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## Book Review

# Ambassadors in Golden-Age Madrid

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BY JESÚS ESCOBAR

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), 604 pp.

In his *Idea of a Christian Prince, Represented in One Hundred Emblems*, a book originally published in 1643, the political theorist and diplomat Diego Saavedra Fajardo offers a lengthy description of the court as an institution. Focusing on the palace as its representative center, Saavedra equates the court with a musical instrument. The corresponding emblem features a crowned harp set before a flat landscape (fig. 1). A Latin inscription reads *Maiora minoribus consonant* bespeaking a challenge Saavedra sets forth that a Prince master the instrument so that he can play it well:

The court — and not the least of which, the palace — is like this harp, whose cords will spread dissonance across the government if the Prince does not touch them with great prudence and skill. Thus, to keep it well tempered it is necessary to understand the qualities of [the harp's] nature: it is presumptuous and varying. It changes color in an instant, like a chameleon, according to prosperous or adverse winds of fortune. Although its language is known to all, few understand it. It adores the Prince ascendant and cannot abide by one who is fleeting. It spies and gossips about his actions, accommodates his customs and rectifies his faults. It always seeks his grace via the wheels of flattery and adulation, attentive to its own ambition and interests. It feeds on lies and abhors truth. It believes in evil with ease but struggles to accept good. It desires change and novelty, fearing everything and trusting in nothing. It is severe in issuing orders, but humble in obeying, envious of itself and of those from the outside. It is a great machine of dissimulation and carefully monitors its designs. It disguises hatred with smile and ceremony. It praises in public and decries in secret. It is its own enemy, vain in appearance and light in its offerings.<sup>1</sup>

Saavedra's words encapsulate a seventeenth-century critique of court life based on his personal experience as a diplomat in Rome, Central Europe and Switzerland. Such firsthand experience lies at the heart of *Ambassadors in Golden-Age Madrid*, a collection of historical accounts demonstrating the frustrations as well as successes of foreigners who made their way through the halls and chambers of Madrid's royal palace and the larger ambit of the Spanish court city. Fourteen chapters are preceded by a prologue and two substantial

<sup>1</sup> Diego Saavedra Fajardo, *Idea de un Príncipe político-cristiano representada en cien empresas* (Valencia, 1675), 468-69. Translation is my own.



FIGURE 1 Diego Saavedra Fajardo, *Maiora minoribvs consonant*, emblem from *Idea de un príncipe político-cristiano representada en cien empresas* (Valencia: Francisco Cipres, 1675), p. 427.

Newberry Library, Chicago, Case W 1025 .762.

(Photo: Newberry Library)

introductions. An epilogue and an appendix listing the names of ambassadors to Madrid round out this book whose authors employ sources from published memoirs to manuscript correspondence and from painted portraits to handwritten diaries that bring the reign of Philip IV (1605–65; r. 1621–65) to life. Many sources are explored here for the first time to reconstruct individual experiences at court. In this way, the book tests the possibilities of biography as a tool for political history.

The national and transnational nature of the Spanish court is the theme of the late John Elliott’s prologue. Elliott writes about the soft power that emanated from Madrid and was felt across Spain and Europe in costume, culture and language. In an astute summation of the chapters to follow, Elliott writes that the world populated by ambassadors was ‘characterized by information and misinformation, understanding and misunderstanding, curiosity and its absence’ (p. 28). Curiosity can be observed in words left behind about Madrid, a city that evolved alongside the court until it came to be subsumed by the institution.

Jorge Fernández-Santos’s introductory essay offers a masterful survey of Madrid’s streets, plazas and buildings that served as the setting and backdrop for the stories about ceremonial as well as quotidian experiences recounted in the volume. As he puts it, one of the book’s central goals is ‘to consider the interlink between early modern international diplomacy and the socio-cultural and material constraints and opportunities of a particular urban milieu’ (p. 35). A careful reader will note that many of the volume’s authors benefitted from Fernández-Santos’s editorial hand as they keep us grounded in actual places, noticed most readily by the consistent use of Pedro Teixeira’s 1656 map of Madrid. The second introduction, ‘The Persuasive Diplomacy of Gifts’ by José Luis Colomer, offers an excellent synthesis of scholarship about the politics of gift exchange in the early modern period. Colomer also presents another of the book’s main objectives to correct the historical image of Philip IV and shine light on his attentive role in government affairs. Art and material culture can assist with this task since, as Colomer writes, ‘the attention [Philip IV] devoted to painting and the sumptuary arts was closely linked to the monarchy’s international relations and the maintenance of its reputation in the world’ (p. 85).

The book's first five chapters are grouped under the heading '*Chapel* Ambassadors, a reference to the representatives of Catholic states who received privileged seating during religious ceremonies in the Royal Chapel. Gino Benzoni's essay about the Venetian Giacomo Querini's experiences in Madrid during two tours of duty surprisingly counters the volume's goal of reassessing Philip IV's rule by assuming the voice of his historical protagonist as captured in diaries without critiquing biases in the primary sources. Jan Kieniewicz and Matylda Urjasz-Raczko's chapter on the Polish ambassador Stanisław Makowski's 'impossible' mission of 1638–47 narrates an individual's unsuccessful navigation of conciliar government in Madrid, a deliberative structure that was unfamiliar to him. Reading about Makowski's misunderstanding of political as well as cultural processes, we can almost hear one of the strings of Saavedra Fajardo's harp coming unwound and snapping.

The court environment in 1648 could not have been more tense for Francesco Antonio del Carretto y Argote, the marquess of Grana and Imperial representative to Madrid, than when news arrived of Vienna siding with France, leaving Spain without a traditional ally. Luis Tercero Casado's excellent chapter devoted to Grana combines biographical details with a deft analysis of the marquess' diplomacy, thereby enlivening the contemporary crisis and turning Grana into a living, breathing and suffering human. Equally compelling is Bertrand Haan's chapter on Louis XIV's ambassador, Antoine Gramont, who arrived in Madrid in 1659 to negotiate a marriage alliance between the courts of France and Spain. Taking a cue from Gramont's surviving writings, Haan is highly attentive to architecture and interiors as settings for court and diplomatic ritual.

The standout chapter in this first section is Lisa Beaven and José Luis Colomer's study of the unscrupulous Camillo Massimo, who served as papal nuncio in Madrid in the mid 1650s using and abusing his position to expand his art collection and library. Although Massimo is the protagonist, he is outshone in the chapter by Doña Lorenza de Cardenas who, though cheated by the future cardinal, exemplifies a powerful woman in seventeenth-century Europe whose history deserves to be known. Moreover, her taste in art reveals important differences between Spain and Italy which Beaven and Colomer reveal by means of an inventive use of written and visual sources.

Five chapters comprise the next section, *Across Confessional Borders: Ambassadors from the North*. Maurits Ebben opens with a consideration of the Dutch ambassador Hendrick van Reede van Renswoude. The author's use of a post-mortem inventory of Van Reede's Madrid residence adds substantially to our knowledge about the material aspects of daily life for ambassadors. Moreover, Ebben's attention to Van Reede's library hints at cross-confessional curiosity if not understanding in the Spanish capital, with Van Reede's eleventh-hour conversion to Catholicism enhancing the drama of this artfully told story. Another outstanding chapter by Piers Baker-Bates and Alistair Malcolm explores the career of the hispanophile British diplomat Richard Fanshawe and his mysterious wife, Ann Fanshawe, whose memoirs have served to date as the principal source for information about her husband. The chapter narrates a frustrating diplomatic attempt to reconcile Spain and Portugal in the interests of Great Britain, revealing the high level of esteem that Fanshawe had with Philip IV and his queen, Mariana of Austria. Baker-Bates and Malcolm's attention to the illustrations accompanying their text is exceptional and bolsters the authors' observations about Fanshawe's life and ambitions.

The section's three other chapters consider representatives from Great Britain, Denmark and Sweden. Todd Longstaffe-Gowan's contribution on Arthur Hopton explores the nobleman's three commissioned portraits as evidence of self-fashioning by someone who wished

to be remembered as a traveler-diplomat. Enrique Corredera Nilsson's chapter about the missions of the Danish ambassador Cornelius Lerche in 1650–55 and 1658–62 pays special attention to his protagonist's interest in books, prints and paintings. Among other things, we learn that Lerche may have been responsible for bringing Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala's manuscript about Viceregal Peru, the famous *Nueva corónica y buen gobierno* (ca. 1615), from Madrid to Copenhagen. Lerche also offers insights to the strategic nature of gift-giving among courtiers. The chapter by Hans Helander and Martin Olin describes the 1651–52 visit to Madrid by Mathias Palbitzki, a representative of Queen Cristina of Sweden, who struggled to establish a footing at court owing to Sweden's shifting alliances following the Thirty Years' War.

*Small Italian States and the Sublime Porte* is the title of the final section, comprised of four chapters. The section opens with Piero Boccardo's chapter about the Genoese nobleman Anton Giulio Brignole-Sale's embassy in Madrid from 1644–46, which complements the Ambassador's known correspondence with new findings derived from the diary of the papal nuncio (and future pope) Giulio Rospigliosi. Unfortunately, the essay's great man approach to history-writing leaves it lacking in comparison with other chapters. In contrast, Paola Volpini's chapter about Medici diplomats serving as brokers of scientific knowledge — namely, Galileo Galilei's claims to have invented a machine capable of measuring longitude at sea — is refreshingly novel. Volpini lays out the stakes for the Medici court clearly: Tuscany, 'a diminutive state with a Mediterranean coastline', was 'trying to introduce itself into the trans-continental trafficking of the powerful Spanish monarchy' (p. 439). Focusing on the tireless efforts of Count Orso Pannocchieschi d'Elci, Volpini's narrative about the transmission of scientific knowledge between courts complements the more obviously political missions of other ambassadors and agents featured in the volume.

Next, Jorge Fernández-Santos and Hüseyin Serdar Tabakoğlu explore the ins and outs of an unexpected visit to Madrid in 1649–50 by an Ottoman representative Ahmed Agha within the larger context of political crisis at the Istanbul court. Although questions about Spanish-Ottoman relations during a bellicose time lie solidly in the background of the chapter, the narrative comes across as something of an entertaining interlude to the book under review, filled as it is with salacious details about a figure who was an imposter if not a buffoon, keeping company in Madrid with prostitutes and actors. A poet takes center stage in the book's final chapter by Mercedes Simal López which considers the visits in 1636 and 1638 by Fulvio Testi as representative to the duchy of Modena. As a broker, Testi was especially ambitious and acted in ways bordering on unethical given that his fickle ruler often required him to hold dueling positions. In the end, Simal López suggests that Testi's duplicity can be traced to an anti-Spanish stance that appeared in his earliest writings and continued after his return to Italy.

The editors of this volume are to be commended for its illustration program. The collection of portraits and city views as well as book frontispieces, archival documents and precious objects in a range of media provide visual delight as a reader makes one's way through the book's chapters. From the vantage of an art historian, which is my own, the book's visual apparatus is contradictorily disappointing as most of the images appear as ornamental background; only a handful of authors incorporate illustrations fully into their texts. In the final assessment, however, this book offers an important revision to the standard history of decline in seventeenth-century Spain. Such is the message of Miguel-Ángel Ochoa Brun's epilogue excerpted from a classic book on Philip IV's ambassadors published in 2002. Ochoa

Brun tests a thesis about the lack of statesmen with political acumen in seventeenth-century Spain, an idea that originated in period sources and was taken at face value by later historians. Highlighting political treatises about government written by former ambassadors — including Saavedra Fajardo whose analogy of the court as a harp opened this review — Ochoa Brun offers a counter-narrative, suggesting that negotiation and diplomacy were strategic objectives of Spanish ambassadors. This essay, like the chapters in this volume, challenges future historians to give greater heed to the daily experiences of life at court as a means of correcting our perceptions of success, failure, or even stalemate during a volatile century.

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