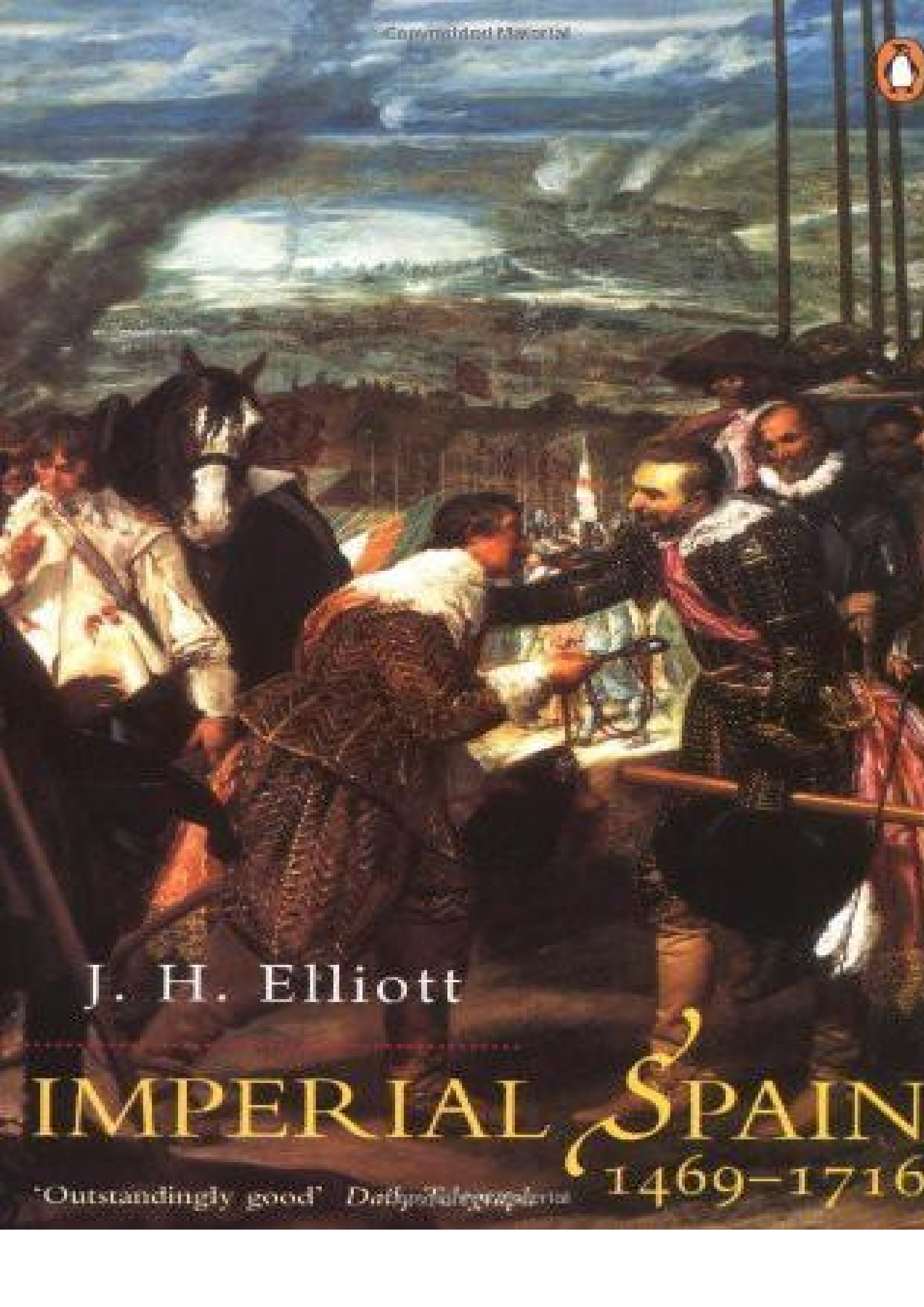


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J. H. Elliott

# IMPERIAL SPAIN

1469–1716

‘Outstandingly good’ *Daily Telegraph*

IMPERIAL SPAIN  
1469–1716

Sir John Elliott was born in 1930. He won a scholarship to Eton College, and then to Trinity College, Cambridge, where he was elected to a Fellowship in 1954 for a dissertation on the Catalan revolt of 1640, subsequently published as *The Revolt of the Catalans* (1963). He was an Assistant Lecturer and Lecturer in History at Cambridge University from 1957 to 1967, when he became Professor of History and head of the History Department at King's College in the University of London. He moved to the United States in 1973 to become a Professor in the School of Historical Studies at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, where he remained until 1990 when he was appointed Regius Professor of Modern History in the University of Oxford, and a Fellow of Oriel College. He retired from the Regius Chair in 1997. He has published extensively on Spain, Europe and Spanish America in the Early Modern period, and his books include: *Europe Divided, 1559–1598* (1968; 2nd edn, 2000); *The Old World and the New, 1492–1650* (1970); *A Palace for a King* (in collaboration with Jonathan Brown, 1980); *Richelieu and Olivares* (1984); *The Count-Duke of Olivares* (1986); and a collection of essays *Spain and its World, 1500–1700* (1989). He was knighted for his services to history in 1984, and has received several honours and awards in Spain. In 1999 he won the Balzan Prize for History, 1500–1800, and he is currently working on a comparison of British and Spanish colonization in America.



# IMPERIAL SPAIN

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1469–1716



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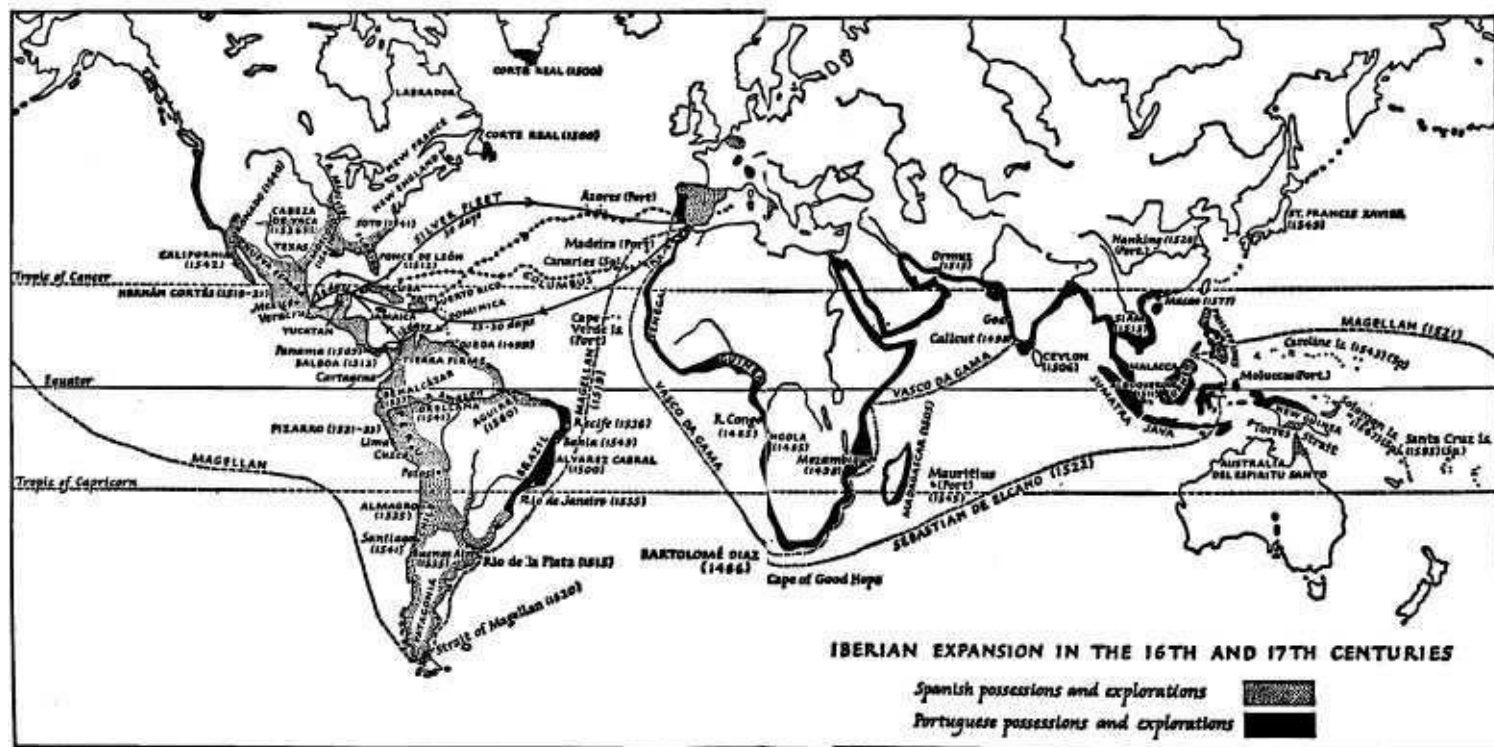
# Acknowledgements

THIS book was read in typescript by Professor H. G. Koenigsberger of Nottingham University, and Professor A. A. Parker of the University of London. Their numerous comments were of the very greatest value in preparing the book for the press, and I have consistently taken their cogent criticisms into account when revising the text. While they bear no responsibility for the final product, it has gained immeasurably from their suggestions, and I am deeply grateful to them. In giving his comments from the standpoint of a specialist of literature, Professor Parker has rendered an additional service, at a time when contacts between historians and literary specialists are often distressingly rare. I am especially indebted to him for showing me how fruitful these contacts can be, and how historians neglect them at their peril. As a result of his labours, I hope that this book will be less misleading to those whose prime interest is in literature, than it would otherwise have been.

My wife has compiled the index, and has helped in the preparation both of the tables and of the maps, which were drawn by Miss Joan Emerson; and Dr R. Robson of Trinity College has again generously devoted his time to reading a colleague's proofs.

TRINITY COLLEGE,  
J.H.E.

CAMBRIDGE.  
27 March 1963



## Foreword

---

All historical works are the product of their time, and *Imperial Spain* is no exception to this rule. In the late 1950s, some time after I had completed my doctoral dissertation on the origins of the revolt of the Catalans in 1640 and had been lecturing at Cambridge University on the history of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spain, I was approached by the publishers Edward Arnold, who asked me if I would be interested in writing a textbook based on my Cambridge lectures. At that time the only available textbook in English on Spanish history of this period was R. Trevor Davies, *The Golden Century of Spain, 1501–1621*, first published in 1937. The opportunity seemed to me an interesting one, and I decided to accept the challenge.

It proved more of a challenge than I had anticipated. Although the study of Spanish literature was flourishing in British and American universities, Spanish history was relatively neglected. Anglo-American historians with a specialist knowledge of the history of Habsburg Spain were almost non-existent, and in Spain itself, in the difficult post-Civil War years, few historians were in a position to engage in sustained archival research. Following the Second World War, the dominant force in European historical writing was the French school of the *Annales*. In 1949 Fernand Braudel published his monumental work *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*, which revolutionized the traditional approach to Early Modern European history, and encouraged a new generation of historians, especially French historians, to embark on research into certain well-defined themes in the history of the Iberian peninsula. Traditionally, the writing of Spanish history had been slanted towards political narrative, but Braudel turned his back on political and diplomatic history, the history of mere 'events', in favour of the history of economic and social developments. By the end of the 1950s this *Annales* approach, although too *marxisant* to be acceptable in the repressive political climate of Franco Spain, was injecting new life into the writing of Spanish history.

While attracted by many aspects of the Braudelian revolution, I could not share all its assumptions and preconceptions, which seemed to me to imply a downgrading of the role of human agency, and consequently, of the influence of power, politics and personality in the historical process. Although it was clear to me that the book I had been commissioned to write should give as much weight as possible to the findings of the new social and economic history, I was also anxious to provide the framework of political narrative that my publishers rightly regarded as indispensable for an Anglo-American readership likely to be largely unfamiliar with the history of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spain. The challenge that faced me was therefore to combine political narrative and social and economic analysis in a synthesis that would be both plausible and accessible.

The challenge was all the greater because of limitations of space, and this inevitably involved a number of difficult choices. In order to make space for those aspects of economic and social history that were deepening our knowledge and understanding of the period, I was compelled to cut down on more traditional themes. These included detailed discussion of foreign policy and diplomacy, which bulked large in standard works like Roger B. Merriman's *The Rise of the Spanish Empire in the Old World and the New* – at that time easily the best account of the period for English-speaking readers, although the first volume had appeared as long ago as 1918. Not surprisingly, a Spanish reviewer of *Imperial Spain* would take me to task for failing even to mention the victory of Charles V over France at Pavia in 1525. But if I felt, with some justification, that battles had been overdone in the writing of Spanish history, I greatly regretted not being able to devote more space to Spain's conquest and colonization of America. It was already clear to me that Spanish history was not fully comprehensible

if its American dimension was not taken into account. Even now, nearly forty years after the publication of my book, we lack a history of Early Modern Spain which effectively integrates the history of the two sides of the Spanish Atlantic into a single narrative. This remains a challenge for the next generation of historians.

Other decisions about the structure of the book were also affected by the question of space. The publishers asked me to begin with the age of Ferdinand and Isabella, rather than with the reign of Charles V. I did not regret this, since I had already decided that my over-arching theme should be the rise and decline of Spanish power, a theme that required close attention to the creation of 'Spain' in the age of the Catholic Kings. This, however, reduced the amount of space available for the period covered by my own research interests: the seventeenth century, traditionally known (and therefore comparatively neglected) as the age of Spain's 'decline'. Initially I hoped to obviate the effects of this by ending the book in the middle years of the seventeenth century, with the passing of Spanish European hegemony to the France of Louis XIV. This would also have allowed me to evade the problem of discussing the reign of Charles II, which was – and remains today – a black hole in our knowledge of Spanish history. In the event, the publishers were adamant that I should continue the book to the end of the Habsburg era, and in order to do this I devoted less attention than I should have liked to the age of Olivares, which seemed to me a critical turning-point, and about which I was to write extensively in the future.

But if an extension of the book to include the last gasp of the Habsburgs and their replacement by the Bourbons gave rise to its own special difficulties, it also had one great advantage. My doctoral research into the history of Catalonia during the first half of the seventeenth century had made me acutely aware that the history of Early Modern Spain was much more than the history of its dominant region, Castile. My study of Catalan history and Catalan society, much of it conducted in Barcelona with the encouragement of the most important Spanish historian of the twentieth century, Jaume Vicens Vives, had opened my eyes to the vital importance of the often tense relationship between Castile and the non-Castilian regions of the peninsula in determining the trajectory of Spanish history. At the time I was writing, this was a highly sensitive subject in Spain, where the type of official history sponsored by the Francoist regime equated the history of Spain with the history of the Spanish state.

By continuing my narrative up to 1716, the year in which the Bourbons abruptly terminated the semi-autonomous status traditionally enjoyed by the Catalans, I was able to give full play to the other central theme of *Imperial Spain*: the interaction over two and a half centuries of centre and periphery. This was a theme glossed over in textbooks of the Franco era, with their insistence on Spanish unity and the triumph of the centralizing state. At that time, Isabella the Catholic, Philip II and General Franco were the figures of honour in the national pantheon, linked across the centuries in a great historical enterprise devoted to the perpetuation of a set of transcendental Spanish values. When *Imperial Spain* appeared in a Spanish edition in 1965, therefore, its appearance caused something of a sensation. Although bearing a title that (although I had not appreciated this when I selected it) was resonant of the regime's propaganda, the book presented what was in effect an alternative history of Spain to the new generation of Spanish university students.

While there are certain points relating to the theme of centre and periphery which I would have expressed differently if I had been writing the book today, the passage of the years has, I believe, vindicated my decision to build much of my narrative around it. Indeed, the decision itself may go some way towards explaining the book's longevity. Now that power in the modern and democratic Spain of the post-Franco era has been devolved to the distinctive nations and regions of which the peninsula is composed, the alternative history that *Imperial Spain* to some extent anticipated has become the acceptable face of the Spanish past. As each region concentrates on its own past, 'Spanish

history' itself is increasingly fragmenting into a series of national and regional histories. This has greatly deepened our local knowledge, but its general tendency seems to me in some respects unfortunate as the Francoist identification of the history of Spain with the history of the Spanish state. Spanish history is, as I see it, the story of the interplay over time of the forces making for aggregation and those making for disaggregation, and neither should be neglected if we are to achieve a balanced account of the Spanish past. This is the story that I attempted to provide in *Imperial Spain*, and which I believe to be no less relevant today than it was when the book was published.

If certain aspects of the book have maintained their relevance, others have inevitably been outdated by the advance of research and the development of new approaches to the past. Readers interested, for instance, in the history of gender in Spain will have to turn elsewhere, although the book was perhaps unusual for its time in devoting as many as two paragraphs to women. It contains, however, not a word on witchcraft, and although it seeks to analyse aspects of collective consciousness, especially in relation to the problem of decline, it obviously falls short of what is now expected by readers who have grown accustomed to the reconstruction of *mentalités* by the new cultural history, and to the granting of a privileged insight into private worlds through micro-historical studies.

The bringing of new perspectives to bear on the past makes such limitations and deficiencies unavoidable, although it should also be borne in mind that the fashionable themes in today's historical writing will not be those of tomorrow. More difficult, perhaps, for a new generation of readers to appreciate is how relatively little information was available to me about many aspects of the story I had to tell, at the time when the book was written. Time and time again I was hampered by the lack of serious historical research on many of the topics which I was attempting to analyse and explain. In spite of the enormous richness of Spain's archives, topics of major importance either remained unexplored or had received inadequate and unsatisfactory attention by the standards of contemporary European historical scholarship. Where historians of France or England, for example, could draw on a large number of historical monographs of high quality when writing accounts for the general public on the Early Modern history of their own countries, the same could not be said for Spain. All too often when writing this book I found that the absence of monographs on subjects of critical importance left me without the information that could provide answers to the questions I wished to raise. Outside the early seventeenth century, where to some extent I could fall back on my own archival investigations, I was therefore necessarily dependent on a relatively small number of authorities, some of whose conclusions have since been challenged or rejected in the light of further research.

One example of this is provided by my treatment of the revolt of the *Comuneros*, which I depict as an essentially archaic and backward-looking revolt. Here I was greatly influenced by the thesis put forward by Gregorio Marañón in his *Antonio Pérez*. In his search for an understanding of the background to the deep ideological divisions that tore Spain apart in the Civil War, Marañón depicted the *Comuneros* as representing the Spanish conservative tradition, and the partisans of Charles V as the upholders of the liberal cause. If I had had at my disposal *Las comunidades de Castilla*, a detailed examination of the *Comunero* movement by José Antonio Maravall that was published in the same year as *Imperial Spain*, I would have been able to compare Marañón's interpretation with a diametrically opposed interpretation, which seeks to demonstrate the 'modernity' of the *Comunero* uprising. While I am not persuaded that the revolt of the *Comuneros* was as forward-looking as Maravall suggests, the opportunity to compare the respective approaches of Marañón and Maravall would certainly have allowed me to present a more balanced and subtle interpretation of this extremely complex movement.

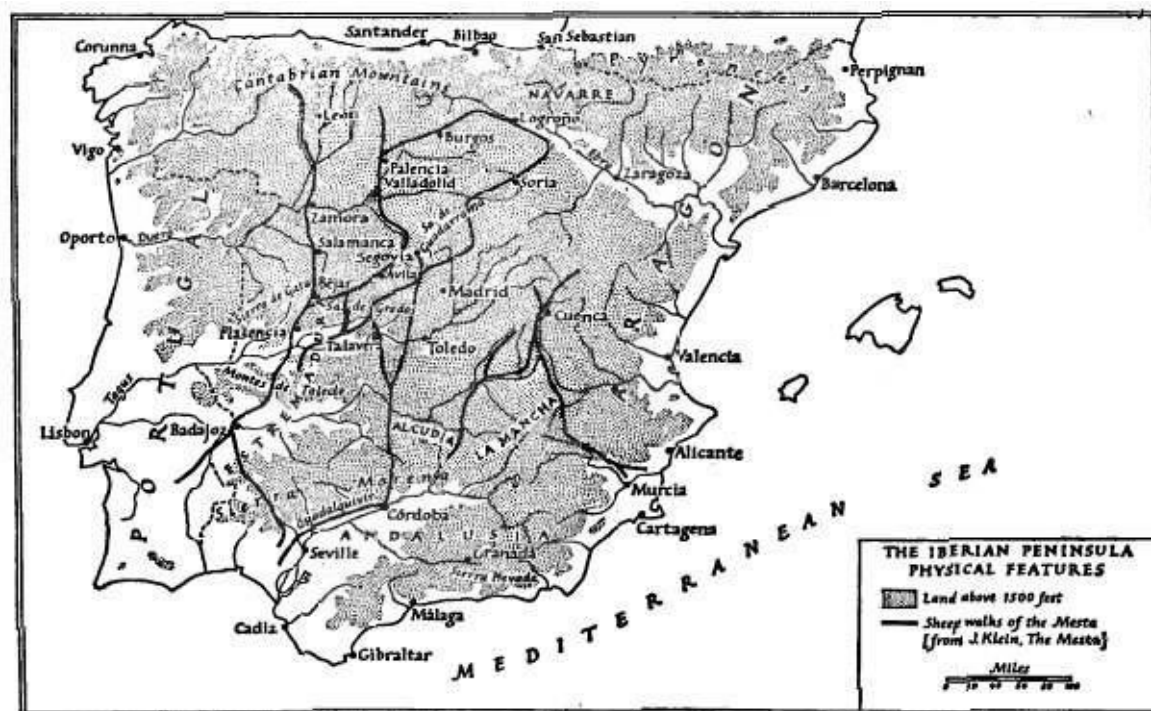
Since the 1960s there has been a transformation in our knowledge and understanding of the history of Habsburg Spain. Although much still remains to be done, especially on the second half of the seventeenth century, a vast amount of archival research has brought many rays of light to bear where

darkness once prevailed. Thanks in particular to the efforts of English-speaking historians we are much better informed, for instance, about the history of the Cortes of Castile in the Habsburg era than we were when I was writing, and although I think that the Cortes were less effective a brake on royal power than they are now sometimes represented, I would certainly have painted a more positive picture of Castilian constitutionalism in the post-*Comunero* era than the one I paint in this book.

Similarly, a vast amount of research has been done on the Inquisition, and on important aspects of the religious history of Counter-Reformation Spain. We also have a more comprehensive picture than we had forty years ago of Spanish cultural developments in this period, and if I had been writing the book today I would not have drawn such a sharp contrast between the 'open Spain' of the early sixteenth century and the 'closed Spain' of Philip II and his successors. The metropolis of a worldwide empire can never seal itself off fully from foreign influences, and cultural borrowings from Flanders and Italy in particular remained continuous through the two centuries of Habsburg rule.

The occupational hazard of all historians is to be overtaken by the passage of time. I am naturally delighted that, in spite of this, *Imperial Spain* is still considered worthy of being reprinted. If written today it would obviously be a very different, although not necessarily a better, book. I have sought, by means of an updated bibliography, to indicate the general trends of advance in historical research over the past four decades, so that readers can follow up for themselves those themes on which they want further enlightenment, and, if they wish, compare my treatment of them with those of subsequent writers. The aim of the book was always to identify important issues, and to suggest ways of looking at them. If the book continues, as I hope it will, to guide readers to those issues and give them some idea of the interest and excitement to be found in the history of Spain in its age of global dominance, this new reprint for a new millennium will have amply served its purpose.

ORIEL COLLEGE,  
OXFORD  
23 May 2001



Map I



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## *Prologue*

A DRY, barren, impoverished land: 10 per cent of its soil bare rock; 35 per cent poor and unproductive; 45 per cent moderately fertile; 10 per cent rich. A peninsula separated from the continent of Europe by the mountain barrier of the Pyrenees – isolated and remote. A country divided within itself, broken by a high central tableland that stretches from the Pyrenees to the southern coast. No natural centre, no easy routes. Fragmented, disparate, a complex of different races, languages, and civilizations – this was, and is, Spain.

The lack of natural advantages appears crippling. Yet, in the last years of the fifteenth century and the opening years of the sixteenth, it seemed suddenly, and even miraculously, to have been overcome. Spain, for so long a mere geographical expression, was somehow transformed into an historical fact. Contemporary observers were well aware of the change. ‘We have in our days,’ wrote Machiavelli, ‘Ferdinand, King of Aragon, the present King of Spain, who may, not improperly, be called a new prince, since he has been transformed from a small and weak king into the greatest monarch of Christendom.’ Ferdinand’s diplomats were respected, his armies feared. And in the New World the *conquistadores* were carving out for themselves an empire that could not but profoundly alter the balance of power in the Old. For a few fabulous decades Spain was to be the greatest power on earth. During those decades it would be all but the master of Europe; it would colonize vast new overseas territories; it would devise a governmental system to administer the largest, and most widely dispersed, empire the world had yet seen; and it would produce a highly distinctive civilization, which was to make a unique contribution to the cultural tradition of Europe.

How all this can have happened, and in so short a space of time, has been a problem that has exercised generations of historians, for it poses in a vivid form one of the most complex and difficult of all historical questions: what makes a society suddenly dynamic, releases its energies, and galvanizes it into life? This in turn suggests a corollary, no less relevant to Spain: how does this same society lose its impetus and its creative dynamism, perhaps in as short a period of time as it took to acquire them? Has something vital really been lost, or was the original achievement itself no more than an *engaño* – an illusion – as seventeenth-century Spaniards began to believe?

There are paradoxes here which baffled contemporaries, as they have continued to baffle ever since. No history of sixteenth and seventeenth-century Spain – least of all one so brief as this – can hope to resolve them. Nor is this a very favourable moment for such an enterprise. Outside one or two relatively specialized fields, the study of Spanish history lags several decades behind that of such countries as France and England, and the detailed monographs which would place the history of Habsburg Spain on a really solid foundation remain unwritten. This means that any historian of the period is faced with the alternative either of writing a narrative account which would lean heavily towards traditional political and diplomatic history, or of producing a more interpretative synthesis which would attempt to incorporate the results of recent researches on social and economic developments, but which is bound in large part to remain speculative and perhaps superficial. I have

chosen the second of these courses, partly because competent narratives already exist, and partly because the state of the subject would seem to demand a general survey which is prepared to raise some of the problems that seem relevant in the light of modern historical interests. Consequently, I have devoted little space to Spanish foreign policy, preferring to reserve it for less well-known aspects of the history of the age. I have also said very little about intellectual and cultural developments, not because I consider them unimportant, but because they require, for satisfactory treatment, far more space than I can give them, and have on the whole received considerable attention elsewhere. All that this book attempts to do, therefore, is to write the history of Habsburg Spain in such a way as to focus attention on certain problems that seem to me to be interesting and relevant, while indicating how much remains to be done before we can confidently claim to have found the answers.



# *The Union of the Crowns*

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# 1. ORIGINS OF THE UNION

ON the morning of 19 October 1469 Ferdinand, King of Sicily and heir to the throne of Aragon, and Isabella, the heiress of Castile, were married at a private residence in Valladolid. The events leading up to the wedding were, to say the least, unusual. The eighteen-year-old Princess, threatened with arrest by her brother, Henry IV of Castile, had been rescued from her home at Madrigal by the Archbishop of Toledo and a body of horse, and conveyed to a city where she would be safe among friends. Her bridegroom, a year younger than herself, had reached Valladolid only a few days before the ceremony after an even more eventful journey. With a handful of attendants disguised as merchants, he had travelled from Zaragoza by night through the hostile country, and had narrowly escaped death from a stone hurled by a sentinel from the battlements of Burgo de Osma. After reaching Valladolid he met his bride for the first time on 15 October, four days before the ceremony. The couple were so poor that they were compelled to borrow to meet the wedding expenses; and since they were marrying within the prohibited degrees, they required, and duly received, a papal bull of dispensation, later discovered to be a spurious document concocted by the King of Aragon, the Archbishop of Toledo, and Ferdinand himself.

There was some excuse for both the secrecy and the deceit. Many people were anxious to prevent the ceremony from taking place. Among them was Louis XI of France, who saw a grave threat to his own country in a union of the reigning houses of Castile and Aragon. But there were also enemies nearer home. Many of the powerful Castilian grandees were bitterly opposed to a matrimonial alliance which promised to strengthen the Crown's authority in Castile. Hoping to dispossess Isabella, they were now rallying to the cause of Henry IV's alleged daughter, Juana *la Beltraneja*, whose claims to



the throne had recently been set aside in favour of those of his sister, Isabella. While Henry himself had been induced by the Isabelline faction in September 1468, as the price of peace, to recognize Isabella as his heiress in place of the daughter whose paternity was universally doubted, he was of a vacillating and unreliable character, fully capable of going back on his word; and the pressures upon him were great. The Prince and Princess were therefore wise to seize the earliest possible opportunity of formalizing a union which would do much to strengthen Isabella's position in Castile.

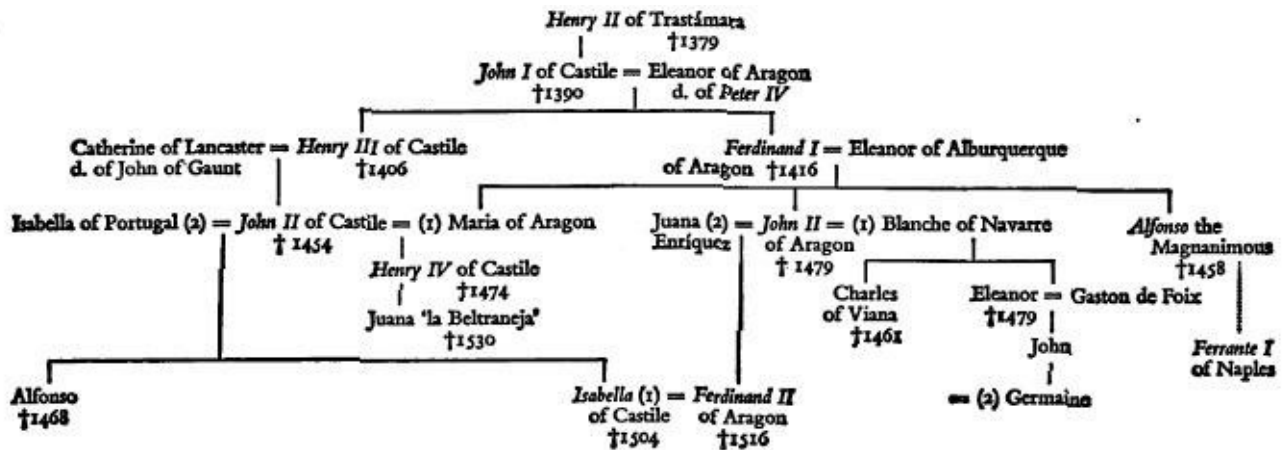
Neither Ferdinand nor Isabella, however, was by nature precipitate, and their marriage was the outcome of arduously reached decisions, partly made for them, but which they ultimately made for themselves. Inevitably there was about the marriage a dynastic logic which reached back to a period long before they were born. Fifteenth-century Spain was divided among three Christian Crowns: Castile, Portugal, and Aragon. The great medieval line of the kings of Aragon had come to an abrupt end in 1410 with the death of Martin I; and in 1412 the problem of the Aragonese succession had been settled by the Compromise of Caspe, which placed on the Aragonese throne a junior branch of the Castilian house of Trastámara. From the time of the accession of Ferdinand I d'Antequera in 1412, therefore, the neighbouring Crowns of Castile and Aragon were ruled by two branches of the same Castilian dynasty. Might not a judicious marriage one day unite these two branches, and so bring together beneath a single monarch two of the three Christian blocs within the Iberian peninsula?

While a Castilian-Aragonese union had for some decades been an obvious possibility, it was far from being an inevitable development. There was no irrefutable economic or historical argument to bring the two Crowns together. On the contrary, the strong mutual antipathy of Aragonese and Castilians made any prospect of union unattractive to both, and the Castilian royal favourite, Don Álvaro de Luna, who was virtual master of the country from 1420 to 1453, could command the support of a Castilian nationalism which had been exacerbated by the intervention of the Infantes of Aragon in Castile's domestic affairs.

In spite of this antipathy there were, none the less, certain forces at work which might under favourable conditions prove conducive to a closer association of the two Crowns. The very presence of a Castilian dynasty on the Aragonese throne had itself multiplied contacts between them, especially since the Aragonese branch of the Trastámara owned large Castilian estates. There were also certain intellectual aspirations towards a closer unity. The word *Hispania* was in current use throughout the Middle Ages to describe the Iberian peninsula as a geographical unit. The native of medieval Aragon or Valencia thought of himself, from a geographical standpoint, as an inhabitant of Spain, and fifteenth-century sailors, although coming from different parts of the peninsula, would talk about 'returning to Spain'.<sup>1</sup> Even if loyalties were overwhelmingly reserved for the province of origin, growing contacts with the outer world did something to give natives of the peninsula a feeling of being Spaniards, as opposed to Englishmen or Frenchmen. Alongside this geographical concept of Spain there also existed in certain limited circles an historical concept deriving from the old Roman *Hispania*; a vision of the time when Spain was not many provinces but two, *Hispania Citerior* and *Ulterior*, united beneath the rule of Rome. This concept of the old *Hispania* was particularly dear to the little humanist group gathered round the imposing person of Cardinal Margarit, Chancellor of Ferdinand's father, John II of Aragon, in his later years.<sup>2</sup> Some of those closest to the Aragonese Court thus cherished the idea of re-creating Hispanic unity – of bringing together *Hispania Citerior* and *Ulterior* beneath a common sceptre.

Although a marriage alliance was, in fact, sought more eagerly by the Aragonese than by the Castilian branch of the Trastámara, the reason for this is ultimately to be found in the grave political difficulties of the Aragonese kings, rather than in the inclinations of a little group of Catalan humanists bent on the restoration of Hispanic unity. John II of Aragon (1458–79) was faced not only by revolution in Catalonia but also by the expansionist ambitions of Louis XI of France. With inadequate resources to meet the threat on his own, his best hope seemed to lie in the assistance of Castile, and this could best be secured by a matrimonial alliance. It was, therefore, primarily the international situation – the ending of the Hundred Years' War and

Table 1 THE UNION OF THE CROWNS OF CASTILE AND ARAGON



the consequent renewal of French pressure along the Pyrenees – which made a Castilian alliance both desirable and necessary to the King of Aragon. The securing of this alliance became the principal object of John II's diplomacy.

The crucial months, which were to determine the whole future of the Spanish peninsula, came between the autumn of 1468, when Henry IV recognized his half-sister Isabella as heiress, and the spring of 1469. The recognition of Isabella made her marriage a question of international concern. There were three leading candidates for her hand. She might marry Charles of Valois, the son of Charles VII of France, and so reinvigorate the old Franco-Castilian alliance. She might, as her brother intended, marry Alfonso V of Portugal, and so link the fortunes of Castile to those of her western neighbour. Finally, she might marry Ferdinand, son and heir of John II of Aragon, and thus formalize a Castilian-Aragonese alliance for which John II had been so vigorously manoeuvring. By January 1469 she had made her choice: she would marry Ferdinand.

Isabella's decision was of such transcendent importance that it is unfortunate that so little is known about the way in which it was finally reached. Strong pressure was certainly brought to bear on the Princess to choose the Aragonese match. There was a formidable Aragonese party at the Castilian court, headed by the Archbishop of Toledo; the King of Aragon's agents were very active, bribing Castilian nobles to support their master's cause; and the papal legate had been induced to use his good offices on Ferdinand's behalf. It also appears that prominent Jewish families in both Castile and Aragon were hoping to buttress the shaky position of Castilian Jewry by working for Isabella's marriage to a prince who himself, through his mother, had inherited Jewish blood. But Isabella, although highly strung by temperament, was a woman of great character and determination. She knew

her own mind, and she made a choice which, both personally and politically, must have seemed the most desirable in the circumstances. Alfonso of Portugal was a widower, much older than herself, and quite without the many personal attractions generally ascribed to Ferdinand. Added to this was the fact that, since John II and Ferdinand were in no position to bargain, she could expect to dictate settlement virtually on her own terms. The very form of the marriage contract, signed at Cervera on 18 March 1469, showed the overwhelming strength of her position. Ferdinand was to live in Castile and fight for the Princess's cause, and it was made clear that he was to take second place in the government of the country. The terms were humiliating, but the prize before Ferdinand seemed so great and the necessity so urgent that refusal was out of the question.

The wisdom of Isabella's choice very soon became apparent. Ferdinand, wily, resolute and energetic, was to prove adept at forwarding the interests of his wife, and the couple could count on the great political experience and sagacity of Ferdinand's father, John II. Isabella needed all the help she could get if she was ever to succeed to her dubious inheritance. Her marriage had precipitated a struggle for succession to the Castilian throne which was to last for a full ten years, culminating in an open civil war between 1475 and 1479. Isabella's brother, Henry IV, had been upset by the news of his sister's marriage, and Louis XI now induced him, in defiance of his agreement with Isabella, to acknowledge the rights of Juana *la Beltraneja*, who was to be given a French husband. In this delicate situation, all Ferdinand's skill was required, and the first five years of the marriage were spent in fostering Isabelline sentiment among the gentry and the towns, while at the same time attempting to secure a reconciliation with the King.

When Henry IV died on 11 December 1474, Isabella at once proclaimed herself Queen of Castile. But the anti-Aragonese faction at the Castilian court had been concerting plans with Alfonso V of Portugal, who saw in *la Beltraneja* a bride for himself, now that death had removed the French prince as a rival for her hand. At the end of May 1475 Juana, encouraged by her adherents, duly claimed the throne. Portuguese troops crossed the frontier into Castile, and risings broke out against Ferdinand and Isabella all through the country. The war of succession which followed was a genuine civil war, in which Juana enjoyed the support of several of the towns of Old Castile and of most of Andalusia and New Castile, and could also call upon the Portuguese for help. Since Isabella was eventually victorious, the history of this period was written by Isabelline chroniclers who followed the official line in declaring that Juana was not, in fact, the daughter of Henry IV the Impotent, and contemptuously called her by her popular nickname of *la Beltraneja*, after her reputed father Beltrán de la Cueva. There is, however, some possibility that she was indeed legitimate. If so, it was the unlawful party that finally won.

But the war was much more than a dispute over the debatable legal claims of two rival princesses for the crown of Castile. Its outcome was likely to determine the whole future political orientation of Spain. If Juana were to triumph, the fortunes of Castile would be linked to those of Portugal, and its interests would correspondingly be diverted towards the Atlantic seaboard. In the event of victory for Ferdinand and Isabella, *Spain* would mean Castile and Aragon, and Castile would find itself inextricably entangled in the Mediterranean concerns of the Aragonese.

During the opening stages of the war, when everything still hung in the balance, Ferdinand's participation was of crucial importance. It was he who assumed command of the Isabelline party, and planned the campaign to restore order and unity to Castile. Ferdinand's military experts, imported from Aragon, instructed Isabella's troops in new military techniques. Ferdinand himself was a skilful negotiator, bargaining with magnates and towns for support of Isabella's cause. He could count already on the aid of the three most powerful families of north Castile – those of Enríquez, Mendoza, and Álvarez de Toledo (the ducal house of Alba), to all of which he was related; and his own energy and resourcefulness seemed to hold out promise of order and reformation to all those Castilians grown

weary of civil war. All this helped gradually to give Isabella the advantage, as she herself gratefully acknowledged. She benefited also from the incompetence of Alfonso of Portugal, whose prestige was badly damaged by defeat at the battle of Toro in 1476. But progress was slow, and it was not until 1479 that all Castile was at last brought under Isabella's control. Her triumph was accompanied by the relegation of her rival to a convent.<sup>3</sup> Early the same year John II of Aragon died. With Castile pacified, and with Ferdinand now succeeding to his father's kingdoms, Ferdinand and Isabella had at last become joint sovereigns of Aragon and Castile. *Spain* – a Spain that was Castile-Aragon, not Castile-Portugal – was now an established fact.

## 2. THE TWO CROWNS

The dynastic ambitions and diplomatic intrigues of many years had finally reached the consummation in the union of two of the five principal divisions of later medieval Spain – Castile, Aragon, Portugal, Navarre, and Granada. The union itself was purely dynastic: a union not of two peoples but of two royal houses. Other than the fact that henceforth Castile and Aragon would share the same monarchs, there would, in theory, be no change either in their status or in the form of their government. It was true that, in the person of Ferdinand, their foreign policies were likely to be fused, but in other respects they would continue to lead the lives they had led before the Union. The only difference was that now they would be partners, not rivals; as the town councillors of Barcelona commented in a letter to those of Seville ‘Now... we are all brothers.’<sup>4</sup>

The Union of the Crowns was therefore regarded as a union of equals, each preserving its own institutions and its own way of life. But behind the simple formula of a loose confederation lay social, political, and economic realities of the kind that can upset formulae and deflect the histories of nations into very different channels from those intended by their rulers. Castile and the States of the Crown of Aragon were, in fact, lands with different histories and characters, living at very different stages of historical development. The Union was therefore a union of essentially dissimilar partners, and – still more important – of partners markedly divergent in size and strength.

After the incorporation of Granada in 1492, the Crown of Castile covered about two-thirds of the total area of the Iberian peninsula. Its area was about three times that of the Crown of Aragon, and its population was also considerably larger. Population is difficult to measure since the figures for the end of the fifteenth century, particularly for Castile, are far from trustworthy. It is possible that Castile at that time had between five and six million inhabitants, while Portugal and the Crown of Aragon each had no more than one million. Some indication of relative size and density of population, although calculated for the end rather than for the beginning of the sixteenth century, is provided by the following table: <sup>5</sup>

	Sq. kilometres	Percentage of total area of peninsula	Inhabitants	Percentage of total population	Inhabitants per sq. kilometre
Crown of Castile	378,000	65–2	8,304,000	73.2	22.
Crown of Aragon	100,000	17–2	1,358,000	12.0	13.
Kingdom of Portugal	90,000	15.5	1,500,000	13.2	16.
Kingdom of Navarre	12,000	2.1	185,000	1.6	15–
	580,000	100	11,347,000	100	19.

Perhaps the most striking fact to emerge from these figures is the superior density of the population of Castile to that of the Crown of Aragon. The awesome emptiness of the countryside in present-day Castile makes it hard to envisage a time when the population was more densely settled there than any other part of Spain. Since the eighteenth century the peripheral areas of the peninsula have, in fact, been the most densely populated regions, but this was not true of the fifteenth and sixteenth

centuries. At that time it was the centre, not the periphery, which was relatively the more populous and this very demographic superiority of the arid central regions may itself represent one of the essential clues to the dynamic expansionist tendencies of Castile at the end of the Middle Ages.

It would, however, be wrong to assume that demographic superiority of itself necessarily ensured political and military pre-eminence in a period when governments still lacked the administrative resources and techniques to mobilize their populations for war. The medieval Crown of Aragon, although smaller in size and population, had displayed a vitality unequalled by Castile, and had triumphantly pursued a course of its own which was profoundly to influence the future political evolution of Spain.

The origins of Aragon's independent history, and of the fundamental characteristics which differentiated it so sharply from Castile, are to be found in the long struggle of medieval Spain against Islam. The Arabs had invaded the Iberian peninsula in 711, and conquered it within seven years. What was lost in seven years it took seven hundred to regain. The history of medieval Spain was dominated by the long, arduous, and frequently interrupted march of the *Reconquista* – the struggle of the Christian kingdoms of the north to wrest the peninsula from the hands of the Infidel. The speed and character of the *Reconquista* varied greatly from one part of Spain to another, and it was in those variations that the regional diversity of Spain was enhanced and reinforced.

The thirteenth century was the greatest century of the Reconquest, but it was also the century in which the divisions of Christian Spain were decisively confirmed. While Castile and Leon, under Ferdinand III, were pressing forward into Andalusia, Portugal was engaged in the conquest of its southern provinces, and Catalonia and Aragon united in 1137 – were occupying Valencia and the Balearics. The pattern of reconquest was by no means uniform. In Andalusia, Ferdinand III handed over vast areas of the newly recovered territory to the Castilian nobles who had assisted him in his crusade. The enormous extent of the territory and the difficulties inherent in cultivating great expanses of arid land forced him to divide it into large blocs and to distribute it among the Military Orders, the Church, and the nobles. This large-scale distribution of land had profound social and economic effects. Andalusia was confirmed as a land of vast *latifundios* under aristocratic control, and the Castilian nobility, enriched by its great new sources of wealth, became sufficiently powerful to exert an almost unlimited influence in a nation where the *bourgeoisie* was still weak, and dispersed through the scattered towns of the north. In Valencia, on the other hand, the Crown was able to exercise a much closer supervision over the process of colonization and repopulation. The country was divided into much smaller parcels, and the Catalan and Aragonese settlers formed little Christian communities dotted over a Moorish landscape – for the Moorish inhabitants of Valencia, unlike the majority in Andalusia, had stayed behind.

From about 1270 the momentum of the *Reconquista* slackened. Portugal, its path to the east blocked, turned westwards towards the Atlantic. Castile, overtaken by dynastic crises and by aristocratic revolts, became preoccupied with domestic affairs. The Levantine states, on the other hand, their work of reconquest done, and their kings succeeding to one another in unbroken succession, were now free to turn their attention eastwards, towards the Mediterranean.

These Levantine states – Catalonia, Aragon, and Valencia – together constituted the entity known as the Crown of Aragon. In fact, the name was misleading, because the kingdom of Aragon, the distant hinterland, was the least important part of the federation. The dynasty was Catalan, and it was Catalonia, with its busy seaboard and its energetic population, which played the preponderant part in the great overseas expansion of the Crown of Aragon. The Catalan achievement was prodigious. Between the late thirteenth and the late fourteenth centuries this nation of less than half a million inhabitants conquered and organized an overseas empire, and established both at home and in its Mediterranean possessions a political system in which the conflicting necessities of liberty and order



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