

BOOK REVIEW

Jorge Fernández- Santos and José Luis Colomer (eds.), *Ambassadors in Golden-Age Madrid. The Court of Philip IV through Foreign Eyes*. Madrid: Centro de Estudios Europa Hispánica, 2020. 608 pp., 287 colour illustrations. €57.70. ISBN978- 84-15245-94-0(hb).

What was life like for diplomats at one of the most influential courts of Europe – that of *el Rey Planeta*, King Philip IV of Spain (r. 1621–1665)? What kind of culture did they participate in, what problems did they face, what was their opinion of their host, and how did this all influence diplomacy? These are the ambitious questions that this volume seeks to answer, making use of various recent developments in the field of diplomatic history: the cultural and spatial ‘turns’, a developing conversation with art history and the histories of science and knowledge, and a focus on gift giving, religion and print diplomacy. The volume editors, José Luis Colomer and Jorge Fernández-Santos, are well equipped to tackle these themes, having done much work on the international reception of Spanish culture (particularly on the Italian peninsula). They have brought together a total of twenty-one contributors, ranging from well-established experts on Spanish diplomacy and court culture like John Elliott, Jan Kieniewicz, Bertrand Haan, Maurits Ebben, Paola Volpini and Miguel-Ángel Ochoa Brun, to art historians like Piers Baker-Bates and Piero Boccardo, and promising early career researchers such as Matylda Urjasz-Raczko, Enrique Corredera Nilsson and Hüseyin Serdar Tabakoğlu.

The volume’s broad scope is reflected in the three introductory essays and the epilogue, sketching the international position of the Spanish court and the perceptions of its decline in the mid-seventeenth century (John Elliott), Madrid as capital and ‘bureaucratic’ city and the experiences of diplomats within this urban space (Jorge Fernández-Santos) the theories and practices of gift giving in early modern European diplomacy (José Luis Colomer) and an overview of the Spanish ambassadors abroad under Philip IV (Miguel-Ángel Ochoa Brun). Taken together, these essays conclude that the flourishing arts under Philip IV were not merely a sign of a courtly decadence that led to the decline of Spanish hegemony, but can be fruitfully examined as deliberate attempts to uphold Spanish prestige abroad through skillful ‘soft power’ diplomacy.

In line with the prominence that art history and material culture take in this volume, the book is beautifully illustrated: from the 287 colour illustrations that form an essential part of the source material for many of the contributions down to the flyleaves featuring the signatures of the ambassadors, and the many snippets of Pedro Texeira’s 1656 map of Madrid that help the reader visualize the diplomats’ movements

through the city. Many of the chapters are also augmented by short appendices that invite the reader to read some of the selected source material for themselves.

The rest of the volume is divided in three parts, based on the varying diplomatic status of representatives at the Spanish court. First are the 'true' ambassadors from the major Catholic crowned heads, the papal nuncio and the Venetian representatives, named 'chapel ambassadors' for their privileged access to the Royal Chapel. The second category is formed by the various protestant ambassadors from Northern Europe. The third category is made up of the remaining minor Italian states plus the Ottoman Sublime Porte: imperial decline is prominent in the accounts of these ambassadors. The featured ambassador of the very first contribution, the Venetian Giacomo Querini (discussed by Gino Benzoni), in fact diagnosed the state with the disease of 'decadenza'. Queen Christina of Sweden's envoy Mathias Palbitzki (discussed by Hans Helander and Martin Olin) was more nuanced in his appraisal. He appears as a diplomat fascinated by Spanish culture and history, but also critical of its bureaucracy, corruption and poverty.

Yet there is plenty evidence to suggest that the cultural production promoted by the Spanish court left an overall positive impression on foreign officials, and that patrons of the arts were in no short supply among the stock of ambassadors. Two essays on the English dignitaries Richard Fanshaw (by Piers Baker-Bates and Alistair Malcom) and Arthur Hopton (by Todd Longstaffe-Gowan) focus on their (self)representation in portraiture. Both were strongly influenced by Spanish tastes, though to different degrees: where Hopton would remain first and foremost a 'cavallero ynglese' (p. 323) Fanshaw 'followed faithfully his same Spanish course' even in death, being buried in a Spanish-style coffin (p. 299). Enrique Corredera Nilsson similarly analyses an intimate painting of the Danish ambassador Cornelius Lerche and his household that combined Danish, Dutch and Spanish influences, as well as the impressive treasure of Spanish books collected by this bibliophile diplomat. The Genoan envoy Anton Giulio Brignole-Sale (discussed by Piero Boccardo) also pursued literary interests alongside his posting as ambassador. In a fascinating essay, Lisa Beaver and José Luis Colomer look at the papal nuncio Camillo Massimo's attempt to purchase the medal and coin collection of his departed friend Ramirez de Prado from his widow Doña Lorenza in exchange for a lapdog and twenty-nine paintings. In an episode that reveals much about Italian prejudices against Spanish art tastes, the nuncio failed to honour the requests of the Doña Lorenza, much to his own disreputation. Each of these essays continues to examine cultural exchange beyond the receiving of official diplomatic gifts, revealing how diplomats functioned – sometimes unwittingly – as cultural brokers.

While the exchange of artistic gifts and the cultural background of ambassadors have come to be important studies in the history of diplomacy, much less is known about the interaction between diplomats and the burgeoning natural sciences in the seventeenth century. Paola Volpini's essay on the attempts made by the Florentine court to have the Spanish navy adopt Galileo's novel method for measuring marine longitude makes an important contribution to this field, analysing the diplomatic and scientific discussions generated by the affair, and the difficulty officials faced in translating between these two realms of knowledge.

How did this cultural diplomacy impact the business of international politics? One source of frustration for nearly all ambassadors was the difficulty of getting things done at the Spanish court. The volume neatly shows how the different diplomatic standings, cultural backgrounds and individual skills of ambassadors informed their ways of dealing with this fact. Luis Tercero Casado's contribution examines the embassy of the Marquess of Grana in service of the Emperor, who employed his skills as a military adviser as well as his familial ties with both Philip IV and Luis de Haro and the special diplomatic infrastructure of the Habsburg dynasty to navigate the difficult dynastic crisis between 1641 and 1651. The envoy from Modena in the late 1630s, Fulvio Testi (discussed by Mercedes Simal López), used his literary fame to forge a friendship with Olivares, and wielded remarkable influence this way. In contrast, the Polish ambassador Stanislaw Mąkowski was an outsider facing an 'impossible mission' to recover outstanding interest payments by the vicerealty of Napoli. Lacking much influence, Mąkowski had to rely on his own deft political analysis of the power structures at the Spanish court, which forms the backbone of Jan Kieniewicz and Matylda Urjasz-Raczko's contribution.

Bertrand Haan's essay on Antoine Gramont's mission to secure a marriage between Louis XIV and Maria Teresa in 1659 shows the careful detail with which the ambassador was chosen to please the Spanish court, as well as how the extraordinary spectacle of his reception, the lively exchange of gifts and the proliferation of their impact through printed accounts shaped the success of his mission. On the other hand, both the Dutch diplomats (Maurits Ebben) and the Ottoman envoy Ahmed Agha (Jorge Fernández-Santon and Hüseyin Serdar Tabakoğlu) were at the centre of diplomatic incidents owing to different standards of gift-giving practices (the Dutch were instructed to refuse gifts from foreign dignitaries, the Ottomans rarely gave gifts because they did not wish to be seen as some tributary state), the conduct of their staff and the conversions of both Agha and Hendrick van Reede van Renswoude to Roman Catholicism. Each of these contributions shows how cultural diplomacy was not merely a means to smooth over ongoing negotiations but were clearly perceived to have an important impact beyond courtly circles by demonstrating the *gloire* and piety-inspiring environment of the Spanish court to the wider world.

The broad contextualization of the various diplomats' backgrounds clearly accomplishes the volume's aim to offer nuanced analyses of the Spanish court by a variety of foreign observers. Yet occasionally this aim gets lost in lengthy biographies where, interesting as they may be, the diplomatic mission in Madrid plays only a minor role. It is also somewhat of a missed opportunity that with so many diplomats gathered together in one place (and many of them with overlapping missions) there are few cross-references in the essays to the correspondence of the other diplomats featured in this volume, who likely made extensive observations on their colleagues. The resulting (and misleading) sense that these diplomats barely interacted with each other and faced isolated political issues is compounded by the choice to structure the essays per group of ambassadors rather than thematically.

Despite this criticism, this is a book that has all the artistic lustre, deft political analysis and gossipy biographic detail that an ambassador at the court of Phillip IV might

hope to find. It is also an excellent starting point for anyone wanting to familiarise themselves with seventeenth-century diplomatic culture and Spanish court life.

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