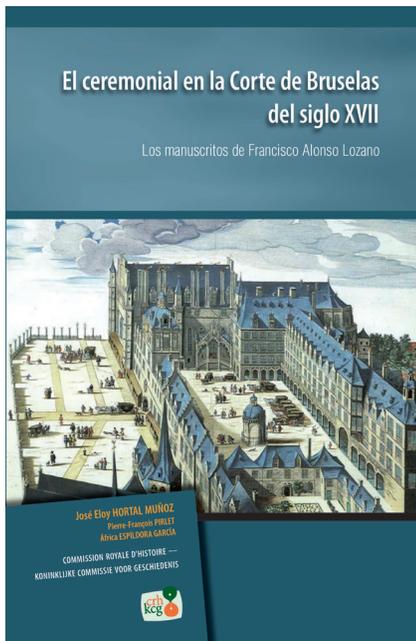


Note

José Eloy Hortal Muñoz, Pierre-François Pirlet, and África Espildora García (eds), *El ceremonial en la Corte de Bruselas del siglo XVII. Los manuscritos de Francisco Alonso Lozano*, Brussels, Commission Royale d'Histoire, 2018, 271 pp. ISBN 978-2-87044-016-2



Since the 1970s, numerous studies have been devoted to the history of the princely courts of Europe. Many of these have focused on the magnificent royal courts of France, England, and Spain, but in recent years the courts of smaller principalities, too, have been researched extensively. By comparison, the court of Brussels has received scant attention in historiography. Owing to its reputation as a subaltern court of the Spanish monarchy, the Brussels court was often considered to have been of secondary importance at best. Most scholars have therefore tended to concentrate on the first decades of the seventeenth century, when the archdukes Albert and Isabella (1598-1633) inhabited the palace on the city's Coudenberg hill and created a court that rivalled many others in size and opulence.

While these studies have greatly contributed to our knowledge of the Brussels court as a centre of international diplomacy and culture, its history during the second half of the seventeenth century has remained largely unexplored. From the 1660s onwards the Coudenberg palace became the residence of a rapid succession of governors, few of whom remained in the Low Countries long enough to take a vested interest in its upkeep. The resulting scholarly indifference towards this later period has also been affected by the problematic archival situation, as relevant sources are scattered across multiple European archives. It is therefore of particular interest that two of the most important surviving documents shedding light on the history of the court in this turbulent age have recently been published by the Royal Historical Commission of Belgium. It concerns two manuscripts

held by the Belgian State Archives (Archives générales du Royaume, *Manuscrits Divers*, nos. 442 and 443), both of which contain invaluable information on the organisation and structure of 'La Maison Royale de Bruxelles', as the household of the governors in the Spanish Netherlands was known.

Written by Francisco Alonso Lozano, who served under several consecutive governors as an aide of the Oratory and as quartermaster, these manuscripts enable us to reconstruct in detail how the Brussels household operated. The manuscripts were compiled by order of Maximilian-Emmanuel of Wittelsbach, Elector of Bavaria, who was appointed governor of the Spanish Netherlands in 1691 and whose boundless dynastic ambitions, the editors surmise, may explain why Lozano was assigned the task of recording the existing court ceremonial – perhaps with the aim of emphasising its prestige (41). The codification of court ceremonial was common practice in early modern Europe, as for example at the court of Madrid, where a similar endeavour resulted in the so-called *Etiquetas Generales de Palacio*. However, unlike the *Etiquetas*, Lozano's work remained unfinished for reasons unknown, and was never published.

The first manuscript, entitled *Plan ou Estat de la maison royale dans ces estats de Flandres*, contains an elaborate description of the organisational structure of the household and the different units it comprised. The second, written in Spanish, offers an overview of the many offices in the household, as well as an explanation of the responsibilities and the salaries involved. The texts are preceded by an introduction by the editor, José Eloy Hortal Muñoz, who in this project was assisted by Pierre-François Pirlet and África Espíldora García. An expert on the history of the courts of the Spanish monarchy, Hortal Muñoz provides the reader with an insightful discussion of the historical context and further particulars about the choices made by the editorial team. There is also a helpful list of court offices in both Spanish and French, as well as an onomastic index.

The value of this edition cannot be overestimated. The book unlocks two crucial sources for understanding the history of the court of Brussels, enabling scholars to compare its *modus operandi* to that of royal and princely courts elsewhere in Europe. The fact that the Royal Historical Commission has decided to award the editors the prestigious Henri Pirenne Prize – intended to reward scholars for exemplary editions of texts on the history of Belgium – testifies to the importance of their contribution.

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