

KLAAS MULLER

S T U D I O O F P E T E R P A U L R U

Study of Isabella Clara Eugenia of Habsburg, Infanta of Spain, as widow in the frock of the Unshod Sisters of Saint Clare

Isabella was a daughter of Philip II of Spain and became governor of the Spanish Netherlands in 1598. When the 12-year truce expired in 1621 and her husband governor Albrecht died in the same year, she wanted to withdraw from political life and return to Spain. However, this was refused to her and she decided to join the Order of the Poor Clares. She died in 1633.

Isabella's relationship with Rubens must have been quite close. Not only was Rubens appointed by her as court painter (in 1609), he also portrayed her (and Albrecht) many times. We can also presume that Rubens -being a diplomat- had an intense political contact with her.

When Isabella returned to Flanders in 1625 after the siege of Breda, she was received in Antwerp (See Hans Vlieghe, *Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard, part XIX, Portraits*, volume 2, p. 120). We know that she was also received by Rubens, who then portrayed her as Clarisse, which became the new official state portrait (possibly the painting in the Galleria Paetina in Florence?, the Galerie Römer in Zürich? or the one in Pasadena, Norton Simon Museum?).

Also Van Dyck painted the Infante at least 3 times: in full-length (in a comparable composition, now Galleria Sabauda in Turin: S Barnes, N. Depoorter, H. Vey, *Van Dyck: a complete catalogue of the paintings*, Yale University Press, p. 318-319). A second time in 3-quarter (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna). And a third time in in grisaille for an engraving of his Iconography (probably collection Duke of Buccleuch, Northamptonshire).

Many versions, copies and pastiches of Rubens' and Van Dycks portraits of the Infante are known, but regarding the original first and authentic version sources are uncertain and contradictory.

Our painting is clearly a study, in our view "after life" because Isabella's face is not idealized: she looks much more realistic than the other known versions. Isabella also looks remarkably older. Moreover, the composition (including the glance, her look, the angle the painter used) differs from the other known versions mentioned above and the hood and dress are very sketchy. The aim of the painter was to create a realistic image as possible of the face and gaze, he cared less for the rest.

An interesting technical fact is that our study was painted on a letter (or for example an invoice). Rubens did this several times in his career (for example "Head of an African Man Wearing a Turban", formerly Collection Christopher Norris,

London).

Oil on paper laid down on panel, 32,5 x 21,3cm

Label on the back: *Van Dyck, Ant., Ec. flam.*



Circa: 1630