

Nature, Knowledge, and Politics in the Holy Roman Empire

This essay is a draft of the first chapter of my book project, currently entitled *Nature, Knowledge, and Politics in the Holy Roman Empire*. In brief, I describe the book as follows:

My book argues that the strategic deployment of science within politics began earlier than is typically recognized. In early-modern Europe astrology offered the most important and pervasive systematic body of knowledge about the natural world, playing fundamental roles in law, religion, politics, and society. Contending with the political struggles that defined the Holy Roman Empire, Emperor Maximilian I (1493-1519) used the science of astrology and its technologies to legitimize and advance his own dynastic programs. His use of astrology formed an integral part of his reformulation of political practice in early-modern Europe. Maximilian recognized and developed a broad political instrumentality for knowledge about the natural world. He displayed an unprecedented concern with enlisting not merely the political elites, who already had power, but also popular audiences that extended into the lowest strata of society. In his program of political outreach, astrology provided the ideal vehicle for communicating the Habsburg message to the broadest possible audience.

Chapters 2 - 7 trace this project out through Maximilian's world:

- 2) Broader socio-political setting in the empire from 1490-1530—highlighting the domestic struggles between the Habsburgs and the German princes, on the one hand, and the international conflicts with the French, Italians, and Turks, on the other.
- 3) Astrology at the court—examines four representative episodes when pro-Habsburg astrologers aligned their predictions with the emperor's goals.
- 4) Astrology at the University of Vienna—argues that Maximilian relied on the University of Vienna both as a source from which to draw astrologers into his court and as a body of experts who could be tapped for advice and intellectual support in his political endeavors.
- 5) Almanacs and Ephemerides as Habsburg propaganda—focuses on the career of Andreas Perlach, who for more than a decade produced astrological almanacs and ephemerides that supported the Habsburg political agenda
- 6) Imperial astrology in the pamphlets—argues that astrological wall calendars and the *judicia* and *practica* that complemented them became important instruments in Habsburg politics.
- 7) Prognostications and Habsburg politics—argues that the astrologers at the Habsburg court seized on prodigious celestial events as evidence of Maximilian's preordained right to rule and justification for Habsburg authority within the empire.

Maximilian and Astrology

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Draft

From the earliest years of his life Emperor Maximilian I was surrounded by astrologers and their interpretations of the natural world. Shortly after Maximilian's birth on 22 March 1459, Emperor Frederick III and Empress Eleonor summoned Regiomontanus to the imperial residence in Wiener Neustadt to cast and interpret the future emperor's geniture. At the time, Regiomontanus was one of the most skilled astrologers in Europe. He was a master of arts at the University of Vienna, where he collaborated with his teacher and friend Georg Peurbach.¹ For nearly a decade Peurbach had provided astrological advice to Frederick III's court in Wiener Neustadt as well as to Frederick's relatives, King Ladislaus Posthumus and Sigismund of Tyrol.² In 1452 Frederick had asked Peurbach to cast a geniture for his future wife, Eleonor of Portugal. Peurbach rushed to complete the geniture before Frederick departed for Rome where he would be crowned emperor and would marry Eleonor.³ Throughout the

1. Regiomontanus has received considerable scholarly attention. The standard biography is Ernst Zinner, *Leben und Werken des Joh. Müller von Königsberg genannt Regiomontanus* (Osnabrück: Otto Zeller, 1968).. On Regiomontanus's astronomical calculations and work, see the recent dissertation James Steven Byrne, "A Humanist History of Mathematics? Regiomontanus's Padua Oration in Context," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67, no. 1 (2006): 41–61.

2. On the close connections between the Habsburg courts and astrologers, see Michael Shank, "Academic Consulting in 15th-Century Vienna: The Case of Astrology," in *Texts and Contexts in Ancient and Medieval Science. Studies on the Occasion of John E. Murdoch's Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Edith Sylla and Michael McVaugh (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 245–70.

3. On Peurbach's authorship of this horoscope, see Helmuth Grössing, *Humanistische Naturwissenschaft: Zur Geschichte der Wiener mathematischen Schulen des 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts* (Baden-Baden: Valentin Koerner, 1983), 88. and Helmuth Grössing and Franz Stuhlhofer, "Versuch einer Deutung der Rolle der Astrologie in den persönlichen Entscheidungen einiger Habsburger des Spätmittelalters," *Anzeiger der phil.-hist. Klasse der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 117

decade Frederick continued to cultivate his relationship with the astrologers and turned to them for advice on political, social, and economic matters. He reportedly relied on astrologers to cast the horoscopes of contemporaries to learn their character, their fates, and even when they would die.⁴ By 1459 Peurbach and Regiomontanus had established close ties to the imperial court. When Regiomontanus cast Maximilian's horoscope, he drew on his experience working with Peurbach, modeling his geniture on the one his teacher had cast for Eleonor.⁵ Regiomontanus brought his formidable intellectual talents and mathematical skills to bear on the task of interpreting the heavens and their influence on the infant Maximilian. He combined precise astronomical calculations with rigorous astrological analysis to read out of the stars a mixture of prediction and advice suitable for the Habsburg heir. In his letter to the empress, Regiomontanus emphasized the mathematical and logical method he employed, highlighted the precise data he had calculated, and made explicit his use of technical astrological rules.⁶ The chart Regiomontanus cast and interpreted reflected the sophisticated and technical science the imperial family expected. Regiomontanus skills and knowledge set the standard that the young Maximilian would later expect from his own astrologers.

(1980), 268–73..

4. Shank, "Academic Consulting," 261, lhotsky kaiser friedrich III.@156.

5. On the similarities between the two genitures, see Grössing, *Humanistische Naturwissenschaft*, 90–91.. One of the surviving copies, BSB Clm 453, was copied by Regiomontanus.

6. Regiomontanus, "Epistola ad quendam Imperatricem iudicium astrologicum de ejusdem filio continens," ÖNB cod. lat. 5179. especially fol. 2r–4r

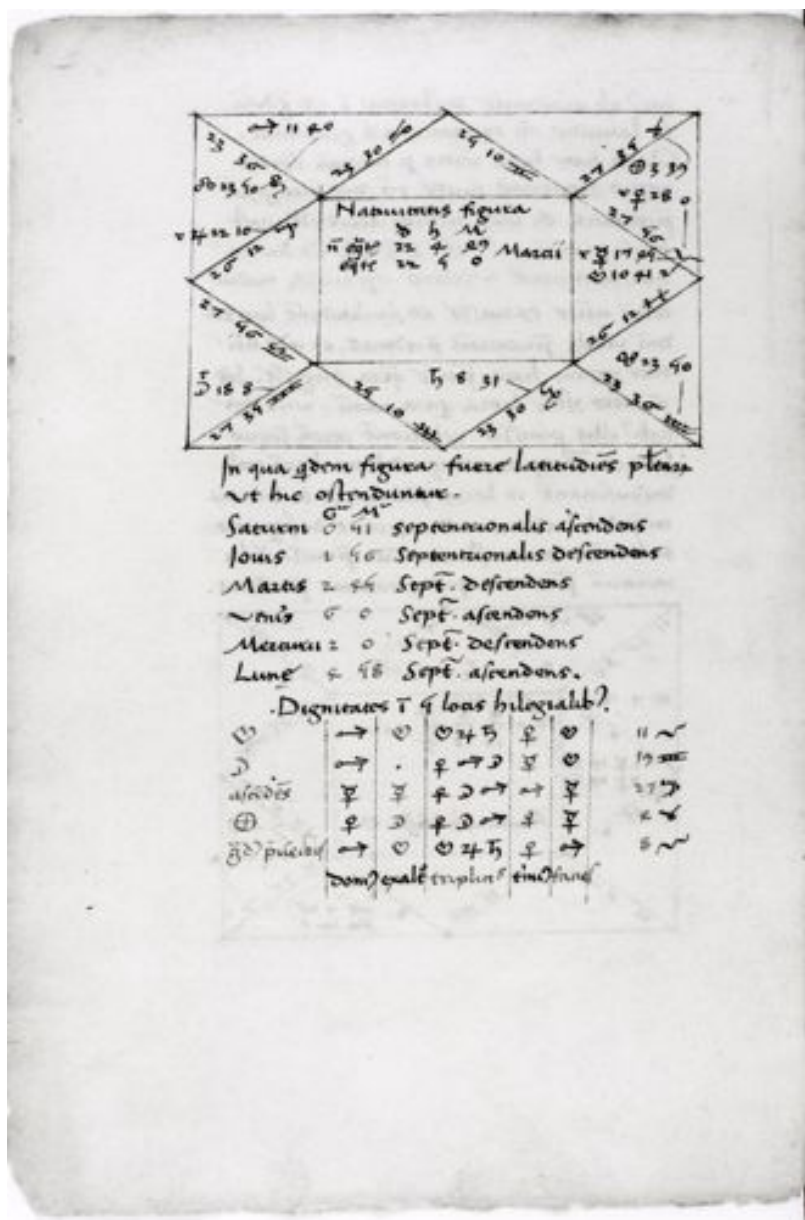


Figure 1. Emperor Maximilian I's geniture, calculated by Regiomontanus at the request of Eleonor, Maximilian's mother. "Epistola ad quamdam Imperatricem iudicium astrologicum de ejusdem filio continens." Ibid., 2v. Courtesy of the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna, Austria.

Regiomontanus stressed that the first challenge was calculating a precise time of birth. He calculated the time of birth using two different methods, the *trutina* associated with Hermes and the *animodar* ascribed to Ptolemy, and then compared the results. He concluded that in this case the *animodar* provided better results and so used it.⁷ Regiomontanus expended the effort to determine Maximilian's accurate birth time because the rest of his *judicium* depended on this initial step. He then presented tables of data, listing the precise positions of the planets, indicating the direction of their motions, their geometric relationships to one another, and their principal significations.⁸ These tables provided the fundamental observational and calculated data for the geniture.⁹ Having presented the raw data for his analysis, Regiomontanus turned to a detailed study of each horoscopic house. As was fitting for the Habsburg heir, Regiomontanus offered the most careful analyses of the first and tenth houses, those that revealed Maximilian's personality and constitution and the contours of his reign, fame, and honors.¹⁰ Regiomontanus reassured the empress that Maximilian would grow up to be a strong, courageous, and noble man. Although quick to anger, Maximilian would be morally just, benevolent, and

7. Ibid., 2r.

8. Ibid., 2v–3v, 5v–8v.

9. “Hec omnia praemissa sunt tamquam fundamenta atque radices huius nativitatis & revolutionum eius sequentium. Deinceps vero ordinem 12 domorum observando ad iudicium huius nativitatis principale descendendum arbitror.” Ibid., 9r.

10. Ibid., 9r–11v, 17r–18r.

virtuous.¹¹ He would be bold in his governance. He would be bold and wise in battle, defeat his enemies, and be gracious but strict in victory. He would be constantly active.¹²

Regiomontanus's letter to Eleonor and his horoscope for Maximilian locate astrology at the center of the Habsburg identity and imperial politics. As a systematic body of knowledge connecting the natural world to the social, astrology offered powerful political tools, both practical and symbolic, for the princes who controlled its production and use. In the *Realpolitik* of Renaissance Europe, astrology presented a set of mechanisms for evaluating the risks and benefits inherent in any action. Princes consulted astrologers to learn when to engage in battles and to negotiate peace agreements, when to avoid expeditions or journeys, and when to make public proclamations. Nero and his mother Agrippina, who had poisoned Claudius, waited until the most "fortunate moment foretold by astrologers" to exit the palace and claim the imperial title.¹³ Rulers also consulted the stars when evaluating possible marriages, as Frederick III had before he married Eleonor. The imperial astrologer Johannes Nihili of Bohemia accompanied Frederick to Rome for his coronation and marriage to Eleonor, where he recommended dates for both events.¹⁴ When the bride failed to arrive in time to celebrate the marriage on 22 January

11. Ibid., 11r.

12. Ibid., 18r.

13. tacitus annals@12, 68 See the recent article by Josèphe-Henriette Abry, Josèphe-Henriette Abry, "What was Agrippina Waiting For? (Tacitus, Ann. XII, 68-69)," in *Horoscopes and Public Spheres. Essays on the History of Astrology*, ed. Günther Oestmann, H. Darrel Rutkin, and Kocku von Stuckrad, Religion and Society, vol. 42 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), 37–48.

14. Shank, "Academic Consulting," 262.

1452, Nihili probably calculated the next propitious date 16 March 1452, which enjoyed a favorable Mercury-Venus conjunction.¹⁵ Astrology also promised to provide insights into the inclinations and dispositions of a prince's enemies, allies, and subjects. Frederick III consulted astrologers to gauge the character, fates, and deaths of his contemporaries¹⁶ Frederick's long-time enemy, the Hungarian Matthias Corvinus, had his astrologer cast Frederick's own geniture before he invaded Austria in 1485.¹⁷ Astrologers also served their patrons by identifying potential enemies and dangers. On a practical level, astrology could both guide and justify political action.

Beyond these pragmatic benefits, astrology also functioned symbolically to legitimize a dynasty or rule. Since the earliest years of the Roman Empire, emperors had deployed astrology to establish their legitimacy by portraying their rule as the realization of a greater destiny. Augustus had his sign, Capricorn, stamped on coins and put on jewelry throughout the empire in an effort to associate his reign with a new era.¹⁸ The political function of astrology was placed on a more robust intellectual foundation in the Islamic tradition. Most importantly, Abu Mashar's *On Great Conjunctions* demonstrated the

15. Ibid.; Grössing and Stuhlhofer, "Versuch einer Deutung der Rolle der Astrologie," 280.

16. Alphons Lhotsky, "Kaiser Friedrich III.: Sein Leben und seine Persönlichkeit," in *Aufsätze und Vorträge*, ed. Hans Wagner and Heinrich Koller (Vienna: Verlag für Geschichte und Politik), , 156.. See also Grössing, *Humanistische Naturwissenschaft*, 88.

17. Bylica's horoscope for Frederick survives in Martin Bylica, "Nativitates," BJ cod. 3225. , . 11r fol. 11r fol. 11r See also Darin Hayton, "Martin Bylica at the Court of Matthias Corvinus: Astrology and Politics in Renaissance Hungary," *Centaureus* 49 (2007), 193.

18. Tamsyn Barton, *Ancient Astrology*. (London: Routledge, 1994), 40–41; Alfred Schmid, *Augustus und die Macht der Sterne. Antike Astrologie und die Etablierung der Monarchie in Rom* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2005), PAGES.

connection between the conjunctions of planets—especially conjunctions between Jupiter and Saturn—and political dynasties and religions.¹⁹ Abu Mashar's *On Great Conjunctions* was translated into Latin in the twelfth century and quickly became the most important astrological text to correlate large-scale historical changes to the motions of the heavens.²⁰ Princes used astrology to locate the basis for their authority in the stars, demonstrating the natural source of their authority and legitimizing their rule as the realization of a divine plan. At the physical level, the celestial motions were the cause of all change on earth. Although individual freewill was protected from astral influence, astrologers had long argued that the motions of the planets influenced collective actions. In this way, astrology provided a natural cause for societal changes. At the same time, the stars were considered signs from God. The skilled astrologer could read God's will in the motions of the planets and stars. This dual physical-theological understanding of astrology simultaneously undermined efforts by adversaries to reject a prince's authority and reinforced a prince's claims to power. Consequently, during periods of political instability or regime change, astrology's political significance grew.²¹

19. See the excellent critical edition Abū Ma'šār, *On Historical Astrology. The Book of Religions and Dynasties (On the Great Conjunctions)*, trans. Keiji Yamamoto and Charles Burnett, vol. 2: The Latin Versions (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

20. For a general survey the importance of Abu Mashar's *On Great Conjunctions* for the history of the Catholic Church, see J. D. North, "Astrology and the Fortunes of Churches," in *Stars, Minds and Fate: Essays in Ancient and Medieval Cosmology*, ed. J. D. North (London: Hambledon, 1989), 59–89.. A more detailed and specific study is Laura Ackerman Smoller, *History, Prophecy, and the Stars. The Christian Astrology of Pierre d'Ailly, 1350-1420* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

21. For a good discussion of astrology's role in establishing the legitimacy of the early Roman emperors, see Schmid, *Augustus und die Macht der Sterne*. especially 245–77

Horoscopes and astrological history helped to establish legitimacy in the person of the emperor. For Maximilian, who was obsessed with strengthening his own authority and through him the authority of the House of Habsburg, particularly in the face of sustained opposition from the German princes and electors as well as foreign kingdoms, astrology provided an ideal political and dynastic tool for locating legitimacy and authority in Maximilian himself.²² The importance of astrology for Maximilian's self-presentation and his conviction that astrology played a fundamental and systematic role in politics is revealed in the emperor's sustained efforts to associate himself with astrologers and astrology. From his earliest efforts to write his autobiography to his mature works, Maximilian repeatedly drew on astrology to structure and understand his own life and emphasized its importance for his own political program. Because Maximilian's autobiographical works increasingly functioned as mirror of princes literature, his emphasis on astrology should be seen as an argument for the place of astrology in contemporary politics. For Maximilian, the ideal, modern prince was educated and skilled in astrology, relied on astrologers as key political advisors, and situated astrology at the center of his political program.

Maximilian's early encounter with astrology echoed throughout his autobiographical works. No early modern prince worked harder than Maximilian or expended more effort to shape and control his image, both for his contemporaries and for posterity. He was obsessed with his *Gedechtnus*, his memorial, which served as a form of self-aggrandizing propaganda for himself and the Habsburg family. Further, his

22. On Maximilian's use of visual strategies for establishing his authority, see Larry Silver, *Marketing Maximilian. The Visual Ideology of a Holy Roman Emperor* (Princeton, NJ: Princetion University Press, 2008), PAGE; Heather Kathryn Suzanne Madar, "History Made Visible: Visual Strategies in the Memorial Project of Maximilian I" (University of California, Berkeley, 2003).

Gedechtnus was centrally concerned with memorializing and institutionalizing his image.²³ His massive autobiographical corpus—including his *Theuerdank*, *Weisskunig*, *Freydal*, and *Ehrenpforte*, his genealogical projects and his various triumphal celebrations—was conceived and executed to project a carefully crafted image of the emperor.²⁴ To realize his dream of memorializing his own ideal image, Maximilian employed teams of humanists and artists from Innsbruck, Augsburg, Regensburg, Nürnberg, and Vienna. He dictated the core of his autobiography to his personal secretaries Joseph Grünpeck and Marx Treitzsauerwein, who then along with humanists like Willibald Pirckheimer and Melchior Pfünzing edited, expanded and polished the emperor's nascent ideas. Scholars such as Johannes Stabius, Jakob Mennel, Conrad Celtis, as well as members of the faculty at the University of Vienna combed through monastery libraries and excavated ruins looking for source material to use in the emperor's autobiographies. From these materials they recovered a mythical German past and to reconstructed imperial genealogies, including the elaborate family tree decorating Maximilian's *Ehrenpforte*.²⁵ Maximilian also relied on networks of artists to illustrate his works, including Albrecht Dürer, Hans Burgkmair, and Albrecht Altdorfer. He rewarded these scholars handsomely, ennobling them, paying

23. Jan-Dirk Müller, *Gedechtnus. Literatur und Hofgesellschaft um Maximilian I.* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1982). See more recently Heather Kathryn Suzanne Madar, "History Made Visible."

24. Larry Silver's recent masterful study puts Maximilian's efforts into historical perspective. See Silver, *Marketing Maximilian*.

25. Christopher S. Wood, "Maximilian I as Archeologist," *Renaissance Quarterly* 58 (2005): 1128–74; Frank L. Borchardt, *German Antiquity in Renaissance Myth* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971). See also Christopher Wood's wider ranging discussion in Christopher S. Wood, *Forgery, Replica, Fiction. Temporalities of German Renaissance Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

them large sums of money, awarding them incomes from mills, and appointing them to important and lucrative positions in his court. Together, these scholars reflect Maximilian's immense efforts to control and project his own memorial.

In his *Weisskunig*, written as a mirror of princes for his grandsons Charles and Ferdinand, Maximilian justified his obsession with his image, claiming:

Whoever prepares no memorial for himself during his lifetime, has none after his death and that same person will be forgotten along with the sound of the bell that tolls his passing. And so the money I spend on my memorial is not lost; rather, to spare expense on my memorial is to suppress my future reputation. For what I do not produce towards my own memorial during my lifetime will not be celebrated after my death by you or anybody else.²⁶

Maximilian never intended his autobiographical works merely to reflect his deeds. Instead, he used them to construct an idealized portrait of the prince, his education, his skills, his interests, and his patronage practices. His *Weisskunig* was merely one part of a larger publicity program that projected his image to all levels of society, from the aristocratic and traditional spheres of authority to the *Burghers* and emerging bureaucratic class that he used to staff his offices to the broad, scarcely literate citizens of the empire. The scope of his project is revealed in a handbill he produced in 1493, which he hoped would reach the

26. "wer ime in seinem leben kain gedachtnus macht, der hat nach deinem tod kain gedächtnus und desselben menschen wird mit dem glckendon vergessen, und darumb so wird des gelt, so ich auf di gedechtnus ausgib, nit verloren, aber das gelt, das erspart wird in meiner gedachtnues, das ist ain undertruckung meiner kunftigen gedächtnus, und was ich in meinem leben in meiner gedächtnus nit volbring, das wird nach meinem tod weder durch dich oder ander nit erstat." H. Th. Musper, ed., *Kaiser Maximilians Weisskunig*, 2 (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1956), 225.

electors, spiritual and worldly, prelates, counts, freemen, gentlemen, knights, servants, captains, magistrates, guardians, administrators, officials, village mayors, lord mayors, judges, councillors, citizens and parishioners, and otherwise all others of our and the empire's subjects and followers of whatever dignity, rank and occupation, who come forward or are shown this our royal letter or copy thereof to see or read, our every grace and good.²⁷

A key aspect of Maximilian's portrait was the emperor's interest in, knowledge of, and support for astrology. On the one hand, astrology provided a powerful mechanism for structuring history and imposing regularity on seemingly contingent events by linking political and social events to the natural world, especially through the predictable motions of the heavens.²⁸ Astrology, thus, promised to infuse Maximilian's various historical projects—his genealogies, his claims to Roman *imperium*, his efforts to link the Habsburg family to the major royal families across Europe—with natural necessity and divine authority. Astrology provides a thread through Maximilian's autobiographical works, from his earliest efforts to dictate his life to his late, more mature and popular efforts to portray himself as the idealized prince. The emperor used his texts to recount his familiarity with astrology and to gesture towards his patronage practices. He expected his artists to illustrate those texts with images that reinforced the his

27. Quoted in Stephan Füssel, *Gutenberg and the Impact of Printing*, trans. Douglas Martin (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 155.

28. Astrology certainly was not the only mechanism for structuring the past or imposing a pattern on the present. Astrology was, however, a particularly powerful system, as Johannes Lichtenberger recognized when he tried to justify his prophetic interpretations of the past and the present by grounding them in astrology. See Dietrich Kurze, "Johannes Lichtenberger (†1503): Eine Studie zur Geschichte der Prophetie und Astrologie," (1960).

own connections to astrology, either by portraying Maximilian at astrologically significant moments or placing him in the context that revealed his astrological knowledge and skills. Together, texts of various sorts—fragmentary dictations, Latin prose, and German prose and verse—and images represented the emperor as deeply influenced by astrology.

Early Latin Autobiography

Maximilian returned from his marriage to Mary of Burgundy convinced that he needed to dictate his autobiography in order to record his accomplishments and memorialize his character.²⁹ As early as 1492, a year before Maximilian was elected emperor, the humanist Heinrich Bebel had encouraged the young king to write an autobiography. Although pressing political and military engagements delayed the emperor's start, by the end of the decade he had begun to outline the contours of his autobiography.³⁰ He dictated his early autobiography in Latin to Joseph Grünpeck, his personal secretary and scribe. Grünpeck, a skilled Latinist from Ingolstadt, had been crowned *poet laureate* in August 1498. As he and the emperor were crossing Lake Constance after Maximilian's defeat by the Swiss troops at Dorneck, the emperor began narrating his *res gestae*.³¹ These early dictations formed the source material that court historians and imperial secretaries were supposed to fashion into a respectable autobiography suitable for

29. Hermann Wiesflecker, "Joseph Grünpecks Redaktion der lateinischen Autobiographie Maximilians I," *Mitteilungen des Instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung* 78 (1970), 416.

30. Hermann Wiesflecker, *Joseph Grünpecks Commentaria und Gesta Maximiliani Romanorum Regis. Die Entdeckung eines verlorenen Geschichtswerkes* (Graz: Jos. A. Kieneich, 1965), 15; Wiesflecker, "Joseph Grünpecks Redaktion," PAGE.

31. Hans-Otto Burger, "Der Weiskunig als Literaturdenkmal," in *Kaiser Maximilians Weiskunig*, ed. H. Th. Musper (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1956), , 16.

an emperor. Maximilian invested even this early, fragmentary work with the nascent astrological themes that would recur throughout his autobiographical corpus.

Central to the emperor's efforts to narrate his life was his birth, understood within an astrological framework. Echoing Regiomontanus's interpretation of his geniture, Maximilian located key aspects of his personality in the configuration of the stars and planets at his birth.

The young prince was born at the extraordinary hour of his constellation, from which up until today he has endured much suffering and also *diffortunia*, although God has protected his body from any physical harm. And still, in all his actions he had the contrary spirit of his constellation.³²

For Maximilian, his misfortunes were directly traceable to the dominant constellations at his birth. These malefic influences followed him throughout his adventures. Fortunately, God's mercy was likewise part of his constellation and frequently spared him from the worst dangers. The constellation at his birth was responsible for more than simply his corporeal health. Maximilian also located in the stars threats to his every action and the source for his warlike character.³³

32. "Natus fuit iuvenis princeps ille in mirabili hora sue constellationis, unde multas passiones usque in hodiernum diem sibi et diffortunia sibi habere necessarium est, quamquam [s] persona sua de periculis [de] corporalibus deus semper eum semper costodivit. Et tamen in omnibus agendis suis semper spiritum contrarium constellationis sue habuit." Maximilian, "Fragmente einer lateinischen Autobiographie Kaiser Maximilians I," *Jahrbuch der kunsthistorischen Sammlungen des allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses* 6 (1888), 423.

33. Ibid., 424.

Beyond recounting his own life within astrological terms, Maximilian gestured toward the importance of learning astrology, which he included among the seven liberal arts. As soon as he could understand Latin, the young king undertook the study of the seven liberal arts so that he could comprehend and teach the deeds of great kings and princes.³⁴ Astrology provided a means of structuring the actions of his predecessors and organizing history. Just as Maximilian himself was never free from the influences of his birth constellation, the kings and princes in the past had constantly acted under the beneficent and malefic influences of the stars. In order to understand how and why they acted as they had, Maximilian implied, required knowledge of astrology.

Although Maximilian never finished dictating his Latin autobiography to Grünpeck, the early fragments already contained the basic contours of his mature works. He expected Grünpeck, Pirckheimer, whom he charged with correcting his “soldier’s Latin,” and his other secretaries to use his Latin dictation as the basis for constructing a polished and complete autobiography.³⁵ When traveling across lake Constance after his disastrous defeat by the Swiss troops, Maximilian asked Pirckheimer to correct and improve his soldier’s Latin. Among the various features Pirckheimer and Grünpeck found in the emperor’s Latin dictation were Maximilian’s keen interest in astrology. Astrology enabled him to understand his own fortune and misfortunes and provided a guide for political action.

34. Ibid., 425.

35. On Maximilian’s comment to Pirckheimer, see Burger, “Der *Weisskunig* als Literaturdenkmal,” 16.

Historia Friderici et Maximiliani

In 1501 Grünpeck had to recuse himself from Maximilian's court when he contracted the French Disease.³⁶ For the young humanist who had recently railed against the moral corruption that he claimed had contributed the disease's spread through the Germans, his suffering was particularly acute.³⁷ Separated now from the emperor's Latin dictation and the other material he had been using to compile Maximilian's autobiography, Grünpeck had to suspend his efforts to write the emperor's autobiography. He did not, however, give up the idea of writing a history of Maximilian's reign. A few years later, after he seemed to have recovered from his illness, he once again used his literary talents to advertise his services to the imperial court. By 1507 Grünpeck had produced at least two new versions of the emperor's autobiography, his *Commentaria divi Maximiliani* and his *Gesta*. The *Commentaria* was largely a working draft while the *Gesta* was a more formal chronicle of Maximilian's reign up to the end of the Bavarian-Palatine War of Success in 1505.³⁸ Neither work appealed to Maximilian, who had by this time rejected Latin in favor of German for his autobiography. Moreover, the dry, chronicle style of Grünpeck's *Gesta*

36. See Darin Hayton "Grünpeck's Joseph Grünpeck's Astrological Explanation of the French Disease," in *Responding to Sexual Disease in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Kevin Siena (Toronto: CRRS, 2005), 241–74. See also Paul Albert Russel, "Syphilis, God's Scourge or Nature's Vengeance? The German Printed Response to a Public Problem in the Early Sixteenth Century," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 80 (1989): 286–306; Paul Albert Russel, "Astrology as Popular Propaganda: Expectations of the End in the German Pamphlets of Joseph Grünpeck (+1533?)," in *Forme e destinazione del messaggio religioso. Aspetti della propaganda religiosa nel cinquecento*, ed. Antonio Rotondò (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1991), 165–95.

37. On Grünpeck's use of the French Disease, see Chapter 3 below.

38. On the relationship between these two versions and Grünpeck's final redaction, see Wiesflecker, "Joseph Grünpecks Redaktion." and Wiesflecker, *Joseph Grünpecks Commentaria*.

failed to interest the emperor, who had already begun to outline his allegorical autobiographies, *the Theuerdank* and *Weisskunig*.³⁹ Whereas Maximilian had previously focused on recording his deeds and achievements, he now wanted instead to glorify them, to memorialize and institutionalize the Habsburg dynasty.

Although Grünpeck realized that Maximilian's interests had evolved, he continued to work on his Latin history, adapting it to fit more closely the emperor's new interests. He presented the final, illustrated version to Maximilian in February 1516 in the hope of winning the emperor's approval and using it as a draft for a printed version.⁴⁰ Each chapter opened with a drawing by the young Albrecht Altdorfer, Grünpeck's fellow citizen of Regensburg.⁴¹ Grünpeck's *Historia* along with Altdorfer's drawings highlight the emperor's interests and activities as well as those of his father, Frederick III. Although Maximilian never returned to Latin for his autobiographical propaganda, he retained close oversight of the project, including Grünpeck's final text with Altdorfer's accompanying illustrations. He annotated various passages, indicating where the topic would be treated more fully in his *Weisskunig*, and crossed out certain illustrations that did not conform to his self presentation. The emperor's close supervision was typical and ensured that his artistic and literary projects crafted the image he wanted to convey.

39. ÖNB cod. lat. 2645, 169r. See also Silver, *Marketing Maximilian*, 2.

40. The manuscript is in the Haus- Hof- und Staatsarchiv in Vienna, ms. Böhm no. 24. Many of the illustrations have been reproduced in Otto Benesch and Erwin M. Auer, *Die Historia Friderici et Maximiliani* (Berlin: Deutscher Verein für Kunstwissenschaft, 1957)..

41. Silver, *Marketing Maximilian*, 2; Hans Mielke, *Albrecht Altdorfer. Zeichnungen. Deckfarbenmalerei. Druckgraphik* (Berlin: Reimer Verlag, 1988), 68–83.

The *Historia* expanded themes already found in Maximilian's dictation and resembled more a mirror of princes text in which Grünpeck used both Frederick III and Maximilian to depict the ideal prince. Again, astrology plays a central role. Frederick had studied mathematics and the motions of the stars because he recognized the political usefulness of such knowledge. Knowledge of astrology was an educated, princely activity that allowed the Frederick to discuss the motions and influences of the heavens with his advisors and courtiers. In the illustration for this chapter, Altdorfer depicted the emperor discussing the influence of the stars with his courtiers and astrologers. The emperor points to a celestial globe with one hand and at the stars with the other. Two astrologers also point at the globe, and one gestures toward the sky. Other courtiers stand by to hear the emperor speak with the astrologers. The emperor might have been discussing Maximilian's future successes and failure, which Frederick claimed were foretold in the motions of the planets and the stars.⁴²

Following Maximilian's birth soothsayers and fortunetellers offered various and often predictions about the young prince's future—in Altdorfer's drawing a palm reader inspect Maximilian's hand.⁴³ Frederick was unsatisfied with these ambiguous and contradictory predictions and turned to the reliable science of astrology and consulted with the skilled astrologers. From them the emperor expected to learn about Maximilian's future, his successes, and challenges to his succession.⁴⁴ Altdorfer's drawing shows

42. Joseph Grünpeck, *Historia Friderici IV. et Maximiliani I. ab Jos. Grünbeck*, ed. Joseph Chmel 1838), 72.

43. "De variis adeuncium imperialem aulam iudicii de infantuli indole" Ibid., 81.

44. "Nec tamen imperator his coniecturalibus saciatus iudiciis, atque extemporariis (ut dici solet) coniectorum fabulis filioli ambigua fata, multarum ob rerum commoditatem certa sciencia complexurus peritos genetlicos consuluit, quid de Maximiliani sentirent futuris aut prosperis aut adversis

Frederick and his astrologers standing in a vaulted hall. One astrologer holds the young Maximilian's hand and gestures toward the stars.

Grünpeck also portrayed Maximilian as an avid supporter of the sciences. A contemporary German translation of the *Historia*, probably completed by Grünpeck himself, underscores Maximilian's enjoyment in reading astrological and astronomical literature, especially the classic texts such as Ptolemy.⁴⁵ Of all his books, Grünpeck claimed, Maximilian preferred astrological texts. By reading such books, the emperor hoped to learn the science of the stars and to understand when and how to apply it his political life. In Grünpeck's text, Maximilian was not content merely to rely on astrologer. Rather, like his father he wanted to possess the knowledge and skills necessary to assess the astrologers' claims. By the mid 1510s Maximilian had moved away from the more prophetic aspects of Grünpeck's text. The emperor crossed out the two chapters in which Grünpeck relied on prodigious phenomena to undergird his history. Maximilian preferred the more certain sciences, based on careful mathematical and historical analysis, to the more sensationalist and prophetic interpretations of prodigious events, which relied on the inspired interpretation of the prophet.⁴⁶

successibus." Ibid., 81–82.

45. Joseph Grünpeck, "Lebensbeschreibung Kayser Friederichs des III. und Maximilians I," cod. lat. 7419., 37v-8r.

46. For a discussion of these different forms of divination, see David Potter, *Prophets and Emperors. Human and Divine Authority from Augustus to Theodosius* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 15–17..

Grünpeck's *Historia* failed to capture Maximilian's attention in part because it was written in Latin and in part because it resembled too closely Grünpeck's earlier efforts to chronicle the events in Maximilian's reign. Nevertheless, Grünpeck dedicated the work to Archduke Charles, later Emperor Charles V, and portrayed Frederick III and Maximilian I as ideal emperors. Both Frederick and Maximilian were described as interested in and knowledgeable about astrology. They had sufficient skills to enable them to discuss astrological interpretations with their courtiers and advisors. Along with their knowledge, they were depicted amongst numerous astrological advisors whom they had attracted to their courts. Grünpeck must have recognized Maximilian's evolving interests, for he had shaped his *Historia* to conform to the mirror of princes literature. He holds both Frederick and Maximilian up as ideal princes, whose education, action, and political practices should be emulated.

During Grünpeck's absence from the court, Maximilian's project evolved. The emperor had realized that Latin was not the ideal language to propagate his image. His shift to German allowed him to reach a broader audience. It was at this time that Maximilian began planning his great literary monuments, his multi-volume vernacular autobiography that would include the *Theuerdank*, *Weisskunig*, and *Freydal*, his genealogical projects, and his *Ehrenpforte*. The emperor employed teams of humanists and artists to realize his grand projects, which were directed by a new set of advisors and secretaries, including Jakob Mennel, Willibald Pirckheimer, Johannes Stabius, and Marx Treitzsauerwein. Maximilian was a master at deploying the power of print to construct and convey his image. He recognized the greater impact that his vernacular works would have in solidifying and disseminating his

image. Maximilian composed his mature autobiographical works in German and further cemented his image as both a student and patron of astrology.

Weisskunig

Maximilian's *Weisskunig* was a fictionalized autobiography modeled on courtly romances, especially those in the Burgundian tradition that he knew through his marriage to Mary of Burgundy. He divided his own work into three sections that recounted his parents' marriage, his own birth and upbringing, and his military campaigns during his reign. Maximilian portrayed his military campaigns as the necessary reaction to the aggressions of envious neighbors. His victories were made possible by his superior innate character—displayed through his pure, white armor—and his exemplary education and rearing.⁴⁷ Maximilian's *Weisskunig* simultaneously provided an ideal model for his successors to emulate and was a powerful piece of propaganda, intended for a broad audience. As a mirror of princes, the *Weisskunig* was intended first and foremost for other princes, his successor, Archduke Charles, and the educated members of the court.⁴⁸ This included the burgeoning bureaucratic class in the empire, which Maximilian had expanded considerably during his reign and drew on to staff offices at all levels in his government. Beyond this more elite audience, Maximilian clearly hoped to produce a *Volksbuch* version of his autobiography in an effort to disseminate his image through multiple registers of society. His

47. On the importance and significance of the Maximilian's white armor, see hans-otto burger literaturdenkmal@19}

48. On the *Weisskunig* as a mirror of princes, see Georg Misch, "Die Stilisierung des eigenen Lebes in dem Ruhmeswerk Kaiser Maximilians, des letzten Ritters," *Nachrichten von der Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen* (1930): 435–59; Marjorie Dale Wade, "The Education of the Prince: A Mirror of Reality and Romance in Maximilian's *Weisskunig*" (University of Michigan, 1974).

model *Volksbuch* was Johannes Hartlieb's *Alexander*, a vernacular translation of the Alexander romance that recounted the education and reign of Alexander the Great.⁴⁹

As with his other projects, Maximilian relied on secretaries, humanists, and artists to carry out his ideas. The Augsburg humanist Konrad Peutinger, at the time one of Maximilian's most trusted advisers, coordinated the project.⁵⁰ For some time Peutinger had played an important role in the emperor's efforts to spread imperial news and propaganda, both in texts and images. Earlier Maximilian had commissioned him to publicize news of the emperor's success in the Bavarian War of Succession.⁵¹ By 1516 Peutinger was involved in many of the emperor's publicity projects, including illustrations for Maximilian's three autobiographical works, *Weisskunig*, *Freydal*, and *Theuerdank*, as well as images for the *Triumphal Procession*. The emperor dictated the bulk of the text to his secretary Marx Treitzsauerwein. The artists Hans Burgkmaier and Leonhard Beck completed most of the illustrations for the book.⁵² Although the emperor delegated the work to these artists and scholars, he retained close control over the final product, correcting versions of both the text and the images throughout the process. In this way, the idealized

49. Maximilian had at least one copy of the Hartlieb's translation of *Alexander* in his personal library. See Theodor Gottlieb, *Büchersammlung Kaiser Maximilians* (Leipzig: 1900), 103.. For a discussion of Maximilian's intentions to produce a *Volksbuch* edition of the *Weisskunig*, see Burger, "Der *Weisskunig* als Literaturdenkmal," 19–20.

50. On Peutinger, see Josef Bellot, "Konrad Peutinger und die literarisch-künstlerischen Unternehmungen Kaiser Maximilians I," *Philobiblon* 11 (1967): 171–90.

51. See Pia F. Cuneo, "Images of Warfare as Political Legitimization: Jörg Breu the Elder's Rondels for Maximilian I's Hunting Lodge at Lermos (ca. 1516)," in *Artful Armies, Beautiful Battles. Art and Warfare in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Pia F. Cuneo, History of Warfare, (Leiden: Brill, 2002), , 97.

52. On Peutinger's role as supervisor and participant, see Silver, *Marketing Maximilian*, 4–6.

image portrayed in the *Weisskunig* is a composite of the emperor's ideal and that of the artists and humanists who worked on the text.

In the *Weisskunig*, Maximilian again cast his autobiography within an astrological framework that traced his irreproachable character to the heavens and underscored his divinely ordained status. When he recounts his birth, Maximilian emphasizes the fact that a comet appeared shortly before he was born.⁵³ This comet shone more brightly at the exact hour of Maximilian's birth and then, shortly afterwards faded and disappeared, leaving no doubt that it was a wondrous sign from God:

After the child was born, the comet grew fainter by the hour, thus one reconginzed that it was a sign for the future reign and wonderful deeds of the child, and the exiled prince recognized by this comet that his [previous] prediction would be confirmed through the celestial influence. I [the exiled prince] want to say one thing: when the child came to maturity and to rule, he became the most warlike and most victorious, but also the kindest in expression, which however is a wonderful thing to see in one a bellicose and very aggressive man. In that one can recognize the comet's valiant and powerful sign of the comet, and its positive appearance, which pointed to the future⁵⁴

53. Musper, *Kaiser Maximilians I. Weisskunig*, 219.

54. "Als nun dasselb kind gepornen was, da nam der comet zustundan mit seinen schein widerumb ab, daruas wol zu erkennen ward, das derselb comet ain zaichen was des kinds kunftig regirung und wunderlich sachen, und der vertriben furst erkennet durch den comet, das sein red durch des himels einfluß bestât wurde. ... Ains wil ich offenbaren, nämlich als diz kind zu seinen jaren und in sein regierung kam, was er der sighaftigist und streitparist, und sein antlitz anzusehen, war er der guetigst, das doch an einem streitpern und an dem allerstreitperisten wunderlichen zu sehen ist." Ibid.

Here again Maximilian has located his hawkish character in the influence of the heavens. Whereas previously in his Latin autobiography he had attributed to the configuration of the heavens at the time of his birth, now he associated it with the appearance of the comet. Although comets were often considered harbingers of doom, Maximilian appropriated the comet to serve as both the source of his warlike behavior and his benevolence.⁵⁵ He had various contemporary models for this more positive association. Hartlieb's translation of the Alexander romance recounted how a comet had appeared at Alexander's birth. Perhaps more useful for Maximilian were contemporary representations of Christ's nativity, which emphasized the corona at the time of his birth.⁵⁶ Any doubts about Maximilian's efforts to associate himself with the birth of Christ were dispelled by the woodcut that illustrated the chapter (Figure 2). Cradling the infant Weisskunig in her arms, a wet nurse stands within a columned room next to a crib marked with the initials for Jesus. Although the comet was not depicted in this woodcut, the beneficent influences of three stars and the moon stream down upon the newborn child, clearly selecting him as the realization of a divine plan.

55. Hartmann Schedel *Nuremberg Chronicle* provides numerous examples of comets presaging deaths, famines, and disasters. See Hartmann Schedel, "The Nuremberg Chronicle. A Facsimile of Hartmann Schedel's *Buch der Chroniken*," (1493).for example, fol. 76r, 157r, 167v, 220r

56. Larry Silver, "Nature and Nature's God: Landscape and Cosmos of Albrecht Altdorfer," *The Art Bulletin* 81 (1999): 194–214.



(fol. 92r)

Wie die kunigin schwanger ward und ain sun geporen ward.

(Cod. 3032)

Figure 2. The young Weisskunig in his mother's arms while beneficent rays stream down from the heavens. ÖNB cod. germ.

Maximilian's birth opens the second section of the *Weisskunig*, in which the emperor details the ideal education for a prince. Maximilian described in detail the young Weisskunig's education, devoting a chapter to each of the important subjects that a prince should study. After learning how to read and write, the young prince should be tutored in the seven liberal arts as well as noble pastimes such as hunting, falconry, jousting, and painting. These early subjects provided the foundation for the most important princely activity, ruling well. To rule justly and fairly, he claimed, and to command the respect of your subjects, the prince must receive a humane education and must know more than his subjects. The art of diplomacy and political negotiations occupies a central chapter in the *Weisskunig*. The young Weisskunig studied books on human nature and disposition, on the estates and orders of society, and on law. He learned the science of politics and the art of negotiation. Success in politics, he claimed, depended on understanding the importance of five different issues: God, the influence of the planets, reason, gentleness in rule, and restraint in war and violence.⁵⁷ For a prince, particularly the ruler of the fractious Holy Roman Empire, diplomacy and the art of negotiation was of the greatest importance. However, diplomacy alone failed to provide the young prince with all the tools necessary to succeed because it did not help the prince understand the hidden and natural inclinations that motivated people. Without a firmer understanding of why people behaved as they did, diplomacy, negotiations, and the entire political process would fail. To understand how and why people acted as they did, the young Weisskunig needed to learn the art of astrology.

57. Musper, *Kaiser Maximilians I. Weisskunig*, 223–24.

Not coincidentally Maximilian devoted the next chapter to astrology and the art of stargazing. He underscored the connection between astrology and politics in the opening lines of the chapter:

And now after the young Weisskunig had studied diplomacy and negotiations and had learned them sufficiently, as previously mentioned, he then considered how in the future it would be necessary for him to recognize the stars and their influences as well as their effects. Otherwise, he might not correctly understand human nature, a topic that seemed to him almost completely absent from the political knowledge.⁵⁸

Because the motions of the stars influenced human nature, which in turn guided people's actions in all aspects of their lives and especially in politics, Maximilian claimed that in order to succeed in politics the prince had to learn astrology. He describes his own instruction in astrology. At first he had tried to learn the science of the stars through reading and self study, but no matter how diligently he applied himself he failed to make significant progress. He realized that the prince needed to secure the best astrologers to teach him the art, so he sought the "most learned doctor in astrology," who along with teaching Maximilian the science of the stars also compiled for him a more extensive and accurate star catalog that would help explain human nature better.⁵⁹ Maximilian soon mastered astrology and relied on it, either

58. "Nachdem und der jung weiß kunig nun das haimlich wissen der erfahrung der welt bewegt und zu gueter maß funden het, wie vor davon geschrieben ist, da gedacht er in im selbs, wie ime kunftiglichen notthun wurde, die stern und einflus mit irer wurkung zu erkennen; sonst mocht er die natur der menschen nit volkumenlich erlernen, das im in dem haimlichen wissen der erfahrung der welt ain mangl sein wurde." Ibid., 224.

59. Previous scholars have speculated about who this most learned doctor might have been. Below I suggest that Maximilian had Andreas Stiborius in mind when he composed this chapter. Stiborius was one the astrologers he had appointed to the University of Vienna. See Chapter three below.

through his own skills or through his astrological advisors, throughout his reign whenever he confronted a serious event. Maximilian's advice here echoed that given in the *Secretum secretorum*, the most widely disseminated mirror of princes text in the middle ages.⁶⁰ Written as a series of letters from Aristotle to Alexander the Great, the *Secretum* urged princes to consult with astrologers before undertaking any activity however trivial.⁶¹ Maximilian confirmed his mastery of astrology throughout his reign by always waiting for the most propitious moment to engage in any activity. Rather than reacting rashly, he waited for the most agreeable moment. This equanimity, which he claimed was contrary to human nature, distinguished him from his princely peers and his subjects and made him more suitable to rule.⁶²

Maximilian's fictionalized history reflected his own history in various ways. The woodcut that accompanied the chapter on astrology located the young Wiesskunig at the center of an astrological scene (Figure 3). The young prince gestures toward a wheel of fortune, while personifications of the planets Mercury and Mars stand in the upper corners of the sky, indicating that these two planets were important astrological influences on the young prince. The connection between Maximilian and Mercury is reinforced through the wheel of fortune that Mercury carried. The caption points to their

60. In general, see Steven J. Williams, *The Secret of Secrets: The Scholarly Career of a pseudo-Aristotelian Text in the Latin Middle Ages* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2003); W. F. Ryan and Charles Schmitt, eds., *Pseudo-Aristotle, The Secret of Secrets: Sources and Influences*, vol. 9, Warburg Institute Surveys and Texts (London: The Warburg Institute, 1982). Nine English versions of the *Secretum* have been published recently in M. A. Manzalaoui, ed., *Secretum secretorum: Nine English Versions*, vol. 276, Early English Text Society (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

61. See the chapter entitled "Of the dyfference of astronomy" in Robert Copland's English translation *Ibid.*, 331–33.

62. Musper, *Kaiser Maximilians I. Weisskunig*, 224.

importance: “The young weiss Kunig’s ascendants at his birth.” Although neither planet was on Maximilian’s ascendent in his geniture, Mercury was the ruler of his ascendent and played an important and recurring role in Regiomontanus’s interpretation of his geniture. Similarly, warlike Mars figured prominently in Regiomontanus’s analysis and had been implicated in Maximilian’s earlier autobiographical fragments as the source of his bellicose nature.

Maximilian’s *Weisskunig* portrayed the emperor’s education and training. A central feature of his training was his education in astrology, particularly as it related to the art of diplomacy and politics. In this work Maximilian gestured toward the courtiers and advisers he had gathered together at his court, though most frequently these advisors were involved in his education and training, were his tutors. As a piece of mirror of princes literature, the *Weisskunig* focused on the skills a prince needed to succeed. Maximilian’s *Theuerdank*, produced at the same time and by many of the same scholars and artists, portrays the prince in a series of adventures as he traveled from Austria to Burgundy. Whereas the *Weisskunig* focuses on the prince’s education, *Theuerdank* offers a fictionalized depiction of the prince in the real world. The two texts complement each other and offer a fuller picture of the role of astrology in Maximilian’s world.



Des jungen w(ei)ß k(unig) ascendenten in seiner geburt.
(Cod. 3033.)

Figure 3. The young Weisskunig learns the art of stargazing. Mercury and Mars, ruling planets from his geniture, stand in the heavens. ÖNB cod. germ.

Theuerdank

The *Theuerdank* was an epic poem in which Maximilian narrated a fictionalized account of his journey from Vienna to the Netherlands in 1477 to claim his bride Mary of Burgundy. Like his other works, the *Theuerdank* was the complex product of Maximilian's own intentions and those of his humanists and artists who carried out the emperor's wishes. Melchior Pfintzing, Maximilian's chaplain, and Marx Treitzsauerwein, the emperor's personal secretary, were responsible for most of the supervision and composition of the text. The illustrations were completed by Hans Schäufelin, Hans Burgkmair und Leonhard Beck. Although Maximilian had begun planning the *Theuerdank* as early as 1505, it did not near completion until 1512.⁶³ In 1517 the Augsburg printer Hans Schönsperger printed 340 copies of the *Theuerdank*—40 folio copies on parchment that were gifts to German princes and other important members of his court, and another 300 on paper for wider distribution and sale. The *Theuerdank* was the only one of Maximilian's various autobiographical works published during the emperor's life.

The *Theuerdank* recounts the many challenges and difficulties he encountered on his journey from Austria to the Netherlands. Throughout his adventures, Theuerdank, that is, Maximilian, was constantly accompanied by Ernhold, who aids the young hero in his struggles against the three fiends Fürwittig, Unfalo, and Neidelhart. Fürwittig, Unfalo, and Neidhart symbolize simultaneously the opposition Maximilian experienced from the Italians, the Germans, and the Dutch. In each case,

63. See Stephan Füssel, *Kaiser Maximilian und die Medien seiner Zeit. Der Theuerdank von 1517. Ein kulturhistorische Einführung*, Die Abenteuer des Ritters Theuerdank (Cologne: Taschen, 2003).

Maximilian is able to avoid their plots and conspiracies through the timely intercession of his constant companion Ernhold, who is easily recognizable in nearly every woodcut by the wheel of fortune emblazoned on his tunic. Ernhold does not change the course of events, either natural or social, so much as warns Theuerdank of impending danger and gives him the knowledge to avoid it. He reveals for the hero when chance conspires against his success and when the winds of fortune will once again be blowing in his favor. Ernhold's struggle against Unfalo, Theuerdank's most common adversary, is a metaphor for the struggle of knowledge to understand the world and to provide the insight into how best to exploit it. Ernhold, in other words, is a fictionalized representation of the role of astrology in Maximilian's life. On the one hand, Ernhold represents the figure of the court astrologer, who was constantly at Maximilian's side offering advice on all matters from politics to health. On the other hand, Ernhold personifies astrology as a body of knowledge that enabled the emperor to choose the most propitious time to act or helped him recognize when events and people conspired against his success.

That Ernhold represented astrology would not have been lost on contemporary viewers. His name, which meant Herald, is a clear reference to the planetary god Mercury. Mercury was the herald or messenger of the higher gods, conveying their wishes to the lesser gods and to humans. Virgil, the source of much of Maximilian's political propaganda, had used Mercury to convey the Jupiter's message to Aeneas.⁶⁴ Mercury's role as the messenger god provided a natural link to astrology, which enabled humans to read God's messages out of the stars. Consequently, Mercury was associated with astrology

64. See, for example, Marie Tanner, *The Last Descendant of Aeneas. The Habsburgs and the Mythic Image of the Emperor* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1993).

and mathematics.⁶⁵ The connection between Mercury and astrology was reinforced through the rich tradition of *Planetenkinder*, pictorial representations of people engaged in the activities most closely associated with particular planets (Figures 4 and 5).⁶⁶ Among Mercury's children were stargazers, often using some instrument, as well as people constructing and using mechanical clocks and other time-keeping devices. Representations of *Planetenkinder* circulated in manuscripts throughout the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Early printed astrological texts, including calendars and longer treatises, often included woodcuts showing the various children of the planets. *Planetenkinder* also appeared in architectural reliefs, adorning palaces, churches and other public buildings.⁶⁷ Early sixteenth century viewers were familiar with these illustrations. Within Maximilian's autobiographical corpus Ernhold's wheel of fortune links him visually to the image of Mercury in the *Weisskunig*, where the personification of the planet is carrying a wheel of fortune like the one decorating Ernhold's tunic. This visual connection, then, associates Ernhold with Mercury, the Lord of the Ascendant in Maximilian's birth horoscope, and emphasizes the important role that Mercury played in all aspects of Maximilian's life.

65. A. Hauber, *Planetenkinderbilder und Sternbilder zur Geschichte des menschlichen Glaubens und Irrsins*, vol. 194, *Studien zur deutschen Kunstgeschichte* (Strasbourg: Heitz & Mündel, 1916), 138.

66. See, for example, *blume regenten des himmels*@158–94

67. For the use of *Planetenkinder* on churches, see Amelia J. Carr and Richard L. Kremer, "Child of Saturn. The Renaissance Church Tower at Nideraltaich," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 17 (1986): 401–34.



Figure 4. A late fifteenth-century illustration of Mercury's *Planetenkinder*. The astronomer stands near the back using his quadrant. From the Schloß Wolfegg Hausbuch.



Figure 5. A late fifteenth-century illustration of Mercury's *Planetenkinder*. Four astronomers stand in the middle gazing up toward Mercury and looking at a planetarium. From British Library, MS. FOL.

Theuerdank's travels to the Netherlands were fraught with dangers and perils, arising from the unfolding of events in the natural world as well as humans conspiring to impede his progress. Ernhold is constantly by Theuerdank's side, offering advice and counsel, guiding the hero's actions and saving him from disasters of all sorts. When Theuerdank is hunting, Ernhold warns him against going into a particular part of the forest where imminent danger awaits. Armed with this knowledge, Theuerdank prepares for the attack and is able to defeat the bear that had been hiding in amongst the trees.⁶⁸ In chapter 52, Unfalo urges Theuerdank to venture out across an open field just as a storm approaches (Figure 6). Ernhold, providing one of the most common types of astrological advice, warns Theuerdank of the impending storm. His advice saves Theuerdank from harm as lightning strikes the ground exactly where Theuerdank would have been if he had followed Unfalo's counsel.⁶⁹ When Theuerdank became ill, Ernhold was at his bedside offering advice to the physicians on how best to cure the ailing prince. Later, Theuerdank consults with Ernhold before engaging in combat or jousting with another knight.⁷⁰ In each case, Ernhold offers the key for Theuerdank to avoid almost certain disaster by steering him away from acting at inauspicious moments, by staying his hand, or by encouraging him to act quickly before the moment has passed. In this way, Ernhold, like astrology, helps Theuerdank control the wheel of fortune,

68. Maximilian, *Die Abenteuer des Ritters Theuerdank von 1517*, Facsimile ed. (Cologne: Taschen, 2003), chapter 25.

69. Maximilian, *Die Abenteuer des Ritters Theuerdank von 1517*, Facsimile ed. (Cologne: Taschen, 2003), chapter 52.

70. Maximilian, *Die Abenteuer des Ritters Theuerdank von 1517*, Facsimile ed. (Cologne: Taschen, 2003), chapters 70, 83, and 92.

not by stopping it but by giving him the knowledge to understand when it is moving in his favor and when it might be moving against him.

The *Secretum secretorum* urges princes to consult with astrologers before undertaking any activity. The science of the stars, the author claimed, provided valid and useful knowledge about the future. In the *Theuerdank*, Maximilian realizes this advice given in the *Secretum secretorum*. At every turn he relied on Ernhold to protect him, to guide him, and to reveal hidden dangers. This fictionalized portrait of the young prince traveling across Europe with his astrologer-advisor at his side reinforces the ideal image of the emperor Maximilian wanted to convey. It was not sufficient merely to be trained in astrology, as Maximilian had indicated in the *Weisskunig*. The prince had to surround himself with skilled astrologers who could provide advice and counsel on any activity and in any location. Together, the *Weisskunig* and the *Theuerdank* provided a complete picture of the place of astrology in Maximilian's idealized court. The prince attracted the best astrologers, from whom he learned the science of the stars. These learned astrologers did not simply teach the prince, but were actively engaged in advancing the science so that it could better serve politics. But education alone was not sufficient. These same astrologers also served advisors to the prince, accompanying him on journeys, offering advice at tournaments and jousts, and predicting dangers in pastimes as well as in combat.



Figure 6. The illustration from chapter 52 in the *Theuerdank*, in which Ernhold's advice saves the young Theuerdank from a bolt of lightning. Ernhold is clearly identifiable by his tunic emblazoned with the wheel of fortune. Unfalo, on the left, had encouraged Theuerdank to proceed precisely when it was most dangerous. From

Conclusion

Maximilian's efforts to shape his own image reveal a ruler acutely concerned about his authority and standing. His broad cultural and political program, manifest in his genealogical works, his historical research, the literary and publishing endeavors, and his use of art, helped to reinforce his authority and bolster the Habsburg position in the empire and Europe more broadly. These efforts, no matter how impressive, remained historical contingencies. They could not offer the necessity that astrology provided or provide the touchstone of nature as a basis for their conclusions. Consequently, Maximilian realized that he would have to find sharper tools. He located those tools in astrology. For Maximilian astrology offered the most comprehensive and persuasive body of knowledge about the natural world, knowledge that was understood to be imminently applicable to human experience.

Maximilian's interest in astrology extended well beyond his self presentation. Astrology permeated his entire political program, from shaping public opinion to guiding political actions. He attracted to his court and to the University of Vienna a number of talented astrologers, including Georg Tannstetter and Andreas Stiborius. In addition to appointing them to important positions at the university, Maximilian expected Tannstetter to produce yearly astrological *judicia* and *practica* as well as the wall calendars that accompanied these texts. Reading Tannstetter's *judicia* in light of his position at the Habsburg court reveals the extent to which they address the pressing political issues of the day. When Maximilian was embroiled in the Bavarian War of Succession in 1504-1505, Tannstetter's *judicia* portrayed Maximilian's ally Duke Albrecht of Bayern-München in a favorable light and predicted wonderful successes for him. By contrast, Count Ruprecht was vilified in these same texts, as were the

Bohemians who had supplied many of the mercenaries fighting in Ruprecht's army. Moreover, Tannstetter warned Kufstein, one of Count Ruprecht's strongholds, of impending disaster in the coming year—Imperial troops surrounded the fortress and forced it to surrender in October 1504. Where Tannstetter produced propaganda for the emperor, Andreas Stiborius constructed instruments and taught Maximilian how to use them.⁷¹

In 1506 Stiborius constructed for Maximilian the *Clipeus Austriae*, a type of astrolabe designed to work at the latitude of Vienna, and penned a set of canons, both of which he presented to the emperor. Stiborius had designed the instrument to make it easy to determine the ascendent and medium coeli and, in early July 1506, instructed the emperor in its use. Maximilian almost certainly used this instrument to determine the most propitious time to sign a peace treaty with the Hungarian King Ladislaus on 19 July 1506. Maximilian paraded out of Vienna early in the day, pitched his ceremonial tents, and then waited until shortly after sunset to sign the treaty with Ladislaus. According to Johannes Cuspinian, the emperor was waiting for the most propitious moment to sign the treaty.

Maximilian also rewarded his courtiers who displayed astrological skills and talents. Joseph Grünpeck, the emperor's first biographer and personal secretary, had secured his position at the imperial court largely through his astrological pamphlets. Johannes Stabius, who was appointed court historian and finally ennobled, created a number of astrological instruments and celestial maps for the emperor and edited and wrote various astrological texts. In short, Maximilian shaped his entire political program around astrology, using it to guide specific political actions, to shape public opinion from the lowest

71. On the role of astrological pamphlets in Maximilian's political agenda, see chapter six below.

registers of society to the highest, to justify political actions, and to garner support for his dynastic agenda. By following the contours of astrology through the court, the university, and beyond into broader audiences, we can begin to appreciate Maximilian's effort to wed science and politics.