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The shaping of the Iberian polities in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries

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CHAPTER ONE

THE SHAPING OF THE IBERIAN POLITIES IN THE LATE FIFTEENTH AND EARLY SIXTEENTH CENTURIES

Xavier Gil

INTRODUCTION

Over the last third of the fifteenth century and the early years of the sixteenth, the kingdoms of the Iberian peninsula experienced major internal transformations, while at the same time emerging to take on a central role on the international stage and as pioneering powers in the age of discovery. Assertive and determined rulers entered into dynastic marriages that resulted in new, composite monarchies; royal authority was consolidated, bringing domestic peace in the wake of major noble uprisings, civil wars, and wars between the kingdoms; territorial consolidation in the peninsula and overseas expansion, which extended the limits of Iberian, Christian, and European presence as far as the Indian Ocean and the subcontinent, the Caribbean, and Brazil; active engagement in regions hitherto outside the sphere of interest of Iberian diplomacy, such as the Holy Roman Empire and Flanders; socioeconomic dynamism and the more visible preoccupation with social and cultural issues related to ethnic and religious minorities, both familiar (Jews and judeoconversos) and new (Moriscos and enslaved blacks). Some of these developments were not unique to Iberia, and were a feature common to Renaissance monarchies, while others were owing to particular circumstances and contexts, such as the completion of the so-called Reconquest with the capture of Granada, the last remaining Islamic kingdom in the southeast of the peninsula. In sum, there is no doubting the significance of the contribution made by the Iberian world to the opening of a new phase in world history.

As elsewhere, dynastic politics was a favoured instrument of the different peninsular kingdoms: Portugal, Castile, the Crown of Aragon (including Aragon proper, Catalonia, Valencia, Mallorca, Sardinia, Sicily, and, for a time, Naples) and Navarre (straddling both sides of the Pyrenees). With meticulous planning of marital alliances frequently disrupted by untimely deaths of spouses and heirs, dynastic politics necessitated the making and remaking of agreements with neighbouring
and distant princes, alliances that significantly altered the geopolitical map of the region.

Thus, in 1468 Joan II of Aragon (the Catalan form of his name is used in this chapter to help differentiate him from Juan of Castile and João of Portugal) proclaimed Fernando, his son and heir, king of Sicily in view of his projected marriage to Princess Isabel of Castile, due to take place the following year. With this in mind, Joan Margarit Pau, bishop of Girona, humanist, and ambassador, dedicated his *Corona regum* to the young prince, a lengthy “mirror of princes” (*speculum principis*) in which, the author noted, Fernando would find “many examples of virtue” (Margarit 2007–2008, I, 119). Nearly half a century later, in 1513, Francesco Guicciardini remarked that Fernando had succeeded in joining virtue to good fortune. He did so in a written report addressed to the Florentine authorities following his diplomatic mission to the king the previous year. In his report, Guicciardini explained that Spain was divided into three parts: Aragon, in which he included Catalonia and Valencia, and where Fernando was king; Castile, ruled by Doña Juana, daughter of Fernando and the late Isabel; and Portugal, ruled by king Dom Manuel, “a small country known for the great concourse of merchants in Lisbon, and for the trade route to Calicut and other newly discovered lands, more than anything else.” He also mentioned the kingdom of Navarre, but emphasised that Aragon and Castile were “the principal parts” (Guicciardini 2017, 123–124, 142).

On the surface, little had changed between 1468 and 1513 in the disposition of the Iberian kingdoms, save that Granada and Navarre had been incorporated into the domains of the Spanish monarchs in 1491–1492: the peninsula was divided, as it had been almost half a century earlier, between three large polities, each one ruled by its own king. Yet, notwithstanding a war between Portugal and Castile (1474–1479), and boosted by a union of the Crowns of Aragon and Castile under Fernando and Isabel between 1479 and 1504 (the year of the queen’s death), their fortunes were now much more closely intertwined—not to mention the fact that Castile had in the meantime established its own foothold in the Caribbean. And yet the dynastic and political crises that had marked the beginning of this period appeared to have resurfaced at its end: in 1474, following the death of her father Enrique IV, Isabel had herself proclaimed queen of Castile in Segovia, at the expense of her half-sister, Juana; in 1516, on Fernando’s death, Charles of Ghent proclaimed himself king of Castile and Aragon in Ghent, in rivalry with his mother, also Juana. Both Juanas were subsequently removed from public life: the first entered a Coimbra monastery, whence she emerged from time to time to make an appearance at the court in Lisbon, while the second, afflicted by a mental disorder, was secluded in a convent in Tordesillas, and both lived out the rest of their considerable days until their deaths in 1530 and 1555 respectively.

Great intrafamilial feuds, succession crises and profound uncertainty about the future marked the beginning and the end. However, while the Castilian-Portuguese war of 1474 became at once a Castilian civil war, both coming in the wake of the Catalan civil war (1462–1472), Charles’ succession in 1516 did not trigger new wars or open conflicts. The upheavals of the mid-fifteenth century certainly gave no inkling of the great achievements to come.
The Avis Dynasty to the Spanish Succession (1580)

John I = Philippa of Ghent
1385–1433

Edward I
1433–38

Peter

Henry the Navigator

Elisabeth
m. Philip the Good
Charles the Bold

Ferdinand

John

Afonso V
1438–81

Manuel I
1495–1521

m. Maria, d. of Ferdinand and Isabella

James
Duke of Braganza

Catherine = John III
1521–57
sister of Charles V

Isabella
m. Charles V

Beatrice
m. Charles II of Savoy

Cardinal Henry
1578–80

Edward = Isabella
Theodosius
Duke of Braganza

Louis

Maria = Philip I
1580–98
(Prior of Crato)
(illegitimate)

Emanuel
Philibert
of Savoy

Jeanne = John d. of Charles V
1557–78

Maria = Philip I
(Charles V of Spain)

Antonio

Sebastian I
1557–78

Image 1.1 Family tree showing the Avis dynasty to the Spanish Succession
Their borders settled since the thirteenth century, relations between Aragon, Castile, and Portugal remained rather ambivalent throughout the fifteenth century. They supported one another in campaigns of the Reconquista—an endeavour that had long since become bogged down—and occasionally closed ranks in the face of foreign incursions related to the Hundred Years War. Yet they also fought amongst themselves when the occasion arose. As elsewhere, these wars did not stand in the way of the respective royal houses marrying into one another, a practice that eventually led to or foreshadowed future unions between the Iberian kingdoms. Thus
Reigning monarchs of Aragon in capitals, unsuccessful claimants in 1410–12 and pretenders to the throne in 1462–72 italicized.

Images 1.3a & b  Family trees showing the Aragonese Succession from Jaume II to Fernando II (a), and the Castilian Succession from Juan I to Charles I (b)

Reigning monarchs of Castile in capitals. Claimants and possible heirs to the throne italicized.

Images 1.3 (continued)
(1369–1379) ENRIQUE II (of Trastámara K. of Castile)

(1379–1390) JUAN I = ELIONOR (of Aragon)

ENRIQUE III = CATALINA of Lancaster
(K. of Castile 1380–1406)

FERNANDO (of Antequera) = LEONOR
(K. of Aragon 1412–16)

MARIA = ALFONSO V
(K. of Aragon 1416–58)

FERRANTE
(K. of Naples 1458–94)

1 CATALINA = ENRIQUE = BEATRIZ Pimentel 2

AFONSO V
(K. of Portugal 1438–81)

LEONOR = DUARATE (K. of Portugal 1433–8)

FERNANDO (of Antequera) = LEONOR
(K. of Aragon 1412–16)

ENRIQUE IV = BLANCHE 1
(K. of Navarre 1425–79)

JUAN II
(K. of Castile 1406–54)

JUANA = ENRIQUE IV = BLANCHE
(Queen of Navarre) d. 1439

2 JUANA = ENRIQUE IV = BLANCHE
(K. of Castile 1454–74)

DUARATE
(K. of Portugal 1433–8)

JUANA ‘la Beltraneja’

ISABEL (Queen of Castile 1474–1504)

Image 1.4  Family tree showing the Houses of Trastámara and Antequera

Image 1.5  Genealogical table showing the rulers of the Iberian kingdoms
in 1109 Castile and Aragon were united for the first time through the marriage of Doña Urraca and Alfonso the Battler, though the ensuing difficulties rendered this a brief association. The first of these tendencies—the spirit of cooperation between the kingdoms—is captured in the commentary of the great Catalan chronicler Ramon Muntaner, referring to a 1284 episode involving the rulers of Aragon, Castile, Portugal, and Navarre: “If these four kings […] of Spain, who are one flesh and blood, could stay united, they would never lack resolve, and would look down on any other power in the world” (Muntaner 1971, 757).

The primary objective of these wars was not to wrest away territory from neighbouring kingdoms, but rather to gain a measure of peninsular hegemony by configuring an advantageous union, making the most of family ties between royal houses and the support of sympathetic factions. In this manner, Fernando I of Portugal tried unsuccessfully to incorporate Castile into his realms in 1369–1373, while Juan I of Castile likewise failed to seize Portugal in 1381–1385, despite the ongoing dynastic crisis in the neighbouring kingdom. Indeed, the decisive victory over the Castilians at Aljubarrota in 1385 paved the way to the consolidation of both the kingdom of Portugal and the new Avis dynasty. Not long after, in 1410, on the death of the heirless Martin I, the last in the line of kings of the Royal House of Aragon that had ruled the Crown of Aragon since 1137, another important dynastic change took place on the other side of the peninsula. The delegates appointed by the Cortes of Aragon, Catalonia and Valencia resolved through the Compromise of Caspe (1412) that of the four main candidates vying for the vacant throne, the one with the strongest claim was the Castilian infante Fernando. A nephew of the late king, uncle to Juan II of Castile (during whose minority he had acted as regent) and the lord of one of the largest estates in the peninsula, Fernando had acquired the nickname “of Antequera” following his taking of that city in 1410, which had given new impetus to the Reconquest. His accession to the throne as Fernando I of Aragon meant that the same Trastámar dynasty now ruled in both Castile and the Crown of Aragon, in the latter case through its junior branch.

During the fifteenth century, each one of the Christian Iberian kingdoms pursued its own course in domestic affairs, while at the same time maintaining close relations with the others through dynastic, economic, and cultural exchanges. Meanwhile, the Nasrid kingdom of Granada remained a vassal state and tributary of Castile, as it had been since 1246 (Elliott 1963, chs 1 and 2; Disney 2009, I, ch. 7; Hillgarth 1978, II; Ladero Quesada 1999; Ruiz 2007, ch. 5).

In Portugal, the long reign of the first Avis king João I (1385–1433) was one of changeable fortunes. Able to count on English support thanks to his marriage to Philippa of Lancaster, João renewed hostilities with Castile, at least until a truce in 1402 and a peace concluded in 1411 finally put an end to these wars for another half century. On the domestic front, he gradually managed to impose royal authority over the clergy, the nobility, and the cities. In a period when throughout Western Europe relations between the crown and the social elites were fraying, the Portuguese rulers managed to secure a considerable degree of control over the clergy, thanks to the concordata of 1427, and over noble estates through the Lei mental of 1434. That said, land disputes between the crown and the nobility continued, especially in the case of the houses of Braganza and Viseu-Beja. At the same time, João took the first step in the overseas expansion of the kingdom with the 1415 conquest of Ceuta,
an important junction on the trans-Saharan trade routes. Although his son and successor Duarte subsequently failed to capture Tangier in 1437, the numerous offspring of the dynasty’s founder and his spouse embodied a felicitous moment in the rise of Portugal: “illustrious generation, high royal princes,” as they were eulogised by Luís de Camões in *The Lusiads* (IV, 50).

Although the possession of Ceuta did not bring great riches, Afonso V (ruled 1438–1481) continued the expansion in the Maghreb. Before that, however, he had to face a challenge from his uncle and regent, Dom Pedro, who at the end of the young king’s minority in 1446 raised an army against him, only to lose his life on the field of battle. Some years later, following Pope Nicholas V’s call for a crusade in defence of Constantinople, Afonso prepared an expeditionary force, and, when the crusade failed to materialise, directed his forces southward, this time with greater success: between 1458 and 1471 he conquered the coastal outposts of Alcácer Ceguer, Arzila, and finally Tangier itself. Meanwhile, through individual initiatives under royal patronage, Fernão Gomes and other navigators continued to make headway along the African shore, reaching the equator in 1471. With the help of scientific and technical advances sponsored by Prince Henry the Navigator, these forward movements led to the growth of the traffic in slaves from the Gulf of Benin and West and Central Africa to Lisbon and, to a lesser extent, other parts of the peninsula. To celebrate these extraordinary feats of exploration and conquest, Afonso titled himself “king of Portugal and of the Algarves, of these shores and beyond the sea in Africa (de aquíém é além mar)”, earning the byname of “the African”. Yet thereafter he shifted his focus to the peninsula, and Castile, which in the final years of the reign of Enrique IV (1454–1474) was on the threshold of civil war.

Of weak character, Enrique had given away a substantial portion of the royal domain to the Castilian magnates through the famous “mercedes enriqueñas”. As a result, the crown lost not only economic resources but also quite manifestly its political authority, a situation that was only made worse by a dynastic struggle. Enrique’s only daughter, Juana, was proclaimed heiress by the Cortes on her birth in 1462. It was suspected however that she was in fact the daughter of the royal favourite, Beltrán de la Cueva, which earned her the sobriquet of “la Beltraneja” from the noble faction opposed to Enrique. Led by the Archbishop of Toledo and the marquis of Villena, this faction forced the king to revert the succession in favour of his half-brother Alfonso. This was followed shortly after by the so-called “farce of Avila” (1465), in which an effigy of Enrique was stripped of the royal insignia and thrown to the ground. The conspirators proclaimed the 12-year-old Alfonso as king, but as he was most likely their pawn, he was unable to attract wider support. His death in 1468 paved the way for a more far-reaching solution: by the accords of Guisando (Avila) Enrique was accepted as king by his noble rivals, who in return secured the succession of his half-sister Isabel (sister of the late Alfonso), though she would forego the customary title of princess of Asturias. With Alfonso dead and Juana supplanted, the prospect arose of a marital union between the two heirs, who were also second cousins: Isabel (born in Castile in 1451 to a Castilian father and Portuguese mother) and Fernando (born in 1452 in Aragon, to Castilian parents and grandparents).

More than one possible match had been mooted for Isabel: the widowed Afonso V, an option favoured by Enrique IV; the Duke of Guyenne, Louis XI of France’s brother; Fernando himself; and the Duke of York. Through a combination
of genuine feeling and calculation, Isabel resolutely opted for Fernando, a choice that the groom’s father, Joan (king of Navarre since 1425 through his first wife Blanca, and of Aragon since 1458 having succeeded his older brother Alfonso V the Magnanimous) had been working towards with the aid of the Castilian faction that favoured the Aragonese solution. The figure of Joan II of Aragon, tireless and tenacious, and ably supported by his second wife Juana Enríquez (Fernando’s mother), a member of the powerful Castilian lineage of the same name, cast a shadow over this entire period. Indeed, in terms of gravity and duration, the difficulties faced by Afonso of Portugal and the Castilian king Enrique were of small account next to those faced by Joan.

In contrast to his brother Alfonso, who had left behind his peninsular dominions in 1432 and settled in Naples after conquering that city and kingdom in 1443, Joan’s focus was always on the peninsula, and above all on Navarre and Catalonia. In Navarre, he clashed with his first wife’s son, Carlos de Viana, whose family ties with the House of Anjou did not escape the attention of the French ruling dynasty, and father and son were duly installed as heads of two opposing local factions, the agramonteses and the beaumonteses, respectively. As for Catalonia, the principality had been in turmoil for some time: the remença peasant movement roiled the countryside, while in Barcelona there were ongoing tensions between two groupings, the biga and the busca, representing the interests of the urban oligarchy and artisans respectively. The king was not above the fray and seemed inclined to resolve the remença issue in terms favourable to the peasants. Towards the end of 1460 the main organs of government, the Generalitat (the standing committee of the Cortes between its sittings) and the Municipal Council of Barcelona instituted the so-called “Representative Council of the Principality of Catalonia”, through which the ruling classes mobilised in armed rebellion against Joan. The king was forced to accept the humiliating Capitulation of Vilafranca (1461), the terms of which, among other things, barred him from entering Catalonia without permission, and obliged him to name Carlos de Viana as lieutenant general. Viana’s death a few months later (which made Fernando heir), surrounded the late prince with a saintly halo, and had the effect of galvanising Joan’s opponents. But divisions soon surfaced among them, and in 1462 a civil war broke out that also encompassed a genuine peasant war in the northern part of the principality, between Barcelona and Girona. The war lasted until 1472, and saw the intervention of Louis XI of France, during whose reign, which had also begun in 1461, large new territories were incorporated into the royal domain, including Burgundy in 1477, Anjou, and Provence (Ryder 2007, part II).

The Council of Catalonia deposed Joan, and in his place offered the principality (with the corresponding title of count of Barcelona) to Enrique IV of Castile, who accepted it, swearing, through his representative, to uphold the laws of the principality in exchange for the oath of loyalty from his new subjects at the end of 1462. It was thus in the throes of a domestic struggle that the Catalan authorities for the first time instituted a dynastic union between Catalonia and Castile, both now ruled by the same monarch. They furthermore urged Enrique to also proclaim himself king of Aragon, a step that he was not prepared to take. The union was brief however, for less than a year later Enrique renounced his sovereignty over the principality as part of a series of agreements with Louis, who, worried by the possibility of a union between Castile and Aragon, made common cause with both kings at one time or
another. Meanwhile, Aragon and Valencia prudently stayed on the sidelines of the Catalan conflict. Pressed by want of money, Joan negotiated the Treaty of Bayonne with the French king, securing military aid in exchange for the exorbitant sum of 200,000 gold escudos. The Pyrenean counties of Rosselló and Cerdanya, strategically bordering France, were pledged as collateral, though Louis promptly violated the agreement by annexing them militarily. Thus, while the rebels handed over the Catalan principality to the Castilian king, to regain control Joan had to resign himself to significant, and potentially irretrievable, territorial losses.

Following Enrique’s renunciation and the agreements between Joan II and Louis XI, the Council proclaimed the Portuguese infante Don Pedro as the new count of Barcelona. When the latter died in 1466, the same honour was extended to René of Anjou, the French king’s brother. Neither Pedro not René were particularly effective rulers. Joan, on the other hand, though a septuagenarian and blinded by cataracts until a successful operation in 1468, continued his military advance from Aragon into Catalan territory, gaining adherents along the way, aided by suspicions that René was merely preparing the ground for the annexation of the principality by France, as had already happened with the Pyrenean counties. Joan finally prevailed in 1472, and, in contrast to the authoritarian tendencies that marked the early years of his reign, issued a general pardon for the rebels by the generous terms of the Capitulation of Pedralbes. He also confirmed the Principality’s existing laws and constitutions, voiding in the process the Capitulation of Vilafranca, and entered Barcelona in triumph. The experience of these eventful years would leave a deep impression on the young Fernando, especially that of being besieged in Girona with his mother in 1462. Thus, thanks to both his parents, Prince Fernando was already seasoned in the struggle for securing the supremacy of the crown by the time of his betrothal to Isabel of Castile.

No sooner had the marriage agreements been signed in Cervera, in March 1469, than other problems and perils presented themselves: Isabel, confined to a castle by her half-brother, the king, had to be rescued by a group of loyalists, while Fernando, coming from Zaragoza, crossed hostile Castilian territory with a handful of trusty followers disguised as merchants. The wedding, discreet and austere, took place in a nobleman’s house in Valladolid on 19 October 1469. The degree of consanguinity between the bride and groom required a papal dispensation, absent which the Archbishop of Toledo supplied a fraudulent one. The genuine document would only be issued two years later.

Enrique IV’s death in 1474 cleared the way for two opposing claims to the Castilian throne: while on the one hand Isabel had herself proclaimed queen, as mentioned above, a year later, Afonso V of Portugal, a widower, married Juana (la Beltraneja), his niece, with the intention of assuming the regency of Castile until his wife’s coming of age. This would have paved the way for his ambition of establishing a dynastic union between the two kingdoms under Portuguese hegemony, an objective made more attainable by his being a cousin of the king of Aragon. Newly married, and to make good Juana’s claim against Isabel, Afonso invaded Castile in 1475, but was forced to withdraw following the battle of Toro in early 1476—in which the Castilian army was led by Fernando—despite its inconclusive outcome. That would be the last attempt to bring about a union of Castile and Portugal by military means, and allowed Fernando to secure the Castilian throne for his wife. It was
a fleeting moment of triumph however, for a Castilian civil war flared up between
the supporters of Isabel and Juana, in which Afonso of Portugal duly intervened—
having been dissuaded from his intention of abdicating and retiring to the Holy
Land as a hermit. Beyond the dynastic dispute, the Luso-Castilian conflict was also a
by-product of the growing rivalry in maritime expansion along the African coastline,
the disputed dominion over the uninhabited Azorean archipelago, and even more so
the Canary Islands (not yet completely subjugated).

The turning point came in 1479. Joan II died in January, making Fernando the
ruler of the dominions of the Crown of Aragon; in the same month, peace was signed
with Louis XI, by then too preoccupied with Burgundy, and a long-term truce was
agreed with the now distant René of Anjou; and in September, the Luso-Castilian
Treaty of Alcáçovas (ratified in Toledo the following year) brought an end to the
civil war and the war of succession. By the terms of the treaty, Afonso renounced his
claims on Castile and the Canary Islands, but he reserved the right to mount crusading
campaigns in the Fez region; Juana, the focal point of the conflict, was its biggest loser,
to the extent that the papal dispensation originally issued for her marriage to Afonso
was now revoked by Sixtus IV, and she had to resign herself to entering the convent of
Coimbra; Castile recognised Portugal’s claim to Madeira and the Azores, was granted
rights over the section of the continent facing the Canary Islands (not as an extension
of the Reconquest, but in recognition of the supposed Visigothic dominion over the
former Roman province of Mauretania Tingitana) and renounced further maritime
advances along the African coast, to the dismay of the merchants of Lower Andalusia.
Finally, various marriages between the respective princes and infantes were projected
based on an elaborate guardianship scheme known as “tercerías”.

Two further events helped to clear the air. The previous year saw the birth of
Juan, Fernando and Isabel’s second son, who became heir to both at the expense
of the first-born, Isabel; and in 1481, Afonso of Portugal died and was succeeded
by his son Joao II, who, having previously collaborated closely with his father, was
now inclined to mend relations with his Iberian relatives and neighbours. These
developments would prove to be the start of a new epoch for both Iberian mon-
archies, whose vigorous new rulers, ranging in age from 26 to 30 years, had enough
experience of government to appreciate the need for strengthening the foundations
of royal authority and justice.

ROYAL PRE-EMINENCE AND TERRITORIAL
EXPANSION, 1481–1494

The first question that Fernando and Isabel had had to face was how to approach
the joint government of their respective kingdoms. To begin with, the Capitulation
of Cervera clearly envisaged a subordinate role in Castilian affairs for Fernando.
This was also manifest in the rituals of Isabel’s proclamation as queen of Castile in
Segovia unaccompanied by her husband: in the procession through the streets of the
city (an act partly in lieu of the coronation, which had fallen into disuse in Castile)
a courtier walked ahead of the queen bearing an unsheathed upright sword (Ruiz

The sword was a symbol of the royal power to administer justice, and hence
rarely flaunted by a married queen, it being held that, while she might be a vessel for
the transmission of dynastic rights, a queen could not personally administer justice, a prerogative of the male consort. The debate that arose over the issue did not mitigate the gesture however, and subsequently upon Fernando's arrival in Segovia from Zaragoza, the so-called Concord of Segovia was concluded in January 1475. Isabel was thus acknowledged as "queen and proprietor" of Castile (in other words, she held full sovereignty), no less than Fernando was to be in Aragon; and yet he was not to be merely the Castilian king consort, but an acting king, while she would only be queen consort in Aragon. According to the established protocol, Fernando's name would precede that of Isabel, followed by the cumulative enumeration of their kingdoms and domains, while the arms of Castile and León would come before those of Sicily and Aragon in all official documents and coinage; appointments to Castilian offices would be Isabel's exclusive right, while justice would be administered jointly or separately depending on the circumstances. It is possible that Isabel considered it necessary to have an acting king given the urgent need to rein in a still restive Castilian nobility. Indeed, a few months later, with war against Portugal imminent, Isabel abrogated the accords in empowering Fernando to act freely and with full authority as if she were present herself. He returned the favour in 1481, on Isabel's first visit to the Crown of Aragon, issuing a similar patent authorising her to intervene in the affairs of those territories, although she scarcely made any use of it. Thus, a junior branch of the Trastámara line, engendered by Fernando de Antequera in Aragon, assumed the Castilian throne, hitherto occupied by the main branch.

Fernando was proclaimed "king of Castile and León" in Segovia, the fifth of that name. Both monarchs duly wrote to the cities of Castile and those of the Crown of Aragon to inform them of the new state of affairs: the respective kingdoms were henceforth "united and joined under one dominion and royal crown". Not long after, in July 1475, Fernando made his first testament, in which he asked his father that the Princess Isabel, his only daughter at the time (born in 1470), should succeed him in the kingdoms of Aragon and Sicily, "because of the great profit that ensues [from the said kingdoms] being joined to those of Castile and León" (Pérez Samper 2004, 166; Hillgarth 1978, I, 485).

The union was consolidated with Fernando's accession to the thrones of the Crown of Aragon in 1479, as the second by that name. The municipal aldermen of Valencia celebrated the consummation of the union as "Spanya juncta", while the Barcelona notary Miquel Carbonell, scion of a family of humanists and royal secretaries, referred to Fernando as "lord, king and prince of the Spains (las Spanyas)". The chroniclers made frequent use of this expression in a laudatory sense, as in the case of the Castilian Diego de Valera in his Crónica abreviada de España (1482), in which he praised the king and queen for having brought into being "well-nigh the monarchy of all the Spains", while the Catalan Joan Margarit dedicated his voluminous Paralipomenon Hispaniae (not published until 1545) to the royal couple, personifications of the Roman Hispania Citerior and Hispania Ulterior, now happily reunited. While the humanists thus harked backed to Rome, the proponents of neo-Gothicism evoked parallels with the unity of Visigothic kingdom. Thus, if at the beginning of her reign chroniclers had lavished praise on Isabel for having restored justice following the disorders of Enrique's reign, duly exaggerating the latter's failings, thenceforth the royal couple were hailed as the restorers of ancient unity (Pérez Samper 2004, 236, 247–250; Tate 1955, 84–85, 1970, 148–150; Fernández
The term “Spain” or “the Spains”, the vernacular form of the Latin *Hispania*, which had long since had geographic, historical, and cultural connotations, now acquired a distinctly political sense. To be sure, Portugal was not included. This deficiency was seemingly acknowledged when the Royal Council came to consider the proper title to be assumed by the monarchs. Hernando del Pulgar, royal secretary, and from 1482 the queen’s official chronicler, explained it thus in the *Crónica* that he began writing at that time on the subject of their joint reign, in a passage dealing with the immediate aftermath of Fernando’s accession in 1479:

> The matter of their titles was also discussed in the King and the Queen’s Council: some members of the council were of the opinion that they should style themselves Kings of Spain, for having [he] acceded to the kingdoms and lordships of Aragon, they were lords of the greatest part of it. But in the end it was determined not to proceed thus, and in all their letters they titled themselves as follows: “Don Fernando and Doña Isabel by the grace of God, king and queen of Castile, of León, of Aragon, of Sicily, of Toledo, of Valencia, of Galicia, of the Mallorcas, of Seville, of Sardinia, of Cordoba, of Corsica, of Murcia, of Jaén, of the Algarves, of Algeciras, of Gibraltar, count and countess of Barcelona, lords of Biscay and Molina, duke and duchess of Athens and of Neopatras, count and countess of Rosselló and of Cerdanya, marquis and marchioness of Oristano and Gociano, etc.”

(Pulgar 1780, 150–151)

This list enumerated the kingdoms and dominions without differentiating between those brought by one spouse or the other. The order was determined by rank or relative antiquity, and as it would be thenceforth preserved with only slight modifications, it constituted yet another indication that the disparate realms and domains formed a whole under the aegis of common monarchs. Yet there was an essential difference between the two aggregations. The kingdoms of the Crown of Castile shared certain juridical features: the same laws (notwithstanding various local privileges or *fueros*, such as those of Sepúlveda or Cuenca), the citizenship (*naturaleza*) of all their inhabitants, thanks to which all could aspire to offices in any one kingdom, and, finally, the fact that all the kingdoms or their representatives came together in a common parliament, or Cortes of Castile. The individual kingdoms existed as such only nominally. On the other hand, the dominions of the Crown of Aragon, both Iberian and Italic, had their own laws (as well as strictly local *fueros*, such as those of Teruel and Albarracín in Aragon), their particular *naturalezas*, and their respective institutions and parliaments.

In any case, the list did not include Portugal. Yet the marriage alliances foreseen in the Treaty of Alcáçovas-Toledo were designed to extend the dynastic union to the entirety of the Iberian peninsula in the following generation. Two of Fernando and Isabel’s daughters (Isabel and María) were matched with Portuguese spouses: Isabel, the first-born, married Prince Afonso (1491), and following his death, Manuel I (1495), who had spent two years of his youth at the Spanish court, in fulfilment of the terms of the above mentioned “tercerías”; he in turn married María, the last
but one of the children, following her older sister’s death (1500). Still, the sought-after union would not materialise until 1580, when Philip II, the son of Charles V and Isabel of Portugal, also became king of Portugal. Even then, the long list of titles remained in use, with Portugal added to it. At the same time, the expressions Hispaniarum rex or Hispaniarum et Indiarum rex swiftly made their way onto coins, seals, and other official documents.

Fernando and Isabel’s monarchy was a composite one, the product of the aggregation of territories, which was nothing uncommon at the time. The late medieval Crown of Aragon itself was already such a polity, and the new monarchy resulting from their marriage was likewise assembled through accumulation: Castile and the kingdoms of the Crown of Aragon were joined together through a union aeque principaliter, which meant that each one of the kingdoms preserved its own laws and institutions. Inheritances and conquests, or rather, the dynastic rights that were continuously invoked and frequently defended by military or other means were both the foundation and the organisational model of the monarchy (Elliott 2009; Cardim 2014, 29–47; Gil 2016, ch. 2).

Juridically equal under joint monarchs, Castile and the Crown of Aragon nevertheless differed noticeably in more than one sense. To begin with, there were demographic disparities: Castile’s population of more than five million dwarfed those of Aragon, Catalonia, and Valencia, which together added up to a million inhabitants (roughly also the size of Portugal’s population). The economic divergence was just as striking, between the dynamism of Castilian cities and Catalan prostration, mostly caused by the protracted civil war. Finally, there were differences in political character. To be sure, all the Iberian kingdoms, Portugal included, had a common political culture firmly rooted in Roman law, with shared principles of authority, obedience, order, and the common good, as well as juridical instruments through which these were articulated; the only exception was Aragon, where Germanic law retained a vitality that was unusual in southern Europe. Even so, the difference between Castile and the Crown of Aragon was appreciable above all in the sphere of relations between the crown and the representative assemblies: royal prerogative was wider in Castile in relation to legislative and fiscal matters, while on the other hand the Cortes of the kingdoms of the Crown of Aragon (especially those of Aragon and of Catalonia) had a significantly greater capacity to influence royal policy. The contractualist or “pactist” conception of power in the Crown of Aragon was a distinguishing feature and was pointed out as such by many local jurists and various foreign diplomats and observers (see Chapter 2 of this volume).

Differences notwithstanding, both styles of government had experienced their travails during the preceding reigns, and it remained to be seen how they would evolve during the new era that beckoned. In Castile, it was quickly evident that the powerful municipal corporations, eager to restrain the nobility and secure domestic peace that would promote economic development, supported the monarchs, so that the Cortes became an essential tool of government, especially in the opening years of their reign. The Cortes of Castile assembled successively in Madrigal (1476) and Toledo (1480) formulated a wide-ranging legislative programme: putting the depleted royal treasury back on a sound footing, the recovery of alienated royal incomes, the formation of a rural police to bring order to the countryside (the Santa Hermandad), and the reorganisation of the Royal Council, being among the most
important measures. Between 1476 and 1494 Fernando also took advantage of favourable circumstances to assume the Grand Masterships of the wealthy military orders of Santiago, Calatrava, and Alcántara, and tried and failed to do the same with the order of Montesa in the Crown of Aragon, an aim realised by Philip II a century later.

In Portugal, João II proceeded with the same basic objectives in mind. His complaint on assuming the throne, that his father’s prodigality had left him in possession of nothing but the kingdom’s highways, was undoubtedly an exaggeration in comparison with the depredations wrought upon Castile by Enrique’s notorious handouts, but it was meant to signal a new era. Moreover, the king obliged all the nobles, the governing elites of the kingdom and the cities to swear an oath of obedience to him, which was done with all due pomp and ceremony at the first Cortes of his reign in Évora, in 1481. The very same parliament promulgated a series of anti-seigniorial laws, and shortly after, in 1484, the king acted resolutely to bring an end to the enduring resistance of the Houses of Braganza and Beja-Viseu, the respective heads of which had conspired against him: the first was executed, the latter assassinated by the king himself. The crown already boasted the mastership of the military order of Christ although it would have to wait until 1550 to secure those of Avis and Santiago (Cunha 1990).

Fernando and Isabel dealt harshly with those nobles who had opposed them in the War of Castilian Succession, ordering their castles and strongholds demolished, especially in Galicia. But they balanced this with a policy of favours and pardons, and facilitated the establishment of what would become the great noble houses of early modern Spain, the duchies of Alba, Infantado, and Medinaceli. They also endeavoured to be physically present in many of their territories as the best means of entrenching royal authority. Their long stay in Andalusia in 1477–1478 was only a foreshadowing of what would become a characteristic feature of their reign, the constant movement across the length and breadth of their domains, above all Castile. Their court was never sedentary, unlike the Portuguese, which, although the itinerant habit could not be shed forthwith, was most frequently based in Lisbon.

In Catalonia, the most pressing problem was the question of the remenç a. A second peasant war broke out in 1484, once again in the region between Barcelona and Girona, which gave rise to two factions: a moderate one led by Francesc Verntallat, and a radical one led by Pere Joan Sala, which called for the abolition of all feudal dues. Fernando continued his father’s policy, and with the backing of the former group issued the Sentence of Guadalupe (1486), which abolished the so-called “bad practices” (mals usos, abusive feudal labour obligations or corvées), allowed peasants to cultivate seigniorial land in exchange for long-term leases, and earmarked compensation for wartime losses. Conversely, in Aragon, where the peasant uprising was considerably weaker, Fernando confirmed the so-called absolute power of the lords over their vassals through the Sentence of Celada of 1497. Meanwhile, in Catalonia, the restraint observed in the remenç a issue also characterised institutional reform. The landmark Cortes of Barcelona of 1480 confirmed the constitutional character of the principality’s juridical order and reinforced it with the law of the Observança. Moreover, Fernando established a system of sortition, or appointment by ballot for municipal officials in the City Council of Barcelona as well as the Generalitat.
Restoring the old institutions to good order and doing so while re-establishing the principle of royal pre-eminence is the best way to sum up the shared aims and comparable achievements of João, Isabel and Fernando. Resolve, political skill, and necessity all came together in this approach. Thus, the administration of justice was strengthened with the expansion of the system of law courts, staffed by educated jurists and letrados: the Desembargo do Paço, the Chancillería of Toledo (transferred to Granada in 1505) and the audiencias. Law codes were compiled with the same end in mind: the Castilian Ordenamiento put together by the jurist Alonso Díaz de Montalvo (1484) and the Manueline Ordenações (1512–1514), which replaced Afonso’s Ordenações of 1446, being the most signal examples. A new special tribunal of the Holy Office was established in Castile and Aragon in 1478, though not until 1536 in Portugal. Finally, the Council of Aragon was created in 1494. With its seat at the court, it was the supreme judicial and administrative body of the territories of the Crown of Aragon, and, enjoying the same status as that of Castile, it underlined the composite character of the Spanish monarchy. Both Councils were the kernel of what has been termed the polysynodial or conciliar system of government, which

Image 1.6 Pillar called “Saint Augustin”, erected by the Portuguese explorer Diogo Cão in southern Angola, 1486
Source: Lisbon. Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga (MNAA)/Getty Images
was completed with the extension of the office of the viceroy (an office with origins in Aragon-Catalonia) to the non-Castilian Spanish domains, and would also later be used by the Portuguese in India.

For all of their complexity, political and administrative reforms did not prevent the territorial consolidation from following its course. Portugal’s extraordinary maritime expansion continued apace: in 1481, Diogo Cão placed the first padrão—the stone pillar with the arms of Portugal as a sign of taking possession of new dominions—in the region of the Congo River; in 1482, the fort of São Jorge da Mina was built in the Gulf of Guinea (thanks to which João could add “lord of Guinea” to his list of titles); in 1488 Bartolomeu Dias rounded the Cape of Good Hope; in 1498 Vasco da Gama reached Calicut; and in 1500 Álvares Cabral landed on the shores of Brazil. The spirit of conquest and the desire for territorial dominion were by no means absent from Portuguese thinking, and so it is significant in that respect that the acquisition of inhabited islands or lands was not officially designated as a campaign of “conquest”. To be sure, most of these settlements were military or trading outposts, at least in part a consequence of the metropole’s scarce human resources. There was also an active Christianising mission, as well as diplomatic outreach: João II struck an agreement with the king of Congo, Nzinga a Nkuwu, who received military and technical aid, converted to Christianity in 1491 (taking the name of João I), and sent the sons of the local nobility to study in Lisbon. On the other side of the scale, the traffic in slaves increased exponentially, from the mainland as well as the island of São Tomé (Cardim 2014, 34–37; Disney 2009, II, 66, 77–79, 110–114).

Spanish priorities lay much closer to home: the recovery of the counties of Rosselló and Cerdanya, the loss of which had so mortified old Joan II, and the conquest of the Nasrid kingdom of Granada, which would represent the consummation of the Reconquest. Fernando’s inclination was to turn his attention first to the northern counties, and with that in mind he requested financial aid from the Cortes of Aragon convoked in 1484. However, on Isabel’s insistence the royal couple finally resolved to direct their efforts towards Granada, as a joint Castilian-Aragonese enterprise. At the start of the century, it was the Portuguese who had their eyes on this prize, but it was the Castilian King Enrique IV who made the first foray in 1455–1458. Now, after the Muslims broke a truce in 1478, Granada, with its 350,000 inhabitants and rough, mountainous terrain, became the overriding objective, even more so once the Pope declared it a crusade. The war was long and costly: it lasted from 1482 to 1492, required the mobilisation of large military formations, and consisted mainly of a series of attritional sieges of towns and cities, in which artillery played an important role (as it had done in the Portuguese conquests in the Maghreb). It was helped along however by internal dissension within the ruling Nasrid family, between the emir Abul-Hassan, his brother and successor, Muhammad “el Zagal”, and the former’s son, Abu Abd Allah (Boabdil). The Spanish monarchs finally entered the city of Granada on 2 January 1492. This event had a resonance far beyond the limits of Iberia, celebrated throughout Christendom, where it was perceived as compensation for the loss of Constantinople in 1453.

The nominally Christian kingdom of Granada was incorporated into the Crown of Castile and was given Castilian laws. In addition, Fernando and Isabel extracted from the Pope the right to nominate candidates for bishoprics in the newly conquered territory, a right they also secured for the Canaries and the New World, a cornerstone
of the Spanish monarchs’ regalist policy. However, the assimilation and conversion of the new Granadine subjects would be a far from straightforward process (Ladero Quesada 1989; Coleman 2003).

In the military encampment of Santa Fe, before the walls of Granada, the royal couple signed agreements regarding two Atlantic ventures: with Alonso Fernández de Lugo for prosecuting the conquest of the Canary Islands, and with Cristopher Columbus, a navigator and adventurer of Italian origin who had come from Portugal, to follow through with his stubbornly pursued project of reaching Asia by sailing west. The couple proceeded thence on a triumphal passage across their domains as far as Barcelona. The time had come to turn their attention to Rosselló and Cerdanya, while also overseeing the government of Catalonia itself. However, their stay in the capital of the principality was marred by an attempt on Fernando’s life in December 1492, which left him gravely wounded. The would-be assassin was Joan de Canyamés, a peasant described as mentally unstable in the official sources, although it was believed in some quarters that he was linked to the remenç a movement, its flame apparently still flickering. Fernando survived, and promptly took advantage of a favourable international climate to recover the Pyrenean counties. The king of France, Charles VIII, wished to conclude treaties with the Holy Roman Emperor, England, and Spain in order to concentrate on his planned Italian campaign. That led to the Treaty of Barcelona of January 1493, which allowed Fernando to recover both counties without having to pay the sum agreed three decades prior, albeit at the cost of forsaking his Trastámara relative, Ferrante, Alfonso V’s successor as king of Naples, who stood in the way of French ambitions in Italy. Meanwhile, news reached Barcelona in March that Columbus had achieved what he set out to do, or at least that is what the navigator himself claimed during his audience with the kings in that city.

Thus, scarcely had two long-sought objectives been attained—Granada and the Pyrenean counties—when new horizons, not only more distant but previously unimagined, hove into view. In 1493, as the preparations for Columbus’ second voyage were being made, Pope Alexander VI, of Valencian extraction and sympathetic to Spanish interests, issued the bull *Inter Caetera*, supplemented by a further three in the months that followed. These papal bulls, following earlier precedents (those of Ireland, or Portuguese expansion along the African coast), entrusted the Spanish rulers with the evangelisation of the peoples of the newly discovered lands and those yet to be discovered, and by the authority vested in the pope as dominus mundi, granted them temporal dominion to facilitate that task. Furthermore, a line was fixed 100 leagues west of the Cape Verde islands, demarcating the Spanish and Portuguese zones of expansion, the Canaries being excepted. Building on this provision, a year later the Spanish and Portuguese monarchs signed the Treaty of Tordesillas that formalised the division of the overseas regions, moving the line of separation to 370 leagues west of the Cape Verde islands. For the moment, the astonishment produced by the news from the Caribbean paled before the far more lucrative trade in spices that the Portuguese had opened up with the Indian Ocean.

The Treaty of Tordesillas contained further provisions dividing up the region of the Maghreb, continuing in the vein of the delimitations of the peninsula itself into reconquest zones belonging to Portugal, Castile, and Aragon respectively, in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries (Almizra, Monteagudo, Torrellas). The treaty
DYNASTIC CRISES AVOIDED, NEW DOMINIONS SECURED, 1494–1516

The invasion of Italy by Charles VIII in 1494, to vindicate rights claimed by the Anjou over Milan and Naples, marked the start of a new era in European politics. In this new phase, Fernando II of Aragon would elevate himself into one of the principal actors on the international stage. If the short-lived Ottoman seizure of Otranto in 1480 had fleetingly drawn his attention towards Naples in support of Ferrante, now, in very different circumstances, he intervened directly in Italian affairs, thus reviving the old medieval Catalan-Aragonese tradition. To this end, and already assured of Rosselló and Cerdanya, he returned to the traditional anti-French policy of the Crown of Aragon, in contrast to the far greater understanding commonly found between the French and the Castilians. Fernando proceeded thus on two separate fronts. On the one hand, he championed the Holy League formed in 1495 by the Holy See, the empire, Venice, and other states to counter the French invasion, which achieved its objective. On the other hand, his marriage strategy was designed to serve the same purpose. Thus in 1489 an agreement was reached for his younger daughter, Catalina, to marry the English Prince Arthur, and in 1495 a double marriage took place establishing a bond with the Holy Roman Empire: Prince Juan, the heir to the throne, married the Archduchess Margaret of Austria, while the infanta Juana wed Archduke Philip the Handsome, heir to the Houses of Burgundy and Austria. These were the foundations of a coherent foreign policy, based on the strengthening of diplomatic relations with England, Burgundy, and the empire with the aim of containing France—an approach that would prove enduring. The designs of both in-laws, Maximilian and Fernando, yielded fruit much earlier and had a
more lasting effect on the future of Spain than any of the various marriage alliances formed with the Portuguese royal house.

It was then, towards the end of 1496, that Pope Alexander VI conceded to Fernando and Isabel the title of Catholic monarchs, which they would henceforward make their own. The title crowned a long series of signal achievements, summarised in the bull *Si convenit* as justification for the papal concession: pacification of their kingdoms, the conquest of Granada, the expulsion of the Jews, the conversion of the New World natives, and help rendered to the Holy See in the Italian Wars. The prestige conferred by the title only encouraged those who saw Fernando as the saviour of Christianity, the conqueror of Jerusalem, and even in messianic terms, as the emperor of the last days.

This heady climate was overshadowed by two Iberian royal deaths. In 1495, João II died and was succeeded by Manuel I (ruled 1495–1521), whose path to the throne was cleared by the deaths in turn of João’s only son, Afonso, and of Manuel’s five brothers, in addition to overcoming João’s clear preference for his bastard son, Jorge.

*Image 1.7*  Façade of the royal chapel in Granada, Spain, with the coat of arms of Ferdinand and Isabella. Includes Navarre
Source: Photo by Dorota Strzelecka (Own work)/Wikimedia Commons [CC BY-SA 4.0]
This remarkable series of events lent him an aura of divine protection, of being a new King David or “the Fortunate”, as he was named by the chronicler Damião de Góis sometime later. Manuel, ably supported by nobles and merchants, lived up to this image by promoting new conquests—especially that of Goa in 1510 by Afonso de Albuquerque, which enabled him to consolidate the recently founded viceroyalty, now raised to the rank of the Estado da India. These triumphs fostered an imperial and universalist mind-set at the Manueline court and enhanced the king’s reputation to such an extent that he, too, was expected to lead a final crusade to recover Jerusalem and deal a death blow to Islam (Cardim 2014, 36, 39, 50–53).

The situation faced by the Catholic monarchs was quite different, as years punctuated by family misfortunes led to various dynastic complications. In 1497 Prince Juan, their only son and heir, died at the age of 19, only six months following his marriage to Margaret of Austria. The first-born, Isabel, recently married for the second time to her cousin Manuel, once again became the heir presumptive. However, she died the following year (1498), immediately after giving birth to her only son, Miguel, in Zaragoza. Miguel was sworn heir by the Cortes of Aragon, Castile, and Portugal and was destined to complete the work of his maternal grandparents by uniting the Iberian peninsula under a single monarch. Yet, he in turn died before his second birthday, in July 1500, in Granada. The new heir was now Juana, married to Philip of Austria (the Handsome), lord of the Low Countries, both residing in Flanders. They already had a daughter, Leonor, when a son was born to them in March of that year, Prince Charles of Ghent, who, after yet more twists and turns of fortune, assumed the legacy of Fernando and Isabel. Finally, in 1502, Catalina, the younger daughter, was widowed following the death of Arthur, Prince of Wales, whom she had married a year prior. These personal calamities prompted Guicciardini to remark—in the abovementioned report of 1513— that if Fernando had indeed possessed both skill and good fortune, the latter abandoned him with regard to his progeny (Guicciardini 2017, 142).

These familial troubles served to highlight once more the personal and dynastic character of the union of crowns. In the first place, when the oath was administered to Prince Miguel as heir to the Portuguese throne in 1499, the kingdom’s Cortes approved certain dispositions, known as the “Lisbon articles” or “King Manuel’s clauses”, which guaranteed that Portuguese constitutional norms would continue to be observed once the kingdom was dynastically conjoined with Castile and the Crown of Aragon in the person of Miguel. As it would be a union aeque principaliter, Portugal would conserve its own institutions under a single monarch (Bouza 2000, 45–51; Cardim 2014, 26–27). Miguel’s death two years later rendered it a moot point however. This in turn meant that the succession of Castile and Aragon would take a different course, a situation that—and this is the second point—unleashed acute intrafamilial tensions that, in combination with developments abroad, placed at risk all that had been achieved hitherto, both in terms of internal pacification as well as territorial expansion.

As the heiress apparent, Juana travelled to the Iberian peninsula in 1502 in the company of her husband Philip, without their children. Her mental disorder manifested itself with increasing frequency. She was sworn heiress by the Cortes of Castile and those of Aragon, and, being pregnant, stayed behind while her husband, who maintained a pro-French stance, on his journey back reached an agreement...
under which Louis XII would have received the kingdom of Naples. This agreement put him squarely at odds with his father-in-law. Previously, in 1499, following a second French campaign against Naples—this time successful—Louis and Fernando had concluded the Treaty of Granada (1500), dividing the kingdom between them, the former assuming the royal title, the latter as Duke of Calabria. The terms were confusing, and the two found themselves at war. It was in this context that Philip came to an agreement with Louis XII. Juana meanwhile rejoined her husband after giving birth to Fernando, who was left in the care of his maternal grandparents. The matter of Naples was resolved in Fernando’s favour, for in 1504 he defeated and expelled his enemy, thanks mainly to Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba, the Great Captain, who not only brought to bear his experience of the war of Granada, but also introduced crucial tactical innovations that rapidly became a standard feature of European military practice. Fernando had gained a new kingdom, albeit one that had previously belonged to the Crown of Aragon, and that, despite having been obtained in both cases by force of arms, preserved its own laws and institutions (Hernando 2012). However, on 26 November of that year (1504), Queen Isabel died. Fernando thus found himself alone, facing a grave family conflict, which was by extension a serious political crisis.

The queen’s testament, composed a few weeks prior to her death, had been designed precisely to pre-empt such complications: it recognised Juana as the universal heiress, and stipulated that in her absence, or if she were deemed unfit to rule, Fernando would act as “governor and administrator” of her Castilian kingdom until Prince Charles turned 20—thus keeping the son-in-law Philip at arm’s length. The same concerns shaped Fernando’s domestic and foreign policy. He convoked the Castilian Cortes at Toro, which swore Juana as heiress in early 1505, and moreover promulgated an important body of laws, including the establishment of entailed estates, or mayorazgos, in the succession of noble houses, not unlike the Portuguese Lei mental. In foreign policy Fernando sought to sideline Philip while at the same time strengthening his hold over Naples through the Treaty of Blois with Louis XII, signed in October that year, by which he committed himself to marrying 18-year-old Germaine de Foix, the French king’s niece. The wedding duly took place in March 1506, in Valladolid.

Around the same time, Juana and Philip arrived in A Coruña to take possession of the kingdom, although an agreement had been struck that Fernando would continue to have a hand in its government. Before leaving Brussels, however, Philip had received pledges of allegiance from a number of Castilian nobles hostile to Fernando, and secured further support on the way to Castile. Following a rancorous meeting between the father- and son-in-law in Villafáfila, near Zamora, which raised the prospect of a renewed dynastic civil war in Castile, Fernando retreated to his patrimonial domains in the Crown of Aragon and visited Naples, where he was proclaimed king by its parliament. Juana and Philip for their part were proclaimed rulers of Castile, the former as queen regnant and the latter only as king consort. However, Philip died unexpectedly shortly after, in September 1506. His death led to a rapid deterioration in Juana’s mental state, and descent into dementia, and so Fernando was asked to return to Castile to govern in accordance with Isabel’s testament. He did not do so immediately, staying in Naples until the following year was well advanced, during which time the Archbishop of Toledo, Francisco Jiménez de
Cisneros, a close ally of the Catholic monarchs, governed in his stead. In due course, through a typical mixture of severity and clemency, Fernando calmed tensions in Castile, while his daughter Juana was shut away in a convent in Tordesillas. She was never formally declared unfit and retained her royal title until her death in 1555.

In 1509, a son born to Fernando and Germaine, Juan, survived for only a few hours. It has been noted that if the boy had lived, it would have meant the separation of the Crowns of Aragon and Castile. However, Fernando’s intentions are unknown, and so, given that Juan had been born in Valladolid, it is not hard to imagine another possibility: that he was seen as a safeguard of the union of Castile and Aragon, Fernando’s enduring ambition—to the detriment of the Flemish succession by the children of Juana and Philip.

Be that as it may, Fernando then saw an opening in Navarre, or rather, created one. A schismatic council at Pisa (1511), condemned by the Pope, was supported by Louis XII, who also aligned himself with Juan de Albrecht and Catherine. These developments, along with the prospect of another military alliance in Italy, allowed Fernando to justify occupying the kingdom, conquered in 1512. Fernando was once more the king of Navarre, as his father had been. Three years later the kingdom was incorporated into Castile, albeit preserving its laws and institution—another case of union aeque principaliter despite being the fruit of military conquest (Floristán 2012). While Fernando was engaged in what would turn out to be his last great territorial annexation, Niccolò Machiavelli was in the process of writing The Prince, chapter 21 of which lauded the Aragonese king’s “great campaigns”, and gave the often-cited verdict of his reign:

This man can be called almost a new prince, since from being a weak king has become by fame and by glory the first king of the Christians; and if you will consider his actions, you will find them all very great and some you will find extraordinary.

(Machiavelli 2005, 108–109)

Yet this “new prince” and his wife Germaine’s fervent desire for an heir would remain unfulfilled. Although at one time he had given thought to designating as governor in her stead Juana’s second son, also named Fernando, born and raised in Castile, in the final version of his will, made just the day before his death on 23 January 1516, he settled on the first-born, Charles of Ghent, who had been nurtured under Maximilian’s wing. The desire to forestall new factional struggles prevailed once again, and this was the outcome obtained by a king who had spent only four of the 37 long years of his reign in his patrimonial Aragonese domains. The testamentary arrangements of both Fernando and Isabel thus meant that the accumulated legacy of the Catholic monarchs was passed on to Charles of Ghent. To be sure, his delayed arrival in the Iberian peninsula, postponed until September of the following year, caused some strain and uncertainty. Yet, in contrast to his father Philip the Handsome a decade before, Charles was the indisputable and sole beneficiary of the whole inheritance.

Other milestones abounded at this time: in 1514, the fifth and last volume of the ManueLINE Ordenações was published, in 1515 Afonso de Albuquerque seized Hormuz for Portugal, and in 1516 Juan Díaz de Solís ventured up the River Plate;
meanwhile the period of Spanish advances in the eastern Maghreb was, by contrast, drawing to a close. Dynastic politics, the fashioning of the early modern state apparatus, and continued overseas expansion went hand in hand, and continued their onward march.

In the space of scarcely more than a single generation much had changed in the Iberian world. While in its outward aspect this world was now also Flemish, Asian, and Atlantic, inwardly it had undergone significant changes in the practices of government. A Portugal fully engrossed in its overseas ventures and a dynastically united Spain served as good examples of the combination of continuity and change that characterised the Renaissance monarchies: in their interaction with more dynamic societies, these new monarchies were simply the old monarchies imbued with a stronger principle of authority and a more clearly defined sense of purpose. Dynasticism, legitimacy, and the settlement of new territories were foundations that would only become more robust with time (Elliott 1963, 74; Allmand 1998, 835–838). Yet new tensions would soon emerge: early in his reign, Charles would face two serious revolts, the Comunidades of Castile (the Comuneros Revolt) and the Germanias in Valencia. Meanwhile, just as Hernán Cortés was securing new dominions for him on the American mainland, Francis I of France was on the way to becoming his main rival in Europe. In this context of rising stakes and tensions, in 1526 Charles married Isabel of Portugal, another step towards the much-desired peninsular dynastic union. The Iberian world, and the world at large, were on the threshold of a new epoch.

NOTE

1 Translated by Igor Knezevic.

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