



Buch, Einzelseite, Das Sonnenweib und der  
siebenhäuptige Drache (Apokalypse – Die Offenbarung  
des Johannes), 1498  
Holzschnitt: Albrecht Dürer  
Druck: Anton Koberger  
39.5 × 28 cm  
Eigentum: Museum für Gestaltung Zürich / ZHdK

Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528) is considered one of the most important exponents of the German Renaissance. His woodcut cycle of the *Apocalypse* manifests his mastery in this field. Dürer liberated the woodcut from its traditional role as book illustration and raised it to the same artistic level as painting.

In 1498, shortly after his first journey to Venice, Albrecht Dürer published his large-format *Apocalypse*, comprising one title page and a picture cycle of fifteen woodcut prints. The pictures on the right are accompanied by the Latin text of the Revelation of Saint John on the left. Dürer treated prints and painting on equal terms, freeing the woodcut from its traditional functional role as book illustration. Furthermore, he placed his monogram in the center of the bottom margin, prominently highlighting his authorship. With his virtuoso hatching technique, he uncovered new expressive possibilities in the woodblock print. By using dense hatching and the swelling and shrinking of lines, he created convincing shading and volume. The gloomy imagery of

the *Apocalypse* reflects the apocalyptic mood prevailing just before the outbreak of the Reformation. The ninth sheet of the series shows *The Woman Clothed with the Sun and the Seven-Headed Dragon*. Here, Satan appears as a seven-headed monster. The beast threatens the pregnant Mother of God, who is standing on a crescent moon, surrounded by the sun's rays. Two angels lift her newborn up into the sky, where he is received and blessed by the Holy Father. A fecund imagination, richness in detail, and inventiveness, as well as technical and artistic mastery, make the *Apocalypse* one of Dürer's most famous works. The book was also commercially successful. Within his lifetime Dürer published several editions that were spread far and wide along Europe's trade routes. This brought him not only considerable earnings but also prominence beyond his own homeland. (Vanessa Gendre)

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