

Cordula van Wyhe, ed. *Isabel Clara Eugenia: Female Sovereignty in the Courts of Madrid and Brussels*.

Madrid: Centro de Estudios Europa Hispánica; London: Paul Holberton Publishing, 2011. 448 pp. \$80. ISBN: 978-1-907372-22-3.

Known as the bride of Europe for her engagements to numerous royal prospects, Philip II's beloved daughter, the Infanta Isabel Clara Eugenia, was finally wed to her cousin, Archduke Albert of Austria, shortly after her father's death in 1598. Philip ceded the Habsburg Netherlands to the archdukes, who reigned as its sovereigns for over twenty years; for another twelve years after Albert's death, Isabel agreed to stay on as governor and captain-general. Like most Habsburg women, Isabel was trained to govern from an early age; unlike them, however, she remained childless and wielded political power for an uncommonly long period. Vital, vivacious, and strikingly attractive in her youth, as can be appreciated in the book's abundant reproductions of her portraits, Isabel was much admired during her reign. Yet despite her active role in the politics of the European courts, her government of the Low Countries after the Dutch Revolt, and her indispensable military authority — and that she accomplished these tasks as a woman ruler — she has received surprisingly little attention, with only two major biographies published: L. Klingenstein's *The Great Infant Isabel: Sovereign of the Netherlands* (1910), and Marie Hennequin de Villermont's *L'Infante Isabelle gouvernante des Pays-Bas* (2 vols., 1912).

Cordula van Wyhe's splendidly illustrated and richly documented edition intends to make up for lost time; indeed, the fifteen essays in this collection, written by a well-chosen international and interdisciplinary group of scholars (whose affiliations, however, are not specified), offer thought-provoking perspectives on her persona and her politics. While at times rehearsing the same biographical information, the chapters approach Isabel's life through a panoply of diverse themes to analyze, first, her childhood and adolescence, comprising her education and political apprenticeship as a young girl at the Spanish court (Santiago Martínez Hernández); the material possessions that she collected and gifted, including her pets, accessories, and jewels (Almudena Pérez de Tudela); and the early fashioning of her persona through portraiture (Cordula van Wyhe). Although the latter chapter affords a thorough explanation of the religious symbolism that accorded Isabel the moral fabric with which to govern, the portraits, depicting not only the Infanta, but various members of the Habsburg royal family, may be enjoyed for their sheer luxury of detail and the exquisite excess of early modern Spanish fashion.

The chapters that follow continue Isabel's biographical timeline to discuss her marriage negotiations, delving into Philip's dynastic plans with Scotland, Portugal, France, and the three sons of Emperor Maximilian II (Elisa García Prieto); and, again recounting Isabel's marriage negotiations, her marriage to Albert, and the archduke's own history, affected by his religious zealotry, known as the *pietas Albertina* (see review of Luc Duerloo, in this issue). This chapter points briefly to the spouses' differences in temperament and their ultimate failure in reviving a Burgundian kingdom, which would have rendered the Low Countries independent. Other chapters address Isabel's activities at the Brussels court: those specifically analyzing her politics include a fascinating study of Isabel's role in the pacification of the Low Countries that also illustrates, with numerous images, the urban festivities in which Isabel took part and her leading role vis-à-vis Albert (Werner Thomas); a perceptive analysis of the rhetorical strategies in her frequent letters to Philip III's favorite Lerma, revealing many aspects of her personality (Magdalena S. Sánchez); her relations with the Brussels court artist and diplomat Rubens (Michael Auwers); her appointment of household officers and their access to the archdukes (Dries Raeymaekers); the little-known political role of her ladies-in-waiting (Birgit Houben); and, certainly one of the most important essays in the collection, a comprehensive investigation of Isabel's often conflicted relations with the Vatican (René Vermeir).

The essays on Isabel's founding of Tervuren monastery (Joris Snaet), and her appearances in literature (Jaime Olmedo Ramos), as well as on the first Netherlands newspaper publisher, Abraham Verhoeven, who helped create a positive image of the Infanta (Paul Arblaster), and, fittingly, the last chapter, on Isabel's retirement and legacy (Alicia Esteban Estríngana), round out the areas of research that center on the Infanta, her politics, and her court. While much is still to be investigated — far more needs to be said about Isabel's influence on Albert's policies, her relations with her brother Philip III, her interest in architecture and the arts, her interactions with her nephew Philip IV, her education at court, and, no less, her delightfully wicked sense of humor — this timely edition goes a long way toward giving the Infanta her due.

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