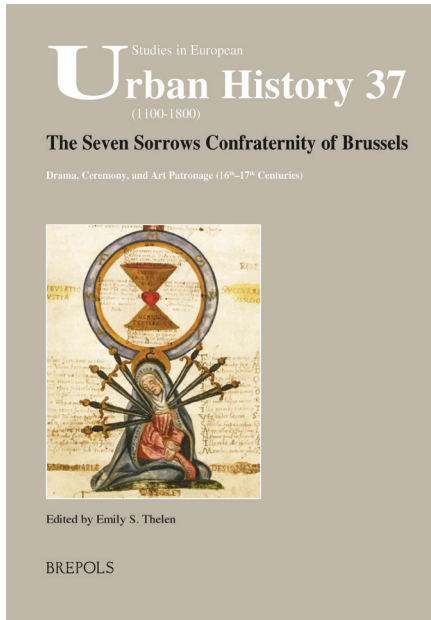


Note

Emily S. Thelen (ed.). *The Seven Sorrows Confraternity of Brussels. Drama, Ceremony, and Art Patronage (16th-17th centuries)* (Studies in European Urban History 37 (1100-1800)), Turnhout, Brepols, 2015. xii+168 pp. ISBN 978-2-503-55333-7.



The Seven Sorrows Confraternity of Brussels, edited by musicologist Emily Thelen, may seem at first sight a book for specialists interested in one specific confraternity, but the opposite is true. The Brussels Seven Sorrows confraternity chapter was one of eight chapters in the low countries, specifically devoted to the sufferings of Mary over the passion of her son. Its study asks for an interdisciplinary approach and yields relevant insights in art history, musicology, literary history, and urban history. The chapter was founded by the Brussels chamber of rhetoric and its activities were directed by chambers until its dissolution in 1785. The other confraternity chapters serve as relevant contexts for the interpretation of sources about the Brussels confraternity.

The Brussels chapter received special patronage from the House of Burgundy, the sources of which have formed the basis of its research. The occasion for this volume was

Remco Sleiderink's recent discovery of an account book (1499-1516), which has made it possible to delve into the 'inner workings' (Introduction, viii) of the Brussels chapter. The account book facilitates the interdisciplinary approach, since it unveils information about the confraternity's role in the city of Brussels and its many cultural activities.

The volume's subtitle *Drama, Ceremony, and Art Patronage (16th-17th centuries)* corresponds to two parts of the book, preceded by a first part about the history and foundation of the confraternity. A chronology of important events precedes the chapters.

Whereas most of the book chapters are based on the recently discovered account book, the volume starts with two contributions that offer new interpretations of existing sources.

Brecht DeWilde and Bram Vannieuwenhuyze analyse a seventeenth-century manuscript inventory. They analyse it mainly as a source of information about the confraternity's dealing with its own past. Susie Speakman Sutch's analysis of the late sixteenth-century membership registry offers a comparable approach. She not only enlightens us on the valuable contents of the registry, but also reconstructs its origins and structure. She thus complements the information from the first chapter and, moreover, helps us avoid certain pitfalls associated with the interpretation of the registry.

Both chapters in the second part, "Drama and Ceremony", are based on the newly found account book. Remco Sleiderink writes about the relationship between the rhetoricians of Brussels and the confraternity plays, Emily Thelen about the liturgical and musical activities as part of the religious and civic networks of Brussels. Both authors complement their research into the account book with other archival material and insights from related contexts, such as the *bliscappen*, processional plays we know more about than about the plays of the Seven Sorrows (Sleiderink), and the practices of the Seven Sorrows confraternity as a whole in the Low Countries (Thelen).

With three chapters, the last part, about art patronage, is the most extensive. Moreover, the theme also recurred in the earlier parts of the book. Patronage indeed is of great relevance for research into confraternities. Commissioning artists and craftsmen for decorations of their chapel and their liturgical activities, the confraternity not only functioned as a patron itself, it was also in need of patrons (bishops, cardinals, popes, and (arch) dukes).

In the first chapter of part III Edmond Roobaert and Trisha Rose Jacobs show the confraternity's role as a patron in the context of the city. Roobaert and Rose give insight into the relationship between the confraternity and the individual artists, as well as into the relationship between the artists themselves. The authors do not restrict themselves to patronage of painters, as happens so often, but incorporate all commissions to local artists, from painters and sculptors to craftsmen, musicians and poets.

The last two chapters focus on the patrons of the confraternity. Dagmar Eichberger shows how prints and woodcuts, supported by the ruling dynasty, propagated the Seven Sorrows devotion. Analysing commissioned paintings, Tine L. Meganck and Sabine van Sprang show the impact of archdukes Isabella (1566-1633) and Albert (1550-1621). An important commission, for example, is the altarpiece for the chapel, made by the court painter Wenzel Cobergher (1560-1624), who advocated the new orthodoxy in the Roman Catholic Church that was promoted by Albert and Isabella. By asking him, the confraternity strategically secured the patronage from the archduke. The choice for an artist to be selected for commission was thus motivated by the wish to consolidate and strengthen the relationship with the confraternity's own patron. Indeed, in 1615, Albert and Isabella became members of the confraternity and paid for parts of the renovation of its chapel.

The Seven Sorrows Confraternity of Brussels is a very rich and informative book. There is no central thesis but many cross-references give the volume cohesion, just like the recurring themes of the intermingling of devotional and cultural practices in the form of plays, music and art, and the connections between court, city, and church.