



This Dark Star: Thomas Digges, the Scientific Revolution and the Infinite Universe

Charles L. Ladner

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This Dark Star is a fascinating introduction to a talented sixteenth-century astronomer and mathematician.

Charles L. Ladner's *This Dark Star* is the enlightening biography of sixteenth-century astronomer Thomas Digges.

Ladner notes that the principal names of the Scientific Revolution are well known, including Copernicus, Galileo Galilei, and Isaac Newton. In contrast, his book states that Thomas Digges's contributions have only recently begun to be appreciated and that Digges is only now being granted his rightful place as one of the foremost astronomers of the era. Here, Digges is introduced as an ardent supporter of heliocentric cosmology who added to, and expanded upon, Copernicus's findings. Ladner notes that it was Digges who posited that the universe wasn't just large, but infinite, and that the stars were not positioned under a celestial dome but were scattered instead.

First contextualizing Digges's work by discussing Europe's intellectual scene leading up to and during the Scientific Revolution, as well as London's contemporaneous sociopolitical state, the book begins Digges's own story in his childhood, exploring his family and educational background to explain where, when, and why his scientific interests arose. His academic work and his public service as a member of Parliament are covered, though his personal life in adulthood is not addressed.

Once it arrives at Digges's career, the book focuses on his publications, with brief recapitulations of most of them and a longer consideration of his masterpiece, "A Perfit Description of the Caellestial Orbes." In that text, Digges translated part of Copernicus's *De revolutionibus* and advanced his own scientific theory of an infinite universe and countless stars. Digges's scientific contributions are made clearer by the book's modern translations of his Elizabethan English and through its basic explanations of general scientific concepts, including parallax. The book's use of clarifying illustrations and tables, and its footnotes, are helpful in expanding on its complex points. Of particular interest are the book's references to popular culture, like William Shakespeare's plays, to indicate when the heliocentric theory entered the collective consciousness.

The prose is clear and straightforward throughout; though it is science-heavy, the book is accessible. But its occasional deviations from scholarly work into personal interjections are distracting, as when it mentions that Robert Dudley "dominated Elizabeth's affairs of the heart" or that Digges's vehement anti-Catholic stance made it so that his "Maryland descendants' ... Catholicism never could have been foreseen." Indeed, the book makes the curious choice to devote more time to Digges's descendants' personal lives than to his own.

Still, *This Dark Star* is a fascinating introduction to the work of a talented astronomer and mathematician whose name has been minimized in the scientific canon.

CAROLINA CIUCCI (July 28, 2022)

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