

# Renaissance Nuremberg

Background Notes

*Beth Taylor - 12 Mar 2014*



**Nuremberg** woodcut by  
**Michael Wolgemut and Wilhelm Pleydenwurff**  
in the *Liber Chronicarum*, Nuremberg 1495



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## The City

Nuremberg was situated at the heart of the Holy Roman Empire. It was a free city, subject directly to the Emperor and acting as the unofficial capital where the Imperial Diet and courts met. It was pre-eminent in metal manufacture, its merchants having developed the copper mines of Saxony and Bohemia, and had many specialist craftsmen working in metal. The trades were not governed by guilds, as in most other cities, but were supervised by the city council. This ensured quality but also allowed for much artistic innovation. It was also a mercantile, trading city sited on major trade routes. The widespread international trade of the city provided cultural as well as business contacts and the wealth it created enabled local patricians – many educated at Italian universities – to support a large community of gifted painters and sculptors.

The city was an early centre of humanism, science, printing and mechanical invention, producing specialist scientific instruments. The first paper mill in Germany was established just outside the city in 1390 and the city was one of the earliest centres for printmaking in Germany. From 1470 the illustrated book trade was well established. Graphic art in the form of prints was an important part of the artistic output of the city, making images much more widely available.

The period 1490-1525 marked the peak of the city's wealth and this was a time when many major art works were commissioned. With the acceptance of Lutheranism in 1525 however, many artists experienced acute economic dislocation. The city council stood firm against iconoclasm thus preserving many important works of religious art. Most artists turned to portraiture, representative themes drawn from classical literature or daily life. The city's most renowned artist, Albrecht Dürer, embraced many of Luther's ideas and while his output reduced, he made portraits and continued to make religious art but only of biblically recorded personages.

The 1530's and 40's saw the erection of several richly decorated patrician houses, reflecting the social position and cultural refinement of their owners. These buildings demonstrated the assimilation of classical forms with ornate entrances and interiors.

## The Artists

### **Hans Baldung “Grien” (1484/5–1545)**

Baldung came from a noted family of lawyers and doctors. Trained in Strasbourg, from 1503 -1507 he worked in Dürer’s shop in Nuremberg as assistant, and was in charge of the workshop during Dürer’s visit to Venice in 1505-7. His nickname ‘Grien’ (green) appears to date from this period; it seems to have designated a favourite colour and served to distinguish him from other apprentices of the same first name, such as Hans Schäufelein.

Baldung is among the most novel of German painters and printmakers, depicting the superstitious, erotica and irrational alongside conventional subjects. He is noted especially for his depictions of witches. In his own lifetime, and among present day scholars he is considered to be one of the great artists of his time.

### **Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528)**

The most renowned of Nuremberg’s artists, Dürer was born and worked in Nuremberg. After training with his father Albrecht the Elder(1427-1502), a goldsmith, he was apprenticed to Michael Wolgemut from 1486 to 1490. He worked along the Upper Rhine, notably in Basel and Strasbourg, from 1490 to 1494. Having married Agnes Frey in 1494, he opened his own workshop in Nuremberg. Travelling to Venice 1494/5, he particularly admired the work of Giovanni Bellini and Andrea Mantegna. His preoccupation with artistic theory began at this time, culminating in his own writings, notably *Art of Measurement* (1525) and *Treatise on Human Proportion* (1528). Dürer’s *Apocalypse* woodcut series of 1498, the engraving *Adam and Eve* (1504), and the prints he made between 1511-1514 established his international reputation. He studied painting techniques in Venice and visited Bologna, Florence and Rome between 1505-7. From 1512 he was involved in Imperial graphic projects. During the years 1520-21 he visited the Netherlands. In the last years of his life, he concentrated on writing and portraiture.

### **Peter Flotner (1485/90 -1546)**

Sculptor, medallist, printmaker and designer from Nuremberg who popularized Italian Renaissance ornamental forms and grotesques through his plaquettes and woodcuts. Flotner often collaborated with the goldsmith Melchior Baier and the painter Georg Pencz to make fountains, cups, furniture and entire rooms for Nuremberg patricians. At the time of the Reformation, he authored Anti-Catholic broadsheets, and produced satirical medals.

### **Adam Kraft (1455/60-1508/9)**

Nuremberg's leading stone sculptor around 1500. Carved the *Schreyer-Landauer Epitaph* (1490-2) on the exterior of St Sebaldus Church (1493-6), the Sacrament House in St Lorenz, the *Stations of the Cross* reliefs (1506-8) for the route between the city and the cemetery, as well as numerous other sculptures around Nuremberg.

### **Hans Suss von Kulmbach (c. 1485-1522)**

An apprentice of the Italian painter and printmaker, Jacopo de'Barbari who worked for the Elector Friedrich the Wise in Wittenberg from 1503 to 1505. He probably moved to Nuremberg in about 1507 and worked in Dürer's workshop until about 1511. In March 1511, he became a citizen of Nuremberg and would have been entitled to open his own workshop. During the second decade of the sixteenth century, Kulmbach succeeded Dürer's teacher, Michael Wolgemut, as the most important designer in Nuremberg of elaborate altarpieces combining sculpted shrines and painted wings. He was also a successful portraitist. Indeed, in the second decade of the 16th century Kulmbach was the most important designer of stained glass and designer and painter of altarpieces in Nuremberg. In the years just before the Reformation, he played a key role in shaping the city's church interiors, most notably the eastern choir of St Sebaldus.

### **Georg Penz (c. 1500–1550)**

German painter, draughtsman and engraver. Entered Dürer's workshop in Nuremberg in 1523, and painted murals in the Rathaus based on Dürer's designs.

His prints of the 1520's include copies after prints by Dürer using the northern Italian style. After a period of banishment from Nuremberg due to his radical religious views, he returned to the city where his work took on a more sumptuous, Italianate appearance. (Penz may have visited Italy in the late 1520's). In the 1530's he made several large ceiling pictures on canvas - the first artist in Germany to conceive of ceiling pictures as a continuous whole – notably *Fall of Phaeton* for the main room of Lienhard Hirschvogel's Renaissance style garden room in Nuremberg. In 1540, he made a (second?) journey to Italy, and his paintings from this period show the influence of the art of Rome and Florence, especially in his portraiture.

### **Hans Schaufelein (c.1480/5–1539/40)**

German painter and designer of woodcuts and stained glass. Entered Dürer's workshop c. 1503/4. Left Nuremberg in 1507, and worked first in

Augsberg and then Nordlingen. The influence and example of Dürer are an important factor in his paintings and woodcuts.

### **Martin Schongauer (c. 1435/50–1491)**

One of Europe's foremost engravers. Like Dürer, the son of a goldsmith. His monogrammed engravings are notable for their compositional inventiveness and naturalistic detail. He was also a noted painter. During his *wanderjahre*, Dürer visited Colmar in the hope of studying with him, but arrived after his death.

### **Veit Stoss (c. 144/50–1533)**

A very successful sculptor who also made paintings and engravings. Trained in the Upper Rhine, he worked briefly in Nuremberg before settling in Krakow from 1477-1496. He returned to Nuremberg where he made a number of sculptures in wood, notably the *Angelic Salutation* for the church of St Lorenz. He also received a commission from the Florentine merchant Raffaello Torrigiani who was in Nuremberg from 1516-1518 for a sculpture of *Tobias and the Angel*. He was also commissioned to make a sculpture of *St Roch* for SS Annunciata in Florence which Vasari called "a miracle in wood".

### **Peter Vischer (1487–1528)**

Brass caster, sculptor and draughtsman, son of Peter Vischer the Elder (1455 – 1529). His work demonstrates his interest in ideas from the classical world and the Italian Renaissance, notably his portrait medals and plaquettes, the relief epitaph of Provost *Anton Kreiss* in St Lorenz, Nuremberg and the Renaissance style multitude of mythological, allegorical, biblical and portrait figures made for the tomb of St Sebaldus in the church of that name in Nuremberg. His visits to Italy in 1507-8 and 1512-14 may well have enhanced his ability to model in wax and to cast using the lost-wax technique. He knew Latin and was a friend of the humanist Schwenter and illustrated his works.

### **Michael Volgemut (1434/7–1519)**

German painter and woodcutter. The head of a large workshop which produced altarpieces, memorial pictures, portraits and designs for glass paintings in late 15<sup>th</sup> century Nuremberg. He was a leader in producing independent portraits and is famed as the teacher of Dürer. He and his stepson, Wilhelm Pleydenwurff were responsible for the 1809 woodcuts illustrations and the text layout of the Nuremberg Chronicle.

## The Humanists

### **Pangratz Bernhauht, called Schwenter (1481-1555)**

Also called Arctocephas, Schwenter was the son of a furrier. He studied the liberal arts at university and from 1504 onwards was employed in various capacities in Nuremberg, including as Head of the Office of Weights and Measures. He was the author and compiler of humanist texts in German translation (*Histori Herculis, 1515*) and chronicled the transition to the Reformation in the city. He was a friend of Peter Vischer the Younger.

### **Conrad Celtis, originally Konrad Bickel, (1459-1508).**

Celtis studied initially at Cologne and Heidelberg. As was customary for humanists, he latinized his name. He was a travelling lecturer, both in Germany and in northern Italy, producing his first publication, *Ars versificandi et carminum* in 1486. He was named poet laureate by the Emperor Frederick III and presented with a doctoral degree at a ceremony in Nuremberg. He travelled to Krakow to study mathematics, astronomy and the natural sciences, and then visited Hungary. On these visits and on his later tours in Germany, he formed literary societies. In 1492 he gave a speech in Ingolstadt, calling on Germans to rival Italians in learning and letters. He was appointed professor at Heidelberg, and librarian to the Emperor in which role he collected Greek and Latin manuscripts. Celtis was a friend of Williband Pirckheimer.

### **Hieronymus Munzer or Monetarius (1437/1447–1508)**

Studied at the University of Leipzig from 1464 and was appointed *Magister* there in 1470. He continued studying in Pavia becoming a doctor of medicine there in 1477. He settled in Nuremberg as a doctor, writing medical reports and a booklet on wine. One of the main figures in the humanist circle of the city, and a rich man from family trading interests, he had a comprehensive library and worked on cosmography and astronomy. He travelled in Italy, the Netherlands and western Europe at various periods between 1483-1495, reporting on his travels in a Latin text. A friend of Hartman Schedel, he contributed geographical sections to the Nuremberg Chronicle including the first printed map of Germany.

### **Williband Pirckheimer (1470-1530)**

The son of a lawyer, Pirckheimer studied law in Italy, at Padua and Pavia. He was a member of a group of Nuremberg humanists, including Conrad Celtis, Sebald Schreyer and Hatmann Schedel, author of the Nuremberg Chronicle. He was consulted by the Holy Roman Emperor, Maximilian I on literary matters. He served as a member of the governing council of

Nuremberg and commanded Imperial troops during a war against the Swiss. A close friend of Dürer, whose display of classical and humanist learning in his works, may well reflect his discussions with Pirckheimer, he lent Dürer the money for his visit to Italy in 1506-7. Pirckheimer was also a close friend of the humanist and theologian, Erasmus.

### **Hartman Schedel (1440-1514)**

Studied jurisprudence at Leipzig from 1456-1460, but also undertook humanist learning with Pieter Luder, following the latter to Padua in 1463. There he studied medicine and was awarded a doctorate in 1466. He worked as a doctor in Germany, settling in Nuremberg in 1481. Also a book collector, Schedel is best known for his writing of the Latin text for the Nuremberg Chronicle, a biblical and world history, based on passages from the classical and medieval works in his collection.

### **Sebald Schreyer (1446–1503)**

A Nuremberg merchant, Schreyer was a patron of the arts and a classical scholar. Conrad Celtis was a frequent guest at his house. Among his commissions were paintings from classical mythology for the grand salon of his house, his epitaph by the sculptor, Adam Kraft, and, with his brother in law, Sebastian Kammermaister, the Nuremberg Chronicle.

## **Suggestions for further reading**

**Bartrum, Giulia, *Albrecht Dürer and his Legacy*** British Museum Press, 2002

**Baxandall, Michael, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany*** Yale University Press 1980

**Exhibition catalogue *Gothic and Renaissance Art in Nuremberg 1300 -1500*** Metropolitan Museum 1986

**Nash, Susie, *Northern Renaissance Art*** Oxford University Press 2008

**Smith, Jeffrey Chipps, *Dürer*** Phaidon 2012; ***The Northern Renaissance*** Phaidon 2004; ***Nuremberg: A Renaissance City, 1500-1618*** University of Texas 1983

All the above have extensive bibliographies.



**Wenzel Jamnitzer *Mother Earth***, Table decoration purchased by Nuremberg City Council 1549.