

Women of Distinction. Margaret of York and Margaret of Austria. Edited by Dagmar Eichberger. 368 pp. incl. 300 col. pls. + 23 b. & w. ills. (Brepols, Turnhout, and Davidsfonds, Leuven, 2005), €60. ISBN 2-503-51917-2.

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THE CATALOGUE *Women of Distinction. Margaret of York and Margaret of Austria*, which accompanied an exhibition held in Mechelen in 2005, is a very attractively designed book, with mostly high quality reproductions. The exhibition was the third in the Low Countries devoted to sixteenth-century Habsburg court culture, following those dedicated to Mary of Hungary and Charles V.¹ The editor, Dagmar Eichberger, intended it to act both as a catalogue and a work of reference, and drew heavily on her own important research on Margaret of Austria, who acted as Regent of the Netherlands from 1509 to 1530. Following the earlier catalogues, the book is arranged around five central themes, and inevitably, a significant number of the objects were also discussed in one or both of the earlier publications.

The first section consists of biographies of the two protagonists and an overview of their cultural context. The second section yields some interesting insights. Wim Blockmans gives an overview of female qualities applied to international diplomacy, while Barbara Welzel discusses the importance of widowhood, demonstrating that Margaret of Austria adopted Judith as a role model of the Christian heroine who stood firm on behalf of her people. This thesis works well, but does not explain why Margaret owned Conrat Meit's statuette of the naked Judith. There is no reason why this work of art, with its pronounced genitalia, should not be interpreted sensually, especially since we know that other objects in Margaret's private quarters, such as Jan Gossaert's *Metamorphosis of Hermaphrodite and Salmacis* (cat. no.91), had that connotation. Philip Lorentz argues in his essay, the most original of them all, that the genre of children's portraiture came into being at the start of the fourteenth century, contemporaneously with the adult portrait. He describes the function of portraits of the two Margarets as children and emphasises the affection in which these images must have been held by the courtiers who ordered them.

Unfortunately not every contribution to this book is as eloquent or convincing. The essay on the power of women over foolish men ends where one would expect it to start, with the discussion of the theme of the vices of women in court circles. The author's final remark that we will probably never know how the iconographical tradition of women's vices affected the power of Margaret of York or Margaret of Austria is especially unsatisfying, since in the accompanying illustration, a woodcut of *Samson and Delilah* (1531), Delilah appears to have been changed from the shoul-

der upwards; she is not looking at Samson but to the right, and wears a widow's headdress, exactly like contemporaneous depictions of the Regent. Further research into this matter could be fruitful. Later in the book Marie Madeleine Fontaine demonstrates how Olivier de la Marche used the examples of Judith and Esther in lengthy poems in honour of ladies of the court.

Jens Ludwig Burk gives an enlightening overview of artistic influences on Conrat Meit, and of the various ways Margaret of Austria had herself portrayed for different occasions. He draws on his own forthcoming monograph on Meit, which hopefully will clear up some questions arising from his essay. How, for instance, can we conclude that there were many pieces of Antique sculpture in the Netherlands from just one life-size portrait of an unknown man *all'antica* (c.1520; J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles), commissioned by an unknown patron?

Eichberger evaluates the friendship between Margaret of Austria and her adviser and friend Antoine de Lalaing, concluding that they must have enjoyed an intimate friendship, without doubting Margaret's honour and chastity. She speculates on the reason for the large number of gifts the Regent gave him, including the most famous gift, Bernard van Orley's triptych *La Vertue de Patience* (Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels). Joris Capenbergh's essay on Margaret of Austria and the New World alternates between a historical overview of Spanish and Portuguese colonies in America and the description of an artefact from the New World owned by the Regent.

The 153 catalogue entries were limited to some 250 words each, which is not enough to do justice to the importance or complexity of some of the works under consideration, and in some cases does not even leave space to discuss aspects of female power. For instance, Bernard van Orley's *Crucifixion with Charity and Justice* (no.56) shows, as has often been observed, Margaret of Austria as Charity. The suggestion (no.53) that Margaret considered her role in bringing up her nephew and three nieces as a gift of God is not mentioned in the entry on the painting, even though Charity is shown with precisely four children. The suggestion that the figure of Justice is a portrait of Isabella of Austria, made elsewhere in the publication, is also not mentioned. Other entries (for instance, nos.25 and 44) are less closely related to the theme of the book and were discussed more extensively in the earlier catalogues.

Compiling an exhibition catalogue to stand as a standard reference work on two important women and covering an entire century of culture at court was a very ambitious project. Obviously, choices had to be made, and most were in Margaret of Austria's favour. Of the sixteen essays, eight are almost exclusively devoted to Margaret of Austria and five to both women. Only one deals solely with Margaret of York while two are less closely related to the subject of the book. The same

imbalance is evident in the entries, so the book cannot stand as a reference work for Margaret of York, third wife of Charles the Bold, and the earlier sixteenth century. *Women of Distinction* provides a useful illustrated overview of the wide-ranging interests of the Regent Margaret of Austria and her entourage, but the real reference work remains Eichberger's own book,² which can also be deduced from the fact that it is cited some 150 times in the catalogue.

¹ B. van den Boogert and J. Kerkhoff, eds.: exh. cat. *Maria van Hongarije, Koningin tussen keizers en kunstenaars, 1505-1558*, Utrecht (Rijksmuseum Het Catherijneconvent) and Den Bosch (Noordbrabants Museum) 1993; H. Soly and J. van de Wiele, eds.: exh. cat. *Carolus, Charles Quint, 1500-1558*, Ghent (Kunsthof de Sint-Pietersabdij) 1999.

² D. Eichberger: *Leben mit Kunst, Wirken durch Kunst: Sammelwesen und Hofkunst unter Margarethe von Österreich, Regentin der Niederlande*, Turnhout 2002; reviewed in this Magazine 146 (2004), pp.32-33.

Pirro Ligorio: the Renaissance Artist, Architect, and Antiquarian; with a checklist of drawings. By David R. Coffin. 226 pp. with 145 b. & w. ills. (Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, 2004), \$55. ISBN 0-271-02293-0.

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HERE AT LAST is a well-illustrated monograph in English on Pirro Ligorio (c.1512/13-1583) that represents his myriad activities.¹ David Coffin (1918-2003) began work on Ligorio in 1945 for a seminar conducted at Princeton University by Erwin Panofsky, and nine years later produced his dissertation, *Pirro Ligorio and the Villa D'Este*.² Now we are treated to an updated version of the thesis, which covers all Ligorio's activities as painter, architect, antiquarian, designer, engineer and courtier in one comprehensive volume.

When Coffin produced his thesis, very little had been written about Ligorio, the result of a long-standing prejudice against the Neapolitan artist and scholar, whose considerable achievements had been blurred by his competitive relationship with Michelangelo and by Vasari's refusal to provide him with a biography in his *Lives*, his reputation sullied by a stint in prison (from which he was released without blame) and accusations of forgery. This book, written at the very end of Coffin's career, could scarcely have been envisaged without the dramatic changes that have occurred in attitudes to Ligorio in the last twenty years by scholars who have begun to revisit his *œuvre*, most of all his inscriptions and his archaeology, in a more positive light. These changes are reflected not only in Coffin's tone, which is far less apologetic than in his dissertation, but also in the bibliography (somewhat irritatingly arranged in subject categories), which shows the burgeoning