

René Vermeir, Dries Raeymaekers en José Eloy Hortal Muñoz ed., *A constellation of courts. The courts and households of Habsburg Europe 1555-1665* (Leuven University Press; Leuven, 2014) 394 p., €49,50
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Habsburg courts: from membership to meaning

The courts of early modern Europe have attracted intense scholarly attention for three or four decades, but the range of questions to be asked and sources to be consulted means that there is plenty of room for new work. This collection of eleven essays by an international team of scholars presents studies of the interconnected Habsburg courts in Madrid, Brussels, Vienna, Graz and Innsbruck from the early sixteenth to the late seventeenth century. All are based on thorough archival research and present substantial new material. Some sweep widely across the history of a single court, showing how various forces shaped it, while others focus on briefer periods or more specific themes. Many are all the more convincing because they present telling evidence that the ideas or models they use to analyse courts and their functions are visible in the ways that contemporaries thought about courts.

While the editors and various contributors rightly emphasize that we should think of the Habsburg realms in terms of dynasty and multiple monarchies rather than in terms of national states, several essays address important themes in the history of state formation. Courts were essential in managing the loyalty of local elites, especially in an age of composite monarchy. The viceroys of the Spanish Habsburgs from Italy to the Indies drew around themselves courts full of, as Philip II put it for the New World, 'the sons and grandsons of discoverers, peacemakers and settlers and other distinguished people'. Membership of the military orders and Golden Fleece, court

posts and pensions were given to Philip III's Flemish subjects, as he said, 'to win over the country's nobles'. Franc-Comtois close to the Archduchess Isabella kept their beleaguered province in contact with the Brussels regime. Magnificent courtly display was also important in the legitimation of power. Courts with dynastic aspirations, like that of Archduke Leopold of the Tyrol, put more effort into it than those without, like that of his predecessor in Innsbruck, the *Deutschmeister* Maximilian. Ceremonial roles might be entrusted to those chosen to make the subject population feel represented around the ruler: Archduke Albert's court guardsmen were Flemings, whereas his fighting bodyguard were Spaniards. Changes in material culture afforded new ways to show magnificence and generated new ceremonial to accompany them, as with the rise of the coach and sedan chair for princely travel and formal entries into towns.

The collection balances attention to court symbolism – coaches that alluded to ancient triumphal chariots, sedan chairs that hinted at monstrosities – with consideration of the practicalities of court life. We can watch over Olivares' shoulder as he weighed up the need to cut costs against the danger that the elimination of 'ancient customs' risked 'loss of authority' and set him in the longer context of a Spanish court that grew more expensive in the 1560s as it settled at Madrid and again, after a period of stagnation, in the 1600s, and that never succeeded in assigning particular revenue streams to its upkeep. A major theme

is the interchange between the different Habsburg courts and the effects it had on each one. Lawyers, physicians and chaplains moved more freely around the dynastic complex than noblemen, but many members of the dynasty were mobile too and servants moved between households. All this is exemplified by the household of Archduke Albert in Madrid, largely staffed by Castilians but including such intriguing individuals as George of Austria, the illegitimate son of an illegitimate son of the Emperor Maximilian who had been prince-bishop of Liège, and Ogier Ghislain de Busbecq, former imperial ambassador to Istanbul. Once Albert was installed in the Low Countries, the strong Spanish presence at his court became a driver of factional politics. First Philip III used his contacts around Albert to steer him towards more a more militant approach to the conflict with the northern provinces and then the Spanish faction in Brussels became linked with the opponents of Lerma in Madrid, each emerging triumphant as the favourite fell and war was renewed.

Courts were shaped not only by networks but also by princely personality and life-cycle and collective dynastic style. Albert's household became more clerical while he was a cardinal, sedan chairs were comfortable for pregnant queens, and Anne of Austria patronised Val-de-Grâce abbey partly as a place of retreat from the pressures of court politics. The inter-

mittent presence of an imperial consort at the Vienna court in the preceding decades meant that it was the structures, practices and personnel of the archduchesses' households at Graz that were transferred to Vienna with the accession of Ferdinand II as emperor. Religion was both a matter of individual piety and of dynastic identity. The intense eucharistic piety and Roman baroque architecture of Anne of Austria's Val-de-Grâce reflected her family traditions. Membership of the military orders of the Reconquista was an appropriate way to draw Flemish noblemen into the crusade against the heresy of the Dutch rebels. And alongside religion stood powerful dynastic tradition, in particular the long shadow cast by the court of Burgundy. One of the keys to the importance of the Franc-Comtois in Brussels was that they were the last Burgundians still under Habsburg rule, while as late as 1636 a Spanish official could explain aspects of the royal household by referring back to 'the grandeur of the House of Burgundy and its Duke Charles'. In drawing attention to such deep structures of court life while acknowledging the flurry of politics, diplomacy and ceremonial, this collection makes an important contribution to our advancing understanding of the early modern court.

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