

Maurits Ebben, Margriet Lacy-Bruijn, and Rolof van Hövell tot Westerflier (eds.), *Alba: General and Servant to the Crown* (Rotterdam: Karwansaray Publishers, 2013, 464 pp., ISBN 978 94 90258 08 5).

Without doubt Fernando Álvarez de Toledo, third duke of Alba, is one of the most controversial figures of Spanish and European early modern history, particularly during his period as governor-general of the Habsburg Netherlands from 1567 to 1573. In connection with the historiographical evolution of the figure of the 'Great Duke' in the interesting introduction to the book Maurits Ebben states 'He also was, during his lifetime, a highly controversial person, and for centuries to come a favourite subject in historiography for all kinds of purposes and from many perspectives. In his own country he initially tended to receive praise as a distinguished statesman and, especially, as military leader but eventually he was forgotten. Abroad, he was better known but enjoyed a notorious reputation' (9).

The origin of the 'Dark Legend' of Alba is found chiefly in the fact that he had to apply the so called Confessionalisation in the Habsburg Netherlands, but when this failed his enemies attacked him constantly. These enemies were not only the political elites of the Habsburg Netherlands, but also a great number of courtiers in Madrid. All these attacks, which are thoroughly studied in this volume, made the Duke of Alba into one of the core elements of the Black Legend, the anti-Hispanic propaganda deployed for centuries.

Nonetheless, historiography started to change its approach to Alba with the first modern biography written by William Maltby in 1983: this was the first work in which the duke was treated as a real person, not just as political figure. In the years that followed the new lines begun in this work were studied in more depth in other biographies, such as those by Henry Kamen and Manuel Fernández Álvarez – works that should be seen within the framework of the renewed interest in the study of the Spanish monarchy from the 1980s. Historians revealed that the Duke of Alba was not just the 'monster' depicted by the various national histories, but one of the most significant persons at the court of Spain for practically the whole sixteenth century. He was a Grandee of Spain, counsellor of State and War, Lord Steward of the Royal Households of Burgundy and Castile – even for Charles V and Philip II – governor of Milan, viceroy of Naples and governor-general of the Habsburg Netherlands. He was also one of the most important generals of his time, fighting in the Holy Roman Empire, Italy, Tunisia, France, Portugal and the

Habsburg Netherlands: and as well as being employed in diplomatic missions he took part in several 'special' embassies to France, Italy and the Holy Roman Empire.

However, new insights of current historiography, which has reinforced the multidisciplinary studies and the collaboration of historians of different countries who have put aside national histories, have contributed to situating Alba in a more realistic perspective. It is in this historiographical context that the greatest value of this volume lies, because it is the first work in which almost all the finest experts on the Duke of Alba, from different countries and different specialities, have worked together to show us a broader perspective of Alba's life. Thanks to this, we find fifteen essays from specialists in various fields such as History, Art History and Literature, coming from the Netherlands, Spain, England, Belgium, France, Ireland and Austria and edited by Dutch scholars. In comparison, at the international congress that took place in 2007 at Piedrahita, Barco de Ávila and Alba de Tormes, commemorating the five hundredth anniversary of Alba's birth, more than thirty scholars participated, but almost all of them were Spanish.

In this volume the different specialists were invited to give the results of their research in their specific fields of expertise with regard to the Duke so that the various essays do not necessarily explore new sources, but ask new questions. The collection is divided in three parts. The first – which covers the essays of H. Kamen, R. Quatrefages, J. Martínez Millán, G. Janssens, W. Thomas, R. Mulcahy, A. Pérez de Tudela and J. M. Calderón Ortega – deals with the different facets of Alba's life. Its focus is not only on political aspects; two essays cover his role as patron of arts. The second part – with essays by F. Edelmayer, M. J. Rodríguez-Salgado, R. Fagel and R. Valladares – has a geographical approach, focussing on Alba's life outside Castile, in the Holy Roman Empire, Italy, the Low Countries and Portugal. The final section – with essays presented by J. Pollmann and M. Stensland, Y. Rodríguez Pérez and M. Ebben – is devoted entirely to Alba as controversial figure during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

We can make some minor critical remarks about the volume, for example there is no single conclusion or vision of the personage, as there are several methodologies involved at the book. However this could be considered as a plus point as it opens different ways to continue the research on the 'Great Duke'. In some of the essays Alba's sojourns in various European lands are not analysed, being represented only as a succession of events, and some contributions have some overlap, for example those related to the Habsburg Netherlands, his role as patron of arts and those focussing on the creation of Alba's image. Despite these minor drawbacks it is clear that, after Maltby's biography, this volume marks another significant milestone in the construction, not only of Alba's image in particular, but also that of

the Spanish monarchy in the sixteenth century in general. It is a remarkable achievement with scholars from different countries and fields collaborating to give this more complete portrait of the third Duke of Alba, who still retains some part of his mythical aura.

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