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A Princely Court in Brussels: The Court and Household of the Archdukes Albert and Isabella (1598-1621)

The court of the Archdukes was subsequently regarded as a model of piety and benevolence, and a high point of national history. From 1598 until the death of the Archduke Albert in 1621 they reigned as sovereigns in Brussels. The Archduke Albert frequently asked the Pope to make him a king. With a wealth of slides and diagrams, Dries Raeymaekers showed that at its peak in 1618 the court, including the palace guard, numbered around six hundred. The Archduchess had twenty-six ladies in waiting. The Archdukes understood the need for a large court to establish their status as sovereigns. The core household had been formed in 1595 in Spain, where the Archduke Albert then lived. Spaniards were always important at court, both as courtiers and servants: the household accounts were written in Spanish. However the palace guard was German and Walloon. The court used Spanish, Austrian and Burgundian traditions. The chapel contained some Englishmen. Simon Thurley pointed out that some monarchs, for example the Archdukes' contemporary James I, regarded a numerous and hospitable household as more important than architectural splendour. In a discussion of the Archdukes' residences in Brussels, Mariemont and Tervueren, Curt Noel pointed out that Philip II was content with a small 'royal space' in the Escorial. Dries Raeymaekers stated that when the Archduke Albert restricted access to his chambers, Flemish nobles thought he was betraying their traditions. After 1621 the Archduchess and her ladies became nuns, although, as Luc Duerloo pointed out, at one time the Archduchess had hoped to be Queen of the Netherlands or Holy Roman Empress.