



Almost majestically, the minster soars up into the sky.



The mighty main portal opens onto the Minster Square.



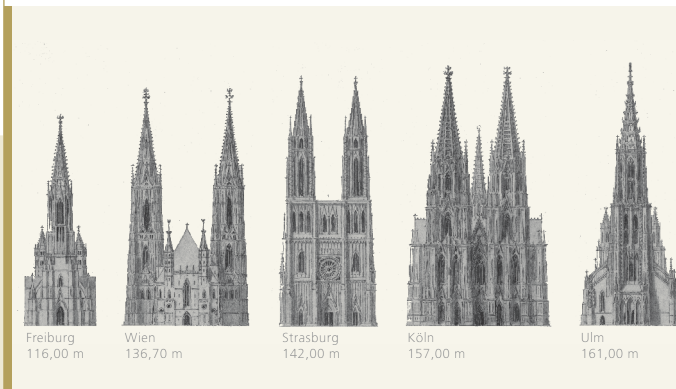
The shoe-maker Sebastian Fischer made a drawing of the minster.



The never-ending battle against weathering ...



... mason's workshop at the minster.



5 church towers and their respective heights. Lithograph by Eduard Mauch, 1843.



An impressive panorama: Ulm Minster is the town's landmark.



Ulm Minster

"The people fled from the church as they thought the minster was going to fall down", he reported. "But the stones didn't hit anybody". Whether the master builder really had to flee, as maintained by Fischer, is a subject of controversy, since there are records of Böblinger some three years later in the workshop journals. This subsidence of the tower was always cited as the reason why the building was never continued much beyond the rectangular crown completed in 1494. Böblinger had in fact begun the next phase, which had an octagonal layout. This was terminated after 5 metres, however, and protected with a provisional pyramid-shaped roof. Böblinger's successor Burkhard Engelberg is regarded as the saviour of the minster. By dividing the relatively new nave aisles, he prevented tension forces from splitting the church.

Some two centuries later, in November 1530, a referendum was held and the people of Ulm voted to become Protestants. The decoration of the church with its more than 50 altars stood in stark contrast to the new ideology. This resulted in the "iconoclasm" of 1531, which is not to be misunderstood as an orgy of destruction. In effect, the council urged the owners of

the altars to remove them from the building. Some of them probably had no further interest in the Gothic works of art, by that time regarded as unfashionable, and perhaps burnt them as "old rubbish".

The council placed the choir stalls under its protection. This unique work of art, which through its depictions of Greek and Roman artists, philosophers and sibyls breathes the spirit of humanism, was created between 1468 and 1474 in the workshop of Ulm master joiner Jörg Syrlin the Elder. Why does a commoners' church need choir stalls? It is where the many chaplains of the private altars would have taken their place. Maybe Ulm wanted to compete with the cathedral chapter in Constance, which had just afforded itself similar choir stalls.

In 1543, some 166 years after the building was started, the council stopped all further work on the minster in order to save costs. But even as a torso, it was regarded as the most immense church in Germany – even though Strasbourg Minster was taller.

Ulm Minster shared its fate of remaining uncompleted with a number of other medieval cathedrals, including those in Cologne, Regensburg, Bremen and Meissen. This fact allows the building suspension to be seen in a different light: It was not just down to architectural or financial reasons, but had more to do with the changing spirit of the times: On the threshold of the Renaissance, no-one wanted to invest more money in a building designed in the outdated Gothic style. It would take the nationalistic movement of the 19th century and the awakening enthusiasm for all things medieval to elevate the completion of these buildings – above all Cologne Cathedral – to a status of national interest. In Ulm, however, the main task was to prevent the meanwhile derelict minster from collapsing. During the course of this, the extension of the main tower was reconsidered.

The minster workshop was reopened in 1844. The nave, which swayed distinctly in every storm, needed to be stabilised. This was achieved by minster master builder Ferdinand Thrän between 1856 and 1870, who erected the 18 meter wide but nevertheless very delicate stone flying buttresses over the side

aisles. Then the two choir towers, completed in 1880, were built. The extension of the main tower followed the design of Matthäus Böblinger. But minster master builder August von Beyer increased the height of the tower by 10 metres above the 151 metres of the original plan. Why? Did Ulm want to put Cologne Cathedral, standing at 157 metres, in the shadow of their minster? This suspicion, maintained to the present day, was voiced during the extension work in Cologne but was vehemently denied in Ulm. According to the counter-argument, even in the middle ages, Ulm's tower had been planned mightier than the Cologne towers. A further reason given for raising the height was perspective: In order to make the proportions of the tower appear more harmonious to the observer in the minster square, Beyer not only corrected the height but also changed the ratio between the two sections of the new part in favour of the upper one.

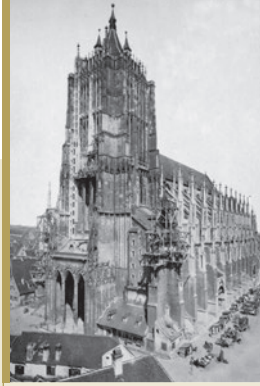
Whether from a desire to break records or for aesthetic reasons, the minster tower was 161.53 metres high when its completion was celebrated in Ulm on May 31, 1890. Half a century later, on December 17, 1944, allied bombers

reduced much of Ulm to ashes. The minster, however, survived the firestorm almost intact. The town was allowed to keep its most important landmark.

What significance does the minster have today for the people of Ulm? Naturally it forms an essential basis for their self-esteem. Their inherent fear that the minster could one day collapse goes so far that they occasionally make donations towards the upkeep of their building. And in the age of the automobile, Ulm's children, returning from long and tiring over-land journeys, have come to see the tall spire of their minster on the horizon as a comforting sign that the garage, and home, is not far away.



The foundation plaque in the minster shows how it was originally intended to look.



To stabilize the swaying minster tower, flying buttresses and arches were added from 1856.



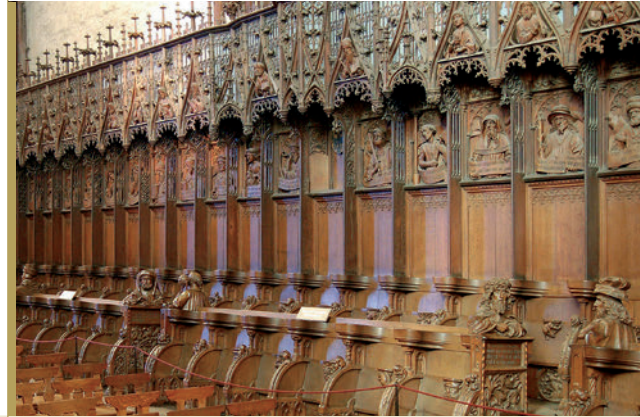
The building of the main tower was a wildly ambitious undertaking.



The North aisle terminates at the entrance to the Neithart Chapel.



In the 15th century, the light-flooded interior was already regarded as the hallmark of Ulm Minster.



The choir stalls are a unique work of art.



The poet Terence looks like Jesus but is wearing a wreath of laurel instead of a crown of thorns.



The baptismal font dating from 1474.



The choir altar is the work of Martin Schaffner.

Ulm Minster

It is a well-known fact that Ulm Minster has the highest church tower in the world, although this has only been the case since it was raised to its present height in 1890. The building of this church, however, broke records even before that. Its capacity to accommodate 20,000 people greatly exceeded the size of the population at the time the church was founded. Above all, it was predominantly financed by the burghers of the town.

In 1488, exactly 111 years after the foundation stone had been laid, the much-travelled Ulm Dominican monk Felix Fabri noted the particular advantages that Ulm Minster had over all other parish churches in the whole of Christendom.

Firstly it was the largest ever, and larger than many bishops' cathedrals. Then, it was the most beautiful of churches, on account of the light that, thanks to its architecture, could penetrate every corner. Thirdly, the minster has more altars than all

other parish churches, namely 51. And they were all financed, together with their attending chaplains – sometimes as many as 5 per altar – by burghers of Ulm. No comparable parish church can boast so many clerics. Above all, the willingness of Ulm's burghers to make donations is greater than anywhere else and gives the parish priest a status similar to that of a bishop.

In 1488 Fabri maintained that "Ulm Minster is better attended than all other churches in the whole of Christendom". Despite its size, on religious festival days it becomes very crowded, even into the corners of the altars, and at Easter time more than 15,000 people usually take communion. There is no other parish in which so many children are baptised daily – five on average. The same applies to confessions and communions as well as to burials in the two graveyards. The significance of Ulm Minster is illustrated to us in Fabri's list of superlatives: It was and is the largest burghers' church. The building was not financed by any clerical or secular princes, but by the burghers. This is particularly emphasized in the report of the laying of the foundation stone. The exact details of this event, carved in stone, can be read in and around the minster: Anno Domini 1377, on the Tuesday

which was the last day of the month of June, three hours after sunrise, on the order of the council, here in Ulm, Ludwig Krafft, son of the deceased Krafft am Kornmarkt, laid the first foundation stone of this parish church.

The carved stone containing this text, which is inlaid into one of the pillars in the south-eastern part of the nave as well as into the church wall just outside the Bridal Gate, depicts the former mayor Lutz Krafft. Together with his wife he is literally placing the building project onto the shoulders of Heinrich II. Parler, the first master builder of Ulm Minster. The plaque also shows how, according to the plans at the time, the minster was to have looked: a hall church with three equally high towers.

Fabri provides the story surrounding these meagre details: After a huge pit had been dug, the whole of Ulm assembled there on June 30, 1377. Former mayor Lutz Krafft and several of the most distinguished personages of the town climbed into the pit. The large foundation stone was lowered into the pit using a crane. Krafft covered it with 100 pieces of gold.

The patricians and the townsfolk followed his example. What moved the people of Ulm to undertake this mammoth project? For one thing, Fabri mentions safety aspects: The former parish church was situated outside the town walls, in what is today the old cemetery. In order to attend, the townsfolk risked being caught up in the hostilities of frequent wars.

Money also played a role, since donations from the people of Ulm flowed into the coffers of the monasteries that lay within the town walls and whose services for salvation were literally closer to home. In addition, the fact that the old parish church was built on Reichenau territory, giving the Reichenau Monks the right to the parish tithe, would also have played a role.

After the resolution to build the new parish church had been passed, the old church, despite having been altered or newly built shortly before, was demolished. The people of Ulm are said to have carried the stones into the town on their shoulders. In fact, whole sections of the old parish church were integrated into the minster, such as the Bridal Gate dating from around 1360 and the northern side portals, one of which

bears the date 1356. The brick walls of the choir are also dotted with normal blocks of stone from the old church. Today, it is hard to imagine that towards the close of the 14th century, the people of Ulm embarked on a building project, fully knowing that they would not live to see its completion. Could they have had any idea that this project would develop a dynamic of its own, the results of which would differ completely from the original plans? After all, the relatively simple hall church on the above mentioned foundation plaque has little in common with the imposing building depicted in Schedel's Universal Chronicle published in 1493 – and practically nothing with the „Town Hill“ rising today above the historic town centre.

The building of the minster was therefore a process with an uncertain outcome. It involved architects of international renown, who were active in several European centres of culture: Michael and Heinrich III. Parler had already worked on Karl's Cathedral in Prague, and Heinrich III. was later appointed to the mason's workshop at Milan Cathedral. Members of the Parler family were in charge of cathedral workshops in Prague, Strasburg, Vienna and Ulm. Ulrich von Ensingen, who

succeeded the Parlers in Ulm and planned the colossal main tower, was also to be found in Strasburg and in Esslingen; his son Matthäus Ensinger trained in Strasburg. Before moving to Ulm, he was in charge of the building of Berne Minster as well as the Church of Our Lady in Esslingen.

Matthäus Böblinger also worked in Esslingen before presenting the new plan for the main tower. Four hundred years later this was to serve as the blueprint for the completion of the tower. Misfortune struck Böblinger however, since during his time as master builder at the Minster the main tower collapsed due to inadequate foundations.

The misfortune of that Sunday in 1492, when two stones from the archway collapsed into the church, was described by the shoemaker and chronicler Sebastian Fischer, who, by the way, with his own hand created the most original, if somewhat clumsy drawings of the minster. Fischer's mother had attended the midday sermon on that day.