

BOOK III • NUREMBERG 1493

The Nuremberg Chronicle

*From Constantine
to the Year One Thousand*

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The Nuremberg Chronicle

Book III. From Constantine to the Year One Thousand

Hartmann Schedel's history of the world, from the
Nuremberg edition of 1493, in modern English

BlusaBooks · MMXXVI



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printed by Anton Koberger, Nuremberg, 12 July 1493. Translated from the
Latin from images of a hand-coloured copy. Woodcuts from the same copy
(workshop of Michael Wolgemut and Wilhelm Pleydenwurff).

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FOREWORD

The history of the world in one book. In the summer of 1493 a book appeared in Nuremberg that set out to tell everything — from the creation of the world to the year of its own printing, and beyond that to the end of the world. In Latin it was called *Liber Chronicarum*, "the Book of Chronicles", but the world came to know it as the Nuremberg Chronicle. It was one of the largest and most splendid books of the early age of printing: a great folio volume of more than six hundred pages in which text and pictures are woven into a single whole.

Who made it. The Chronicle was written by Hartmann Schedel (1440–1514), a Nuremberg physician, humanist and one of the great book collectors of his time. Schedel gathered and reworked everything his age knew about the course of the world — the Bible, the Church Fathers, the ancient authors and the newest Italian chronicles, above all the *Supplement to the Chronicles* of Jacopo Filippo Foresti of Bergamo and the writings of the humanist Enea Silvio Piccolomini, later Pope Pius II. The book was printed by Anton Koberger, perhaps the greatest publisher in Europe at the time, and paid for by two wealthy citizens of Nuremberg, Sebald Schreyer and Sebastian Kammermeister. The Latin edition was completed on 12 July 1493, and on 23 December of the same year a German translation by Georg Alt followed.

A book of pictures. The Nuremberg Chronicle is remembered first of all for its pictures. The woodcuts were made in the workshop of Michael Wolgemut and his stepson Wilhelm Pleydenwurff. In those very years the young Albrecht Dürer was an apprentice in Wolgemut's workshop, and it is often thought that his hand may have taken part as well. The book contains 1,809 pictures, yet they were printed from only 645 woodblocks: one portrait of a king or a prophet serves for many different people, and one view of a city sometimes stands for several cities. Still, many of the great city panoramas — Nuremberg, Vienna, Cologne,

Regensburg — are the first views of these cities in print on such a scale and with such life. Some copies were coloured by hand in the fifteenth century at the buyer's wish.

The seven ages of the world. Following medieval tradition, Schedel divided history into seven ages: from the Creation to the Flood; from the Flood to Abraham; from Abraham to David; from David to the Babylonian Captivity; from the Captivity to the birth of Christ; from Christ to the author's own day; and the seventh — the time of Antichrist and the Last Judgement. A description of the lands of Europe was added at the end.

What is in this book. This is the third book of six in the series. It continues the sixth age of the world and covers almost seven centuries — from the emperor Constantine the Great and the founding of Constantinople to Otto III and the year one thousand. Here are the Council of Nicaea and the Arian controversy, the desert fathers and the great fathers of the Church — Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, John Chrysostom —, the invasions of the Goths, Vandals and Huns, Attila and the end of the Western Roman Empire in 476. Then follow Theodoric, king of the Ostrogoths, Clovis and the Franks, Saint Benedict, Justinian and his generals, the coming of the Lombards into Italy, Pope Gregory the Great, the emperor Heraclius and the time of Muhammad, the quarrel over holy images in Byzantium, Charles Martel and Pepin, Charlemagne and his heirs, the Hungarian raids, the Ottonians and the "transfer" of the empire to the Germans. Almost every page carries the lives of popes, the reigns of emperors and the saints of their time. Between these stories Schedel sets great views and descriptions of cities: Constantinople, Buda, Strasbourg, Ravenna, Salzburg, Erfurt, Ferrara, Würzburg, Eichstätt, Bamberg and Magdeburg. For convenience we have divided the book into ten parts.

Our translation. We translated from the Latin edition, working from images of the pages of a hand-coloured copy. The translation is complete — sentence by sentence, with nothing left out and nothing retold. Here and there we divided Schedel's long sentences, but we did not change their content. Where a word had faded in the print or an abbreviation was unclear, we restored the sense from the

context and from the sources Schedel himself drew on. Where the Chronicle gives a year in the margin — the year of the world, the year from the founding of Rome or the year after Christ — it is kept at the head of the entry. The book also exists in a Latvian edition.

How to read it. Place names, peoples, lesser-known persons and things no longer familiar today are explained in footnotes on the same page, where they first appear. Schedel writes as a man of the fifteenth century: his numbers and dates often disagree with what we know today, he confuses rulers of similar names, and he tells legends as seriously as history. We have left his mistakes in the text untouched and explained them briefly in the notes. At the end of the book each part has a commentary, *In plain words* and *What history tells us*.

The pictures. The woodcuts in this book are the originals — cut from the pages of the same hand-coloured copy and placed where they stand in the Chronicle. There are 51 of them: the great councils of the Church, portraits of the Church Fathers, the monastery of Monte Cassino, Muhammad, Charlemagne, wonders in the sky and great city panoramas. Several of the large panoramas fill two facing pages in the Chronicle, so here they are given in two halves. At the beginning of each part there is a colour illustration in the manner of late fifteenth-century manuscript miniatures — this is modern work, not part of the Chronicle.

The Nuremberg Chronicle series.

- I. The Creation and the First Ages of the World
- II. From the Babylonian Captivity to Constantine
- III. From Constantine to the Year One Thousand
- IV. Emperors, Popes and Crusades
- V. The Last Times and the Last Judgement
- VI. The Description of Europe

This is the publication of a historical source. Schedel writes with the faith, knowledge and prejudices of his time. We leave his words untouched; our explanations are only in the footnotes and the commentary.

PART I

CONSTANTINE, CONSTANTINOPLE AND THE COUNCIL OF NICAEA



Illustration in the manner of 15th-century manuscript miniatures

Constantinople

Constantinople, the imperial and most renowned city, was formerly (as has been written) called Byzantium, and, being quite small, was afterwards named Constantinople. For the emperor Constantine, called the Great, had resolved to move the seat of the empire from Rome to the East, so that he might more easily check the raids of the Parthians. Some authors relate that he went to the Troad¹

1. The Troad — the region in the north-west of Asia Minor (modern Turkey) around ancient Troy, by the Dardanelles.

and laid the foundations of an imperial city where Agamemnon and the other Greek princes had once pitched their tents against Priam. But, admonished in a dream by Christ the Saviour, who pointed him to another place, he left the work he had begun unfinished (its traces long remained) and went to Thrace and Byzantium. And, declaring that this place had been shown to him by God, he soon enlarged the city, raised new walls, built lofty towers, and adorned it with the most magnificent buildings, both private and public. He gave it such splendour that it could rightly be called a second Rome. The old writers who saw it in its flower thought it rather a dwelling of the gods than of an emperor on earth.

The emperor gave the city the name New Rome, but the stubbornness of the common people prevailed, and it came to be called after its founder — Constantinople. His successors, the emperors, took care to adorn it everywhere with public buildings and with palaces of its citizens, and very proud ones too, so much so that strangers who came there, marvelling at the city's splendour, said it was the home not of mortals but of the dwellers of heaven. The walls of the city were famous throughout the world for their height and thickness, and the outer walls were well fortified. It is said that the city was almost triangular in shape. The sea washes two of its sides, and there is no lack of walls fit to repel attacks from the sea; the side that faces the land is closed, behind high walls and outer walls, by an enormous ditch. The city has eleven gates, which display its dignity; their names are these: the Golden Gate, the gates of Pege, of Saint Romanus, of Charsias, the Royal Gate, the gates of Caligaria, of Xylina, of Bacmagona, of Pharos, of Theodosius, and of Sylaca.

Besides its other most magnificent buildings, there stands in it the work of the emperor Justinian — the church of Saint Sophia, famous throughout the world, in which nine hundred priests once served, built with wonderful skill out of costly materials. The city was distinguished by such splendour that it was held to be the pillar of the whole East and the one home of learned Greece. Three great councils were held in it: namely, under Theodosius the Elder, under Pope Agatho, and under the emperor Justinian. When the Turks had long hated it because of its

dignity, in the year of our salvation 1093 a certain prince of theirs, Belzetes,² besieged it with a huge host of Turks and then took it. After that the French, together with the Venetians, held it for fifty-five years. Later the most illustrious family of the Palaeologi,³ with the help of the Genoese, took it from the French and held it most gloriously until the year 1453, in which



Constantinople (left half)

2. History knows of no Turkish conquest in 1093: the Seljuks threatened Constantinople at that time but never took it. The city was first captured by the crusaders in 1204.

3. The Palaeologi — the last dynasty of Byzantine emperors (1261–1453); Michael VIII Palaeologus recovered Constantinople from the Latins in 1261.

Mehmed the Ottoman,⁴ emperor of the Turks, captured and plundered it. Thus this most noble city fell into the hands of the infidels, about 1130 years after its founding. Almost as long had elder Rome stood when it was first taken by the Goths: Alaric⁵ broke into Rome in the 1164th year from the founding of the city, yet he ordered that the basilicas of the saints should not be wrecked. The fury of the Turks, however, left nothing holy, nothing clean in the imperial city: its most sacred churches they dedicated to the filth of Muhammad.

We read of the deeds of the Thebans, of the famous exploits of the Lacedaemonians and Athenians; the commonwealth of the Corinthians was not to be despised; Mycenae was once renowned, Larissa mighty, and many other memorable cities, whose walls, were you to look for them now, you would not find even in ruins. No one can point out even the ground on which they stood. Out of so great a ruin of antiquity Constantinople alone had survived; it had so many wonderful works, so many arms, so many books, so much glory, that this one city seemed to make up for the losses of all the others. And although, after the division of the empire or its transfer to the Franks, Constantinople often fell into the hands of enemies, yet never were the basilicas of the saints destroyed, nor the libraries burned, nor the monasteries plundered to the last. Therefore until this very year a monument of ancient wisdom remained in Constantinople. No Latin could be thought learned enough unless he had studied for some time in Constantinople. From there Plato was given back to us, from there Aristotle; from there the works of Demosthenes, Xenophon, Thucydides, Basil, Dionysius, Origen and many others were made known to the Latins in our own days.

Now, under the rule of the Turks — the most savage of men, enemies of good morals and of letters — the opposite will come to pass. Now a second death will come to Homer and Pindar, to Menander and all the most illustrious poets. Now the final ruin of the Greek philosophers will be revealed. For countless men,

4. Mehmed II the Conqueror (1432–1481) — the Ottoman sultan who took Constantinople on 29 May 1453.

5. The Latin text has *Athalaricus*; in fact Rome was taken in 410 by Alaric I, king of the Visigoths.

outstanding in every branch of learning and virtue, came out of this most famous city, among them John surnamed Chrysostom, bishop of this very city. There survives a book on virginity by Bishop Atticus; likewise Gennadius, Cassian and others. And quite recently Manuel Chrysoloras⁶ brought Greek letters into Italy with immense benefit, in the time when a Palaeologus ruled in Constantinople. Now the river of all learning has been cut off, the spring of the Muses dried up. I admit that in many places among the Latins the study of letters flourishes: at Rome, Paris, Bologna, Padua, Siena, Perugia, Cologne, Vienna, Salamanca, Oxford, Pavia, Leipzig, Erfurt. But all these are only streams drawn from Greek springs. Cut a stream off from its source, and what is cut off dries up. Nothing beneath the moon is everlasting.

But since Mehmed, emperor of the Turks, had determined that a city lying in the midst of the Turkish lands must not remain outside his rule, and that greater glory would accrue to his name if he took it, he brought up his engines of war, assaulted it with great force, and at last took it. So in that unhappy year this city came into the power of the foulest infidels, the Turks, and people of both sexes, together with the emperor Palaeologus, were put to death. All of this will be told more fully under the emperor Frederick III.

6. Manuel Chrysoloras (c. 1350–1415) — a Byzantine scholar who from 1397 taught Greek in Florence and launched the study of Greek in the Italian Renaissance.



Constantinople (right half)

Saint Helena

Helena, mother of the emperor Constantine, was a woman of incomparable faith, piety and singular greatness of soul. Some say she was the daughter of a king of the English, though a captive; others, such as Ambrose, say that at first she was an innkeeper⁷ and of low birth. When her son had been baptized and she saw the miracles that blessed Sylvester had shown to the Jews, she was moved by her greatness of soul and by visions in the night to go to Jerusalem to seek out the wood of the Cross. This was hard indeed, for the old persecutors had set up an

7. Latin *stabularia* — the keeper of a roadside inn or posting station. So Ambrose of Milan calls Helena; the legend of a British princess arose much later.

image of Venus in that place, so that Christians would worship Venus in place of the Saviour. But the woman, led by her devotion, cleared the place itself of rubble and found three crosses lying in confusion; on one of them could be read that inscription in three languages: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." Present too was Macarius, then bishop of that city, who, reverently holding one of them in his hands, said that this was the true one. And indeed the third, when laid upon a dead woman, restored her to life. The Cross of the Lord was found on 3 May, and Helena adorned it and held it in great veneration.

Judas, the finder of the Cross, was also baptized; he was later given another name and called Cyriacus. Then Helena, having built a church on the spot where she had found the Cross, took with her to her son, on leaving, the nails with which the body of Christ had been fastened to the Cross; one of them he set into the bridle of his horse, to use in battle. Constantine too, deeply moved, forbade by edict that anyone should ever again use that kind of punishment.

Now Constantine the Great, eager to spread the Christian religion, built the Constantinian basilica, which they call the Lateran. And at Sylvester's request he built a basilica to Peter on the Vatican and to Paul on the Ostian Way. By the emperor's order a basilica was also built in the Sessorian court under the name of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem, where he placed a part of the holy Cross found by his mother Helena. She, at last, having deserved well of God and men, died at Rome on 18 August.

Arius the Heretic

Arius, a certain presbyter at Alexandria, a man distinguished more by his bearing and looks than by virtue, and more eager for praise and glory than for truth, began to sow discord in the faith of Christ. He tried to separate the Son from the eternal and ineffable substance of God the Father with these words: "There was a time when He was not" — not understanding that the Son is co-eternal with the Father and that in the Trinity there is one and the same substance, since it is said: "I and the Father are one." By these frauds of his he tried to prevail, and so he infected

almost the whole world with his error. Meanwhile the Arian heresy grew strong, with the support of Constantius, who forced our people to take Arius back.⁸

So in the second year of Constantius a council was summoned at Laodicea, a city of Syria (or, as others will have it, at Tyre); Catholics and Arians gathered there. When Arius could not refute certain arguments, he turned to abuse and charged that most holy man Athanasius with magic arts, producing in a little box the arm of Arsenius. But God at length did not let this devilish man go unpunished: not long afterwards, surrounded by a crowd of bishops and people, he turned aside into a public place to relieve himself and, straining to empty his bowels, voided all his entrails into the pit of the privy, suffering a death well worthy of his most shameful life.

The Council of Nicaea

The synod of Nicaea, the first of all synods, was held in this year, which is the sixteenth year of Constantine's reign, against the teaching of this faithless Arius, at the command of the supreme pontiff and of Constantine the Great, the emperor. When Alexander, bishop of the city of Alexandria, had tried in vain to call Arius back from his error, a general council was summoned by Constantine's order, at generous expense, at Nicaea, a city of Bithynia. Three hundred and eighteen bishops took part in it. There was disputing there for some time, and sharp disputing too. For certain men skilled in questions then sided with Arius, opposing the simplicity of our faith. One of them, a most learned philosopher, moved by the Spirit of God, in a single moment embraced as holy and whole the faith he had attacked before.

At last, when the matter had been carefully examined in the council, it was decided that *homoousios*⁹ should be written, that is, that the Son should be

8. Arius (c. 256–336) taught that the Son was created and not eternal like the Father. Arianism was later backed by Constantine's son, the emperor Constantius II (337–361).

9. Greek *homoousios*, "of one substance". With this word the Nicene Creed (325) declared that the Son is of the same substance as the Father.

confessed to be of one substance with the Father. Those who held with Arius were about seventeen, who maintained that the Son of God was created from outside and not begotten of the very divinity of the Father. When the truth of so great a dispute had been made known, Constantine confirmed the council's decree, threatening exile to those who opposed it; so only six went into exile with Arius. The rest came over to the view of those who judged rightly.

At the same council, they say, the Photinians were also condemned, who took their name from Photinus, bishop of Galatia; following the heresy of the Ebionites,¹⁰ they asserted that Christ was conceived of Mary in a pious marital union. The Sabellians were condemned too, who ascribe only one person to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. At that council the bishops themselves (as happens) handed Constantine written complaints, accusing one another and asking for the prince's judgement; but the excellent emperor burned their writings and answered that they must await the judgement of God alone, not of men. It was also decreed at that council that those who had castrated themselves out of impatience with desire should no longer be admitted to the clergy. Finally, many other things were laid down at that council for the honour and peace of the Church, as is found in the decrees.

10. The Ebionites — an early Jewish-Christian group (1st–4th centuries) who held Jesus to be the son of Joseph and Mary, a chosen man rather than God.