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Author(s): Mary Rose Bedell

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Kid Gloves: The Child Armor of Philip III

By: Mary Rose Bedell

Abstract: The body of the early-modern ruler would never truly be his own. Instead, it served as the physical embodiment of the broader nation state. For the Hapsburgs in the sixteenth century, armor was one key method for uniting the physical body of the king with the military prowess of the nation. This process began at a young age: in the case of Philip III, at the age of seven, when he received a suit of armor produced by Milanese armorer Lucio Piccinino. This paper unites a visual study of gauntlets made for Philip III with studies of the contemporary portraits of Philip III by artists at the Hapsburg courts and historical analysis of Phillip's education. By analyzing each of these sources, it becomes clear that Phillip's prince hood was caught in a crossroads between the ancient and the modern. He at once embodied the classical heritage of Greece and Rome, indicated by the decorative program of the armor, and the future of the country, suggested by the armor's contemporary form and function.

Keywords: *armor, Prince Phillip III, Hapsburg, gauntlets, prince hood*

In his controversial book *The Prince*, Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527) offered this counsel to Renaissance rulers: "…most men judge more by their eyes than by their hands. For everyone is capable of seeing you, but few can touch you. Everyone can see what you appear to be, whereas few have direct experience of what you really are…"[i] In *The Prince*, Machiavelli understands that to be a prince is to engage in a constant performance. Each act that members of royal families performed, beginning at a young age, were calculated to increase their majesty and prestige. When Prince Philip (1578-1621), the future Philip III of Spain, was seven years old, he received a gift of armor, including a set of gauntlets (Figure 1) from the Spanish governor of

Milan, Carlos de Aragón y Tagliavia (1583-1592). When the Spanish governor of Milan gifted Prince Philip this armor at a critical juncture in Philip's educational journey, he expressed his hope that Philip would embody the heritage of the classical past and the future success of the Spanish kingdom.

The armor, designed by Milanese armorer and goldsmith Lucio Piccinino, also known as Lucio Marliani, survives in pieces showcased at two museums. The Patrimonio Nacional in Madrid holds the majority of the suit, including the burgonet and the breastplate, meanwhile The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City holds the aforementioned gifted gauntlets that are the focus of this paper. The design of the gauntlets is typical of Lucio Piccinino's work, combining delicately engraved vines with embossed pagan deities and classical grotesques.[ii] Armor with this degree of ornamentation was made for parade purposes, rather than for battlefield or tournament use, and was filled with symbols to represent the owner's persona and social status.[iii] The gauntlet is made of three sections: a cuff, metacarpal plates, and articulated finger plates that allowed the hands to remain dexterous while still protected.[iv] On the Metropolitan gauntlet, the cuff is decorated with an embossed figure, likely Mars, wearing Roman armor and carrying a staff.

There is a substantial body of literature about the evolution of parade armor during the Renaissance in Italy, but less has been written about child armor specifically. In part, this is due to the armor's rarity. Armor was exceedingly expensive and the average nobleman might only order one or two such suits in a lifetime.[v] For instance, Ferdinand II of Tyrol, Archduke of Austria purchased armor by Jörg Seusenhofer in 1547 for 1,258 florins, or twelve years of salary for an average court bureaucrat.[vi] Child armor, which would be quickly outgrown, was a lavish expense.[vii] Most of the child armor that still survives was associated with royal princes, for

whom lavish expense was the rule. Despite its shallow treatment in most literature on armor, children's armor provides a unique opportunity to study how young princes were educated and how their elders treated them as the embodiments of the future of the kingdom.

For Prince Philip, the lavish expenditure on his armor was particularly prudent because of the tenuous state of the Spanish succession. Philip II's first marriage to Maria Manuela of Portugal (1527-1545) produced only one son, Carlos (1545-1568), who showed early signs of mental illness.[viii] After Carlos attempted to stab the duke of Alba during a council meeting, his father imprisoned the prince and entrusted him to the care of the duke of Ferrara, where he died at the age of 23.[ix] Philip II's second marriage to Mary I of England (1516-1558) produced no offspring, and his marriage to his third wife, Elisabeth of Valois (1545-1568), produced only daughters. Only his fourth marriage to Anna of Austria (1549-1580) produced potential heirs: Ferdinand (1571-1578) who died at the age of six, and Diego (1575-1582), who died at the age of seven. Their third son, Prince Philip, was born in 1578, the year of Ferdinand's death, while Diego was the heir-apparent to the throne. When Diego died in 1582, Philip became the heir-apparent at just four years old.

Prince Philip received the armor at the age of seven, a factor which likely has three causes. Firstly, it is around the same age that Ferdinand and Diego died, and it was prudent to demonstrate that Philip was healthy and strong. Secondly, the prince took the oath to uphold the majesty of the Spanish crown that was required by Spanish heirs in 1584, and the gift may have marked this momentous occasion.[x] Thirdly, seven years old was around the age that Spanish princes began their formal education.[xi] The armor, given at this critical point in Prince Philip's life, represents the three facets of Spanish princely education: classical literacy, martial training, and statecraft.

By the sixteenth century, members of the nobility were expected to have some knowledge of classical texts and motifs. Humanists in the Renaissance looked back to classical examples for political, military, and scientific guidance and they encouraged their princes to do the same. Philip II chose the humanist and chaplain García de Loaysa y Girón (1534-1599) to be Prince Philip III's first tutor, a decision which exemplified that teaching of the ancients was key to being a modern prince.[xii] By his teenage years, Prince Philip could translate the works of Julius Caesar and Cicero from Latin into Spanish.[xiii] Renaissance princes, including the Hapsburg court, demonstrated this kind of classical education by surrounding themselves with classical styles and motifs in their art and architecture. Prince Philip's armor, complete with the images of Mars on the gauntlets, expressed his classical education to the Spanish courtiers and visiting dignitaries alike. It was an advertisement that he was learning the appropriate classical material that would equip him with the skills to rule.

The second skill that proved a prince's right to rule was his martial training. At the Spanish court, gifting armor to princes was a matter of initiation into the masculine arenas of riding, hunting, tournament fighting, and battle strategy.[xiv] A prince's physical health was key to the succession of the monarchy and he needed to demonstrate his physical capacity to lead. He would do this by learning to fight with swords, riding a horse, and completing other tasks evidencing physical prowess. Perhaps more importantly was his military training. While princes in the Renaissance rarely charged into battle alongside their troops, their military training equipped them to be effective commanders and strategists. Armor, which men at court frequently combined with civilian clothing, represented a man's military capabilities even off the battlefield.[xv] Mars, the Roman god of war, was a common motif in the sixteenth century, and appeared on accessories such as gauntlets (Metropolitan Museum of Art 04.3.34–.35) or Powder

Flasks (Metropolitan Museum of Art 14.25.1507). The embossment not only symbolized the prince's martial prowess to others, but also served as a reminder to himself. The placement on the gauntlets allowed the prince to see the Mars figure without the aid of a mirror. By wearing armor, especially armor with martial motifs, Prince Philip demonstrated that he was healthy enough to lead and that he had the military intelligence to do so.

Renaissance princes lived a performative existence, with each aspect of their identity carefully crafted to produce a particular effect. This performance was perfected during the reign of Philip III's grandfather, Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, who utilized armor to demonstrate the unification of the king's body and state.[xvi] Educating princes on how to become effective rulers began with lessons on manners and etiquette, but it was learned primarily through active participation rather than through careful study. Prince Philip was a fixture in court rituals throughout his childhood and he needed to dress for the occasion, which made armor a sensible gift. The stakes were high: Philip was the embodiment of the future of Spain and he was watched on all sides for signs of weakness. When the Spanish governor of Milan presented Prince Philip with the suit of armor, his gift was part of the pageant performance of court life.[xvii] When the young Philip wore this parade armor at court functions, he embodied the promise of Spain's continued power and influence.

The armor that survives today can only offer a partial glimpse into how the armor looked and functioned, but Renaissance princes' portraits provide a useful supplement for art historians. The *Allegory of the Education of Philip III* by Justus Tiel, c. 1590 (PO01846) shows the Metropolitan and Patrimonio Nacional armor as it would have been worn, including the accompanying clothing, feathers, ruff, and sword.[xviii] In Justus Tiel's painting, Philip must choose between vice, represented by Cupid, and the female figure of Virtue, who offers him an

upraised sword.[xix] He stands facing the viewer in a confident pose and prominently displays the hand that wears the Metropolitan gauntlet, with Mars easily visible at his wrist. The god Chronos helps Philip choose wisely by pushing the child Cupid aside and pressing Virtue closer to the prince.[xx] The armor, in the painting as well as in reality, suggests to all onlookers that Philip was well equipped to make virtuous decisions.

Philip II could have commissioned Prince Philip armor himself, and he likely did commission more armors as the prince grew, but the fact that this armor was a gift from the Spanish governor of Milan is significant. Milan, which entered Spanish control in 1556, was the most significant center for armor manufacture in Italy.[xxi] Most of its armor production was practical, making the equipment that would be worn by ordinary troops, but the most famous of the Milanese armorers were known for the intricately designed parade armor produced for the nobility of Europe.[xxii] Milan was known for the elaborate, grotesque designs popularized in the mid-sixteenth century by the armorer Filippo Negroli (c. 1510-79.).[xxiii] Lucio Piccinino belonged to a later generation who embraced the mannerist forms that were prevalent among other artists in the final quarter of the sixteenth century.[xxiv] Armor produced in the Italian capital of armor manufacture, in the most fashionable style that represented his education, offered Prince Philip the greatest prestige.

Renaissance princes enacted careful performances for an ever-watchful audience: performances of strength, classical erudition, and statecraft. Prince Philip's gauntlets demonstrate the hopes and anxieties that surrounded the prince – that he would lead the country to military triumph and prosperity, and anxieties that he would not. By gifting Philip the armor, the governor of Milan offered the prince a valuable tool for presenting himself as the worthy successor of his classical heritage and the embodiment of the future of Spain.

Figures

Figure 1 – Pair of Gauntlets for a Child – Lucio Piccinino, c. 1585

Steel, gold, silver. Each approx. 7 1/8 in x 4 ½ in.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 19.128.1-2

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[vi] Matthias Pfaffenbichler, *Armourers*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 51.

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[viii] A.W. Lovett, *Early Habsburg Spain, 1517-1598* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 125.

[ix] Lovett 1986, 126.

[x] Alvaro Soler del Campo, "Child's armor of Philip III," in *The Art of Power: Royal Armor and Portraits from Imperial Spain*, ed. Alvaro Soler del Campo, trans. Jenny F. Dodman (Madrid: Sociedad Estatal para la Accion Cultural Exterior, 2009), 256.

[xi] Martha K. Hoffman, *Raised to Rule: Educating Royalty at the Court of the Spanish Habsburgs, 1601-1634* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana University Press, 2011), 57.

[xii] Hoffman 2011, 55–56.

[xiii] Hoffman 2011, 73.

[xiv] Hoffman 2011, 11.

[xv] Springer 2010, 19.

[xvi] Jennifer Liston, "The Performance of Empire: Leone Leoni's Charles V as Virtus Subduing Fury," *Visual Resources* 28, no. 1 (March 1, 2012): 39, https://doi.org/10.1080/01973762.2012.653430.

[xvii] Soler del Campo 2009, 256.

[xviii] Carmen García-Frías Checa, "Allegory of the Education of Philip III," in The Art of Power: Royal Armor and Portraits from Imperial Spain, ed. Alvaro Soler del Campo, trans. Jenny F. Dodman (Madrid: Sociedad Estatal para la Accion Cultural Exterior, 2009), 257.

[xix] García-Frías Checa 2009, 257.

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[xxii] Stuart W. Pyhrr and Jose-A Godoy, *Heroic Armor of the Italian Renaissance: Filippo Negroli and His Contemporaries* (New York City: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998), 4.

[xxiii] Pyhrr and Godoy 1986, 31.

[xxiv] La Rocca 2017, 123.