

Reviews of Books

XANTHE BROOKE, *Murillo's True Portrait of the Holy King Ferdinand III in Context*.

Preface by Jonathan Ruffer. Madrid: Centro de Estudios Europa Hispánica/Bishop Auckland: The Auckland Project. 2024. 232 pp.; 76 colour illustrations.

After a century out of public view, a portrait of Ferdinand III of Castile and Leon (1201–1252) came to auction in 2019 and the following year entered the holdings of the Zurbarán Trust in Bishop Auckland. This painting of c.1671 by Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1617–1682) subsequently went on exhibit in the Spanish Gallery of the Auckland Project. Xanthe Brooke has composed an engaging study of the artistic, religious and political factors behind the remarkable but little-known image and its passage through the centuries.

The seven chapters encompass a range of themes in a chiefly chronological framework. Brooke reviews the king's role in Spanish history, including his conquest of Seville in 1248 and eventual burial in its cathedral. She then explores his depiction in art from the 1620s to the 1640s, with an influential Roman print of 1630 by Charles Audran (1594–1674) presenting the monarch in terms often derived from sixteenth-century Habsburg portraiture. The narrative turns to Murillo and characterizes his exceptional knowledge of the king's appearance and images as the foundation for the singular *vera effigies*, or true portrait, now in Bishop Auckland. Its creation dates to around 1671, when Seville staged festivities to promote the canonisation of Ferdinand III. This celebration, alongside his listing in 1672 as a saint in the Roman martyrology, spurred devotion in key Spanish cities, including the court of Madrid. The burst of enthusiasm, however, did not lead to substantial artistic innovation in either the Iberian Peninsula or the American realms; Brooke explains how Murillo's holy image, while noteworthy, had limited influence on other painters or imagery. She concludes by tracing the provenance and fortunes of this artwork into the twenty-first century.

Readers will come to appreciate the choices made by Murillo when depicting Ferdinand III. For example, Brooke compares the *vera effigies* of the beardless monarch—partly grounded in observation of the corpse by the artist in 1649 and 1671—with other images, including by Murillo himself, that traditionally show the king as bearded and therefore Christ-like. This art historical background explains the different approaches to facial hair. To better understand the motive of this undated 'true portrait', Brooke notes that the Latin inscription acclaims the king as divine or holy (*divi*) rather than as a saint (*sanctus*). The word choice may indicate that his sainthood had not yet earned papal recognition. This observation opens the door to speculation that Murillo composed this painting within a limited time frame of 1671 to 1672 to support the campaign for canonization.

Art historians will find the beautifully illustrated book indispensable for its approach to Murillo, Ferdinand III and Seville, yet other readers may avail themselves of its ample contextual material. For instance, historians of statecraft may consult Brooke's account of how the Spanish Habsburgs and their Bourbon successors harnessed the powers of the royal saint. The initiatives of Mariana of Austria (r.1649–1665, regent 1665–1675, †1696), for example, envisioned Ferdinand III as a Spanish counterpart to Louis IX of France (1214–1270), canonized in 1297. Scholars of religion will admire the analysis by Brooke of the transatlantic devotional landscape that shaped the fortunes of the Castilian saint from the seventeenth century onward.

Perhaps a future study will pursue a technical investigation of Murillo's painting of Ferdinand III in the Spanish Gallery. This methodology surfaces when Brooke briefly describes the analysis by Spanish researchers of a possible nineteenth-century copy of this portrait in the church of Santa María de las Huelgas Reales at Burgos. The original painting in Bishop Auckland—described in passing as having undergone restoration in Spain, likely between 1829 and 1835—deserves a study of its surface, layers, pigments and canvas, so that the insights of technical art history may support Brooke's compelling narrative.

This book stands among the first in the Spanish Gallery Collection Studies, an initiative to advance scholarship at the museum formally opened in 2022 by Queen Letizia of Spain and Charles, then Prince of Wales. With her thorough history of this unfamiliar portrait of Ferdinand III, Brooke opens this series on a strong note. Murillo has long drawn international recognition as among the best painters of Spain, and Brooke takes readers to a realm of artists, saints and holy images. Her publication can serve as a model for research on the many dimensions of a single artwork.

JEFFREY SCHRADER

University of Colorado Denver.