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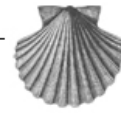


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Pilgrimage in the Medieval City. The Example of Nuremberg in the 15th Century¹

By Gerhard Weilandt

Research on the architecture of pilgrimage usually focuses on those buildings that owe their importance directly to their roles as centers of pilgrimage, like the churches of Vézelay or Santiago de Compostela. One easily forgets the numerous other churches which served as destinations for pilgrims as well; churches that were built for other purposes and for which pilgrimage was only a secondary – nevertheless important – purpose. This essay examines the medieval city of Nuremberg as an example of this, where a rich corpus of written documentation allows certain qualified statements.

Almost every church in Nuremberg owned a rich treasure of relics that were regularly exhibited to attract pilgrims. The relics of the Holy Empire must be mentioned first. They were kept in Nuremberg since 1425 in the Church of the Hospital of the Holy Ghost.¹ In their first years there, they were exposed inside the church, but soon the church building proved to be too small for the pilgrim crowds, so that the display was moved to the nearby market place (*der Hauptmarkt*), where they were shown from the balcony of a private building for veneration. (fig. 1) The Masses celebrated here were solemnly approved by the bishop of Bamberg in 1433 (necessary because the exhibition place was not a consecrated church.)² The day of the exposition, *die Heiltumsweisung*, was a general feast in Nuremberg and its popularity caused such a great crush of people, that the city council took precautionary measures to prevent a revolt. During the rest of the year, the shrine with the relics was hung on an iron chain high up in the choir of the Church of the Holy Ghost.³ (fig. 2)

¹ Julia Schnelbögl, “Die Reichskleinodien in Nürnberg 1424-1523,” in: *Mitteilungen des Vereins für Geschichte der Stadt Nürnberg* 51 (1962), pp. 78-159.

² Stadtarchiv Nürnberg, Urkundenreihe 1433, April 24.

³ Stadtarchiv Nürnberg, D 2/III, Rechnungen Nr. 209, 1663, ad Febr. 10: “Item Hannßen Christoph Götz Mahlern alhier von einer großen Ketten, doran der Casten zum Heilthumb hengt zuvergulden: 10 fl.”

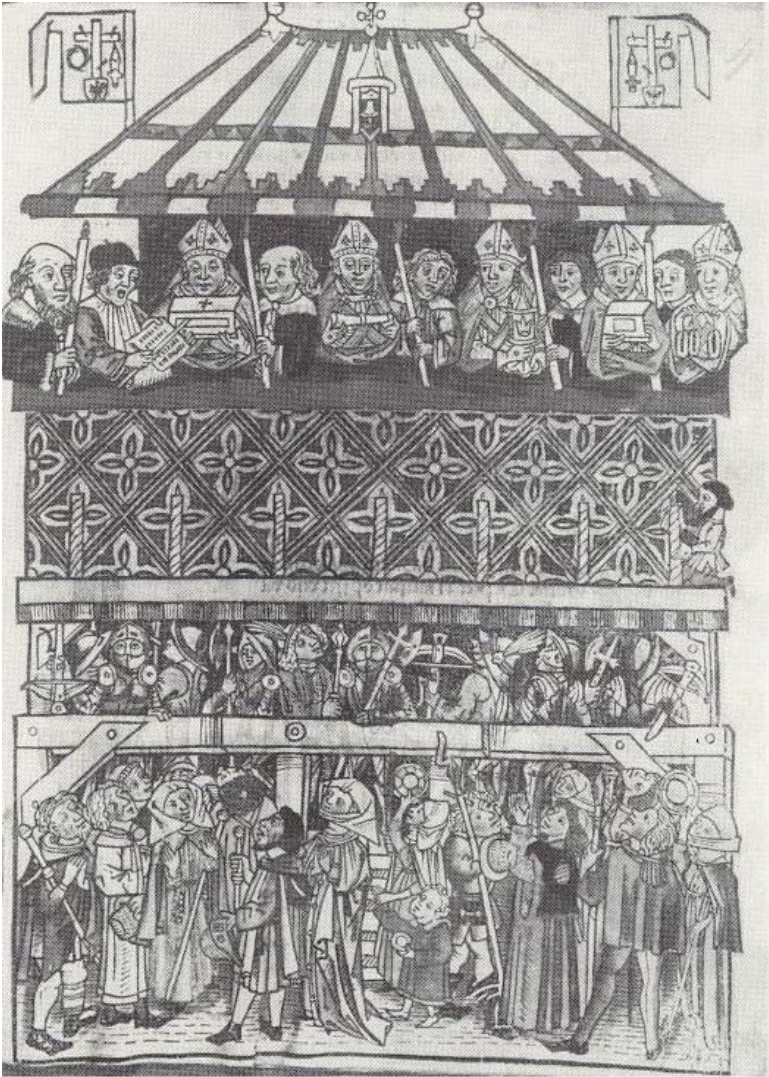


Fig. 1: *Heiltumsweisung in Nuremberg*, woodcut, after 1487; by permission of Nuremberg Stadtarchiv.



Fig. 2: Nuremberg, HI. *Geist-Spital*, engraving by Johann Andreas Graff, 1696; Archive of the author.

But at some minor feasts, the relics were presented to the public within the church itself, as attested to by the 1460 indulgence of the bishop of Eichstätt who referred to the church “where the imperial relics of the passion of Christ are kept,”⁴ being open on certain days to all visitors. Except for these days, only distinguished guests such as princes were allowed to gaze at the relics of the Holy Empire – each time with the formal approval of the city authorities. For that purpose the shrine was let down on the chain, then opened so the relics could be venerated. Immediately after the visit it had to be pulled up again in order to avoid the possibility of the holy remains being stolen. The choir of the church of the Holy Ghost had been built in the 14th century, long before the imperial treasure was brought to Nuremberg. Nevertheless it was well-suited for keeping such a shrine. The building itself acted as a monumental shrine similar to the Ste. Chapelle in Paris or the late Gothic choir of the imperial church in Aachen. The main difference was that, in Nuremberg, the treasure was suspended in the airy heights, placing it even more precisely in the center of the architecture. The relics of the Holy Empire, including the imperial crown and the holy lance, were the most important treasures not only of Nuremberg but also in all of Germany.

But there were more, incredibly important, relics in the other Nuremberg churches. The Dominicans kept the relics of the Holy Innocents, the children killed by King Herod in his attempt to find the Christ child. These relics were presented to the public in a shrine made of glass,⁵ which was placed in a chapel attached to the nave, rather than in the choir, where the pilgrims would disturb the monks during their prayer. A statue of the Virgin Mary which stood in the now-destroyed Franciscan church was another important object of veneration. It was also placed outside of the choir in the nave and was solemnly consecrated by a bishop in 1434.⁶ That this is the only surviving dedication document of a sculpture in Nuremberg

⁴ Stadtarchiv Nürnberg, Urkundenreihe 1460, März 14: in qua ... reliquie de passionibus Cristi imperiales nuncupate conservantur.

⁵ Stefan Roller / Gerhard Weilandt, “Der Dreikönigsaltar in St. Lorenz und Hans Pleydenwurff,” in: *Hundert Jahre Verein zur Erhaltung der St. Lorenzkirche 1903-2003*. Sammelband der Referate des Kolloquiums aus Anlass des Vereinsjubiläums, ed. Christian Schmidt / Georg Stolz (Schriftenreihe des Vereins zur Erhaltung der St. Lorenzkirche in Nürnberg e.V. 2), Nürnberg 2004, pp. 35-44.

⁶ Wilhelm Deinhardt, *Dedicationes Bambergenses. Weiheitenotizen und -urkunden aus dem mittelalterlichen Bistum Bamberg* (Beiträge zur Kirchengeschichte Deutschlands 1), Freiburg/Br. 1936, p. 76, No.

underlines its importance. The statue owed its veneration less to its artistic value than to the fact that numerous relics were placed within its body. Every person kneeling in front of it and reciting the *Ave Maria* obtained an indulgence. Another church, the Chapel of the Virgin Mary (*die Frauenkirche*) at the main market possessed relics of the girdle and veil of the Virgin Mary, which were enclosed in precious reliquaries and exhibited from time to time.⁷

Even the Chapel of the Hospice of St. Martha could brag of important relics and reliquaries. There, the pilgrims rested in a common room, with the more distinguished, *die ehrbaren*, but slightly separated from the others, and, of course, the men were strictly separated from the women. To garner publicity and attract as many pilgrims as possible, every high feast was announced from the pulpits of the main churches in the city and leaflets were attached to church portals. The text of one, for the feast of St. Matthias, has come down to us: “On the next day N. is the day of the holy apostle St. Mathias that will be celebrated laudably at the chapel of St. Martha. And the day before they will sing vespers and preach afterwards. And on the day itself they will sing and celebrate the Mass and there you will find great mercy and indulgence.” (*Auff den nachsten N. ist der tag des heyligen zwelfffpoten sand Mathias, den wirt man lobelichen begen zw sand Martha und am abent wirt man da vesper singen und darnach predigen, und am tag meß singen und lesen da vindt ir groß gnad und applaß*).⁸ The day before the feast, the sacristan opened the altarpieces and decorated the altar of the day (for example, the altar of St. Matthias on his day) with a carpet and vexilla. He spread grass and placed trees as embellishments in the church and lit numerous candles.

112: “...Item eadem prescripta dominica [1434, June 20] in eadem ecclesia prenominata benediximus et consecrauimus ymaginem beate virginis Marie apponendo multas reliquias sanctorum, ut quicumque Chrii fidelium coram predicta ymagine deuote flexis genibus dixerint angelicam salutacionem seu Aue Maria trina vice, de iniunctis eciam sibi penitenciis LX^a dies criminalium et annum venialium in Domino misericorditer relaxamus ...”

⁷ See the inventory of 1435, Staatsarchiv Nürnberg, Rep. 44e (Losungsamt, Akten), SIL 131 No. 7, fol. 1v: “Item ein silbrein vergult monstranczen mit einer bariln, do unser frawen gurtel in ist, wigt mit der bariln 2 mark 4 lot ...;” fol. 2v: “Item ein hultzein tafeln mit silber beslagen, do ein stück unser lieben frawen sleyr ynn ist und ander wirdig heiligtum auff der taffeln, ist beslagen, 3 mark 6 lot 1 quinten lauter silber vergult und unvergult. Mer ist auff den flugellein 15 lot 1 quinten silber.” Stephan Schuler, “Saalbuch der Frauenkirche in Nürnberg,” ed. J. Metzner, in: *Berichte über das Wirken und den Stand des Historischen Vereins zu Bamberg* 32 (1869), pp. 1-114, p. 62: “Item an dem ostertag frue als man vnnsern [herren] aus dem grab erhaben hat, so setzt man die silbrein stuck mit dem heiligthum auff die taveln, dorauff man pettelt vnd lest sie sten pis man an dem ostertag gesungen hat.”

⁸ *Stadtarchiv Nürnberg, D 15, M IV, No. 9* (Stiftungsbuch des Marthaspitals, 1471), fol. 12v.

The relics were exposed on the altars and on the *Heiltumsstuhl* —a relic stand used to collect the alms (*daß man das almußen dapey sammeln sol*),⁹ that was covered with cushions upon which the sacristan placed the skulls, jaws, and other bones, preserved in shrines and monstrances. The relic stand was flanked by four gilt sculptures of angels, amplifying the effect of the decoration. An honorable man took care of the treasures, a service for which he received a bottle of wine. The sacristan was rewarded for his trouble, too, and the more money collected in alms on the relic stand, the more money he received. The presentation of relics took place in a comparable way in the other churches of the city.

The importance of the financial aspect so strongly emphasized in the documents, is echoed by another example. From the parish Church of St. Lorenz we know that income from every feast in the ecclesiastical year over several decades was recorded in the *Almosenbuch* – alms book.¹⁰ This archive refers to the voluntary gifts of the pilgrims visiting the church (mostly on feast days), when the relics were presented on the relic stands and altars. From 1439 to 1472, a huge new choir hall of St. Lorenz was erected. (fig. 3) Fortunately, documents from some years survive which record the expenses of building the choir and these can be compared to the income from the alms. I have published these accounts elsewhere in detail, but here, briefly, is the result: In the four years where we can compare the expenses with the income the voluntary alms of the pilgrims covered between 31.3 and 37.6 % of the entire cost of construction. In other words: one third of the expenses for the choir could be met by the alms of the pilgrims. These documents allow one to understand the considerable importance of the pilgrimage in this Nuremberg parish church.

⁹ Stadtarchiv Nürnberg, D 15, M IV, No. 9, fol. 13r: “Item am abent [the day before the feast] sol der meßner die kirchen zieren und die altar auff thün und den altar zieren, dar auf sand Mathias rast, und das er ein tebich hencke uber den selben altar und ein pancklach slahe auff die seyten deß selben altars, auch das er den heylthum stul zw richt daß man das almußen dapey sammeln sol der pflieger befehlen das der meßner ein erbern man pit, der deß abentz und am tag piß daß man die meß gesingt pey dem heyltum sitze, darumb sol ym der pflieger geben ein maß weins zuvertrincken.”

¹⁰ Gerhard Weilandt, Heiligen-Konjunktur. “Reliquienpräsentation, Reliquienverehrung und wirtschaftliche Situation an der Nürnberger Lorenzkirche im Spätmittelalter” in: *Von Goldenen Gebeinen. Wirtschaft und Reliquie im Mittelalter*, ed. Markus Mayr (Geschichte und Ökonomie 9), Innsbruck/Wien/München 2001, pp. 186-220.



Fig. 3: Nuremberg, *St. Lorenz*, hall choir; by permission of Nuremberg Stadtarchiv.

The Church St. Sebaldus and the Church of the Nunnery of St. Katharina

The crucial importance of pilgrimage is also evident in two other Nuremberg churches: the main Nuremberg Church of St. Sebald and the Church of the Dominican nunnery of St. Katharina. Both are fascinating examples because they differ markedly from one another both in function and in their architectural structure. St. Sebald, the oldest parish church, was open to everyone, while St. Katharina, as a convent church, very strictly obliged its members to keep away from the outer world. One wonders how the pilgrimage took place in both churches and how the pilgrimage affected their architecture.

St. Sebald is a Romanesque basilica with two choirs; the eastern one being replaced by a Gothic choir during the years 1361 to 1379.¹¹ (fig. 4) In constructing the new choir, workmen erected its enclosing walls leaving the old Romanesque building untouched. The citizens of Nuremberg wanted to keep the old church functioning as long as possible. It was not until 1374 – eleven years after the commencement of construction – that the bishop of Bamberg allowed them to pull down the old choir.

The decision to erect the new choir with an ambulatory was closely connected with the growing cult of St. Sebald, a hermit, who was buried in the church – and is still buried there today. Already in the 13th century the parish church was named after this saint, even though he would not be officially canonized until the 15th century. The high altar was dedicated to another patron, St. Peter, and in 1337, St. Sebald is first mentioned as secondary patron of the high altar. Some years later, c.1340/50, a stone sculpture, placed prominently in the church, represented him for the first time. In 1379, on the occasion of the dedication of the choir and the new high altar, he became the main patron. This shows how the building of the choir and the cult of St. Sebald were closely connected. The driving force behind the propaganda of St. Sebald was the city council of Nuremberg. This is verified by the fact that on the initiative and monies of the council, the legend of St. Sebald (*hystorie von sand Sebolde*) was copied and sent to all monasteries in the city, so they could celebrate his feast every year with singing like that in the parish church. The saint was the patron of the whole city and the new hall choir became his encompassing shrine, with the saint himself placed in the center of the

¹¹ Gerhard Weilandt, *Die Nürnberger Sebalduskirche im Zeitalter der Gotik und Renaissance. Eine Topographie der Bilder* (Habilitationsschrift, Technische Universität Berlin), Berlin 2003 (forthcoming).



Fig. 4: Nuremberg, *St. Sebald*, hall choir, pre-war photo; Archive of the author.

choir. In 1397, a new silver shrine was commissioned, which is still preserved today. It was placed in the central axis, in the bay between the piers north IV/V and south IV/V (fig. 5, 6); after World War II it was moved one bay to the east. Its original placement meant that the parish clerics had their patron close to them while reading the hours -- he was literally among them.

Over time, a tense situation emerged: on the one hand the choir was the place where the clergy read and prayed and where distinguished guests like the emperor were solemnly received. On the other hand, the shrine of St. Sebald in the choir served as a destination of pilgrimage. So the clergy had to come to an arrangement with the needs of the public. During the time of the old Romanesque choir, the problem was not as grave since there were only a few parish priests. For the daily Masses which took place at the high altar, the attendance of the public was not only allowed, but was promoted. That is attested to by a 1303 document of the bishop of Bamberg, who promised an indulgence to everyone who “takes part in the celebration of the Mass in the choir of the Church of St. Sebald” on the main feasts of the ecclesiastical year, i.e. the feast of Our Lord, the Virgin Mary, and the Apostles.

The situation changed in the course of the 14th century, when many prebends were founded. The growing number of clerics meant that the public was increasingly considered as disturbance and was thus driven from the inner choir. With the completion of the Gothic hall choir in 1379 no further indulgences were granted to the visitors for attendance at the Masses. The older privileges were transmitted to another altar placed in the ambulatory, the altar of St. Peter, who had ceased to be the patron for the high altar. (fig. 6) Now, the visitors would normally gather in the ambulatory, not in the inner choir. The tabernacle was not situated close to the high altar, but was moved to the ambulatory, (fig. 6, Wn II) so that the priests of the minor altars and the venerators of the Holy Sacrament would no longer enter the sanctuary. We observe an increasing separation of the inner choir and the ambulatory, always with the intention to separate the clerics from the hustle and bustle of the world.

How did this intention affect the architecture? Looking at the hall choir in its present state, the inner choir appears to be completely open. The slender piers leave enough space between them to seemingly invite the visitor to stroll about, but the situation was completely different in the Middle Ages. There were numerous mobile furnishings that provided the structure and affected the original appearance of the architecture. These wooden objects have vanished almost entirely, but they can be reconstructed. Stalls were inserted in the empty

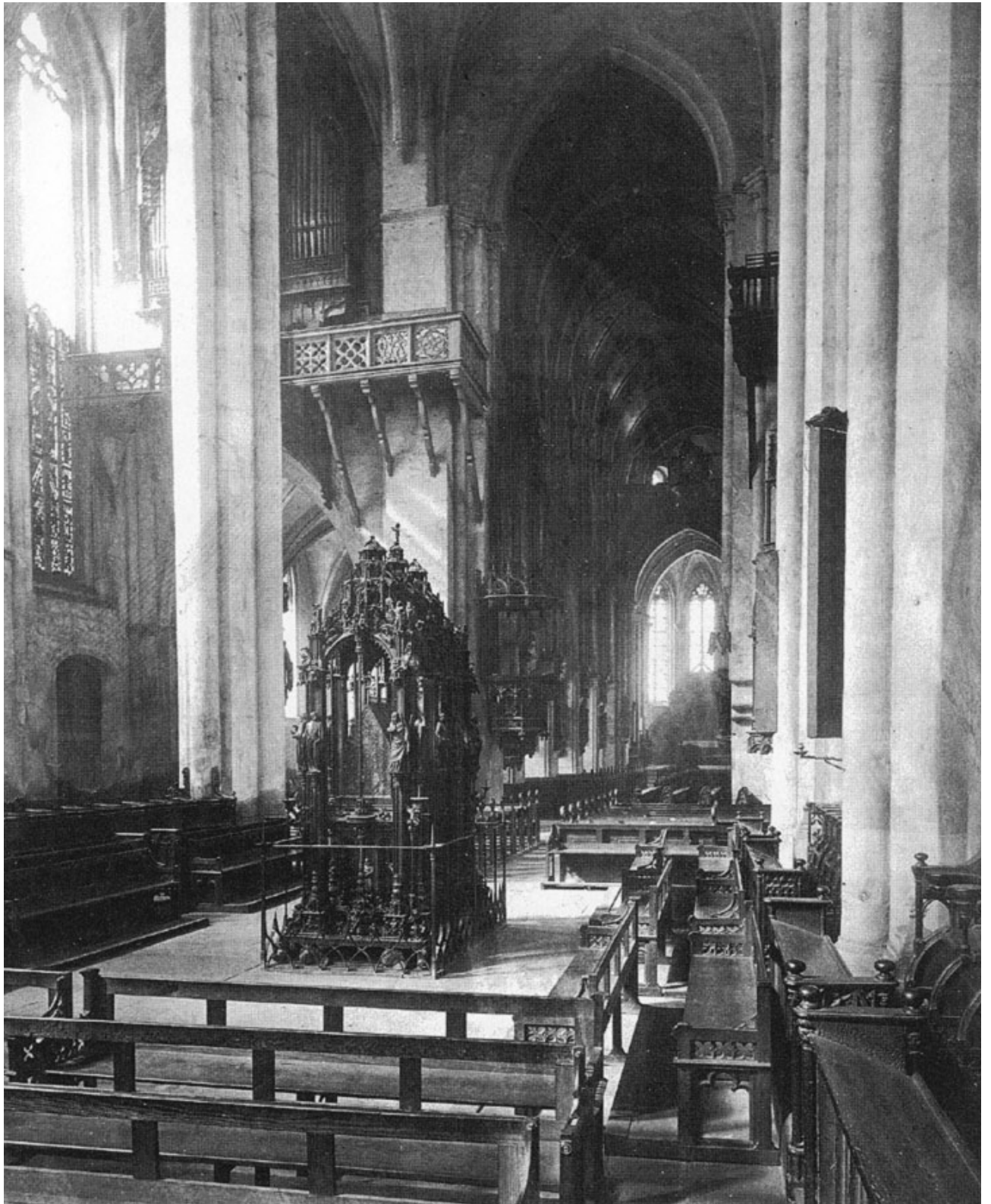


Fig. 5: Nuremberg, *St Sebald's shrine in the hall choir*, photo c. 1900; by permission of Nuremberg Stadtarchiv.

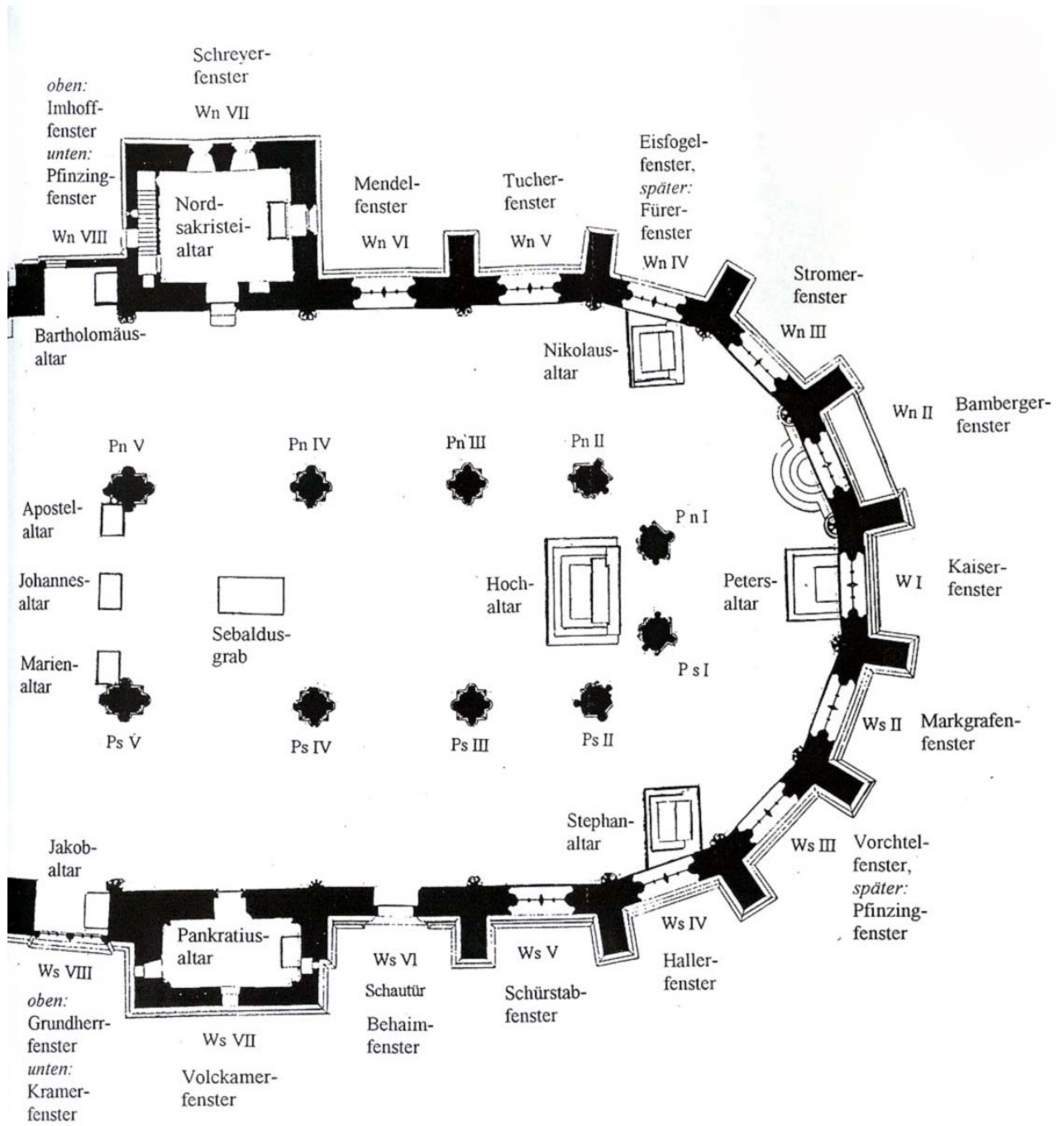


Fig. 6: Nuremberg, *St. Sebald*, plan of the choir, Archive of the author.

spaces between almost all piers, a situation that was preserved until World War II. (fig. 4, 5) There was a single opening for passage right in front of the high altar. (fig. 6 between the piers Pn II/III and Ps II/III) The stalls served not only seating purposes; they simultaneously separated the ambulatory simultaneously from the inner choir. The double seats were arranged back to back so that they could be used by the clerics during the liturgical hours as well as by the visitors to the ambulatory. However, they were not high enough to prevent the pilgrims in the ambulatory from looking into the inner choir, because their dossals were missing. An 1838 drawing by Georg Christoph Wilder illustrates the stalls in their original medieval state. (fig. 7), showing that, the pilgrims could normally see the shrine of St. Sebald, at least from a distance.

Further barriers completed the original disposition. Above the stalls between the western piers (fig. 6, Pn/s V-III) there were massive beams or *Tremen*, with wooden sculptures of angels on them. The angels served as removable candlesticks and were put up and lit, especially on high feasts. This disposition – angels on beams and double-sided stalls with a passage in front of the high altar – was copied in the second Nuremberg parish church of St. Lorenz in the 15th century, where, unlike St. Sebald, it has been preserved up to the present day. (figs. 4, 8). On several high feasts, sumptuous tapestries were suspended from the beams in St. Sebald. Out of at least five of such decorative series, only a single one survived: showing the legend of St. Sebald. (fig. 9) The tapestries served to decorate the inner choir on high feasts and to prevent curious glances.

The series of beams continued in north-south direction at the western end of the choir (piers Pn/s V). There was a crucifixion group with the Virgin Mary and St. John on this *Tram* lit by six candles. Underneath the vault of sacristy, another tapestry with the representation of the fourteen auxiliary saints (Holy Helpers) occasionally hung. They were intended to remind the visitors in the nave that St. Sebald could help them in their needs, too. He was regarded as particularly helpful for women when bearing their children. The western part of the inner choir was closed in the shape of a horseshoe: at the top, the beams featured sculptures and tapestries were hung below. On the floor, the gap between the western piers (n/s V) was closed by three altars which stood one beside the other. (fig. 6) With the completion of the Gothic choir, they marked the border to the old Romanesque nave, and between them only two relatively narrow gaps remained. They cannot have served as the main entrance to the high altar which was situated between the piers north and south

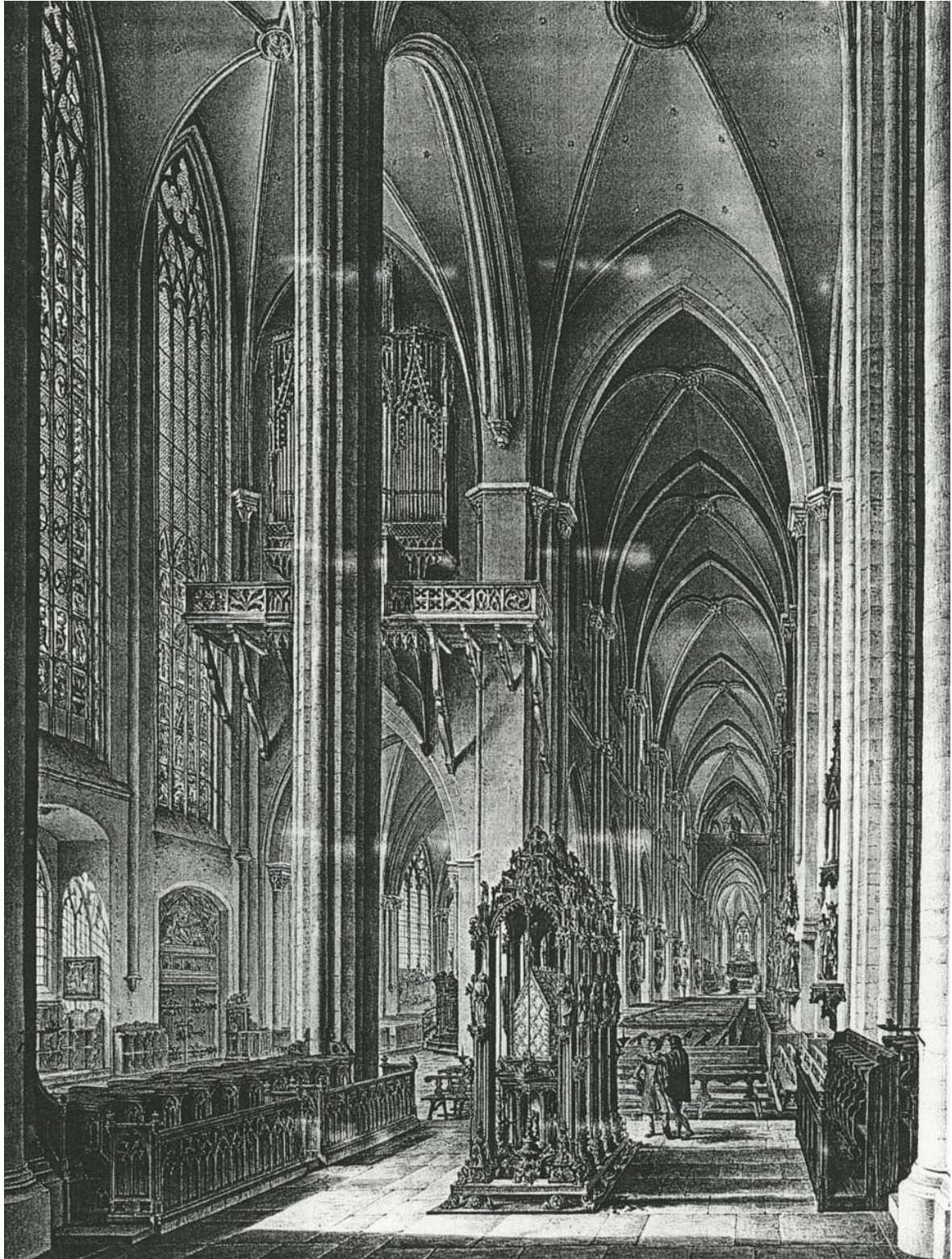


Fig. 7: Georg Christoph Wilder, *Interior of St. Sebald's Church*, drawing, 1838; by permission of Nuremberg, Stadtarchiv.



Fig. 8: Nuremberg, *St. Lorenz*, angels on beams in the choir, c.1500; Archive of the author.



Fig. 9: Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, *Tapestry with the Legend of St. Sebald*, detail; with permission.

II/III. The purpose of all these obstacles placed between public ambulatory and inner choir was clearly to prevent disturbance of the priests during prayers. Such measures were not only useful, but necessary, as evidenced by a donation by the Nuremberg citizen Sigemund Oertel in 1496, who arranged to have a sum of four guilders given every year to keep the dogs out of the church in perpetuity. But it was the numerous pilgrims, whom these structures tried to prevent from stepping into the choir, at least during the liturgical hours.

Yet, it was not possible to keep them out completely since the shrine of St. Sebald was placed in the inner choir. The pilgrimage reached its annual culmination on his feast day of August 19. To prepare, the day before, the shrine and its covering box would be dusted and a canopy was placed above them. Then the administrator of the church, the *Kirchenmeister*, covered the shrine with thick roses made of pasteboard that symbolized the fragrance of paradise emanating from the relics of saints, in full view their medieval visitors. The following day, the shrine was carried in procession through the city of Nuremberg. Relic stands were erected outside the choir in the nave to collect money with armed persons stationed nearby to prevent theft. It seems that the head of St. Sebald and his arm were exhibited here since they were kept in their own reliquaries outside the shrine. Probably the other relic treasures of the church were also presented on the stands to attract as many pilgrims as possible. In any case, these stands were erected to relieve the choir (with the shrine) from the pilgrim masses and to prevent overcrowding.

The liturgical feasts and prayers performed in the inner choir and St. Sebald's shrine were accessible to everyone. Big votive images made of wax hung from iron chains close to the shrine. There was also a stone suspended near the shrine as obvious proof of the saint's power. According to legend, a peasant woman was sent to St. Sebald to bring him a big cheese as a pious gift. But, driven by stinginess, she exchanged the cheese for a smaller one. And as she laid it down at St. Sebald's tomb, it was changed into a stone. Thus it was placed near his tomb to remind people of the legend. This story is depicted on the tapestry of St. Sebald from about 1425. (fig. 9) Despite the question of whether this story tells the truth or not, it does reveal that the shrine of St. Sebald was open to the public.

The pious alms of the pilgrims are an excellent indicator of the popular reputation of a saint. They consisted not only of wax votives or of natural products such as the famous cheese, but also of money. A look at the income of the church clearly shows the importance of the pilgrimage on the feast of St. Sebald. For example, in the year 1499-1500, it amounted

to 534 Nuremberg pounds. From this total the sum of 168 pounds came in during the feast day of St. Sebald alone, that is, more than the one-fourth part of the entire yearly income was collected in one single day. This emphasized the overwhelming importance of the pilgrimage for the church.

The high altar, dedicated to St. Sebald since 1379, was also featured on the feast day, though it played a minor role. According to the 15th-century liturgical handbook (*Mesnerpflichtbuch*) the retable was not opened at this time and a good frontal was put on the altar only. The *mensal* (or altar table), where the reliquaries were placed, was decorated with a golden cloth. A week after St. Sebald's feast, on the octave, the sacristan put the previously-mentioned reliquary head of St. Sebald on the *mensal*. On this day, the stream of the pilgrims passed the high altar. The pious people came through the transept portals and from there, went through the southern and northern ambulatories. They reached the high altar through the gaps between the piers in front of the altar (Pn/s II/ III).

At the place where the pilgrims turned in towards the sanctuary we can observe several monuments closely connected with pilgrimage. On the northern outer wall, just opposite the entrance to the inner choir (Wn V), there was a 15th-century mural painting, (lost in WWII). (fig. 10) An old photograph shows a blank area in the center of the mural that served as background for a lost object, obviously a sculpture. The surrounding scenes depict the pilgrimage to a saint, obviously St. Sebald, the patron saint of the church and the high altar; so the lost sculpture must have represented him. At the side, in the foreground, three citizens (probably parents with their son) knelt, formerly looking up to the saint. The rest of the picture is filled with ill and wounded people on pilgrimage: A lame figure with a crook moves forward on a winding path, while two men with pilgrim badges on their hats stride along towards their destination. In the background, on the left side, a man with an amputated leg leaves the scene when a family comes to meet him. The mother carries a motionless child, possibly a wax votive for St. Sebald, who was, as stated, famous for his assistance of pregnant women. However, the depicted destination of the journey, a church with a wood frame building, does not look much like the church of St. Sebald at the time when the mural painting was executed c.1460/70. Only the western tower resembles the still-existing Romanesque construction. From this we can conclude that the Romanesque predecessor of the Gothic church was represented. The reliability of this reconstruction, of course, has to remain an open question, but the picture is thoroughly interesting as an attempt to recall a



Fig. 10: Nuremberg, *St. Sebald*, mural painting; Archive of the author.

lost building. It served to stress the long tradition of the cult of St. Sebald and his high reputation. The place was chosen very carefully: on approaching the shrine, the pilgrims had to pass the sculpture of the saint with the wall-painting, and sometimes, when there was a great crush, they even had to rest there awhile.

On the south side of the ambulatory, we find an indication for another pilgrimage that took place at a different date. Here the patrician Haller family commissioned one of the huge windows of the choir (Ws IV). It dates to around 1379, when the building was completed and the donation rights were handed over to the leading Nuremberg families. The panels of stained glass depict scenes which were, in most points, influenced by the nearby altar of St. Stephen and St. George. The legend of the patron St. George, for example, occupies an entire row of the window. (fig. 11) In the fifth row, however, (fig. 12) we can see the Massacre of the Innocents distributed over four panels – just as detailed and thus equally important as the legend of the patron St. Martin. What was the purpose of a scene from the life of Christ in this place? There is no connection with the nearby altar and its liturgical function. The answer can be found in the earliest inventory of the treasures of the church, written down in the middle of the 15th century where we find a reference in the list of precious reliquaries to “ein silbrein vergult monstrancz mit der kindlein arm,” a gilt silver monstrance with the arm of one of the children, i.e. one of the Innocents of the Bible who were killed by order of king Herod. The relic was one of the main treasures of the church and was presented on the high altar every year on the feast day of the Innocents, December 28. It was intended to attract numerous pilgrims to the church from far and near. The visitors of the relic would pass the story of the Innocents depicted in the window. The representation served as a kind of road sign since it marked the place where the pilgrims could enter the inner choir. Simultaneously, it instructed the pious people about the fate of the poor children while they were waiting for the access to the high altar in the sanctuary – a very meaningful disposition that evoked pity of the pious, and spurred their readiness to give alms.

The second example is the church of the Dominican nuns, that of St. Katharina. The building was erected at the end of the 13th century and dedicated in the year 1297.¹² It was

¹² *Walter Fries, “Kirche und Kloster zu St. Katharina in Nürnberg,” in: Mitteilungen des Vereins für Geschichte der Stadt Nürnberg 25 (1924), pp. 1-143.*

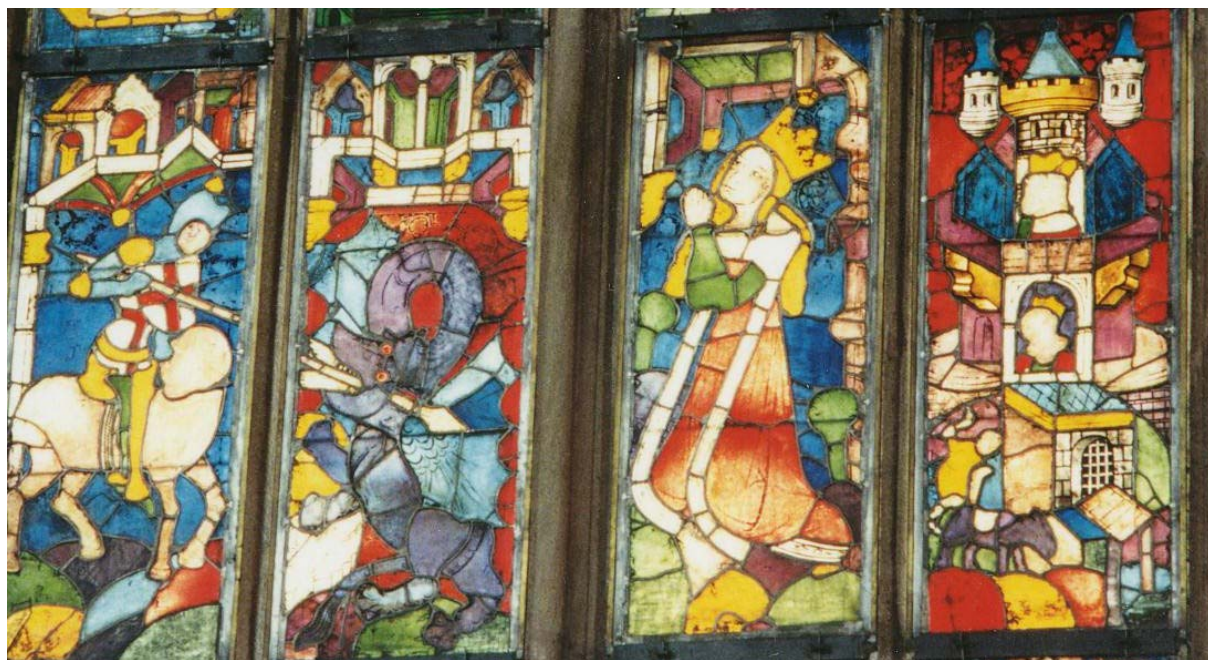


Fig. 11: Nuremberg, *St. Sebald*, window of the Haller family, detail;
Archive of the author.



Fig. 12: Nuremberg, *St. Sebald*, window of the Haller family, detail;
Archive of the author.

totally destroyed in World War II except for the outer walls and is now preserved as a ruin. The church was a Gothic basilica with a single-nave choir. The choir of St. Katharina is relatively narrow compared with St. Sebald and so appears not to be very suitable for pilgrimage. (fig. 13) Yet, recent research shows that there was indeed a pilgrimage there. The main relic of the monastery came from St. Catherine, the patron saint of the convent and the church. It was kept – as in St. Sebald – in the eastern choir of the monastery church. Large portions of the original shrine (dating to the end of the 15th century) are preserved in a dismantled state. They are usually – and still in recent scholarship – regarded as the remains of an altarpiece, but our investigations within the context of the research project *Fränkische Tafelmalerei* at the Technische Universität Berlin revealed that they were originally placed at the northern outer wall of the choir next to the entrance to the sacristy. This makes it impossible that it served as an altarpiece. On one hand, it would be completely unusual for a single-nave choir in Nuremberg, if there was more than one altar, —the high altar. The altarpiece of the high altar of St. Katharina is preserved; the *Landauerretabel*, now in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum.¹³ (fig. 14) On the other hand, an altar place orientated to the north would be equally strange. So the dismantled pieces must have had a different arrangement—indeed they don't look very much like an altarpiece.

Rainer Brandl reconstructed the original appearance though not quite correctly.¹⁴ (figs. 15, 16) The shrine was divided into three horizontal registers with the upper two panels depicting the legend of St. Catherine from the teaching of the saint by a hermit up to her martyrdom, which is spread over the whole of the middle register in three scenes. In the lowest register the donor Georg Fütterer (with his sons and his wife with her daughters) was represented. The latter panel is missing, as well as the middle one, which once depicted the funeral of St. Catherine. The middle register was movable. It was possible to move it down – not up as Brandl reconstructed. When this was opened, the interior of the shrine became visible, showing a group of carved figures: St. Catherine lying on her deathbed, while three

¹³ Peter Strieder, *Tafelmalerei in Nürnberg 1350-1550*, Königstein im Taunus 1993, p. 198, No. 43; Gerhard Weilandt, "Alltag einer Küsterin – Die Ausstattung und liturgische Nutzung von Chor und Nonnenempore der Nürnberger Dominikanerinnenkirche nach dem unbekanntem 'Notel der Küsterin' (1436)," in: *Kunst und Liturgie. Choranlagen des Spätmittelalters– ihre Architektur, Ausstattung und Nutzung*, ed. Anna Moraht-Fromm, Ostfildern 2003, pp. 159-187.

¹⁴ Rainer Brandl, "Der Katharinenaltar des Georg Fütterer. Anmerkungen zu seinem wiederentdeckten Stifterbild," in: *Anzeiger des GNM* 1988, p. 95-115.

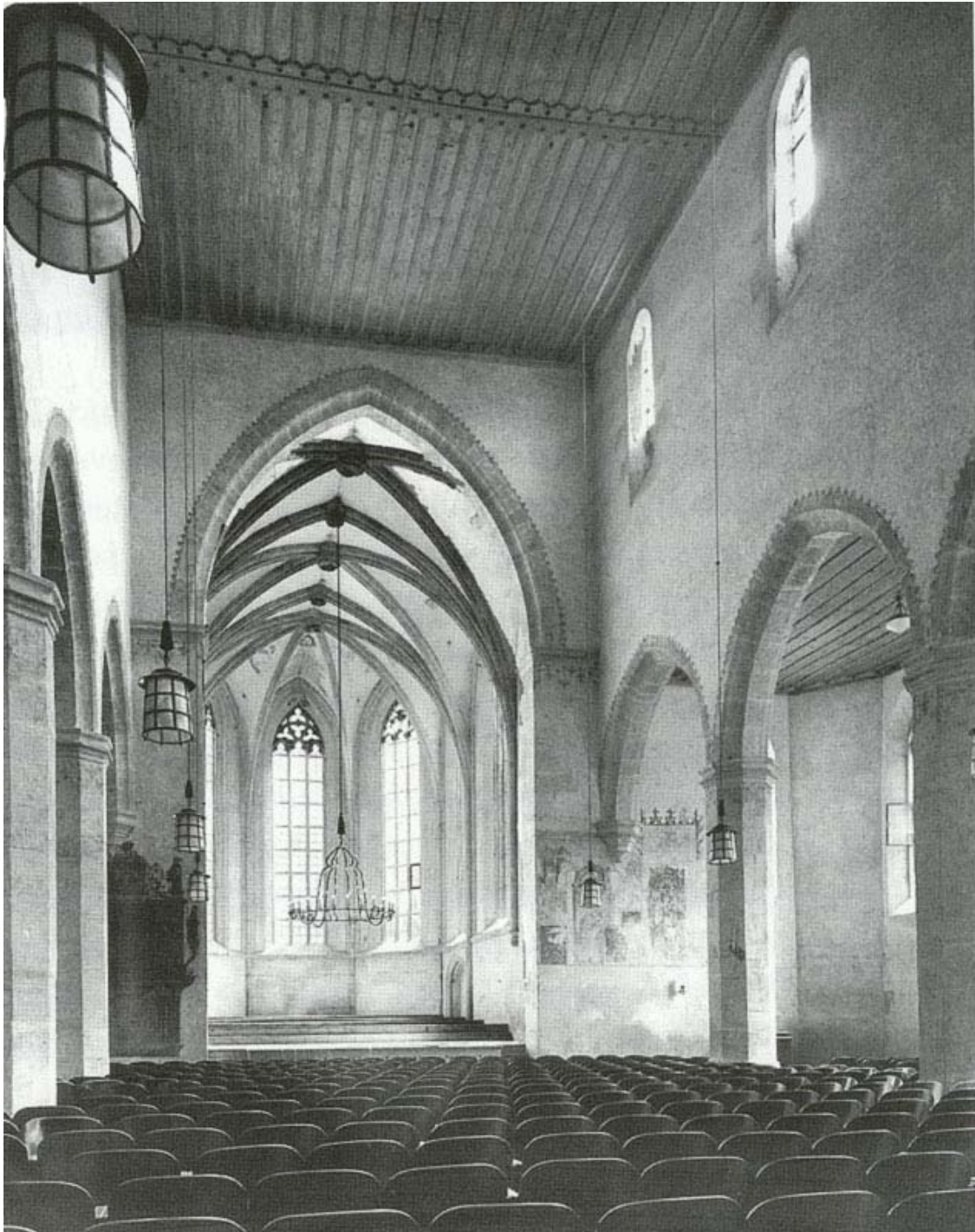


Fig. 13: Nuremberg, *St. Katharina, interior*, pre-war photo; Archive of the author.



Fig. 14: Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, *Altarpiece of Marx Landauer*, c. 1465; with permission.

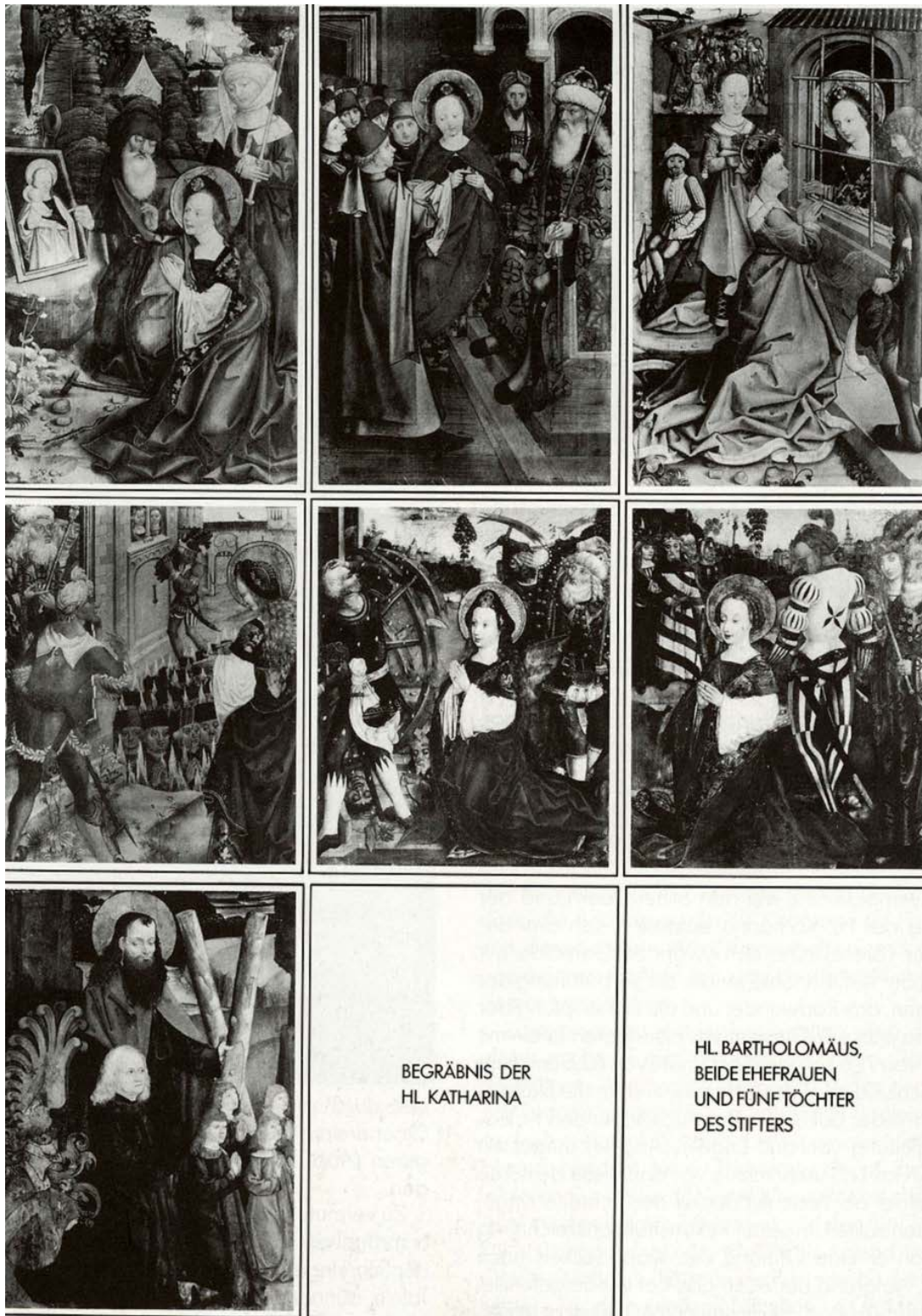


Fig. 15: Nuremberg, *Tomb of St. Catherine*, reconstruction by Rainer Brandl, closed; after Rainer Brandl.

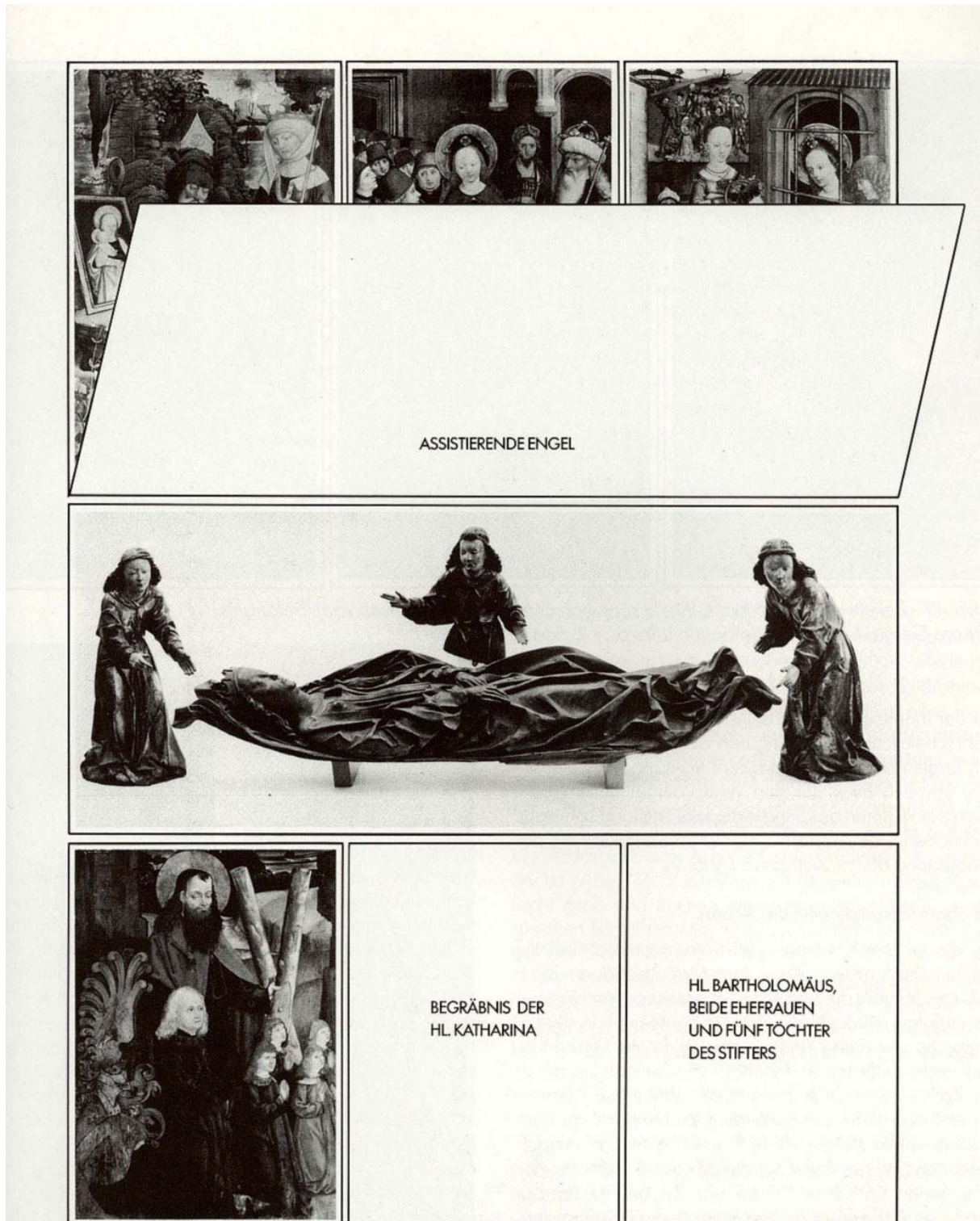


Fig. 16: Nuremberg, *Tomb of St. Catherine*, reconstruction by Rainer Brandl, opened; after Rainer Brandl.

angels are about to seize and carry her up to heaven. When the shrine was opened, the lower register with the donors and the painted funeral of St. Catherine was concealed, being superfluous since the carved group in the center (now visible) represented the same subject. Neither could the outer scenes of the martyrdom be seen in the open position. But they were obviously regarded as crucially important, because they told the prehistory of the death of St. Catherine in an immediate and vivid depiction. Therefore the passion scenes from the outer side were repeated on the inner side of the middle register. Figure 17 shows the only preserved panel of this series, now in Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum. Split off from the panel with the outer scenes of martyrdom, it depicts the miracle of the wheel in nearly the same way as on the outer side (fig. 18). So while we notice a transformation, as far as the scenes are concerned, it is done without any decisive change. Only the sculptures in the center reflected a substantial increase in imagery, and that was just the point. The figure of St. Catherine was hollowed out in the chest where relics were originally kept. They were the reason why the construction of the shrine was so sumptuous. Obviously the sculpture of St. Catherine was revealed on high feasts only, especially on her feast day, when considerable alms were given to the church, according to the income records of the monastery.

How did the pilgrimage to St. Catherine in the eastern choir fit within the everyday life of the nuns in the monastery? We saw that there was a certain separation of the clerics from the ordinary people even in the parish church of St. Sebald. The problem was much more serious in a nunnery. The monastery of St. Katharina had been reformed in the year 1428 by followers of the strictest observance. This meant a complete separation of the nuns from the outside world. They used only a small part of the church -- a wooden gallery in the west— which was reserved for their needs. (fig. 19) Originally there must have been an entrance from the church, but it had apparently been closed as a result of the reform. A new entrance to the nuns' choir was broken through the northern wall of the church creating an entry directly from the cloister. The current portal with the pointed arch was certainly installed later since it cuts through older wall-paintings from the 14th century. (fig. 20) This would have permitted the nuns to reach the gallery from the cloister without ever setting foot in the church. And the nuns never used the ground floor of the church. A recently published document, the *Notel der Küsterin*, a notebook of the sacristan, gives an extraordinary detailed



Fig. 17: Wien, Kunsthistorisches Museum, *Martyrdom of St. Catherine*; Archive of the author.



Fig. 18: Nuremberg, St. Lorenz, *Martyrdom of St. Catherine*; Archive of the author.

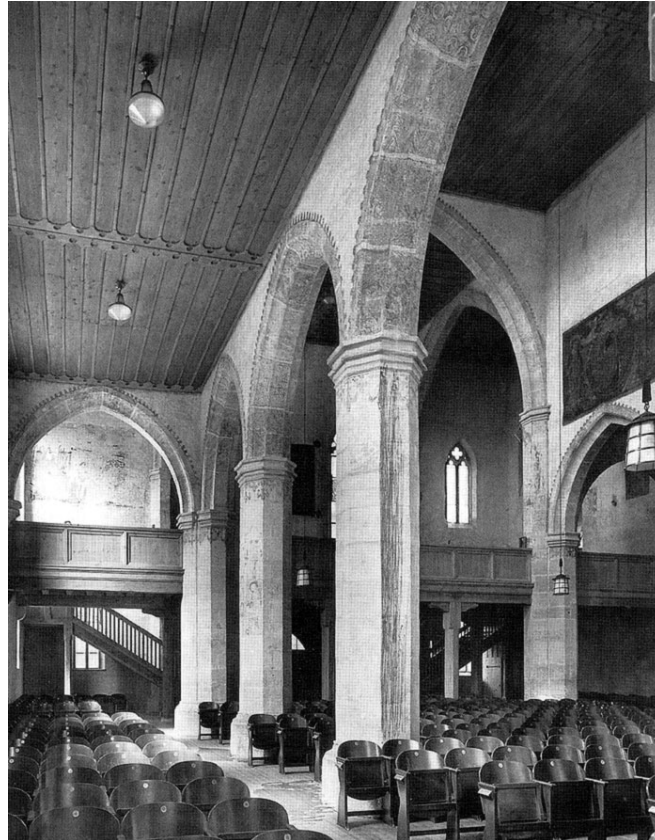


Fig. 19: Nuremberg, *St. Katharina*, interior looking west; Archive of the author.



Fig. 20: Nuremberg, *St. Katharina*, nuns' choir, north wall; Archive of the author.

report on the everyday life and the feasts' of the nuns.¹⁵ From this document we know that the nuns did not leave the enclosure at all after taking the veil. The sacristan alone cared for the liturgical vestments used by the priest and the altars in the outer church which were decorated for the feasts. Unlike the rest of the church, the western gallery was part of the enclosure and the liturgy of the nuns took place there. The gallery was separated from the church by a high balustrade through which the nuns could see neither the floor of the church nor the high altar. Only on a single, but very crucial occasion, could they could cast a glance at the altar. During the daily Mass celebrated there, a *Gatter* or grille, in the balustrade was opened to let the nuns see what was going on at the altar. Above all they wanted to look at the Holy Sacrament being elevated by the priest for transubstantiation. On Sunday in the octave of Corpus Christi, a public procession came from the nearby hospital of the Holy Ghost to St. Katharina. The *Notel* demands: "And when the sacristan hears them, she opens Our Lord [that is the sacrament house in the nuns' choir] but she may not open the grille." (*Und wen si die küsterin höret, so tut si unsern herren auf, aber die gatern bedarf si nit auf sperren.*) The clear purpose of this measure was to prevent any contact with the public. The nuns venerated the Holy Sacrament strictly separated from the laity. Thus, during the reading of the hours in the choir, the doors of the church were locked to avoid any acoustic interference. The same happened during the daily Mass, except for the servants of the monastery who were allowed to be present.

Apart from such occasions the eastern choir with the high altar and the shrine of St. Catharine was open to everyone. Yet, we don't know whether there was a screen to separate the nave from the choir. It was not necessary, in any case, since the nuns did not set foot in it at all. Therefore, the pilgrims could move freely when they visited the shrine of St. Catherine on her feast day. The *Notel* gives precise instructions. At the beginning of the day, around prime, the sacristan: "carries everything out, the relics and panels and images and what other pretty things she has, she carries everything to the door so that nothing beautiful remains in the choir [that is the nun's choir on the eastern gallery]. She must hand out relic stands for the holy heads and borrow more things from the sisters. And the alms dish and the alms board and the big diploma with the numerous seals and the great carpet in front of the

¹⁵ See Weilandt, "Alltag einer Küsterin."

altar [that is the high altar] ... She also has to stick flags to the altars in the church and two big flags in the middle of the church.” Everything was mobilized to decorate the church, including several objects of private devotion taken from the nuns and made accessible for public veneration. This is very instructive in so far as it shows that panels like the small triptychs, often regarded as private altarpieces or *Hausaltärchen*, served not only for the use of the nuns, but for the decoration of the altars in the church, if necessary. There was no strict distinction between private devotional images and public altarpieces in the convent of St. Katharina.

The display of splendor in the outer church was in sharp contrast to the simple decoration of the nun’s choir on the feast day of St. Catherine. The sacristan spread “the black altar cloth with the plants or which one she likes” – nothing more, although on other feasts the nuns’ choir was decorated at great expense with relics, paintings, and sculptures. On St. Catherine’s feast day, they exhibited the big diploma with the numerous seals in the outer church, which spelled out the privilege of indulgence. Many people came here to attain these privileges and to give their alms. It was the day devoted to the pilgrims, not to the nuns, who stayed on their gallery and celebrated the feast in peace. The strangers could walk around freely in the richly-adorned church, unhindered by the nuns. Because of this, the narrow single-nave choir of St. Catherine granted a considerably better and undisturbed access to the shrine of the saint than the huge hall choir of St. Sebald. The choir that at first sight appeared to be so incommodious for pilgrimage was thoroughly suited for that purpose in the end. It is not form but function that makes the difference. In St. Sebald the frequent prayers and Masses of the clerics prevented access by the public for the most part of the day, while in St. Catherine the liturgy left more time for the public visitation in terms of the hours and the single daily Mass. 