

BOOK VI • NUREMBERG 1493

The Nuremberg Chronicle

*The Description
of Europe*

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The Nuremberg Chronicle

Book VI. The Description of Europe

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

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Source: Hartmann Schedel, *Liber Chronicarum* (the Nuremberg Chronicle),
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 sixth and final book of the series. With it the whole Nuremberg Chronicle comes to an end. Having told the history of the world as far as the Last Judgement, Schedel added a description of the lands at the end of his book — so that the reader would know not only what had happened in the world, but also what the world he lived in was like. The book opens with the insert "On Sarmatia": the kingdom of Poland and the Jagiellonian dynasty, Saint Stanislaus, Cracow with its university, where the young Nicolaus Copernicus was studying at that very time, Lübeck, the capital of the Hanseatic League, Neisse and Silesia, and a prayer in verse for King Maximilian. Then follow the praise of Germany and the great description of Europe, which Schedel took over almost word for word from the *Europe* (1458) of the humanist Enea Silvio Piccolomini, later Pope Pius II. That is why the text so often says "I": it is Enea Silvio himself, telling of his journeys, his embassies and his conversations with rulers. Here are Hungary and John Hunyadi, Wallachia, Thrace, the Ottoman sultans, the battle of Varna and the fall of Constantinople in 1453, Greece and the Balkans, Carinthia, Styria and Austria, Bohemia and Silesia. The fourth part is especially remarkable for readers from the Baltic: Lithuania, with one of the earliest descriptions of the Baltic pagan religion — sacred groves, the sacred fire and the serpents — Russia, Livonia, Prussia and the Teutonic Order with the battle of Grunwald. Then come Saxony and the Hanseatic towns, Denmark, Sweden and Norway, Frisia and Holland, the secret court of Westphalia, Hesse, Franconia with

Nuremberg, Bavaria, Switzerland and Savoy, France and the end of the Hundred Years' War, England, Scotland, Ireland, Spain with the fall of Granada, and Portugal with its voyages along the coast of Africa. The last parts are devoted to Italy: Genoa, Milan, Venice, Ferrara, Bologna, Florence, Siena, Rome and the popes, and the kingdom of Naples under Alfonso of Aragon. The Chronicle ends with a description of Germany, the great map of Europe across two pages and the colophon in which Anton Koberger announces, on 12 July 1493, that the work is finished. For convenience we have divided the book into nine 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. Where Schedel's and Enea Silvio's sentences run very long we have sometimes divided them, but we have not changed 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. In our copy a few handwritten leaves are bound in among the printed pages; they are not part of the printed Chronicle, and we have not translated them. The book also exists in a Latvian edition.

How to read it. Place names, peoples, lesser-known persons and ideas unfamiliar today are explained in footnotes on the same page, where they first appear. Schedel and Enea Silvio write as people of the fifteenth century: their numbers and dates do not always agree with what we know today, they confuse rulers with similar names, and they tell old legends — of the Franks descended from Troy, or of geese that grow on trees — side by side with what they saw for themselves. We have left these errors untouched in the text and explained them briefly in the footnotes. In the description of Europe, "in our time" and "this year" usually mean about 1458, when Enea Silvio wrote his work. 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 32 of them: the great panoramas of Cracow and Lübeck,

views of Sarmatia, Hungary, Constantinople and other lands, portraits of rulers, and the last and perhaps most precious picture in the Chronicle — the map of Europe drawn up by the Nuremberg physician Hieronymus Münzer. The large pictures fill two facing pages in the Chronicle, so here they are given in two parts. Some of the views of lands were printed from one and the same block and do not show any particular place. At the start of each part there is a colour illustration in the manner of late fifteenth-century book miniatures — it is a 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

With this book the series is complete: together the six books cover the whole of the Latin edition of the Nuremberg Chronicle — from the creation of the world to the final colophon.

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

SARMATIA, POLAND AND CRACOW



Illustration in the manner of 15th-century manuscript miniatures

Of Sarmatia, a Region of Europe



Sarmatia

Of the Kingdom of Poland and Its Beginning

Since mention will shortly be made of Boleslaus¹, who was the third king of Sarmatia, I have resolved to set down briefly something also about the land of

1. Bolesław II the Bold (c. 1042–1081/82) — King of Poland from 1076; the chronicle calls him the third king of Sarmatia.

Sarmatia and how it came to earn a royal sceptre.

Sarmatia², then, is a very broad and spacious country, for the most part untilled and lying waste, and it lies beneath a most harsh sky. On the east it has the Muscovites and the river Tanais³, on the south the Dacians and Pannonians⁴, on the west the Bohemians, Moravians, Silesians and Germans, and on the north the German Sea and the Codan Gulf⁵. That part to which the name of kingdom belongs is called Poland. It bears two names: the part of the land where Cracow lies is called Lesser Poland, while the part where Poznań and Gniezno rise is called Greater Poland.

From Krakus⁶, the first duke, down to the time of the first Boleslaus, only dukes ruled there. In the time of the Emperor Otto⁷ the First, the most illustrious duke was Boleslaus⁸ — not the one of whom we shall speak in the life of Saint Stanislaus, for that one was his grandson, born of a son of Boleslaus who had formerly been a monk. This Boleslaus harassed the king of France and the German peoples with a victorious hand. At last, at the entreaty of the Emperor Otto, he put an end to that war and concluded a treaty with the Germans and the Gauls. And the Emperor Otto, seeing the greatness of spirit of so mighty a prince, which had become known to all Germany and Sarmatia, went with Duke Boleslaus into Sarmatia,

so that he might see his realm and power more clearly. The illustrious duke received him in Poznań with the highest honours. For three miles or more before the city he had silken stuffs and purple garments, adorned with gold and silver, spread along the road by which the emperor was to pass. And after the emperor

2. Sarmatia — the name ancient geographers gave to the vast lands east of the Vistula; humanists used it for Poland and Lithuania.

3. Tanais — the ancient name of the river Don, regarded as the boundary between Europe and Asia.

4. Dacians and Pannonians — ancient names for the peoples of Dacia (modern Romania) and Pannonia (Hungary).

5. Codan Gulf (*sinus Codanus*) — the ancient name of the western Baltic Sea.

6. Krakus — the legendary founder of Cracow; his existence cannot be proved historically.

7. The chronicle speaks of Otto I, but it was Emperor Otto III who visited Gniezno in the year 1000.

8. Bolesław I the Brave (967–1025) — Duke of Poland, crowned in 1025 as the first King of Poland.

had entered the city, anyone at all was allowed to pick them up and carry them off. He honoured the emperor with such magnificent and splendid banquets, spectacles and other ceremonies that he had no vessel that was not of gold; and after each course he ordered them thrown into wells whose depth no one knew, so that they were lost. Many other displays of splendour he arranged for the Emperor Otto, which the ancient history of Sarmatia relates at some length.

Then the emperor, seeing the generosity, the loftiness of mind and the abundance of riches of so great a prince, judged, not without reason, that this most illustrious duke was worthy of a royal crown. He therefore adorned him with a royal sceptre and diadem and honoured him with all the other dignities that a royal throne requires. And so that Boleslaus, now an illustrious king, should not appear ungrateful for so great a favour from the emperor, he offered the emperor as a gift the arm of the holy bishop Adalbert⁹, whom the Prussians had slain by a wicked death.

When the power of the kingdom had already grown, around the year of our salvation 1400 or a little before, the king of Poland died without offspring. At length the duke who ruled over Lithuania and Russia¹⁰ was elected king. Formerly he had worshipped idols, but at the time when the sceptre of the kingdom was offered to him, he embraced the Christian religion together with all the land he ruled. Thus he joined the Lithuanians and Russians to the kingdom of Sarmatia in such a way that they cannot be separated from it except by a fixed agreement. This most illustrious prince brought under the yoke, in a most savage war, the Prussians¹¹, a maritime people of Germany, and extended his realm still further. There stand the notable cities of Gdańsk and Toruń¹². There too is the most

9. Adalbert of Prague (Vojtěch, c. 956–997) — Bishop of Prague and missionary, killed in 997 by the pagan Prussians; a patron saint of Poland.

10. Jogaila (Władysław II Jagiełło, c. 1362–1434) — Grand Duke of Lithuania; baptised in 1386, he married Queen Jadwiga and became King of Poland.

11. Prussians — a Baltic people on the Baltic Sea; their land was conquered in the 13th century by the Teutonic Order, which Poland and Lithuania defeated at Grunwald in 1410.

12. Gdańsk and Toruń — Hanseatic towns in Prussia; they passed under Polish rule only in 1466 by the Peace of Toruń, under Casimir IV.

famous castle of Marienburg¹³, the like of which, it is said, no mortal has ever seen: it is fortified with many and varied buildings, walls, towers and ditches, so that no enemy has a safe approach to the castle.

A few years ago the realm was even larger, but the most treacherous race of the Tartars and Turks, attacking it, brought great harm upon all Sarmatia. For the land that lies beyond Russia, which the people call Podolia¹⁴, is all burnt out and laid waste, so that it cannot even supply travellers with their needs, although it is so fertile that the grass grows to the height of a tall man; and it is so fragrant with bees and honey that there is scarcely room enough for them to store it: they build their combs under the trees, or in thickets and woods.

The famous Hercynian Forest¹⁵, than which there is nothing more excellent in all Europe, runs through the whole of Sarmatia and spreads its woodlands around Cracow; through them anyone may travel as far as Lithuania and Scythia. With so many arms it wanders across that whole country and nourishes great herds of wild beasts. In the part of the forest that lies more to the north it bears the bison¹⁶, a fierce and enormous beast that greatly hates the human race but is excellent for eating. It is of a tawny yellow colour, with a broad forehead and horns, so that it is hardly fit for the hunter except with the greatest and most varied toil.

Of metals Sarmatia yields nothing but lead, and for no other reason than because of Saturn, who afflicts the land with bitter cold¹⁷. But there is a very great abundance of salt, which other distant peoples also use; this brings the greatest profit to the whole country, and the king has no greater treasure in the whole

13. Marienburg (Polish Malbork) — seat of the Grand Master of the Teutonic Order, one of the largest brick castles in the world; the Order's own mercenaries sold it to Poland in 1457.

14. Podolia — a fertile plain on the upper Dniester and Bug, in western Ukraine today; in the 15th century it was often ravaged by the Crimean Tartars.

15. Hercynian Forest — the ancient name of the great upland forests of Central Europe; here it means the forests of the Carpathians and Poland.

16. Bison (wisent) — the European bison; today it survives chiefly in the Białowieża Forest on the Polish–Belarusian border.

17. In medieval astrology, cold and the metal lead belonged to Saturn.

realm. For under the earth huge blocks of salt are cut out¹⁸, while above ground another kind of salt is boiled out of water. Sarmatia is also a fertile and most bountiful land, rich in every kind of fruit and in all that the human body needs for its nourishment.

Now we must add something about the illustrious offspring of the most noble prince Ladislaus, of whom we spoke before. He had (as some say) three wives, by whom he had two sons: the elder was called Ladislaus¹⁹, the other Casimir. After his father's death Ladislaus was raised to royal rule, and so he governed the kingdoms of Hungary, Bohemia and Poland, where he performed most glorious deeds of war and enlarged both the realm and the Christian religion. For he had laid waste so much of the Turkish king's land that he even pitched his camp before Constantinople. While he was waging most savage wars against the Turks there, and both sides fought in a most cruel battle, the Pannonians turned their backs and fled, leaving the king with a few Sarmatian troops amid so vast a multitude of enemies.

Casimir²⁰, for his part, ruled as duke over Lithuania and Russia. When the king's fate became known to the nation, Casimir was proclaimed king by the Sarmatians. He took to wife the daughter of the Duke of Austria²¹, sister of Ladislaus who ruled the kingdoms of Bohemia and Hungary. By her he had six sons and five daughters.

The firstborn is called Vladislaus²². While still young he was elected to rule the kingdom of Bohemia, for he was endowed with a wonderful greatness of mind

18. That is, the salt mines of Wieliczka and Bochnia near Cracow, worked since the 13th century.

19. Władysław III of Varna (1424–1444) — King of Poland and Hungary, killed fighting the Turks at Varna in 1444.

20. Casimir IV Jagiellon (1427–1492) — Grand Duke of Lithuania from 1440, King of Poland from 1447.

21. Elizabeth of Habsburg (c. 1436–1505) — daughter of King Albert II, called the “Mother of the Jagiellons”.

22. Vladislaus II Jagiellon (1456–1516) — King of Bohemia from 1471 and King of Hungary from 1490.

and excellent counsel. For this reason, when Matthias, king of Hungary²³, died, he also obtained the kingdom of Pannonia. Next to him was a brother who had been given his father's name, Casimir; he was renowned for the highest intelligence and prudence, but at last, his illness growing stronger, he died²⁴. After him came the most illustrious prince John Albert²⁵, destined to be a marvel to the whole world. He performed many glorious feats of arms against the Tartars and other peoples, and on his father's death he succeeded to the kingdom, which, with favourable fortune smiling on him, he governs by his own virtue and the counsel of the best and most learned men.

The renowned Duke Alexander²⁶ is the fourth royal son; scarcely has all Sarmatia produced his equal in strength and loftiness of mind. Because of his steadfastness the Lithuanians accepted him as their duke after his father's death, and he is held to be the greatest glory of all Sarmatia. After him follows the famous prince Sigismund²⁷, who walks in his father's footsteps. He would shine with many noble deeds, if only some happy fate would favour him. The most renowned prince Frederick²⁸ holds the place of the youngest son. With an inborn, noble virtue of mind, leaving behind the empty tumults of princes and a restless life, he betook himself to a more tranquil station; and so, elected Bishop of Cracow, he afterwards became Archbishop of Gniezno. All these five most illustrious princes live to this day in magnificence and great renown.

23. Matthias Corvinus (1443–1490) — King of Hungary, one of the most brilliant rulers of the Renaissance.

24. Saint Casimir (1458–1484) — died of tuberculosis at Grodno; canonised in 1602, patron saint of Lithuania.

25. John I Albert (1459–1501) — King of Poland from 1492.

26. Alexander Jagiellon (1461–1506) — Grand Duke of Lithuania from 1492, King of Poland from 1501.

27. Sigismund I the Old (1467–1548) — later (1506) King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania.

28. Frederick Jagiellon (1468–1503) — Bishop of Cracow from 1488, Archbishop of Gniezno from 1493, cardinal.

Of the five daughters, the first married George, Duke of Bavaria²⁹, the second Frederick, Margrave of Brandenburg, the third the Duke of Pomerania. The two remaining daughters, unmarried, live with their mother.

Of Saint Stanislaus, Bishop of Cracow and Patron of Sarmatia

Saint Stanislaus³⁰, a man of great standing before God, is the patron and standard-bearer of all Sarmatia. He was born in the year of our salvation 1008³¹ in a village called Szczepanów³², of noble and distinguished parents, whose care it was to devote themselves to divine service in the churches and to please God with devout prayers. When he had reached young manhood, at his father's advice he went to the famous school of Paris, where he gave all his effort to the study of the best letters. He thus flourished in many virtues, but applied himself above all to sacred and divine law — not, as the lawyers of our age are wont to do, for the sake of gain, so as to obtain the honour of higher offices, but so that, if ever his place, rank or condition should allow it, he might administer justice as much to the poor as to the mighty, to the orphan and the ward, and render to each with equal weight what was his own, as the law commands.

At length, returning to his ancestral home, he came to Cracow, the illustrious city of Sarmatia. There, because of his virtue and learning, he was given the dignity of a canon. And when the bishop died, by the providence of heaven he was raised to the bishop's throne. Always maintaining the best order in his station, he took care to spread holy religion and the worship of God.

Now when he had bought a village from a certain knight, and the knight had died, the dead man's friends tried to reclaim that same village from the holy bishop by right of inheritance. He could not produce evidence of the agreement

29. George the Rich (1455–1503) — Duke of Bavaria-Landshut; his wedding to Hedwig Jagiellon in 1475 is the famous “Landshut Wedding”.

30. Saint Stanislaus of Szczepanów (c. 1030–1079) — Bishop of Cracow, killed by King Bolesław II; canonised in 1253, the chief patron saint of Poland.

31. The figure in the source is wrong; Stanislaus is usually thought to have been born around 1030.

32. Szczepanów — a village in Lesser Poland between Cracow and Tarnów.