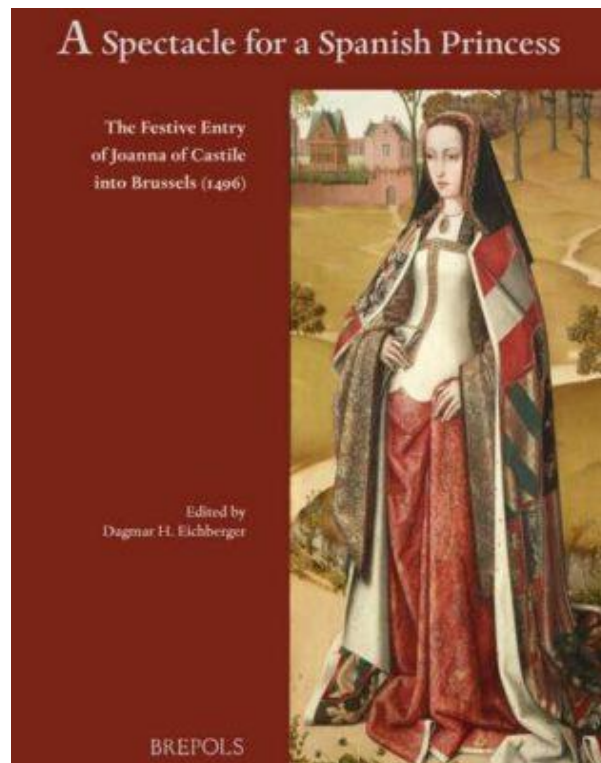


Historians of Netherlandish Art Reviews



A Spectacle for a Spanish Princess: The Festive Entry of Joanna of Castile into Brussels (1496)

By Dagmar H. Eichberger, ed.

Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2024. 440 pp, 240 color illus. ISBN 978-2-503-59443-9.

Review published July 2024

This volume, published by Brepols with the collaboration of CEEH (Centro de Estudios Europa Hispánica), addresses an event known from only one primary source, the manuscript of *The Festive Entry of Joanna of Castile into Brussels* in the Kupferstichkabinett at the Staatliche Museen in Berlin (ms. 78 D5). The editor, Dagmar Eichberger, has delivered an interdisciplinary study on the literary, visual, and material culture of Brussels in 1496, the year in which the *Joyeuse entrée* of the Spanish princess Joanna of Castile took place in the city following her marriage to Philip the Fair. The monograph tells the story of the woman, nicknamed “the Mad” by positivist writers; in this volume, though, she is considered as an important player in the negotiation between the Habsburgs, the Trastámara-Aragón dynasties, and the city of Brussels.

Most of the manuscript’s 63 folios include Latin text on their verso and an image on the recto. These pages are studied by different scholars over the first ten chapters, which follow the manuscript’s structure: 29 miniatures with a procession of the city representatives and 28 *tableaux vivants*, plus two folios with coats-of-arms related to Joanna and her husband. The monograph addresses three interconnected themes: Princess Joanna, the manuscript itself (and festive culture), and the city of Brussels. The final chapters comprise a codicological description of the manuscript by the editor, a

description of its watercolor sketches by Helga Kaiser-Minn, and a transcription of the Latin text and a translation into English by Verena Demoed. Finally, the publication includes a full-page reproduction of the entire manuscript.

Eichberger's introduction presents the state of research, mentioning all publications that have analyzed the manuscript and the hypothesis of the volume. Even if mentioned in the historiography, the source was sometimes only considered relevant by scholars due to the lack of any other account of what happened during the festivities held in Brussels (pp. 27-28). Indeed, Eichberger uses the set of miniatures to uncover information on the relationship between Princess Joanna and the city of Brussels, which tried to entice her to visit, possibly to ensure future benefits. However, the preserved manuscript is not a presentation copy intended for Joanna but was meant to be a record of this important event for the city itself.

The next chapter, by Raymond Fagel, describes the political circumstances and known sources on Joanna's stay in the Low Countries. It explains the princess's role until 1501, according to chroniclers and Spanish diplomats at the Habsburg court, and describes her courtiers' degree of integration in Flanders (p. 45-47). The study by Annemarie Jordan Gschwend deals with Joanna's *trousseau* and her possessions, carried by her fleet from Laredo to Middelburg in 1496. With few available sources, the author reconstructs the Spanish princess's fashion strategy, including displaying her luxury goods, such as jewels, garments, textiles, furniture, and perfumes. The chapter highlights a few preserved examples of Spanish fashion items that perfectly illustrate what an infanta might wear and use in everyday life. It also provides information on the rarely mentioned marriage chest (p. 60-61) from the Pedro de Osma Museum in Lima, Peru.

The festive entry seems to be sending a message to the princess, and the article by Wim Blockmans, as well as Eichberger's chapter on Old Testament scenes, explore this aspect. Both analyze the female iconography of the *tableaux vivants*' imagery and the Latin poems accompanying them in the manuscript. Blockmans sets out the symbolism of the number three during the festivity and the importance of street performances that recalled the *Nine Female Worthies*. He notes that neither the ephemeral decorations nor the text mention Joanna's virtues, but the celebration organizer wanted to include her mother, Queen Isabella of Castile, in the discourse (p. 135). Meanwhile, Eichberger addresses the visual and textual content of the manuscript as a message from the city to the princess. She concludes that the stories performed during the event were related to heroic deeds, marriage negotiation, and peacemaking (p. 161), and they were meant to be understood as lessons for the young princess who, after the event, would perform her duties in the Low Countries. The chapter by Anne-Marie Legaré places *The Festive Entry of Joanna of Castile into Brussels* in the broader context of watercolor paper manuscripts from Flanders, Germany, Provence, and Lorraine. She states that this type of book was not exclusively related to noble patronage but also to the upper middle classes, and according to her, the authorship of its miniatures must be related to the Brussels Guild of Painters (pp. 225-26).

Several contributions consider the city of Brussels and its political strategy developed under Habsburg rule. Claire Billen and Chloé Deligne's joint chapter stresses the city's visual policy during the event, describing the participation of civic guilds in the festivities and their representations on the manuscript pages. They conclude with an analysis of the attitude of Brussels's citizens toward the Habsburgs, supposing that the manuscript

“recalls the procession of unity” of the city (p. 106). Remco Sleiderink and Amber Souleymane’s chapter offers a hypothesis on the authorship of the poems from the manuscript, suggesting that the text was created in the milieu of the Brussels chambers of rhetoric, particularly the *De Lilie* chamber. As the city registers of Joanna’s entry are not preserved, the authors deduce who might have been responsible for the *tableaux vivants*’ design and the rhetoric of the festivities from the organization of other ceremonies in the city (held in 1486, 1498, 1503, and 1504). Convincingly, they propose that the city poets Jan Smeken, Johannes Pertcheval, and Hendrik De Lichte might have been involved in organizing the event (pp. 118-20). The chapter by Laura Weigert deals with public entertainment during state events and identifies the meaning of metaphors portrayed in performances in the streets of Brussels. This study suggests an interpretation of the presence of fools, lights, and gestures as part of the culture of spectacles in the Low Countries (pp. 170-73). Finally, Sascha Köhl discusses the architecture of the town hall in Brussels, remarking on how important the building became as a symbol of prosperity in the city and comparing it with other cases in Brabant. Köhl’s analysis provides a new reading of the engraving that shows the building from 1650, remarking on the “second tower,” called *Boterpot*, with a bulbous spire, built ca. 1500, and states that precisely this part of the town hall could have been the first archive of the city’s privileges (p. 201).

The monograph offers new knowledge about the history of the Habsburg monarchy, brings the manuscript source into the spotlight, and deals with Princess Joanna’s role when she arrived in the Low Countries. The publication tells the complex story of the events of 1496 as a critical moment for the Habsburgs’ future in an accessible and multidisciplinary way. The chapters analyze written and visual evidence from the manuscript but also offer the reader the broad political and literary contexts of the moment that determined the strategy implemented by the city to invite Joanna to settle her court there. To an extent, the city was successful, as the princess did indeed spend most of her time in the Low Countries in Brussels.

Encompassing subjects such as history, art history, and the history of literature, and approaches like Habsburg or general court studies, this publication is recommended for all scholars interested in the Low Countries. The volume can also be helpful in its approach to understanding Early Modern festivities, urban studies, and the history of fashion. The high-quality reproduction of the primary source in the final pages of the publication allows readers to test the ideas introduced in the preceding essays.

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