

## Introduction

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When Jon Arrieta at the start of his stay in Oxford in 2005 suggested a seminar on “Forms of Union in the British and Spanish Monarchies in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries”, I welcomed the idea enthusiastically, both because of its historical importance and because of its contemporary relevance. If I may be allowed a personal reference, it is a subject that has been close to the centre of my interests ever since I began researching in the 1950’s into the history of Habsburg Spain. My study of the origins of the revolt of the Catalans in 1640 against the policies of the government in Madrid headed by the Count-Duke of Olivares brought me face to face with a theme that is central to the history of modern Spain –the theme of the relationship between Castile, the dominant kingdom in the Spain created by the union of the Crowns of Castile and Aragon in the late fifteenth century, and the other kingdoms, regions and peoples of the Iberian peninsula. This theme of the fluctuating relationship between what I called –I think not very satisfactorily– centre and periphery, was the guiding thread in my book, *Imperial Spain*, published in 1963. Ever since then it has continued to inform my thinking, not only about Spain itself, but also about the *monarquía española*, including Spain’s overseas empire in America.

Among the British historians who read my *The Revolt of the Catalans* was the young Conrad Russell, who was then at an early stage of his researches into seventeenth-century British history. As he later told me, the reading of that book gave him insights into the problem of absentee kingship and of the relationship between England, Scotland and Ireland, which he would go on to develop in his studies of what he called the British question and the origins of the English civil war, or, as it is now coming to be called, “the War of the Three Kingdoms”. We have come a long way since British history was largely English history, just as we have come a long way since Spanish history was largely the history of Castile.

This has had important implications for our general understanding of the development of European states, and the European state-system, in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The whole thrust of nineteenth and early twentieth-century European historiography was directed towards interpreting and vindicating the centralized nation-state as the logical, and desirable, culmination of a thousand years of European history. Alternative

forms of state organization, like Austria-Hungary, came to be regarded as political anachronisms, the unsustainable relics of a discredited past, and the break-up of Austria-Hungary at the end of the First World War seemed to confirm this judgment.

But since the end of the Second World War there has been a marked change of attitude as new political forces have come into play across the continent. Attempts to build a European community have led to a diminution of the sovereignty of the nation-state in favour of a supra-national organization with echoes of the empire of Charles V, who was born, if not in Brussels, at least in Ghent. At the same time the centralized nation-state has come under pressure from below, as well as from above. On the one hand we have seen the resurgence of national and ethnic groups which, for one reason or another, either failed to achieve the status of independent statehood during the preceding centuries or, alternatively (like Scotland), lost it. On the other we have seen the resurgence of *regions*, anxious to secure a greater degree of control over their own lives by loosening the ties that bind them too tightly to central government. The effect of this realignment of political, national and regional forces in contemporary Europe has been to revive interest in those alternative forms of political organization which, until as recently as half a century ago, seemed to have been relegated to the scrapheap of history.

This process of rethinking and reshaping the international structure of Europe and the internal structure of the European state has gone hand in hand with the rethinking by historians of the earlier history of European state-formation. To some extent at least the processes of rethinking by politicians on the one hand and historians on the other have interacted, in the sense that historians have been alive to the political movements at work in contemporary Europe, while politicians –or so I would like to think– have picked up ideas that are floating in the historical air. Work by historians of Spain, Italy and the Netherlands on the *monarquía española* of the Spanish Habsburgs, by historians of central Europe on the Austrian Empire, and by British historians on developments in the British Isles between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries, has helped to accustom us to the idea of what I called, in an article published in *Past and Present* in 1992, “A Europe of Composite Monarchies”<sup>1</sup>.

Whatever term we choose –“composite monarchies”, “multiple kingdoms”, “dynastic agglomerates”<sup>2</sup>–, we now have a pretty good idea of what it involves. We are looking at political entities in which two or more polities have been brought together in some form of association or merger. The

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1. ELLIOTT, J. H. “A Europe of Composite Monarchies”, In: *Past and Present*, 187 (1992); pp. 48-71. Reprinted In: ELLIOTT, J. H. *Spain, Europe and the Wider World, 1500-1800*, New Haven and London: 2009), ch. 1.

2. The term suggested by John Morrill in his Stenton Lecture for 2005, “‘Uneasy Lies the Head that Wears a Crown’. Dynastic Crises in Tudor and Stewart Britain, 1504-1746” (University of Reading, 2005); p. 11.

seventeenth-century Spanish jurist, Juan de Solórzano Pereira, identified two ways in which a newly acquired territory might be united to the monarch's other dominions. One of these was what he called "accessory union", whereby a kingdom or province, on being united with another, was regarded as juridically part of it, with its inhabitants possessing the same rights, and subject to the same laws. This form of union might come about in particular as a consequence of conquest, as it did, for instance, with the American territories which fell to the conquistadores, and were juridically incorporated into the Crown of Castile. But the more common form of union in the Early Modern period was what Solórzano Pereira called union "aeque principaliter", in which the constituent kingdoms were brought together through marriage or dynastic inheritance, and each of them, although henceforth ruled by the same monarch, retained its own laws and institutions. This applied to most of the kingdoms and provinces that came to form part of the *monarquía española*, even if, as with Navarre or Naples, they might technically be regarded as conquered territories. It is worth noting, incidentally, that, under the terms of the marriage settlement, if a child had been born of the marriage of Philip II to Mary Tudor and succeeded to the joint thrones of England and Spain, sixteenth-century England, united to Castile "aeque principaliter", would have preserved its own laws and institutions.

I suspect that Solórzano Pereira's distinction between his two forms of union –accessory union and union on an equal footing, or "aeque principaliter"– is too clear-cut to cover the complexities of political union in Early Modern Europe. The "incorporating union" of England and Scotland in 1707, for instance, seems to fall neatly into neither category, since, while the Scots lost their parliament, they preserved their church and their legal system. But, as John Robertson says in his contribution to this volume, the "rigidity of the choice facing the Scots was also a reflection of a wider inflexibility in European thinking about forms of union." As he tells us, it was difficult to conceive of a union in which there were inequalities of power, a genuinely federal union, rather than one that was either confederal or incorporating.

It is clearly necessary for us to be alive to the concepts of a period, as also to the vocabulary in which they were expressed, as Pablo Fernández Albaladejo demonstrates in discussing the vocabulary available to the Count-Duke of Olivares when he attempted to introduce his ideas for the government of Spain. It is clear that the novelty of his projects was out of step with the traditional language in which he had to formulate them. This in turn raises the question as to whether there were significant national variants. For the Scots, the word "province" suggested dependency. For seventeenth-century Catalans, on the other hand, it seems to have been a neutral term which they could use of the Principality without implying any form of subordination<sup>3</sup>.

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3. For the use of the word *provincia* in seventeenth-century Catalonia, see TORRES SANS, Xavier. *Naciones sin nacionalismo. Cataluña en la monarquía hispánica (siglos XVI-XVII)*, Valencia, 2008; pp. 114-121.

It is, however, necessary to range more widely than the technicalities of union, however fascinating these may be from both a historical and a juridical standpoint. We need to consider how unions operated in practice, and how they changed over time. At some moments, unions appear to function well; at other moments not so well. Why should this be, and what makes a union work? How, in other words, do –and should– composite states operate, and to what extent do they call for a different kind of politics from the politics of a centralized state?

What is clear is that juridical forms are not in themselves sufficient to ensure a union's success. The contributions to this volume demonstrate the need to pay attention to topics that aroused contemporary sensitivities, such as the name to be given to the new collective entity, the language to be employed in its administration, and the nature and degree of integration, including psychological and economic integration, that was sought and achieved. These topics will not be easy to handle, but they deserve more systematic treatment than they have so far received.

As regards nomenclature, for example, in 1603 James VI and I wanted to impose the name of "Great Britain" on the collectivity of his territories. While this was relatively acceptable to the Scots, it displeased the English, who, as Jenny Wormald tells us, were afraid that "England" would be marginalized. The English solved the problem to their own satisfaction by using "England" and "Britain" interchangeably, and tended to speak of Scotland and Wales as if they formed part of England. Castilians similarly tended to identify Castile with Spain, in spite of the protests of the other Iberian peoples.

Where language is concerned, this did not have the importance in the early modern period that it would possess from the early nineteenth century onwards, with the advent of Romanticism. But in some instances, as in seventeenth-century Catalonia, the question of the language used by the royal administration could prove to be highly sensitive. Equally, however, language could be a useful weapon of defence against the dominant power. According to a recent article on seventeenth-century Flanders, when Madrid attempted to appoint a Spaniard to the Council of Finance in Brussels, the influential royal councillor Pierre Roose replied as follows:

To achieve the desired effect, the Spaniard who is to join the Council and inform His Majesty of the financial situation would need to know the French language very well. Alternatively, His Majesty would have to order that Castilian should be the spoken and written language for Council business, and that all documents authorizing the collection and distribution of money should be drafted in the same language. The first would be difficult, the second impossible<sup>4</sup>.

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4. VERMEIR, René. "Les limites de la monarchie composée. Pierre Roose, factotum du comte d'Olivares aux Pays-Bas espagnols", In: *XVIIe Siècle*, 240 (2008); pp. 495-518, at p. 508.

As for integration, religious differences in Great Britain obviously presented serious obstacles to the union of the different kingdoms, whereas in Spain this problem did not arise. The differences between the Anglican and Scottish forms of Protestantism played an important part in the outbreak of the Civil War, as also in the attempts to achieve a more perfect union, while the conflict between a Protestant England and a Roman Catholic Ireland disastrously affected the relationship between the two countries over the course of more than four centuries.

While the religious question was an exclusively British problem, economic integration, on the other hand, created enormous difficulties both in the Iberian peninsula and in the British Isles. Readers of this volume will quickly become aware of the great importance of customs barriers as obstacles to union; and Jesús Astigarraga's account of the impact of the barriers on the politics of the Basque provinces well into the nineteenth century can only enhance admiration for the skill of the delegates who negotiated the Anglo-Scottish union in 1707 in constructing out of the two countries a single commercial and industrial entity.

Finally, as Pablo Fernández Albaladejo and Jenny Wormald demonstrate, much remains to be said about the challenge facing the partisans of a looser union in attempting to overcome the kind of ethnic and national differences that seemed to stand in the way of a union of hearts and minds. Here a fascinating comparison could be made between the policies adopted by James I and those of the Count-Duke of Olivares. Both of them were very conscious of the challenge, and anxious to overcome it as far as possible, but while James I quickly came to appreciate the impossibility of realizing his ambition in the near future and adjusted his policies to the realities of the situation, the Count-Duke persisted with his schemes to the point of leading his country to disaster. Was James a more prudent and agile politician than Olivares, or is it simply that the pressures of war left the Count-Duke with no other option?

These are questions of more than purely antiquarian interest. Indeed, they possess a direct contemporary relevance. In the opening years of the eighteenth century, the constitutional structures of Britain and Spain underwent major upheavals. The Anglo-Scottish union of 1707, replacing the dynastic union of 1603 brought about by the accession of James VI of Scotland to the English throne, meant a radical change in the constitutional structure of Great Britain. It produced new and significant asymmetries between the different parts of a British composite monarchy that was transformed by the Glorious Revolution of 1688 into an entirely new historical phenomenon, a composite *parliamentary* monarchy.

These asymmetries are understandable if one thinks of the different ways in which the territories subject to the British crown had been united. The principality of Wales had effectively been assimilated into England in 1536 under a form of accessory union. Ireland, elevated to the status of a kingdom in 1541, preserved its own parliament, but was effectively an English conquest, and was treated as such. Scotland lost its parliament in 1707, but was otherwise

treated, in theory if not necessarily in practice, as having been united 'aeque principaliter'. When the House of Hanover ascended to the British throne in 1714, George I, as King of Great Britain, continued to be the Elector of Hanover, and the electorate, which formed part of the Holy Roman Empire, preserved its traditional institutions. In due course the ministers of George I and George II would learn how to manipulate one or other of the king's two titles to advance the foreign policy objectives they wished to pursue<sup>5</sup>. As for the British colonies in North America, each of which had its own representative assembly, the uncertainties surrounding their constitutional status were to have momentous consequences in the second half of the eighteenth century.

These constitutional asymmetries between the territories ruled by eighteenth-century British monarchs created opportunities but also signalled dangers, both for the government and for the territories themselves. By contrast, in the Spanish Monarchy the Bourbon dynasty which succeeded the Habsburgs on the throne in 1700 introduced drastic constitutional changes between 1707 and 1716. The *Nueva Planta* abolished the traditional laws, liberties and institutions of the territories of the Crown of Aragon –the kingdoms of Aragon and Valencia, and the principality of Catalonia– and subjected them directly to the central government in Madrid. In the formulation of Ricardo García Cárceles, the 'horizontal Spain' of the House of Austria was replaced by the 'vertical Spain' of the Bourbons<sup>6</sup>. But even the vertical, centralized and absolutist Spain of the Bourbons was not a completely unitary state. The Catalans retained their civil law and their local usages, while the Basque provinces and Navarre, which had been willing to accept the new dynasty, preserved a separate status that survived without major change until 1876.

In Spain, following the Napoleonic invasion of 1808, and the loss of the greater part of its American empire, the Bourbon unitary state was subjected to growing strains and tensions. The Spanish Civil War can be seen, from one point of view, as the culmination of the long struggle between horizontal and vertical Spain that began with the imposition of the *Nueva Planta* over two centuries earlier. The Franco regime restored vertical Spain, but with the transition to democracy and a constitutional monarchy following the death of Franco and the new constitution of 1978, horizontal Spain has once again moved into the ascendant. In Britain, the strains and tensions came later –first with the Irish uprising and the creation of an independent Irish republic in the 1920's, and then more recently– again following the loss of overseas empire –in the upsurge of Scottish and Welsh nationalism. In both instances I believe that there is a direct relation between the loss of empire and the resurgence of nationalist sentiments at home.

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5. See the discussion of the British-Hanoverian connection and its foreign policy implications in SIMMS, Brendan. *Three Victories and a Defeat. The Rise and Fall of the First British Empire*, London, 2008; especially pp. 90-92, and 295.

6. GARCÍA CÁRCELES, Ricardo. *Felipe V y los españoles. Una visión periférica del problema de España*, Barcelona, 2002; pp. 114-124.

Spain with its 1978 constitution, and Britain with its moves in the direction of devolution, have therefore both been faced in recent years with the problem of how to work out new and effective forms of union appropriate for a new era. Both countries are aware of the need to rethink the inheritance of the past, looking at what deserves to be salvaged, and what can be jettisoned. Historians have a vital part to play in this process of rethinking, and, if they do their work well, might even manage to convince today's dangerously a-historical politicians that they can learn something from the past. The problems of living together, of what Spaniards call *convivencia*, are the problems of every age, and remain crucial to our survival. Let us hope that the past can provide us with some guidance.

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