

"None of them were more loved by their peoples": The Daughters of Isabella I of Castile and the Construction of the Perfect Christian Consort through the Arts⁵

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Being Educated in a Multi-Confessional Territory: The Peculiarities of the Instruction of the *Infantas*

In 1554, King Philip II received a letter from Francis of Borgia, the confessor of his grandmother, Juana I of Castile. The object of the letter was to report on an extremely important issue: the religiosity, or rather the lack thereof, of the Queen. The priest questioned the devout practices carried out by the mother of Carlos I of Spain as follows:

She responded after having listened to me very carefully, that in the past she used to confess and take communion and she heard her masses and she had images and she prayed in some approved prayers that a friar confessor of the Catholic kings had given her ... and ... the images that she had ... were a Saint Dominic and a Saint Francis and Saint Peter and Saint Paul.⁶

With these words Juana was referring to her childhood, specifically to her period as *infanta* of Castile and Aragon. Raised along with her sisters in one of the most important courts of the period, the Castilian, their mother, Queen Isabella, oversaw the girls' religious education. The court of Castile had a peculiar characteristic in that three cultures coexisted. This significant co-existence of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim populations influenced the education of the *infantas* in their way of both understanding religion and expressing it.⁷

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⁶ "Ella respondió después de haberme escuchado con mucha atención, que antiguamente se confesaba y comulgaba y oía sus misas y tenía imágenes y rezaba con unas oraciones aprobadas que le había dado un fraile confesor de los Reyes Católicos. y ... las imágenes que ella tenía ... eran un Santo Domingo y un San Francisco y San Pedro y San Pablo." Miguel Ángel Zalama Rodríguez, *Vida cotidiana y arte en el palacio de la reina Juana I en Tordesillas* (Valladolid: Secretariado de Publicaciones e Intercambio Editorial, Universidad de Valladolid, 2003), 261.

⁷ Cynthia Robinson, *Imagining the Passion in a Multiconfessional Castile: The Virgin, Christ, Devotions, and Images in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (University Park PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013), 25.

In 1487, Pope Innocent VIII allowed the *Reyes Católicos* to choose the preceptors who would serve at their court.⁸ This meant that Isabella was able to build her own pedagogical system based on spirituality, intellect, and courtly models.⁹ Five university-educated churchmen were chosen as tutors for the *infantas*: Antonio Giralдино and Fray Pedro Ampudia for Isabella, Fray Andrés de Miranda for Juana and María, and Alejandro Giralдино for Katherine and María.¹⁰

These tutors, with the approval of Queen Isabella, chose the religious readings which educated the *infantas*. These were readings of Castilian origin and not devotional readings of the *Devotio Moderna*. The spiritual movement known as *Devotio Moderna* supported a return to a pious life based on the imitation of the life of Christ. Thus, the human character of Christ was highlighted using his love, suffering, and death as elements of connection with the faithful. However, these events in the life of Christ could be taken by Jews and Muslims as a sign of Christianity’s weakness. For this reason, and although these events from the life of Christ are included in Castilian representations, Isabella preferred to emphasise Christ’s divine character. This led to the texts produced in Europe and in Castile having different objectives; while the former were intended to support meditation in Castile, they had an evangelising purpose. These texts fought for the evangelization of the territory above the private devotion that the central European manuscripts promulgated. This meant approaching religion and the images produced by it from a pedagogical perspective; its purpose was not only to save the soul but to train in the correct religion. The coexistence of the three cultures in the Castilian territory explains why the human qualities of Christ—symbols of Christianity’s weakness—are ignored in favour of the divine character of his person. This gave rise to images of the Passion that are less inclined to the bloodthirsty and that highlighted this divinity.¹¹ This also explained why the role of mediator that Christ acquired in other parts of Europe was supplanted here by the Virgin Mary. Her human qualities—piety, suffering, or faith—were points of union with the faithful, in addition to serving as a feminine model of behaviour.¹²

⁸ Antonio de la Torre, “Maestros de los hijos de los Reyes Católicos,” *Hispania* 62 (1956): 265–266.

⁹ Isabel Val de Valdivieso, “Isabel la católica y la educación,” *Aragón en la Edad Media* 19 (2006): 559.

¹⁰ Antonio de la Torre and Eugenia Alsina de la Torre, ed., *Cuentas de Gonzalo de Baeza, tesorero de Isabel la Católica, Volume I and II* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1955), 45, 132, 182, 231, 364, 412 and 43, 126, 205, 263, 340, 377, 431.

¹¹ Cynthia Robinson, *Imagining the Passion in a Multiconfessional Castile*, 70–75.

¹² Melania Soler Moratón, “Arte y devoción: la experiencia de las imágenes religiosas de las últimas Trastámara” (PhD Thesis, University of Murcia, 2020), 289.

This explains why, until the end of the fifteenth century when all Hispanic territories were Christianised, translations into Spanish of works as important as Ludolph of Saxony's *Vita Chisti* (1502) were not carried out. This led to a preference for texts already produced in the Hispanic territory and support for new texts under the auspices of the Catholic Monarchs. Works such as Fray Martín de Córdoba's *El Jardín de las nobles doncellas*, created for Queen Isabella in 1469, were recovered and republished in 1499. Fray Martín de Córdoba's work was a pro-Isabella manifesto created after the death of her younger brother, Alfonso, and the proclamation of Isabella as crown princess. The author compares the figure of Isabella with that of the Virgin Mary herself, ensuring that, "just as the Virgin gave birth to Christ, Isabella must give birth to the word of God."¹³ This quasi-divine character granted to the queen may explain the later re-impression of the book: this virginal comparison grants Isabella the power to reconquer the territory in the name of Christianity. The reconquest of new territories gave rise to the need to produce new texts that supported evangelisation.

Thus, the *Reyes Católicos* supported new texts. It is interesting to note how some of these works were created by Judaeo-Converso authors such as Fray Hernando de Talavera, a Hieronymite monk and Queen Isabella's confessor. His origin, perhaps, can explain his opposition to the Inquisition and the harsh punishments against converts. He advocated a more pacifist evangelising vision with conversion through persuasion and progressive enculturation. Thus, for example, "He searched everywhere for clerics and religious who had knowledge of the Arabic language, so that they could preach and teach them in it" and he allowed Moorish dances and instruments to be used during mass.¹⁴ These characteristics are reflected in works such as "*Tratado sobre la demasía en vestir y calzar, comer y beber*" ["A treatise on excess in clothing and footwear, eating and drinking."].¹⁵

Jewish converts and Moorish writers from the court environment introduced new facets to Castilian religiosity. For example, Sufi mysticism influenced the introspection of Hispanic mendicant currents. This fact was reflected both in the vocabulary used in these writings, tending towards metaphors related to the love and divinity of the deity, and in new iconography such as the tree of life.¹⁶ Public-devotional actions such as processions, masses,

¹³ Vanesa Regalado del Valle, "El tratado *Jardín de nobles doncellas* y su influencia en la personalidad de Isabel la Católica," *Digilec* 6 (2019): 5.

¹⁴ María Julieta Vega García Ferrer, *Fray Hernando de Talavera y Granada* (Granada: Editorial Universidad de Granada, 2008), 39.

¹⁵ Teresa de Castro Martínez, "El tratado sobre el vestir, calzar y comer del arzobispo Hernando de Talavera," *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma. Historia Medieval* 14 (2001): 11–92.

¹⁶ Cynthia Robinson, *Imagining the Passion in a Multiconfessional Castile*, 150.

or alms were added to the evangelising nature of these devotional texts. Aware of the public relevance of her virtue, Isabella and her daughters were protagonists of these devotional activities. The girls' participation in these devotional activities had different objectives. Not only did it have a salvific purpose, but it also publicly showed the virtue of the princesses and the piety of the entire dynasty. Furthermore, their example served as an example for others in the desire to evangelise the territory.¹⁷ As this article will further examine, this was reflected in these women's reigns.

Christian Queens of Europe: María and Katherine of Aragon and Castile

Thanks to their vast progeny, the Catholic Monarchs created a marriage network that linked the Trastámara court with the main European ones. In this way, they were not only able to create new political-economic allies, but also to isolate their main enemy, France. The heiress Isabella married twice within the Portuguese royal family: first to Prince Alfonso and, after his death, to Manuel I of Portugal. Isabella's early death forced a final marriage with Portugal, this time between the *infanta* María and her sister's widower. For their part, Juan and Juana would be the protagonists of the Trastámara-Habsburg double alliance, marrying Margaret of Austria and Philip the Fair respectively. Finally, Katherine was married twice: first to Arthur Tudor and, after his death, to Henry VIII. After the deaths of Juan and Isabella, Juana was proclaimed queen of Castile in 1504. Thus, the princesses became queens and consorts of four of the main courts in Europe. It was in Portugal and England, where they served as queen consorts, that we best see examples of cross-confessionalism. These women's relationships with God were a topic of interest because they functioned as a model of virtue. However, despite the manifest importance that this part of the personal lives of Isabella, Juana, María, or Katherine had for their contemporaries and for future generations, the Castilian aspect of their religious training has gone largely unnoticed in the research carried out regarding these four women thus far. This article delves into this aspect, focusing our efforts on highlighting the Castilian aspects of the devotion of these women and the construction of the perfect Christian consort. Wedding processions, masses and artistic promotion are the pillars on which the devout public figure of these queens is here sustained.

Wedding Processions

On 12 November 1501, Katherine of Aragon, Princess of Wales, entered the city of London for her wedding to Prince Arthur. The chronicles highlighted the bride's exoticism:

¹⁷ Bethany Aram, *La reina Juana: gobierno, piedad y dinastía* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2001), 52.

On a large mule, with a rich saddle in the style of Spain; [...] Her body was richly dressed, in the style of her country, and on her head a small cap, in the manner of that of cardinals, beautifully embroidered, with a gold ribbon on this hat to be hidden; her hair loose on her shoulders, which is a light red colour, a kind of cap between her head and her carnation-coloured cap and this was tied from the middle of her head up and so the men could see all her hair from the half down.¹⁸

It is clear from this paragraph the impression that Katherine's aesthetics produced on the English viewer. Before them stood not a future Tudor bride, but an *infanta* of Castile and Aragon. This impression lasted in Katherine's subsequent appearances, such as, for example, on her wedding day.

On 23 June 1509, on her second marriage with a Tudor heir, Katherine's entry into the city and appearance presented marked differences with respect to previous chronicles:

Borne by two White Palfreis, the Litter couered, and richely appareled, and the Palfreis Trapped in White clothe of gold, her persone appareled in white Satin Embrodered, her heire hangyng donne to her backe, of a very great length, bewtefull and goodly to behold, and on her hedde a Coronall, set with many riche orient stones.¹⁹

Between both scenes a transformation took place in the figure of Katherine. The *infanta* who had arrived at the port of Plymouth was left behind to become the new queen of England. The responsibilities of the Castilian *infanta* were left behind, too; now she had to provide an heir to certify the rights of the Tudor dynasty to the throne.²⁰ Katherine's case perfectly exemplifies the transition that both she and her sisters undertook to become part of a new dynasty. The arrival of a new family and, with it, a new socio-cultural space, made Isabella's daughters foreigners in their new homes. Their beliefs and devotions were an element of unity and disagreement in their new courts.

Mass as an Element of Feminine Acceptance

At the end of December 1500, Ochoa Isasága, royal treasurer of the *Reyes Católicos*, wrote to his lords about the Christmas festivities of that year at the Portuguese court. The treasurer

¹⁸ Francis Grose, Thomas Astle, and E. Jeffery, ed., *Here begynneth the note and trewth of the moost goodly behavior in the receyt of the Ladie Kateryn* (London: T.C. & E.C. Jack, 1808), 278.

¹⁹ Edward Hall, *The lives of the Kings, Henry VIII with an introduction by Charles Whibley*, Volume 1 (London: T.C. & E.C. Jack, 1904), 12.

²⁰ Soler Moratón, "Arte y devoción," 278.

began by explaining the queen's private prayers. These were performed in Spanish, assisted by books of Hispanic origin, and accompanied by her Spanish confessor, Fray García de Padilla. This Hispanic character contrasted with the mass she attended with her husband. This took place in the palace chapel along with the rest of the court, officiated in Portuguese and using texts in this language.²¹ This shows how, even though María adapted to Portuguese devotional customs and converted these religious activities into public displays of virtue and dynastic religiosity, her intimate devotion had a Hispanic character. This explains why throughout her life María acquired Hispanic devotional works, such as a copy of the "*Revelaciones de Santa Brígida*."²²

María and the Lisbon Massacre of 1506

In 1497, as part of the marriage agreements between Manuel I of Portugal and the *Reyes Católicos*, the Portuguese king agreed to expel Jews from his territories. As they were an important part of the economy, in September of that year the king decreed that all Jews had to become Christians and prohibited them from leaving the territory. However, the Christian population was not satisfied, and, on 19 April 1506, a revolt began that ended the lives of 4,000 Jews in the city of Lisbon. It was Queen María who advised and asked the king to ask for public forgiveness for the events that occurred and to execute all those who participated in it.²³

Devotional Art Promotion: Learning and Development from María and Katherine

It is interesting to highlight how these queens of England and Portugal used their new positions to sponsor artistic works that served to project and consolidate their new positions. For example, Katherine, one of the great patrons of her period, used devotional art to learn about her new homeland and position. Thus, in her collection we can find what is known as the Hours of Katherine of Aragon, today in the Royal Library of Belgium. These Hours were produced in the Bruges workshop of Willem Vrelant around 1460, suggesting that this volume served as a didactic-linguistic element for the young Princess of Wales. Through this book she would learn English, a language in which she was not taught during her Castilian childhood. Her own signature in the volume confirms her use of it.²⁴

²¹ General Archive of Simancas (AGS), Estado, leg. 367, fol. 17.

²² Biblioteca Archivo Provincial Histórico de la Comunidad de Padres Franciscanos de Zarauz, *Obras curiosas*, núm. 1803, fol. 73.

²³ Isabel Dos Guimarães Sà, *Duas irmãs para um rei* (Lisbon: Circulo de Leitores, 2012), 141.

²⁴ Eamon Duffy, "A Very Personal Possession," *History Today* (November 2006), 14.

For her part, in 1513, Queen María founded a Hieronymite convent on the island of Berlengas to give comfort and sacrament to sailors. To decorate and nourish this new foundation, the queen sent ornamental elements from her own oratory that included silver, pieces of costume, and a sculpture of Our Lady the Virgin. By express wish of the queen in her will, the foundation received a total of fifty thousand *reales*, with the express ordinance of carrying out said action before any other. The Virgin taken from the rooms of the deceased queen would go to Berlengas along with pieces for the dressing room, a chasuble, dalmatic cape, and frontals that would decorate the small monastery.²⁵

Conclusions

As has been explored, the Christianity developed in Castile had outstanding particularities. The *infantas* of Castile and Aragon were raised under the prism of multiculturalism that supported territorial evangelisation over private devotion. Added to this was the use of Jewish and Moorish elements, with the aim of making Christianity more accessible. This influenced the devotional mechanisms which María and Katherine used to be accepted and validated as queens in their new courts, even influencing the politics of these territories.

They developed a public religious figure adapted to local traditions in their prayers, writings, and even clothing. This coexisted with a private devotional figure rooted in the Hispanic traditions that the queens cultivated throughout their lives supported by the purchase and promotion of works of art.

²⁵ Melania Soler Moratón, "Reyna de Portugal e de los Algarbes, de aqueude y de allende la mar en África, señora de Guinea e de la conquista e navegación: María Trastámara, segunda esposa de Manuel I de Portugal, y las artes," in *Isabel la Católica y sus hijas: El patronazgo artístico de las últimas Trastámara* (Murcia: Editum, 2020), 140–141.