

Double-page woodcut map with fine contemporary hand-colour in part.

OUTLANDISH CREATURES AND BEINGS FROM THE FURTHERMOST PARTS OF THE EARTH

Secunda etas mundi.

Author
SCHEDEL, D. Hartman

Publication date
June 1493.

Publisher
Anton Koberger,

Publication place
Nuremberg,

Physical description
Double-page woodcut map with fine contemporary hand-colour in part.

Dimensions
427 by 567mm. (16.75 by 22.25 inches).

Notes
‘The world map is a robust woodcut taken from Ptolemy… What gives the map its present-day interest and attraction are the panels representing the outlandish creatures and beings that were thought to inhabit the furthermost parts of the earth. There are seven such scenes to the left of the map and a further fourteen on its reverse’ (Shirley)

From the famous ‘Nuremberg Chronicle’, a history of the world, published the year that Columbus returned to Europe after discovering America. The text is a year-by-year account of notable events in world history from the Creation down to the year of publication. It is a mixture of fact and fantasy, recording events like the invention of printing, but also repeating stories from Herodotus. Even the world map is decorated with strange beings from the far reaches, including a cyclops and a four-eyed man. 645 woodcuts were used to illustrate the Chronicle, but many were used more than once, so there are a total of 1,809 illustrations, making it the most extensively illustrated book of the fifteenth century. The cutters were Michael Wolgemut, his stepson, Wilhelm Pleydenwurff, and their workshop. As Albrecht Dürer was the godson of Koberger and was apprenticed to Wolgemut from 1486 to 1489, it is likely that he was involved in the work.

The publication history of the ‘Nuremberg Chronicle’ is perhaps the best documented of any book printed in the 15th-century, owing to the survival of the contract between Koberger and his financial partners Sebald Schreyer and Sebastian Kammermeister, the contract between Koberger and the artists, and the manuscript exemplars of both the Latin and German editions (see A. Wilson ‘The making of the Nuremberg Chronicle’ 1976). Albrecht Durer, godson of Koberger, was apprenticed to Wolgemut from 1486-89, exactly during the period Wolgemut’s shop was busy creating the woodcuts for this volume.

‘The Chronicle would appear, at first glance, to follow in the tradition of a conventional structure of human history within the framework of the Bible, in analogy to the six days of creation. A brief Seventh Age follows, reporting the coming of the Antichrist at the end of the world and predicting the Last Judgement. This is followed, somewhat unsystematically, by descriptions of various towns. This narrative pattern conforms with that of the medieval “universal chronicles” written in Latin, as well as with vernacular chronicles. In the known Middle High German chronicles of the world, too, historical events are interwoven with digressions on the subject of natural catastrophes, wars, reports of the founding of cities, etc. Events occurring in other parts of the world are inserted parallel to the biblical stories. Hartmann Schedel chose to place particular emphasis on describing the most important cities of Germany and the Western world. In many cases, we find in the Chronicle the first known illustrations of the cities in question, along with the story of their foundation, the etymology of their names and a painstaking list of facts about the cultural life, economy and trades flourishing there in the period around 1490’ (Stephen Fussel, ‘Introduction’ to the Taschen edition).

The world map is widely regarded as the work of Nuremberg physician and humanist Hieronymous Munzer (1437-1508), who also contributed to the book’s text.

Bibliography
Shirley 19; Wilson, p.98-122.

Provenance

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