

C.G. BOERNER

DEALERS IN FINE ART SINCE 1826

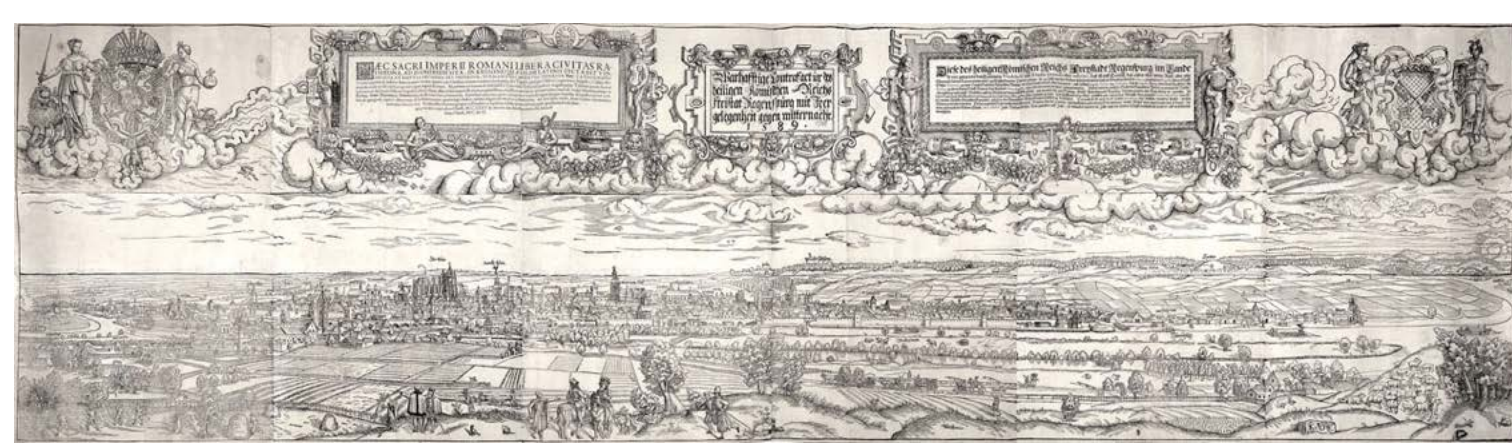
Distraction / Abwechslung
25 August 2020

Sometimes size does indeed matter. Large books from the first centuries of printing usually survive in higher quantities than the small pamphlets meant for wider distribution. Whereas the often sumptuously bound large tomes were kept safely on library shelves, the “pocket books” were widely read and thumbed through over and over again until they got tattered and thrown away.

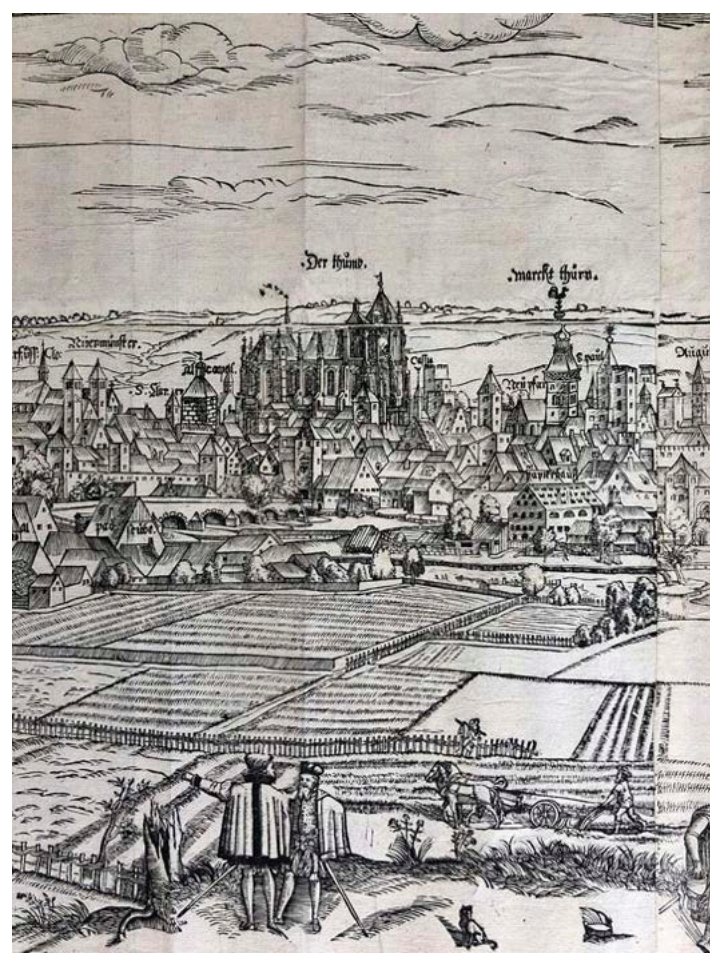
With prints, the relation between size and survival seems to be reversed. The smaller ones were safer since they could get pasted in books and albums. If they could not be folded, the larger ones were often just too big to fit at all. This is especially true for the *Riesenholzschnitte*, composite woodcuts printed from many blocks on as many sheets of paper, which were then assembled to form one large composition. The format lent itself to panoramic views such as Jacopo de’Barbari’s bird’s-eye *View of Venice* of 1500, an early masterwork of both medium and theme.



De’Barbari’s view set a trend, especially north of the Alps, where civic pride, especially in the centers of trade and commerce, lead to the creation of topographically faithful renderings. One of the most ambitious ones is this monumental view of Regensburg from 1589.



Franz Kirchmair signed the work as the *Reisser* (designer). Given that eighteen blocks were used to create an image that measures overall 62 x 220 cm (24½ x 87 inches), it is hardly surprising that not one but two *Formschneider* (block cutter) added their monograms: Dietrich Winhart and the still-unidentified Master IS (the latter is known to have collaborated with Kirchmair as early as 1562).



Whereas twelve early impressions of de’Barbari’s *View of Venice* are known, we were able to trace only five copies of Kirchmair’s *Riesenholzschnitt*, to which ours can now be added. This brings us back to the question of the survival of these large prints. Due to their size, they were often pasted to walls—in city halls as well as in the *Faktoreien* (trading posts) that the cities maintained among each other. This ultimately condemned the prints to perish. What survives are only those examples that were *not* used for their intended purpose but instead filed away by some conscientious archivist or librarian in one of the noble collections that began to form from the seventeenth century onward. The provenance of our *View of Regensburg* proves the point: it can be traced back to Franz Ritter von Hauslab (1798–1883), a Viennese military man whose collecting focused on scientific and topographical materials. His holdings of 10,000 maps dating from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are explicitly mentioned by the researchers of the Fondation Custodia in their entry on Hauslab (Lugt 1247). The collection was later acquired by the Princes of Liechtenstein and were dispersed together with their other print holdings after World War II. Since a large portion of the collection ended up at the Metropolitan Museum, one might ask why our splendid print did not make it to New York. This brings us to yet another rather typical aspect of a *Riesenholzschnitt*’s fate. Once a print has managed to survive the centuries carefully preserved in a library, the books might end up getting sold *en bloc*. And more often than not, the large rolled-up items that don’t quite fit into the shipping boxes get left behind . . .

[View of Regensburg](#)

