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ASTROLOGICAL FORECASTING AND THE TURKISH MENACE IN THE RENAISSANCE BALKANS

Abstract: Astrology played a prominent role at the court of the late-fifteenth-century Hungarian king, Mathias Corvinus (1458-1490). In fact, his chief adviser was the astrologer Martin Bylica. This interest in predictive astrology has sometimes been seen as a singular blemish on the rule of an otherwise exemplary Renaissance monarch. However, understood within the context of his times, King Mathias' astrological interests reinforce his image as a man of learning. An acceptance of predictive astrology was a core belief within the intellectual worldview of the day, allowing the presence of a court astrologer to function as an anxiety-reduction mechanism in the face of the massive threat represented by the Ottoman Turks.

Key words: Mathias Corvinus, astrology, Martin Bylica, Antonio Bonfini, Hungary, Steven Lukes, Pierre Bourdieu, habitus, Peter Winch, Stephen Krasner, epistemic regimes.

In 1468 an event occurred that may seem very strange to modern people, especially empirically trained scientists: at the behest of King Mathias Corvinus (1458-1490) two astrologers squared off for debate before the Hungarian diet in the city of Pozsony.[2] With war against the Bohemians looming, domestic turmoil roiling the Hungarian countryside, and the powerful forces of the the Ottoman Empire massed on Corvinus' border, this debate between two astrologers arguing before such an august body might appear to have been an incomprehensible distraction. From a modern standpoint, it might seem even more bizarre that with all the demands upon his treasury and his time, Corvinus personally moderated this debate and rewarded the victor—Martin Bylica—with what was then a vast sum of money (100 *florins*).[3] Corvinus then named the Polish scholar not only his chief astrologer, but also his principle political advisor. Howe-

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[2] Darin Hayton, "Martin Bylica at the Court of Mathias Corvinus: Astrology and Politics in Renaissance Hungary," *Centaurus* 49 (2007): 185-198.

[3] Ibid., 186.

ver, I will argue that when considered contextually, Corvinus' actions were not only perfectly rational but also had concrete advantages: establishing a prominent astrologer as his political advisor provided an anxiety-reduction mechanism that boosted morale for the political elites within his realm while strengthening his sense of control in the face of the multiple adversities the Hungarians faced.

Until very recently the subject of astrology at Renaissance courts has been routinely glossed over, misunderstood, or ignored. As Monica Azzolini writes: "historians have generally considered astrology as mere superstition and thus have given it only anecdotal value."[4] There have been exceptions though. As far back as 1923 Lynn Thorndike began to argue against this view of astrology as "superstition" with the publication of the first volume of his magisterial *History of Magic and Experimental Science.*[5] More recently, scholars such as Laura Ackerman Smoller and Scott E. Hendrix have argued that astrology held a key place in the intellectual worldview of medieval, Renaissance, and early modern Europe.[6] However, the work done so far has barely scratched the surface, especially when we turn our attention to the Balkans. One of the very few scholars to pay particular attention to this region is Darin Hayton, who has argued that Matthias Corvinus sponsored Martin Bylica for the same reason he employed Renaissance architecture when he renovated his palaces at Buda and Visegrád, patronized painters and sculptors, developed an immense library of illuminated Greek and Latin works, and founded a short-lived university at Pozsony: this was all part of an expensive campaign meant to increase Corvinus' social capital,[7] thereby strengthening his hold on his throne by convincing elites in both Hungary and abroad that he was a cultured, Renaissance prince.[8] While

[4] Monica Azzolini, *The Duke and the Stars: Astrology and Politics in Renaissance Milan* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2013), 277.

[5] Lynn Thorndike, *History of Magic and Experimental Science* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1923-1958), 8 vols.

[6] Laura Ackerman Smoller, *History, Prophecy, and the Stars: The Christian Astrology of Pierre d'Ailly, 1350-1420*. (Princeton University Press, 1994); Scott E. Hendrix, *How Albert the Great's Speculum Astronomiae Was Interpreted and Used by Four Centuries of Readers* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2010); Scott E. Hendrix, "Rational Astrology and Scientific Rationalism in Premodern Europe," in *Rational Magic*, Scott E. Hendrix and Brian Feltham, eds. (Fisher Imprints, 2011): 63-104 .

[7] Here I am borrowing Pierre Bourdieu's concept of capital. See "The forms of capital," in J. Richardson (ed.) *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of* Education (New York: Greenwood, 1986): 241-258.

[8] This is the thrust of Hayton's argument. See also Jean-Patrice Boudet and Darin Hayton,"Matthias Corvin, János Vitéz, et l'Horoscope de Fondation de l'Université de

Hayton does not use the term "propaganda," it certainly sounds as if the program in which Corvinus was engaged functioned in that way.

There is no doubt that Hayton is correct about the effect that Corvinus' support for artists and scholars had. However, we should be careful about assuming that the Hungarian king had a propaganda value foremost in his mind when he brought Bylica to his court. In other words, there is no reason to believe that the accrual of cultural capital was the primary goal for supporting astrologers at the Hungarian court. Instead, in order to understand why astrology was so important to Corvinus that he would choose an astrologer to be his primary adviser, we must start by understanding that he saw the world very differently than a modern person does. We must recognize that the Hungary of the fifteenth century was in fact "a foreign country: they do things differently there," to borrow the phrase of the novelist L.P. Hartley.[9] It is this difference that makes anthropological and sociological theories so useful when attempting to understand Corvinus and his world.

Let us start by recognizing that Matthias Corvinus was a very well educated man. His father, John Hunyadi (c. 1407-1456) obtained the services of the prominent humanists János Vitéz (whom Corvinus would later make archbishop of Esztergom from 1465 to 1472) and Gregory of Sanok (c. 1403-1477) as tutors to the young Matthias.[10] The education they provided gave Corvinus a thorough grounding in modern and classical languages as well as the seven liberal arts, one of which was astronomy. Today this would mean that he knew about mathematical astronomy (among other things), but in the fifteenth-century that was only one component of the study of the heavens. In the thirteenth-century Albert the Great established the understanding of astronomy that would become normative in Christian Europe well into the seventeenth century, a view in which premodern European intellectuals saw term as encompassing two related disciplines: an understanding not only of the way heavenly bodies moved, but also the way they influenced terrestrial bodies and events.[11] By the fifteenth century there was little if any question in the minds of intellectuals that the motions of celestial objects and their various combinations had a direct impact on events on the earth. Therefore, a person trained in premodern astronomy saw the prediction of future events as a simple exercise in the mathematics required

Pozsony en 1467," in Actes du colloque «Mathias Corvin, les bibliothèques princières et la genèse de l'Etat moderne» (Budapest: Orszagos Széchényi Könyvtár, 2009), 205-13.

[9] L.P. Hartley, *The Go Betweens* (New York: The New York Review of Books, 1953), 16

[10] Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *Court, Cloister, and City: The Art and Culture of Central Europe, 1450-1800* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 39-41.

[11] Hendrix, *Speculum astronomiae*, chapter 1. This view of astronomy and astrology would remain normative until the seventeenth century.

to determine the position of heavenly bodies for the time in question. This was not some medieval superstition, either: as late as the seventeenth century Johannes Kepler defended the notion that celestial bodies influence terrestrial events while Galileo Galilei cast horoscopes for friends, family, and wealthy patrons.[12] True, both medieval and early modern intellectuals believed that the resulting predictions were not absolutely reliable. As Albert the Great argued in his works *On Fate* and *The Mirror of Astronomy*, predictions represented likely outcomes, but events could always be altered through the exercise of a person's free will.[13] But since people rarely exercised their will in order to counteract the powerful influences received from the heavens, predictions could be made about most future events with a high degree of accuracy.

Of course we know now that there is no empirical basis for belief in celestial influence or the predictive power of astrology. However, not only did Corvinus not "know" anything of the sort, he also approached the process of "knowing" very differently than we do today. In order to understand what this means, I have found the theory of epistemic regimes to be very useful. The usefulness of this concept lies in its ability to refocus our understanding of idea and knowledge formation away from wholly voluntaristic models while indicating how selectivity and action within the realms of the intellect occur within a web of internal and external regulative frameworks.[14] This regulation occurs in part within the mind of the individual, functioning both through the unspoken and unexamined sets of assumptions informing the questions one asks as well as how one answers those questions. Connected to those sorts of issues, however, are the interrelated social, political, economic, and educational dimensions constituted by "sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules, and decision making procedures around which actors' expectations converge,"[15] as with any other sort of regime.[16] In other words, the sorts of questions one asks, how one goes about answering those questions, and what

[12] Hendrix, "Rational Astrology and Scientific Rationalism,"

[13] Albert's argument became normative for medieval and early modern intellectuals. It's rather complicated, but the gist of it is that most people rarely exercise their free will, instead allowing themselves to act according to impulse—which is wholly governed by celestial influences. For an in-depth exploration, see Scott E. Hendrix, "Choosing to be Human: Albert the Great on Self Awareness and Celestial Influence," *Culture and Cosmos* 12.2 (2008): 23-41.

[14] Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge,* A.M. Sheridan Smith, trans. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 69-70.

[15] Stephen Krasner, *International Regimes* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 2.

[16] I discuss this issue at length in Scott E. Hendrix, "Natural Philosophy or Science in Premodern Epistemic Regimes? The Case of the Astrology of Albert the Great and Galileo Galilei," *Teorie vědy / Theory of Science* XXXIII.1 (2011): 111-132.

one understands as "proof" are all conditioned by the intellectual assumptions of his or her culture. As Wittgenstein might have said, these are all rule-bound activities whether or not we are consciously aware of those rules.[17]

To further clarify what an epistemic regime is and the way it conditions our approach to the world, think about the way a modern scientist approaches knowledge formation. Ideally, he or she develops a hypothesis, gathers empirical evidence, interprets that evidence through the lens of theories developed by fellow scholars in the field, and then determines whether or not the evidence supports or refutes the hypothesis in question. This approach to knowledge is thoroughly empirical in its assumptions: "proof" is to be found in the realm of objective evidence. These concepts are ingrained in the mind of the modern scientist through years of education, association with other scientists, the affirmation gained by producing solid scientific studies—or the rejection earned by failure to follow these rules of modern science properly. However, this was not at all the way an intellectual functioning within an early modern epistemic regime thought. For people such as Corvinus and his tutors, empirical observations of the world represented only one form of evidence, and neither the most important nor the most compelling form of evidence at that. Rather, for a Renaissance intellectual proof consisted of statements drawn from authoritative texts, which usually meant the oldest source material available –such as the writings of Aristotle or Pliny the Elder—filtered through the rigorous application of logic.[18]

This approach is very different than that taken by a modern scientist, so different in fact that I have argued elsewhere we will do better to stick to the term natural philosophy, which intellectuals in this period used, rather than the anachronistic term "science" when considering the work they did.[19] However, it is important that we not lapse into thinking of Renaissance astrological beliefs as irrational or superstitious. Instead, I suggest that we should approach the subject through the theoretical lens Steven Lukes has developed. The foundational principle in his analysis of the subject of rationality is that "there are contextually-provided criteria for deciding what counts as a 'good reason' for holding a belief," removing "rationality" from the realm of unchanging concepts with independent ontological status.[20] In turn, Lukes has been influenced quite fruitfully by the work of Peter Winch, who argues that there is no

[17] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, G.E. M. Anscombe, trans. (New York: Macmillan, 1953), section 11.

[18] Hendrix, "Natural Philosophy or Science in Premodern Epistemic Regimes?" 120-126.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Steven Lukes, "Some Problems About Rationality," *Archives of European Sociology* 7 (1967):247-264, 263.

single rationality. Instead, this concept is only explicable on a contextual basis. Whether an individual is seen as rational can only be adjudicated based upon whether or not he or she acts –or thinks— in a way that conforms to the norms of the culture to which the person belongs.[21] This position should not be taken as relativist in regards to the reality of the phenomenological world. Rather, the focus of this approach is the way in which objective phenomena are interpreted and understood through the lens of the basic beliefs of the individual. Such beliefs are constructed upon the foundational knowledge and ideas the individual has acquired as part of his or her historical and cultural heritage, and are seen to be held not as a set of ideas accepted by choice, but rather as a conceptual framework "forced upon him by his experience of the world."[22] Therefore if we want to understand rationality in any given time and place, we must consider the background and cultural norms making up the constituent building blocks of each particular form of rationality, since there is no single absolute model upon which one may rely.

Within this model of rationality, drawing on the models of the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, rational actors are seen to *perform* rationality through "a sort of metanoia [meaning a personal change or metamorphosis] marked in particular by a bracketing of beliefs and of ordinary modes of thought and language, which is the correlate of a tacit adherence to the stakes and the rules of the game."[23] During the Renaissance, the rules of this game were set through the exercise of institutional capital orchestrated within the locus of the various universities that had been established across Europe beginning with the University of Bologna in 1189.[24] Within this context intellectuals dealing with natural philosophical questions were almost always university graduates, creating a situation whereby the investigation of the natural world through the application of rules established by Greek and Hellenistic thinkers such as Aristotle and Ptolemy was dogmatically held to be the very form of what it was to be a rational individual.[25] The result was a premodern European intellectual class that shared a set of presuppositions taken for granted and held to be beyond dispute –a habitus –inculcated through their common education. The

[21] Peter Winch, "Understanding a Primitive Society," *American Philosophical Quarterly,* 1 (1964):307-324.

[22] Richard Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, 2nd edition),17.

[23] Pierre Bourdieu, "The Peculiar History of Scientific Reason," *Sociological Forum*, 6, no. 1 (1991):3-26, 8.

[24] Edward Grant, *The Foundations of the Modern Sciences in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996),Chap. 3.

[25] Cf. Bourdieu's analysis of the functioning of investigators within the modern scientific fields. Bourdieu, 8.

component parts of this education that are most relevant to our current study included the reading of a shared literature written primarily by Greek and Arabic authors understood through shared forms of analysis driven by basic assumptions about the world derived from this common experience and reinforced by the authority of professors, degree-granting institutions, and the professionalized European intellectual class.[26]

In broad outlines, that was the context of Matthias Corvinus' intellectual worldview, one in which astrology held a place as not only rational, but also a discipline of immense worth. In fact, his interest in the subject was so great that the Italian chronicler and long-time resident at the Corvinian court, Galeotto Marzio (d. 1494 or 1497), described the monarch approvingly as both a "king and an astrologer."[27] But why would Corvinus have found predictive astrology to be so useful?

For the answer to that question, we must remember that Matthias lived in very troubled times indeed. His father, John Hunyadi, had never been king. However, he was long the most powerful man in the realm, and from 1446 until his death in 1456 he had acted as regent (a king in all but name, for all practical purposes) for the young Ladislaus V.[28] Matthias learned firsthand about the dangers facing his native land; he was knighted at the Siege of Belgrade in 1456 at the age of 13.[29] His education in the school of hard knocks was far from complete, however. Later that year, his father died and a two-year struggle for power erupted. Captured at Buda he was sentenced to death by decapitation for presumably plotting against King Ladislaus. While this sentence would never be carried out, his older brother would in fact die by judicially ordered decapitation in 1457. The seventeen-year old king would die soon afterwards, apparently from leukemia, although poisoning was widely suspected at the time. Matthias then found himself a hostage of George of Poděbrady, king of Bohemia from 1458 to 1471, ostensibly for safe keeping. This must have been a frightening and tumultuous time. Poděbrady hoped to take the throne for himself, and it was not at all clear he would not be able to do so in spite of the opposition of the people of Buda and Pest. Not clear, that is, until Matthias' uncle Mihály Szilágyi arrived at the head of 15,000 battle-hardened troops ready to offer their support to Matthias. On 20 January 1458

[26] For a fuller treatment of the context of early modern natural philosophy, see Scott E. Hendrix, "Rational Astrology and Empiricism."

[27] Marcus Tanner, *The Raven King: Matthias Corvinus and the Fate of his Lost Library* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 15.

[28] Camil Mureşanu, *John Hunyadi: Defender of Christendom* (Oxford: Center for Romanian Studies, 2001).

[29] For a complete discussion of these events, see Tanner, preface and chapter 1.

the Diet named Matthias King of Hungary, a decision thousands of Hungarian noblemen meeting on the ice of the frozen Danube ratified four days later.

Detailing the history of the following years of warfare, treachery, and political maneuvering would take us too far afield from our subject. Instead, it is sufficient to consider the magnitude of the threats the young king faced. Both the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick III to the West and the Polish king, Casimir IV, to the North possessed credible claims to the Hungarian throne, claims they would seek to assert at the head of armies. The Venetians to the South were also a significant threat, but there was no greater threat to the Hungarians than the Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans had captured Constantinople—long thought to be impregnable—in 1453,[30] an event that greatly focused the minds of the Hungarian military class. The threat the Ottomans represented was all too real: in the not-too-distant future the Sultan's armies would destroy the Hungarian forces at the Battle of Mohács in 1526, killing almost the entirety of the Hungarian nobility in the process. Matthias can certainly be forgiven for desiring a force multiplier in the face of the range of threats standing against him.

The model for a solution was readily available at courts across Europe. As Monica Azzolini and Laura Ackerman Smoller demonstrate, astrologers played a prominent role at almost all Renaissance courts, with advice about military matters being one of the most important aspects of their job description.[31] Matthias was personally acquainted with men who found the advice of astrologers to be invaluable: his friend and ally, the Duke of Urbino, maintained two court astrologers, as did the Duke of Ferrara. Even his committed enemy, the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick III, kept several astrologers on staff.[32] Therefore, Matthias had the example of friends and foe alike to show him the value of astrological forecasting. Given the intellectual climate of the day, it is highly unlikely if any of the members of Corvinus' court would have discounted the efficacy of astrology. Given the forces arrayed against the Hungarians, it is equally unlikely that anyone with a hint of military training would have been sanguine in the face of the multiple threats they faced. In such an atmosphere, it is highly likely that the educated elites at the Corvinian court would have welcomed their king's choice of an astrologer as his chief adviser. What could be more useful during a time of war and rumors of war than the ability to peer into the future?

[30] Caroline Finkel, *Osman's Dream: The History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1923* (London: John Murray, 2007), 48-52.

[31] Monica Azzolini, "Reading Health in the Stars: Politics and Medical Astrology in Renaissance Milan," *Horoscopes And Public Spheres: Essays on the History of Astrology*, Günther Oestmann, H. Darrel Rutkin, and Kocku Von Stuckrad, eds. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005): 186-206; Smoller, 109.

[32] Tanner, 15.

So just how prominent was astrology at the court of Matthias Corvinus? Anyone visiting his palace at Buda would have received some indication of its importance when they walked under one of the two ceilings painted with astrological imagery, the most important of which displayed the position of heavenly bodies at the time of Mathias' coronation as king of Bohemia in 1469.[33] This mural was meant to show viewers that Corvinus' claim to the Bohemian throne was not only valid, but in fact fated in the stars. To those closest to the king, however, the most significant indication of the credence he gave to his astrologers and their predictions would be the role the discipline played during wartime. According to the Italian chronicler Antonio Bonfini, during time of war the king "consulted the stars and took auspices for" military expeditions, "for it seemed he never did anything without consulting the stars." [34] Based on the actions of other Renaissance rulers, it is likely that he appealed to his astrologers for the most fortunate time to begin a military expedition, as indicated by the reference to "auspices," rather than using astrological advice to determine whether or not to undertake an expedition.[35]

Maintaining our focus on Antonio Bonfini, we can see that if he is any example, King Matthias' contemporaries approved of the royal interest in astrology. To understand the extent of this approval, we must begin by understanding the Italian humanist's goal in writing this chronicle. It was not intended simply to provide a dry recitation of events. Instead, Bonfini sought to tell the world of the "most famous deeds of the Hungarians. . . [and also] about the arts by means of which they acquired and retained control of such a greatly wealthy kingdom,"[36] as well as how they lost that kingdom. His explanation for that loss lay in his perception that "the discipline of the ancestors [of the Hungarians]" had been "declining little by little from the time of the death of Matthias [Corvinus]." In other words, for Bonfini, Matthias' rule marked a high-water mark for

[33] Ibid., 14.
[34] Quoted in Tanner, 15.
[35] Smoller,
[36] The full text of the relevant passage reads as follows: "Ungorum praeclare gestis occurrisent gentes nostrae exordia tacitus mecum coepi perpendere, quibus artibus tam opulentissimam regni possessionem acquisuissent, retinuissentque (artibus enim eisdem acquirentur regna, & retinentur) quibusque , subsidente paulatim ab Mattiae regis morte maiorum disciplina, Turcarum id libidine cessessit: non mediocriter dolere coepi, tot fortia maiorum facta, totque praeclaras victorias ab Occidentis primum populis, Turcis deinde (quorum impetum, postquam infasto hi sidere ex Asia primum in Europam traiecerunt,nulliis externis auxiliis adiuti, a centum annis soli fere sustinuerunt) magno sudore & sanguine partas, a nullo (quod equidam sciam) Scriptore orationis illustras fuisse." Antonio Bonfini, *Rervm Vngaricarvm Decades Qvatvor Cvm Dimidia* (Frankfurt, 1581), 9. This work is extremely important and deserves far more attention than it has received up to this point.

the Hungarians. But to appreciate fully why he believed this to be the case, and what he saw as the reason for Hungarian decline, we need to be careful in our understanding of what Bonfini meant by "discipline." A proper understanding of how he used his terms is key to understanding his explanation for the loss of this "greatly wealthy kingdom," which was "surrendered to the desire of the Turks," an event that "grieved [Bonfini] greatly." Writing in 1581, more than two generations after the Hungarian defeat at Mohács, it seems that Bonfini found the time to be ripe to explain what had gone wrong, causing the collapse of Hungarian resistance in spite of the fact that "they had held out for almost a hundred years, aided by no outside forces."

Let us start with considering what Bonfini saw as the reason why the Hungarians had been able to hold out against the power of the Turks for so long, before then turning to the cause of the Turkish victory. For Bonfini it was not simply the inevitable victory of a numerically superior foe, as we can see by his explanation for the successful Turkish invasion of Europe, which occurred "upon the judgment[37] day established by the star." Thus, it was an astrological event that spelled the Hungarian defeat, and when Bonfini again and again bemoans the gradual decline in discipline and the "arts by which the kingdom was acquired and retained," he is not writing about any general decline of "arts" or a decline of "discipline" in the general sense. Rather, he is using those terms in precisely the same way as his near contemporaries across Europe with interests in astrology, from John Dee (1527-1608/9)[38] to Gerolamo Cardano (1501-1576).[39] In other words, for Bonfini, Matthias' interest in astrology was neither an aberration nor a mark of irrationality, but an extremely important bulwark against the threat of the Turks. Previous scholarship has failed to note the pride of place Bonfini gave to astrological explanations due to a combination of the fact that his *Rervm Vngaricarvm Decades Qvatvor Cvm Dimidia* has neither been translated nor published in a modern edition combined with a general lack of familiarity with astrological terminology on the part of most researchers.

Furthermore, previous researchers have failed to understand Bonfini's precise meaning when he stated that the "judgment day established by the star" spel-

[37] It is worth noting the importance of the term "infasto" within the key phrase, "infasto hi sidere." This word is uncommon. "Fasto," can mean "on a judicial day." The prefix "in" applied here will make the word "on/ in accord with a judgment day." The key thing to keep in mind is that "fasto" is a judicial term, indicating that in Bonfini's view a judicial verdict has been passed against the Hungarians.

[38] Peter Finch, *John Dee: The World of a Renaissance Magus* (New York: Routledge, 2002, 2nd printing).

[39] Anthony Grafton, *Cardano's Cosmos: The Worlds and Works of a Renaissance Astrologer* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2001).

led the destruction of Hungarian forces at Mohács. In all likelihood he was referring to what William Eamon has called "the biggest media event of the sixteenth century ... when scores of astrologers jumped onto a bandwagon of collective hysteria by proclaiming the imminent end of the world."[40] This apocalyptic hysteria was the result of an impending conjunction of the three upper planets, Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars, in the sign of Pisces, set to occur in 1524. Over 160 works by 56 different authors spread the word that the world would end in a new flood, with some such as the German astrologer Leonhard Reinmann predicting additional cataclysms, such as a general uprising of the peasants that would lead to widespread death and destruction.[41] Of course while there was a peasant uprising in Germany between 1524 and 1525, the nobility quickly and brutally suppressed it, and while torrential rains fell on some parts of Europe, other locations experienced drought. However, so many astrologers had staked their professional reputation on the presumed end of the world that it was impossible for these men to simply ignore the failure of their predictions. Instead, there was a widespread attempt to reinterpret their predictions in order to demonstrate that they were not failures at all. But how could this be? After all, the world had not come to an end. However, as Helga Robinson Hammerstein[42] has demonstrated, sixteenth century astrologers argued that they had merely misinterpreted the signs, that the alignment in Pisces had foretold disasters other than the end of the world. The most common events these astrologers pointed to were the rise of Lutheranism and the subsequent wars that followed and the crushing defeat the Hungarians suffered at Mohács. Therefore, Bonfini's efforts to provide an astrological explanation for the reverses the Hungarians suffered was perfectly in keeping with mainstream intellectual thought of his day.

Similarly, Bonfini's attitude toward Matthias' use of astrology was perfectly in keeping with European intellectual mores. As Hilary Carey has demonstrated, the use of astrological forecasting to determine the most propitious time to act was a very common practice at mediaeval and Renaissance courts.[43] As far back as the thirteenth century, the astrologer Michael Scot (c.1175-1232) had advised the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II (1220-1250) about everything from the proper time to wage war to the best time to

[40] William Eamon, "Astrology and Prophecy in the Renaissance," http://william eamon.com/?p=869, accessed 10 March 10, 2013.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Helga Robinson Hammerstein, "The Battle of the Booklets: Prognostic Tradition and the Proclamation of the Word in early sixteenth-century Germany," in 'Astrologi hallucinati:' *Stars and the End of the World in Luther's Time*, Paola Zambelli, ed. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1986): 129-151.

[43] Hilary Carey, *Courting Disaster: Astrology at the English Court and University in the Late Middle Ages* (St. Martin's Press, 1992), 39.

consummate his marriage in order to produce a male offspring.[44] This sort of practice would become normative; no less a scholar than Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) advised the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolph II (1576-1612) about almost every aspect of his reign.[45] While astrology had been viewed with suspicion at one time, this stigma had long since all-but disappeared.[46] Even Pope Julius II (1503-1513) kept astrologers in his pay. He had the foundation stone for St. Peter's Basilica laid only after an astrologer carefully determined the most fortunate time for this monumental event to occur.[47]

Given this intellectual climate, it would have been most unusual if Matthias Corvinus had chosen not to employ an astrologer at his court. While we modern people might look back at his acceptance of astrological forecasting with bemusement, within the context of the fifteenth century it was completely rational for him to do so. In fact, to the members of his court, including those tasked with fending off the various military threats the Hungarians faced, failure to secure the advice of an astrologer might well have appeared to be an unpardonable bit of malpractice on the part of the king. Furthermore, Bylica's advice likely provided a concrete benefit for this king beset by so many enemies, both domestic and foreign. Bronislaw Malinowski argued in regards to the Trobriand islanders he studied that people turn to magical modes of thinking when forced to recognize "the impotence of [their] knowledge and [. . .] rational technique."[48] Stanley Tambiah has argued that this explanation is "naïve and easily falsifiable."[49] After all, many people in the modern world still appeal to magical modes of thinking in spite of what Tambiah would have seen as more "rational" modes of explanation. However, the problem disappears if we view astrological forecasting not as an alternative to "rational technique," but instead as one form of such a technique. As Tambiah admits, the strength of Malinowski's model is that he provided an explanation for the

[44] Charles H. Haskins, "Michael Scot and Frederick II," *Isis* 4.2 (1921): 250-275.

[45] James Connor, *Kepler' s Witch: An Astronomer's Discovery of Cosmic Order Amid Religious War, Political Intrigue, and the Heresy Trial of His Mother* (New York: HarperCollins Publishing, 2004), pp. 159-181. For Kepler's astrological beliefs and his career as an astrologer, see Gerard Simon, *Kepler: Astronome, astrologue* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979).

[46] See Scott E. Hendrix, *How Albert the Great's Speculum Astronomiae Was Interpreted and Used by Four Centuries of Readers*, for a detailed exploration of the concerns expressed about astrology in the thirteenth century, and the process whereby the discipline came to be seen as non-controversial and mainstream.

[47] Mary Quinlan-McGrath, "The Foundations Horoscope(s) for St. Peter's Basilica, Rome, 1506: Choosing a Time, Changing the Storia," *Isis* 92.4 (2001):716-741.

[48] Bronislaw Malinowski, 72.

[49] Stanley J. Tambiah, *Magic, Science and Religion and the Scope of Rationality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 72.

appeal of magical modes of thinking without denigrating the worldview that produced it, advancing "a species of explanation that one may label as 'anxiety reduction' and 'compensatory action.'"[50] Given the manifold sources of anxiety facing King Matthias, from questions about his right to rule to the seemingly overwhelming power of the Ottoman threat, he and those at his court were certainly in need of a "rational technique" allowing for "anxiety reduction." Examining the historical context in this way allows us to see that Corvinus did not turn away from technology and rational technique. Rather, he appealed to one of the most prestigious disciplines of his day, a technology that promised to improve the likelihood of the survival of his kingdom. Understood within the cultural and historical time in which Corvinus lived, astrological forecasting was a perfect "anxiety reduction" mechanism.

This reevaluation of the place of astrology at the Hungarian court in the fifteenth century is long overdue. A growing number of historians recognize Matthias Corvinus' achievements and the talent he brought to bear on the enormous problems he faced. Nevertheless, it is altogether too easy for modern people to look askance at the king's "superstitions," which is why scholars of the period sometime seem embarrassed by the "extraordinary interest in astrology"[51] Corvinus displayed, driving them to explain it away as a singular aberration of an otherwise exemplary Renaissance court. This attitude is a mistake, for Corvinus' interest in astrology was no superstition at all. Instead, his understanding of and interest in astrology was one more indication of the remarkably cultured nature of Corvinus' court.

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[50] Ibid., 72.

[51] John Monfasini, *George of Trebizond: A Biography and Study of His Rhetoric and Logic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 195.

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TURSKA NAJEZDA I ASTROLOŠKO PREDVIĐANJE NA BALKANU U DOBA RENESANSE

U poznom XV veku astrologija je imala istaknutu ulogu na dvoru ugarskog kralja Matije Korvina (1458 – 1490). Njegov glavni savetnik je zapravo bio astrolog Martin Bilica. Ovo interesovanje za proročanski aspekt astrologije se ponekad smatra jedinom mrljom na vladavini inače uzornog renesansnog monarha. Međutim, shvaćeno u kontekstu njegovog vremena, astrološka interesovanja kralja Matije učvršćuju njegov imidž učenjaka. Prihvatanje prediktivne astrologije je bilo osnovno verovanje unutar savremenog intelektualnog pogleda na svet, omogućavajući da prisustvo dvorskog astrologa posluži kao mehanizam za smanjenje anksioznosti izazvane ogromnom pretnjom koju su predstvaljali otomanski Turci.

Ključne reči: Matija Korvin, astrologija, Martin Bilica, Antonio Bonfini, Ugarska, Stiven Luks, Pjer Burdje, habitus, Piter Vinč, Stiven Krasner, epistemološki režimi