to the heraldic color referred to as “azure.” The funerary cloth was painted with lead white, slightly toned with small amounts of iron oxide pigments in red, ochre, or black. The laurel leaves were presumably painted with green earth and then lightened or broken up with lead-tin yellow. The preserved paint layer largely corresponds in color to dried laurel leaves. The shoulder piece of the helmet could not be clearly identified; analyses indicate a shiny metallic surface, which differs in color from the clearly documented gilding on the helmet bars, collar, and hem. The helmet lining was painted vermilion, which corresponds to the heraldic designation of red as vermilion. The coloring of the curved acanthus leaves on the sides of the cartouche remained unclear. However, differentiated paint layers could be identified for the helmet decoration and the framing acanthus leaves: the inside was gilded, while the top was black, presumably with iron oxide black.

This follows heraldic rules, under which the exterior of the helmet decoration matches the shield’s color, while the lining is executed in metallic colors—gold or silver. The focus of the restoration of the Emmerich coat of arms was reconstructing the historic paint layers, including the previously existing gilding. Originally, a new oil-based coating was planned. At the same time, in consultation with the Saxon State Office for Monument Preservation, the use of REMMERS silicone resin paints was examined as a potentially more practical alternative. The planned oil painting was not feasible under the local conditions. Because the scaffolding had to be rebuilt daily for organizational reasons, it was impossible to seal off the work area. The fresh oil paint could therefore not be adequately protected from falling leaves, pollen, and insects—factors that would have prevented a clean and lasting result.



Fig. 8. Main epitaph, 2021

Ryc. 8. Główny napis nagrobny, 2021

For this reason, the decision was made to use silicone resin paints for the reconstruction. Because this paint dries to a very matte finish, traditional oil gilding was deliberately avoided. Instead, newly available metallic interference pigments from Kremer Pigments were used, embedded in a suitable binder. These pigments offer a long-lasting alternative to classic gold bronze, as they neither corrode nor tarnish. They consist of fine aluminum flakes coated with iron oxide and silicon dioxide, providing a color-stable and visually high-quality solution.

The restoration began with dry cleaning the surface with a soft brush, followed by vacuuming. The heavily chalky paint layers from the 1978 renovation were removed using micro-steam cleaning, preserving the original paint layers. The azurite paint layer on the cartouche remained intact after cleaning. In the undercuts, the thick paint layers from the last renovation were removed with a scalpel and a fiberglass eraser. This allowed re-examination and the collection of suitable material for pigment analysis. Damage was also observed on the ashlar blocks, joints, and iron anchors. Loose mortar in the vertical and horizontal joints was carefully removed with a small chisel. Exposed iron anchors, whose corrosion had spalled the surrounding lime mortar, were me-

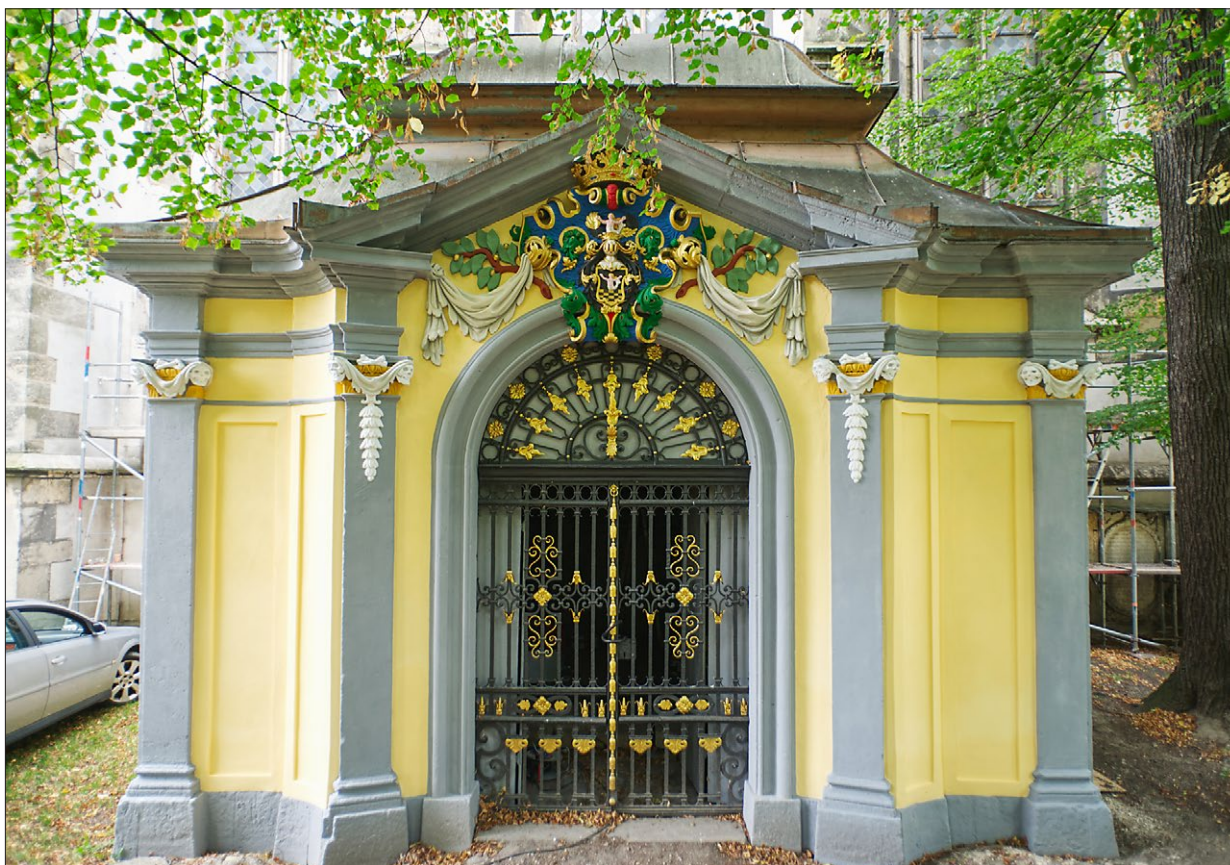


Fig. 9. Emmerich family vault, as seen in 2025

Ryc. 9. Krypta rodziny Emmerichów, stan w 2025 r.



Fig. 10. Coat of arms, as seen in 2025

Ryc. 10. Herb, stan w 2025 r.

chanically cleaned with a stainless steel brush and then treated with OWATROL—first diluted with substitute turpentine, then undiluted for permanent conservation. The vertical and horizontal joints were repointed with the natural stone repair mortar Mineros 2000, whose grain and color match Silesian sandstone. Detached original lime mortar fragments were reattached in their original positions over the corrosion-treated iron elements using epoxy resin (AKEPOX 5010). On the sculptural relief itself, only minor mechanical damage was found. For the reconstruction of the larger loss at the top of the leaf crown, a stainless steel anchor was bonded into the stone with AKEPOX 3015 Rapid Bond to serve as reinforcement. The missing leaf was then reconstructed with Mineros 2000, based on a historic photograph from around 1900. Smaller losses on the laurel leaves were filled with a synthetic resin-based filler. The new paint layer was applied using REMMERS silicone resin paints. Despite the challenging con-

ditions, a paint layer was achieved that meets both conservation requirements and practical on-site conditions (Fig. 9).

Conclusion

The restoration of the Emmerich Tomb demonstrates how careful analysis, conservation objectives, and practical measures work together to preserve an important witness to Görlitz history. Despite prior renovations and damage, key findings on the original coloration, furnishings, and construction history were successfully documented. Through the restoration of the coat of arms, the grille, and the winter closure, as well as ongoing work on the facade, the building's authentic architectural character is being preserved and its historical impact reinforced. In this way, the tomb remains a visible and tangible expression of Baroque sepulchral culture and a part of the Emmerich family heritage for future generations (Fig. 10).

Abstract

In August 2021, the restoration of the Emmerich Tomb at the Nikolaikirchhof in Görlitz began. The initial measures included a detailed survey and emergency conservation of damaged plaster, particularly the remaining ceiling plaster. In parallel, a conservation concept was developed based on comprehensive investigations of both the interior and exterior, which also defined the conservation objectives. To support the planning, scientific analyses were conducted: the Institute for Diagnostics and Conservation of Monuments in Saxony and Saxony-Anhalt (IDK), Dresden, performed quantitative salt analyses on building material samples. In addition, pigment and paint layer samples were examined from the interior, the family coat of arms above the entrance portal, and the entrance grille. In 2023, a significant private donation enabled the continuation of the project. Consequently, in 2024, the coat of arms, the entrance grille, and the wooden winter closure were restored. Current work focuses on the facade (Fig. 1).

Streszczenie

W sierpniu 2021 r. rozpoczęto renowację grobowca rodziny Emmerichów na cmentarzu Nikolaikirchhof w Görlitz. Wstępne działania obejmowały szczegółowe pomiary oraz konserwację ratunkową uszkodzonego tynku, zwłaszcza zachowanej części tynku sufitowego. Równolegle opracowano koncepcję konserwatorską w oparciu o kompleksowe badania zarówno wnętrza, jak i zewnętrznej części zabytku, w ramach której określono również cele konserwatorskich. W celu wsparcia prac projektowych przeprowadzono analizy naukowe: Instytut Diagnostyki i Konserwacji Zabytków w Saksonii i Saksonii-Anhalt (IDK) w Dreźnie wykonał ilościowe analizy zawartości soli w próbkach materiałów budowlanych. Ponadto zbadano próbki pigmentów i warstw farby pochodzące z wnętrza, herbu rodowego nad portalem wejściowym oraz kraty wejściowej. W 2023 r. znacząca darowizna prywatna umożliwiła kontynuację projektu. W rezultacie w 2024 r. odrestaurowano herb, kratę wejściową oraz drewnianą osłonę zimową. Obecne prace koncentrują się na elewacji (ryc. 1).