

Heinz Noflatscher, Michael A. Chisholm, and Bertrand Schnerb, eds.
Maximilian I. (1459–1519): Wahrnehmung — Übersetzungen — Gender.
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German nationalist tradition regarded Maximilian I as a failure, a fantasist whose grand delusions about re-creating an international empire that had only briefly existed under the later Hohenstaufen impeded the development of the German people toward nationhood. Since the publication of the late Helmut Wiesflecker's monumental five-volume biography (1971–86), a new picture has begun to emerge. Increasingly he is now viewed as an enterprising, visionary ruler who constructed an extraordinary imperial position out of his diverse inheritance and laid the foundations for the role the Habsburgs' played in Europe into the twentieth century. At the same time Maximilian's diverse talents as a writer, patron, artist, and architect of his own grandiose vision of kingship and empire are recognized as integral to his success. If he seemed devoted to a medieval notion of knighthood, depicting himself as the last knight of a now-bygone heroic age, it is clear that he both understood and successfully manipulated the new media of the print era. Maximilian, it seems, was a protean figure, fully in tune with the complex politics and culture of his age.

This excellent volume considers Maximilian and his world in a variety of novel ways. The largest group of essays is devoted to the theme of "Perceptions and Political Communication." Paul Sutter Fichtner considers the numerous meanings that are reflected in the over 1,000 surviving images of the emperor, and distinguishes between the image that he presented of himself in his writings and the hardheaded and practical way that he conducted himself in his core roles as head of the house of Habsburg and as German emperor. The other essays in this section draw on diplomatic sources to illuminate Russian, English, French, Ferraran, Mantuan, and Florentine perceptions of Maximilian and the empire.

A second group of essays, under the heading "Cultural Transfer," focuses on the role of Maximilian's court as a trendsetter and an agency for the processing of images and experiences of the world outside Europe. Here Klaus Brandstätter examines the festivities of the court, while Sabine Sailer examines the significance of clothing and dress styles favoured by Maximilian's second wife, Bianca Maria Sforza. Particularly important in this section is Oliver Auge's essay on the influence of Habsburg court practice on the Dukes of Mecklenburg and Pomerania. Auge is able to show that the increased communication between Vienna and northern Germany led to the adoption there of the administrative practice, court rituals and linguistic conventions of the Habsburgs.

The third cluster of essays is entitled "Gender and Scope of Action," and examines aspects of the life of Bianca Maria Sforza. Traditionally dismissed as unimportant compared with her predecessor, Maria of Burgundy, Bianca Maria now appears a much more interesting figure who made the best of a court plagued by money shortages and in some ways blighted by her lack of children. Her correspondence, analyzed by Christina Antenhofer, reveals a sensitive and intelligent

woman well capable of negotiating a politically effective path between her imperial husband and her usurper uncle Ludovico Sforza. Daniela Unterholzner's essay on the meals served to the ladies at Bianca Maria's court explores its internal complexities of rank and illuminates the distinctions between the public and private realms.

Four essays under the heading "Global and Regional Integration" deal with practical issues of government. Harald Kleinschmidt examines Maximilian's theory of international relations. Georg Schmidt illuminates the contribution that German city republics made to the development of modern ideas of liberty. Manfred Hollegger shows that, like many early modern princes, Maximilian struggled to negotiate the balance between his own aspirations to greater control and those of his estates to preserve their traditional rights and liberties. In doing so, as Axel Metz argues, he skilfully exploited the dual role of his advisers — on the one hand territorial representatives, on the other hand royal servants — to pursue his objectives.

The final group of essays surveys sites of memory, concluding with an excellent essay by Howard Louthan that situates the volume in the context of twenty-first-century early modern studies. One can only wholeheartedly agree with his view that the editors have opened up new perspectives that are sure to stimulate new research.

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