

The Black Legend and the Image of Charles V in Spanish Historiography of XIX-Xx Centuries

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Abstract

The present study looks at the basic trends in studying the phenomenon of black legend and its influence on Charles V and his image in Spanish and European history. The historiographic tradition is classified into stages according to the changes in interpreting the monarch's life, his political, economic and cultural contribution into Spanish historical development. The approaches to Charles V's reign are also analyzed from geographical point of view. The attitudes to Charles V are analyzed from various angles. On the one hand, the key factor is the relation between estimations and associations with Philipp II. On the other hand, the reference mark is the imperial status of Spain, which provoked diversity in interpretations. In conclusion the authors highlight the importance of obtaining a clear and unbiased outlook on the problem.

Keywords: Cultural history; Political linguistics; Charles V; Legend.



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1. Introduction

Nowadays the figure of Charles V is one of the most popular in Spanish academic circles. However, the history of studying the Iberian emperor as a person is quite heterogeneous and contradictory. The views on Charles V as the founder of a new dynasty and new culture on Iberian Peninsula, as well as the ways of evaluating his contribution to the development of Iberian culture have varied during the whole period of researching this problem. The process of analysing Charles V's reign may be divided into several stages:

1. The period of accumulating and systematizing documentary material on the subject chronologically limited by the 19th century was marked by creation of general researches on the subject. It is worth mentioning that not only representatives of the Iberian Hispanism contributed to the analytical process, but also scholars from other European states. The starting point of the well-known polemics among Hispanists about the place of the Spanish emperor in the general historical development of Europe was made by the Germans Druffel and Maurenbrecker. A bit later appeared the first purely biographic research on Charles V by Baumgarten, focusing on the king and his relations with the reformation leaders. Military aspect of his reign attracted special attention of Italian historians De Leva, La Lumia and Alessandro Bardi. Special mentioning deserve the works by the Belgians M. Henne and Th. Juste. However, according to contemporary historiographers the above-mentioned works by the Italians and the Belgians while describing the hero (i.e. Charles V) they did not extend beyond national political interests and glorification of their motherland. In this respect the monograph Carlos V published by Louis-Prosper Gachard in 1872 occupies a specific position. M. Fernandes Alvares highlights exceptional role of this monograph in reconstructing the events of Charles V's reign. In France the first historian to study the figure of Spanish emperor was M. Mignet. Among Iberian historians we should mention Laiglesia, José Muñoz Maldonado (Conde de Fabraquer), Cánovas del Castillo, Rodríguez Villa, Bofarull y Sanz.

2. Period of analysis which covered the 20th century. This stage began with polemics between Karl Brandt and (Menéndez, 1937), which gave rise to two traditions:

- 1) Spanish;
- 2) German.

The debates between Brandt and Menéndez (1937) concentrated around Charles V's view over monarchy and its origin. Brandt's theory is based on Chancellor Gattinara's influence on the king. Menéndez (1937) views the emperor's ideas as the product of purely Spanish outlook inherited from the Catholic kings who stood for peace between Christian kings and Crusades against unbelievers. Later on, Sanchez Albornoz joins the polemics, initiating a new tradition. His successor (Jover, 1975) authored the dual conception of Charles V's policy: Aragonese and Catalan. Subsequent discussions mainly appealed to Charles V's attitude to religion, cultural policy and intercultural relations. The widest response got the works by J.A. Maravall, interpreting Charles V's ideas as a synthesis of medieval and Renaissance traditions.

However, this imperial view over Charles and his policy is not the only one. The work by A. Dominges Ortis *El Antiguo Régimen: los Reyes Católicos y los Austrias, y en De Carlos V a la Paz de los Pirineos. 1517-1660* is a shining example. The author considers it impossible to apply the term empire to Spain of that period due to its political and economic heterogeneity. Among European researchers of the 20th century the most outstanding are

Fernand Braudel, Pierre Chaunú, Henri Lapeyre, Konetzke, Chabod, Haring, and Merriman, who revealed various aspects of Charles V's reign. M. Bataillon investigates Erasmus' doctrine and their influence on the mindset of the emperor's court elite; Charles V's cultural policy is examined in the work by Koenigsberger; Bruno Anatra looks at Italy and its role in Charles V's. John Elliot, John Lynch, Defournet, Fiorato and Redondo, Pierre Civil, scrutinized the form of governing in Renaissance Spain. Antonio Fontán and Jerzy Axer study intellectual atmosphere in Spain and Spanish-Polish relations; documentary sources were analysed by Spaniard Cádenas and the Austrian Frédéric Edelemayer (Hornby, 2007).

Despite comparative popularity of Charles V among Spanish historians, this theme remained rather latent. The surge in this field occurred in the year 1998, which commemorated Charles V's 500th anniversary. This year Spanish government held a series of cultural and academic events in honour of Charles V and Philipp II. Museum expositions, conferences, symposiums, congresses and video projects actively covered by Mass Media took place not only in Spain, but also in other European countries. The scale and scope of the events demonstrated the keen interest, modern scholars have in Charles V. This widespread popularity was explained by Fernández (1975), who sees Charles V as a sincere and honest governor who struggled for united and peaceful Europe whose virtues provided his posthumous fame.

2. Methodology

The present study focuses on the main trends in historiography on Charles V and his contribution to Spanish historical development, therefore the methods to be used are those of systemic, comparative and retrospective analysis. The study is guided by the following principles: 1. Historicism; 2. Objectivity; 3. Integrity.

3. Results

There is no unique opinion about the role Charles V played in European history. It regards the uniqueness of Spanish historical development. Contemporary historians, apart from natural divergence in views, point out deliberate contortion. We refer to the so-called the black legend about Spain, which, according to J. Juderías and his followers had a huge effect on the way Charles V was seen by Spanish and European historians. The term black legend appeared in Spanish historiography at the end of the 19th century to refer to the dark myth formed around the Iberian state. The dark aureole around Spain is traditionally associated Philipp II. In modern Spanish studies the metaphor black legend is applied not only to Philipp II's Spain; a number of researchers, including R. García Carcel, associate this image with Charles V as well. The variations in interpreting this phenomenon are largely determined by historiographical tradition of presenting the relation between Charles V and Philipp II. The question consists in the degree of unity in their political, economic and cultural aims, as well as the way the subsequent generations viewed this unity. The existing black legend about Spain is traditionally applied to the name of Philipp II, and depending on the interpretation, it either falls upon his father, painting it in dark colours, or is opposed to it and presents the emperor in a much positive way.

Over the last several centuries the attitude to Charles V and his role in the historic development of Spain and Europe has changed several times. And if during the first two centuries after the death of the Spanish emperor his name was directly associated with the name of his son and was severely criticized, in 18th century the situation changed. Due to the popular tendency to contrapose Charles V to Philipp II his features as a historical figure acquire fundamentally new colouring. For example, (Lafuente, 1879) opposes Spanish vivacity of Charles V who was Flemish and Flemish composure of Philipp II who was Spaniard; restlessness of the first and permanent tranquillity of the second; open nature of the father and cold reservation of the son. Thus, by the 19th century Charles V was disassociated from his son's severe image, and so was the emperor's political course. At the turn of the century with the spread of positivist ideas in Spain, the relations between the two monarchs took another twist. Researchers elaborated a concept of so-called the sharp turn, according to which the originally identical aspirations of both Spanish kings suffered a drastic change. Positive image of Charles V and negative of Philipp II get historical explanation. This tradition was formed and retained for some time in Spanish studies of the 20th century. According to García Cárcel and Mateo Bretos (1990), this tendency dominated in European historiography throughout the whole century. Today the new researches on Philipp II affect the image of Charles V. New authors tend to recognize immediate succession between the two kings, therefore the sharp turn is interpreted as natural evolution in Philipp II's ideas. Charles V, thus, does not lose his prestige, and his role as one of the monarchs remains topical.

However, debates still exist, as well as certain conceptual discrepancies. The major controversies concern the king's early years. The fact that Charles V was born and brought up in Flanders seems rather ambiguous. On the one hand, Flemish education and the pro-European interests are often regarded as the reason of some of his failures (e.g. the rebellion of comuneros). As a matter of fact, Charles V was and still is often criticized for his lengthy absence from Spain which inevitably caused troubles. He was frequently disdainfully referred to as king the foreigner. On the other hand, Charles' ability to adjust to various cultures and interact with different nations may be interpreted in his favour. According to this view even Flemish education becomes less harmful being gradually offset by the increasing hispanization which culminates in his testament. Fernández (2017) emphasizes the fact that his will was written in Latin and Spanish, which testifies to his close approximation to Spanish spirit. A similar trend is evident in F. Checa's studies, which addresses cultural issues. He attributes Flemish influence to Charles's early years, pointing out the increasing prevalence of Spanish culture with the course of time.

An important aspect in assessing Charles V is his Emperor's status, obtained in the 16th century. For the 16th century Europe Charles was the emperor whose domains expanded throughout Europe and beyond its frontiers.

Despite relative wealth and impressive territories of Charles' kingdom, the young emperor was bound to face certain difficulties. The vast lands of his empire were scattered by the whole Europe, each patch being inhabited by a separate nation with its own language, customs and territories. Therefore, this large monarchy, possessing extensive lands, appeared to be quite a complicated structure to govern and thus became an object of controversies and debates not only among contemporaries but also the following generations (Folarin and Folarin, 2018).

1520 became a crucial year in Charles' life granting him the title of the emperor of the Holy Roman and German Empire. This fact has been perceived rather ambiguously for already several centuries. On the one hand, the era of the first Habsburgs on the Spanish throne is frequently seen as a period of splendor, inculcating pride in the hearts of their descendants. However, a number of hispanists call in question the fact of existence of Spanish Empire. To address this issue, we can appeal to the study of (Fuente Merás de la, 2005), who distinguishes two main vectors in studying the identity of this state: emic and etic. The emic position is mainly represented by Spanish historians who advocate the view, that having obtained imperial status a bit of a sudden, Spain took up the title with all the possible responsibility and took active part in the life of the Empire. What is more, a number of scholars studying the origins of imperial aspirations in Spanish kings, date them back to the Reconquista era, when gradual reconquest of their lands gave rise to the so called imperial ideology. As for the etic position, it is predominantly shared by foreign scholars. Its adherers tend to interpret Spain as a backward state and explain any advances in its economy and culture as a result of influence from the outside. In its most radical form this theory gets to deny the possibility to employ the term empire to XVI century Spain. For example, (Pro Ruiz, 2000) in his *La image historical de la España imperial como instrumento político del nacionalismo conservador* gives ideological explanation to the tradition to give imperial interpretation to Spanish history. He states that aggressive criticism towards Charles V and Philip II in the first half of the XIX century was a result of political situation in the country, while new trend in interpreting the contribution of Spanish Habsburgs which appeared in the 1950s were provoked by revolutions and subsequent transition to conservative ideology (Suiyerkul *et al.*, 2018)

The emperor is usually evaluated in accordance with the imperial framework, as well as his activities in political, social, economic and cultural spheres. Taking into account the abundance of interpretations, it seems rather logical that the same events and actions may be explained differently by various scholars. For some historians the emperor represents medieval Europe, who devoted his life to struggle for the Universitas Christiana. Others understand his nature as the last crusader and the defender of Europe against the threat of the Ottoman Empire. Another view represents Charles V as a versatile personality, a king who spoke four languages and governed the major part of Europe in the times, when even in terms of distance between separate states of the empire to fulfil the monarch's duties seems almost unfeasible. So, we have a wide range of views over Charles V and his reign, implying various explanations and numerous opinions (Antúnez, 2015).

4. Discussion

In order to outline the trends in interpreting the contribution of the first two Habsburg kings in Spanish history it seems reasonable to distinguish between two positions:

1. Critical view, which comprises the scholars whose attitude to Charles' policy is rather negative. The criticism is normally based on revealing medieval influence on Charles' way of thinking, which is equaled to rejecting new ideas. Another factor is his religious policy. This concept is shared by many European scholars and a number of Spanish historians who suppose Charles V to be the great loser. Fernández (1975) points out that for John Elliott, Joseph Pérez, Alfred Kohler Charles V is usually seen as incorporation of archaic ideals of the middle ages, opposed to the new era and its ideals. A shiny example of this concept are the lectures on cultural history delivered by George Mosse (University of Wisconsin, North America), one of the renowned historians of the second half of the XX century. Admitting the expanse of Spanish lands during Charles' reign and their high political status that time (being one of the largest states on the continents, along with Turkey and Russia), the lecturer highlights the medieval nature of the monarch's cultural heritage. This fact can hardly be disputed given the upbringing that the king received in the Netherlands and his subsequent interest in Erasmism. Hence, the Charles' mission as a peacekeeping, sagacious and virtual king seems rather natural. As well as his military policy aimed to liberate Christians from non-Christians and heretics (both Turks and Protestants). Unlike Fernández (1975) George Mosse infers that Charles V as well as Philip II advocate relics of the past, struggling against the reformed religion and the new culture. Therefore, their military triumphs are interpreted as a temporary success which will inevitably lead to frustration. According to Mosse, Spanish Habsburgs were devoid of Italian humanism and Machiavelli's ideas appeared unacceptable to their doctrine. Summing up, this position tends to represent Spanish kings as medieval kings who enjoyed transient success on the world arena, but soon lost their power. Much milder is the criticism by Hugh (2010). However, his relatively positive interpretation of Charles' reign does not impede him to consider this monarch a king-looser. Describing his last years spent in the Yuste monastery he assumes: most probably, he suffered from the feeling of failure. His project to unite Europe under the auspices of Catholic Church was defeated by the hand of Protestants.

2. The second position can be qualified as positive towards Charles and is mainly shared by Spanish scholars. This group of historians for example, (Fernández, 1975), (Heras de las, 2016) treats his reign as a prosperous epoch in Spanish history and rate this king among the greatest public figures of his age, whose name is deservedly kept in memory of next generations. Fernández (2017), for instance, describes the king as the greatest man of his time who aspired to unite Europe under the flag of Christianity. A famous Iberian historian (Menéndez, 1937) in his work *Idea imperial de Carlos V* defines the imperial title as a personification of the only person who is at the top of the hierarchy possessing authentically Roman glory. The monarch is expected to unite all nations in one large family

which shares the same religion, culture, policy and economy, therefore a Christian Empire prioritizes alliance over expansionism. These authors appeal to the fact that despite twofold influence on the emperor exercised by Gatinara and Mota, the king's counselors, he does not hesitate to opt for the second. So, Gatinara's ideas aimed to not only maintain the inherited lands and possessions, but also to expand them, seeking to establish a global monarchy cede the floor to Mota's doctrine. Hence, the mission of the emperor is far from conquering new lands, he is rather meant to fulfil his moral duty in front of his people and unite them: The aim guiding Charles when he took this empire was not to conquer new lands, the inherited territories were large enough..., but to perform the hard obligations imposed on him by the title of emperor. This point of view is very common among Spanish historians and the image of peacekeeping sovereign uniting all nations in one family is considered fundamental. (Heras de las, 2016) attributes to Charles the same characteristics: Charles considered being responsible for all Christian society, not only a part of it. Such attitude, however, does not prevent Charles from sharing humanistic ideals. The same (Heras de las, 2016) writes in his article that Charles represents along with a crusader a Renaissance man, and behind a soldier is hidden a talented politician, capable of successfully conducting peace negotiations.

5. Conclusions

Resuming all the facts mentioned above, we can infer that interpretation of historical events and figures vary substantially according to the scholar's belonging to a certain country, his political and economic antipathies and predilections, moral and cultural values. Every period leaves its mark on the way people see and explain their history. It can be clearly seen, that even associations with a certain contemporary or relative might considerably transform public attitudes, as it happened to Charles V and Philipp II. The dark shade attributed to the son, frequently affected the historian's view of Charles V's doings. The same can be said about national stereotypes and traditions to interpret certain historical phenomena. For this reason, the recent studies on Charles V and his contribution into Spanish historical development are of paramount importance. It is vital to reconsider the emperor's legacy and get a clear and realistic understanding of his place in Spanish history. In this respect historiographic studies are indispensable, being a tool to separate facts from prejudice and provide an unbiased outlook.

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