

# Royal Coronation of Maximilian I (April 9, 1486)

## Abstract

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In 1486, Archduke Maximilian, the only son of Emperor Frederick III (r. 1440–93), was elected king of the Romans and his father's successor as emperor. He was crowned king in Frankfurt am Main in April 1486. The following account of Maximilian's coronation was composed in Latin by an anonymous eyewitness. Ceremonial ritual was extremely conservative, of course, and on grand occasions of this sort the Holy Roman Empire appeared in its most traditional guise. All of the principals had fixed positions and responsibilities, and the ceremony featured a complete intermingling of religious and secular elements. Unlike his father, Maximilian I (r. 1486/93–1519) was never crowned emperor by the pope. In 1507, he crowned himself in the cathedral of Trent.

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[...] On April 9, at about three o'clock in the morning, a whole ox worth about 7 florins was roasted in front of the king's lodgings. In the ox was a hog, in the hog a goose, and in the goose a hen, all of which were roasted together, as is the custom at the coronation of a Roman king. Later, at the appointed hour, the king's man came and cut off a large piece of roast ox for the king, whereupon a crowd of men and women pressed in and cut up the roast ox with swords and axes, each taking what he or she could. Meanwhile, Bishop John von Horn of Liège appeared with more than 200 well-armed cavalry in good order, all dressed in royal court attire. A bronze fountain with a black eagle bearing the king's arms was erected in front of the Roman king's palace; Rhine wine flowed from the eagle's breast. To the right of the eagle was a golden lion with the banner and arms of Brabant, and Rhine wine flowed from the lion as well. To the left of the eagle was a black lion with the arms of Flanders, also spurting Rhine wine. There was a frightful crush of armed men and all sorts of other people. At around six o'clock in the morning, His Imperial Majesty, Elector Palatine Philip, Elector Ernest of Saxony, Duke Adolph of Cleves, Duke Albert of Saxony, and Duke William of Jülich came to the Roman king. There the two electors dressed themselves as befitted their electoral rank, and then they marched to church in the following order: the nobles in front, followed by the bishops, and after them Duke Albert of Saxony, the Duke of Jülich, and the Lord of Cleves, the last of whom wore very expensive armbands adorned with pearls and a hat decorated with a brooch of pearls and precious stones. Last came His Imperial Majesty in a golden garment with a very valuable sculpted chain that bore an expensive cross. On the emperor's right walked his son, Maximilian, the Roman king, in a golden, ermine-fringed mantle that covered the shoulders of his highness down to the elbows and whose front closure was decorated with pearls and precious gems; on his head he wore a golden hat, cut in the Italian style and trimmed in ermine. On the emperor's left trod Elector Ernest of Saxony in a similar coat and tunic made from red satin and a large, tall scarlet hat, likewise trimmed in ermine. Elector Palatine Philip walked on Maximilian's right; he was similarly dressed and wore a red satin hat. Thus they entered the church. In the church's portico they were met by the spiritual electors, the archbishops of Cologne, Mainz, and Trier, in their pontifical vestments with miter, cross, and bishop's crosier,<sup>[1]</sup> and also by the clergy, who carried crosses, incense burners, and the Gospel book. There were also other prelates, bishops, and abbots in pontifical vestments ready to receive the princes. When they met, the archbishop of Cologne, who was supposed to celebrate the Mass, said a prayer [...]. After the prayer, the archbishops of Mainz and Trier stood on either side of the Roman king and led him into the church. The archbishop of Cologne preceded them, followed by the procession, and an antiphon was sung [...]. When this was finished, the king got down on the altar steps and stretched himself out, full length, and the archbishop of Cologne prayed over the prostrate king

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[...]. Then the king sat on a beautifully decorated chair before Our Lady's altar; slightly farther back, the archbishop of Mainz sat on a little bench to the king's right, and the archbishop of Trier sat to the king's left. Behind them stood the archbishop of Esztergom,[2] the Duke of Jülich, Duke Albert of Saxony, the Duke of Cleves, and Caspar, Duke of Bavaria and Count [Palatine] of Veldenz. On the right of the altar, His Imperial Majesty sat on a richly decorated throne three steps high; to his left were Elector Palatine Philip and Elector Ernest of Saxony. Now the festive service of the Apparition of the Lord began with a sequence [...] sung in the Gregorian manner.[3] Next, the archbishops of Mainz and Trier stood up and took off the king's mantle. The king walked between them in his golden tunic before the altar, where he lay down with his arms outstretched in the form of a cross. After two priests sang the litany, the archbishop of Cologne arose and, crosier in hand, said a prayer [...] to which the clergy responded. The king arose, and the archbishop of Cologne, who stood before the high altar, crosier in hand, put to him these six questions. "Will you preserve the traditional Catholic faith and protect it with just means? Will you be a faithful protector and defender of the holy Church and her servants? Will you rule and defend the Empire, which God has entrusted to you, according to the justice of your predecessors? Will you guard the rights of the Empire and the Imperial office, recover their unjustly lost properties and employ them for the good of the Empire and the imperium? Will you be a just judge and a righteous defender of poor and rich, widows and orphans? Will you render to the most holy father and lord, the Roman pope, and to the holy Roman church the obedience and loyalty you owe them?" To each of these questions the king answered: "I will." Then the archbishops of Mainz and Trier led the king to the altar. He laid the [first] two fingers of his right hand on the altar and said: "With God's help and supported by the prayers of Christians, I will, as best I can, loyally perform my duties, so help me God and all His saints." Then the two archbishops escorted him back to his place before the altar, and the archbishop of Cologne stood, crosier in hand, and asked the German princes, the clergy, and the people: "Will you submit yourselves to this prince and ruler and strengthen his lordship, fortify it with your loyalty, and obey his commands, according to the Word of the apostle that every soul should obey the higher power, especially a so eminent king?" To this question, the archbishops of Mainz and Trier, the German princes, the clergy, and the people cried three times: "So shall it be!" Then they escorted the king before the altar, where he prostrated himself lengthwise, as the archbishop of Cologne gave a blessing over him [...].

After the blessing, they raised the king up on his knees and bared his shoulders, breast, and elbows, as he sat in prayer with folded hands. The archbishop of Cologne anointed him with the oil of catechumens on the head, on the breast, between the shoulder blades, and on the shoulders; then he also anointed the palms of his hands, praying as he did so. [...] Meanwhile, the clergy sang "The Lord has Anointed You." Then the archbishops led the king into the sacristy, where the senior cathedral canon wiped the anointed places of his body with the purest wool. The canons then put shoes and an alb on him, along with a stole crossed over his breast.[4] The king returned before the altar, where he prostrated himself and held his arms out in the form of a cross, while the archbishop of Cologne spoke a blessing [...].

After these blessings, the Roman king was dressed in a mantle by the archbishops of Mainz, Trier, and Cologne. At the same time, they handed him the sword of St. Charles,[5] and the archbishop of Cologne said a prayer [...]. Then they placed the sword in its scabbard and girded the king with it. Then the archbishop of Cologne gave him the bracelets, the pallium,[6] and the royal ring [...], also the Imperial scepter and orb [...]. When this was done, all three archbishops—Mainz, Trier, and Cologne—placed the crown of Charlemagne on his head, saying prayers all the while [...]. The archbishops of Mainz and Trier then led him to the altar; he laid both hands upon it and said the following verse in German: "I confess before God and his angels, that I shall preserve the laws, justice, and peace of the holy Church, serve the welfare of my subjects and exercise justice, and, taking divine mercy into consideration, preserve the laws of the Empire as best I can with the advice of the princes and the loyalty of the subjects of the Empire and of my friends. To the most holy Roman pope, the Roman Church, and the other bishops and churches of God, I shall render them the honor which, by church law, they are due. Whatever the emperors and kings have given over to the churches and clergy, I will preserve and maintain

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undiminished. To the abbots and orders as Imperial vassals, I will render the proper respect, insofar as the Lord Jesus Christ grants me help, strength, and worth.”

Following this oath, the archbishops of Mainz and Trier led the king to his royal throne, which is located above the altar of the apostles Simon and Judas [...]. The archbishop of Cologne, along with his entourage and the other princes, followed the king. They seated him on the stone throne of St. Charles, while the archbishop prayed [...]. When the king was seated on the throne, he was approached by all those who wanted to be knighted. The king drew the sword of St. Charles from its scabbard and held it in his hand. The first who stepped up was Elector Palatine Philip, then Elector Ernest of Saxony, the Duke of Jülich, Duke Caspar of Bavaria, Duke Charles of Gelderland, Margrave Christoph of Baden, Landgrave William of Hesse-Kassel, William of Egmont, and many others, a total of 200 or more were knighted to the sound of trumpets. Then, while the *Te Deum* was being sung [...] they all descended [the altar] and took their former places in the choir.[7]

The Roman king now took the scepter in his hand at the Offertory and produced several gold coins [...]. Next, the canons of Aachen Cathedral came and invested him as a fellow canon, and after he had sworn an oath for the benefice attached to this office, they brought him to his place in the choir. He handed over the statutes and the gift of wine, according to the custom of this church. The king supports two vicars here; they hold the entire benefice and perform his duties in the church. Thus the royal coronation ended.

## NOTES

[1] The miter is the double-pointed hat worn by a Latin Christian bishop; the crosier is his staff with a curled head—trans.

[2] The archbishop of Esztergom (German: Gran) is the primate (head) of the Hungarian church—trans.

[3] The sequence is a long prayer sung as part of the Mass on special holy days—trans.

[4] The king was anointed and dressed as a deacon of the church, the office just below that of priest—trans.

[5] Charlemagne, whom some revered as a saint—trans.

[6] The pallium is a white woolen sash, a symbol of office normally conferred on a new archbishop by the pope—trans.

[7] “O God, We Praise Thee” (*Te Deum laudamus*), an early Christian hymn of praise—trans.

Source of German translation of original Latin document: Inge Wiesflecker-Friedhuber, ed., *Quellen zur Geschichte Maximilians I. und seiner Zeit*. Darmstadt: WBG, 1996, pp. 43–47.

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