



*The Crown and the Cosmos: Astrology  
and the Politics of Maximilian I,*

Darin Hayton

(Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh  
Press, 2015).

Review by: Natalie Anderson

*The Crown and the Cosmos: Astrology and the Politics of Maximilian I*. By Darin Hayton. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015. xiii + 312 pp. \$45.

**H**oly Roman Emperor Maximilian I (1459-1519) was highly aware of his own image and reputation as a ruler, and he did much to curate and ensure his legacy in both his own lifetime and beyond. Various cultural aspects of Maximilian's court, such as his music or art patronage, have been previously explored by numerous authors, including Larry Silver or Louise Cuyler. In *The Crown and the Cosmos*, Darin Hayton offers his own contribution and delves into the previously unexamined but, as he claims, critical role that astrology played in Maximilian's political and cultural agenda. As with many previous studies of his reign, this work demonstrates both Maximilian's efforts to carefully construct his own image as a ruler, and highlights one of the many tools he used to do so.

To modern readers, astrology might at first conjure up images of daily horoscopes and star signs, but Hayton skilfully uncovers some of the significance behind this medieval science, which often required highly logical and mathematical methods, and an adherence to a strict set of technical rules and regulations. By examining astrology through an appropriate historical lens, Hayton emphasises the respect that it was viewed with in its day. Astrology was also often used practically—such as to legitimise rule, and to justify political or military action—and Maximilian, Hayton asserts, was fully aware of this practical function of astrology and cannily made use of it throughout his reign.

Hayton's first two chapters, 'Astrology and Maximilian's Autobiography' and 'Astrology as Imperial Propaganda,' show how Maximilian used astrology directly in his own life and in works that he himself commissioned. While 'propaganda' is a term perhaps too frequently thrown around in historical contexts where it did not yet exist as an established concept, Hayton gives a clear explanation of and justification for his use of the word. And, if any late-medieval monarch's rule validates an adoption of the word, it is certainly Maximilian's.

Indeed, from the time of his birth, astrology was part of Maximilian's upbringing and life in court. Renowned astrologer Regiomontanus claimed that the prominent place of Mars, the Roman god of war, in Maximilian's geniture (personal horoscope) meant that he would grow up to be strong and courageous in battle and that, perhaps unsurprisingly, he would be a famous and honourable ruler. Later, as Hayton points out, in Maximilian's own loosely autobiographical works, such as *Weiskunig* and *Theuerdank*, astrology is there from the beginning,

demonstrated both in text and woodcuts, aiding the young ruler and foreshadowing his inevitable successes.

Maximilian surrounded himself with noted astrologers, such as Joseph Grünpeck, who wrote his own biography of the emperor (the *Historia Friderici et Maximiliani*), and Sebastian Brant, who produced a slew of pro-imperial broadsheets that used astrology and natural phenomena to predict and explain Maximilian's triumphs and setbacks. These two chapters contain the most compelling examples of Maximilian using astrology and astrologers as political tools, and they present a clear picture of astrology as playing a key role in Maximilian's court and legacy, with the emperor as a fully aware mastermind of the situation.

In chapters three through six, Hayton veers away slightly from astrology as it was utilised by Maximilian personally, and instead focuses on astrology as it was taught and studied in the universities, and how it was used by both astrologers and regular people. Hayton first examines the astrological curriculum as it was promoted by Maximilian at universities, particularly in Vienna. He presents a thorough survey of the lectures of famous astrologers, including Georg Tannstetter, and the astrological instruments they employed. These instruments themselves make for a fascinating study. The *Clipeus Austriae*, *Horoscopion, practica*, and ephemerides, among others, are presented not just as simple predictive texts, but also as complex scientific tools. While these chapters are interesting on their own, they occasionally feel more like a general study of fifteenth and sixteenth-century astrology, and sometimes lose their connection to Maximilian.

Hayton's final chapter on prognostications, however, brings together the ultimate combination of astrology and politics, as Habsburg court astrologers including Johannes Stabius, Georg Tannstetter, and Andreas Perlach interpreted a range of signs to prophesize Maximilian's path to greatness and his inevitable successes, such as the emperor's long sought after victory over the Turks. No clearer example of astrology's political usefulness could be offered to the reader than these men's efforts to promote a Habsburg agenda through their numerous works. The astrologers' devotion to Maximilian and, in turn, his promotion of them paints a picture of one ruler's vision of astrology as a crucial part of political rhetoric.

Additionally, throughout the book, Hayton provides the reader with numerous images of astrological charts, texts, and illustrations. These are both useful in helping to visualise the unusual and complex astrological instruments described and are fascinating in their intricacy and detail. They also reinforce Hayton's thesis with their pointed combinations of astrological and pro-

Habsburg imagery. As a whole, they make an excellent accompaniment to the text and exemplify the incredible range of document sources that Hayton investigated over the course of his research.

Through this in-depth exploration of a hitherto understudied facet of Maximilian's reign, Hayton sheds light on Maximilian's intense self-awareness as a ruler and also brings greater understanding to an all-too-easily dismissed medieval science. As a whole, Hayton's work is a valuable contribution to modern scholarship on Maximilian I.

*NATALIE ANDERSON*

University of Leeds