INTRODUCTION

In early April 1501 the sculptor Tilman Riemen-
schneider was summoned to the hilltop city of
Rothenburg ob der Tauber by the city's gov-
erning council. It was not his first trip to the
medium-sized Franconian city. His friend and
sometime collaborator, the friar Martin Schwarz
(Frater Martinus Schwarz), was the guardian—a
position equivalent to abbot—of the Franciscan
monastery there and had first brought Riemen-
schneider to Rothenburg more than a decade
earlier, around 1485, to carve an altarpiece for the
high altar of his monastery's church.[1] Schwarz
himself had given this grand Crucifixion retable
its final polychrome finish, for he was a reputable
painter of sculpture as well as panels. Since 1485
Riemenschneider and his workshop had produced
two other altarpieces for Rothenburg: one, a
retable showing Saint Francis receiving the stig-
mata, that stood in front of the rood screen in the
Franciscan church; the other, a Marian altarpiece
that adorned the lay altar at the junction between
the east choir and the nave in Rothenburg's only
parish church, just a few blocks away.

Riemenschneider made his visit to Rothenburg
in spring 1501 in order to sign a contract for what
would prove to be one of his most salient artistic
commissions: an altarpiece to display the city's
miracle-working blood relic within an elaborate
new pilgrimage environment (fig. 1). Between 1453
and 1471 the city had added to the Parish Church
of St. Jakob an elegant western apse with an
elevated chapel dedicated to the Holy Blood, and
it was in this chapel that the grand new altarpiece
was to stand—a pendant to Riemenschneider's
Marian altarpiece already in place in the nave of
the same church. The pilgrimage function of the
chapel and its unique position bridging a major
street demanded an equally striking centerpiece
and one that responded to the local context.
Riemenschneider was thus tasked with creating
the figures for an altarpiece that would crown the
dynamic pilgrimage environment at the heart of

FIG. 1   Holy Blood Altarpiece within the western chapel of St.
Jakob in Rothenburg.

the city and act as a visible nucleus of Rothenburg's civic identity.

Despite the modern tendency to identify it as "Riemenschneider's Altarpiece of the Holy Blood," the commissioned altarpiece had multiple authors. Like most medieval projects, this one required the collaboration of several artists and artisans, including Martin Schwarz, who served as artistic counselor to the municipal government of Rothenburg and presumably came up with the overall program of the altarpiece; Erhart Harschner, a local joiner commissioned with building the armature of the retable and executing its elaborate framework of interweaving vines; Riemenschneider and his assistants, who carved the figural components; and teams of drivers and metalworkers charged with delivering and installing the retable. The representatives of the city had drawn up a plan for the altarpiece, and Harschner was already at work on the framework by the time Riemenschneider was summoned to Rothenburg. The exact specifications of Riemenschneider's contribution—the figures' scale, iconography, and position—were set down in a contract signed on April 15, 1501, during Riemenschneider's sojourn.[2] The municipal committee retained the final say on whether the altarpiece was to be finished in a monochrome wood stain—a technique that Riemenschneider had employed before but that was still rare—or would be brightly painted following the time-honored practice current across medieval Europe.

The creation of the altarpiece was consequently protracted. Over the course of several years, it stood in various states of "completeness," during which time it nevertheless functioned as a visual focus for services and devotion within the western chapel of the parish church. The contract of 1501 between the city and Riemenschneider

optimistically specified that the sculptor should deliver the figures for the Holy Blood Altarpiece by Christmas that year. In reality, it took Riemenschneider almost four years, until 1505, to complete the contracted work. In March 1502 Harschner traveled to Würzburg to visit Riemenschneider's workshop and discuss the final details of their collaboration. Two months later Harschner was ready to deliver his contribution, complete with its elaborate superstructure of twisting spires and nodding arches. This casing was promptly installed in its intended location on the central altar of the elevated western Chapel of the Holy Blood. In the same month, the newly gilded cross reliquary containing the titular blood relic was set up within the upper crest of the altarpiece, where it served as the devotional focus of the established local pilgrimage. It was not until two months later, in July 1502, that the first figures for the altarpiece arrived from Riemenschneider's Würzburg workshop, with further installments delivered in 1504 and 1505.[3] Despite what might be considered the unfinished state of the altarpiece, then, it served as a visual focus for services and pilgrimage, one that was augmented periodically over the course of more than two years. In fact, even once all the components had been installed, the potential remained for the monochrome, or *holzsichtige* (literally "wood-visible"), altarpiece one day to be dismounted, painted, and reerected within the chapel.

In the decades following the installation of the Holy Blood Altarpiece, Riemenschneider and his workshop produced several more retables for Rothenburg. Indeed, by the 1520s nine altarpieces by Riemenschneider's workshop likely dotted the city's religious spaces. These varied in scale and program, yet together they created a visual network—strengthened by Riemenschneider's

characteristic style and underscored by repetitions in iconography and composition—that stretched throughout the city. Though they depicted universal biblical themes found in medieval churches throughout Europe, the altarpieces together formed a unique local program that aesthetically remapped the urban space of medieval Rothenburg and contributed to its identity as a prosperous and significant center.

Riemenschneider's altarpieces are one choice sample from the rich array of art objects and architectural projects that constituted the late medieval city of Rothenburg. In this book they form the teleological thread to an exploration of urban planning in the late medieval city. Through a contextualized study of the environments for which Riemenschneider's altarpieces were commissioned, this book investigates processes of medieval artistic programming, arguing that—despite the many hands involved, the variety of contributing media, the protracted periods of construction, and the absence of any single prescriptive intent—the art and architecture of a medieval church or city often displayed a meaningful coherence. This coherence was an active force that drove later additions and adjustments. It thus served as a tool of urban planning. The result was a network of dynamic spaces that were instrumental in shaping a particular identity of place.

Medieval Programs and the Agency of Artworks

The modern division of art history by artistic media—reflected in museum collections, curricula, and academic training—is true neither to the experience of medieval art by its contemporaries nor to the construction processes of artworks and ensembles, which frequently involved teams of artisans and designers, overseers and patrons. Like the Altarpiece of the Holy Blood in Rothenburg, medieval artworks were complicated objects. From their design to their interpretation, they remained fundamentally multifaceted, participating in dynamic environments, alongside other objects and human activity. This book builds on recent scholarship that problematizes media-based studies by considering a variety of artistic media within the spatial, ritual, and sociopolitical contexts in which they functioned.[4]

The recognition that art objects and architecture were both produced and experienced in complex environments has led some scholars to question our ability to reconstruct an idea of the integrated Gothic church; in Willibald Sauerländer's words, "there is no way back to the *real* Gothic cathedral."[5] The notion of order, which suggests a unitary conception of medieval church space, has remained one of the primary critiques of the Gothic cathedral as *Gesamtkunstwerk* (literally "total work of art") and of what Paul Crossley has termed "holism."[6] There is in the concept of the Gothic cathedral the implied idea of a single intent, of a sequence of things, of a comprehensive tidiness, that does not hold true to medieval construction processes. Yet at the same time, the repetition of themes, the choice of placement, or the correspondences between different works found within a Gothic church seem to suggest a guiding logic to the ensemble.

This raises two fundamental questions of this book: To what extent were medieval environments programmed? Who (or what) had agency in assembling such environments?

Throughout this book I build upon Jacqueline Jung's concept of the "spatial environment,"

which suggests that though we cannot comprehensively reconstruct a specific medieval program or experience, we can investigate the resonances between various media within flexibly defined spaces.[7] Such resonances have been invoked by other scholars as well: Paul Crossley has described "subtle and self-conscious coordinations between simple ingredients—altars, relics, images, and liturgies"; and Paul Binski has traced "'webs of significance,' human, ideological (or mythological) and artistic," that made up the medieval church.[8] These approaches are cautious to avoid the idea of a preconceived plan or unified order guiding the design of medieval church programs across media, yet they return to the fundamental observation that medieval art objects were experienced as part of wider visual and cultural fields.[9]

Important for my discussion of medieval artistic programming is the question of design. As chapter 1 shows, authorities often applied for indulgences, secured rights to conduct specific rituals, and raised money for anticipated projects long before the laying of a cornerstone or the signing of a contract. This forethought, however, did not mean that patrons developed or followed a master plan. Indeed, medieval artistic programming, like medieval urban planning, was rarely governed by an imperative blueprint. Various individuals as well as institutions actively contributed pieces, stipulated the iconography of major commissions, or oversaw choices for architectural projects. How, then, can we think about structured programming or approach the apparent logic of a medieval ensemble without coming to a holistic view of the Gothic church as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*?

In late medieval Rothenburg the city council served as the leading institutional patron of art. Yet each year brought new members to the council and saw old ones depart. We can never know the intricate webs of public and private motivations that guided the elected councilmen's decisions. Instead, we must consider medieval artistic programming as a protracted process, the integrity of which relied on its authors' and audiences' sensitivity to preexisting visual and social environments. Especially in considering ensembles like the urban complex (discussed in chapter 3), which integrated multiple environments and artistic media into a spatial-thematic program, it is important to keep this flexible and dynamic process in mind.

The title of *Artistic Integration in Gothic Buildings*, one of the seminal volumes on medieval artistic programming, reframes this programming as a process of "integration." Although the essays included in this multiauthor work interpret "integration" differently, several notable contributions suggest that an internal logic led to the formation of intelligible artistic programs. Arnold Klukas, for instance, proposes that Gothic churches were constructed "according to a schedule of essentials" and that a community could retain an implicit or even explicit "consensus of symbolic language over generations in time."[10] Similarly, Peter Draper suggests that a sense of decorum, or appropriateness, guided additions to church space. Draper posits that medieval viewers were aware of the coherence of a building's program—in other words, that they were sensitive to correspondences between what may seem to the modern viewer to be disparate elements of an ensemble.[11]

These ideas of decorum and coherence make sense in light of what Paul Binski has demonstrated for Canterbury, Madeline Caviness for Braine, and Gerhardt Weilandt for the Church of St. Sebald in Nuremberg: that correspondences between different media contributed to a spatial-thematic

environment for viewers to experience, even though they were not the "coherent product of a single intelligence."[12] Spatially structured resonances between architecture, stained glass, and ritual, in particular, have been a focus of scholarship on the question of artistic programming in the Gothic church because of the often proximate inception of architectural and glazing programs.[13] But such relationships could characterize, materially and chronologically, a much broader ensemble of elements. It makes sense to think of medieval programming not as a "sustained programmatic intention"[14] but as an ongoing and ever-changing process of configuration, which could follow the guiding agendas of multiple patrons while cohering to an overall sense of decorum.

The studies of such programming have to date confined their inquiries to single churches. Only rarely has medieval artistic programming been considered across the space of the medieval city, and then usually only through one artistic medium, most commonly architecture.[15] Traditionally, the medieval city has been seen as a product of "organic growth," developed as a haphazard consequence of unguided change.[16] This book, instead, argues that both the medieval church and the medieval city were guided by similar and interrelated processes. In considering artistic programming not as the result of the intentions of a single designer but rather as a configured system of meaningful correspondences, we can approach the medieval city as a purposeful yet ever-changing ensemble. This ensemble depended less on a stable end concept than on flexible ideas of appropriateness. Moreover, the city was, at least in part, a product of the environments themselves, since established spaces affected the choices of patrons and artists making new contributions.

Anthropology and the history of science provide a useful framework in dealing with the power of objects to interact with human agents. Recent work on actor-network theory and assemblages allows programmatic coherence to be theorized without the hazardous assumption of a single or unified creative impulse. Bruno Latour's actor-network theory holds that nonhuman as well as human bodies are *actants*, capable of exerting agency and participating in networks.[17] Therefore, art objects, as well as patrons, artists, and viewers, may actively partake in complex systems of relation.

Building on Latour, Jane Bennett has observed that "an actant never really acts alone. Its efficacy or agency always depends on the collaboration, cooperation, or interactive interference of many bodies and forces." The power of such a collaborative ensemble is what Bennett terms "the agency of assemblages." Thus, in addition to the power of individual bodies (human and nonhuman alike), Bennett proposes a distributive agency exerted by ad hoc assemblages, an agency distinct from the constituent bodies.[18] In other words, the power of an ensemble is more than the sum of its individual parts.

This has important implications for the study of artistic programming during the Middle Ages. First, it follows that art objects—architecture, altarpieces, stained-glass windows, reliquaries, and so forth—possessed agency and thus could guide future commissions. The dedication of an altar to the Holy Blood, for instance, helped inspire the design of the architecture built to house it, and that architecture, in turn, affected the design of the altarpiece later commissioned to stand within the space (chapter 2). Even if we cannot reconstruct the intent behind a new commission, we can

investigate the conditions and objects that may have guided its design.

Second, multiple pieces could function together as ensembles. They formed environments with their own distinct agency and acted within networks alongside humans. Two elevated chapels with complementary altarpieces by the same artist's workshop, therefore, could define a meaningful spatial system and relate themes of protection and salvation across a multimedia artistic program (chapter 3).

Finally, assemblages remained malleable, "open-ended collective[s]."[19] As flexible groupings of constituent components that could simultaneously participate in multiple networks, artistic programs need not have been the product of a preconceived or uniform intent. Rather, they could result from the relationships between multiple objects and actors established over long stretches of time. Medieval spatial environments were never truly "complete" but rather carried the constant potential for expansion and change: individual as well as institutional patrons continually commissioned new pieces, and monumental additions, like altarpieces, could be installed in stages or with a monochrome finish and then painted years later. As a result, the medieval experience of artistic programs—like their production—was characterized by intermittent aggregation and adjustment (chapter 4).

Medieval artistic programming was therefore an ongoing and dynamic process that depended on human and nonhuman actors, one that was not straightforward but rather multifaceted and complex. In this way, its effects were remote from the idea of a guiding master plan or from the totalizing model of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, in which every element must necessarily fit a single program or

intent. Instead, artistic programming was a process by which various flexible systems of relation or correspondence manifested themselves across and through space.

What I propose, then, is a kind of unity different from that of design, intent, or reception considered alone. Rather than reconstruct the Gothic Cathedral, we can investigate the complex dynamics of medieval spatial environments and the "dialectic between possible intention and evident result."[20] This dialectic not only exists for historians today but also played a fundamental role in the aggregation of these environments during the medieval period. Coherence depended not on a fixed, complete, or authentic program but rather on the interactions between individual entities and environments and between extant materials and the open potential for adjustment. Networks of patrons, artists, objects, and spaces worked together to establish flexible ideas of decorum, and medieval artistic ensembles were the product of a collaborative and sustained process of configuration. Artworks, both individually and as ensembles, acted on their environments by adjusting foci, elaborating established themes, and redirecting liturgical and devotional practices. The effects of this agency extended beyond the confines of a single church structure and contributed to the remapping of the medieval city.

Case Study: Rothenburg ob der Tauber

Rothenburg ob der Tauber is an ideal place to study medieval artistic programming because it offers historians an opportunity at least partially to reconstruct several artistic environments of varying scale. Many German sites, which have received

little attention in English-language scholarship, preserve more of their original church furnishings than comparable sites in England or France, thus making them valuable case studies for the interactions between multiple artistic media. Rothenburg, which during the Middle Ages was an imperial city and today is one of Europe's top "medieval" tourist destinations, is interesting for its preserved evidence of discrete artistic environments but also of the processes that helped configure multiple ensembles into citywide networks. The excellent survival rate of both its material fabric and its archival sources attests with nuance to the complex dynamics at work in late medieval artistic programming.

Although some known artists resided in Rothenburg intermittently,[21] the city never developed into a center for artistic production on par with Würzburg or Nuremberg. Rothenburg, therefore, was forced to import most of its art objects and architectural styles. This practice of importing art makes Rothenburg distinct from capital cities, such as Paris or Prague, economic powerhouses, like Florence or Bruges, or major pilgrimage destinations, like Rome or Jerusalem, which tended to develop their own resident workshops. Rothenburg's success at distinguishing itself artistically during the late Middle Ages ultimately stemmed from its collection and configuration of artistic imports. With its single parish church, its local communities of Franciscans, Dominicans, Teutonic Order priests, and Knights Hospitaller, its municipal government of elected patrician-class men, and its practice of importing art, Rothenburg thus models features common among a large number of late medieval cities.

Although today Rothenburg seems a tiny town at 10,000 inhabitants, by medieval standards it was considerable in size. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, its total population numbered between 5,000 and 7,000 individuals, living in about seven hundred houses (fig. 2).[22] By comparison, most of the roughly three thousand medieval cities that lay within the borders of modern-day Germany had total populations of fewer than 1,000 individuals.[23] Rothenburg was thus one of the fifty largest cities in Germany by population, leaving aside its four hundred square kilometers of territory, which was more extensive than every other German-speaking city except Strasbourg and Ulm.[24]

Rothenburg lies in a hilly, wine-producing region of Franconia fifty kilometers (thirty miles) south of Würzburg and sixty-five kilometers (forty miles) west of Nuremberg. In the Middle Ages the Duchy of Franconia extended further north and west than the region of that name does today, and it included an important stretch of the Rhine River north and south of Mainz. The Tauber River meanders through a narrow valley and forms a tributary of the Main River northwest of Rothenburg at Wertheim. Although never navigable, the Tauber once marked an important trade route with numerous medieval cities built along its course.

From its position about fifty meters above the Tauber River, Rothenburg commands a view of the surrounding area. Although the land rises gradually from the east (the direction from which most modern visitors arrive in Rothenburg), most medieval travelers approached the city from the Tauber valley, to the west. From here, the city appears to crown the steep hill, its walls following the natural formations of the land. It is this view of the fortified hilltop city that dominates "portraits" of Rothenburg from the sixteenth century on and that the medieval city government went to great lengths to construct (fig. 3).

FIG. 2   Map of Rothenburg by Johann Ludwig Schäffer, 1729.
© Stadtarchiv Rothenburg ob der Tauber.

Beginning in the twelfth century, Rothenburg developed from a small *castrum* or *oppidium* into a prosperous *civitas*. In 1142 the Stauffer king Conrad III erected a castle on the steep promontory in a bend of the Tauber River—the *roter Burg*, literally "red castle," above (*ob*) the Tauber, which ultimately gave the site its name.[25] Supported by a nearby *Wirtschaftshof* and a small stone church, this settlement—situated at the west end of the current city—grew into an active urban center with market privileges and an encircling

defensive wall.[26] In 1274 it was granted the status of *Reichsstadt*, or free imperial city, under the direct protection of the Holy Roman emperor and free of fealty to a local lord. Rothenburg successfully retained this standing over the next centuries, making it one of sixty-five free imperial cities around 1500 and an important player in regional politics.[27]

Medieval Rothenburg benefited from its position on an international trade route that ran along the base of the Tauber valley and once connected
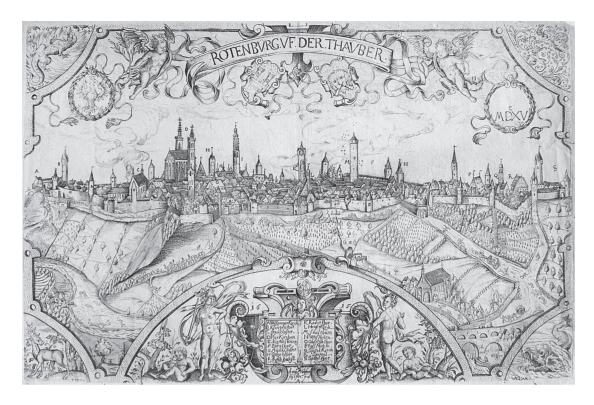
FIG. 3   View of Rothenburg by Hans Meichsner, 1615.
© RothenburgMuseum.

Italy with Augsburg, Würzburg, and the Rhineland. In 1340 an imperial privilege permitted the city to redirect this route from its path along the Tauber River, over a double-tiered bridge and into Rothenburg, thus stimulating additional business within the city walls. In turn, the city's primary export, Rothenburg wool, left the city along this route to be traded as far away as Como, Italy, during the fifteenth century.[28] Rothenburg also produced wine for local consumption from the vineyards planted along its sunny southern slope, and taxes on this popular beverage helped line the city's coffers.

Throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Rothenburg allied itself with other free imperial cities in opposing the interests of regional nobility and championing the rights of free imperial cities. In 1378 Rothenburg joined the powerful Swabian association of towns and municipalities known as the Schwäbische Städtebund, through which it engaged in regional politics alongside cities like Nuremberg, Regensburg, and Augsburg. It also made "brotherhood" pacts with individual cities, such as Schwäbisch Hall.[29] These alliances helped Rothenburg eschew pledges to local lords, who were keen to benefit from the city's prosperity. Although it never acquired the level of imperial favor garnered by Nuremberg, its powerful neighbor to the east, Rothenburg maintained ties to the imperial court: receiving the emperor in the city on several occasions, hosting a *Reichstag* in May 1377,

and corresponding with the court based in Prague during the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.[30] The existence of a Rothenburg *Landgericht*, or regional court, also gave it legal jurisdiction over an area otherwise controlled by the bishop of Würzburg.[31]

Rothenburg thus successfully established itself as an independent player within the region. On occasion, however, its politics landed the city in some difficulty. In 1405, for example, a dispute between the city council of Rothenburg and Burgrave John III of Nuremberg led King Rupert of Germany (r. 1400–1410) to call the knights of Franconia together in a war against the hilltop city. Heinrich Toppler, the mayor of Rothenburg at the time, attempted to enlist the help of the deposed king Wenceslaus IV (r. 1376–1400), a maneuver that cost him the alliance of some of his fellow councilmen and ultimately his life. In the end, Rothenburg was left to its own defenses before an army of more than ten thousand men. However, the city's fortuitous position and excellent defense system held off all attacks, and by October 1407 the burgrave of Nuremberg and the bishop of Würzburg, who were leading the attack, ran out of fiscal means to sustain the war.[32]

A few decades later Rothenburg was once again involved in a conflict with regional nobility, this time taking the side of Nuremberg against the markgrave Albrecht Achilles. The dispute, which lasted from 1440 to 1450, led to an elevated clash of forces in 1449. The cost to Rothenburg was high: in a single year twenty towns on territory belonging to the city burned, and the surrounding farmland was left devastated.[33]

Such conflicts placed a burden on the residents of Rothenburg and at times led to internal conflicts. For instance, after the costly conflicts of the 1440s, which prompted the city council to raise taxes, particularly on wine, the city's middle class rebelled.[34] On the night of Sunday, July 11, 1451, the leaders of the revolt—carefully chosen to represent the major trades of the city—forced their way into the houses of several members of the inner city council and took these men prisoner.[35] Locked in city hall, the councilmen were tried. By the time a delegation of representatives from the concerned cities of Augsburg, Ulm, Nördlingen, Schwäbisch Hall, Dinkelsbühl, and Windsheim arrived at the locked gates of Rothenburg to negotiate the release of the city councilmen, the leaders of the rebellion had drafted a new constitution aimed at gaining representation for the major trades on the inner city council.

This new constitution was short-lived. The agitators and captive councilmen had agreed to a compromise, which added twelve new members to the inner city council. Eleven of the new councilmen were to represent the leading guilds of the city, but the last was to be chosen from the patrician families. Although the twelve new members were intended as a balance to the twelve old ones, in practice the majority rested with the old conservative patriciate. This established faction quickly voted to restore complete power to the old government.[36] In 1455, therefore, the original constitution was reinstated with an added clause that forbade guilds to play a political role in the city henceforward.[37]

The primary organized political entities within Rothenburg during the late Middle Ages, then, were the city council of Rothenburg and the various resident religious institutions, particularly the Teutonic Order commandery, the Franciscan monastery, and the Dominican convent. These organizations had each negotiated special

privileges within the city and, early in Rothenburg's history, had contributed substantially to the material urban fabric. But over the course of the fourteenth century, they ceded more and more authority to the municipal government.

The position of the Teutonic Order in Rothenburg, in particular, deserves further note here because of its critical role in administering the parish church and chapels of the city. Rothenburg lay within the Diocese of Würzburg, with its advowson—the right to appoint clergy—originally held by the Collegiate Church of Neumünster in Würzburg. In 1258, however, Neumünster suffered a period of economic crisis, and the bishop of Würzburg signed over the clerical staffing of Rothenburg's parish to the Teutonic Order. Rather than incorporate Rothenburg into the nearest commandery of the order, in Mergentheim, the bishop placed the city under the Teutonic commandery of Würzburg.[38] This oversight by the Würzburg commandery, although short-lived, proved formative for the architectural design of the choir of Rothenburg's parish church in the first half of the fourteenth century.

By 1286 the Teutonic Order had established enough of a presence in Rothenburg to warrant its own commandery. A military order founded in Acre in the Kingdom of Jerusalem, the order had gained a strong footing in Franconia during the first quarter of the thirteenth century and by 1225 had established seven commanderies within the region. Even after the fall of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, it continued to flourish, in large part because of the patronage of the German kings and the opportunities for political advancement offered its members. In Rothenburg, donations first document the order's presence around 1226, and by 1398 the city was in a position to stipulate that

the order maintain at least ten priests within the city to meet its clerical needs.[39] Many of the order's members belonged to prominent patrician families of the city, so that familial ties likely played a role in city-order politics.[40]

Of course, Rothenburg continued to hold close ties to Würzburg even after the local commandery of the Teutonic Order assumed responsibilities for staffing the parish. It was the bishops of Würzburg who, after the presentation of priests by the order, held the rights to their investiture.[41] The bishops also conducted consecration ceremonies in Rothenburg, approved pilgrimages, and issued indulgences. Yet the oversight of the parish staffing by the Teutonic Order offered the city council an opportunity to position itself as the principal institutional patron of church space in the city.

Overall, Rothenburg's strategic maneuvering in regional and local politics succeeded in increasing the city's prestige, autonomy, and territorial control until the end of the Middle Ages; it also provided the impetus and funding for many of the city's architectural and artistic projects. The episode that forms a natural end point to the narrative of this book erupted in the 1520s from chronic discontent among the farming class stirred up by the agitation of Protestant reformers. On March 24, 1525, forty-two Rothenburg townsmen took over the city regiment.[42] This self-appointed commission did not abolish the city council but investigated its dealings, with a particular eye to its financial conduct. Rothenburg's officials were accused of conducting the affairs of the city for their own benefit as well as stubbornly holding on to the old religion—two things closely related to the long and successful history of the city's leading class.[43]

The same day, March 24, frustrated burghers decapitated a crucifix that stood near the newest

religious structure of Rothenburg, the Chapel to the Pure Virgin Mary (Kapelle zur Reinen Maria), and destroyed the furnishings of the Marian chapel of Kobolzell. As the city's parish church, St. Jakob also became the site for several acts of protest: individuals repeatedly interrupted Mass by throwing books from the altar and disturbed a sermon by upsetting lamps.[44] By May the city council, fearing for the safety of the many liturgical accoutrements of its churches and chapels, gathered these items in city hall for safekeeping and inventory.[45]

Although the conservative municipal government regained control and initially clung even more closely to the old religious traditions, it was only a question of time until Lutheranism became the official religion of the city. The disruptions of 1525 thus represent a moment when the identity of the city was in crisis and artistic programming—which for more than two centuries had been a primary means of establishing the city's late medieval identity—experienced dramatic opposition. Over the next centuries, Rothenburg gradually fell into poverty, only to be rediscovered by artists, politicians, and tourists in the nineteenth century.[46] It is thanks to this general impoverishment, the city's antiquarian rediscovery, and the rebuilding campaigns of the last century that Rothenburg preserves so much of its medieval character today.

Urban Programs

Today approximately 2.5 million tourists visit Rothenburg ob der Tauber every year. They come to see the quintessential medieval city and the art of Tilman Riemenschneider, now recognized as one of the greatest late medieval and early Renaissance artists. Both the medieval town and Riemenschneider's sculpture belong to—and indeed help shape—what nowadays resemble pilgrimage routes through Franconia. Despite the twofold interest that draws modern visitors to Rothenburg, however, these two stories—of the medieval city and of Riemenschneider—have never been told together. This book attempts just that. Throughout its pages, Riemenschneider's works serve as main protagonist, though they often enter late, as crowning elements added to older ensembles.

To date, the oeuvre of Tilman Riemenschneider has predominantly been studied with regard to questions of style, date, and workshop practice; only rarely have the local contexts of individual pieces been considered.[47] The altarpieces with figures by Riemenschneider, commissioned for the city between circa 1485 and 1514, are relatively well documented: in terms of their survival rate, their archival record, and their spaces of original installation. Rothenburg thus provides a unique opportunity to study the relationship between a city's patronage and the late Gothic artistic workshop that it favored. It is my contention that Riemenschneider's altarpieces were more closely tied to the long histories (sociopolitical and construction histories in particular) of the spaces in which they stood than has heretofore been recognized. Much of this book, therefore, concentrates on establishing the context for these late additions by considering the aggregation of their political, architectural, and devotional settings over the preceding two hundred years. Only by tracing this intricate context can we appreciate what meaning Riemenschneider's work held for Rothenburg, one of the artist's greatest patrons.

For Riemenschneider scholarship specifically, Rothenburg offers the chance to consider

the choices made by the artist and his workshop within a well-documented context, an approach that adds important contributions to ongoing discussions: about the impetus behind the decision to finish selective works with a monochrome stain around 1500, about the frequent repetition of motifs within the oeuvre of a single workshop, and about the relationship between patrons and artists in the design process of altarpieces and other commissions. The many repeat commissions for Rothenburg in Riemenschneider's distinctive style crafted a visual aesthetic that echoed through the city's religious spaces. The interconnections between Riemenschneider's pieces in Rothenburg would have been striking to his contemporaries, just as his style remains recognizable today. Yet the networks in which Riemenschneider's altarpieces participated were not new to the city, nor were they created in a vacuum. Rather, they responded to and built upon an aesthetic spatial system that had been aggregated within the city over the previous two centuries.

The following chapters, therefore, focus on a time from the early fourteenth through the early sixteenth century, when the municipal government of Rothenburg ob der Tauber oversaw the building and furnishing of church space within the city. Since the best surviving evidence of the nature of medieval programming is the resulting built environment and its documented uses, this book explores several spaces of late medieval Rothenburg in order to elucidate the intricate correspondences between architecture, ritual, and figural art that justify their treatment as a programmed system. My primary sources are the buildings and artworks themselves, though I also draw on a wide range of textual material from financial accounts to political records and liturgical

texts. I point to several thematic ideas, such as Holy Blood, that were particularly pronounced throughout Rothenburg, examining processes that helped define legible programs. Of course, the artistic programs of Rothenburg were not comprehensive: they did not encompass all art within an environment, nor would they have been equally legible to all audiences. They did, however, help structure the experience of visitors through systems of spaces, and they allowed the civic council to push its agenda of community formation and city beautification over the course of two centuries.

Chapter 1 examines structures of patronage and institutional control that were central to artistic programming in Rothenburg. In particular, it traces the construction of the choir and nave of Rothenburg's Parish Church of St. Jakob within the context of a contemporary shift in the administrative oversight of the parish *fabrica ecclesiae*. I demonstrate how architectural citation functioned during and after this shift and argue that church spaces became important sites for the formation of civic community within the late medieval city.

Chapter 2 investigates the motivations and processes that guided the addition of a new west end to the Church of St. Jakob. Building on Jacqueline Jung's idea of the "spatial environment," it considers pieces created in a variety of artistic media within the dynamic context of their intended display. In particular, it examines how the compositions by architects Niclaus Eseler Sr. and Jr. and the artists Tilman Riemenschneider and Erhart Harschner responded to an established pilgrimage to emphasize the power and identity of the particular place.

Chapter 3 extends the inquiry beyond the boundaries of a single architectural structure, examining, through the examples of Rothenburg's Parish Church of St. Jakob, urban cemetery, and

two-story Charnel House of St. Michael, how distinct environments could form a tight spatial-thematic system I call the "urban complex." I show that interactions within Rothenburg's parish urban complex were not only fostered by patrons and builders and experienced by visitors but could be stimulated by the spaces themselves.

Chapter 4 considers the wider urban fabric, arguing that the medieval city was planned—not prescriptively according to a blueprint or fixed system of streets—but flexibly as a network of interconnected environments that could be continually remapped by new commissions and orchestrated performances. In particular, I consider the network of altarpieces, with figures by Tilman Riemenschneider, that stretched throughout Rothenburg. Stylistic, iconographic, and aesthetic repetitions within this oeuvre played an important role in reshaping the visual identity of Rothenburg and thus constituted a significant intervention in the material and social fabric of the city.

The epilogue of this book, finally, reflects on Rothenburg's modern identity as Germany's exemplary late medieval city. It closes the study by considering the clash of temporalities encountered by tourists to the modern "medieval" city.

Ultimately, studying how Rothenburg, a medieval city of moderate size yet high ambitions, shaped its aesthetic landscape through combinations of imported art and architectural ideas, can help us better understand common processes of medieval artistic programming. It is my contention that art and architecture played a critical role in shaping the civic structures of the late medieval city. Just as urban space could participate in governing cities and public pictures could control public behaviors,[48] the artistic environments aggregated over nearly two centuries in Rothenburg ob der Tauber helped build the social and material medieval city.