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Ever since the days of the Romans, the glittering ribbon of the Rhine, whose beauty is sung in so many songs, has been one thing above all others: a very important transportation route. The Romans not only used the Rhine for traveling by boat, but also as part of their defensive strategy against the Germanic peoples living east of the river. On the Rhine's western banks, the Romans built encampments for their legions, which later became settlements and towns for soldiers' families and for merchants. With the citizens of the Roman Empire, the then-new Christian faith also came to the Rhine and, over time, supplanted other religions. Thus, many of the Rhine Valley's first houses of Christian worship were built in Roman times.

Amid the chaos that followed the collapse of Rome's empire, it was often the structures of the Christian communities, by then solidly established, that preserved a modicum of order. This is how some bishops even came to hold power over their cities for several centuries. And although the cities' residents often mounted resistance to their bishops' power, the cathedral cities were the ones that grew and gained economic importance most rapidly. It is therefore not surprising that, despite religious upheaval and the Reformation, it was precisely the cathedral cities along the Rhine – with the lone exception of Basel, in Swiss territory – that avoided reform and retained their Catholic faith.

As a testament to these historic changes, the cathedrals along the Rhine are impressive in their variety and architectural accomplishment. Speyer Cathedral, a monumental endowment from the Salian dynasty, is especially remarkable. Regarded as Europe's most important Romanesque edifice, it evidences the ambition and self-confidence with which the Salian monarchs turned their concepts of salvation and power into architecture. The cathedrals in nearby Worms and Mainz are impressive as well – partly as responses to Speyer's monumental architecture, and partly for charting their own architectural paths. Cologne's and Strasbourg's cathedrals are considered masterpieces of Gothic architecture.

Dom, Kathedrale, Münster – German has three terms that are often used as synonyms but are nonetheless different. “Dom” is derived from the Latin word “domus” (house) and denotes the house of God, where the diocese's believers gather together. “Kathedrale” goes back to the Latin “cathedra” and refers to the bishop's throne, which stands beside the high altar. The term “Münster”, which is primarily used in southern Germany, comes from the Latin “monasterium”, and in many cities it describes a large, urban parish church. In spite of these basic distinctions, the “wrong” terms are used for some of the buildings presented in this book. The minsters in Basel and Konstanz were the seats of bishops when they were built, whereas Freiburg Minster only became a cathedral in the modern era.

What all these churches have in common is their impressive size and their significance as centers of religious life. The basilica form, with its nave and two side aisles, is derived from the basilicas that stood on Roman cities' forums; basilica churches provided space for the thousands of believers who gathered there in throngs on high feast days. The chancel is usually amply proportioned to accommodate the bishop and the many other clerics in attendance.

A typical feature of Romanesque cathedrals is an unusual abundance of towers, representing the heavenly Jerusalem. These churches' two-towered facades were retained in the Gothic period and built up into impressive edifices. Gothic cathedrals took a long time to build, giving rise to a new kind of organization: building works (Bauhütten), internationally networked workshops that employed stonemasons and master builders and disseminated their knowledge across regions, quickly spreading Gothic architectural forms throughout Europe.

In the late Middle Ages, all these churches would have been richly decorated with altarpieces and other artworks. In places such as Mainz Cathedral and the choir of Cologne Cathedral, we can begin to visualize this. However, many churches lost some or even all of their furnishings to the Reformation and its iconoclastic riots, as well as wartime destruction and misguided restorations.

Today, these churches are no longer just visited by believers, but mostly by tourists. The Rhine Valley has been a must-see for travelers in Europe since at least the eighteenth century. In fact, Cologne Cathedral, which is the subject of this book's final chapter, is Germany's most-visited tourist attraction. River cruises, in particular, have put cathedral visits on every traveler's agenda.

The photographs in this book, by Florian Monheim, provide a unique way of experiencing the cathedrals and their furnishings, and also of discovering the surprising details that I point out in each chapter. I would encourage you not just to pay attention to the churches' interior furnishings, but also to give their exterior architecture time to sink in. That's why every chapter begins with a tour around the outside of the building. I hope that this very special journey of discovery brings you great pleasure.

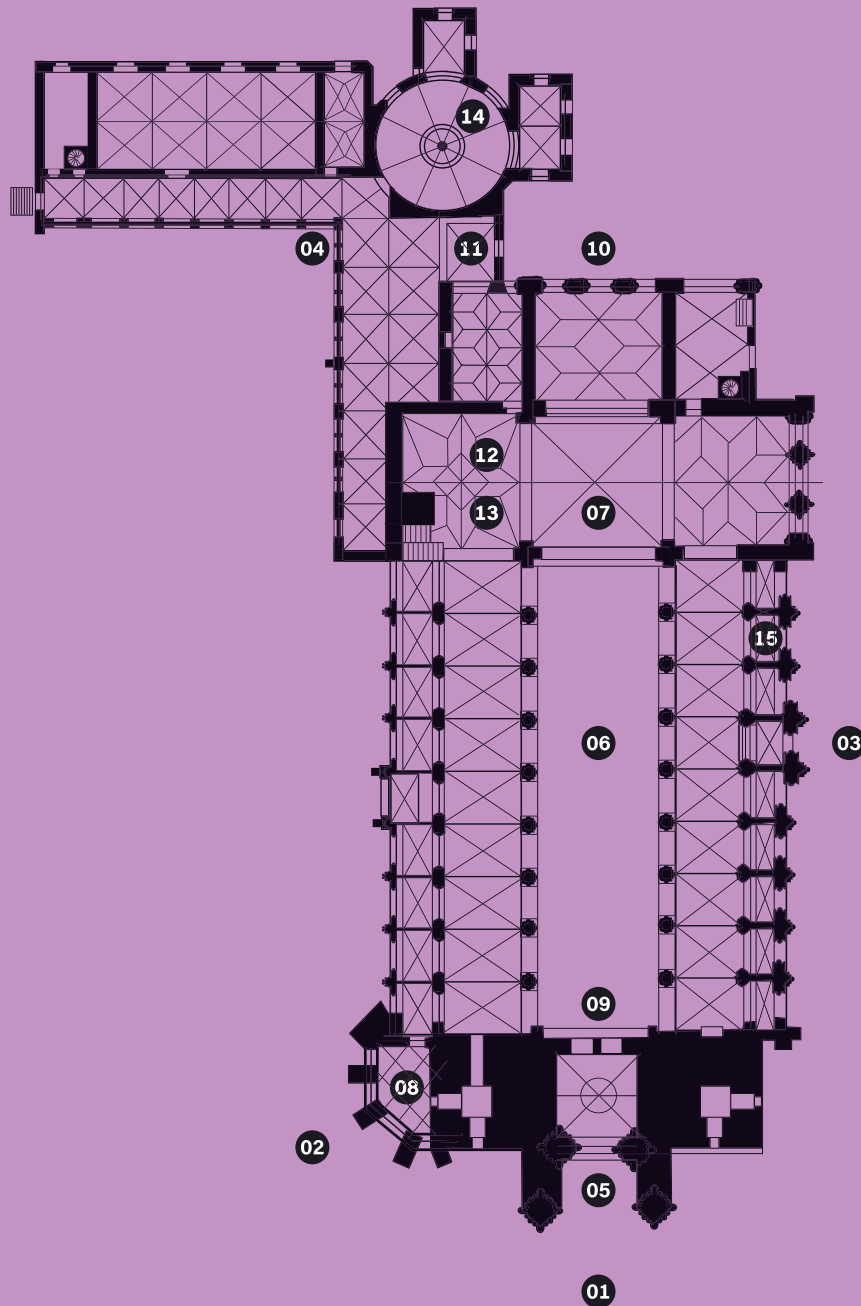
Barbara Schock-Werner



Konstanz

Minster of Our Lady





Few art lovers think of Konstanz when they think of important churches along the Rhine. That is a mistake. The Romans built a fortress here to ensure safe passage across the river, and a bishop took up residence around the year 600. By the High Middle Ages, the diocese of Konstanz had become the biggest north of the Alps. Although the city lost its diocesan status early in the modern era, it remained important in church history due to the famous council held here between 1414 and 1418.

The church building is correspondingly eclectic, with components dating from different centuries. Today it is called a minster (*Münster*) and presents many interesting details. It is especially beautiful when seen from the lake while approaching the city by boat. The facade and tower of Konstanz Minster still rise proudly above the roofs of the old city to this day.

History

A cathedral was probably built here in the early ninth century. This Carolingian building was likely designed as a basilica – that is, a church with a high central nave and at least two lower side aisles. The oldest surviving section is the crypt, which dates from around the year 1000. A new structure was built in the eleventh century and given a flat painted ceiling a century later. Not until the seventeenth century was that ceiling replaced by a vault. Annexes, chapels, and a cloister were added little by little. All of these, especially those built during the late Gothic period, are extremely high in architectural quality and in some cases quite innovative.



West Facade

01 The tour begins on the minster's west side, where the main entrance is located. One immediately notices that different parts of the church were built at different times. The west facade thus reflects the history of the minster's construction, from the Romanesque period to the nineteenth century.

The north tower was built around 1100, the south tower more than two hundred years later. The tower levels directly below the platform date from the late Gothic; the center tower, which projects slightly in front of the other two, was raised to the level of the platform at nearly the same time. Massive buttresses decorated with tracery support it on the west side. It is topped with an octagonal upper tower with an openwork spire, which was added only in the nineteenth century.



Welser Chapel

02 Nestled against the left side of the west facade is the magnificent Welser Chapel, built circa 1500. Its construction was overseen by Lux Böblinger, who died in Konstanz in 1504. It was commissioned by the Welsers, a patrician family from Augsburg who, like the Fuggers and several others, became rich through trade. Their memorial shields hang inside the chapel. Its supporting buttresses are connected by sharply pointed ogee arches and a balustrade. Above them rise a number of miniature towers known as pinnacles.

