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PART I

Medieval Iberia
(eighth–fifteenth centuries)



History, politics and cultural studies



1

FESTIVE TRADITIONS IN CASTILE AND ARAGON IN THE LATE MIDDLE AGES

Ceremonies and symbols of power

Teofilo F. Ruiz

The extent (and limits) of royal power throughout medieval and early modern western Europe rested, to a large degree, on the adroit deployment of a variety of rich ideological discourses and symbols of power. These representations of power, whether solemn or festive, were easily identifiable by those in the position to challenge the power of kings and by the population as a whole. Ceremonies and symbols helped create what Joseph R. Strayer, Ernst Kantorowicz, and others have described as “the religion of monarchy.” Sometimes, however, such discourses of power failed to impress the Crown’s adversaries or worked, in perverse fashion, to undermine or delay the full exercise of regal power. Such was the case in France in the first decades of the fifteenth century when the English (and putative French) king Henry VI (1421–1471), and Charles VII (1403–1461), the so-called king of Bourges, struggled to legitimize their rights to the French throne. While the former king ruled Paris (and was crowned king of France at Westminster Abbey and Notre Dame de Paris) and the latter had an uncertain hold on Bourges and southern France, neither of the two had access to Reims – then in the hands of the Burgundians interested in weakening both rulers. Without Reims there could be no formal crowning and, far more important, no anointment with holy oil which, by the fifteenth century, had become fully associated with Clovis’ miraculous baptism in 496. When Charles VII was able to enter Reims and undergo those rituals of monarchy peculiar to France, the claims of Henry VI became defunct.

If I have provided this one lengthy example it is to note – as we begin an examination of ceremonies and festivities in the diverse Iberian realms – that rituals could not only be malleable, as was often the case in Castile, but counterproductive. The example may also serve as a reminder that, while the history of royal ceremonies in northern medieval and early modern Europe has often been presented as normative, their structures and aims are not entirely applicable to parallel rituals of power enacted in the Spanish realms. In that sense, the kingdom of Castile, most of all, and other Iberian realms developed their own festive and ceremonial practices. One should emphasize that, unlike the French and even the English, Iberian ceremonies that marked the ascent to the throne were never so wedded to tradition as to make them indispensable. In fact, Iberian ceremonies often differed greatly from those of the north. Yet, as is the case with every historical event or cultural artifact, context mattered a great deal. It did so then; it does so now.

Late medieval and early modern Spanish rituals of power: divergent models

Without subscribing to a teleological stance that traces modern states to their medieval origins, it is also undeniable that a series of political and cultural developments led to greater centralization of political power in the thirteenth century and beyond. These developments, underlined by the growth of royal bureaucracies, the emergence of borders, new forms of warfare, and, most significantly, taxation, were paralleled by greater emphasis on “public” displays, textual and pictorial representations of royal ceremonies, symbols of power, and festivities. Moreover, from the early fourteenth century onwards the chroniclers’ descriptions of these events increased exponentially. What was the meaning of such displays? How effective were they?¹

In this discussion I wish to focus on a specific genre of ceremonies – regal coronation or royal ascent to the throne – as well as on the symbols of authority and royal power displayed or omitted at these events in the coronation cycles of Castile and the Crown of Aragon. One must begin by dispelling the notion that there was a uniform tradition common to all the Iberian realms. While the different Peninsular kingdoms shared some ritual elements with one another and with other parts of the medieval West, they also had peculiarities that signaled differences among them. For example, depending on the period examined, the Crown of Aragon’s ritual ceremonies of royal investiture at times had closer parallels with ceremonies in France and southern Italy than they did with those of Castile. There was no “Spain” in the Middle Ages or in the early modern period in the sense in which such a term could be used in the eighteenth century, when the Bourbons centralized most of the Peninsular kingdoms, following French practice. Yet, strangely enough, neither the Bourbon kings then, nor their descendants now, were ever crowned or bestowed with those symbols of power commonly deployed by their ancestors in France. Following their Castilian and Habsburg predecessors they were neither ritually crowned nor anointed.

Ceremonies and rituals of power in Spain

In Spain’s medieval realms, rulers deployed complex rituals of power. These festive events were laden with ideological and symbolic significance, articulating elaborate political discourses. These ceremonies not only differed from realm to realm – though they shared similar purposes and the ritual trappings that had become almost obligatory in royal self-representation – but also often voiced (through imitation and one-upmanship) political antagonisms between the different polities in the Peninsula and internal conflict between the Crown and the high nobility. These ceremonies of power and legitimation rested on the presence and display of a series of symbols – swords, crowns (or the absence of crowns), seals, gestures, knighting, oaths of fidelity, and royal entries – that constituted the ceremonial and symbolic discourse of royalty in the Spanish medieval kingdoms and elsewhere.²

Because of space limitations, I have restricted the scope of this paper to two festive cycles. The first encompasses three successive events: the royal entry of Alfonso XI in Seville (1327), the coronation of Alfonso IV in Zaragoza as king of the Crown of Aragon (1328), and the coronation of Alfonso XI in Burgos as king of Castile-Leon (1332). I would argue that all three ceremonies were thematically linked, forming a continuum of political competition between Iberian realms and their rulers. Moreover, though somewhat similar displays and rituals were present, the differences, sometimes subtle and at other times striking, tell us a great deal about the comparative history of festive traditions in both realms. Our second case study examines the ascent to the Castilian throne of Isabella I (1474) and that of her consort, Ferdinand II, to the Crown of Aragon (1479). The second of these cases has been little studied in this context.

A royal entry and two coronations

Elsewhere I have examined in detail Alfonso XI's royal entry into Seville in 1327 for both its festive and symbolic significance (Ruiz 2012, 68–70). Here it is sufficient to note that this royal entry was unprecedented in the festive rituals of the Iberian realms. After restoring order to Castile and bringing rebellious nobles and municipalities into line, Alfonso XI (1312–1350) came to Seville for the first time since reaching his majority. He did so now as the undisputed ruler of the land. Although the chronicle dedicates only a single page to the event in its printed edition, the ritual significance of this entry marks a watershed in the Peninsula's festive traditions. The king was received outside the walls of the city with feigned military equestrian skirmishes (*bohordos*) and knights dressed and riding in the Muslim fashion. Mock battles of barges on the River Guadalquivir re-enacted the Christian conquest of the city in 1248. What was unusual, however, was that the nobles and prominent citizens came to meet the young king outside the gates of Seville, dismounted from their horses, and brought him into the city under a baldachin or *palio*. Although the use of the *palio* will become a permanent fixture in later royal entries, to my knowledge this is the first such occurrence in the Iberian Peninsula for monarchs (Ruiz 2012, 68–70; *Crónica de Alfonso XI* 1953, 204).

The symbolic and ritual pretensions of this entry, allying the king with the sacred and with similar ceremonies that required the use of a baldachin, most of all the Corpus Christi, must not have gone unnoticed in the eastern kingdoms. When Alfonso IV came to the throne after the death of his father Alfonso III, he was, as Bonifacio Palacios Martín showed many years ago, the heir to a well-established tradition of coronation and anointment (see subsequent discussion). Nonetheless, and probably prompted by Alfonso XI's bold claims in Castile, Alfonso IV (1328–1336) made a series of crucial departures from the established traditions or practices of coronation and anointment in the Crown of Aragon. Of course, in Iberia such rituals did not make a king, but were secondary to, and an adornment of, other crucial ceremonies: most importantly, being sworn in by the Crown of Aragon's parliaments. The death of the previous ruler automatically determined the succession to the throne. This was the case even in France with the traditional formula of "*Le roi est mort, vive le roi!*" Yet while in France a king could not fully be a king until ceremonially crowned and anointed at Reims, in the Crown of Aragon, and far more so in Castile, these rituals of kingship were an added element to an already acknowledged regal authority.

Ramón Muntaner, a Valencian delegate and eyewitness to the festivities, provided a lengthy and vivid description of the rituals surrounding Alfonso IV's accession, to conclude his *Crònica*. Even if one takes into account Muntaner's propensity for exaggeration, there is no question that in 1328 there were substantial additions to the festive programs usually associated with coronations in the Crown of Aragon. It was, in the words of Palacios Martín, a "public spectacle." The ceremonies were held on Easter Sunday, a feast closely associated with renewal and rebirth. After touring his diverse kingdoms and meeting with their respective *Corts* or *Cortes*, the king made his way to Zaragoza. His arrival and the preparations for the coronation took place against the backdrop of endless parades of high nobles and knights through the streets of the city, the knighting of at least 256 lesser nobles, a royal vigil of arms on Good Friday, and, on Easter Saturday, the shedding of mourning clothes and the donning of new and colorful garments. On Easter Sunday, the king placed his sword and crown on the altar. He dressed himself in ceremonial robes, girded the sword unaided, and allowed his brother to place golden spurs on his feet. Raising his sword, the king challenged the enemies of the faith, promising to defend the weak and to give his life to God if necessary. Then, having approached the main altar, he took the crown in his hand and crowned himself,

while allowing, afterwards, the bishop to anoint him on the shoulder. (See Muntaner 1999, 610–631; Palacios Martín 1975, 23, 77ff., 204–227.)

If Alfonso IV had been prompted to enhance the ritual and festive aspects of his coronation in response to the symbolic claims made by Alfonso XI in his royal entry into Seville in 1327, the Castilian king was certainly prompted to plan his own coronation in response to that of Alfonso IV. After all, Alfonso XI had been king for twenty years by the time he chose to undertake a coronation and anointment. He had been in firm control of the realm for only slightly less than a decade. The only other reason that may have motivated his coronation was the birth of his legitimate heir, though he had already produced several illegitimate children with his beloved mistress, Leonor de Guzmán. Moreover, there had been no tradition of either coronation or anointment among the kings of Castile for close to two centuries: neither Alfonso XI's father, nor his grandfather, nor his great-grandfather had been crowned. Yet, in the context of Peninsular rivalry and family links – Alfonso XI's sister was Alfonso IV's queen – one may see the reasons for the unexpected ceremonies of 1332.

Alfonso XI traveled to Santiago de Compostela where he was knighted by the mechanical arm of a statue of St. James placed on the main altar. Before that, he had kept vigil over his arms as befitted a soon-to-be-knighted nobleman and as Alfonso IV had done. Surely, for a king who had already led successful campaigns against Granada, knighting was redundant. Furthermore, as Peter Linehan has shown, despite other historians' assertion of its ancient pedigree, the statue of St. James had probably been brought from France for this occasion. As was the case with many Castilian ceremonies including Alfonso XI's crowning, this was another invented tradition. Returning to Burgos to preside over numerous jousts and festivities, the king marched in formal procession to the nearby monastery of Las Huelgas where he crowned himself, crowned his wife, and was anointed on the shoulder, disregarding the *ordo* that had been written for the ceremony. What did all these things have in common? What was the meaning of these rituals (see Linehan 1993, 584–601; Ruiz 1985, 109–144)?

Reading festivals: the malleability of rituals

If we engage in a “thick description” of these three festive events, certain common features and dissimilarities become evident, pointing to the differences in the construction of festive traditions in the two Spanish realms. The first thing to note is the malleable nature of ritual or performative strategies. Rituals depend, as do festivals, on the exact reiteration of certain formulae and gestures to be effective. This is certainly the case of certain rituals such as the elevation of the host in the Mass and transubstantiation. The miracle depends on the exact repetition of the words in a particular order. This was certainly not the case with festive performances. While royal entries, coronations, and the like shared some elements in their basic structure with previous such displays, each particular context allowed for changes, innovations, and subtle differences that addressed particular political needs. Chroniclers and others describing the festivities often sought refuge in such formulae as “as it was done [before] in the kingdom,” proclaiming therefore the authority of ancient tradition. This is the case, for example, with Alfonso XI's entry into Seville, even though there is no textual or iconographical evidence that anything similar had ever been done before in the Castilian realm. Yet we know that, in all three of the cases briefly previously described, significant modifications were introduced, and these were pregnant with political symbolism.

In the case of Alfonso XI's entry in 1327, the baldachin or *palio* seems to have been an innovation that advanced political claims which had not been deployed by Castilian kings

for five generations or more. The vivid example of Church rituals or a notion (however misguided) of ritual practices associated with the reign of Alfonso VI and Alfonso VII, the last claimants to the imperial title, may have prompted the use of the *palio* and a new understanding of the political role of such sacred symbols in Castile. As we know, the entry into Seville followed upon Alfonso XI's successful restoration of order and an end to the chaos that prevailed during his minority. It preceded his first formal campaign against Muslim rulers. Similarly, as Palacios Martín has noted, Alfonso IV's elaborate coronation rituals in Zaragoza – an event with close chronological links to Alfonso XI's entry but which generally followed Arago-Catalan precedents – aimed at providing something new in terms of coronation rituals. Whether it is simply that Muntaner's lengthy and elaborate description of the event provides us with more details than we have for other coronations in the Crown of Aragon, or whether Alfonso IV truly wished to match the symbolic gestures of his Castilian counterpart, it is clear that at the coronation in Zaragoza new formulae were introduced, and new claims, most of which reflected courtly ideals, were advanced. These new claims, which portrayed Alfonso IV as defender of the faith and righter of wrongs, were either not present before or were not deemed worthy of description in earlier and sparser accounts of coronation rituals.

This ability to try something new, while keeping novelties within the broad structure of coronation rituals, is most evident in the solemn ceremonies for Alfonso XI's coronation in 1332. In fact, no king had been crowned or anointed in Castile since the mid-twelfth century (whether, as Nieto Soria (1998) has argued, they were crowned spiritually by God or not, is inconsequential). The reality is that, without warning, Alfonso XI chose to do something that was far from the norm in Castile. Moreover, after 1332, the Kings of Castile and later Spain abandoned ritual coronation and anointment ceremonies; later medieval kings (except for Henry II, the Trastámara usurper), and their Habsburg and Bourbon descendants, including the present king of Spain, also eschewed this type of ceremony. In the three cases examined previously, which were closely connected politically and chronologically, rituals were summoned out of the past or invented outright while claiming the authority of tradition, performed, and then abandoned once again. What is significant here is that while the high nobility and clergy were most certainly aware of the rituals associated with coronation, anointment, and a royal entry, as far as the audience was concerned – that is, the all-important “public” that by their presence and acclamations gave legitimacy to the performance – these ceremonies were always new. They resembled and reiterated something known while introducing new elements that addressed the political needs of the moment.

Processions, knighting, and symbols

Common also to all three events was the movement from one place to another. Processions, a well-known medieval cultural event that included the peregrination of relics, the Corpus Christi, and other movements of sacred symbols in and out of urban spaces or along established routes within cities, were an important aspect of the festive performance of the royal entry or of the coronations described previously. They were also part of all festive performances in medieval and early modern Europe. In the case of Alfonso XI's entry into Seville in 1327, the king travels to Seville; he is met outside the city and brought into the city in solemn procession, accompanied along the way by equestrian and martial displays; he wends his way through the city of Seville along what must have been a pre-arranged and well-plotted route.

Alfonso XI repeated this performance for his coronation: a pilgrimage to St. James, the return to Burgos, and the formal and hierarchical slow procession from Burgos to the monastery of Las Huelgas in 1332. Alfonso IV would also tour the different capitals of the Crown of Aragon before entering Zaragoza. The movement of people, so vividly described by Ramón Muntaner, is a carefully scripted move from “here to there;” or, to borrow a phrase from Michel de Certeau’s *The Writing of History*, from the “known to the unknown.” It was a movement from the known world of action, of kings and martial displays, to the unknown and mysterious world of the cathedral and the sacred. Processions, therefore, involved transitions through liminal spaces. They served as markers for important events in the life cycle, and, in this particular case, for the political life of kings. Though the two Alfonsos were kings *before* their coronations or royal entries, the *palio*, the crowns, and the anointments signaled important steps in their respective claims to rule.

Both of the coronations described previously involved knighting, the girding of one’s own sword, and other aspects that marked the martial character of kingship in the Iberian kingdoms and elsewhere in the West, as well as the revival of courtly traditions in fourteenth-century western Europe. Similarities abound, but differences too. We already know of the significance of the sword in festive ceremonies. Swords asserted the power of kings and were an important ingredient of royal performance. Both the kings of the Crown of Aragon and those of Castile were punctilious in not allowing anyone to gird their swords. They were equally insistent in bringing many chivalric elements into the act of coronation. In the case of Alfonso XI, as we have already seen, he raised the stakes in 1332 by having a mechanical statue of St. James knight him. This was also an invented tradition and a managing of rituals to advance claims to power. It may have been a unique episode in the history of the Castilian monarchy. The statue, which can be seen in Las Huelgas of Burgos to this very day, does not seem to have been used again in any of the ceremonies accompanying the ascent to power of Castilian kings; at least, there is no textual evidence that it was. The importance of the statue, as Peter Linehan has so powerfully shown, was to give sacred sanction to Alfonso XI’s knighting (which in the case of both kings was a prerequisite to the coronation and anointment) without the presence of clergymen. In this the knighting and coronation of 1332 differed from those of 1328, as ecclesiastical participation was kept to a minimum in the former, but was much more significant in the latter (see Linehan 1993, 427, 598–599 and *passim*).

Finally, there was the question of self-crowning and of the crown itself as a symbol of royal power, central to the ceremonies held at Zaragoza in 1328 and at Burgos in 1332. Both kings crowned themselves, ignoring the bishops present. The studies of Palacios Martín and Percy Schramm make it clear that there was not a well-established tradition of self-crowning before the late thirteenth century in the Crown of Aragon and, as Schramm has shown, crown, sword, scepter, and other symbols played an important role in the representation of regal power. The important example of Frederick II, the Hohenstaufen emperor, who crowned himself, and the connections between the Crown of Aragon and Frederick’s Sicily through marriage and rule of the island after the Sicilian Vespers’ rebellion against the French created a thread of textual and ritual transmission that explains why Peninsular kings chose not to be crowned by clergy, unlike kings from north of the Pyrenees. In the case of Alfonso XI, this was taken to an extreme, as he not only crowned himself, but crowned his queen as well. A great deal more can be drawn from a close reading of these texts, but for limitations of space this is not the place to press them further (see references at the end of this chapter).

Ascending the throne in late medieval Castile and the crown of Aragon: the Catholic Monarchs

The ascent by Isabella and Ferdinand II to their respective thrones in Castile and the Crown of Aragon in 1474 and 1479 provide ample opportunities for exploring how the process by which new rulers came to power was transformed throughout the Middle Ages. More important to us here is the manner in which claims to power were asserted through ceremonies that, while familiar, also presented new elements that reflected specific political contexts. Moreover, in the particular case of Ferdinand II, the articulation of power in the Mediterranean lands of the Crown of Aragon – Naples and Sicily above all – reflected the peculiar circumstances of each of these realms. If nothing else, the performance of power remained flexible, the rituals malleable. It is very clear that for all their protestations of holding equal power – *tanto monta, monta tanto* – Ferdinand and Isabella ruled over very unequal realms (see Elliott 1963, 73). Moreover, while Isabella sought to unify the Peninsular kingdoms and worked for administrative and legal centralization, Ferdinand II preferred the variety of administrative practices, legal systems, and local privileges so clearly associated with the diverse realms of the Crown of Aragon (see Elliott 1963, 68–72, 96–97 and *passim*). How did they then articulate their rise to power?

Isabella I and Ferdinand II

As Elliott pointed out long ago, the two members of the royal couple that would, in time, become the Catholic Monarchs reached the throne of their respective realms against long odds and in the midst of severe crises. Isabella's claim to the throne was not straightforward since Juana, also known by her enemies as *la Beltraneja*, also had rights to the throne regardless of whether she was legitimate or not. Castile had descended into general anarchy, with the nobility engaged in a free-for-all, as they sought to control and take advantage of the monarchy. The Crown of Aragon also suffered from endemic violence in the form of a civil war that pitted the nobility against the peasantry, the so-called war of the *remenças*. Catalonia, with Barcelona as the head of the principality, insisted on its ancient privileges and autonomy. The city of Barcelona itself was torn apart by social strife. The situation was hardly a stable one, and this context determined, to a certain extent, the manner in which both rulers would mark their ascent to the throne, Isabella in 1474, and Ferdinand in 1479.

Isabella was in Segovia when she heard of her half-brother King Henry IV's death on December 12, 1474. Ferdinand, her husband for the previous five years, was in Aragon dealing with the mounting problems plaguing the kingdom in the last years of John I's rule. Isabella acted swiftly to establish her claims to the throne. Andrés Bernáldez and other contemporary chroniclers provide details of Isabella's grab for power in what was, surely, a *coup d'état* in which Castile truly became Isabella's realm with Ferdinand as a consort:

[. . . upon hearing the news] the Princess Doña Isabel covered herself with mourning clothes and cried, as it was to be done, for her brother the king, and she went to the Church of Saint Michael, and there also went the banners of the king Don Enrique [Henry], and those of the city of Segovia, covered in black mourning and carried low, and after enacting all the ceremonies [and prayers] of mourning, masses, and obsequies, they [the people of Segovia] built a stage and they [the magnates and people of Segovia] raised Doña Isabel Queen of Castile and Leon. Then the *mayordomo*

[the king's steward] Cabrera gave the newly named queen the keys to the fortresses [*alcazares*] in the city, the staff of justice, and the treasures of her brother, whose *mayordomo* he was . . .

(My translation of Bernáldez 1953, 576; Ruiz 2007, 198–199)

Hernando del Pulgar's chronicle, always more reliable than Bernáldez's, emphasized the raising of the banners of Castile to the traditional cry of "Castile, Castile for the king Don Fernando and for the queen Doña Isabella, his wife and *ruler of these kingdoms*." This was followed by other acclamations throughout many cities in northern Castile and by processions of nobles coming to Segovia to kiss Isabella's hand in obeisance (del Pulgar 1953, 253; Ruiz 2007, 198). The emphasis in the quotation is mine and reaffirms John Edwards' (2000, 21) description of Isabella's self-proclamation as queen as a "coup." Similarly, Alfonso de Cartagena described Isabella's procession through Segovia, with the newly invested queen marching behind the sword of justice, which her equerry held high by its point.

Isabella was not crowned or anointed. What legitimized her power were a series of ceremonies that had a long pedigree in Castile, but which were slightly modified for this particular performance. We do not know whether the Queen and her advisers had discussed what to do in the case of Henry IV's death: something that was expected to come sooner rather than later. We do not know either whether her claim to power was scripted on the spot by borrowing from traditional Castilian practices. What we do know is that a series of symbols and ritual performances needed to be enacted as a necessary corollary to her claims to the Castilian crown.

Here once again we are met with processions, this time through the streets of Segovia, which included the donning and discarding of mourning clothes (something that Alfonso IV had done in 1328), and acclamations by the "people," essentially the high nobility allied to Isabella. Other ceremonial elements were also added, for which there were precedents. Yet even though Andrés Bernáldez refers to the formal acclamation of both Ferdinand and Isabella as a coronation, no crowning took place. Moreover, there is no evidence from accounts of previous ascensions to the throne that all these events – processions, acclamations by the people, raising of standards, assuming the keys to the royal fortresses in Segovia, the staff of justice, and Henry IV's treasure – could be undertaken in such a short time span.

The haste of the performances and their order, if we are to take the chroniclers at their word, tell us that the Queen and her advisers understood the need for swift action, owing to both her Castilian rivals and the absence of her husband. What would have been done over the following weeks was carried out in just a day or two – further evidence, once again, of the malleability of rituals within Castile. Yet no other symbol played as powerful a role for the population of Segovia and, ultimately, for the rest of Castile as the sight of the naked sword of justice held aloft in front of the Queen, as she processed through the streets of Segovia. Swords had had special significance in Castile since the glorious sword of Ferdinand III (1217–1252), and were deployed endlessly by Castilian monarchs and regents from Ferdinand III till the late Habsburgs. The messages conveyed by the sword of justice could not have been lost on the population of Segovia and, far more importantly, on the magnates that accompanied the Queen in her ceremonial procession through the city (see Ruiz 2009, 13–48; 2012).

When we turn to Ferdinand II, the story changes dramatically, pointing to the importance of ritual context and traditions in the selection of the appropriate performance for each occasion or locality. One must remember that Ferdinand II became king of Castile in 1474, the moment that Isabella, his wife, became queen. We must also remember that he had earlier been named king of Sicily by his father. Zurita, always an impeccable chronicler, continuously refers to him as king of Sicily. In the turbulent period that followed Isabella's claims to the throne, Ferdinand proved

to be a most valuable consort, leading the Castilian armies in subduing rebellious noblemen, meeting the Portuguese invasion, and engaging in a long campaign against Granada. His energies were concentrated on the restoration of order in Castile, but he had also received the homage of many of the great noble houses and ecclesiastical dignities as king of Castile. He spent little time in the eastern kingdoms, despite his father's request for his presence to help deal with the many fierce civil conflicts that plagued the Crown of Aragon. Even though, as Hernando del Pulgar reports, there was some opposition to the female succession and support for King John of Aragon (Ferdinand's father) as the rightful heir to Castile, Ferdinand chose not to press the point (del Pulgar 1953, 255). Instead, del Pulgar's chronicle, like other Castilian accounts of the period, is an endless litany of Ferdinand's martial deeds. In fact, a careful reading of the Castilian and Aragonese chronicles for the late fifteenth century provides a rather sorry portrait of a society besieged by conflict and in search of order. That the Catholic Monarchs managed to restore order after all – though far more in Castile than anywhere else in their realms – is a tribute to their abilities.

We do not hear much about Ferdinand's ascent to the throne in the Crown of Aragon. Upon hearing of his father's death in 1479, Ferdinand undertook a brief visit to the eastern realms to acknowledge his inheritance. After all, Ferdinand had already been sworn in as first born and legitimate heir to the thrones of the Crown of Aragon at the *Cortes* of Calatayud shortly after the death of Alfonso V in 1458 (Zurita 1967, book XVII, chapter XXV). A return visit to Calatayud, Zaragoza, Barcelona, and Valencia in 1481, this time in the company of Queen Isabella and the recently born Infante Don Juan, prompted a new series of exchanges of oaths – the *Cortes* and *Corts* swearing in Ferdinand as rightful king and his young son as heir. This recognition of them as legitimate rulers was given in return for promises to respect the liberties and privileges of each of the realms composing the Crown of Aragon. These ceremonies were accompanied by the usual solemn entries, festivities, and the like, but the exchange of oaths and the reaffirmation of the contractual nature of Aragonese, Catalanian, and Valencian rulership seems to have been the central performance necessary for ascending to the throne.

Even though the kings of the Crown of Aragon had a long tradition of actual coronation and anointment, and even though Ferdinand of Antequera, the new Trastámara king, had followed that tradition with a spectacular coronation feast in 1412, his descendants abandoned such practices in clear imitation of their Castilian relatives and royal counterparts. There was no coronation for Ferdinand II of Aragon as king of the eastern kingdoms. Zurita alerts us to the fact that such ceremonies had been abandoned long before. After a careful description of Ferdinand I's coronation, Zurita comments that: “[this was] the last [such coronation] that there has been until our own times; because the king and his successors [successors of Ferdinand I] were not crowned with that majesty and triumph that was present in the coronation of that prince and as was the custom of his ancestors [Ferdinand I's ancestors]” (MacKay 1987, 2, 949–957; Zurita 1967, book XII, chapter XXXIV).

Ferdinand II did experience the solemnity of kingship by himself after the unexpected death of his son-in-law, Philip the Handsome; the illness of his daughter, Queen Juana; and the unrest brewing in Castile, prompted his return. But it began with his impressive royal entry into Naples, almost a replay (without the breaching of the walls) of that of his uncle Alfonso V. Bernáldez provides an exuberant description of the clothing, the artificial constructions (a bridge between the king's ship and the shore), and, most of all, the rich *palio* under which Ferdinand II entered the city. There was no coronation, but there was pomp and display worthy of a true king. And that royal entry into his Italian possessions served as a prelude to an equally impressive entry into Seville. There he claimed control over Castile, even if it was in his daughter's name, without the very large shadow cast by Isabella (see Bernáldez 1953, 730–731; Ruiz 2012, 86–89).

Conclusion

Several observations are in order as we come to the end of this account. We see that Castile and the Crown of Aragon, though sharing some ritual elements in the acts of coronation – whenever kings were crowned – and most certainly in the festivities that accompanied ascent to the throne, also differed greatly. Those differences tell us a great deal about political culture in the medieval Iberian realms, as well as the importance of context. There was a great deal of competition between Castile and the Crown of Aragon. Most of the differences played out on the battlefield, even if during the fifteenth century both kingdoms were ruled by the same family. Clearly, the events of 1327, 1328, and 1332 were thematically connected. The Castilian king, Alfonso XI, and his Arago-Catalan counterpart, Alfonso IV (or their respective agents and advisers) made concerted efforts to signal ascent to the throne: the use of a baldachin in Seville, the impressive ceremonies of Zaragoza, and the unprecedented coronation and anointment of 1332.

All three events used festive forms – processions, clothing, knighting ceremonies, a willing “public” or audience. In all three cases, there is a flow from the streets of Seville, Zaragoza, or Burgos to the interior spaces of a cathedral or monastery. Each location determined the nature of the audience. On the road to Seville, or in the streets of Zaragoza or Burgos, the expectation was that the inhabitants of the city would line up to witness the king’s passage. In these “public” displays important lessons about hierarchy and power were reiterated. They formed part of the manner in which kings displayed their power and sought to gain the allegiance of their people. In the interior spaces, nobles and clergymen were introduced to the mysteries of royal authority, to the forceful acts of self-coronation and knighting, to the sacred elements of anointing. These were rituals that could only be played out by kings or kings to be.

When we turn to the late fifteenth century, there are significant differences. Both Isabella and Ferdinand depended on what was essentially the approbation of important sectors of society, specifically the high nobility and urban representatives. In Castile, this happened right at the moment of ascent, an ad hoc event conjured to fulfil the political needs of an immediate accession to the throne. Oaths taken at the *Cortes* happened much later in Castile where the importance of the *Cortes* declined in the fifteenth century. In Aragon, the process could also occur a long time after the ascent to the throne. Yet it was a more formal affair, and conformed to the contractual nature of rulership in the Crown of Aragon. It required the exchange of oaths, and a promise to abide by the liberties and privileges of each realm. This is worth reiterating. The kings of the Crown of Aragon were anointed and crowned (or self-crowned) until the first of the Trastámaras, Ferdinand I, who was the last to undergo this ceremony. For the rest of the century, Ferdinand I’s descendants followed Castilian practices that eschewed formal coronations and anointments. However, unless they were in Sicily or Naples, they could not abandon the traditional ceremonies that legitimized their rule through the approval of each of their kingdoms’ *Cortes* or *Corts*. But every ceremony that marked their ascent to power was performed – and performance is the right word here – in the context of feasts that moved from “public” to private and that sought to include all the representatives and people of their realms.

Notes

- 1 For a discussion of the evolution of festivals in late medieval and early modern Spain see Ruiz (2012, 1–67 and passim).
- 2 For symbols of royalty see Schramm (1960).

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