

**Gijs Versteegen, Stijn Bussels, Walter Melion (ed.), Magnificence in the Seventeenth Century. Performing Splendour in Catholic and Protestant Contexts, Leiden (Brill Academic Publishers) 2020, XXIV–374 p., 47 fig. (Intersections, 72), ISBN 978-90-04-43264-2, EUR 137,00.**

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**Gloria Moorman, Rome**

Be it at the towering remains of the Terme di Caracalla, or faced with the modern skyscrapers of Dubai<sup>1</sup>, examples of »lavish expenditure [...] linked to specific rulers« tend to instill in their onlookers a powerful mixture of immediate awe that is eventually capped, for some, by a lingering sense of moral unease. The cross-cultural causes and reception of such mixed emotions – remedied, ideally, by the balanced effect of spending appropriate to occasion and the common good – take centre stage in this volume edited by Gijs Versteegen, Stijn Bussels and Walter Melion. In the introduction, Versteegen and Bussels specifically task the work with newly implementing broader, cultural categories into the study of *magnum facere* in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Together, the selection of sixteen essays adds interdisciplinary nuance and investigates how »the consolidation of religious difference, the clash between growing absolutism and the success of republics, and the increasing importance of *nouveaux riches* in the public space« affected both the theorization of magnificence and the concrete, transmedial expression of splendour in catholic and protestant Europe.

Part one, »Traditions of Thought«, takes on the first part of this task and traces origins ranging from late scholastic reception to art theory. Matthias Roick shows that the Ethics generated »textual universes« encapsulating editions, translations, paraphrases, treatises and commentaries, to then discuss just how the Aristotelian notion of magnificence was received in scholarly literature. Jorge Fernández-Santos studies the Christianised interpretation of magnificence by Thomas Aquinas and his followers, and indicates how it influenced Philip II's display of magnificence at the royal monastery of El Escorial. Michèle-Caroline Heck continues the considerations on patronage that form a *fil rouge* throughout the volume, but turns to art theory by

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<sup>1</sup> See recently: Vasileios Syros, Magnificence as a Royal Virtue in Ottoman Jewish Political Thought, in: *Renaissance Quarterly* 74 (2021), p. 1071–1110. This review has benefited from funding received from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation programme (G.A. 758450 – ERC-StG2017 »Republics on the Stage of Kings. Representing Republican State Power in the Europe of Absolute Monarchies«).



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reflecting more specifically on the role of artist and observer in the making – and impact – of a work of art's magnificence as means to affirm power.

The second part, »The Court and Aristocracy«, offers samples of how splendour was expressed in its most prominent socio-cultural environment. It opens with Miguel Hermoso Cuesta's analysis of the Hall of Realms in Philip IV's Buen Retiro Palace, unpacking this example of Spanish royal magnificence through its constituent parts of painting, sculpture, textiles and literature. Anne-Madeleine Goulet deals with the challenging economic aspects underlying the display of »Franco-Roman magnificence« through organized performances in Rome. Félix Labrador Arroyo and José Eloy Hortal Muñoz shed further light on what was required to keep up appropriate appearances, shifting focus to the Spanish royal household as signifier, together with architecture, of harmonious political rule. Co-editor Gijs Versteegen, then, goes on to study the construction and reception of another initiative meant to express the magnificence of the Spanish crown, the foundation by Philip IV of the Jesuit Reales Estudios in Madrid.

Part three, »Architecture«, signals a move towards somewhat more emphasis on northern, protestant Europe. It departs from the essay by co-editor Stijn Bussels and Bram Van Oostveldt on the costly construction of Amsterdam's new town hall and its cultural validation by poets and visual artists, emphasizing the building's role as cross-medial vehicle to project and promote the city's global prominence. Lindsay Alberts then reconciles references to early-Christian sobriety with the appreciation of more sumptuous magnificence in her study of the Medici's Cappella dei Principi at San Lorenzo in Florence. Anne-Françoise Morel treats the restoration of Old St. Paul's in London and contextualizes the campaign by connecting it to the classical theory of magnificence. Elizabeth den Hartog discusses Gaspar Fagel's garden and its celebrated collection of exotic plants, partially sourced through the Dutch Republic's colonial connections worldwide. This essay successfully rounds off part three, by linking back to Bussels and Van Oostveldt: both garden and town hall served as sites of dual self-fashioning, by celebrating at once individual citizens and the Dutch Republic's flourishing civil collective.

The fourth and final part, »Performance«, takes a central theme – firmly embedded in the volume's subtitle – as its focal point. Alessandro Metlica indicates the dynamic process of reshaping royal or imperial magnificence in a republican context by examining civic ritual in the Republic of Venice. The close connection between regality and magnificence is re-established by Alessandra Mignatti, who more directly situates it in the Habsburg monarchy to study the dynasty's ceremonial celebration in and by the city of Milan. Kathrin Stocker returns to the critical, local reception of transnational extravagance, and relates *magnificentia* to protestant *modestia* in Württemberg. Klaas Tindemans examines the play »Lucina's Rape« to show how the genre of the masque, usually associated with the positive appreciation of kingship, could



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equally be used to highlight royal hypocrisy. Victoire Malenfer retains focus on the textual and theatrical staging of magnificence in her study of the court play »The Magnificent Lovers«. Perhaps inevitably, the volume therefore ends in the heartland of 17<sup>th</sup>-century monarchical splendour, to shed light on »the political use of magnificence« by Louis XIV.

The volume's strength lies in its ambitious geographic and methodological range, bringing together scholarship from authors of diverse backgrounds. In the process, a wealth of primary source materials was made accessible in both its original language and in English. The definition of the work's four parts may introduce slightly problematic subdivisions that downplay, especially, the overarching importance of architecture and performance – cornerstones of this study of magnificence, as announced by both its subtitle (»performing splendour«) and the felicitous cover image of a female allegory of magnificence (holding up the catafalque treated in Mignatti's chapter thirteen) that together foreground the volume's dual rootedness in celebratory architecture and performance as open-ended processes. Individual essays constitute case studies that provide exiting, micro-historical windows prompting further reflection on the specific modes and broader mechanisms of magnificence they bring to the surface.

The editors' main contribution to scholarship certainly is their invitation to approach in a more inclusive manner the converging worlds of baroque architecture, theatre and visual culture. As this volume underlines with welcome vigor, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century power was never simply portrayed, but formed, rather, the protean result of performance and ongoing negotiation across political actors and the media of the moment.



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