

Chronicle of the congress on “Ferdinand II and the Crown of Aragon”

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At the May 2015 meeting of the History-Archaeology Section of the Institut d'Estudis Catalans, the decision was taken to hold a congress on Ferdinand II in 2016 to mark the five hundredth anniversary of the death of the Catholic King, the nickname by which the monarch is known all over the world. The decision came with its own set of problems, including economic ones at a time when the country had not yet fully pulled out of the recession which had affected much of the world of the past several years, Europe and Spain included. Furthermore, many of the institutions and universities in Spain were also expected to hold congresses. However, ultimately not very many celebrations of the quincentenary were held. In consequence, the congress hosted by the Institut d'Estudis Catalans, which was meant to be a small gathering about the lands held by Ferdinand II – called the Crown of Aragon, which was consolidated in the 15th century – became a large one because of its quality and its classic yet modern structure, thanks to the new research in the papers presented and the debates that accompanied the talks from the 26th to 28th of October.

As I write this brief chronicle of the congress, the authors have already submitted all their papers in writing to the Institut d'Estudis Catalans, which will publish them. Until the printed volume appears, I believe that it is worth shedding light several issues that came to light at the congress “Ferdinand II and the Crown of Aragon”. Perhaps the most important one is what lay behind the cordial atmosphere among the participants, namely that all of them – from different universities and often with different ideas – shared a historical and scientific rigour which accepted the premise that “the antithesis of science is dogmatism” as the rule of thumb, an idea which has a longstanding history since last century. And this concept was obviously seen in the different areas of history into which the congress was divided: economic, social, religious, institutional, cultural and foreign policy.

To begin with economics, the authors who participated in this section showed its value. In his talk on “Castile and the Crown of Aragon: A necessary economic comparison”, Antoni Furió discussed the historiographic errors that have been committed by either over- or under-esti-



FIGURE 1. Cover of the congress programme.

mation, depending on the subject, such as the valuation of the treasuries, primarily in Castile, and then in the other kingdoms. Furió thinks, but also proved with figures, that the valuation and modernity of the centralised Castilian economic power in much of the monarchy has been overstated. Likewise, there has been altogether too much inaccurate talk about the supposed weakness and obsolescence of the treasury of the lands in the Crown of Aragon, in an income model in the Crown which was much more decentralised and in which the king himself did not have the capacity to levy taxes. Furió blamed these inaccuracies on a persistent historiographic tradition that is much more favourable towards Castile, while he also accused the non-Castilian literature of a total lack of inquiry into these topics. Therefore, his work virtually revolutionises many of the issues that used to be taken as facts, in addition to reassessing the economic contributions of Sardinia and Sicily within the Crown of Aragon.

While Antoni Furió compared Castile and the Crown of Aragon, Gabriel Jover examined another clash in “Bifurcations of agrarian structures during the reign of Ferdinand II (1452-1516): Mallorca and Catalonia”, in which he explained why and, with all the relevant exceptions, how the Catalan landscape, which started off worse, ended in a better situation than Mallorca. It is true that in Catalonia the peasants, especially those in the northern reaches, suffered from the “*mals usos*” (bad customs) of the lords. They were the serfs, who would be thoroughly explained in subsequent lectures. However, some of them in Catalonia, the intermediate peasantry, not only managed to eliminate the “*mals usos*” but also appropriated the useful realm. On Mallorca, to the contrary, the free peasants in the 13th century, before and especially after the peasant rebellion in the mid-15th century, lost ownership of the land and a landowning aristocracy developed in the midst of a crisis in feudal revenues.

Something similar to what Gabriel Jover explained was covered in the talk by Miquel Deyà on issues of public debt and taxation in his talk entitled “Mallorca, Catalonia and the Crown at the beginning of the reign of Ferdinand II (1479-1485)”. Deyà denied a premeditated royal reform plan – called the redress – and showed how on the issue of payment of the public debt, Ferdinand II placed the interests of the Catalan creditors – especially those from Barcelona – before those of the Mallorcan creditors. Indeed, the Catalan creditors had not been paid the interest on the loans they had given the Great and General Council of Mallorca. After the civil war from 1462-1472 and the Courts of 1481, the king wanted to consolidate the peace in Catalonia before improving the island, a small realm which could wait. Deyà said many other things which are not summarised here, but I do recommend that the reader look at a talk that is archive-worthy and quite novel in its perspective.

The next two historians continued to share studies based on different but related economic areas, in addition to assessing the period from somewhat different

vantage points. In his talk entitled “Agrarian production and manufacture in Catalonia. Between the redress and stagnation”, Jaume Dantí first pointed out the lack of economic data with which to draw solid conclusions. He cast doubt on some of Vicens Vives’ contributions, without fully denying them, as he believes Vives was overly optimistic about the Catalan redress, although he sees more positive economic variations in Catalonia in the 1490s and early 16th century than in the 1480s. Finally, he underscores the institutional conservatism of the municipal reforms of Barcelona compared to mercantile protectionism and attempts by the King and the city of Barcelona at a dubious economic increase. The author’s conclusion is also dubious: the period had shown more stagnation than redress while awaiting the true foundations of recovery.

Without denying Dantí’s reasoning, in his talk entitled “In a time of transition: Trade of the Crown of Aragon in the Mediterranean”, David Igual was a bit more optimistic, perhaps because his scenario was not limited to Catalonia but encompassed a broader region, and perhaps, too, because his ideas and sources are more from vantage points which believe that the depression in the late Middle Ages was not as chaotic as was thought years ago. He views the 15th century more as a time of recovery, and despite the Catalan civil war from 1462 to 1472, this can be seen most frequently and clearly in trade. However, this is true in both the Mediterranean – where examples abound – and the Atlantic, which the author did not ignore and which also influenced *Mare Nostrum*. His conclusion is reminiscent of Dantí’s, although Igual views this period as a time not so much of stagnation but of transition.

Turning now to social history, Esteban Sarasa summarised the evolution of the strongest nobility in the entire Crown during the reign of the Trastámaras in his talk “The secular nobility in the Crown of Aragon during the 15th century. The example of Aragon”. This nobility was strong because of several reasons: the Courts’ division into two wings – the upper and the petty nobility, clashes through banditry, the opposition to the royalty and the seigniorial bonds over their vassals, the worst-treated in the entire Crown. Ferdinand II was often required to govern with them by signing agreements that favoured them in the revolts of the vassals – the Sentència de Celada (Ruling of Celada) of 1497 – and by accepting legal petitions he did not like.

A different sort of example in Catalonia in relation to the world of lords and vassals was presented by Rosa Lluch in her paper “Ferdinand II and the serfs”. She did not defend Vicens Vives’ theses on serfs but instead relativised them. Lluch knows that the Sentència Arbitral de Guadalupe (Arbitration Judgement of Guadalupe, 1486) was not a victory for the Catalan serfs, but a pact between nobles and vassals before a king who governed. The “*mals usos*” were indeed abolished, but the lords retained their incomes and many other rights. Lluch thinks that more

research is needed into this crucial topic in Catalan history, a topic that she herself has addressed in several studies.

Obviously, the nobles remained strong not only during the reign of Ferdinand II but also afterward, in the 16th and even in 17th centuries. Valentí Gual demonstrates this in his talk complemented by plentiful archival documentation entitled "Justice in the lords' lands in the time of Ferdinand II", in which he cites many conflicts resolved by the nobles in their own fashion. The author distinguishes between the royal and the seigneurial jurisdiction, and within the latter between the barons and the Church, which had its own territorial divisions and a structure of district officials with only distant ties to the king.

To conclude this part, the talk by Enrique Cruselles, "Businessmen and the urban aristocracy in Barcelona and Valencia in the late 15th century", explains the origin, growth and even mental changes of the merchants. They were the true pillars of these cities, but they were also rentiers of the Catholic King, buyers of public debt, controllers of the leases on the taxes of the capitals and, logically, holders of oligarchic power over the municipal structures. All of this led to an economic decline in both cities, although the oligarchic group became ever richer and more closed. These events happened in Barcelona first, which had already been hurt by the civil war that led to the urban aristocracy (1510), but also in Valencia, which in the early 16th century was heading towards the Brotherhoods of the kingdom after the death of Ferdinand II.

Along with social relations, religious relations were also discussed, as not only did they affect everyone but there were also religious minorities then. In "The religious world around Ferdinand II", Ignasi Fernández Terricabras explained the status of Christianity in the era of a king who has received nothing but praise as an authentic monarch who, along with his wife Isabel, not only stopped the Turkish and Muslim attacks from the outside but also launched a reform process inside the Church. The author believes that actually there is a great deal of exaggeration, and that the reforms undertaken from the top of the secular clergy – especially bishops – and perhaps the regular clergy did not so much improve Christian spirituality, although it did to some degree, as bring the Church closer to the power of the Crown in both Castile and the Crown of Aragon and Catalonia. As one of the best historians on this topic, his study is also full of notable examples, including one worth underscoring here: the Benedictine monastery of Montserrat.

Indeed, a king that wanted to control the Church could not stop keeping close watch over, if not expelling, the religious minorities and possible heretics. The introduction of the Inquisition, in line with the new tendencies emerging from Castile in 1478-1480, achieved this despite the legal opposition from the kingdoms. However, the lecture entitled "The tribunal of the Holy Office of the Inquisition on Mallorca during the reign of Ferdinand II", presented by the Mallorcan historian Mateu Colom, revealed

a bit more than is usually known. The Balearic Islands, a small kingdom without Courts of its own, played an important role in this congress, more important than the king himself considered them as he was convinced that this territory would not bring him serious problems over the Inquisition.

Despite this, without discrediting the Holy Office, in the talk "From converts to the expulsion of the Jews: The apostolic pastoral", Rafael Narbona presented a lengthy study which spans from the early 13th century to the expulsion. Beyond the golden age of the Jewish world until 1283, Narbona stresses the fact that the mendicant Christian orders imposed a pastoral on themselves that sought the conversion of the Jews without force, even though the pogroms of 1391 facilitated this. The best thinkers, including Saint Vincent Ferrer, the monarch himself and Benedict XIII, among others, wanted not forced but real conversions. For example, to Father Jaume Pérez of Valencia, these forced conversions would not be authentic until the third generation after 1391, the generation that joined the Christian power in around 1470, just when a process got underway – the pastoral of conversion continued until the end – which led to the expulsion of the Jews in 1492. This text is difficult to summarise but essential reading.

With a larger population yet one that was generally poorer than the Jewish converts, the Islamic world also made an appearance at this congress. However, the authors did not base it on the well-worn clichés about the agrarian landscape with vassals. In his lecture "Rural Mudejar manufactures in the inland regions of northern Valencia", Joaquin Aparici wrote more about the trades of the craftsmen than the peasants. And in his lecture "From Mudejars to Moriscos in Valencia under the reign of Ferdinand the Catholic. Beyond an anecdote: Adultery", Manuel Ruzafa's title says it all: this author views adultery as yet another reason for the separation of and persecution between the Christian and Muslim worlds.

Obviously, without the existence and knowledge of political institutions, a society cannot govern itself. This is why the congress discussed not all of these institutions but certainly the most important ones. In her lecture entitled "Ferdinand, Isabel, Germaine: The construction of a court for modern times", Maria Àngels Pérez Samper addressed the nerve centre of all of them: the royal court. She examined its late mediaeval roots, the duplication of the royal houses albeit linked by dynastic unions, and their entire evolution parallel to historical events, without forgetting the royal entries into the cities: as can be seen in those of Barcelona – Ferdinand and Isabel – according to the *Llibre de solemnitats*. This is an archival source followed by a bibliography which has been brought thoroughly up to date.

However, with Alphonse the Magnanimous' precedent of going to Naples, which was continued by Ferdinand II of Castile, the monarch sought delegates for the general governor of all the kingdoms, not solely the crown prince,

who traditionally occupied the post. With the Catholic King, the institution of the viceroyalty was consolidated, an institution that was thoroughly studied by Vicens Vives, Garcia Gallo and Lalinde Abadía. Now, in his study “Notes on the consequences of Ferdinand the Catholic’s royal absenteeism in Catalonia”, Jordi Buyreu updates a perennially important topic which he complements with the start – but only the start – of the Council of Aragon since 1494. We should add that the king began to appoint his family members or people close to him to the viceroyalty.

While the general lieutenants or viceroys were the king’s delegates in the kingdoms, the Courts with their different wings represented the country in the Old Regime and created laws, as well as granting services. In “The Courts of the kingdoms: The legislation of the Courts in the years of Ferdinand II: A comparative examination of the kingdoms of the Catalan-Aragonese Crown”, Eva Serra says it all with the title. In this lecture, which had never before been given, Serra studied this comparison and drew major conclusions regarding the similarities and differences. This is a difficult topic to study given the host of constitutions and *Furs* (codes of law) that existed in so many Courts, as Serra thoroughly explains, although the reader must always bear in mind that laws are not the entire reality. One example: the Courts did not like the appointment of viceroys, either with Ferdinand II or even in the Courts of 1599, and they put up all kinds of hurdles, but general lieutenants there were.

Tomàs de Montagut finished these institutional contributions with his talk on “The monarchy and the regional institutions: The *Diputacions dels generals*”. Montagut began by explaining the different jurisdictions of power: universal, general and special. He noted how in the Crown of Aragon and especially Catalonia, which is the region being examined, power was dualist and pactist between the king, the Courts and the latter’s representation when they were not being held, namely the *Diputació del general* after 1359. Montagut outlines all of this and then ends in the era of Ferdinand II, noting the different changes in royal power over the *Diputació*: from the *Poch valdria* of 1481 and the application of ballot voting after 1493 to the election of deputies and auditors of accounts and a series of other minor changes in the Courts of 1503, 1510 and 1512. Despite this, as has been noted, “the level of administrative organisation of the Generalitat de Catalunya in the era of Ferdinand was quite high”, an issue about which little has been known until now.

To conclude this area, and perhaps the previous ones as well, the lecture by Àngel Casals, “A long-range vision: Ferdinand II. From the Trastámaras to the Hapsburgs”, sought to be an overview of the reign of Charles V. He assessed his reign on different issues, which led him to connect this century and king with the early years of the 16th century, after Ferdinand II had died, and with the Hapsburg dynasty, to ascertain points of similarity and/or dif-

ference between the two eras. This synthesis was indisputably difficult to write given that the author started from prior to Ferdinand II.

In the lecture entitled “Culture in the Trastámara century of the Crown of Aragon (1412-1516): Humanism, the printing press and languages”, Agustí Alcoberro addressed the century up to Ferdinand II with the issues that might be of the most interest to historians without a specialisation in literature and art, which would require more talks. And Alcoberro shed light on the quantity and quality of Catalan humanists, who were closely connected to the Roman and Neapolitan worlds thanks to Alphonse the Magnanimous and the Borgia popes. Alcoberro studied names like Joan Margarit, Jeroni Pau and Miquel Carbonell, among others, and their works, along with the introduction of the printing press in our lands, the survival of Latin in humanism and the spread of Catalan, facts which show a course of humanism which would later be halted after the 16th century.

It is not easy to contribute anything new on Ferdinand II’s foreign policy, which is well known, yet the guest authors managed to do so. In “Ferdinand II of Aragon and Pope Alexander VI. Church and diplomatic relations in the wars of Italy”, José María Cruselles examined not so much the wars cited but the complex relations between the Borgias after Alphonse the Magnanimous, but especially after Ferdinand II. These relations were ambivalent, and shall we say favourable, until 1496, when the royal couple was given the name the Catholic Kings; shortly thereafter, they became adversarial, as the pope supported the French monarchy for Cesar Borgia’s family reasons after 1499. This is an innovative text because of the perspective it provides based on the Italian conflicts.

In his talk “The last years of the international policy of the reign of Ferdinand II (1504-1516)”, Enrico Valseriati began his study where Cruselles left off. The Italian historian offered a summary, with a more updated bibliography, of everything that is known: Ferdinand II’s sojourn in Naples and the new viceroyalties, the seizure of cities to serve almost as watchtowers in North Africa, other conflicts in Italy and the conquest of Navarre. However, he also cited little known or little studied facts, such as the attempt by Leo X, a Medici, to appropriate Naples for himself, dreaming about the forthcoming death of Ferdinand II and his family’s expansion to the Mezzogiorno. It was a similar model as the Borgias, but only empty gestures, hence the case of Brescia studied by Valseriati.

And as an epilogue to the Congress, my own talk, “The historiographic image of King Ferdinand II and his actions” analysed all the contributions on the figure of the monarch from the chroniclers of the era until today. Furthermore, without pretending to be a definitive assessment of the sovereign, it does underscore the pragmatism of a king capable of changing his statements depending on circumstances but never sacrificing the principles he upheld: the expansion to Europe and his political domain.