

Liber Chronicarum

It is often said, and not without reason, that everything is in books. However, human book production has become so overflowing that we could also say that all that glitters is not gold, and that if we trace its history we will come across titles and works of the most inconsequential kind, together with real treasures. The **Liber Chronicarum that concerns us here is one of these great treasures, a paradigmatic example of excellence in the art of printing and engraving, a milestone in the history of printing, books and culture.**

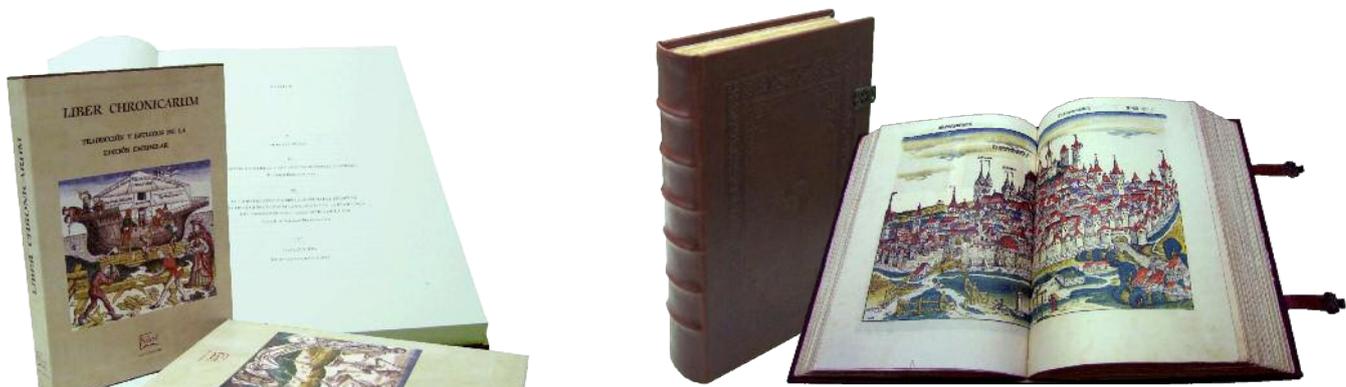
One of the most fruitful and at the same time most interesting moments in the human publishing panorama –of that “Gutenberg Galaxy” so successfully coined by McLuhan –must be placed, indisputably, at the dawn of its history, when the mechanics, instrumentation and the whole technique of the global process of book publishing was in its infancy, or if we may say so, in its infancy, which is what the etymological root of the word *incunabulum* means. In a broader and more figurative sense, the word indicated the place of birth and also early childhood, which in our case takes us back to the **year 1455 when Johannes Gutenberg printed his famous 42-line Bible in Mainz (Mainz)**, officially marking the birth of the printing press and triggered a phenomenon that would have a decisive influence on the history of mankind, in capital letters, and gave a new meaning to the word “illiterate”.

Strictly speaking, today, the word *incunabulum* covers any book printed before 1500. This etymological and chronological delimitation of the *incunabula* is particularly important for us, since we are speaking here to the reader about the *Liber Chronicarum*, the work of Hartmann Schedel, the bibliophile *par excellence*, the reader of the most important work of the *incunabulorum*, unanimously recognised as the *incunabulum* of all *incunabula*. Or as he liked to refer to himself, Hartmann Schedel, the book eater.

An exceptional protagonist of the incipient German humanism, of which his native Nuremberg was to become one of the most flourishing focal points, Hartmann Schedel presents us with the profiles of a multidisciplinary, multifaceted personality, of varied and multiple readings, displaying an exceptional erudition and memory, and with a compulsive collecting hobby that would lead him to collect the most varied and valuable objects throughout his life. His house soon became a veritable small museum, and his apothecary's shop a haven for the many friends and prominent people of the city.

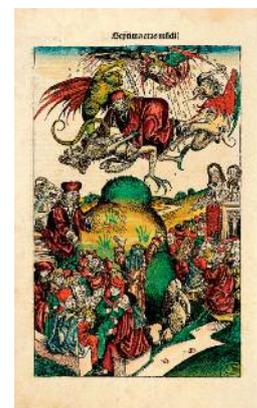
The other great protagonist of the *Liber Chronicarum* was the printer and typographer Antonio Koberger, whose figure as a businessman, merchant and promoter of all kinds of publishing projects reached exceptional proportions. Although we know that he came from a family of bakers in Nuremberg, there is little information about his intellectual and humanistic training, although his membership to a municipal group of advisors and his professional prestige would more than justify his subsequent incorporation into the select and influential group of the city's patricians. He managed what was undoubtedly the largest printing press of the time, employing over a hundred workers, which would eventually become a gigantic company not only for printing but also for publishing and marketing books.

Koberger was also the godfather of Albrecht Dürer. He would later print the Latin and German editions of his famous Apocalypse, the highest peak of German woodcut printing in book form in the 15th century. However, Koberger's most ambitious project and the largest woodcut work of the *incunabulum* period was undoubtedly the *Liber Chronicarum*, with over 1800 woodcuts, processed in the workshop of Dürer's master, Michael Wolgemut. Dürer was still quite young at the time, and under the guidance of his master he learned and perfected the art of engraving so successfully that he was soon to become the leading historical figure in this art. Dürer would later paint an excellent portrait of his admired master. Undoubtedly the simple knowledge that in some way the *Chronicarum* engravings can bear the touch of the young Dürer gives the book an added charm.





In any case, Koberger did an exemplary job, faithfully executing with his workers the sketches and designs that Schedel himself had drawn for each folio. **Both the Latin edition and the German version of the *Chronicarum*, which would see the light of day at the end of the same year, represent the summits of typographic printing that are difficult to surpass.** Everything in them exudes harmony and beauty. The various typefaces, ligatures and nexuses, special signs and abbreviations, etc., form a writing box that blends harmoniously with an overflowing iconographic ensemble. If, as is often said, one of the fundamental differences between an incunabulum and any other book printed later is the fact that the *incunabulum* still retains a high degree of fidelity to the manuscript model, the *Chronicarum* is, in this sense, a consummate work of art.



On another level, the edition of the *Liber Chronicarum* was to become an extraordinary publishing project, which today would be described as ambitious, but which, at the end of the 15th century and only 40 years after the publication of the *Gutenberg Bible*, came to represent a risky gamble and a fascinating publishing adventure, with profiles of true madness and without precedent. The economic and social dimensions of this project were so considerable that we will have to wait until the 18th century for another publishing enterprise of equally gigantic proportions to make us recall this feat of the *Chronicarum*. We are thinking of the no less exciting adventure of the publication of the *Encyclopédie de Diderot et D'Alembert*, famous for so many and varied aspects.

In terms of **textual content**, the *Liber Chronicarum* still belongs essentially to the concept and genre of the medieval chronicle or *chronica*, which was widely distributed and enjoyed the fervour of the general public.

We cannot end this foreword without two further considerations which seem to us to be of considerable interest. The first is an invitation to the reader to ponder the importance of the unabridged Spanish version of the original text which can be found in this volume. It is the first and only version in its history. We at Siloé are doubly proud. Firstly for having successfully faced this enormous challenge, and secondly for having put an end to the lacerating injustice of the fact that one of the most beautiful and emblematic books in human history does not have a corresponding Spanish version.

As a final consideration, Professor Briesemeister's words are most worthwhile: *the brilliance of this monumental book is a remarkable illustration of the Gutenberg Galaxy*. That galaxy which we mentioned above and which, humbly, we publishers have the profound conviction to promote by publishing this work and disseminating one of the most coveted pieces in the history of bibliophilia.

It has seemed to us a noble enterprise to do our bit for a greater approximation and better knowledge of that golden age –some dare to say sacred– of the art of printing which is the *incunabulum* era. The Ministry of Culture shares such criteria, having distinguished our edition with its prestigious annual prize for the best published book in the facsimile category. If we succeed in getting the reading and bibliophile public –which here in Spain is becoming more and more widespread and cultured– then our books will also be of interest to the general public, who will also make them their own. In that case, the enterprise will have been worthwhile.

