

BOOK REVIEW

A Spectacle for a Spanish Princess: The Festive Entry of Joanna of Castile into Brussels (1496), ed. Dagmar H. Eichberger (Turnhout: Brepols, 2023; pp. 440. €110).

A solemn or joyous entry into the city was usually the high point of any princely nuptials. This choreographed procession, featuring the town's religious and secular bodies and many forms of pageantry, made possible a unique symbolic dialogue between the town and the court. The entry was imbued with multiple messages that asserted the city's identity, demands or claims *vis-à-vis* the sovereign or his consort.

Unfortunately, few detailed textual or visual representations of this ceremony have survived from before the sixteenth century. A precious exception is Ms 78 D5, stored in the Berlin Kupferstichkabinett. In 63 folios, combining pen-sketches and watercolour images with textual comments, the booklet records the entire processional sequence and ephemeral theatrical stages (*tableaux vivants*) during the entry of Joanna, daughter of Queen Isabel of Castile, into Brussels in 1496. *A Spectacle for a Spanish Princess* aims to bring this truly extraordinary source to a wider audience. As such, it provides a high-resolution colour reproduction of the manuscript, a commentary on the visual features, and a transcription of the accompanying texts in Latin with English translations. The first half of the volume consists of nine essays that tackle specific aspects of the manuscript and the ceremonial event.

The first chapter, by Raymond Fagel, briefly runs through the historical background of Joanna (or Juana)'s marriage to Philip the Handsome, her early years, education and journey to the Low Countries. Annemarie Jordan Gschwend reconstructs the princess's trousseau, the majority of which was lost in a shipwreck during Joanna's tumultuous voyage. Through a meticulous analysis of the surviving Spanish royal accounts, Gschwend identifies a luxurious and diverse set of items, often produced by Muslim craftsmen and containing exotic commodities such as perfumes or dyes brought from the New World.

Chapters Three (Claire Billen and Chloé Deligne), Four (Remco Sleiderink and Amber Souleymane) and Eight (Sascha Köhl) focus on the role of Brussels in the ceremony. Facing a financial and reputational crisis, Brussels had to put its best foot forward for the incoming princess to lure her into choosing the city as her residence. Billen and Deligne expound on the religious and secular authorities and members of various guilds who walked in the parade. As they show, the carefully staged order of magistrates cast Brussels as a well-governed city of chief importance in Brabant or the lands of Burgundian dukes in general. Picking up on the same theme, Köhl examines the town hall whose panegyric fills the last lines of Ms 78 D5. By detailed analysis and comparison, Köhl very convincingly shows the unique features of this building (inner fountains, a judicial hall with paintings by Rogier van der Weyden, a spire tower, a tower with a bulbous roof), which also demonstrate Brussels's leading position among its rivals. Sleiderink and Souleymane concentrate on

two bodies directly involved in the organisation of the reception—the guild of crossbowmen and the chamber of rhetoricians. By bringing up other cases of princely or religious celebrations, the authors very clearly show that the city had a stable tradition of such festivities.

Zooming in on the *tableaux vivants*, Chapters Five (Wim Blockmans), Six (Dagmar Eichberger) and Seven (Laura Weigert) attempt to elucidate the messages presented to the princess in various stages along her processional route. Blockmans and Eichberger scrutinise *tableaux* showing female heroines and delve into their sources, inspiration and traditions. These images mostly revolved around heroic deeds and good counsel—expected of Joanna—and matrimonial compatibility. Weigert's essay, on the other hand, demonstrates that not everything was about political messages. Many parts of the entry (wild men, jesters, fireworks, etc.) were meant to provide entertainment and recreation, albeit with a moralising and perhaps esoteric edge. The closing chapter by Anne-Marie Legaré addresses the visual technique used in the manuscript. By bringing together other contemporary sources, Legaré proves that watercolour on paper was far from an inexpensive and minor form of illustration as it was regularly used by the elite for literary or historical works.

There is a slight amount of repetition across chapters, but this could hardly be avoided given the common topic and the need for coherence within particular chapters. There are historical and genealogical errors here and there (e.g. Joanna's daughter was not Catherine of England, but of Portugal, p. 136; King Alfonso V of Naples was neither father of Alfonso II nor grandfather of Joanna, p. 137; Isabel of Castile was not the first queen regnant in Europe, p. 133). Many chapters produce very compelling arguments, although one may contend that, for example, the sequence of civic groups (Chapter Three) in the parade is not a result of attempts to shake off the crisis but a constant feature in joyous entries. Similarly, some sections would perhaps benefit from more comparative analysis, for instance, when speaking about queenly ideals presented to Joanna via the *tableaux vivants*. The choice of martial heroines (Amazons and belligerent biblical women) is quite extraordinary, and it should be highlighted more, for example, by engaging with examples of other princely women. The same applies to the literary sources of the *tableaux*: while it is true that Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris* was not the most influential one (although the authors disagree on the proportion: Blockmans claims that five female figures were taken from Boccaccio, p. 124, Eichberger only two, p. 162), there could have been other sources of inspiration, such as Christine de Pizan's *La cité des dames*, which shares a much higher proportion of the female characters with Joanna's entry.

Despite these minor reservations, the essays successfully approach Ms 78 D5 and Joanna's entry from many perspectives, presenting them as a multisensorial and complex source and event. Obviously, they do not answer every question. But taken together, with the facsimile and accompanying commentaries, the volume is a splendid piece of scholarly (and even art-) work that deserves the attention of scholars working on any aspect of medieval and early modern Europe.

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