

Book Reviews

A Spectacle for a Spanish Princess: The Festive Entry of Joanna of Castile into Brussels (1496). Edited by Dagmar H. Eichberger. Brepols, 2024. 440 pp. \$138.00. ISBN 9782503594439.

In many ways, this is a wonderful publication that will be of enduring scholarly value. This is not least because the final third consists of a handsomely produced facsimile (albeit not to scale) of the illustrated festival book that is the main source for historical knowledge about the formal reception of Joanna of Castile and Aragon into the city of Brussels on 9 December 1496. Although there is a scattering of specialist articles on this festival book, a more detailed study is long overdue. The book may have been relatively neglected because it is a manuscript (78 D5 from the Kupferstichkabinett in Berlin). Therefore, in the past, it was not as easily accessible as the many later-printed festival books from the Low Countries, a vital European center of both civic ceremonial and printed texts and imagery in the later medieval and early modern period.

Manuscript 78 D5 is certainly important for several reasons. First, it is the earliest-known fully illustrated account of a civic entry produced anywhere in Europe. It contains sixty fascinating pen and watercolor miniatures, some of which include shell gold and silver paint, and each of these images is supplemented by a short textual description. Moreover, the spectacular performance described in the festival book was devoted to an important young woman: Joanna, who was the second daughter of Isabel of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon, as well as the newly minted Duchess of Burgundy. When Joanna made her entry into Brussels, she had been married for less than two months to Philip the Handsome, the first Habsburg Duke of Burgundy and hence overlord of various Netherlandish provinces that he had inherited from his mother, Mary of Valois. These provinces lay at the center of the northern European trading networks and were therefore both

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populous and affluent, with powerful and highly self-conscious civic traditions. The marriage of Joanna and Philip was therefore one strand of the complex diplomatic and dynastic links between the princely houses of Valois, Habsburg, and Trastámara. At the same time, Joanna's first entry into Brussels shortly after this event, where she was unaccompanied by her husband and thus welcomed ceremonially in her own right, helped to reinforce the equally complex political and social links between the inhabitants of Brussels and their ducal overlords.

The volume under review is, however, much more than a handsome and useful facsimile. It is also a scholarly anthology of ten essays focused on the entry ceremonial, its historical context, its literary and artistic contents, and the manuscript itself. The first of these essays is by Dagmar Eichberger, who is also the editor of the book. Eichberger provides a general introduction to manuscript 78 D5, underscoring that it is the first of its kind in Europe and "the first dedicated exclusively to a woman" (26). This, in itself, testifies to the importance of Eichberger's work in bringing the entire volume into being. Then follows an essay by Raymond Fagel, which sketches the broader historical context in the period from 1496 to 1501, when Joanna had to flesh out her new role as the Duchess of Burgundy. This was by no means an easy task, as Fagel cogently shows, but Joanna performed well. Her position at the Burgundian court was consolidated by the fact that she gave birth to three healthy children with astonishing rapidity: Eleanor, future queen of Portugal and later of France, in November 1498; Charles, future Holy Roman emperor and king of Spain, in February 1500; and Isabella, future queen of Denmark-Norway, in July 1501.

After these two general overviews, there are more detailed essays. In the first, Annemarie Jordan Gschwend documents and discusses with all her customary thoroughness and verve the fabulous trousseau that Isabel of Castile assembled for her second daughter. Then follows a thoughtful and well-researched essay by Claire Billen and Chloé Deligne focused on twenty-nine of the illustrations in the festival book. These show the processional order of the various members of the civic community of Brussels as they marched with their new duchess. The next essay by Remco Sleiderink and Amber Souleymane also presents impressive research that, through circumstantial evidence, allows for the identification of the chief organizer of the festival as Jan Smeken, the city poet of Brussels.

After this, two further essays attend to the many facets of femininity articulated in the festival performed for Duchess Joanna. First, Wim Blockmans insightfully evaluates the use of "female characters as role models for the ideal princess-consort" (141)

deployed by Smecken and his various assistants. Then follows an equally insightful analysis by Eichberger of the role of Old Testament heroines in the entry. The following two essays change tack again to a more embodied approach. Laura Weigert contributes with an astutely observed and acutely argued investigation of the entry festival as entertainment, as something to be enjoyed; this is an important corrective because older scholarly accounts of such festivals tend to stress their moralizing contents. And Sascha Köhl responds to the short description of the Brussels Town Hall at the end of the manuscript with a meticulously researched account of this building's original architecture and civic significance. In the final essay, by Anne-Marie Legaré, attention turns to the manuscript itself. Watercolor on paper was a somewhat unusual medium for a book in the late fifteenth century, but by drawing on important parallel cases, Legaré demonstrates that the manuscript fits in a specific genre of books dedicated to recording either historical events or specific religious or princely spectacles. The medium therefore stages the manuscript as a type of reportage.

All of these scholarly treasures are followed by three useful short pieces: Eichberger's "A Codicological Description," Helga Kaiser-Minn's "Short Descriptions of the Miniatures" supplemented with helpful thumbnail illustrations, and Verena Demoed's transcription and English translation of the Latin text. Finally comes the facsimile itself. It must be underscored, again, that the whole is a remarkable achievement, not least because the project was begun during the COVID epidemic (19). Fundamentally, *A Spectacle for a Spanish Princess* showcases collaborative scholarship at its best, drawing out the many and rich historical insights to be gained from engaging with one manuscript from a wide range of viewpoints. From now on, this book will enable more and better grounded scholarship on Joanna herself, on her entry into Brussels, and on the history of such civic entries in general.

Given this, it may seem churlish to draw attention to a few problems. But that is, after all, the duty of a reviewer. First, it is odd to open the entire volume with two pictures from a musical manuscript (16–17) and then to have no coherent analysis of the role of music within the entry. Admittedly, Björn R. Tammen published such an analysis in 2011 ("A Feast of the Arts: Joanna of Castile in Brussels, 1496," *Early Music History* 30 [2011]: 213–48). But it would have been helpful to have someone like him summarize more recent research on the role of music in princely entries and then bring this to bear on manuscript 78 D5. As Sleiderink and Souleymane note, a distinct combination of music and rhetoric was central to

the literary culture of Brussels in this period (119) and therefore to the city's official poet, Jan Smeken, almost certainly the chief organizer behind Joanna's entry.

In addition, the volume as a whole is sadly marred by a lack of thorough copyediting and proofreading. For example, Joanna's daughter Eleanor is referred to by this name but, on the same page, also as "Leonor" (48) and elsewhere as "Eleonora" (136). And while the idea of Queen Tomyris having someone drowned "in a womb filled with blood" (135) is an evocative possibility, Demoed's translation of the manuscript text more prosaically identifies the vessel as a "sack" (271). In fact, the Latin phrase "in uterem" just means a container of some sort. And these are but two of many such problems across the volume. This is not a complaint leveled against the editor or the authors—several of whom are operating in their second or third language—but rather against Brepols, the publisher. It is not the first time I have raised such problems in a review of a book from this publisher. But it is particularly galling when the book is otherwise so beautifully produced and so full of scholarly insights. If Brepols insists on publishing in English, why skimp on something as minor as an appropriately skilled copy editor and proofreader? It shows profound disrespect for all the hard work of everyone who contributed to this otherwise wonderful book.

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