

The Great Ball Game Hall of Prague Castle: Its Appearance and Function in the Context of Habsburg Renaissance Ballcourts

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Abstract

The Great Ball Game Hall of Prague Castle, dating from the years 1567–1569 and built for Emperor Maximilian II, presents an exceptional architectural realization. Apart from the representative appearance of the Great Ball Game Hall also its unusual scale is singular: It is roughly twice as long as was the custom and as was recommended by the *Trattato del giuoco della palla* by Antonio Scaino (Ferrara 1555). The dimensions of the building are linked to the question of how the Great Ball Game Hall was actually used. Archival sources from the time of the reign of Emperor Rudolf II indicate that it was used probably for the *pallone* game and not for the game of tennis. From the framework given by the historiography of Renaissance sports and recreation evolves the hypothesis that also covered buildings for the *pallone* game existed – contrary to the dominant opinion that the game was played exclusively outdoors.

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Renaissance ball game halls

[1] In recent years several publications have been devoted to Renaissance ball courts and ball games. However, with the exception of brief mentions in the publication by Heiner Gillmeister and texts published in Czechia, these studies ignore the existence of this phenomenon in Central Europe.¹ In Prague Castle, e.g., we can still admire today in the Royal Garden near the famous Royal Summer Palace the Great Ball Game Hall dating from the years 1567–1569. With an arcaded façade it presents an exceptionally demanding architectural realisation (Fig. 1).²



1 Great Ball Game Hall in the Royal Garden of Prague Castle, after the restoration of the façade in 2018–2019 (photo © Ivan Muchka, 2019)

[2] The specific architectural expression of the Prague ball game hall, its *decorum*, shows that the building was accorded great importance. Although ball games were popular, often those playing them were satisfied with rooms inside a palace (such as in the Castello Sforzesco in Milan). If the ball game halls stood alone, usually they were simple, plain, architecturally unarticulated buildings, as in the case of the ball game

¹ Heiner Gillmeister, *Tennis: A Cultural History*, 2nd ed., London 1998; Cees de Bondt, *Royal Tennis in Renaissance Italy*, Turnhout 2006; Theo Stemmler, *Vom Jeu de Paume zum Tennis*, Frankfurt a.M. 1988; examples of other publications where ball games play their part, are Rebekka von Mallinckrodt and Angela Schattner, eds., *Sports and Physical Exercise in Early Modern Culture: New Perspectives on the History of Sports and Motion*, London 2016; *Spiel! Kurzweil in Renaissance und Barock*, exh. cat., ed. Sabine Haag, Vienna 2016; Andrea Steckerová, "Kratochvíle a reprezentace: Aristokratické sporty raného novověku", in: *Start: Sport jako symbol ve výtvarném umění*, ed. Rostislav Švácha, Prague 2016, 22-55; Rostislav Švácha, ed., *Naprej! Czech Sports Architecture 1567–2012*, Prague 2012, 14-20.

² The Renaissance history of the building and its style are discussed in detail in particular by Olga Frejková, *Palladianismus v české renesanci*, Prague 1941, especially 46-47, 67-70, 104-111, 118-120, 138-141, 149-150, and 157; Jiří Svoboda and Václav Procházka, "Míčovna", in: *Památková péče* 35 (1975), 18-44.

halls of the Palazzo Ducale in Urbino, the Villa Belriguardo near Ferrara or the Villa d'Este in Tivoli. Buildings in the German lands, known, for instance, from the "Stammbücher" of the nobility, were generally simple walled buildings with a gable roof.

[3] A second specific trait of the Great Ball Game Hall in Prague, apart from its representative appearance, are its unusual dimensions. It is roughly twice as long as was the custom and as was recommended by the first printed treatise on ball games and their rules, this being the *Trattato del giuoco della palla* by Antonio Scaino (Ferrara 1555). The dimensions of the building are linked to the issue of how the Great Ball Game Hall in Prague was actually used.

The Habsburgs and ball games

[4] The existence of ball game halls in the Czech and Austrian lands can be connected with the ruling family of Habsburg. Their representative and social activities were linked in particular with hunting, but also with tournaments, festivities and with sports. Ball games reached Prague in the time of Ferdinand I (1503–1564), who introduced the atmosphere of modern court life to the metropolis. In 1538, he began to establish the Royal Garden in Prague Castle.³ During the 16th and at the beginning of the 17th century the Habsburgs then constructed a total of four ball game halls in the garden. A further ball game hall was built by Archduke Ferdinand II of Austria (1529–1595) below the Star Summer Palace in Prague, and Rudolf II (1552–1612) also built a ball game hall at the estate in Brandýs upon Elbe. There is no clear evidence that any other separate building of a ball game hall existed in the Czech lands before 1600.⁴

[5] The Habsburgs became acquainted with ball games and Renaissance 'tennis' in particular during their sojourns in Burgundy, Holland and Spain. Ferdinand I was brought up in Spain, where he undoubtedly came into contact with sports activities; Philip the Handsome (1478–1506), Ferdinand's father, born in Bruges, was an exceptionally famous player of

³ Lastly Sylva Dobalová and Jaroslava Hausenblasová, "Die Zitruskultur am Hofe Ferdinands I. und Anna Jagiellos. Import und Anbau von Südfrüchten in Prag 1526–1564", in: *Studia Rudolphina* 15 (2015), 9-36.

⁴ Among ball game halls built circa 1600 we include the ball game hall of the Lobkovic family in Horšovský Týn and the ball game hall of the Smiřický family in Kostelec nad Černými lesy; after 1630 the ball game halls were established of Albrecht of Valdštejn in Jičín and the Trčka family of Lípa in Opočno. For the last two see Petr Uličný et al., *Architektura Albrechta z Valdštejna. Italská stavební kultura v Čechách v letech 1600–1635*, vol. 1, Prague 2016, 310-311, 316-320, 325-327. In Moravia one may consider in particular Mikulov and Valtice, and possibly Bučovice.

the *jeu de paume*.⁵ However, it must have been first and foremost the ball game hall belonging to the Viennese Hofburg that had a direct influence on the buildings in Prague Castle.

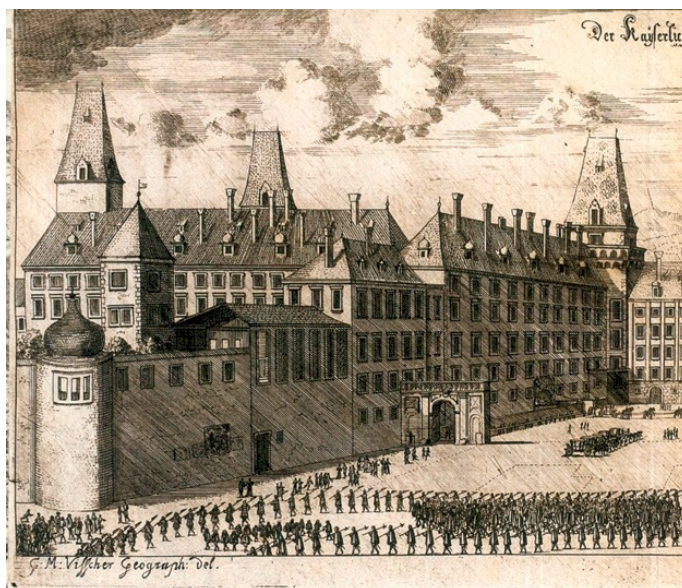
The ball game halls in Vienna

[6] The first Viennese ball house was situated beside the so-called Ebersdorfer Haus close to the Hofburg, which was purchased by Maximilian I (1459–1519), and it still functioned in the time of Ferdinand I. Both the house and the ball game hall burned down in 1525. A further Ballhaus is documented in the royal residence in Vienna in the years 1533–34 close to the garden with the maze.⁶ In the course of the modernisation of the medieval Hofburg Ferdinand I then built a further ball game hall between 1540 and 1542, in the extension of which, closer to the castle, there was also the building of the *Kunstkammer*. The buildings were situated on the Burggasse leading to the church of St. Michael. The ball game hall, the author of which was Benedikt Kölbl, quite definitely had a roof and an external terrace, accessible from the garden through a tower with a spiral staircase. The designer of the tower was Jan Tscherte. This tower also connected two levels of the terraced garden, and beside it stood a small house for the gardener.⁷ Although the ball game hall is described as "large" in written sources, its dimensions were by no means exceptional – roughly 25 x 8 meters (Fig. 2).

⁵ Stemmler, *Vom Jeu de Paume zum Tennis*, 17; Italian halls are the focus of De Bondt, *Royal Tennis in Renaissance Italy*.

⁶ Renate Holzschuh-Hofer, "Galerie, Kunstkammergebäude und Ballhaus, 1521–1619", in: *Die Wiener Hofburg 1521–1705: Baugeschichte, Funktion und Etablierung als Kaiserresidenz*, ed. Herbert Karner, Vienna 2014, 198–213: 198–203; Herbert Karner, "Galerie, Kunstkammergebäude und Ballhaus, 1620–1705", in: *Die Wiener Hofburg 1521–1705*, 214–240; Renate Holzschuh-Hofer, "Ballhaus", in: *Wien Geschichte Wiki*, [https://www.geschichtewiki.wien.gv.at/Ballhaus_\(1\)](https://www.geschichtewiki.wien.gv.at/Ballhaus_(1)) (accessed 3.10.2019). For the second Ballhaus mentioned see *Die Wiener Hofburg 1521–1705*, 87, 198.

⁷ The appearance of the New Ball Game Hall and tower was also the subject of Renate Holzschuh-Hofer, "Galerie, Kunstkammergebäude und Ballhaus", 198–201.



2 Georg Matthäus Vischer, *Der kayserliche Burg Platz in Wienn*, detail with ball game house, in: *Topographia Archiducatus Austriae*, s.l. 1672, ill. 5 (photo © National Library of the Czech Republic, Prague)

[7] Shortly after the completion of these buildings the Viennese architect Bonifaz Wolmut (before 1510–1579) became the chief architect of Prague Castle.⁸ In Vienna he may have acquired skills and knowledge which he later utilised in Prague – especially with regard to the staircase tower. Regarding the further history of these Viennese ball game halls, including the Early Baroque plans of Giovanni de Galliano Pieroni (1586–1654), I would like to refer to the already published research work of Austrian colleagues.⁹ Later, when Emperor Rudolf II eventually wanted to establish his "summer palace on the bastion" in the Hofburg he also requested a new ball game hall in it (called a "Ragetlspiel") with a connecting passageway, but the building was postponed due to shortage of funds.¹⁰

The ball game hall at the Star Summer Palace in Prague

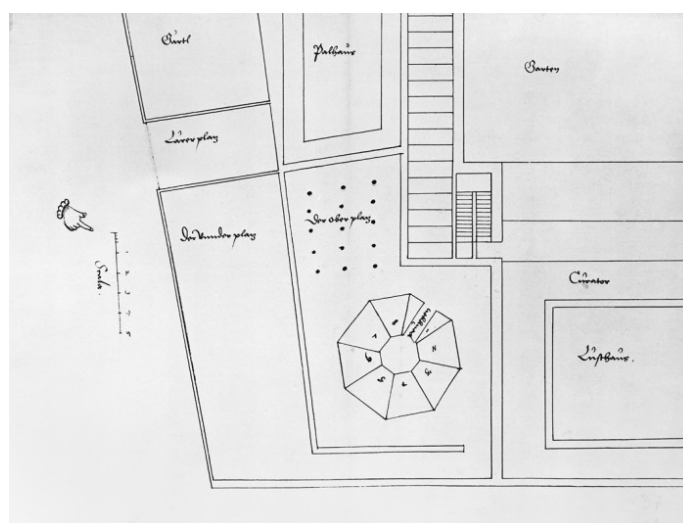
[8] Ferdinand I did not reside permanently in Prague. At Prague Castle, apart from the Summer Palace, he did not start to build any other remarkable building. In 1542, a devastating fire forced him to reconstruct the residence. The building work was organised by his second-born son,

⁸ Sarah J. Lynch, *"Ein Liebhaber aller freyen khünst": Bonifaz Wolmut and the Architecture of the European Renaissance*, Ph.D. thesis, Princeton 2017; Pavel Vlček, "Wolmut, Bonifác", in: *Encyklopedie architektů, stavitelů, zedníků a kameníků v Čechách*, ed. Pavel Vlček, Prague 2004, 719-720. The book by Frejtková, *Palladianismus*, is basically a monograph on Wolmut.

⁹ *Die Wiener Hofburg 1521–1705: Baugeschichte, Funktion und Etablierung als Kaiserresidenz*, ed. Herbert Karner, Vienna 2014.

¹⁰ Holzschuh-Hofer, "Galerie, Kunstkammergebäude und Ballhaus", 198.

Archduke Ferdinand II, who acted as a governor of the lands of the Bohemian Crown from 1547. The construction of the very first ball game playground in Prague Castle was actually one of his first tasks.¹¹ The site selected for it was below the unfinished building of the Summer Palace. In February 1548 the bricklayers began to dig the foundations.¹² Most probably the structure was not covered, but a brick-built roofless enclosure. It existed for roughly 20 years. Its location is shown on three plans from 1560–1563 (Fig. 3). Architect Wolmut was to establish an area for the cultivation of oranges and Italian fruit trees "alongside the ball game hall in the ramparts" and Archduke Ferdinand wished to construct a fish hatchery nearby.¹³



3 Bonifaz Wolmut, Plan of a garden below the Royal Summer Palace, 1563, drawing, 300 x 400 mm. Present location unknown (photo © Photo Archive of the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague)

[9] Not long after this, Archduke Ferdinand built yet another ball game hall. This time, however, it was not on his father's orders, but belonging to

¹¹ For details see Jaroslava Hausenblasová, "Archduke Ferdinand as Builder, Benefactor and Organiser of Festivities in Bohemia", in: Ivan Muchka et al., *The Star. Archduke Ferdinand II of Austria and His Summer Palace in Prague*, Prague 2017, esp. 29-32.

¹² Franc Kreyczy, "Urkunden und Regesten aus dem k. und k. Reichs-Finanz-Archiv", in: *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen des Allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses* (hereinafter JKSAK) 5 (1887), LIX, reg. 4143.

¹³ National Archives, Prague (hereinafter NA Prague), ČDKM IV, archive box 191, fol. 252-264; Sylva Dobalová, "Erzherzog Ferdinand II. von Habsburg, das Lusthaus Belvedere und die Fischbehälter im Königlichen Garten der Prager Burg", in: *Die Gartenkunst* 20 (2008), Beilage zu no. 2 (*Habsburg. Das Haus Habsburg und die Gartenkunst – ein internationaler Kongress in Wien, April 2007*), 11-18; Frejtková, *Palladianismus*, 104.

his own project, the Star Summer Palace in Liboc some kilometers to the West of Prague Castle. This ball game hall, the overgrown ruins of which we can still see on the slope below the palace (Fig. 4), is usually referred to in sources as a "galleria" and it was already completed in the first phase of the construction of the Star, i.e. in September 1556.¹⁴



4 Ruins of a ball game hall at the Star Summer Palace, Liboc district of the city of Prague (photograph © Sylva Dobalová, 2014)

According to the building records it was provided with a wooden roof. The contemporary poem by Vavřinec Špan of Španov, celebrating the building of the Star, states, however, that it was vaulted.

*Right below this stronghold lies the spheristerion eight paces wide and thirteen times one hundred feet long and upon it is a splendid high-reaching rounded [incurvus] vault. [...] an immense, high and noble building suitable for jumping, wrestling and ball games was built here.*¹⁵

[10] In 1577 the building is called the "Palnhaus".¹⁶ It was never an orangery or stable. The back wall was a retaining wall and the façade had arcades, originally with a row of eleven windows. Nevertheless, this elegant variant was subsequently altered and part of the arcades walled up. The result of this was that there were six segmental arch windows alternating with five alcoves (Fig. 5). Between the windows and the alcoves were pilasters with Tuscan capitals. Ascertaining the original form of the façade is important because it was prior to the designing of the

¹⁴ For details about the ball game hall at the Star see Sylva Dobalová, "Ball Game Hall or Antiquarium?", in: Ivan Muchka et al., *The Star. Archduke Ferdinand II of Austria and His Summer Palace in Prague*, Prague 2017, 360-366.

¹⁵ Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek (ÖNB), Cod. lat. 9902.

¹⁶ NA Prague, ČDKM IV, archive box 192, folio 642, 16 July 1577, the budget of Ulrico Aostalli mentions "die gallerey oder Palnhauß".

Great Ball Game Hall in the garden of Prague Castle and may have influenced it. Also both buildings were executed by Bonifaz Wolmut.¹⁷



5 Model of the Star Summer Palace in Prague with ball game hall in the front, 2001. On display in the Star Summer Palace (photograph © Ivan Muchka)

[11] Wolmut arrived in Prague from Vienna in the first half of 1555 to review the repairs at Prague Castle. He clearly participated in the construction of the Star from April 1556, when Pambio (Giovanni Maria Aostalli) and his assistant, the young Giovanni Lucchese, were still working on the Star. The ball game hall is mentioned in the building report of Wolmut dated September 1556 as finished for the greater part and temporarily roofed with timber.¹⁸ It is also documented by his requests for payment of salary.¹⁹

[12] The length of the ball game hall at the Star was 36 meters, its width 5.7 meters, and the height of the hall wall on the side of the façade with windows 5.5 meters. A ball game hall of such a length should, however, be at least twice as wide. The usual ratio of the walls of ball game halls was approximately 3:1, ideally 28.4 x 9.5 meters.²⁰ The windows at the Star were situated low above the floor of the hall. This rather inhibits their use

¹⁷ The ball game hall is mentioned in the building report of Wolmut as being in a rough stage of construction completed in September 1556; see *The Star*, 54-55; Jarmila Krčálová, "Der Prager Hof Ferdinands I. und Maximilians II.", in: Jarmila Hořejší et al., *Die Kunst der Renaissance und des Manierismus in Böhmen*, Prague 1979, 50-53.

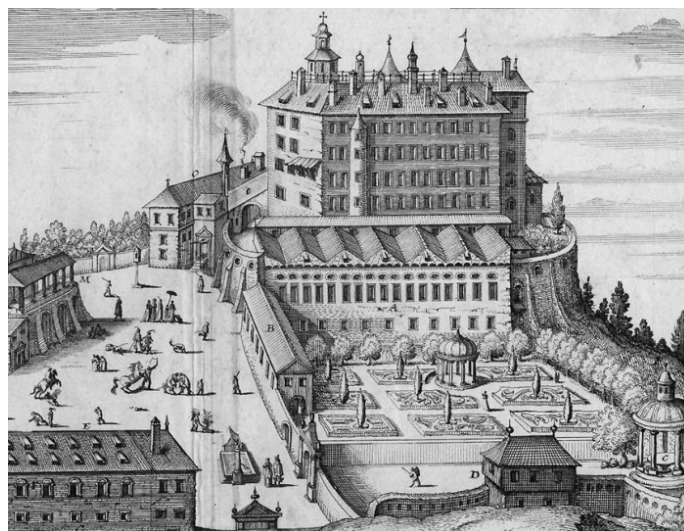
¹⁸ David Ritter von Schönherr, "Urkunden und Regesten aus dem k. k. Statthaltereii-Archiv in Innsbruck", in: *JKSAK* 11 (1890), no. 2, LXXXV-CCXLI: CLXVI, reg. 7222.

¹⁹ Karel Köpl, "Urkunden, Acten und Regesten aus dem k. k. Statthaltereii-Archiv in Prag", in: *JKSAK* 12 (1891), no. 2, I-XC: VII, reg. 7961.

for Renaissance tennis. What was it used for, then? Perhaps for fencing, wrestling or physical exercise?²¹

The ball game halls in Innsbruck

[13] According to the will of Ferdinand I, Tyrol fell to Archduke Ferdinand II after his death, and in 1567 the Archduke moved to Tyrol. In the present context we should not forget his ball game hall at Ambras Castle near Innsbruck (Fig. 6).



6 Ambras Castle and its ball game hall (B), detail from a veduta of the castle, engraving, ca. 200 x 300 mm, in: Matthaeus Merian, *Topographia Provinciarum Austriacarum*, Frankfurt 1649 (photo: public resource)

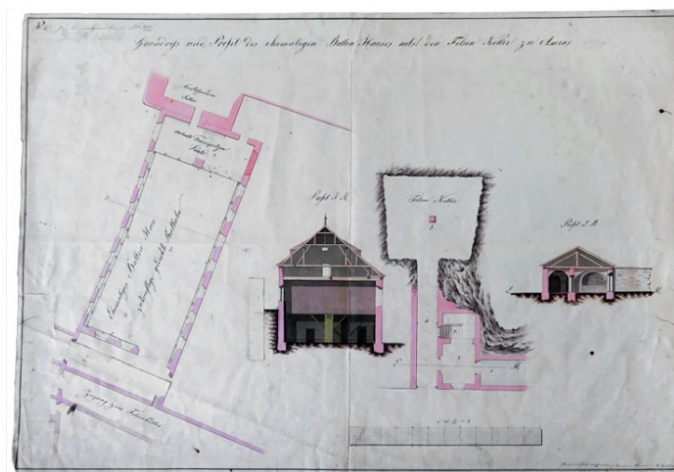
The author of the ball game hall was Giovanni Lucchese. The building was erected in 1572, but the preparations were done, as with other constructions of the "lower castle", at least from the autumn of 1565. The ball game hall was to be paved in marble, and in 1575 it was decorated by Giovanni Battista Fontana.²² It stood alongside the wall dividing the entrance courtyard of the castle from the drop in the terrain. A plan of its

²⁰ "Ballhaus", in: *Johann Heinrich Zedlers Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexicon aller Wissenschaften und Künste*, 64 vols. and 4 supplementary vols., Halle and Leipzig 1732–1754, *Supplement*, vol. 2, 1330–1332.

²¹ Archduke Ferdinand was reminded of the need to exercise his body for example by his personal physicians, Pietro Andrea Mattioli and Julius Alessandrini von Neustein in 1554 and 1567/68; see: *Ärztliche Gutachten und Ratschläge über Erzherzog Ferdinand II.*, ÖNB, ms. 11155, fol. 25–35.

²² David Ritter von Schönherr, "Urkunden und Regesten aus dem k. k. Statthaltereiarchiv in Innsbruck", in: *JKSAK* 14 (1893), no. 2, LXXI–CCXIII: XLC, reg. 9906; XCII, reg. 9914; CXLV, reg. 10426 (alternatively 9927 and 9935).

arrangement has been preserved from 1824, which partly shows its original state (Fig. 7).²³



7 Plan of the ball game hall at Ambras Castle, 1824, drawing, 510 x 733 mm. Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, inv. no. A127 (photo © KHM-Museumsverband)

Inside, it had a wooden balcony supported by a single pillar. On the north side it was connected to the cellar of the Spanish Hall by a pair of doors, on the south it was connected by an open passageway to the so-called Bacchus Grotto carved into the rock. We have no reports on the original façade of the ball game hall.²⁴ The length of this hall at Ambras was 28 meters, the width 11 meters, and the height to the ceiling was 7.2 meters.

[14] Apart from the ball game hall at Ambras, there were two more ball game halls in Innsbruck belonging to the Habsburg residence of Hofburg, which Archduke Ferdinand II had built. They stood close to each other. The first, smaller one was situated at right angles to the present-day Rennweg.²⁵ The second extended alongside the Rennweg, and later it was used as a "Comedihaus", then as a riding hall and "Dogana" (today the building is part of the complex of the Kongresshaus). Also connected to it was the "Regataspil" place (the expression probably meant "Rakettenspiel") which was around 100 meters long. The Large Ball Game

²³ Plan des Ambraser Ballspielhauses, 1824, in: Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, inv. no. A 127 (Schloß Ambras, Innsbruck); recently see Haag, *Spiel!*, 48-49, cat. no. I.3; Elisabeth Scheicher, "Schloss Ambras", in: *Die Kunstdenkmäler der Stadt Innsbruck. Die Hofbauten*, ed. Johanna Felmayer, Vienna 1986 (= *Österreichische Kunsttopographie*, XLVII), 613.

²⁴ Schönherr, "Urkunden und Regesten aus dem k. k. Statthaltereiarchiv in Innsbruck" (1893), reg. 9906 (at Schönherr's time, the original Italian letter was kept in Tiroler Landesarchiv, Innsbruck; during our research, it was not traceable). Compare with Frejková, *Palladianismus*, 104.

²⁵ *Die Kunstdenkmäler der Stadt Innsbruck. Die Hofbauten*, 638.

Hall was connected by a bridge with the Hofburg. Both these ball game halls can be seen clearly on an oil painting recording the destruction by fire of the wooden lodge of Ruhelust in 1728.²⁶ In the painting, the Large Ball Game Hall is rendered with 16 window axes, indicating that its dimensions must have been considerable.

The Front Ball Game Hall in the Royal Garden of Prague Castle

[15] There was talk of a further ball game hall in the Royal Garden of Prague Castle in the spring of 1563: In April 1563 Ferdinand I instructed the Archduke to build a covered passageway ("bedegkter curator"), which could also be used for the playing of the "Spanish game". The old shooting range from 1548 was to be pulled down and the material used for the construction of a new shooting range and ball game hall.²⁷ The above-mentioned comment on the Spanish game is important. From Scaino it emerges that by the Spanish a typical game was played across a net with the ball deflected by the hand ("giuoco da mano"). The French game, on the contrary, was described as a racket game. This is the basic difference in the games, which later, according to Scaino, diversified into a multitude of variants.²⁸

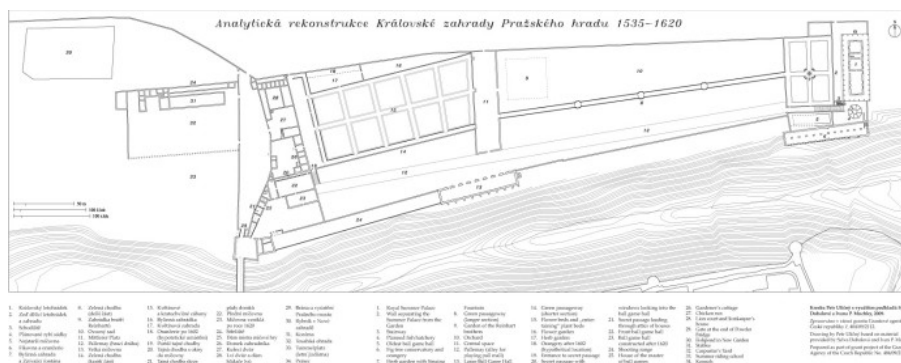
[16] In the summer of 1564, however, the Emperor died, and under his successor, Maximilian II, two new ball game halls came into being instead of one, each with a different purpose. The so-called small or front ball game hall was situated at the beginning of the Royal Garden in front of the Powder Bridge. Archives record its existence in 1567.²⁹ For the sake of clarity I will henceforth refer to it as the Front Ball Game Hall. The general position of the ball game halls in the Royal Garden is shown in the plan drawn by Petr Uličný (Fig. 8).

²⁶ See the reproduction in: *Die Kunstdenkmäler der Stadt Innsbruck. Die Hofbauten*, 637.

²⁷ Kreyczy, "Urkunden", XCII, reg. 4340.

²⁸ According to De Bondt, *Royal Tennis*, 217-220.

²⁹ Frejková, *Palladianismus*, 105-106, 110 and note 375; the sources quoted by her are now located in: NA Prague, sign. ČDKM IV, archive boxes 191 and 192. The Wolmut working account, dated 30 May 1567 and containing information on the Front Ball Game Hall, is kept in: NA Prague, sign. ČDKM IV, archive box 192, fol. 496-499, 501-507. For 1568 see Kreyczy, "Urkunden", reg. 4418.



8 Petr Uličný, Reconstruction of the Royal Garden of Prague Castle, 1535–1620, in: Sylva Dobalová, *Zahrady Rudolfa II. Jejich vznik a vývoj*, Prague 2009 (© Petr Uličný, Ivan Muchka, Sylva Dobalová). Number 1: Royal Summer Palace, 4: fish ponds planned by archduke Ferdinand II, 5: the oldest ball game house, 11: "Mittlerer platz", 13: Great Ball Game Hall, 20: secret passage, 22: Front Ball Game Hall, 23: ball game hall constructed after 1620, 24: shooting range.

Along the side of the Front Ball Game Hall a "secret passage" was built leading into the garden. On the southern long side of the hall the passage had eight regularly placed windows (today partly walled up). Through these windows it was possible to watch the game being played below on the playing floor. This was evidently the ball game hall described by François de Bassompierre, who visited Prague in 1604 and noted:

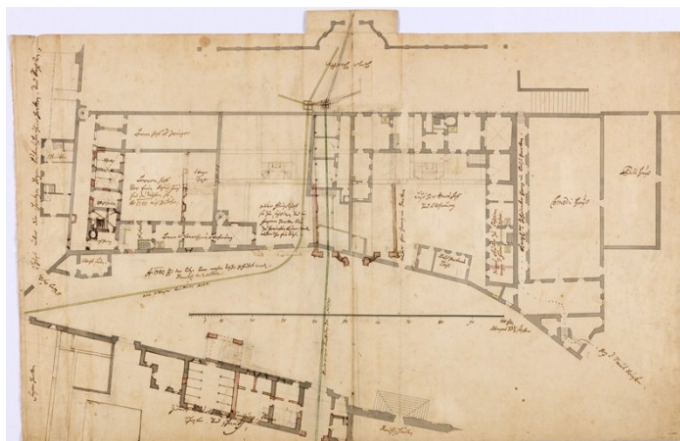
*When I played ball five or six days later against the great Vallenstein [...], the Emperor [Rudolf II] came to watch our game through the blinds in one of the windows overlooking the ball game hall and remained there a long time.*³⁰

[17] Today the entire area of the so-called stable yard has been rebuilt. The length of the building was 30.5 meters and the width 13.2 meters. The ground plan of this is captured, for instance, on Johann Heinrich Dienebier's plan of the stable yard, where it is the larger of the two ball game halls depicted (Fig. 9).³¹ From 1680 the building served as a theatre.³²

³⁰ Eliška Fučíková, ed., *Tři francouzští kavalíři v rudolfínské Praze*, Prague 1989, 99 and 129, note 13.

³¹ J. H. Dienebier, Ground plan of the buildings at the entrance to the Royal Garden, 1741, in: The Archive of the Prague Castle (here quoted as APC), Old plans collection (SPS), inv. no. 5/141.

³² APC, sign. HBA, inv. no. 2043.



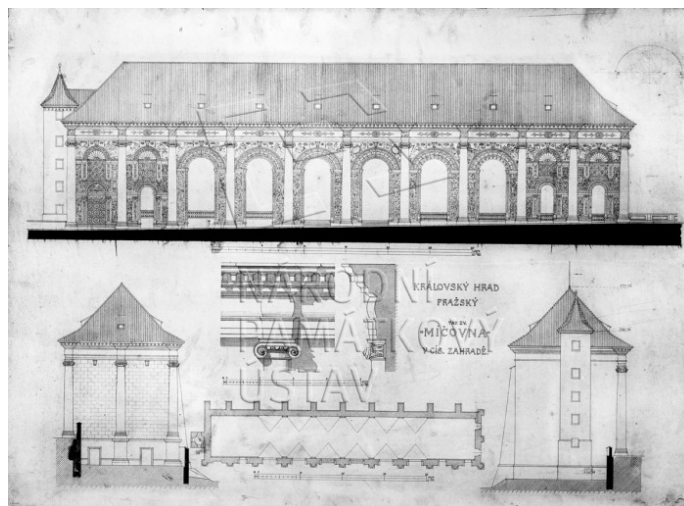
9 Johann H. Dienebier, *Ground plan of the buildings at the entrance to the Royal Garden*, 1741, drawing. The Archive of Prague Castle, Old Plans collection (© The Archive of Prague Castle, photo: Ondřej Přibyl)

Maximilian II and the Great Ball Game Hall of Prague Castle

[18] Emperor Maximilian II did indeed complete the projects started by his predecessor, but at the same time he initiated his own. Although his activities in the construction of residential buildings in Prague Castle are not too evident today, in the gardens he left substantial traces; he financed, for example, the bronze Singing Fountain. The building activities regarding the Great Ball Game Hall have been described by Olga Frejková and further specified by Jan Svoboda and Viktor Procházka.³³ The ideal state of the Great Ball Game Hall, as understood at the time of its rescue at the beginning of the 20th century, is shown by the plan drawn up at that time (Fig. 10).³⁴

³³ Frejková, *Palladianismus*, 104-111, 118-120; Svoboda and Procházka, "Míčovna"; Ivan Muchka, *Architecture of the Renaissance*, Prague 2001, 66-67; Ivan Muchka, "Die Bautätigkeit Kaiser Ferdinands I. in Prag", in: *Kaiser Ferdinand I. 1503-1564: Das Werden der Habsburgermonarchie*, exh. cat., Vienna 2003, 249-257; Oskar Pollak, "Studien zur Geschichte der Architektur Prags 1520-1600", in: *JKSAK* 29 (1910-1911), 85-170.

³⁴ Mostly nineteenth-century plans of the Great Ball Game Hall are deposited in the APC, in the Old plans collection (SPS); in particular see folders 122, 136, 142, 144, 147, 157, 163. The plan reproduced in Fig. 10 is a copy kept in the National Heritage Institute; the original version is in the APC-SPS, no. 144/25.



10 Great Ball Game Hall of Prague Castle, plan from the beginning of the 20th century. National Heritage Institute of the Czech Republic, Prague, no. N05446 (photo © National Heritage Institute of the Czech Republic)

[19] The building was once again realised by Bonifaz Wolmut and begun in May 1567.³⁵ In September the foremen were already dealing with the vaulting, which was to be "plain" in accordance with the Emperor's wishes, and the lunettes were to be executed "according to the model". The building was always described as the Great Ball Game Hall ("Gros Palnhaus").³⁶ The vaulting was not completed until the following year, in June 1568.³⁷ At the end of the year the splendid garden façade was realised (Fig. 1). The architect divided it by eleven Ionic half-pillars that form a colossal order row. These support a complete entablature with a barrel frieze and a massive profiled moulding. Between the pillars the centre of the ball game hall has six slightly compressed arcades with openings breaking through almost the entire span of the arcade. The last two intercolumnia instead are closed by two tiers of blind arches (with the lower ones having window openings except for the easternmost). Whereas the central arcades functioned as huge windows and provided light for the entire length of the playing field, the pairs of closed intercolumnia at both ends of the building could mirror the internal balconies.

[20] Reports have been preserved concerning the inside decoration of the Great Ball Game Hall – Wolmut asked whether the walls should be "painted" or merely whitewashed; Piero Ferrabosco as a painter was

³⁵ See Wolmut's working accounts from 1567–1569, NA Prague, sign. ČDKM IV, archive box 192, esp. fols. 496-499, 501-507, 523-525, 539-556.

³⁶ For instance letter of the Emperor dated 16 August 1577, NA Prague, sign. ČDKM IV, archive box 192, fol. 644.

³⁷ Frejková, *Palladianismus*, 108 and note 371 (sources from APC); Kreyczy, "Urkunden", reg. 4418.

suggested. Concerning the north (garden) façade, at the end of 1568 a painter "did not start the [outdoor] decoration". In spite of the fact that we can read the date 1568 on the garden façade, Wolmut considered the ball game hall to have been completed in July 1569 (on the south façade of the ball game hall this date can also be found).³⁸ In view of the type of decoration applied, scholars deduced that its author maintained close relations to Holland.³⁹ Seated allegories of the Elements, the four Cardinal and three Theological Virtues – the following two fields had vanished and have been redecorated in 1954 – and the seven Liberal Arts are the figural motifs that command the spandrels of the arcades. In the last case the figures were inspired by the two cycles of the Liberal Arts by Frans Floris (1517–1570) dated 1551 and 1565 respectively. The ornamental component is exceptionally rich. It is composed of punched ornaments, grotesques, spiral tendrils, braids, meanders, festoons of fruit, vases and birds, medallions, figures of satyrs and animals, a combination of motifs associated with Cornelis Bos (1508–1555). Besides, the decoration integrated the symbolism of the Order of the Golden Fleece, and the arch of the first arcade from the east was decorated with the Imperial Eagle. The construction elements were painted as well (Fig. 11); traces of paint were found on the moulding (spiral tendrils and egg and dart ornaments), and also on the half-pillars (shading).



11 The Great Ball Game Hall, Prague Castle, detail with painted decoration of the entablature and the upper part of a column, after the renovation in 2018–2019 (photo © Sylva Dobalová, 2019)

³⁸ Ferrabosco is mentioned in Frejková, *Palladianismus*, 106, according to: NA Prague, sign. SM S 21/4, box 2103, fols. 149–150; regarding the date of 1569, see Kreczy, "Urkunden", reg. 4418.

³⁹ Regarding the state of preservation of the sgraffito in the first half of the twentieth century, see: Svoboda and Procházka, "Míčovna", 28; Pavel Janák, "Obnova sgrafit na míčovně", in: *Umění* 1 (1953), 215–225.

[21] Last to be constructed was the tower with the spiral staircase, leading to a small room below the lower part of the roof which served as a changing room, and to the attic of the ball game hall (Fig. 12).⁴⁰



12 The tower of the Great Ball Game Hall, Prague Castle, with reconstructed house of the ball game master (photograph © Sylva Dobalová, 2014)

Up to the spring of 1573 the small room, toilet and floor were still being completed.⁴¹ But already the following year, due to soil subsidence, there was a risk of the vaulting collapsing, and in 1577 roof repairs were proposed.⁴² On 6th July 1589, architect Ulrich Aostalli submitted a cost estimate for the repair of the roof to the Royal Bohemian Chamber.⁴³ The wall facing the Deer Ditch was strengthened with abutments probably at the end of the sixteenth century. We do not know the precise date of the repair, though the envelope sgraffito of the abutments has been preserved. The abutments are also documented by Rudolfine vedutas (Fig. 13). In June 1596 a repair of the tile roofing was ordered, and again in

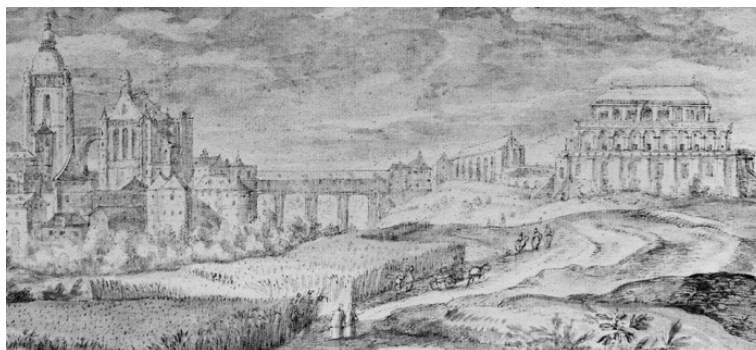
⁴⁰ Frejková, *Palladianismus*, 110; NA Prague, SM S 21/4, fol. 137-142.

⁴¹ Ulrich Aostalli, report on activity, NA Prague, SM S 21/4, box 2096, vol. 3 (years 1568-1575).

⁴² NA Prague, ČDKM IV, archive box 191, 16 August and 22 August 1577, fol. 640-647.

⁴³ NA Prague, SM S 21/4, archive box 2097, fol. 196-201; regarding a pavement, see fol. 202-210, 29 July 1590.

1612, when the building was clearly in a disastrous state. In 1617 the vaulting finally collapsed.⁴⁴



13 Pieter Stevens, Prague Castle with the Powder Bridge, the Great Ball Game Hall and the Summer Palace, detail, after 1600, ink wash on paper, 18.5 x 33.8 cm. Museum of the City of Prague, inv. no. H 031.207 (photo © Photo Archive of the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague)

[22] The post-Renaissance history of the Great Ball Game Hall tells of varying usage. The building served as a riding school and as stables, it was divided into floors and became a storehouse for military equipment. The interior was completely destroyed, the original windows walled up and new ones put in, even in the moulding.⁴⁵ Starting in 1920 efforts were made to repair this valuable building. In May 1945, however, the Great Ball Game Hall burned down and only the outside walls remained (Figs. 14 a, b, c).

⁴⁴ Svoboda and Procházka, "Míčovna", 20 and 44, according to APC, sign. HBA, no. 2045 and extracts from accounts of the building office and rent master's office inv. nos. 193 and 1912; in addition to Svoboda and Procházka see NA Prague, SM 21/4, archive box 2097, 29 June 1596, fol. 255-262.

⁴⁵ Let us mention briefly some important dates from the post-Renaissance history of the Great Ball Game Hall, following the article by Svoboda and Procházka, "Míčovna". In the time of Leopold I the Great Ball Game Hall began to be used as a winter riding school and in the years 1679-80 it was provided with a wooden gallery with a railing and wooden stairs; arcades were partly walled up. In 1723, on the arrival of Emperor Charles VI, the building was divided by a wooden ceiling, and the ground floor was used as stabling for 80 horses and the upper floor as a granary. All ball game halls burned down in 1757 during the Prussian siege. In 1772, during the reign of Maria Theresia, the Great Ball Game Hall was rented to the military husbandry commission for the storage of military equipment. After 1848, the building was divided into three floors and used as a garrison; in the area of the capital mouldings on the north side (arcades) and on the south side towards the Deer Ditch, small rectangular windows were inserted.

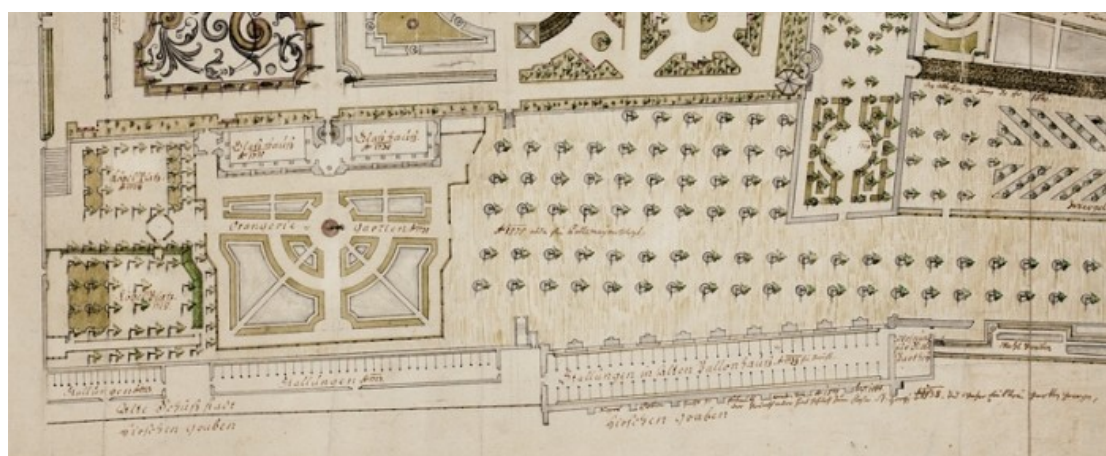


14 a, b, c Great Ball Game Hall of Prague Castle after bombing in 1945, photographer unknown. National Heritage Institute of the Czech Republic, Prague (© Photo Archive of the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague)

[23] The present appearance of the interior of the Great Ball Game Hall is the result of the reconstruction by Pavel Janák (1882–1956), which took place after WWII. Janák tried to comprehend the original logic of the building. The architect stated that the original dimensions of the interior of the ball game hall were 63 x 10 x 14 meters and that through the insertion of a floor at the level of the garden he lowered the height of the interior to 10 meters.⁴⁶ On either end of the hall Janák divided off smaller rooms, the length of which corresponds to the windowless outer spans of the façade; in these he installed two staircases to the service basement. He gave the main hall a length of 40 meters.

⁴⁶ Pavel Janák, "Úprava míčovny na Pražském hradě", in: *Architektura ČSR* 11 (1952), 212-218; Pavel Janák, "Architekt a památka", in: *Architektura ČSR* 13 (1952), 219-220; Pavel Janák, "Míčovna v Královské zahradě a její sgrafita", in: *Ochrana památek* 29 (1954), 9-12, 27.

[24] Let us picture the original interior of the Great Ball Game Hall as a higher vaulted room, undivided by floors and partitions. All that was left of the Renaissance vaulting were traces of the coussinets and Janák drew on these for the construction of a concrete shell vault preserving the original profile. Janák assumed that the original floor of the hall had been 4 meters lower. The game hall could be entered directly onto the playing area from the west side, from the level of the terrace of the Deer Ditch. It is true that stable buildings were constructed here, but they were not directly connected to it. The situation is well shown on the plan by J. M. Ziegelmayr dated 1744 (Fig. 15).



15 Johann M. Ziegelmayr, Plan of the Royal Garden of Prague Castle, detail with the Great Ball Game Hall and stables, 1744. Archive of Prague Castle, inv. no. 142/36 (© Archive of Prague Castle, Old Plans collection, photo: Ondřej Přibyl)

The entrance to the east side was evidently only by way of the staircase tower. A small house was also built onto it (like at the Vienna Hofburg). The tower connected the individual floors of the house, which contained two flats, and enabled access from the lower level of the terrace above the Deer Ditch.⁴⁷ The existing opening is roughly at the level of Janák's present floor, i.e. it is possible to imagine an entrance here from the house to a wooden balcony.

[25] It would be appropriate to see both Maximilian's ball game halls in a mutual context. The building of the Great Ball Game Hall cost 4.181 "heaps" (threescores) of Meissner groschen plus a further 50 groschen and 3 1/2 pence, whereas the building of the Front Ball Game Hall cost in total 1.019 "heaps", 24 groschen, and 3 pence.⁴⁸ Both were built by the same

⁴⁷ Frejková, *Palladianismus*, fig. 46, plans from 1899.

⁴⁸ František Kašička and Pavel Zahradník, *Pražský hrad: Stájový dvůr* [Prague Castle: a permanent court], typescript of the Institute for the Reconstruction of Historical Towns and Buildings in Prague, 1992, 8, according to APC, sign. HBA, inv. no. 2045.

architect at the same time. In comparison with the Great Ball Game Hall the smaller hall was a simple construction, roughly half the size. There is, however, one striking similarity: the Front Ball Game Hall also has an excavated ground floor and from the north it also appeared to be a single-storey building, even though the clear height of the interior was around 14 m, measured according to the Baroque plan of J. H. Dienebier, in which it is described as a "Comedi Haus".⁴⁹

Responses to the Great Ball Game Hall: Neugebäude Palace in Vienna and Brandýs upon Elbe

[26] The Great Ball Game Hall of Prague Castle was basically completed by Maximilian II before the construction of Neugebäude Palace in Vienna (undertaken from 1569).⁵⁰ The question naturally arises of whether the Prague model may have been followed in the ball game hall built at Neugebäude. The original Renaissance ball game hall there had almost identical dimensions to those of the Great Ball Game Hall in Prague: the internal dimensions at Neugebäude were circa 57 x 13 meters, and in Prague circa 63 x 10 meters.⁵¹ No plans were preserved of this peripheral part of Neugebäude Palace, however, that were older than the end of the 18th century. The rather unreliable Delsenbach veduta (1715) reflects the appearance of the ball game hall that it acquired only after the middle of the 17th century. At that time a menagerie was built in part of it (Löwenhof). The fish tanks, the artistic design of which suggested the inspiration of the ponds of the Villa Madama in Rome, and which were installed along the side wall of the ball game hall, were not depicted by Delsenbach at all, and neither were the stables. The sources that have been preserved tell us nothing about the creation of the original ball game hall and whether it had a roof or not. It is therefore assumed that this was more probably an open structure or one with a simple roof, definitely not vaulted as was the case in Prague.⁵² In the eighteenth century the ball

⁴⁹ APC, Old plans collection (SPS), inv. nos. 136/3 and 141/1.

⁵⁰ See Hilda Lietzmann, *Das Neugebäude in Wien. Sultan Süleymans Zelt – Kaiser Maximilians II. Lustschloß*, Munich and Berlin 1987, 54-58. Other specialised texts do not deal with the problems of the ball game hall.

⁵¹ Measurements of the ball game hall in Neugebäude Palace according to a plan published in: [RH-H], "Wien XI., Neugebäude", in: *Geschichte der bildenden Kunst in Österreich*, vol. 3: *Spätmittelalter und Renaissance*, ed. Artur Rosenauer, Munich 2003, 281. For the Great Ball Game Hall in Prague see above, Fig. 10.

⁵² A hypothetical reconstruction of the ball game hall at Neugebäude Palace has been worked out by Manfred Wehdorn, see "Schloss Neugebäude – an Idealised Reconstruction", <http://www.livinpast.at/hauptseite.html?en> (accessed 1 April 2019); see also Wolfgang Behringer, "Arena and Pall Mall: Sport in the Early Modern Period", in: *German History* 27 (2009), 331-357.

game hall was used for storage etc.; in 1993 it burned down. After the fire the existing roof was built.

[27] Rudolf II decided to move the main imperial seat from Vienna to Prague and was not much interested in the fate of Neugebäude Palace. He met a decision, however, to improve the chateau of Brandýs upon Elbe (Brandýs nad Labem/ Brandeis an der Elbe) near Prague. At the time when he relocated from Vienna in 1583 the chateau had already been restructured by Ferdinand I. Rudolf II had the garden connected to the chateau by a covered passageway and on the edge of it he built a ball game hall and a *Lusthaus*. The building work here was led by Ettore de Vaccani. In the years 1586–87 the building accounts mention items for the "covered passageways". In 1588 there is reference to work on the *Lusthaus* above the river and its painted decoration,⁵³ and work on the passageways and on the walls of the gardens is again mentioned in the same year. The garden and its buildings were destroyed by the Swedish troops of General Johan Banér (1596–1641) during their sojourn in 1639–40. The ball game hall is described in the Land and Duties register of 1651.⁵⁴ According to this register it was situated "below the passageway" into the garden, and there were two further small rooms beside it. Indeed, there are preserved steps and a wide passage hidden within the supporting wall of the garden.

[28] In my opinion, the ball game hall can be seen on the veduta of the "Swedish fortification" of the Brandýs Castle by Carlo Cappi, which Merian included in his *Topographia Bohemiae, Moraviae et Silesiae* of 1650 (Fig. 16).

⁵³ According to: Jarmila Krčálová, "Zámek v Brandýse nad Labem", in: *Umění* 2 (1954), 136-152: 138. The archival sources are deposited in the NA Prague, fund SM, especially carton 192, file B 94/ 16 III (economic matters); carton 196, file B 94/ 44 (yields of the estate 1572–1628) and file B 94/ 45-48; carton 202, file B 94/146-185, especially 175 (repairs to the chateau 1636–1640).

⁵⁴ Justin V. Prášek, *Brandejs nad Labem. Město, panství i okres* I, Brandejs nad Labem 1908, 86-87; Justin Prášek, "Urbář brandejský a přerovský", in: *Památky archeologické* 23 (1908–1909), parts 4, 5, 7-8, 253-258, 341-348; the land and duties register is kept in the National Archive in Prague-Chodovec.



16 Carlo Cappi, Castle at Brandýs upon Elbe, detail, in: Matthäus Merian, *Topographia Bohemiae, Moraviae et Silesiae*, Frankfurt 1650 (photo © Photo Archive of the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague)

The striking construction below the garden, which has no roof, is not, therefore a bastion with embrasures newly built by the Swedes, as tradition has it.⁵⁵ In favour of the combination of a ball game hall and a passage speaks the similar situation in the stable yard at Prague Castle, where it was possible to look into the Front Ball Game Hall from the passageway windows. Both the Brandýs ball game hall and the Great Ball Game Hall in the Royal Garden, and again the hall below the Star summer residence are built below an edge of the terrain, with the floor of the ball game hall situated on the lower terrace. The length of the hall in Brandýs, based on my research in the terrain, can be assessed at 50 meters at most.

Ball games during the reign of Rudolf II

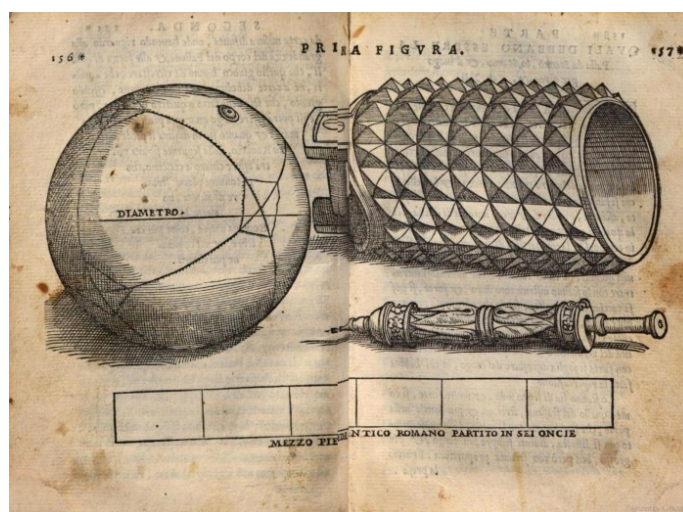
[29] Reports show that the Prague ball game halls were used not only by the Habsburgs, but also by members of their court. For example, in 1582 or 1583, while playing the game "with a racket and a small ball", the talented Flemish-Italian sculptor Hans Mont lost his left eye. Because of the accident he could not continue his career and left the court service.⁵⁶ But in which ball game hall did this accident happen? Two ball game halls are frequent in French châteaux (for instance Blois), but we also find a small and a large ball game hall in Innsbruck. In Prague the halls were described as "Pallonhaus", "Pallhaus" or "Palnhaus", but decidedly not systematically.

⁵⁵ See Prášek, *Brandesß*. In the text by Václav Matoušek et al., "Pohled na zámek Brandýs nad Labem a opevnění švédského tábora v prostoru Staré Boleslavi z roku 1640 v díle M. Meriana", in: *Historická geografie* 34 (2007), 193-148, no notice is taken of the "bastion".

⁵⁶ Lars Olof Larsson, "Hans Mont van Gent", in: *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift* 36 (1967), 1-12: 7.

[30] From the time of the reign of Rudolf II there are several testimonies. Pierre Bergeron stated that on his first visit to Prague Castle on 8th August 1600 he played close to the Castle: "on peut jouer au ballon en un lieu fait exprès le forme d'une grande galerie fort haute".⁵⁷ Probably what Bergeron means is that in a ball game hall he played *pallone* (*jouer au ballon*, game with a ball) – and not a game with a racket, as emerges from comparison with similar French texts.⁵⁸

[31] The hypothesis that tennis was not played in the Great Ball Game Hall is also confirmed by the Tyrolean physician and humanist Hippolytus Guarinoni (1571–1654). Guarinoni intersperse the lines of his work on healthy living *Die Greuel der Verwüstung Menschlichen Geschlechts* (1610) with many reminiscences on his youth, which he spent in Prague. In the 15th chapter of the sixth book (*On ball games*) he describes several types of games, among them a game with an inflatable ball, which is inflated with a "syringe" and hit with the help of a "britschen" (a wooden tool to deal out blows). It was this that he saw played in the Great Ball Game Hall – and it was played here by pages. Evidently, he is thinking of the game *pallone con bracciale*, which Scaino described in his treatise: A spiked wooden sleeve on the forearm was used (*bracciale*), with which a larger ball was parried (Fig. 17).



17 *Pallone, pompa e bracciale*, in: Antonio Scaino, *Trattato del giuoco della palla*, Ferrara 1555, 156-157 (photo: public domain)

⁵⁷ François-Georges Pariset, "Pierre Bergeron à Prague (1600)", in: *Relations artistiques entre les Pays-Bas et l'Italie à la Renaissance. Études dédiées à Suzanne Sulberger*, Bruxelles et al. 1980, 185-198: 195, according to a manuscript in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, ms. 5562, fol. 126-130, 132-134.

⁵⁸ Compare Martin Dolch, "Das Spiel mit dem Ballon. Entstehung und Ausbreitung eines höfischen Sports der Renaissance", in: *Salzburger Museum Carolino Augusteum – Jahresschrift 25/26* (1979/80), 143-211: 158.

We may therefore assume that in the Great Ball Game Hall in the time of Rudolf II they played *pallone*, which did require a larger playing field. The question remains unanswered, however, of whether this also applied to the period in which the ball game hall was built. An answer to this question might also elucidate the original purpose of the ball game hall at Neugebäude Palace. The Front Ball Game Hall in Prague Castle was used for tennis.

[32] We also learn something about the various types of games played from the tasks of the ball game masters. In February 1570 Emperor Maximilian II informed the Royal Bohemian Chamber that, on the advice of Archduke Ferdinand, he had entrusted the administration of the ball game hall and shooting range to "pâté-maker" Petr Pachut.⁵⁹ In Vienna a certain Giovanni Taberin asked for the extension of his contract in 1583.⁶⁰ In the publication of the payment lists of the court of Rudolf II recording the period 1576–1612, though, Taberin is not mentioned.⁶¹ Already from 1580, however, we find on these lists the ball makers ("Ballmacher") Oliver Colin (mentioned in 1580, 1584, 1589 and 1601) and Alphonso Passeti de Ferrara (from 1592 to 1612). Working as the pitcher ("Ballschläger", "Ballonschläger") for the pages at court was Julius Zerpirtet Mellon from 1594, Francisco Rizzo from 1604 and from 1601 also Julius Anfosso, who ten years later was listed actually as "pallonmeister beym großen pallonhauß". Not only by the Great Ball Game Hall, but also by the small ball game hall there stood a small house for the master.

The fourth ball game hall of Prague Castle

[33] Under the short reign of Frederick V of the Palatinate, king of Bohemia from 1619 to 1620, ball games were also played at Prague Castle. In 1621 the "pallonmeister" Julius Anfosso submitted a request for the renovation of the Great Ball Game Hall.⁶² A fourth, new building for ball games, however, was constructed in 1625–26 by Emperor Ferdinand II of Habsburg, perhaps because it was difficult to repair the Great Ball Game Hall. From this time the sources mention a "new ball game hall" (but

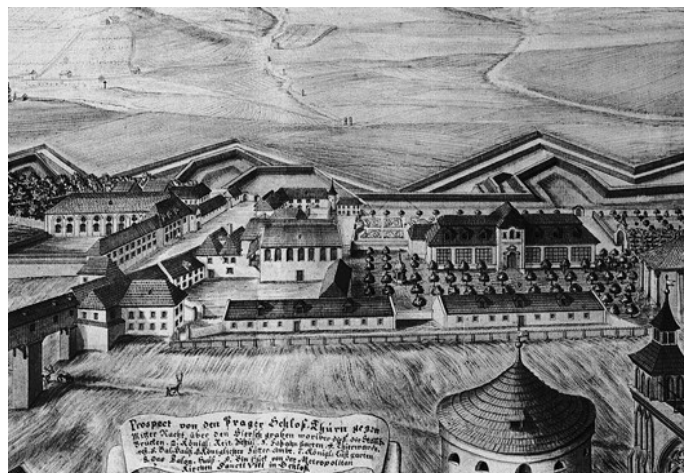
⁵⁹ Kašička and Zahradník, *Pražský hrad*, 9, according to APC, sign. DK (Royal Bohemian Chamber), kart. 3, inv. no. 348; cf. NA Prague, SM S 21/10, fol. 70.

⁶⁰ Gillmeister, *Tennis: A Cultural History*, 151, cf. Erwin Mehl, "Prager und Wiener Erinnerungen an das Ballhausspiel. Vom 'Spiel der Könige' und vom 'König der Spiele'", in: *Olympische Rundschau* 12 (1941), 12-23.

⁶¹ Jaroslava Hausenblasová, *Der Hof Kaiser Rudolfs II.* [= *Fontes Historiae Artium*, IX], Prague 2002.

⁶² Gustav Bodenstein, "Urkunden und Regesten aus dem K. und K. Reichsfinanz-Archiv in Wien", in: *JKSAK* 31 (1913–1914), no. 2, I-LVII, regesta 20304 and 20318.

usually again referred to as "small").⁶³ We know the ground plan of the fourth ball game hall from the above-mentioned plan by Dienebier (Fig. 9), and we can see the building on Dietzler's prospect of the northern bailey of Prague Castle from the tower of St Vitus Cathedral, dated 1742 (Fig. 18).



18 Jan Josef Dietzler, View of the northern bailey of Prague Castle from the tower of St Vitus Cathedral, detail with ball game halls and a greenhouse, 1742, ink drawing, 36.3 cm x 60.9 cm. National Gallery in Prague, inv. no. K 26931 (photo © National Gallery in Prague)

The hall was about 26 meters long and the usual 10 meters wide, the height evidently the same as the adjacent older "Front" Ball Game Hall, i.e. 14–15 meters to the ridge of the roof. In 1637 both ball game halls were painted black.⁶⁴ The area is drawn in on several plans from the middle of the eighteenth century.⁶⁵ The fourth ball game hall was pulled down after the Prussian bombardment in 1757, and the theatre installed in the building of the "front ball game hall" was turned into stabling. After WWII the area was rebuilt and today it is difficult to find any traces of these two ball game halls.

A ball game hall in the French fashion?

[34] From studying the group of Habsburg Renaissance ball game halls several conclusions emerge in regard of the Great Ball Game Hall of

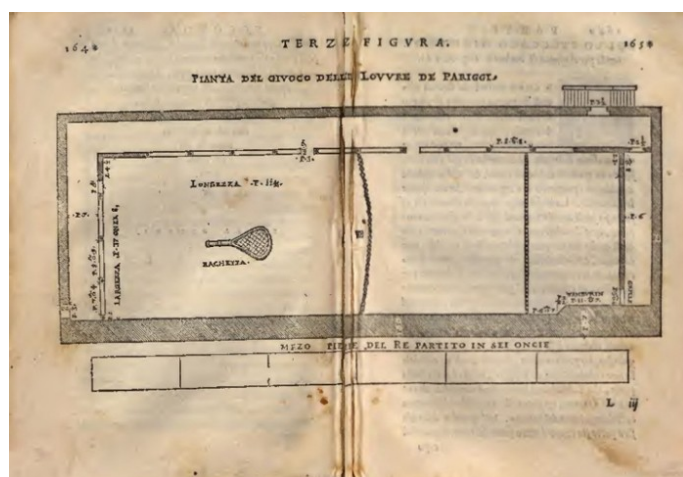
⁶³ NA Prague, SM S 21/4, years 1622–1644.

⁶⁴ NA Prague, SM S 21/4, years 1622–1644, report of court painter dated 22 September 1637; for repairs in 1633 see NA Prague, ČDKM IV, box 192, fol. 703.

⁶⁵ The state of the building after its reconstruction as a theatre is shown in Dienebier's sketch from 1723, APC, Old plans collection (SPS), 141/1. The "new" ball game hall here has a gabled façade with a thermal window; cf. plan from 1784, APC, Old plans collection (SPS), inv. no. 136/7a.

Prague Castle. Today, it is the only building that provides the opportunity to gain an impression of its original appearance. In terms of its dimensions, considered unusual by some scholars, it was not singular, but followed by the ball game hall of Maximilian II in Neugebäude Palace and evidently also by the ball game halls in Innsbruck and in Brandýs upon Elbe.

[35] Pierre Bergeron described the building as a "large and beautiful ball game hall of unusual length and with a pillared portico".⁶⁶ Although I have stated that it was evidently *pallone* that was played here and not tennis, as an example of non-uniform dimensions of ball game halls let us mention the Delizia di Belriguardo near Ferrara, where Alfonso d'Este circa 1560 built a roofed ball game hall for racket games measuring 43 x 12.5 meters, with a height of 9 meters. It was a ball game hall "in the French fashion" meaning that it had rather large dimensions.⁶⁷ This French specific is also mentioned in the 1555 treatise by Antonio Scaino, who reproduces "the ground-plan of the ball game hall in the Louvre" according to a drawing by Sebastiano Serlio (Fig. 19).⁶⁸



19 Ball game hall in the Louvre, in: Antonio Scaino, *Trattato del giuoco della palla*, Ferrara 1555, 164-165 (photo: public resource)

[36] The ball game hall drawn by Serlio reflected existing buildings. The ball game halls of the Louvre stood by the east entrance from the Rue d'Autriche, symmetrically on both sides of the entrance to the bridge. The first of these halls was established by François I before 1533 (known as the Small Ball Game Hall).⁶⁹ A Great Ball Game Hall was constructed on the orders of Henri II. This is the one Scaino described as a splendid

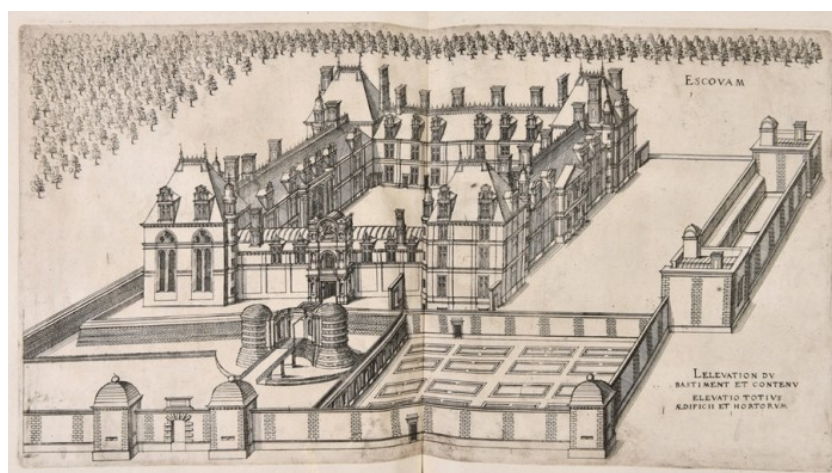
⁶⁶ Fučíková, *Tři francouzští kavalíři*, 83.

⁶⁷ Bondt, *Royal Tennis*, 85-86.

⁶⁸ *Jeu des rois – roi des jeux. Le jeu de paume en France*, exh. cat., ed. Yves Carlier, Paris 2001, 132.

architecture, of exceptional length and width, the vastness of which corresponded to the splendour of the monarch. According to Scaino's ground-plan it measured ca. 37 x 12.5 meters.⁷⁰ These dimensions correspond to the playing area of the Prague Great Ball Game Hall, which is even longer as balconies or galleries were added at both ends.

[37] A similar functional division of the building as in the Great Ball Game Hall in Prague – playground and areas with balconies – appears in some other French ball game halls such as the hall of the château of Écouen as captured by J. Androuet Du Cerceau (Fig. 20). Although the playing area was not roofed, the side pavilions with rest rooms, hearths and a staircase to the terrace naturally were.⁷¹



20 Château of Écouen, with ball game hall on the right side of the view, in: Jacques Androuet Du Cerceau, *Le Second Livre des plus excellents Bastiments de France*, Paris 1579 (photo © National Library of the Czech Republic, Prague)

The architectural design of the Great Ball Game Hall

[38] Bonifaz Wolmut must have demonstrated considerable ingenuity when he built a covered ball game hall. In any case we must change the view on which many researchers have agreed so far, that is that *pallone* was played exclusively outdoors.⁷² It is interesting, by the way, that one of the first substantiated reports on the playing of ball games in Central Europe, written down in Augsburg, tells us that in the course of the first

⁶⁹ According to Pierre Quoniam and Laurent Guinamard, *Le Palais du Louvre*, Paris 1988, 31 and fig. 24; *Jeu des Rois*, ed. Carlier, 130-132.

⁷⁰ Calculation according to Stemmler, *Vom Jeu*, 49.

⁷¹ Jacques Androuet Du Cerceau, *Le Second Livre des plus excellents Bastiments de France*, Paris 1579; Du Cerceau's drawings including the ball game hall in Écouen are reproduced in: *Jacques Androuet Du Cerceau. Les dessins des plus excellents bâtiments de France*, eds. Françoise Boudon and Claude Mignot, Paris 2010.

Imperial Diet in 1548 a *pallone* game was played; that the city had built a "ball game hall" for this purpose, roughly 60 meters long and 6 meters wide; and that Archduke Ferdinand and other members of the House of Habsburg played there.⁷³ Nevertheless, I would like to add that in front of the Prague Great Ball Game Hall there is an empty space about 80 meters long, known as the *Mittelplatz* (see Fig. 8), the purpose of which has not yet been revealed. Reports do not mention that tournaments took place here, so it is possible to conjecture that ball games might also have been played here when the weather was pleasant – this would also be in keeping with the similar layout of playing areas in Innsbruck; here next to the two ball game halls in the Hofburg also a large "Regattaspiel" is mentioned.⁷⁴

[39] Let us eventually contemplate the final architectural design of the Great Ball Game Hall. Its arcaded façade had a precedent: Wolmut had developed it for the small ball game hall at the Star. Nevertheless, one has to consider the building at Prague Castle as outstandingly original. In art history literature, its façade is considered as a unique expression of the late artistic attitude of Bonifaz Wolmut, who committed many peccadillos against the classical theory of Renaissance architecture. A researcher who covered dozens of pages in her search of possible models for the Great Ball Game Hall, Olga Frejková, drew attention to two main details, which show that the author of the ball game hall was not a classically (Italian-) trained architect. One indicator are the Ionic corner capitals that lay in a single plane and are not angled out, as they are intended only to be seen from the front, from the garden. According to Frejková the entire building is conceived two-dimensionally and the façade "is not artistically connected to the building". The second detail, according to her, is the replacement of the tectonic keystones of the arcade arches with small brackets.⁷⁵ Further anomalies include the fact that in the centre of the ball game hall façade there is a pillar and not a window opening; the arcades are not semi-circular, but compressed; the toothed carving of the

⁷² The history of covered buildings and their possible use for *pallone* is considered by Günther G. Bauer, "Das Salzburger Hofballhaus 1620/25-1775", in: *Homo Ludens* 6 (1996), 107-148. In contrast to this, the majority of scholars assumes that this was a game intended to be played exclusively outdoors, see Stefan Größing, "Pallone – ein aristokratisches Ballspiel", in: *Homo Ludens* 6 (1996), 79-107; cfr. Dolch, *Das Spiel*.

⁷³ Dolch, *Das Spiel*, 170-171.

⁷⁴ Johanna Felmayer, "Kongresshaus", in: *Die Kunstdenkmäler der Stadt Innsbruck*, 473-480: 473 and plan on p. 631. Felmayer mentions that the "Regattaspiel" was 100 meters long.

⁷⁵ Frejková, *Palladianismus*, 137-138.

entablature has the edge consoles angled out (Fig. 11), and the Ionic half-pillars have no bases and the plinths stand directly on the ground.⁷⁶

[40] However, as Ivan Muchka pointed out, we must realise that a very inconvenient place was selected for the building. It does not stand on a flat surface, but the ground slopes down along its length. The half-pillars on the façade are extended towards the east; they are not the same length. From three points of the compass the building stands on the lower terrace, several metres lower than the garden façade. It was probably not feasible to build a kind of pedestal on which there could be placed a pillar with all its classical components. Wolmut decided not to comply with the modularity of classical building rules.

[41] Frejková wondered how Wolmut arrived at apparent Palladianism basically before Palladio, even though he never stayed in Italy. Through the study of treatise literature, Frejková came to the conclusion that the educated German architect adopted antiquity through Serlio, as did Italian Palladianism.⁷⁷ In the specific case of the Great Ball Game Hall, though, a part may also have been played by French influences arriving in Bohemia at second hand, through treatises or journeys of the aristocracy. My article confirms Frejková's assessment from the perspective of the architectural history of ball game halls. Building on the ideas of Frejková and updating the sources of Wolmut's work would, however, have exceeded the framework given by the sports and recreation focus of my text. This is, then, a question for future research. E.g., the singularity of Wolmut's design lies also in the fact that the arcaded building was decorated with narrative, figural, and ornamental sgraffito (Fig. 1, 11), which we would have difficulty finding on the buildings of Palladio.

[42] Bonifaz Wolmut realised his last construction, the Great Ball Game Hall, at the request of Emperor Maximilian II, who ordered it at the beginning of his reign and was open-minded towards innovation. Undoubtedly, Wolmut wanted to show the new Emperor his ability. Neither should we ignore the fact that such 'experiments' in architecture were also made possible thanks to the informal environment of the gardens: these were far less bound by conventions than the residential buildings.

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⁷⁶ Muchka, *Architecture*, 66-67; and Ivan Muchka, *Hvězda. Arcivévoda Ferdinand Tyrolský a jeho letohrádek v evropském kontextu*, Prague 2014, 89-91.

⁷⁷ Frejková, *Palladianismus*, 177-178.

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