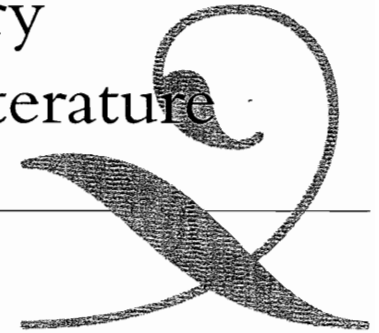


A New History
of German Literature



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ences from the culture of the non-Jewish neighbors. The adaptations of non-Jewish texts provide samples of the reception of non-Jewish (in this case German) texts by the Yiddish-speaking audience.

The Cambridge Codex has led to fierce debates among scholars of Yiddish and of German, but it has also brought the two disciplines closer together, since the texts it contains are a testimony to medieval Jewish literary activity that combined German and Hebrew traditions.

See also Post 1200

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Marion Aptroot

Circa 1400

Nuremberg becomes a hub of commercial activity and a center of book publishing and collecting

The Culture of the Book

Nuremberg in the 15th century was unrivaled among German cities as a center of literary activity. No other city of the time could lay claim to having produced the first pocket watch or the first globe, or to being the first town outside Italy to own a paper mill. The connection between an innovative book culture and thriving commerce may not be obvious until one realizes that the drive and demand for excellence that marked Nuremberg commerce were also basic to its literary preeminence.

Nuremberg was famous for its armor, its fine weapons of tempered steel, and a variety of handmade artifacts. The stamp "N" on a product guaranteed the quality of its workmanship. In part all this was possible owing to Nuremberg's location at the crossroads of twelve trade routes, which made it a center of international commerce. The routes fed raw material to this city of roughly fifty thousand, a population surpassed only by Cologne and Augsburg at that time. Nuremberg artisans transformed the raw materials into a variety of goods, which were then funneled along the same routes to citizens of European cities and communes eager to pay for "Nürnberger" quality. What worked in trade also served the intellectual life of the city, for along the same routes traveled ideas, manuscripts, new methods of bookmaking, and styles in art to Nuremberg, where they were noted, processed, reproduced, and again disseminated throughout Europe just like other goods and with the same emphasis on quality.

However, the city was not simply a manufacturing and trading center; it

was also the de facto capital of the Holy Roman Empire of the German nation in this period. It was in Nuremberg where the emperor stored his treasure, garrisoned the imperial regiments, and was a frequent resident. So it was only natural that government business was conducted at Nuremberg too and that officials traveled to the city from all over the country. Governments, parliaments, and courts all needed legal scholars, historians, scientists, philosophers, entertainers—in short, a population dedicated to the production, consumption, and exchange of ideas, manuscripts, and books. All this goes by way of saying that the culture of the book in the 15th century had long since moved from its monastic venue to the highly competitive marketplace. Nuremberg book printing houses in no way resembled the secluded monastic scriptoria portrayed in Umberto Eco's novel *The Name of the Rose*. By the 15th century, writing of all kinds—manuscripts, correspondence, legal or political or religious texts, how-to books of practical advice, informative calendars, the earliest almanacs, containing single-sheet broadsides of ballads, poems, or political tracts—had long since become a commercial matter, an artisanal and an intellectual métier, very much dependent on a flourishing economy for success. Printing only accelerated this trend, even as the competition between printed and handwritten books intensified.

With the advent of printing in Nuremberg in 1469, the city quickly became a center of the industry in Germany. The printer and book trader Anton Koberger came to dominate the business after 1470, keeping twenty-four presses working, with more than one hundred employees. He established an international book trade, and built warehouses for his stock in Paris, Lyon, Vienna, Ofen, Breslau, Krakow, Venice, and Milan. Nuremberg editions from his presses were famous for their fine quality. They also illustrated the close link between manuscript collecting and publishing. One of Koberger's justly celebrated productions was the 1483 edition of a 9th-century German Bible. He also produced a sumptuous bilingual (German-Latin) edition of Hartmann Schedel's *Weltchronik* (*History of the World*) with 1,809 woodcut illustrations, as well as an Apocalypse with illustrations by Albrecht Dürer. Koberger's industrial approach to book production drove smaller printers, who were unable to compete, out of the city, and in some cases out of Germany altogether.

The central role Nuremberg played in irrevocably changing the book culture illustrates both the nature of that culture in the 15th century and how closely intertwined manuscripts and printed books were during this period. Rather than being regarded as a technological breakthrough, a revolution, the invention of movable type was taken in stride, as simply a more efficient way of producing books. It meant that a greater number of more or less identical copies of a book could be produced in a short time and at considerably less expense than was the case for the traditional hand-copied codex. Of course, the printed book tried to emulate the manuscript, as cheaper goods usually try to copy more elegant and expensive products. Manuscript books, or at least a segment of that market, in turn, became more elaborate and decorative, so as to be clearly distinguishable from cheaper emulators.

Initially, movable-type printing affected primarily the business side of book production, by creating competition between traditional stationers who produced fancy manuscript books, and printer-stationers, who sought to manufacture cheaper versions. Printing had little apparent effect at first on the actual product. No new literary genres were created in the 15th century as a result of its advent. At best, one might point to the broadside or single-sheet publication containing, in addition to woodcut illustrations, a poem, a ballad, a sentiment, or political or religious expressions of some kind. These mass-produced, inexpensive publications—an early manifestation of popular culture—offered printers a quick return for relatively little investment of either time or labor (unlike more ambitious printing projects). While they did not represent a new kind of literature, they did exploit the intimate link between book production and commerce, thereby revealing print technology's potential for creating what today is called a mass market.

Nuremberg's rapid rise to preeminence as a printing capital—similar to Lyon in France—highlights the fact that long before the turn of the 15th century, long before printing, Nuremberg was an important center of intellectual activity and consequently for production and collection of manuscripts. Literary activity in Nuremberg flourished during the period immediately preceding the introduction of printing in large part because the city had become an important center for Humanist studies in Germany, but also thanks to its political and commercial importance.

Prominent families could afford to send their sons to study in Italy, where they copied and had copied classical and vernacular works of all kinds—literary, historical, philosophical, and scientific. Nuremberg's Humanists were prolific collectors of manuscripts from the mid-14th century on. Their libraries contained intellectual works of high culture as well as more personal items such as university notes, commentaries by the Humanists themselves on the works they collected and studied, and even, in the case of Hartmann Schedel—author of the *Weltchronik* mentioned above—domestic writings, such as recipes.

Hartmann Schedel and his much older cousin Hermann typify Nuremberg Humanist collectors. They traveled extensively in Italy, where they made countless copies of works they needed or wanted. Most of the manuscripts dating from this period were made, in the manner of the Schedels' collection, by scholars, in connection with their own studies. Illustrative of the fact that in the later 15th-century readers used manuscripts and incunabula interchangeably for their collections and research, Schedel's library—one of the largest private collections in Europe with more than six hundred volumes at the time of his death in 1514—contained printed books and codices side by side. Moreover, his library catalogue rarely distinguishes between volumes as *liber scriptus* (manuscript) or *liber impressus* (printed). However, the catalogue does make a distinction between parchment (*in pergameno*) and paper, since works written on vellum had a greater monetary value than those written or printed on paper. Most interesting in Schedel's library, from the standpoint of the print-

manuscript dichotomy, were the volumes that were so much a mixture of handwriting and printing as to make it impossible to categorize them.

The kinds of manuscripts and books to be found in Nuremberg libraries reflect a great variety of interests in ancient and modern history, literature, philosophy, theology, and science, as well as more pragmatic concerns. Alongside classical authors such as Plato, Aristotle, Tacitus, and Cicero were practical handbooks, such as the *Volkskalender* (folk calendar), a kind of almanac full of technical information pertaining to ways of calculating time, to astronomy, astrology, remedies, folklore, and other kinds of practical information for daily life. Folk literature, such as the pre-Lenten plays (*Fastnachtsspiele*) performed by artisans after parades and other activities that mark the carnival season, began to be collected at this time. More than a hundred *Fastnachtsspiele* from Nuremberg still exist; they show a progression from anonymous composition to more carefully crafted texts by such well-known Nuremberg poets as Hans Rosenplüt (b. ca. 1400), who is also known for his *Spruch auf Nürnberg* (*In Praise of Nuremberg*), a long poem celebrating the glories of the city.

Such were the kinds of works to be found in private collections. Comparing the record of one of these, Hartmann Schedel's personal library, with more than six hundred volumes in 1514, allows us to measure the difference between private collections and the still rare municipal libraries of the period. Here again, Nuremberg was in the vanguard, having had the first Ratsbibliothek, or municipal library, in Germany. City records mention the existence of a library as early as 1370. This was not a free-standing institution, but a room in the Rathaus (city hall) where books were stored and consulted. Since the records of the holdings in the 14th century were lost to fires, we cannot be certain what kinds of manuscripts were deposited in the library. Many of them undoubtedly pertained to law. Yet we find mention of aldermen or burgesses (*Ratsherren*) bequeathing their libraries to the city. These were varied collections that supplemented the legal volumes supplied by the municipality for use by its judges and lawyers. The *Rat* (city council) regulated every aspect of life within the municipality. While the members of the council numbered only forty-two, they were drawn from the patrician upper class, consisting of three to four hundred economically successful families, businessmen, lawyers, doctors, and the like, who accounted for 6 to 8 percent of the population.

Given the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a relatively small, homogeneous element of the larger population—the artisan class, which comprised some 50 percent of the population of Nuremberg, was excluded from power—the *Ratsherren* were likely to be similar in outlook and taste, formed as they were in the Humanist tradition. That leading citizens were so keen to bequeath their manuscripts to the Ratsbibliothek shows an awareness on their part of the importance of Humanist works in promoting an image of the city as a center of learning and culture.

Even though the early records of Nuremberg's municipal library have been lost, we can still trace the role of burgesses' donations in the first half of the 15th century. On March 4, 1429, Dr. Konrad Kornhofer, provost of Saint

Lorenz, deeded his library over to the Ratsbibliothek. It consisted of philosophical, theological, and scientific works. The donation could not be accommodated in the existing space, so a new room had to be added to the Rathaus. By 1432, the books, which had been stored in kegs, were being bound. Ten desks were provided, to which a certain number of the books were chained, while the rest were stored in containers on the walls. During the renovation that was undertaken by Ratsherr Hans Tucher from 1486 to 1488, the number of desks was increased to thirty-three and storage space for the increased holdings also had to be expanded. By this time there were 371 books and manuscripts, all duly catalogued, but far short of the 600 or so in Hartmann Schedel's personal library.

The increased inventory derived not only from legacies, but also from the council's active acquisition by commissioning specific kinds of books. In 1478, the council requested a German translation of Aeneas Silvio Piccolomini's *De miseria curialium* from Walther von Hirnkofen. Ten years later, it asked a Benedictine monk, Sigismund Meisterlin, to write a chronicle of the city. It also soon recognized the benefits of printing for the increase of the holdings of the library by the simple expedient of directing Nuremberg printers to donate copies of their published books.

The collections attracted scholars who in turn brought forgotten manuscripts to light. Conrad Celtis, a major Humanist figure in 15th-century Nuremberg, discovered the early medieval plays by the German noblewoman and nun Hroswitha in a monastery just outside of Nuremberg. His edition of Hroswitha's plays was adorned with preliminary sketches for illustrations by Albrecht Dürer, though the working drawings were apparently not from the master's hand. Nicholas of Cusa, who spent time in Nuremberg in the 1440s, had discovered manuscripts by Tacitus and Plautus as early as 1427, the latter containing twelve previously unknown comedies by the Latin playwright. The juxtaposition of the discovery of Hroswitha's and Plautus's manuscripts in close proximity to Nuremberg was important for the light it shed on how Hroswitha might have come by the Plautine models for her own plays.

We must presume that the link between the thirst for texts among the Humanists that inspired such finds and their own production of new texts was a close one. From the 1440s on, Nuremberg also became the center of activity for such notable figures as Aeneas Silvio Piccolomini, who was instrumental in bringing Humanism to Germany and who, as private adviser to Emperor Friederich III, resided in Nuremberg for a time in the 1440s. During his stay, he wrote an erotic comedy, *Chrysis*, in the style of Terence and a love story, *De duobus amantibus historia*. At the same time, Nicholas of Cusa, also in Nuremberg, wrote a treatise on astronomy that traces the movements of the earth relative to the sun in a manner that suggests he foresaw Copernicus's discovery of a solar-centered universe, though he did not feel he had sufficient evidence to announce a view so counter to Church doctrine.

By the 1460s we find a growing interest in near-contemporary indigenous

and foreign secular works in vernacular languages. Heinrich Schlüsselfelder translated Boccaccio's *Decameron* in 1460, for example. In the previous decade the patrician Wölflin Lochamer compiled the *Lochamer Liederbuch*, a book of lyric songs and verses. History, and particularly local history, also became an increasingly important focus. In 1493, Hartmann Schedel wrote his *Weltchronik*, at the exact center of which he placed a laudatory description of Nuremberg. Translated into several languages and sold throughout Europe, the *Weltchronik* promoted Schedel's view of Nuremberg as central to what was then regarded as world culture. Conrad Celtis, another key Humanist figure, wrote his own meditation on Nuremberg, the *Norimberga*, published finally in 1502, though completed earlier. As though presaging Weber's *Protestantism and the Rise of Capitalism* (and, indeed, Nuremberg was one of the first important cities to embrace the Reformation), Celtis notes both the spirituality of the city and the intensity of its material acquisitiveness. Nurembergers in their drive for profits, he said, were like bees looking in flowers everywhere for treasures and riches to bring back to their city.

What we have seen in this brief survey of the book culture in 15th-century Nuremberg is that collecting books and manuscripts served multiple functions for different groups of readers. How these different, but overlapping, groups used their books shows us just how narrow our modern understanding of the book has become. Whereas a modern reader conceives of a book as having a specific content, within a book culture like Nuremberg's, a book's content was something to be worked on by its user. The notion of the book was much more holistic than today, encompassing not only content produced by an original writer, but additions by readers, and the meanings created by the page layout, as evidenced by works like Schedel's *Weltchronik*, which left empty pages at the end for the reader to fill in at will. Books, both printed and copied, were read, studied, commented on by their owners, and traded for yet others in a lively exchange. In short, the prominent burghers engaged in bibliophilia used their acquisitions to express themselves in an active and productive way that is hardly conceivable in our own day. Manuscript collecting, book printing, buying, and selling, Humanist studies, papal and imperial politics, writing of all kinds, and commerce were inextricably intertwined in Nuremberg. Perhaps of no other place at that time, even of Lyon, can it be said that book culture was a metaphor for the life of a city.

See also 1027, 1457, 1500 (Dürer), 1515

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