

*A Constellation of Courts: The Courts and Households of Habsburg Europe, 1555–1665.* René Vermeir, Dries Raeymaekers, and José Eloy Hortal Muñoz, eds.

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This collection is the revised result of a roundtable that was held in Brussels in 2006. It contains eleven articles by scholars from at least four European countries, including Austria, Belgium, France, and Spain (two authors list no affiliation.) Almost half of these

authors are tied to the important research group *La Corte en Europa* at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, and much of the research presented in the volume was funded by various Spanish government agencies and the Research Foundation Flanders. The volume provides a variegated look into the complex worlds of Habsburg courts in the century on either side of 1600. It is particularly helpful in promoting a better understanding of the complex relationships between Madrid and the Low Countries (including the oft-forgotten *Franche-Comté*), and to some extent Portugal and France, as well as similar court-centered ties between Vienna and the subsidiary Habsburg courts in Graz and Innsbruck.

Because of the time that has elapsed between the original meeting and the appearance of this volume, some recent works relating to the subject have been omitted or only mentioned in passing in the footnotes. The editors have tried to compensate with a clear if rather brief introduction and conclusion, which include references to works up to 2013 and some websites. The theme of the collection is an important one: in order to adequately understand the politics and cultural connections of the period, the stale analytical division between a study of the elder, Iberian branch of the Habsburg dynasty and the younger, Austrian one must be overcome. As the editors state in their introduction, “This divide must be crossed in order to truly comprehend the relationship between the European courts under Habsburg rule” (14). The particular role of the court at Brussels is emphasized. According to the editors, “understanding this court’s history is key to unravelling the evolution of the relationship between both branches of the family during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries” (16).

There are some tried-and-true themes that again come to the fore in the collection. These include the ongoing debates about the role of the Burgundian model for the development of Habsburg courts, and the seemingly endless discussions of factions at the Spanish court. It must be admitted that at times only dedicated specialists might be interested in following the detailed analysis of the particular gentry women and men occupying various middle-level court offices, whether those women and men exercised their circumscribed authority in Brussels, Graz, Innsbruck, or wherever. A strength of the overall work is indicated in Manuel Rivero’s chapter on the courts of the Spanish viceroys: he writes of the dynamic nature of the subject matter of the collection, where “conflicts over jurisdiction were endemic and choral in nature,” and “it was a question of jurisdictional spaces that ebbed and flowed like a magma of states in unstable equilibrium, continually negotiating their scope and their boundaries” (72).

Two figures in particular can be used to represent the advantages of the approach advocated by the authors in this collection: the increasingly well-known Archduke Albrecht (d. 1621) and his lesser-known but also important relative Archduchess Margarete (d. 1611). Albrecht’s name appears in the index to this volume more often than his better-known royal relatives Kings Philip III and IV of Spain, and almost as often as his (in)famous uncle and father/brother-in-law Philip II. Albrecht, born in Central Europe to an Iberian Habsburg mother and an Austrian Habsburg father, went on to a dazzling religious and political career in Spain, Portugal, and the Habsburg

Netherlands. His cousin Margarete, born at the Styrian Habsburg court now becoming better and better known as the cradle of the reinvigoration of the dynasty, went on to become queen of Spain and exercised substantial influence in the rejuvenation of that court as well as on the court of her royal daughter the infanta Ana (d. 1666), who would become queen consort, queen regent, and queen dowager of France.

It can only be hoped that scholars are inspired by the examples collected in this volume to look beyond the narrow confines of the nation-states that have blinkered so many researchers. A comprehensive bibliography of all of the works mentioned in this collection would have made such future research easier. Instead, readers will have to mine the footnotes of the various chapters, complete with their references to archival research conducted across the European Continent. As the editors write in their conclusion, "At present there is an unprecedented level of enthusiasm for studies on the relationships within the House of Austria" (367). Perhaps a future volume will take us further into the shining constellation of Habsburg courts, including those found in the Americas, Bohemia, or Hungary, as well.

JOSEPH F. PATROUCH, *University of Alberta*