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Materiële representatie opgetekend aan het Haagse hof (1345–1425).

Anne-Maria van Egmond.

Hilversum: Verloren, 2020. 472 pp. €39.

This is the slightly revised PhD thesis defended at the University of Amsterdam in February 2019. The book focuses on the courtly culture of the counts of Holland, Zeeland, and Hainaut from the Bavarian dynasty in the period 1345–1425. Van Egmond was trained as an art historian, but she has transcended her own discipline by profoundly scrutinizing the 150 available financial accounts, inventories, and other documents available for the counties of Holland and Zeeland to extract information concerning the representation of the rulers of these principalities (Hainaut is, for practical reasons, left out of the research). The book consists of three parts, each subdivided into three chapters, which concentrate on the way the counts were represented on figurative objects such as tombs, seals, coins, miniatures and drawings (1); an assessment of financial accounts for (art) historical research into patronage, including a detailed overview of the structure of these documents (2); and an analysis of the organization of the household, the way material objects for the count were purchased and manufactured, and the material production of the financial accounts (3).

The central concept in the book is that of “material representation,” which the author defines as “all luxury objects and representations aiming at creating the image of a competent prince vis-à-vis his peers and subjects. More specifically, it concerns the signs that identify the prince as such, the objects aimed at representing, legitimizing, and consolidating the count’s status and ambition” (10, my translation). Sometimes the more neutral term “material culture” is used. However, the author’s contribution to the historiographic discussion on either material culture or representation and on related concepts such as “patronage” or “court culture”—which could have been used equally to examine the available material—is not entirely clear, or even hidden in footnotes (10n5). Moreover, the author does not explicitly argue which ambitions the counts did have, to whom they needed to prove their competence or princely status, and for whose eyes the courtly splendor was intended. Van Egmond gives only a glimpse of a possible answer to these questions in chapter 2, where she discusses the donation by Count William VI (r. 1404–17) of livery badges with the symbol of the enclosed garden, representing the unity of the counties, to a range of family members and the politically divided nobility.

Examples of “luxury objects” are gold- and silverware, tapestries, paintings, images, books, and luxury clothes. With “representations” the author refers to coins and seals and, especially, the heraldry deployed on these and other media (chapter 2). These were relatively cheap means to diffuse the image and symbols of the ruler among a wide audience. But other objects purchased by the counts were not fully investigated, like harnesses and armor, which is an omission. These may not be considered as luxury, but they were relatively expensive, and played a crucial role in the imaging of the ruler,

not only in real life—e.g., on the battlefield or tournament field—but also on coins and seals. The financial accounts even had a special chapter dedicated to the purchase, decoration (*schilderye*), and cleaning of harnesses and shields.

The book is wonderfully illustrated with images of objects, drawings, and miniatures, and also with entire pages and details from the financial documents, all in full color. Van Egmond not only has a keen eye for the objects and images that could be traced through the evidence of the accounts, but she also pays due attention to administrative procedures and the structure of the court in The Hague. The footnotes are informative and reflect her findings in the accounts. The publication of several lists, financial excerpts, and court ordinances in five annexes adds to the richness of the book and converts it into a useful tool not only for art historians but also for social and political historians. However, the ambiguous treatment of the central concept has influenced both the structure and contents of the book. Information concerning the accounts, for example, could have been structured more coherently, instead of spreading it out throughout the book (introduction, chapters 4 and 9). Also, some chapters lack a problematizing research question (3, 6, 7, 8), which lead to a somewhat descriptive approach. Nevertheless, this book can be considered a valuable contribution to the field of court studies, in general, and to the study of the court of the counts of Holland and Zeeland, in particular.

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