

Northern Gothic, Italian Renaissance and beyond

Toward a *thick* description of style

Stephan Hoppe

In 2004, Hellmut Lorenz drew attention to several Central European works of architecture for which the common dichotomous taxonomy of « Gothic » or « Renaissance » as a stylistic category did not seem to function convincingly as a distinction¹. Among others, Lorenz pointed to the aedicule on the Bautzen gate tower commissioned by King Matthias Corvinus (1486) (fig. 1) and some of the portals of the Cracow Wawel Castle (ca. 1520/25) (fig. 2) as examples of a « style between the styles ». These were works of architecture on which branch work (*Astwerk*), at the time a new development in ornamentation, was closely linked with classical motifs such as columns and entablature details :

« Frappierend bleibt die langanhaltende ästhetische Faszination an der Verbindung der künstlerischen Ausdrucksmöglichkeiten der beiden Stile, die als Kontrast wie auch in gleichsam amalgamierter Form auftreten konnte. [...] Die Frage ist zu stellen, ob das Fach Kunstgeschichte mit der charakteristischen Eigenart dieser Kunstwerke in angemessener Weise umgegangen ist – und die Antwort darauf kann schwerlich positiv ausfallen »². (It is surprising that there has been a long-lasting aesthetic fascination with the combination of the expressive possibilities of the two styles, which could appear as a contrast or in an amalgamated form, as it were [...] We must ask whether the discipline of art history has indeed dealt appropriately with the characteristic distinctive character of these works of art. The answer can hardly be positive).

A main reason for this epistemological deficit in regard to a clear and unambiguous classification is probably due to the fact that the stylistic categories « Gothic » and « Renaissance » have tended to be viewed by modern art history since the nineteenth century as formal systems imbued with their own autonomous logic³. Almost in direct analogy to natural scientific classifications, they were attributed with fixed non-variant essential phenomenological characteristics. In the case of Gothic style, for example, that includes lancet arches, high flying buttresses and dissolution of the solid wall. The Renaissance is associated with

1. LORENZ 2004.

2. LORENZ 2004, p. 44.

3. See the critics : Hermann Hipp, « Die "Nachgotik" in Deutschland – kein Stil und ohne Stil », in HOPPE, MÜLLER AND NUßBAUM 2008, p. 14-46 ; Josef A. Schmoll genannt Eisenwerth, « Stilpluralismus statt Einheitszwang – Zur Kritik der Stilepochen-Kunstgeschichte », in Werner Hager, Norbert Knopp (ed.), *Beiträge zum Problem des Stilpluralismus*, Munich, 1977, p. 9-19 ; Robert Suckale, « Die Unbrauchbarkeit der gängigen Stilbegriffe und Entwicklungsvorstellungen. Am Beispiel der französischen gotischen Architektur des 12. und 13. Jahrhunderts », in Friedrich Möbius, Helga Scieurie (ed.), *Stil und Epoche. Periodisierungsfragen*, Dresden, 1989, p. 231-250 ; Jan Biaostocki, « Zum Modusproblem in den bildenden Künsten » (first published 1961), in *Stil und Ikonographie. Studien zur Kunstwissenschaft*, Cologne, 1981, p. 12-42 ; Stephan Hoppe, « Stil als Dünne oder Dichte Beschreibung, Eine konstruktivistische Perspektive auf kunstbezogene Stilbeobachtungen unter Berücksichtigung der Bedeutungsdimension », in HOPPE, MÜLLER AND NUßBAUM 2008, p. 48-103.

rounded arches, an orientation to classical pillar motifs, horizontalism, stress on the tectonic structure or on volume and cubic capacity as style-defining elements. From the purview of this model, we have « pure Gothic » and « pure Renaissance » wherever the individual factors merge in an especially stringent manner into a formal system ; that is exemplified in the case of the cathedrals of the Ile de France in the thirteenth century or in the rebuilding and transformation of St. Peter's in Rome in the sixteenth century. But in cases such as those cited by Lorenz, where the buildings clearly deviate from such ideal images, combining within themselves elements of both styles, the scholarly question of weighting and importance often depends on prior premises which shape the basic classification.

The present paper follows an alternative path for exploring and better grasping this phenomenon. The core criterion is not the relatively close approximation of an ideal image, but rather the *cultural context* of the original situation of genesis of the fields of classification. This can be utilized to help interpret style.

In the early 1970s, the anthropologist Clifford Geertz drew attention to a similar problem in his own discipline of ethnography, and his methodological thoughts on this subject, grouped under the general metaphorical label of « thick description », have been a topic of extensive discussion since⁴. But in the field of the history and analysis of art, this has to date not been the case. Geertz utilized ideas from the English philosopher Gilbert Ryle, who pointed out in connection with winking that independent of the material physical fact of moving the eyelids, such a phenomenon only becomes understandable if viewed as a part of human culture, and is integrated back into the context of meaning-making and social semiosis⁵ :

Consider, he says, two boys rapidly contracting the eyelids of their right eyes. In one, this is an involuntary twitch ; in the other, a conspiratorial signal to a friend. The two movements are, as movements, identical ; from an I-am-a-camera, « phenomenalist » observation of them alone, one could not tell which was twitch and which was wink, or indeed whether both or either was twitch or wink. Yet the difference, however unphotographable, between a twitch and a wink is vast ; as anyone unfortunate enough to have had the first taken for the second knows. The winker is communicating, and indeed communicating in a quite precise and special way : (1) deliberately, (2) to someone in particular, (3) to impart a particular message, (4) according to a socially established code, and (5) without cognizance of the rest of the company. As Ryle points out, the winker has done two things, contracted his eyelids and winked, while the twitcher has done only one, contracted his eyelids. Contracting your eyelids on purpose when there exists a public code in which so doing counts as a conspiratorial signal is winking. That's all there is to it : a speck of behavior, a fleck of culture, and – *voilà !* – a gesture⁶.

In terms of this example, a *thin* description would center on noting the eyelid movements of the two boys as a physical event, on this plane far removed from semiosis, and quite indistinguishable in their physicality. Only by including the symbolic dimension do we get a *thick* description, where the activities of the two boys are very different. Transposed to phenomena of architectural history, this means that an analysis remains in the mode of *thin* description when it is solely an effort to determine the formal characteristics of an object. Only when an attempt is made to reconstruct the concrete circumstances in the specific life worlds involved can we speak about a *thick* description. In the case of architectural styles, this could mean including contemporary contexts of meaning in raising questions about what is Gothic, what is Renaissance. In regard to the problem of style interpretation, that also means we have to include contemporary conceptions about the stylistics of classical archi-

4. GEERTZ 1973.

5. Gilbert Ryle, « The Thinking of Thoughts. What is "le penseur" doing ? » in *Collected papers* Vol. 2., Bristol, 1990, p. 480-496 (first published : *University lectures* no. 18, 1968 [Saskatoon]).

6. GEERTZ 1973, p. 4.

ecture. Assessing the object under focus oriented to the actual world of antiquity as we know it today is insufficient when it comes to a *thick* description⁷.

However, it is quite difficult to reconstruct cultural elements of meaning and historical conceptions drawn solely from individual buildings ; the buildings scarcely still « speak » their original language in the presence of today's observers. It appears necessary to search for further sources for cultural contexts. Initially, such a search does not appear promising, since there are hardly any known relevant textual commentaries pertaining to the architectural works of the Northern Renaissance, unlike the situation for the same time period in Italy. We have no knowledge of the existence of programmatic texts for the aedicule of the Bautzen or the Cracow portals, nor are there any such extant texts for most of the other structures which Lorenz mentions.

For that reason, I propose embarking down a pathway that to date has been seldom traveled, but where one can build on far richer material. Pictorial sources will be tapped from closely related cultural contexts in which certain architectonic motifs and principles appear in a context rich in content, in this way casting additional needed light on contemporaneous ways of dealing with variants and dichotomies in style. Due to the brevity of the present article, only a few examples can be presented and evaluated here⁸. Two phenomena of architecture north of the Alps around 1500 will be given special consideration : the reception of stylistic characteristics from the Romanesque period and the use of branch work, i.e. the substitution of certain architectonic motifs by natural, botanical forms.

Romanesque as a conception of classical antiquity

The Prado painting *Marriage of the Virgin* (fig. 3) is a first indication of the beginning discussion in interested circles about the differentiation of architectural styles according to historical periods at the early fifteenth century north of the Alps. The painting probably was created in the late 1430s or early 1440s in Brussels⁹. In the framework of the Biblical typology and its figures of thought, a church building in the process of construction in the forms of contemporary Flemish Gothic is contrasted here with a building which is not only clearly of another stylistic nature, but also appropriates various elements from Romanesque structures from a distant past¹⁰. These include most especially the shafts of the columns decorated with various types

7. Here the work of Hubertus Günther on the conception of the classical temple in Renaissance Venice has proved fundamental : Hubertus Günther, « Die Vorstellungen vom griechischen Tempel und der Beginn der Renaissance in der venezianischen Architektur », in Paul von Naredi-Rainer (ed.) : *Imitatio. Von der Produktivität künstlerischer Anspielungen und Mißverständnisse*, Berlin, 2001, p. 104-143. See also Gerhard Straehle, *Die Marstempelthese, Dante, Villani, Boccaccio, Vasari, Borghini die Geschichte vom Ursprung der Florentiner Taufkirche in der Literatur des 13. bis 20. Jahrhunderts*, Munich, 2001 ; Ulrich Pfisterer, *Donatello und die Entdeckung der Stile 1430-1445*, Munich, 2002 (though here not related to architectonic conceptions of style).

8. Far more examples are discussed in my habilitation thesis : Stephan Hoppe, *Die imaginierte Antike. Bild- und Baukonstruktionen architektonischer Vergangenheit im Zeitalter Jan van Eycks und Albrechts Dürers*, manuscript Cologne, 2009.

9. See now : Stephan Kemperdick, Jochen Sander (ed.), *Der Meister von Flémalle und Rogier van der Weyden. Exhibition catalog. Ostfildern*, 2008, catalogue no. 9. The author follows the arguments of Felix Thürlemann, *Robert Campin. Eine Monographie mit Werkkatalog*, Darmstadt, 2002, p. 309ff. regarding localization in Brussels and dating ca. 1440, since in his view, the identification of the Gothic architecture in the picture with a structure in Brussels provides a reference, difficult to refute, to the place where Rogier van der Weyden, worked in 1435 at the latest. Otherwise one would have to postulate that Campin was commissioned from the ambient of this church and for that reason conducted a detailed study in this foreign city. In the case of Thürlemann, there is also the genealogy of the copies commented on later. By contrast, Albert Châtelet assumes Campin is the artist, but at the same times sees the intellectual influence of Rogier van der Weyden (p. 138, p. 204) manifested there, and dates the picture to « 1428-1430 (?) » (Albert Châtelet, *Robert Campin. Le Maître de Flémalle. La fascination du quotidien*, Antwerp, 1996, p. 138, p. 198-214 and catalogue no. 11).

10. Eva Frodl-Kraft, « Der Tempel von Jerusalem in der "Vermählung Mariae" des Meisters von Flémalle. Archäologische Realien und ideale Bildwirklichkeit », in Sumner McKnight Crosby, André Chastel et al. (ed.), *Études d'art médiéval offertes à Louis Grodecki*, Paris-Strasbourg, 1981, p. 293-316.

of ornamentation ; these appeared in this form for the first time in painting in the Netherlands in the St. Luke Madonna (dated ca. 1435), by the Brussels city painter Rogier van der Weyden¹¹. Subsequently, painted works of architectures that were based in part on Romanesque features were often used in Netherlandish and German painting, permitting one to localize the pictorial content as pagan and Biblical antiquity¹². Romanesque and « genuine » classical languages of form were largely exchangeable one for the other in architectural conceptions held by central European artists down into the sixteenth century. At the end of the fifteenth century, this conception was also activated in actual architectural praxis.

An instructive example of such transmedial influence is the west tower of the church of St. Kilian in Heilbronn, under construction between 1507 and 1529 (fig. 4). The nave and choir were completed around 1500 in forms considered today Gothic and regarded back then in the transalpine context as quite « modern »¹³. The decision was now made to construct a single west tower on the already completed lower storeys of what was originally planned as a two-tower construction¹⁴. The master craftsman Hans Schweiner from Weinsberg (1473-1534) was given that task in 1507 ; he had already been involved in a junior position in the remodeling of the Heilbronn side aisles in the 1490s. The payment he received in 1507 « for drafting and supervision, 6 guilders »¹⁵ was probably for a first design for the tower project. Drawing on Simone Farys's painstaking reconstruction of Schweiner's total work, which initially was totally along the lines of the contemporary Gothic stonemason's tradition, we can safely assume that his Heilbronn tower design of 1507 still made use of the « modern », i.e. Gothic language of form. Schweiner may well have followed his first draft when redesigning the two windows on the north and south side of the older rectangular foundation below the side platforms. Their crowning shows the popular forms at the time, especially typical of the Augsburg master builder Burkhart Engelberg¹⁶.

However, in the consciousness of contemporaries, the actual construction must have commenced in 1513, since that date was emphasized in two different inscriptions on the

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11. Dirk Vos, *Rogier van der Weyden, the complete works*, Antwerp, 1999 ; catalogue no. 8 ; Stephan Kemperdick, *Rogier van der Weyden, 1399/1400-1464*, Cologne, 1999, p. 31ff ; Christiane Kruse, « Rogiers Replik, Ein gemalter Dialog über Ursprung und Medialität des Bildes », in Christiane Kruse, Felix Thürlemann (ed.), *Porträt – Landschaft – Interieur. Jan van Eycks Rolin-Madonna im ästhetischen Kontext*, Tübingen, 1999, p. 167-185.
 12. Stephan Hoppe, « Romanik als Antike und die baulichen Folgen, Mutmaßungen zu einem in Vergessenheit geratenen Diskurs », in Norbert Nussbaum, Claudia Euskirchen and Stephan Hoppe (ed.), *Wege zur Renaissance. Beobachtungen zu den Anfängen neuzeitlicher Kunstauffassung im Rheinland und in den Nachbargebieten um 1500*, Cologne, 2003, p. 89-131 ; Stephan Hoppe, « Architekturstil und Zeitbewusstsein in der Malerei Stefan Lochners, Verwendung und Vorbilder », in Claudia Euskirchen, Marco Kieser and Angela Pfoth (ed.), *Hörsaal, Amt und Marktplatz. Forschung und Denkmalpflege im Rheinland. Festschrift für Udo Mainzer zum 60. Geburtstag*, Regensburg, 2005, p. 57-70 ; Stephan Hoppe, « Die Antike des Jan van Eyck, Architektonische Fiktion und Empirie im Umkreis des burgundischen Hofes um 1435 », in Dietrich Boschung, Susanne Wittekind (ed.), *Persistenz und Rezeption. Weiterverwendung Wiederverwendung und Neuinterpretation antiker Werke im Mittelalter*, Wiesbaden, 2008, p. 351-394.
 13. On contemporary conceptions of « modern » and « classical » architecture, see for a basic introduction : Krista De Jonge, « Style and Manner in Early Modern Netherlandish Architecture (1450-1600), Contemporary Sources and Historiographical Tradition », in HOPPE, MÜLLER AND NUßBAUM 2008, p. 264-285. See also Hermann Hipp, *Studien zur "Nachgotik" des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts in Deutschland, Böhmen, Österreich und der Schweiz*, Tübingen, 1979 ; Hermann Hipp, « Die Bückeburger "structura", Aspekte der Nachgotik im Zusammenhang mit der deutschen Renaissance », in *Renaissance in Nord-Mitteleuropa I*, Munich-Berlin, 1990, p. 159-170.
 14. On the tower project, see now in detail, and convincing in terms of architectural analysis, FARYS 2004 ; see also Christhard Schrenk (ed.), *Der Kiliansturm. Turm der Türme in Heilbronn*, Heilbronn, 2005, esp. Simone Farys, « Hans Schweiner von Weinsberg (1473-1534) », p. 33-43 and Karl Halbauer, « Von kühnen Treppenläufen und bizarren Kreaturen », p. 55-81 (henceforth quoted as HALBAUER 2005).
 15. FARYS 2004, p. 97.
 16. Franz Bischoff, *Burkhard Engelberg. « Der vilkanstreichliche Architector und der Statt Augsburg Wercke Meister ». Burkhard Engelberg und die süddeutsche Architektur um 1500. Anmerkungen zur sozialen Stellung und Arbeitsweise spätgotischer Steinmetzen und Werkmeister*, Augsburg, 1999.

building. They probably began building at that time the rectangular tower shaft above the side platforms. From this point on, Schweiner's architecture moves increasingly, clearly, and ever further away from the Gothic world of forms. Initially, modern details still appear, such as the pinnacles on the buttresses, though they largely disappear at higher levels. After 1513, Schweiner's revised draft also accommodated classical-like motifs which are Italian in origin ; these were likely imparted via the printmaker's art. Striking is his recourse to several etchings by the Augsburg artist Daniel Hopper (ca. 1470-1536)¹⁷.

But more important in this context is a second source for the new, non-Gothic language of forms : art historians have always viewed the style of the Heilbronn tower as a mixture of North Italian and Romanesque features and motifs.¹⁸ Already in its general configuration, the upper part of the tower square unmistakably resembles an earlier language of forms that is somewhat familiar in the region. The rounded arch window opening without the otherwise customary tracery paths, is strikingly reminiscent of the architecture of the cathedral of Worms, located some 100 km to the west (ca. 1130/40-1181) (fig. 7). These forms, however, are typical as well of many other Rhenish structures of the twelfth and early thirteenth century. Simone Farys actually identified Worms Cathedral as the direct source for some aspects of Schweiner's pre-Gothic language of forms, though not the sole source. Thus, we can find in the so-called small bell chamber of the Heilbronn octagon the spectacular, striking animal figures which have a counterpart on the window sills of the Worms east choir (fig. 5).

Perhaps we can even determine the possible time frame when Schweiner studied the details of the Romanesque cathedral and other older buildings along the southern Rhine. By a fortunate accident, we know that in 1513, the year of the date of construction that is so richly documented by inscription, Schweiner was reimbursed for a journey to Frankfurt, Mainz « and elsewhere ». The main reason for the trip, however, was to purchase a needed crane¹⁹. Further details in Heilbronn show that in his design of the upper tower storeys, Schweiner actually was concerned about appropriating a pre-Gothic language of forms, and not about copying a specific older and prominent church structure. The notable so-called *Säulenfresser-Köpfe* (pillar-eating heads) on the Heilbronn octagon, devoid of a lower jaw (fig. 6), are not something derived from the Rhenish cathedral. They are very probably based on a far less significant source, yet one which likewise represents the cathedral's pre-Gothic style. A corresponding deformed monster head forms the right external capital on the pillar portal of the municipal church in Weinsberg, from the early thirteenth century, the home town of Hans Schweiner. This instance of reception proves that Schweiner did not just imitate particular stylistic features of a prominent historical building. He also had a clear idea about where he could find other representatives of this style that deviated from modern Gothic. He was thus able to form an idea of this historical style abstracting from individual cases.

If one links this synthesizing, almost learned way of dealing with stylistic models with the traditional character of the first design, it is possible to assume that in 1513 Schweiner did not merely visit some older buildings. Rather, in this period he also was learning, « developing his thinking further », so to speak, i.e. becoming familiar with a new complex of ideas about architecture. The clearly traditional i.e. Gothic character of his earlier architectural language and its simultaneous formal distance from paradigms in Italy points to humanistic circles that were not themselves dealing professionally with the working out of architectonic forms. These circles must have led Schweiner into the world of ideas of supposedly classical

17. HALBAUER 2005, p. 74ff.

18. See already Moritz von Rauch, « Baugeschichte der Heilbronner Kilianskirche », *Vierteljahreshfte für Landesgeschichte*, new series, 24 (1915), p. 218-254.

19. *Urkundenbuch der Stadt Heilbronn*. Vol. II, ed. Moritz von Rauch, Stuttgart, 1913, no. 1766.

or classicizing buildings in his own region. The core of this world of ideas permitted Schweiner to locate in the indigenous world of the Romanesque a useable and empirically exploitable access to an antique language of architecture.

If representatives of the pictorial arts like Rogier van der Weyden or Jan van Eyck believed that principles of classical architecture were preserved in Romanesque art, it was only natural then for circles interested in humanistic ideals to recommend to the architect Schweiner that he engage in renewed and intensive study of those older structures. Nothing suggests that this study would have involved a retrospective glance at a period style of the High Middle Ages. On the contrary: the aim of these efforts was clearly to refresh and update contemporary architectural practice with the new interest in antiquity. However not only were the styles of the Romanesque and classical antiquity, which in phenomenological terms actually do share a number of common features, viewed by contemporaries as coherent languages of form; some quite modern inventions such as so-called *Astwerk* were also perceived in this light.

Astwerk (branch work) as a conception of classical antiquity

In the course of the fifteenth century, it became ever more frequent a practice in European architecture to supplant architectonic motifs that were actually geometric in nature, such as pillars or ribs, by seemingly botanical forms, structures evoking branches and branch tracery. Older art history viewed this as a typical late phenomenon of late Gothic, in accordance with the model of the historical development of forms²⁰. More recent research, geared more powerfully to the insights and methods of cultural studies and working from an array of perspectives, has now been able to show that since the late fifteenth century, branch tracery was not generally seen as a « modern » language of forms. Rather, it was considered representative of an era far more removed in time, indeed as a rustic representative of the art of classical antiquity²¹. With logical consistency, in certain cases of the early Northern Renaissance, it was utilized in connection with the classicizing reception of the Romanesque. That is evident for example in the west portal of the Cathedral of St. Peter and Paul in Görlitz, constructed around 1510 presumably by Albrecht Stieglitzer, where both branch work and Romanesque forms were evident to the eyes of contemporary beholders as evocations of a classical style (fig. 8).

In 1525/26, the imperial Benedictine Gothic Abbey Church in Chemnitz commissioned the sculptor Franz Maidburg to create a new main portal for the church (today the *Schlosskirche*), which shows in its lower register the imperial patrons Emperor Lothar III. von Süpplinburg and his consort, Empress Richenza. It is modeled as a kind of rustic, apparently

20. Ernst-Heinz Lemper, *Das Astwerk, Seine Formen, sein Wesen und seine Entwicklung*, Leipzig, 1950; Margot Braun-Reichenbacher, *Das Ast- und Laubwerk, Entwicklung, Merkmale und Bedeutung einer spätgotischen Ornamentform*, Nuremberg, 1966; Eva Börsch-Supan, *Garten-, Landschafts- und Paradiesmotive im Innenraum, Eine ikonographische Untersuchung*, Berlin, 1967.

21. Paul Crossley, « The Return to the Forest, Natural Architecture and the German Past in the Age of Dürer », in Thomas W. Gaetgens (ed.), *Künstlerischer Austausch. Artistic Exchange. Akten des XXVIII. Internationalen Kongresses für Kunstgeschichte Berlin. 15.–20. Juli 1992. Bd. II*, Berlin, 1993, p. 71-80; Hartmut Krohm, « Der "Modellcharakter" der Kupferstiche mit dem Bischofsstab und Weihrauchfaß », in Albert Châtelet (ed.), *Le beau Martin. Études et mises au point*, Colmar, 1994, p. 185-207; Hubertus Günther, « Das Astwerk und die Theorie der Renaissance von der Entstehung der Architektur », in Michèle-Caroline Heck, Frédérique Lemerle and Yves Pauwels (ed.), *Théorie des arts et création artistique dans l'Europe du Nord du XVI^e au début du XVIII^e siècle*, Villeneuve d'Ascq (Lille), 2002, p. 13-32; Hans Hubach, « Johann von Dalberg und das naturalistische Astwerk in der zeitgenössischen Skulptur in Worms, Heidelberg und Ladenburg », in Gerold Bönning and Burkard Keilmann (ed.), *Der Wormser Bischof Johann von Dalberg (1482-1503) und seine Zeit*, Mainz, 2005, p. 207-232.

wooden structure²² (fig. 9). Those framing structures, which in the tradition of Gothic building would have been realized as purely geometric forms, are in effect « recreated » here by stylized thick tree trunks in stone. The otherwise customary ornamental Gothic gables with tracery (*Wimperge*) and baldachins above the figures are suggested by stylized branch work (fig. 10). The initiator of the renewal of the abbey, Abbot Heinrich von Schleinitz (tenure : 1484-1522), was deeply involved in the movement of humanism, particularly evident in the recently successful reconstruction of the abbey library, which he decisively promoted and expanded²³. He arranged the purchase of texts by Erasmus, the *Historia rerum ubique gestarum* and letters of Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini, *De triumpho Romanorum* by Flavio Biondi and *Antiquitatum variarum volumina XVII* by Giovanni Nanni as well as writings of Petrarca, Boccaccio, Pico della Mirandola, Lorenzo and Georgio Valla, Poliziano and many others. In addition, there were numerous historical works added to the collection.

We can also reconstruct an extraordinary source of influence for the unusual form of the Chemnitz portal. The idea of the form ultimately goes back to Albrecht Dürer, who since the beginning of the sixteenth century had dealt with branch work as an architectural motif. In his woodcut series from around 1503, on the Life of the Virgin, there are several representations of the Jerusalem Temple, which clearly are configured as classicizing architectures. In the Circumcision of Christ, the entrance to the Holy of Holies is adorned with a motif of branch work, which for the realization in Chemnitz only had to be expanded by adding upper storeys²⁴ (fig. 11). This was probably the work of Maidburg. There is no indication that Dürer himself was personally involved in the process of drafting the design in Chemnitz. In the Circumcision of Christ, the historical horizon of the branch work architecture is Biblical antiquity. A short time later, around 1512, Lucas van Leyden began to work with the idea of portal architecture and branch work style for a creation from the Roman imperial epoch (fig. 12). On the woodcut with Virgil in a basket, part of the series of the *Vrouwenlisten*, the motif of branch tracery characterizes the ornamentation above the entrance to the imperial residence on the Palatine, and the classical element is even further stressed by a classical *tropaeum* based in part on the torso of Hercules of Belvedere visible in the branch work²⁵.

In the pictures by Albrecht Dürer and Lucas van Leyden, it becomes strikingly clear, as already earlier in the Heilbronn west tower, that contemporary conception of classical architectural style differs considerably from our own knowledge today. In this context isolated contemporaneous textual sources take on a new quality as witnesses to this different world of ideas. What was considered crude now begins to make solid sense. Thus, the Ulm-based Dominican Felix Fabri advances an argument astounding for his time regarding the age of a predecessor church there, writing around 1490 in his chronicle of Ulm, the *Tractatus de*

22. Heinrich Magirius, *Die Schlosskirche Chemnitz, Forschungen zur Baugeschichte der Benediktiner-Klosterkirche im Mittelalter*, Beucha, 2005, esp. p. 53ff. ; Hans Burkhardt, *Franz Maidburg, Über Leben und Werk eines bedeutenden sächsischen Bildhauers. Versuch einer Biographie*, Annaberg, 1996 ; Hartmut Krohm, « Franz Maidburg, Ein obersächsischer Bildhauer in der Nachfolge Tilman Riemenschneiders », in Claudia Lichte (ed.), *Tilman Riemenschneider. Werke seiner Blütezeit. Exhibition catalogue Mainfränkisches Museum, Regensburg*, 2004, p. 224-240.

23. Jürgen Sarnowsky, « Die Bibliothek des Klosters Chemnitz am Vorabend der Reformation. Ein Bücherverzeichnis von 1541 », *Studien und Mitteilungen zur Geschichte des Benediktinerordens und seiner Zweige* 1997, no. 108, p. 321-373. See Hubert Ermisch, « Geschichte des Benedictinerklosters zu Chemnitz im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert », *Archiv für die Sächsische Geschichte*, 1879, new series, 5, p. 193-261, on Abbot Heinrich von Schleinitz, see p. 222ff., though there is scarcely anything there on his humanistic educational background.

24. Rainer Schoch, Matthias Mende and Anna Scherbaum, *Albrecht Dürer, Das druckgraphische Werk. Vol. II : Holzschnitte*, Munich, 2002.

25. Jan Piet Filedt Kok (ed.), *The New Hollstein. Dutch & Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts 1450-1700*, Lucas van Leyden, Rotterdam, 1996, nos. 175-186 ; Ellen Jacobowitz, Stephanie Loeb Stepanek (ed.), *The prints of Lucas van Leyden & his contemporaries*, exh. cat. Washington D.C., 1983, here p. 102-123 ; Yvonne Bleyerveld, *Hoe bedriehlijk dat die vrouwen zijn, Vrouwenlisten in de beeldende kunst in Nederlanden, circa 1350-1650*, Leiden, 2000, here p. 95-115.

civitate Ulmensi ; he deals with the founding of Wiblingen Abbey Church in the eleventh century before the gates of the city :

When the Holy City of Jerusalem was liberated by our forces and the counts mentioned had returned, in good health, safe and sound, they learned from the master builders that construction on the mountain mentioned was not feasible, and that due to the sandy composition of the soil on the mountain, no larger building could be erected to stand there. So they put their heads together and decided to place the foundation stone for the monastery at the point where by God's good grace it stands today. Not long thereafter, the mountain where they had commenced with construction split apart. A portion of the church (which, as the stonemasons' work appear to prove, was erected in the Year of Our Lord 444), fell and was hurled down the mountain together with a part of the church courtyard. Later on, when persons dug further on down, they unearthed human skeletal remains, which had slid down together with the mass of earth²⁶.

In the Latin original of the chronicle, the decisive passage is : *pars antiquae ecclesiae quae constructa fuit anno domini 444 sicut sculptura docere videtur*. Fabri's conclusion belongs among the first attested testimonials from the cultural area north of the Alps regarding the use of phenomenological observations of old architecture in an attempt to date an object from the distant past. No matter how the Romanesque church may have actually appeared, for Fabri, in terms of his conceptions of style, it represented (late) classical antiquity.

Two generations later, the humanist and Lutheran theologian Andreas Althamer (a.k.a. Brentzius), born about 1500 in Brenz (District of Heidenheim) in Swabia, wrote in 1536 in the second revised edition of his Tacitus commentary *Commentaria Germaniae in P. Cornelii Taciti Equitis Rom. Libellum...* that he considered the church of his home town likewise to be in actuality a Roman structure :

There were actually Romans in these places. That is initially revealed by this inscription on a stone set in the wall [...] and there are coins [...] and then the circumstance that the construction of this temple provides reports about a certain age that is astounding. Because externally at the apse, references have been carved into almost two hundred stones ; these include various images of special composition and on the peoples of classical antiquity. Here are the images of kings, queens, men, women and centaurs. There are various kinds of birds : eagles, pelicans, cranes, storks, swans, ostriches, creatures with ears hanging out in front, and long ears, basilisks, roosters, hens and other creatures which I confess are unknown to me. [There are] animals, such as lions, bulls, deer, hunting dogs, wild boars, panthers, pigs, apes, leopards, bucks, cats and donkeys. [There are] sea monsters, sirens, fish, crabs, spiders and turtles. In addition, labyrinths, roses, lilies, blossoms, petals and much more. Had the true and proper faith mentioned earlier been widespread then among the population, would they not then have carved other Christian works of the Passion of the Lord or sacred stories ? Since now nothing of this can be seen, I must conclude that before the planting of the Faith in this place, it was not persons of Germanic origin who built this edifice, but rather Romans : this because my fellow countrymen [also] say that they were built by heathens, that's how they call these peoples. »
(Fuisse enim Romanos in iis locis, primum arguit lapis intrinsecus muro insertus, hac inscriptione..., deinde numismatica..., et quod ipsius templi structura mirandam quondam vetustatem referat. Nam foris per muri gyrum sunt ad ducentos ferme lapides excisi variarum imaginum miri operis et aethnicae antiquitatis indices. Sunt regum, reginarum, virorum, mulierum, centaurorum effigies. Avium varia genera, aquilae, pellicani, grues, ciconiae, cygni, struthiones, auritae propendulis et longe patentibus auribus, basilisci, galli, galliae, et aliae mihi prosus ignotae. Animalia leones, thauri, cervi, canes venatici, apri, pardi, pantherae, porci, simiae, lepores, hirci, feles, asini. Monstra marina, syrenes, pisces, cancri, araneae, testudines. Praeterea labyrinthi, rosae, lilia, flores, folia et alia multa. Si orthodoxa fides tum fuisset huic populo praedicta, haud dubie aliquid

26. An edition of the chronicle was published by Gustav Veesenmeyer, *Frater Felix Fabri Tractatus de civitate ulmensi, de eius origine, ordine, regimine, de civibus eius et statu*, Tübingen, 1889, see p. 175. The quote here is an English translation of the German translation by K[onrad] D[ietrich] Häbler, *Bruder Felix Fabris Abhandlung von der Stadt Ulm nach der Ausgabe des litterarischen Vereins in Stuttgart verdeutscht*, Ulm, 1909, p. 117ff. There is little research on Fabri's Ulm chronicle ; though see now especially Rolf Kießling, « Wer etwas sucht, der sucht es oft an viel steten, da es nit ist », *Stadtgründungslegenden schwäbischer Reichsstädte im Spätmittelalter*, in Volker Dotterweich (ed.), *Mythen und Legenden in der Geschichte*, Munich, 2004, p. 47-75, p. 59ff., see Klaus Graf, « Ulmer Annalen » and « Ulmer Chronik », in *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters. Verfasserlexikon. 2. Auflage. Bd. 11, Lieferung 5*, Berlin-New York, 2004, p. 1580-1583.

*Christiani operis de dominica passione aut sacris historiis incidissent : nunc cum nihil harum rerum cernatur, conicio ante plantatam iis locis fidem, non Germanos, sed Romanos id Aedificii struxisse : nam et populares mei ab paganis, ita ethnicos apellant, extractum praedicant)*²⁷.

Unlike the Romanesque church in Wiblingen, the church in Brenz an der Brenz is still standing, and art historians date it to ca. 1240²⁸. The Roman inscription stone that Althamer mentions and which was inserted in the wall as a *spolia* remnant is still extant. Likewise still in existence is the rich pictorial ornamentation of the frieze on the rounded arch, which Althamer describes in such enumerative detail. Althamer's description is clearly in the tradition of humanism : not only does he evaluate stone inscriptions, since the fifteenth century ever more common a practice. No, he also looks carefully at the building, naming and giving the location for important meaningful details. Totally in keeping with the ever more developed source criticism at the time, he sought to decode the architecture of the church in such a way that – in view of the lack of textual information, the builder and approximate date of construction – could be disclosed by the visible form of the building.

Althamer had come to Nuremberg around 1528 as deacon of St. Sebaldus Church. Doubtless, when he expanded his commentary on Tacitus by adding the passage quoted above, he was aware of the ideas in circulation regarding the age and function of the double chapel in the Kaiserburg in his new place of residence (fig. 13). Konrad Celtis had already commented in his *Norimberga* on the Romanesque building, in reality stemming from the twelfth century :

On the Castle mount, there are three beautiful chapels [...]. The third, rather narrow, is located in the Emperor's Fortress. The ruler attends religious services there. Generally there is a legend that earlier on this mount was a temple dedicated to Diana, and to substantiate this, they point to an idol and to several old and no longer identifiable images. Whether that is true or not is impossible for me to say with certainty [...]²⁹.

(Collis delubra tria et ornata habet, [...], tertium in imperiali arce angustis, quo Caesar rei diuinae et sacrificiis ceremonisque adsistit. Ferunt vulgo illud quosdam Dianae fuisse phanum eiusque rei argumentum adducunt idolon veteresque quasdam et incogniti simulacra imagines, quod ego [...] non quidem affirmauerim).

So Romanesque perceived as classical antiquity was not only a widespread notion in the circles of the painters and the master builders. It extended further.

Only recently Christopher S. Wood has drawn our attention to the underlying type of historical thinking in his eminent study on German antiquarianism around 1500 :

In the fifteenth century, by contrast, on the far horizon of the modern paradigm, things that are today considered works of art and therefore not substitutable, like statues and paintings, were still constantly standing in for one another. Copying was the normal way to make new things. When approaching an artifact, fifteenth-century observers looked for its referential target, not for an origin point within its production history. They understood the meaning of an artifact as a fixed referential quantum preserved across a chain of mutually substitutable artifacts, rather than as a dynamic, open-ended process originating in the artifact itself. Artifacts were able to imply, with great force, a prior chain of artifacts that linked up with a distant point of origin, a historical figure, perhaps, or a moment of founding. So deeply rooted in this period was the premise of the impossibility of novelty that practically every

27. Andreas Althamer, *Commentaria Germaniae in P. Cornelii Taciti Equitis Rom. libellum de situ, moribus & populis Germanorum*, Nuremberg, 1536, (this is a second edition with commentary by Althamer, substantially expanded as compared with the first edition in 1529), here quoted in Werner Körte, *Die Wiederaufnahme romanischer Bauformen in der niederländischen und deutschen Malerei des 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts*, Wolfenbüttel, 1930, p. 86.

28. Bodo Cichy, *Die Kirche von Brenz*, Heidenheim, 1966 ; Walter Messerschmidt, *Gallus-Kirche Brenz*, Brenz, 1975.

29. Quoted in Thomas Schauerte, « Antikenrezeption, Archäologie und Numismatik, Humanistische Bildthemen », in Thomas Schauerte (ed.), *Albrecht Dürer - das große Glück. Kunst im Zeichen des geistigen Aufbruchs. Unter Mitarbeit von Birgit Münch. Katalog zur Ausstellung*, Bramsche, 2003, p. 101-110, esp. p. 104, translated by Gerhard Fink (ed.), *Konrad Celtis « Norimberga », Ein Büchlein über Ursprung Lage Einrichtung und Gesittung Nürnbergs vollendet um das Jahr 1500 gedruckt vorgelegt 1502*, Nuremberg, 2000, p. 39ff.

signifying artifact, every monument, was presumed to have an ultimate source in a remote and primordial reality, even if that source was in practical terms unknowable³⁰.

Conclusion

Despite the requisite brevity of my remarks here, let me formulate a conclusion. From the perspective of an autonomous style model most of the architectural phenomena shown in this paper can scarcely be recognized as the product of Renaissance efforts to reinvigorate and recover the architectural style of classical antiquity. Only combining the different media and categories of sources reveals a discourse of the nascent Renaissance that may seem to us somewhat unfamiliar, but is nonetheless in itself quite coherent.

In the view of its builders, the elements of the Heilbronn tower which we understand today as (neo-) Romanesque represented no other style but that of classical antiquity. In certain contexts, the branch work did not represent the « modern » Gothic, but rather an indigenous variant of the far distant and quasi-archaic classical antiquity. Several of the examples cited by Hellmut Lorenz, such as the Bautzen aedicule or the cornices of the portals in the Wawel Castle, were thus not at all intended as a hybridization of Northern Gothic and Italian Renaissance, but rather were meant to display to the knowing eye an evocation of the classical language of forms drawn from diverse sources, from the North and the South. The branch work here is consciously subject to the classical matrix of the Ionic kymation (egg and dart). Examples such as those cited remind us that the « European Renaissance » (Peter Burke) acted in far more multifarious ways than any attempt to measure it solely by Italian art practice at the time can reveal³¹. A *thick* description of the kind sketched here can, I would argue, add significant facets to the traditional *thin* description of stylistic phenomena.

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30. Christopher S. Wood, *Forgery, replica, fiction. Temporalities of German Renaissance art*, Chicago, 2008, p. 18ff. Cf. also : Alexander Nagel, Christopher S. Woods, *Anachronic renaissance*, New York, 2010.

31. See Peter Burke, *the European Renaissance : Centres and Peripheries*, Blackwell, 1998. He notes : « It is perhaps in this context that we should place another development on the periphery of Europe, the so-called "Romanesque revival" in fifteenth-century Scotland, the return to cylindrical columns and round-headed windows and doorways in Aberden and Dunkeld cathedrals. It may be no more than coincidence that the processional doorway at Melrose Abbey dates from the 1420s, when Brunelleschi was engaged in reforming architecture by returning to Italian Romanesque models which he thought were classical ones. Or were the Scots thinking in the same way ? » (p. 50-51). See also Jean Guillaume, « Avant-propos : Renaissance ou Renaissances ? » in Jean Guillaume (ed.) : *L'invention de la Renaissance. La réception des formes « à l'antique » au début de la Renaissance, Actes du colloque tenu à Tours du 1^{er} au 4 juin 1994*, Paris, 2003, p. 7-8.

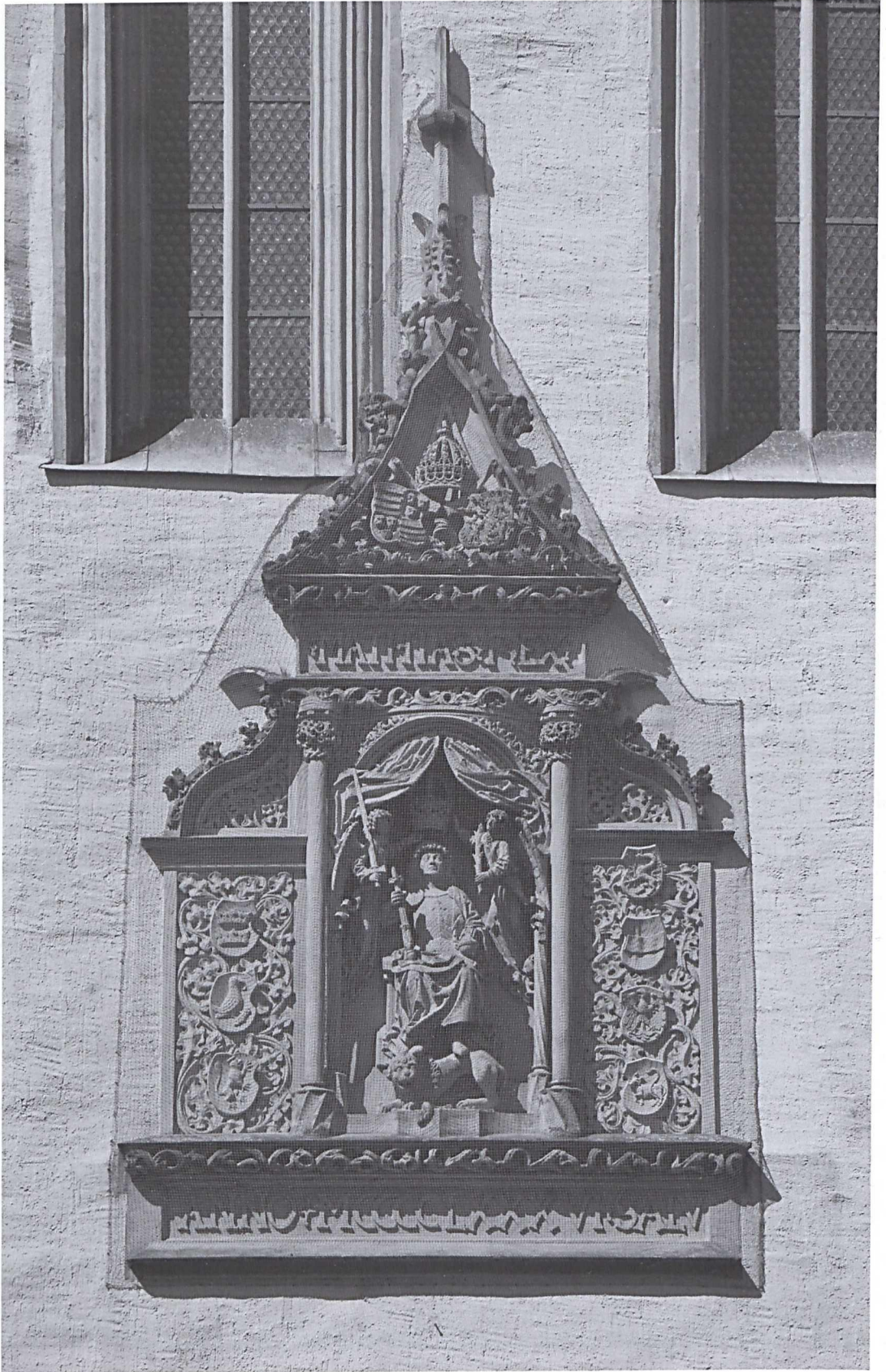


Fig. 1. Aedicule on the gate tower of the Bautzen Castle commissioned by King Matthias Corvinus, dated 1486.



Fig. 2. Portal of Wawel Castle in Cracow, ca. 1520-1525.

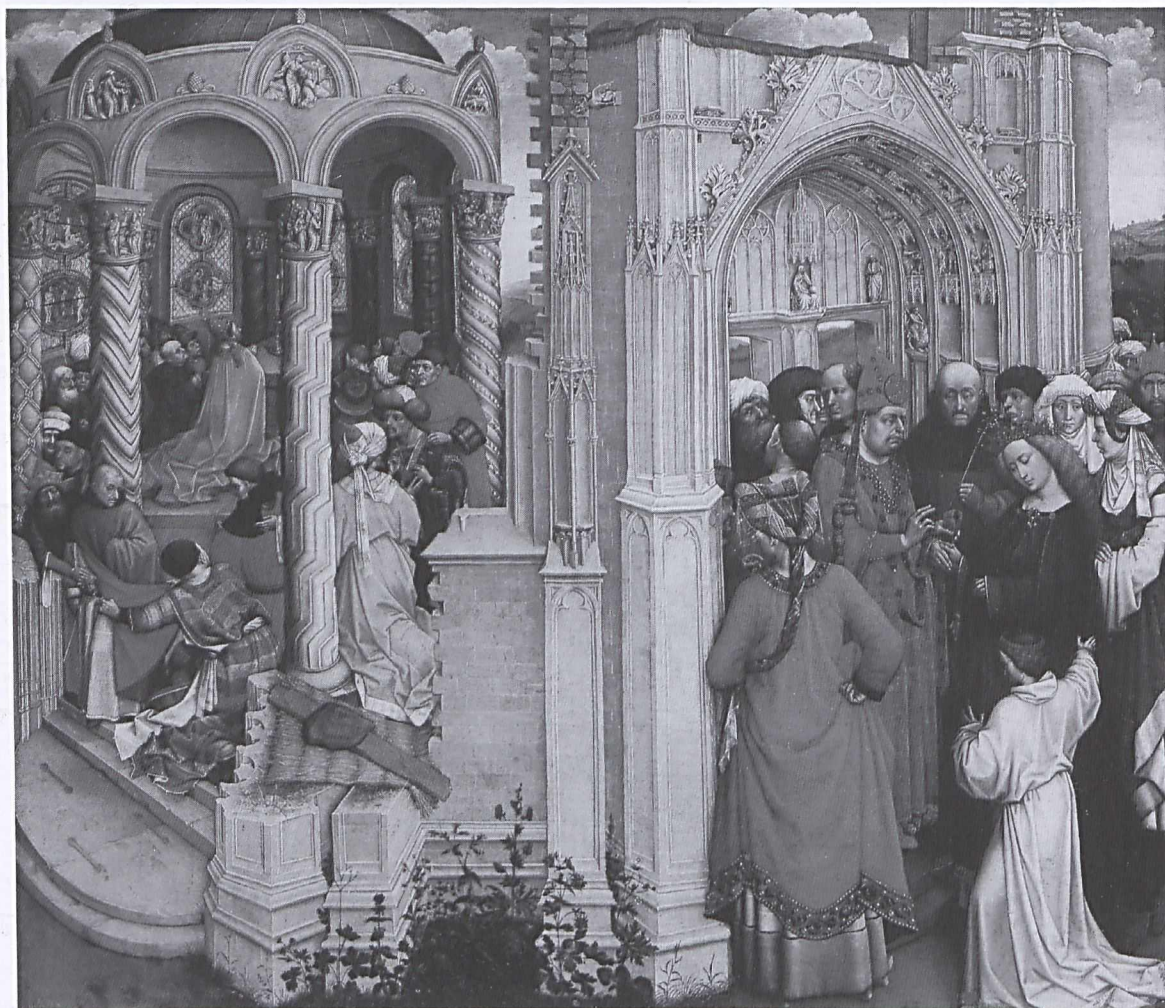


Fig. 3. Circle of Rogier van der Weyden or Robert Campin : *Marriage of the Virgin*, ca. 1440 (Prado).



Fig. 4. Hans Schweiner : West tower of St. Kilian Church, Heilbronn, 1507/13 - 1529.



Fig. 5. Bear figure on the tower octagon of St. Kilian Church, Heilbronn, ca. 1520.

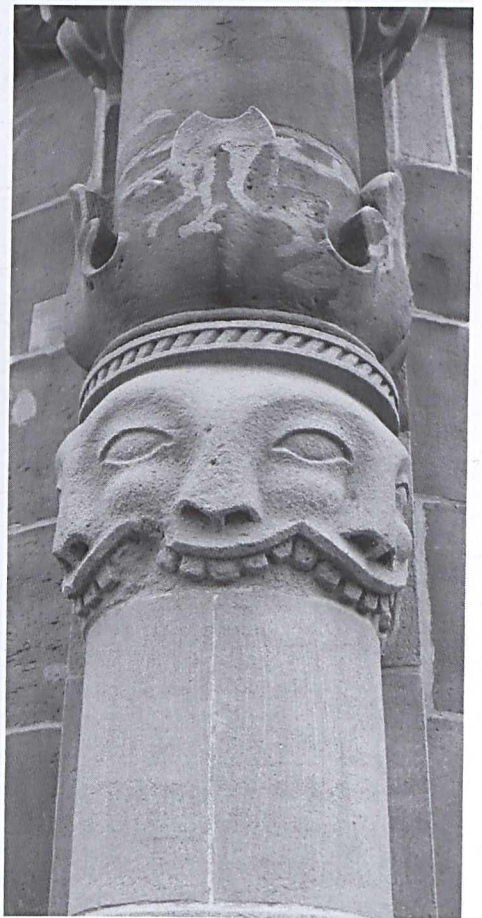


Fig. 6. So-called Säulenfresser-Köpfe (pillar-eating heads) on the tower octagon of St. Kilian Church, Heilbronn, ca. 1520.



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Fig. 7. Worms Cathedral from the northeast (ca. 1130-1181).

Fig. 8. Ascribed to Albrecht Stieglitzer : west portal of St. Peter and Paul Church, Görlitz in a neo-Romanesque manner with branch work, ca. 1510.



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Fig. 9. Franz Maidburg : former north portal of the Abbey Church of Chemnitz (today Schlosskirche), 1525-1526.

Fig. 10. Empress Richenza, detail of former north portal of the Abbey Church of Chemnitz, 1525/26.



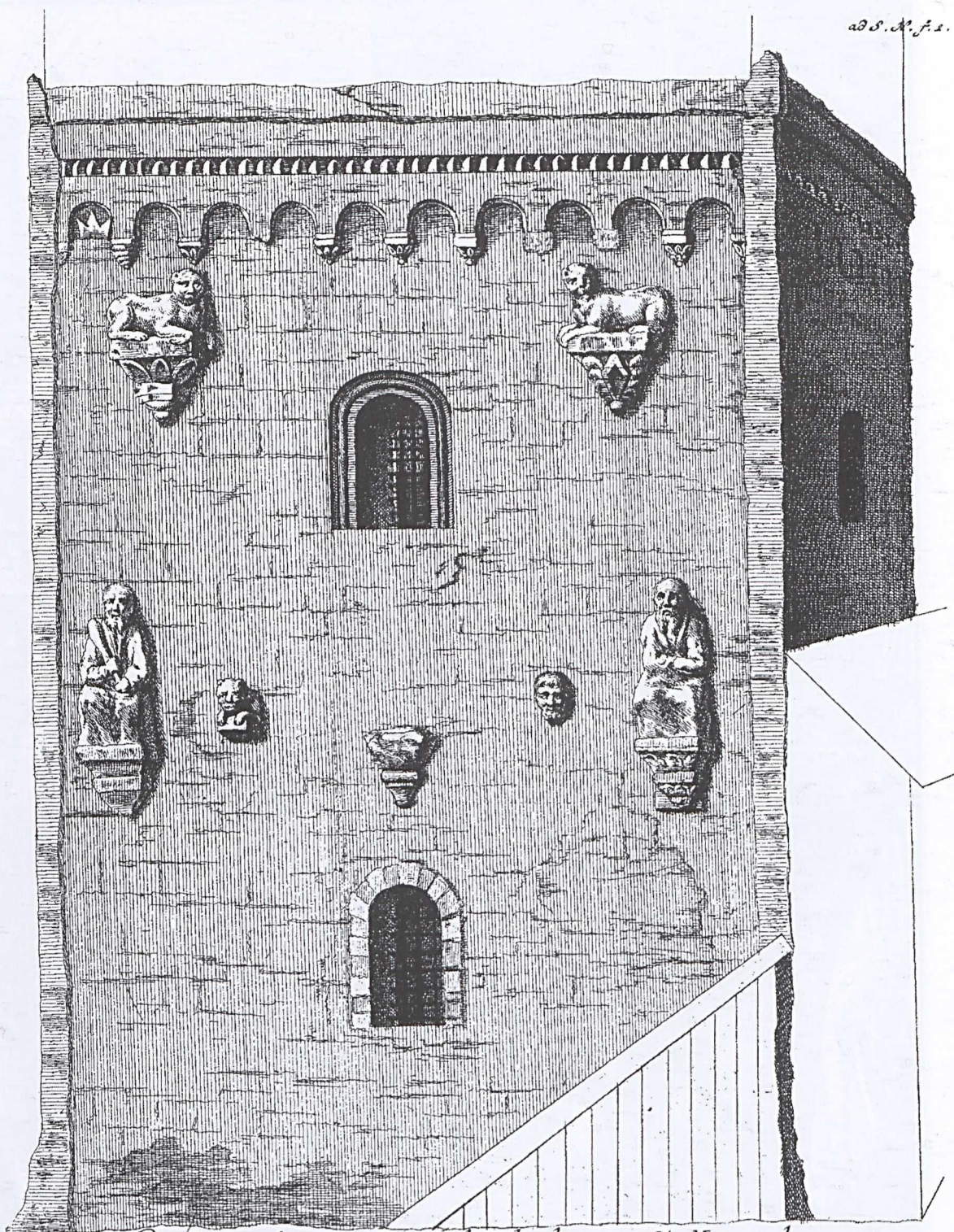


Fig. 11. Albrecht Dürer : *Offering in the Temple*, from the series of woodcuts on the Life of the Blessed Virgin, ca. 1503.



Fig. 12. Lucas van Leyden : *Vergil in the Basket*, from the woodcut series on the *Vrouwenlisten*, ca. 1512.

ad S. M. f. s.



*H. Wyreff fecit. Abriss des uralten Dianen-nachmals aber zu St. Margareth
benannten Tempels, nächst an dem Kayserl. Schloß auf der
Reichs-Vesten zu Nürnberg*

Fig. 13. The twelfth-century chapel in the Nuremberg Kaiserburg described as a former temple dedicated to Diana (Lazarus Carl von Wölkern, *Singularia Norimbergensia*, Nuremberg, 1739, after p. 244).