

# Of Elephants and Harmony: Memory, Knowledge and Pleasure in the Joyous Entry of Albert of Austria and Isabella of Spain into Antwerp.

Abstract:

This essay is about a sculpted elephant set on a wheeled base, an early modern festival float belonging to the city of Antwerp in present-day Belgium. Twice a year, during civic processions known as *ommegangen*, this float was paraded through the streets of Antwerp. However, on 10 December 1599, the civic authorities deployed the elephant as a stationary pageant, to form part of a different festival, the Joyous Entry of the Infanta Isabella Clara Eugenia and her husband, Archduke Albert of Austria. This article explores the many roles and resonances pertaining to this specific use of the float. The article is therefore a detailed case study of how one Habsburg subject city deployed one particular sculpture within urban pageantry to articulate and negotiate its often fraught relationship to its overlords and its position within the broader Luso-Hispanic Empire. At the same time, I show how the Antwerp urban elite drew on diverse forms of knowledge – historical, geographical, dynastic, scientific, musical and religious – to address and, to a certain extent, domesticate their courtly visitors.

Keywords: Habsburg, Elephant, Music, Sculpture, Joyous Entry Ceremony, Antwerp

On a clear winter's day, Friday 10 December 1599, a great festival was performed in the city of Antwerp in the Habsburg Netherlands. In formal terms, it was a Joyous Entry, an inaugural and transformatory ceremony. Through it the Spanish Infanta Isabella Clara Eugenia and her husband, Archduke Albert VII of Austria, formally took up their new offices as joint sovereigns of the city, as Margraves of Antwerp and Dukes of Brabant (Antwerp was one of that Duchy's four capitals and ducal authority was only fully legitimate after performing a Joyous Entry into each). The ceremony involved the swearing of mutual oaths, some of considerable political significance, and Albert and Isabella also had to serve as the main actors in a great procession along a historically evocative and specially decorated route, circuitously leading them from the fortified Emperor's Gate into the heart of the city.<sup>1</sup>

As was customary, the Antwerp municipality had strained every resource to put on an impressive show. This was no mean feat in December 1599. After thirty-three years of the conflict usually known as the Dutch Revolt, triggering intermittent but violent warfare in the Low Countries, the formerly affluent entrepôt and cradle of colonial investment was now radically depopulated and in poor financial shape.<sup>2</sup> In 1598 an important peace treaty had been signed between the French crown and the Habsburgs; this, at least, had offered a little respite

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed account of the history and nature of Joyous Entries, see M. Thøfner, *A Common Art: Urban Ceremonial in Antwerp and Brussels during and after the Dutch Revolt*, Zwolle, Waanders, 2007, pp. 51-57 and 71-75. On the Entry of Albert and Isabella, see pp. 199-201 and 206-225. For a more recent assessment, see T. Cholcman, *Art on Paper, Ephemeral Art in the Low Countries: The Triumphal Entry of the Archdukes Albert and Isabella into Antwerp, 1599*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> An excellent overview of the turbulent financial situation in Antwerp in the early modern period may be gained from H. van der Wee, *The Growth of the Antwerp Market and the European Economy (fourteenth to sixteenth centuries)*, Dordrecht, Springer Science and Business Media, 1963. For the specific situation at the end of the sixteenth century, see pp. 269-284.

and raised hopes for further negotiations.<sup>3</sup> But the Revolt itself had not yet been resolved and would, in fact, rumble on for another decade.

Despite the difficult situation inside Antwerp, great efforts had been made to decorate the processional route in accordance with established civic traditions. There were numerous specially designed displays and performances along the Entry route. And, as had been customary even in times of plenty, the festival organisers also deployed as stationary pageants several of the floats normally paraded in Antwerp's two annual *ommegangen*, processions which were both civic and religious in nature.<sup>4</sup> This included a life-size sculpted elephant bearing a small tower on its back, with a hidden mechanism for moving the trunk, probably constructed of wood and papier-mâché (fig. 1).<sup>5</sup> The elephant was placed in a highly significant location, at the easternmost entry into the central square or *Grote Markt*.<sup>6</sup> Here was the urban heart of civic authority, with the imposing Town Hall on the western side, at this point in time the largest structure of its type in northern Europe.<sup>7</sup> The elephant marked the exact spot where those in the procession would first see this building come into view.

This essay is about that elephant or, rather, it is about the roles and resonances pertaining to it on 10 December 1599. What follows is a case study of how one Habsburg subject city used urban pageantry to articulate and negotiate its relationship to its overlords and its position within the broader Luso-Hispanic Empire. At the same time, it shows how the Antwerp urban elite drew on several registers – on shared historical, geographical, dynastic, scientific and musical knowledge – to address and, to a certain extent, domesticate their courtly visitors. Of course, there was a point to all this. The elephant was part of a wider ceremonial strategy devised to exhort Antwerp's new overlords to heed and find remedy for its dire financial situation, a direct consequence of Habsburg warfare.<sup>8</sup> Thus the elephant – and the festival as a whole – simultaneously legitimised and challenged Habsburg power; it is but one episode in the long early modern history of habitual conflict between the city of Antwerp and its sovereigns, which ranged from open violence to cordial mutual suspicion.

My broader aim is to underscore that pageants like the elephant float as it was in December 1599 should not be reduced to political and financial expediency. The elephant also divulges a great deal about early modern attitudes to music, to exotic animals and to the tricky question of how to negotiate memories of recent conflicts and the transformations that they had wrought. In this way, the elephant demonstrates that the relationship between cities like Antwerp and the broader Habsburg Empire worked across many registers, from hard-headed political instrumentality to richly poetic musicality. Historians conventionally keep such registers apart. In what follows, I hope to show that we do so at our peril. For one thing, if we do not attend to the roles of sound and music in the Joyous Entry, we will not grasp that this predominantly secular ritual came with carefully calibrated links to the sacred, specifically to the liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church.

## Elephants and Memory

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<sup>3</sup> On this, see J.-F. Labourdette, J.-P. Poussou and M.-C. Vignal (eds), *Le Traité de Vervins*, Paris, Les Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2000.

<sup>4</sup> On the traditional *ommegangen*, see Thøfner, *A Common Art*, pp. 46-51 and 59-71. On the reuse of *ommegang* floats during the Entry of 1599, see 219-222.

<sup>5</sup> A fascinating insight into how such objects were constructed is offered in C. Debuiche, S. Pitman, P.H. Smith, T. Taape and T.H. Uchacz, *The Matter of Ephemeral Art: Craft, Spectacle, and Power in Early Modern Europe*, «Renaissance Quarterly», LXXIII, 1 (2020), pp. 78-131.

<sup>6</sup> J. Bochius, *Historica narratio projectionis et inaugurationis Serenissimorum Belgii Principum Alberti et Isabellae (...)*, Antwerp, Officina Plantiniana, 1602, p. 269.

<sup>7</sup> H. Bevers, *Das Rathaus von Antwerpen (1561-1565): Architektur und Figurenprogramm*, Hildesheim, Zürich and New York, H. Olms, 1985.

<sup>8</sup> Thøfner, *A Common Art*, pp. 206-225.

The elephant float deployed in Antwerp on 10 December 1599 was, at least in part, a well-established trigger of shared civic and courtly memories. That much is made clear in the official account of a slightly earlier ceremony, the festival mounted by the Antwerp municipality in 1594 to welcome the Archduke Albert's older brother, Ernest of Austria, as governor-general of the Habsburg Netherlands.<sup>9</sup> In this account, the Antwerp city secretary Johannes Bochius asserts that the sculpted pachyderm was modelled on a real elephant who had visited the city in 1563; it was a gift from King Emmanuel of Portugal to the Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand.<sup>10</sup>

Bochius actually seems to be confusing several elephants.<sup>11</sup> For example, there was the celebrated white Hanno, sent from India to the court of Manuel I of Portugal and then shipped from Lisbon to Rome as a gift for Pope Leo X in 1514.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, King Manuel was famed across Europe for his access to and possession of Indian elephants, one of the many consequences of Portuguese colonial expansion. The King enjoyed parading them through Lisbon and also made a habit of gifting them to other European monarchs. That must be why Bochius associated the *ommegang* elephant with him but, by 1563, Manuel I was long dead and buried. Instead, Bochius must be referring to an elephant sent from Lisbon in that year as a gift from the court of Sebastian I of Portugal, not to reigning Emperor Ferdinand I, but to his son, the future Emperor Maximilian II, then King of Hungary and Bohemia (and, as it happens, the uncle of the Infanta Isabella and father of both the Archdukes Ernest and Albert). This particular elephant was shipped from Lisbon to Zeeland and then walked overland to Antwerp from whence it travelled onwards to central Europe. During its visit to Antwerp the exotic beast drew great crowds. It was inspected by unlearned and learned alike, including the young Justus Lipsius and the Florentine merchant Lodovico Guicciardini; once it had got to Vienna, it was enthused over by the famed botanist and zoologist Charles de l'Écluse or Carolus Clusius. The elephant also was drawn by artists and represented in refined etchings as well as in rough woodcut illustrations for celebratory broadsides.<sup>13</sup> Probably because of all this, in Antwerp the animal was something of a local celebrity and thus became the model for the *ommegang* float.

In other words, Bochius's account is not entirely wrong. The *ommegang* elephant was a commemoration of one particular moment when an actual elephant had marched through the streets of Antwerp on its way from Lisbon to Vienna. By 1599 this moment was still well within living memory; certainly, both Lipsius and Clusius were still alive, albeit of advanced years. This means that Bochius's confusion needs to be taken seriously. It comes with an underpinning logic. Clearly, in later sixteenth-century Europe, Indian elephants were powerfully associated with the Portuguese crown and its far-flung colonial Empire. Such associations would have been particularly intense in Antwerp, a city with a long history of commercial links with Lisbon. Crucially, for much of the earlier sixteenth century, Antwerp

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<sup>9</sup> For a thoughtful and comprehensive analysis of this Entry, see I. Raband, *Vergängliche Kunst und fortwährende Macht: Die Blijde Inkomst für Erzherzog Ernst von Österreich in Brüssel und Antwerpen, 1594*, Merzhausen, Ad Picturam, 2019, pp. 99-192.

<sup>10</sup> J. Bochius, *Descriptio Publicae Gratulationis, Spectaculorum et Ludorum in adventu Sereniss[im]is. Principis Ernesti (...)*, Antwerp, Officina Plantiniana, 1595, p. 112. See also Raband, *Vergängliche Kunst*, pp. 131-132.

<sup>11</sup> This may be because, not having been present in Antwerp in 1563, Bochius drew on a secondary source. Cholcman, *Art on Paper*, p. 27. This was J. Goropius Becanus, *Origines Antwerpianae (...)*, Antwerp, Officina Plantiniana, 1569, pp. 180-181. But Goropius Becanus is quite clear that the elephant is male and was a gift for Maximilian II.

<sup>12</sup> On Hanno the elephant, see E. Bassani, *Raphael at the Tropics? A carved ivory oliphant in the Musée de l'Homme*, «Journal of the History of Collections», X, 1 (1998), pp. 1-8; and D. Lach, *Asian Elephants in Renaissance Europe*, «Journal of Asian History», I, 2 (1967), pp. 133-176, especially pp. 149-160.

<sup>13</sup> Much of the present paragraph is indebted to D. Lach, *Asian Elephants*, pp. 168-171.

had served as the major northern European port for the transshipment of and trade in spices and other goods brought by Portuguese ships from Asia.<sup>14</sup> This had been a central factor in the transformation of the city from a mainly local harbour into a world entrepôt. However, after 1566, this colonial trade was severely interrupted by political complexities in Portugal and by the Dutch Revolt. Moreover, from 1585 onwards, much of the shipping customarily bound for the port of Antwerp had been choked off by the blockade of the Scheldt maintained by the United Provinces, the nascent polity in the northern Netherlands eventually known as the Dutch Republic.<sup>15</sup>

So, when Bochius and his contemporaries associated the *ommegang* elephant with the famously pachydermophile Manuel I, they were also recalling the heady days when Portuguese ships regularly brought Asian cargo to Antwerp. Certainly, there was a living memory of those days in the city because, by 1599, there were still Portuguese merchants and bankers resident in Antwerp. In fact, this particular urban grouping paid for and organised the making of a splendid triumphal arch of their own to welcome the Infanta and the Archduke with all due respect.<sup>16</sup> Even so, after more than thirty years of economic hardship, they were hardly the thriving community of mid-century. To this should be added that the newly ascended King of Portugal was none other than King Philip III of Spain, the Infanta Isabella's half-brother and, to boot, the Archduke Albert had cut his political teeth as the Habsburg viceroy in Lisbon from 1583 to 1593.<sup>17</sup> The elephant, then, was a reminder of Antwerp's particular position within a now sadly ailing but still important commercial and political network defined by a shared allegiance to the Habsburgs.

It is worth pointing out here that, while King Manuel's actual elephants came from India, most early modern Europeans remained somewhat confused about the exact nature and origins of these exotic animals. They could, and were, variously associated with Asia, Africa and South America.<sup>18</sup> Therefore the Antwerp *ommegang* elephant was probably evocative of the Portuguese Empire in general, rather than of any particular place in that overseas Empire. It was a reminder of the entire political, maritime and commercial network that had Lisbon at its centre and Antwerp as its northernmost European entrepôt.

It is equally striking that, in his account of 1595, Bochius presents the elephant of 1563 as a gift for a regnant Holy Roman Emperor. Good philologist that Bochius was, this notion may have been planted in his mind by a number of precedents. For example, Julius Caesar, the first Roman Emperor, favoured the use of elephants as torchbearers in triumphal processions.<sup>19</sup> Or there was the elephant Abul-Abbas, famously given to Charlemagne by the Abbasid caliph Harun al-Rashid in 802. Similarly, an elephant was given by Al-Kamil, Sultan of Egypt, to the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II in 1229.<sup>20</sup> More recently, there was the renowned Süleyman, an elephant initially gifted to King John III of Portugal by the Tamil ambassador Sri Ramaraska Pandita in 1542. Then, in 1549, Süleyman was passed onto John's grandson, Don Carlos of Spain, who ceded it to none other than the future Emperor Maximilian II, with

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<sup>14</sup> A somewhat dated but still useful introduction to this topic is F. Edler-De Roover, *The Market for Spices in Antwerp, 1538-1544*, «Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire», XVII, 1-2 (1938), pp. 212-221. See also van der Wee, *The Growth of the Antwerp Market*, 113-208.

<sup>15</sup> Van der Wee, *The Growth of the Antwerp Market*, pp. 228-284.

<sup>16</sup> Bochius, *Historica Narratio*, pp. 209-217. See also T. Cholcman, *The Merchant Voice: International Interests and Strategies in Local Joyeuses Entrées. The Case of Portuguese, English, and Flemish Merchants in Antwerp (1599) and Lisbon (1619)*, «Dutch Crossing», XXXV, 1 (2011), pp. 39-62.

<sup>17</sup> On Albert's time in Portugal, see L. Duerloo, *Dynasty and Piety: Archduke Albert (1598-1621) and Habsburg Political Culture in an Age of Religious Wars*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2012, pp. 24-30.

<sup>18</sup> P. Mason, *Before Disenchantment: Images of Exotic Animals and Plants in the Early Modern World*, London, Reaktion Books, 2009, pp. 13-14.

<sup>19</sup> D. Lach, *Asian Elephants*, p. 138.

<sup>20</sup> D. Lach, *Asian Elephants*, especially pp. 141-163.

the elephant eventually arriving in Vienna in 1552. Sadly, like most elephants transported to and around Europe in the early modern period, Süleyman's health was compromised and he died the following year.<sup>21</sup> Probably, the elephant that passed through Antwerp in 1563 was meant to replace him.

As all these examples show, there was a long-standing connection between the gifting of elephants and regnant emperors in early modern Europe. Therefore, when the *ommegang* elephant was on display in Antwerp in December 1599, this was surely a way of complimenting the Archduke Albert, former viceroy of Portugal, son of Maximilian II, grandson of Ferdinand I in the paternal line and of Charles V in the maternal.<sup>22</sup> Besides all this, Albert was the younger brother of the reigning Holy Roman Emperor, Rudolph II, renowned for his love of the exotic, especially in the form of wonderful, weird and curious objects, plants and animals.<sup>23</sup> The sculpted *ommegang* elephant therefore evoked not just one but rather three distinct if overlapping early modern networks. First, the commercial world of the Portuguese Empire; second, the familial world of the crazily intermarried Habsburg courts at Lisbon, Madrid and Vienna; and, finally, the world of collectors, viewers and lovers of *exotica* as exemplified by Rudolph II, Carolus Clusius and the many ordinary inhabitants of Antwerp who had flocked to see the elephant of 1563.

To this should be added that, in the early modern period, exotic animals formed part of a widely shared body of knowledge that ranged from classical philology through magical thinking to open wonder and careful empirical observation. As has been ably argued elsewhere, those who participated in the generation and circulation of this body of knowledge were not all members of academic, civic or courtly elites.<sup>24</sup> Sometimes quite ordinary persons got involved, too, and sometimes these autodidacts commanded considerable respect. From this it follows that the Antwerp *ommegang* elephant – with all its local, commercial, imperial, geographical, historical and dynastic allusions – embodied forms of knowledge and types of enjoyment shared by courtiers, citizens and ordinary people alike. Moreover, in early modern Europe, there were no clear distinctions and no firm value systems attached to types of knowledge that we now categorise as quite distinct, like, for example, the magical and the scientific.<sup>25</sup> Rather, like most of humanity, early modern Europeans happily entertained unsystematic thoughts, imprecise memories and contradictory beliefs. That said, in 1563, both Guicciardini and Lipsius had professed themselves unimpressed by the visiting elephant because it did not manifest the wonderful qualities proclaimed for it by authorities of Classical Antiquity such as Pliny the Younger.<sup>26</sup> That does not undermine my broader point. It merely shows that those of a marked philological mindset used the actual elephant to reconsider all they had read about such creatures in Pliny and elsewhere. Clusius's response was different; he thought the creature a wonderful and instructive sight, perhaps because he was more inclined towards natural history and deeply fascinated by the exotic.<sup>27</sup> What can be said for certain is that, by 1599, the Antwerp *ommegang* elephant came with a rich and complex set of valences which, in turn, could and did trigger rich and complex responses.

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<sup>21</sup> On Süleyman, see the excellent account by A. Jordan Gschwend, *The Story of Süleyman: Celebrity Elephants and Other Exotica in Renaissance Portugal*, Zürich and Philadelphia, Pachyderm Production, 2010.

<sup>22</sup> On Albert's family, see Duerloo, *Dynasty and Piety*, p. 18.

<sup>23</sup> A good sense of Rudolph's broad interests may be gained from E. Fucikova (ed.), *Rudolf II and Prague: The Court and the City*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1997. A helpful assessment of his *Kunstammer* is T. DaCosta Kaufmann, *Remarks on the Collections of Rudolf II: The Kunstammer as a Form of Representatio*, «Art Journal», XXXVIII, 1 (1978), pp. 22-28.

<sup>24</sup> This insight comes from Mason, *Before Disenchantment*, especially pp. 67-86 and 124-148.

<sup>25</sup> Again, this draws on Mason, *Before Disenchantment*, especially 15-35.

<sup>26</sup> D. Lach, *Asian Elephants*, pp. 139 and 168.

<sup>27</sup> Mason, *Before Disenchantment*, pp. 124-148.

## Drumming

The elephant float also came with sonic associations. Drummers usually walked before it when it was paraded through Antwerp in the two customary *ommegangen* held at the beginning and the end of the summer. Or at least that was the case in 1599, as evinced by the civic accounts, and there is other evidence to suggest that it was nothing new.<sup>28</sup> Be that as it may, at least in 1599 parading the elephant along the normal (also circuitous but different) *ommegang* route involved immersing participants and spectators alike in rhythmical sound echoing along the streets, audible both before and after the float had disappeared from sight.<sup>29</sup> That the elephant came with such a soundscape was probably due to its broader significance, as discussed so far. To this it should be added that, in the two annual processions, it was usually staffed by someone paid specially to operate the hidden mechanism of its trunk – perhaps moving back and forth in time with the drumming – and, on its back, it bore a female figure personifying Fortune with a rudder and a sail fluttering hither and thither.<sup>30</sup> Even without the drummers, the importance of good fortune for navigational purposes must have been blindingly obvious to the inhabitants of Antwerp, a city which by 1599 had suffered considerably because of the blockading of the river Scheldt.

The only one other float singled out in this way, that of the armoured Giant variously named Antigoon or Druon, was conventionally understood to embody the whole urban community.<sup>31</sup> Usually, drummers also marched in the *ommegangen* with the various militia companies, urban associations for elite male citizens who often processed with banners bearing some form of ducal insignia; this they also did during Joyous Entries. For example, the swordsmen's guild of Antwerp would display the arms of the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I of Habsburg, formally their founder as well as joint sovereign of Brabant by virtue of his marriage to Mary of Burgundy, the then reigning Duchess.<sup>32</sup> As this suggests, in the Netherlands, such guilds had a long history of serving as intermediaries between the civic and ducal, between locals and Habsburgs.<sup>33</sup> In general, these militia men were more accustomed to social gatherings than warfare and therefore were very likely in need of drums to keep in step. Even so, it is safe to say that drummers singled out important aspects of each *ommegang* and that this included the elephant, at least in 1599.

Again, it is clear that the *ommegang* elephant came with markedly local valences and, in this manner, the sculpture was also a mechanism for domesticating the incoming Habsburg princes, for reminding them again and again of the deep and abiding connections between the city and its overlords. At the same time, this insistence on local festival traditions could be understood as somewhat ambivalent. For it also foregrounded the fact that the city of Antwerp was distinct from many others within the Habsburg domains because its main civic processions

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<sup>28</sup> The relevant accounts are published in A.K.L. Thijs, *De Antwerpse ommegang in 1599*, «Volkskunde», CII, 1 (2001), pp. 35-53.

<sup>29</sup> On the customary *ommegang* route, see Thøfner, *A Common Art*, pp. 50-51.

<sup>30</sup> A.K.L. Thijs, *De Antwerpse ommegang*, pp. 47-51; Bochijs, *Descriptio Publicae Gratulationis*, p. 112.

<sup>31</sup> M.A. Meadow, *Ritual and Civic Identity in Philip II's 1549 Antwerp Entry*, «Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek / Netherlands Yearbook for the History of Art», XLIX (1998), pp. 36-67. The specific point is made on p. 57. For a discussion of the sculpture of Antigoon or Druon, see C. Göttler, *Druon Antigoon, der unzerstörbare Koloss: Städtischer Raum, antiquarische Kultur und Künstlerwissen im Antwerpen des 16. Jahrhunderts*, in A. Nova and S. Hanke (eds), *Skulptur und Platz: Raumbesetzung – Raumüberwindung – Interaktion*, Berlin, Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2014, pp. 41–72. Helpful points about this pageant are also made in A. Pawlak and S. Rütth, *Riese, Walfisch und das Jüngste Gericht: Die Antwerpener Festkultur der Frühen Neuzeit als soziokulturelles Dispositiv*, «Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik», L (2020), pp. 435-463.

<sup>32</sup> See Thøfner, *A Common Art*, p. 189.

<sup>33</sup> A good sense of how this worked may be gleaned from P. Arnade, *Realms of Ritual: Burgundian Ceremony and Civic Life in Late Medieval Ghent*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1996, pp. 65-94.

were tied calendrically to the feasts of Whitsun and the Assumption of the Virgin.<sup>34</sup> In contrast, in locations as varied as Cuzco and Barcelona, it was the feast of *Corpus Christi* which usually drew crowds as well as considerable municipal investment, resulting in elaborate pageant floats accompanied by drums and other forms of music.<sup>35</sup> But that feast was never particularly important in Antwerp and, on 10 December 1599, it was definitely best not mentioned. That was because, in 1568, at one moment of intense conflict between Antwerp and the Habsburgs, the hated Duke of Alva (at that point Spanish governor-general of the Netherlands) had sought to re-establish the city's long defunct *Corpus Christi* procession.<sup>36</sup> Much to the consternation of the locals, it was duly performed that year under armed guard, only four days after the usual Whitsun *ommegang*. But *Corpus Christi* never became an important feast in early modern Antwerp; instead, the municipality pointedly focused its efforts on more emphatically local traditions.

To cope with such bitter memories, on 10 December 1599, the more militant aspects of the *ommegang* elephant were both recuperated and reworked. Instead of the usual embodiment of Fortune on its back stood six youths (fig. 1). One boy, elevated above the rest, was dressed in “habitu & cincinnis” (“in the robes and curling locks”) of the God Hymen, that is to say, he was impersonating the ancient Greek deity of love and marriage.<sup>37</sup> The other five bore wings and could thus be construed as *amorini*, little Cupids, or, alternatively, as angels. On either side of the elephant there were two Latin inscriptions explaining the specific logic of the pageant: Hymen, the classical god of love and marriage, is the greatest god of all and thus deserves to be carried by the greatest of all beasts. The inscriptions also made clear that elephants often bore towers of war on their backs but that, for this festive occasion, these had been replaced Hymen, that is, by love.<sup>38</sup> So the elephant came with clear military connotations. Indeed, again within living memory, it had served in a far more aggressive role during another Joyous Entry. In 1582 – in a ceremony marking the fact that at this point in time Antwerp had formally deposed the Infanta's father, King Philip II of Spain, as its overlord and instead transferred that dignity to a French prince, François of Valois, Duke of Anjou and Alençon – the elephant had carried a fortified tower on its back, bristling with guns and banners (fig. 2). As is well known, this transfer cost Antwerp dearly; the city was eventually returned to Habsburg rulership by military conquest, by its capitulation in 1585 after a prolonged siege led by King Philip's nephew and commander-in-chief of the Spanish army in Flanders, Alexander Farnese.<sup>39</sup>

Accordingly, in December 1599, the formerly militant elephant was presented as pacified by love and it was linked with an appropriate soundscape. When the Infanta and the Archduke came to the pageant float, the six youths on its back sang for them a newly composed polyphonic motet in six parts, consisting of an elegantly pithy Latin verse penned by Bochiuss, the main festival organiser, and set to music by a local composer, Cornelis Verdonck:

Prome nouas, Hymenæa, faces, noua gaudia Belgis,  
Serta salutifero myrtea sparge toro.  
Diua petit thalamum diuos genitura iugalem,

<sup>34</sup> Thøfner, *A Common Art*, pp. 47-48.

<sup>35</sup> On this festival in Barcelona, see K. Kreitner, *Music in the Corpus Christi Procession of Fifteenth-Century Barcelona*, «Early Music History», XIV (1995), pp. 153-204; on the festival in Cuzco, see G. Baker, *Music at Corpus Christi in colonial Cuzco*, «Early Music», XXXII, 3 (2004), pp. 355-367, and also C. Dean, *Inka bodies and the body of Christ: Corpus Christi in colonial Cuzco, Peru*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 1999.

<sup>36</sup> Thøfner, *A Common Art*, p. 98.

<sup>37</sup> Bochiuss, *Historica Narratio*, p. 269.

<sup>38</sup> Bochiuss, *Historica Narratio*, p. 269.

<sup>39</sup> For a discussion of the ceremonial aspect of this, see Thøfner, *A Common Art*, pp. 148-156.

Pax sit amore, salus fœdere, dote quies.<sup>40</sup>

(Bring new torches, Hymen, new joy for the Netherlanders,  
Scatter myrtle-wreaths over this salutiferous bed  
The goddess goes to her wedding chamber so as to bring forth gods,  
Love may [thus] bear peace; a covenant, prosperity; a dowry, repose.)

Ostensibly, this collaborative effort was a neatly turned compliment to Albert and Isabella who, by this date, had been married for only eight months.<sup>41</sup> As part of her marriage settlement, the Infanta had received as her dowry the overlordship of the seventeen Netherlandish provinces nominally under Habsburg rulership from her father, Philip II.<sup>42</sup> In reality, she and her husband were never to govern more than the ten southernmost provinces, including Brabant where the city of Antwerp was located, but that it would be so was not yet clear in December 1599. At the same time, Bochiuss's poem is an open plea for peace and a fond hope that the Infanta (the goddess of the poem) will bear children and thus, under the terms of her succession to sovereignty, bring forth a future cadet dynasty (the gods) and thus secure a measure of independence for the seventeen Netherlandish provinces with regards to the Habsburg government in Madrid.<sup>43</sup>

## Singing

In fact, the musical interlude atop the elephant was as evocative of the past as it was of hopes for a rosy future. Here, it should first be noted that fairly elaborate soundscapes formed a wholly traditional part of early modern civic festivals across Europe. There was a standard expectation of celebratory artillery salutes, musket salvos, fireworks, trumpet fanfares and bell ringing as well as the less organised but still festive noises accompanying communal feasting, drinking, toasting and singing.<sup>44</sup> In addition, during Netherlandish Joyous Entries, there was a lively tradition of performing specially composed music for the incoming rulers, which is hardly surprising given that this area was a power-house of late medieval and early modern musical culture. For example, when Albert and Isabella's shared grandfather, the Emperor Charles V, visited Cambrai in 1540, he attended a performance in the cathedral of a motet in four parts specially composed by the choir master, the eminent musician Jean Courtois.<sup>45</sup> Equally, during the Entry of Isabella's father, Philip II, into Bruges in 1549 four hundred boys and girls sang a

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<sup>40</sup> Bochiuss, *Historica Narratio*, p. 269. My warm thanks to Professor John Onians for helping me with translating this poem.

<sup>41</sup> That this was self-evidently a collaborative effort serves as a useful counterweight to the interesting but not terribly nuanced arguments about artistic authorship to be found in Cholcman, *Art on Paper*, pp. 35-42. It is instructive, to say the least, that Cholcman nowhere addresses the question of festive soundscapes in this work.

<sup>42</sup> The best account of these negotiations remains H. Lonchay, *Philippe II et le mariage des archiducs Albert et Isabelle*, «Académie Royale de Belgique, Bulletin de la Classe des Lettres et des Sciences Morales et Politiques et de la Classe des Beaux-Arts», VI (1910), pp. 364-88.

<sup>43</sup> For details of the Infanta's complex nuptial settlement, see Lonchay, *Philippe II et le mariage de archiducs*, pp. 364-88.

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, K. Kreitner, *Music in the Corpus Christi Procession*, pp. 153-204; T. Wind, *Musical Participation in Sixteenth-Century Triumphal Entries in the Low Countries*, «Tijdschrift van de Vereniging voor Nederlandse Muziekgeschiedenis», XXXVII (1987), pp. 111-169; and J. van Leeuwen, *Geluid, muziek en entertainment. Het gebruik van auditieve communicatiemiddelen tijdens het ritueel van de wetsvernieuwing in Gent, Brugge en leper (1379-1493)*, «Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire», LXXXIII, 4 (2005), pp. 1029-1057.

<sup>45</sup> See N. Bridgeman, *La Participation musicale à l'entrée de Charles Quint à Cambrai, le 20 janvier 1540*, in J. Jacquot (ed), *Fêtes et cérémonies au temps de Charles Quint*, Paris, Editions de Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1960, pp. 235-254.



song in Flemish for him by St Albert's chapel.<sup>46</sup> In Antwerp that same year, there was an arch on the Katelijnebrug with nine women:

all together singing a very sweet song, very ingeniously in five parts, in our mother tongue, to the honour of the entering prince, made on several instruments, such as harps, fiddles, violones, lutes, &c.<sup>47</sup>

Even more recently, during the welcome staged in Antwerp in 1594 for Albert's elder brother, Ernest, there had been a pageant entitled "Theatrum Pacis Austriacae" ("Theatre of Austrian Peace").<sup>48</sup> On it, ten singers and musicians impersonating Apollo and the nine muses had performed a Latin motet in five parts also by Bochijs and Verdonck, probably with each of the voices doubled up by an instrument.<sup>49</sup> As all this shows, by 1599, a polyphonic performance was a standard component of Joyous Entries into Antwerp. And, by extension, such performances evoked past welcoming ceremonies, reminding all participants of moments when the city had honoured incoming Habsburg princes with resonant music. It was a way of bringing to mind past interludes when the relationship between Antwerp and its overlords had been, quite literally, harmonious.

Like the elephant itself, Verdonck's music is therefore mnemonic. It was also a metaphor for the pacification of the usually militant elephant with its associated sounds of drumming. To add weight to this point, it is helpful to attend in some detail to the musical form taken by the performance atop the elephant on 10 December 1599. Verdonck crafted his motet carefully to underscore certain parts of Bochijs's poem (for a modern transcription, please see appendix 1).<sup>50</sup> Overall, the effect is of considerable rhythmical and tonal variation, as if to display the facility of both composer and singers and, in the process, to set up a marked contrast with the simpler art of drumming. For example, the phrase "nova gaudia Belgis" ("new joy for the Netherlanders") is reiterated several times across all voices, from the end of bar seven through to bar nineteen, where the repeats finally coalesce into something resembling overall rhythmical coherence. Moreover, in these passages, the playfully dotted rhythm on "gaudia" does, indeed, suggest a sense of joy. Equally, in "sparge" ("scatter") the sweeping movements of arms and hands strewing myrtle are invoked by prolonged melismata – numerous notes sung on just one syllable of the text, "spar-" – in three of the six voices. These melismata are the longest by far in the whole composition, running across bars twenty-five to twenty-eight.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, the most striking section is undoubtedly the acclamation "Pax" ("peace"). In bar thirty-nine this is sung by a single tenor on a sustained F, followed in the next bar by an equally sustained and rhythmically coherent response of "Pax" from the five other voices. This is then repeated in bars forty-eight and forty-nine, but now growing out of "quies" ("repose"). It would take somebody incredibly tone-deaf to miss the point: Verdonck's music is even more insistently a plea for peace in wake of a successfully consummated marriage than Bochijs's poem.

A further richness is added by the reversal of parts in the repeat of "Pax sit amore ...", where the two top voices swap melodic lines, as do the two middle ones (compare bars thirty-nine to forty-eight with bars forty-eight to fifty-seven). This kind of tightly knit imitative counterpoint

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<sup>46</sup> T. Wind, *Musical Participation*, pp. 117-118.

<sup>47</sup> T. Wind, *Musical Participation*, p. 127.

<sup>48</sup> Bochijs, *Descriptio Publicae Gratulationis*, p. 79. See also Raband, *Vergängliche Kunst*, pp. 115-121.

<sup>49</sup> The music is in Bochijs, *Descriptio Publicae Gratulationis*, pp. 82-83. For a detailed discussion of this piece and its performance, see B. Huys, *Twee Huldemotetten ter Gelegenheid van Blijde Intreden te Antwerpen, door Plantijn gedrukt* in J. Robijns (ed.), *Renaissance-Muziek 1400-1600: Dotum Natalicium René Bernard Lenaerts*, Leuven, Seminarie voor Muziekwetenschap, 1969, pp. 149-153, especially pp. 151-152.

<sup>50</sup> My warm thanks to André Vierendeels for kindly letting me publish his transcript of this motet.

<sup>51</sup> My analysis of this six-part composition is indebted to B. Huys, *Twee Huldemotetten*, pp. 152-154.

comes with an effect best appreciated in performance. It generates a sense of dialogue or, better, antiphony because the musical phrase is first called out by one singer and then caught up and repeated by another. In this respect, the two full repeats of “Pax sit amore ...” are but logical extensions of the call-and-response initially voiced in the intonation of “Pax” across bars thirty-nine to forty and forty-eight to forty-nine. In short, Verdonck’s music is self-reflexive. It showcases its own dialogic nature, a harmonious but richly complex and nuanced conversation involving several distinct voices. In December 1599, such a conversation was exactly what the city of Antwerp needed its Habsburg overlords to engage in, when negotiations for peace had been completed with France but the Netherlands themselves remained in the grip of bitter conflict.

From this it follows that Verdonck’s motet was first and foremost addressed to Albert and Isabella and that begins to account for its relative complexity. Although musical structures always seem more complicated than they really are when parsed out verbally, there can be no doubt that the motet belongs within elite musical culture. Verdonck and Bochiuss and their paymasters, the Antwerp municipality, would all have known that their new sovereigns grew up listening to some of the finest choral and instrumental ensembles to be found in later sixteenth-century Europe, those of the German Imperial and Spanish Royal courts.<sup>52</sup> So Verdonck’s composition is certainly attuned to its chief, courtly listeners. Nevertheless, in early modern Antwerp, elite musical culture was not narrowly exclusive. That is because the city was a notable centre of musical publishing rivalled only by Venice; it was also a centre of instrument-making, renowned for producing the finest harpsichords to be had anywhere; moreover, the cathedral of Antwerp was famous for its choral traditions; and, finally, there was a thriving musicians’ guild.<sup>53</sup> Verdonck was therefore showcasing to the new sovereigns a widely held local skill-set. On a more general level, musicality was far more widespread in early modern Europe than it is now; song, in particular, was performed in palaces and hovels alike.<sup>54</sup> Basic musicality was therefore also a widely shared body of knowledge and source of pleasure. Not everybody present in Antwerp on 10 December 1599 would have got every nuance of Verdonck’s music but there were plenty of people who might have enjoyed listening to it and thinking it over.

That said, beyond the Infanta and the Archduke, the motet cannot have been widely audible. Six youthful singers, two of whom must have been boy sopranos, do not have great acoustic reach however professional and experienced, especially not when singing outdoors. That must be why, at the welcoming ceremonies of 1549 and 1594, the voices were supported by instruments. Given this, it is safe to assume that Verdonck and Bochiuss deliberately restricted the sound. It was another way of setting up a contrast with the militant drumming usually associated with the elephant and, thus, of underscoring how delicately fragile is the song of children and of peace, of how one must strain to hear it amongst the clamour of war. This, in

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<sup>52</sup> Consider, for example, the engagement of music at the court of Rudolph II, Albert’s brother: P. Daněk and P. Jakoubková, *Music and musical culture in the Czech lands during the reign of Emperor Rudolf II* *Rudolfine Prague Composers*, «Czech Music», XXVI, 2 (2016), pp. 27-37. A wonderful impression of the situation in Madrid, where both Albert and Isabella spent stretches of their childhoods and young adulthoods, may be found in J. Hathaway, *Spirituality and Devotional Music in the Royal Convent of the Descalzas, Madrid*, «Journal of Musicological Research», XXX (2011), pp. 202-226.

<sup>53</sup> On the history of Antwerp musical publishing, see R.L. Weaver, *Waelrant and Laet: music publishers in Antwerp’s golden age*, Warren, Harmonie Park Press, 1995; on harpsichord making, see G. O’Brien, *Ruckers: a harpsichord and virginal building tradition*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1990; on music in Antwerp cathedral, see K.K. Forney, *Music, Ritual and Patronage at the Church of Our Lady in Antwerp*, «Early Music History», VII (1987), 1-57; on the Antwerp musicians’ guild and the general situation in the city, see G. Spiessens, *Antwerp*, in *Oxford Music Online*, 2001: <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.01066> (last visited 27 August 2021.)

<sup>54</sup> An excellent argument for this is R.W. Oettinger, *Music as propaganda in the German Reformation*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2001.

turn, tallies with the fact that the Joyous Entry of Albert and Isabella was performed in Advent, a season when instrumental support was traditionally eschewed in church music in anticipation of Christ's birth.

Now, it is a well-established fact that there were clear parallels between the Advent liturgy and the ritual forms taken by Joyous Entries in the Netherlands during the medieval and early modern periods.<sup>55</sup> Bochijs and Verdonck's motet is ostensibly secular. Yet such parallels, including musical resonances, must have been particularly obvious when an Entry was actually performed in Advent, as it was on 10 December 1599. The quasi-angelic costumes worn by five of the singers can only have augmented such sacred resonances.

To be precise, Albert and Isabella's Entry into Antwerp was on Friday before *Gaudete* Sunday, known as such because in the Tridentine liturgy the Introit begins "Gaudete in Domino semper" ("Rejoice in the Lord always").<sup>56</sup> Moreover, the Epistle for that day closes thus: "Et pax Dei, quae exsuperat omnem sensum, custodiat corda vestra, et intelligentias vestras in Christo Jesu Domino nostro." ("And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus Our Lord.")<sup>57</sup> The rhythmical weight on the word "gaudia" in Verdonck's motet, together with the paramount sonic emphasis on "Pax", musically anticipate the liturgy of the coming Sunday which, in itself, anticipates the joy to be had at the coming of the Lord and his peace.

At least to those well-versed in the Tridentine liturgy, Verdonck's motet would have sounded like an affirmation of Catholic orthodoxy. To Albert and Isabella, both devout followers of Rome, this must have seemed reassuring. It was certainly a pressing consideration because Antwerp came with a tradition of overt religious dissent, most openly expressed during the infamous riots of August 1566, when the city's splendidly furnished churches were ransacked by radical protestants. These riots began, not coincidentally, on the day after that year's performance of the second of the two annual *ommegangen*.<sup>58</sup> The rioters destroyed not only works of art, as is well known, but also sheet-music and musical instruments in what they considered a purification of the Lord's temples from idolatry and sensuality.<sup>59</sup> A decade later, and at least in part as a response to the Duke of Alva's heavy-handed tactics, between 1577 and 1585 Antwerp would gradually develop into a self-governing Calvinist city republic in all but name. However, as already noted, the city was forcibly reduced to Habsburg obedience and this was immediately followed by a purge expelling Calvinists and Anabaptists from the municipal government and the civic militia. A particular poignant moment in this history was on 27 August 1585, when a *Te Deum* to celebrate Farnese's victory was sung inside the cathedral of Antwerp.<sup>60</sup> During the Calvinist interregnum, the only music permitted inside that building during communal worship had been unaccompanied vernacular congregational singing in unison. In contrast, the *Te Deum* was certainly in Latin, definitely involved organ music and was very probably performed polyphonically by a choir.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> See G. Kipling, *Enter the King: Theatre, Ritual and Liturgy in the Medieval Civic Triumph*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1996, especially pp. 48-114.

<sup>56</sup> See, for example, *Missale Romanum ex decreto Sacrosancti Concilii Tridentini restitutum* (...), Venice, Aldine Press, 1574, p. 45. The whole passage is from Philippians, 4:4-6.

<sup>57</sup> *Missale Romanum*, p. 45. The passage is Philippians 4:7.

<sup>58</sup> Thøfner, *A Common Art*, p. 51.

<sup>59</sup> On these riots, and especially on the destruction of music that they entailed, see K.K. Forney, *Music, Ritual and Patronage*, pp. 41 and 49-50.

<sup>60</sup> On the role of music in relation to this particular ceremony, see M. Thøfner, *Marten de Vos and the Virgin Mary: Love, Mimesis and Music*, in W.S. Melion, J. Woodall and M. Zell (eds), *Ut Pictura Amor: The Reflexive Imagery of Love in Artistic Theory and Practice, 1500-1700*, Leiden and Boston, Brill, 2017, pp. 585-611, especially pp. 607-61.

<sup>61</sup> According to a post in the cathedral accounts, the organ was played on that occasion by 'Servatius Vander Muelen' who had, in fact, served throughout the Calvinist period. W. Aerts et al, *La Cathédrale Notre-Dame d'Anvers*, Antwerp, Fonds Mercator, 1993, p. 85. However, he would not have accompanied any formal worship

Again, it must be underscored that all these memories of conflict were still very much alive in 1599 even if Antwerp was now formally a Roman Catholic city under Habsburg overlordship. Indeed, there was a sizeable residue of closet Protestants and a small but active Jewish community, some of them from Portugal, and the otherwise orthodox municipality was inclined to let such individuals mind their own business.<sup>62</sup> Accordingly, despite Bochiuss's and Verdonck's discreet references to the liturgy for *Gaudete* Sunday, at face value their motet is secular and could therefore not offend dissenting sensibilities. In fact, its poly-vocal form, ranging from the soprano to the bass, articulates a tritely conventional but nevertheless poignant utopian ideal of human differences drawn together to generate harmony.<sup>63</sup> In this, at least, the motet both drew on and mobilised a widely shared musical culture that straddled social, religious and political divides.

## Conclusion

The Antwerp *ommegang* elephant, as deployed on 10 December 1599, worked by recuperating a rich and varied body of shared knowledge, competences, memories and pleasures so as to build bridges between the city and its Habsburg overlords. After thirty-three years of conflict, some of it exceptionally acrimonious, that must have seemed a dire necessity to locals and to visiting courtiers alike. Crucially, much of what the elephant conveyed was not straightforwardly verbal or textual but rather sculptural, spatial and sonic. The pageant worked by combining wonder, the appropriate early modern response to the exotic, with visual and auditory pleasures and with various registers of historical, political, scientific and religious knowledge. Accordingly, in the above analysis, I have tried to respond to the *ommegang* elephant as an early modern person might have done. That is to say, the point is not to distinguish sharply between categories such as piety, wonder, pleasure, sensuality and knowledge, but rather to explore how they work together, to make up a greater if somewhat chaotic and untidily organised whole.

Some scholars may object that my analysis is too heavily reliant on official festival books, such as those published by Bochiuss in 1595 and again in 1602. These are certainly not unproblematic but they are often the most exhaustive sources available. At the same time, early modern scholars like Bochiuss felt a certain obligation to convey, if not exactly truth, then at least verisimilitude. It would therefore only be appropriate to offer the above account in that same spirit. Another objection may be that my account is over-elaborate, that the sculpted *ommegang* elephant of early modern Antwerp must surely collapse under such a weight of interpretation. In my defence, I offer a passage originally penned by one exceptionally long-lived early modern inhabitant of Antwerp, the writer Richard Rowlands Verstegan, who was in his thirties when, around 1585, he settled in the city where he would live until his death in 1640. The passage in question comes from his "Character of a wise man": "From all that he sees and hears, he draws conclusions, by which he first of all instructs himself, and then others."<sup>64</sup>

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because, in the sixteenth century, Calvinists almost always eschewed polyphony and instrumental music in that context. Nevertheless, in the Netherlands, church organs were usually retained in Reformed churches but only to be 'used for spiritual recreation and edification outside the formal liturgy'. A.J. Fisher, *Lutheranism and Calvinism*, in I. Fenlon and R. Wistreich (eds), *The Cambridge History of Sixteenth-century Music*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2019, pp. 56-91, p. 84.

<sup>62</sup> Thøfner, *A Common Art*, pp. 164-167.

<sup>63</sup> This utopian view of musical harmony was clearly articulated in a later pageant staged during the entry of Albert and Isabella. See Bochiuss, *Historica Narratio*, p. 278.

<sup>64</sup> "De Character van eenen wijzen man." [...] "Wt alles dat hy siet en hoort treckt hy conclusion / waermede hy aldereerst hem selven instrueert / ende daer nae andere." R. V[erstegan]., *Characteren oft Scherpsinnighe Beschrijvinghe van de Proprieteiten, oft Eyghendommen van Verscheyden Persoonen*, Antwerp, Guiliam

## Appendix 1

Modern transcript of ‘Prome nouas...’ by Cornelis Verdonck and Johannes Bochius. Transcribed and edited by André Vierendeels, and reproduced here with his generous permission.

[please insert the PDF submitted with this manuscript]

[captions for the two illustrations:]

Fig. 1. Anonymous engraver after Joos de Momper, ‘The Antwerp *Ommegang* Elephant’, illustration from J. Bochius, *Historica narratio profectionis et inaugurationis Serenissimorum Belgii Principum Alberti et Isabellae [...]*, Antwerp, Officina Plantiniana, 1602. Reproduced with the permission of the Trustees of the British Museum. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Fig. 2. Anonymous engraver after Hans Vredeman de Vries (?), ‘The Antwerp *Ommegang* Elephant’, illustration from [P. Lozeleur de Villiers], *La Ioyeuse & Magnifique Entrée du Monseigneur François [...]*, Antwerp, Officina Plantiniana, 1582. Photograph: the author.

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