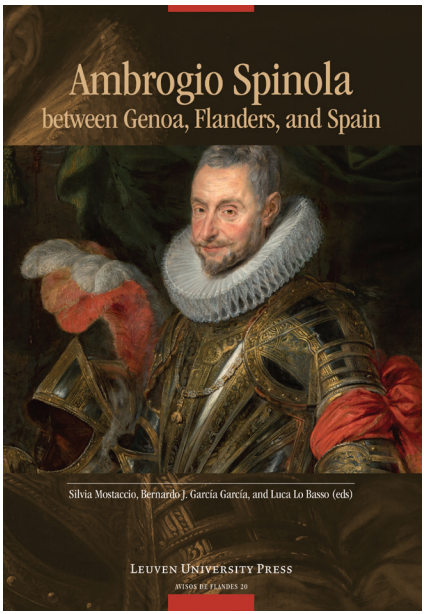
Review

Silvia Mostaccio, Bernardo J. García García, and Luca Lo Basso (eds.), *Ambrogio Spinola between Genoa, Flanders, and Spain*, Leuven, Leuven University Press, 2022, 384 pp. ISBN 9789462703421.



One of the most celebrated images of a military figure of the early modern period is Velázquez's painting of Ambrogio Spinola accepting the surrender of the city of Breda in 1625. Spinola, whose army had (at enormous cost) besieged the strategically crucial city for months, is shown in a chivalrous and generous pose, extending his sympathy to a vanquished opponent. Completed in 1635, ten years after the event in question – and five years after Spinola's ignominious and premature death from bubonic plague while leading Spanish troops at the siege of Casale-Monferrato – the painting was one of a number of prestigious compositions which Philip IV commissioned for his new pleasure palace of Buen Retiro. In many ways it is emblematic of Spinola's reputation: his genius as a soldier, his political astuteness, and his recognition of the necessity of Spanish patronage for the promotion and prominence of his distinguished *casa*.

It is no surprise, therefore, to see frequent references to the Velázquez painting throughout this impressive and enlightening collection of essays. The volume is the result of what appears to have been a singularly productive and stimulating conference at Louvain-La-Neuve in 2019. The editors could recognise that while the myth of Spinola's pre-eminence was unquestionable, nobody had yet produced a collection of multifaceted essays – or indeed, a satisfactory up-to-date biography – to outline how he and his relatives built their fortune and embellished their reputation. Quite apart from being an outstanding commander, Spinola was also a military entrepreneur, a discerning cultural patron, a skilled and crafty politician, and a financial kingpin whose loans to the Spanish crown were essential to the continuation of Habsburg hegemony until the 1630s.

The essays in this volume are both individually and collectively a splendid tribute to Spinola's varied and honourable career. After a short introduction from the editors which

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reflects on the historiographical challenges of producing such an effort, the book is divided into three complementary sections, with three, four, and four essays respectively. The first section concentrates on the family's dynastic strategies through the prisms of gender, warfare, and literary contacts. Blythe Alice Raviola produces an elegant reflection on the role of Giovanni Botero in promoting the legend of Spinola for posterity. The potential opportunities for Italian nobles and aristocrats in Spanish service reached as high as the crown itself. Carlo Emanuele I, that notoriously wily and untrustworthy Duke of Savoy-Piedmont, had sent his three young sons to the Spanish court in 1603 in the hopes that their own claims to succession might be recognised, given the fact that they were Philip III's nephews. In his 1611 *Relationi universali*, their tutor Botero glorified Spinola's remarkable accomplishment in capturing Ostend in 1604, an achievement due in part to the sophisticated understanding of siege engineering he had gained in his youth in Genoa. Spinola gained significantly through this success, with the Golden Fleece the most tangible evidence of Philip III's pleasure at Ostend's fall. The second essay, by Emiliano Beri, focuses on the relatively little-known career of Ambrogio Spinola's younger brother, Federico (killed in a sea engagement with the Dutch in May 1603), whose skills as both a military and naval officer were scarcely inferior to his sibling's. This was evident in his ambitious and novel proposal to counteract Dutch naval successes against Spanish shipping through the use of a galley squadron inherited from his uncle. Federico's plan fell foul of Archduke Albert, but it was essential to Spanish diplomatic objectives: namely the attempts to inflict a defeat upon, and therefore conclude a favourable peace with, Elizabeth I's England, the Dutch Republic's most important ally and also an avowed enemy of Spain. Attempts by Ambrogio Spinola to obtain control of the Neapolitan galley squadron were less successful, given the fact that the Doria family – Spinola's most significant rivals among the Genoese aristocracy – resented any attempt by this upstart to interfere with their prerogatives as galley commanders in Spanish service. Silvia Mostaccio's contribution centres upon the Spinola family network between Brussels, Madrid, and Genoa in the early years of the seventeenth century. Mostaccio explains how Spinola leveraged his value to the crown in financial terms for the benefit of his children. She also explores the concept of military masculinity: if Spinola, a devout Catholic and a brilliant soldier, was indeed a product of the age of Borromeo and Bellarmine, then he exhibited an authoritarian insistence on the subservience of his family to his political and dynastic ambitions. Spinola was right to exert pressure on the Spanish court, given how their financial mismanagement crippled the extensive banking networks across Europe into which Genoese financiers (including Spinola himself) were inextricably plugged. Spinola's eventual loss of almost his entire fortune was a result of chronic Habsburg inability to reform the empire's finances.

The volume's second part, exploring Spinola's networks at the height of his career, begins with a valuable overview from Alicia Estefan, who outlines the close relationship between Spinola and Archduke Albert. The latter, despite his other talents, was no general, and rather than assume control of military operations himself, Philip III chose Spinola to assist Albert. This was not without implications for the role of Philip II's son-in-law, who did not govern the Netherlands as a sovereign *suo jure* and who had always been expected to command Habsburg forces campaigning in the region. The political sensitivities surrounding his apparent demotion in favour of a non-Spaniard result in some intriguing

Old Testament parallels being drawn by officials and clerics at the Spanish court. The next piece, from Dries Raeymaekers, assesses Spinola's role as *mayordomo mayor* at the viceregal court of Albert and Isabella, a role to which he was appointed in 1620. Raeymaekers investigates the networks which Spinola had fostered and created over the preceding two decades, including with the influential papal nuncio Guido Bentivoglio. Davide Maffi and co-editor Luca Lo Basso focus in their essays on the undignified end to Spinola's life and career: his efforts to make order out of the chaos that was Olivares's Italian policy in the late 1620s. Dispatched to Milan by Olivares in order to block his access to the young Philip IV, Spinola griped repeatedly at his lack of money and resources, and mistrusted (rightly) the Spanish crown's Sabaudian ally, Carlo Emanuele I. The refusal of the Austrian court to offer direct support for the Spanish invasion of Monferrato was the last straw in what had been a reckless and ill-conceived effort to destroy an apparent French incursion into northern Italy.

The third part focuses on how Spinola's life was immortalised for posterity. It starts with an intriguing chapter by Nina Lamal and Paul Arblaster, who analyse the newsworthiness of Spinola's accomplishments. Spinola's desire to amplify his deeds meant that he was perhaps the Eisenhower or Montgomery of his age: his military exploits in the Low Countries were described lavishly in affordable print periodicals and broadsheets, distributed widely in Italy and elsewhere. His genius as a logistician was emphasised by these means, as were his connections to militant Catholic orders such as the Jesuits. The canny media operations of the court in Brussels provide an early example of how an individual's talents could be elevated for collective popular admiration. Enrico Zucchi continues this theme with an essay on how various Italian authors ionised Spinola as a defender of republican liberties, and how Genoese writers in particular attempted to resist the Spanish hijacking of his 'origin story'. Laura Stagno supplies an excellent piece on how Genoese artists such as Andrea Ansaldo depicted the republic's hero. One such example occurred in the mid-1630s, when Maria Spinola commissioned a new wing of the family palazzo, to be decorated with frescoes depicting the achievements of her two elder brothers, who had both died in active service to Spain. The final chapter, by Bernardo J. García García, concludes the aims of the collection by summarising with great succinctness the various ways in which Spinola's illustrious career was represented across Europe. The author reflects that it was not until 1621 before Spinola received the noble title of marquis of Los Balbases – a rather ungracious delay in granting this selfless servant of Spanish imperialism his due. This collection is replete with images from the period, and has clearly been assembled with much care. It is invaluable to the early modern military historian, and given Spinola's contribution to the political world of the Low Countries, it is also essential to the historian of transimperial networks, cultural exchange and patronage, and the early modern court.

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