

Imagines coeli Septentrionales cum duodecim imaginibus zodiaci.



SHOWN here is the oldest printed star chart from Europe, published in Nuremberg, Germany, in 1515.

Prior to 1515, all European and Arab star charts were individually hand-drawn, and hence restricted to single copies. With the advent of printing, large numbers of identical copies could be produced at will. The chart consists of a pair of woodcuts depicting the northern and southern skies as known to European astronomers at that time, with constellation figures as they were visualized by the Greeks and Romans. As well as the 48 standard Ptolemaic figures, Dürer illustrated Caput Meduse, the head of the Gorgon, held by Perseus. The constellation figures are shown reversed, as they would appear on a celestial globe, and the constellations of the zodiac progress anticlockwise.

The woodcuts were engraved by the German artist **Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528)** who usually gets sole credit for them. **Ptolemy's** star catalogue in the *Almagest* was the source of the stars shown. Their positions were updated to 1500 and plotted by **Conrad Heinfogel (1517)**, a German astronomer. The stars are numbered according to the order in which they were listed in the *Almagest*. Stars of first and second magnitude, and some

of third magnitude, are shown by star-shaped symbols, open or filled, while fainter stars are marked simply as small open circles. Whereas modern charts have the celestial equator around the rim and the celestial pole at the centre, on these charts it is the zodiac that lies around the rim. As a result there are not many constellations to show in the southern half of the chart, for the far southern skies had not then been charted by Europeans. In the corners of the northern chart, Dürer depicted the four ancient authorities on whose descriptions the constellation figures are based. At top left is **Aratus Cilix** (of Soli in Cilicia); top right is **Ptolemy Aegyptus**; bottom left is **M. Mamilius Romanus** (Roman astrologer of the first century AD); and finally **Azophi Arabus** (al-Sufi, the Arab astronomer who revised and updated the *Almagest*).

In the lower left corner of the southern hemisphere chart Dürer notes the contributions of **Stabius**, **Heinfogel** and himself above their individual coats of arms. At top left is the coat of arms of the Archbishop of Salzburg, **Cardinal Matthäus Lang**, and at top right is a dedication to him. Finally, there is an acknowledgement to the **Holy Roman Emperor, Maximilian I**, who was the patron of Stabius and Dürer.

