

CRACOW IN THE EUROPEAN CORE

JACEK PURCHLA



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2. St. Maurice's Spear, presented in 1000 AD to King Boleslaus the Brave by the Emperor Otto III. Wawel Cathedral Treasury House

A city is the outcome of long-term processes, the result of many phenomena interacting with each other. Its shape and form present a specific kind of summing up of its civilisational development, and that is why urbanisation is so often invoked as a symbol of the European cultural heritage. The triumph of urbanisation is given special expression by what the British have called "creative cities," that is cities which have made a creative contribution to the building up of the universal values in our civilisation while at the same time maintaining their local features and pursuing their own, unique, identities. Cracow is one of these cities; while at the same time it is inseparably bound with the specific properties and *genius loci* of Central Europe.

The foundation at the roots of European civilisation is the great cultural heritage of Antiquity. The Rhine and the Danube were the natural boundaries for the influence of the *Imperium Romanum*, separating it off from the *Barbaricum*, a world composed of the Celtic, Germanic, and Slavonic peoples. The heritage of these peoples makes up the second stream of European civilisation. Charlemagne was the first to undertake the task of integrating the *Barbaricum* with the civilisation of Rome, shifting the border of Latinate Europe out to the Elbe. Beyond the *Limes Carolinus* were the lands in the valleys of the Elbe, Oder, Vistula, and Danube, inhabited by Slavs. These lands were not within the area covered by the process of Christianisation carried out from Byzantium, either, which in the 9th century reached Bulgaria, and Rus later on.

It was not until the 10th century that the peoples of Central Europe were mature enough to set up relatively strong political entities. The emergence of the new kingdoms of Bohemia, Poland, and Hungary meant the extension of the Western European model of statehood

into this region and brought about a territorial growth of Carolingian Europe. The process coincided with the programme of renewal introduced by the Emperor Otto III, who envisaged Latinate Europe as consisting of four sovereign components; alongside Italia, Gallia, and Germania, there was also Sclavinia now, that is the new realm ruled by Boleslaus the Brave of the Piast dynasty, first King of Poland. Otto's vision received its political confirmation at the congress held in 1000 A.D. at Gniezno, the original Piastian capital. The Spear of St Maurice which Otto presented to Boleslaus on this occasion, symbolising the new country's sovereignty and its membership of European Christendom, has been preserved for centuries in Wawel Cathedral as one of the most treasured national heirlooms.

The examples of Bohemia, Poland, and Hungary give a ready insight into the essence of European civilisation. The conversion of these countries' first monarchs to Christianity initiated the long process of acculturation in their respective societies. Christianity became the major factor stimulating the spread of civilisation in *Europa Minor*, the "Lesser" or "Junior" part of the continent. The statehood of the three new monarchies, which for almost the entire next millennium from the early 11th century onwards would include the territory of modern Slovakia as well, consolidated at the turn of the 10th and 11th centuries. Alongside the Scandinavian countries, these three monarchies would constitute the only permanent extension of the Western European model of the state. The factor which determined this situation was the ultimate division of Christendom in the 11th century into the West and the East.

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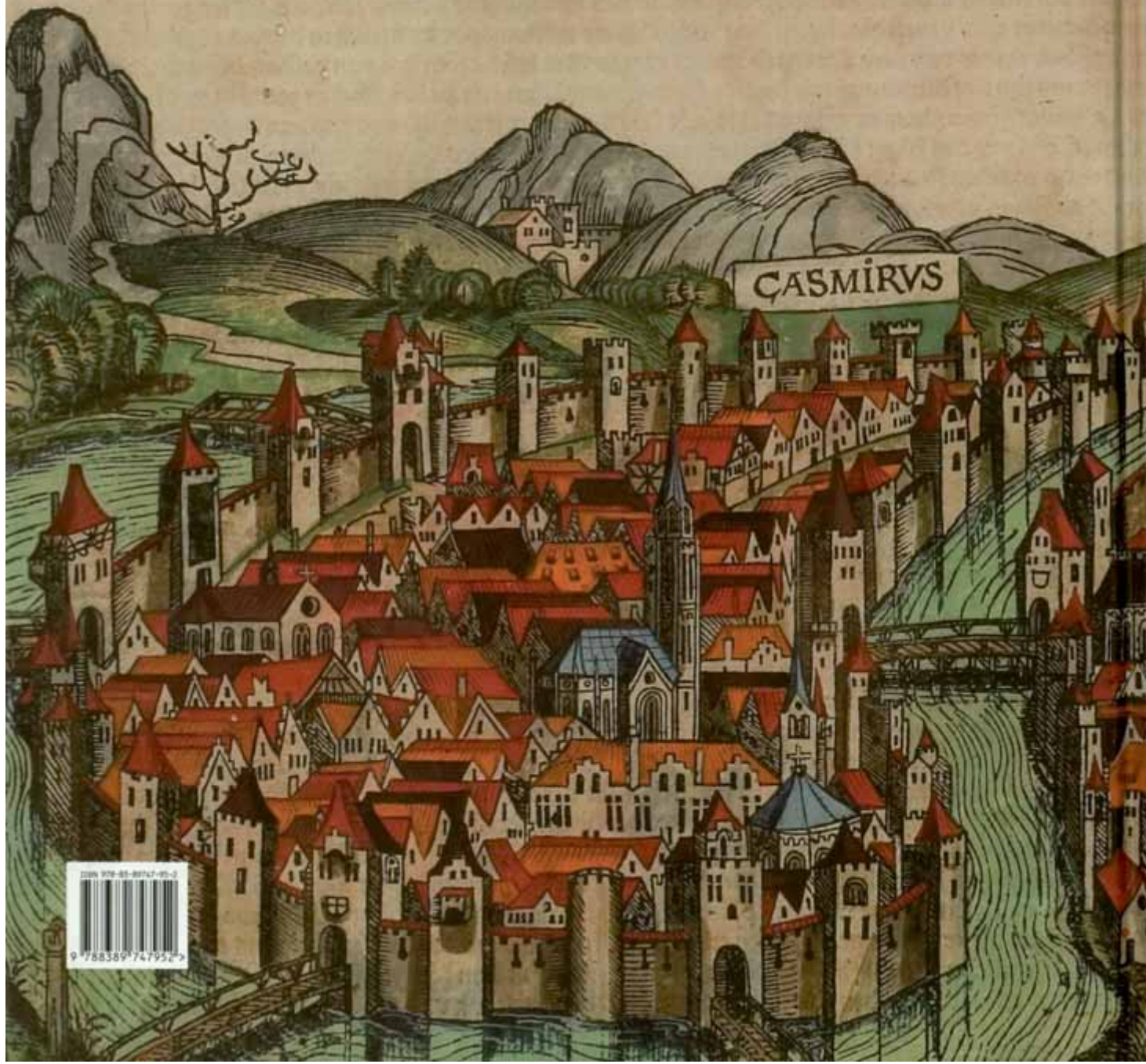
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View of Cracow from Hartmann Schedel's *Chronica Mundi*, 1493

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