

Book Review

Sergio Ramiro Ramírez, *Francisco de los Cobos y las artes en la corte de Carlos V*. Madrid, Centro de Estudios Europa Hispánica, 2021. ISBN 978-84-18760-01-3. 464 pp., 102 col. illus., €33,66.

There has been no book-length study of Francisco de los Cobos, that important figure for the reign of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, since Hayward Keniston's magisterial text of 1960. Cobos's official title may have been 'imperial secretary', but he was also the effective deputy in Spain for Charles from 1533 until his death in 1547. From an aristocratic but obscure background in Úbeda, rising through the bureaucratic ranks, he had also entered into an advantageous noble alliance with the powerful Mendoza clan through his marriage to María de Mendoza, who played an indispensable part in his future success. At the same time Cobos became notoriously avaricious on his own behalf and that of his wife's family when it came to acquiring and accumulating not just wealth but also works of art, and in particular he became a focus for spectacular diplomatic gift-giving on the part of those who sought his favour. Keniston, however, while he dealt with Cobos's cultural patrimony well, was not an art historian and this was not his primary interest. This aspect has also been obscured by the destruction and dispersal of much of Cobos's artistic legacy, particularly the wanton damage inflicted in 1936 on his master work, the Sacra Capilla del Salvador, in his native Úbeda.

Sergio Ramiro Ramírez's substantial new book on Cobos as a patron of the arts, then, fills a lacuna in the scholarship, since, as a significant Maecenas of the arts during Charles's reign, Cobos was arguably the least discussed among his contemporaries until a revived interest was generated at the time of the millennium by the celebrations for the 500th anniversary of the birth of the Holy Roman Emperor. What studies there have been previously of Cobos as a patron were either the product of local Andalusian efforts, or focused solely on particular aspects of his collecting, such as this reviewer's work on the Úbeda *Pietà*, or a recent interest in the so-called Michelangelo sculpture, *San Giovannino*, in Úbeda. The number of such studies

shows the range and quality of Cobos's acquisitions, but this new book is the first to cover every facet of his activity as a patron. It also offers for the first time a comprehensive theory accounting for Cobos's acquisitions, which unites them in terms of contemporary theories of *magnificentia*, and – as the subtitle, 'en la corte de Carlos V', suggests – sets Cobos in the context of the patronage of the arts at the court of Charles V more generally.

The text itself is divided into four distinct sections: the first outlines Cobos's life and career, the second places his collecting in the context of that of his elite contemporaries throughout Europe, the third covers his activities as a patron and how they related to his dynastic ambitions, and the fourth focuses on how he was able to serve his imperial master in this area – all bound together by the overarching idea of *magnificentia*. In Spain, Cobos's patronage focused in particular on his native Úbeda, where he founded and endowed the Sacra Capilla del Salvador and many other buildings besides, reflecting his own glory in the beautification of his native town. In addition, Cobos was strongly connected to Italy through his political role and was arguably the most important conduit between many Italian artists, notably Titian, and Spanish patrons from the emperor downwards, a role strongly brought out in the second section of the book. It also recurs in the final section where Cobos's role as master of works for Charles's architectural projects in Spain is brought to the fore.

Throughout, the text illustrates how Charles's empire was formed of a network of cultural exchange that ranged from Flanders to the Indies, in all aspects of which Cobos became involved. In addition, though Keniston appeared to have trawled the archival documents comprehensively, the author has uncovered yet more in an impressively wide range of archives, both Italian and Spanish, such as those regarding a significant group of paintings by Titian and Raphael (among others) that were lost to shipwreck in 1536.

Furthermore, and unlike Keniston's publication, which was sparsely illustrated at best, the text here is accompanied by lavish illustrations in colour of all the surviving major projects – of which there were many.

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In terms of adverse criticisms of Ramírez's book, there are therefore few, but in this reviewer's opinion more could have been made of the figure of María de Mendoza, who tends to fade into the background in studies of Cobos, but who was evidently a significant figure in her own right, powerful both in continuing

Cobos's cultural legacy and in defending the rights of her family during her long period of widowhood.

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