

A Monarchy – ancient and modern

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As we welcome HM The King of Spain to London this week, this State Visit is both a celebration of a Monarch at the confluence of great tides, ancient and modern, but also of a relationship between the British and Spanish monarchies that is centuries deep.

As with all centuries-old monarchies the succession has occasionally been far from smooth. In the twentieth century, the Spanish monarchy has gone through a series of traumas that have left many exalted monarchies prostrate and off their thrones.

At the dawn of the twentieth century, Spain found itself with a thirteen year old monarch, King Alfonso XIII, who was under the Regency of his mother, an Austrian Archduchess. Even on birth, Alfonso had a dramatic effect on the Spanish succession. His father, Alfonso XII, had died the previous year, leaving two daughters, but also a newly pregnant widow. Spain then practiced a law of succession similar to Britain's, whereby in the event of a failure in a generation to produce a male heir, female succession in that generation would ensue. Spain therefore had to endure the suspense of six months awaiting the royal birth of either a boy, who would immediately succeed, or a girl who would take third place, to her elder sister in accession to the throne. In the event, in 1886, baby Alfonso succeeded at birth.

Alfonso XIII came of age in 1902, and set about identifying a potential bride. In 1905, on an earlier State Visit to Britain, Alfonso was introduced by an unlikely cupid, King Edward VII, to his niece Princess Victoria Eugenie of Battenberg. Known to her family as "Ena", Victoria was the daughter of Princess Beatrice, herself the youngest daughter of Queen Victoria. Resigned to being her mother's companion in her old age, Beatrice had found a royal husband prepared to live in the shadow of her dominant mother – Prince Henry of Battenberg.

Henry of Battenberg was a younger son of Prince Alexander of Hesse and by Rhine, who hadmorganatically married Countess Julia Hauke. In those days princes were obliged to marry other royal princesses, at pain of inappropriate marriages being deemed 'morganatic'. Julia did not become a Princess of Hesse, but was instead created Princess of Battenberg, a title which descended to their children. Henry's eldest brother, Louis, in his turn became Prince of Battenberg, but moved to Britain and joined the Royal Navy, rising to become First Sea Lord at the outbreak of the first world

war, father to Lord Louis Mountbatten, last Viceroy of India and also First Sea Lord, and grandfather to Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh.

Henry and Beatrice had four children. The eldest, Prince Alexander, renounced his German title in 1917, and was created Marquess of Carisbrooke (his uncle Louis did likewise, becoming Marquess of Milford Haven). Their two younger sons were Lord Leopold Mountbatten, who died of haemophilia in 1922, and Prince Maurice of Battenberg, who served in the British Army in the first world war, and was killed at Ypres in 1914. Their only daughter was Victoria Eugenie, born at Balmoral. Henry himself served as a Colonel in the British Army in the Ashanti War in West Africa, contracted malaria, and died aboard HMS Blonde, off Sierra Leone.

The proposed marriage between Ena and Alfonso XIII had a number of obstacles to overcome. Ena, a Protestant, had to convert to Roman Catholicism. A female-line descendant of Queen Victoria, she was a potential carrier of haemophilia (her brother Leopold was to die of it). His mother hankered for him to marry a Habsburg. Nevertheless the marriage went ahead, and they were married in 1906 at the Royal Monastery of San Jerónimo in Madrid.

They had four sons and two daughters. Their initial fears of haemophilia were borne out, as it afflicted two of their sons, including their eldest son, Infante Alfonso, who died in 1931, in a motor accident. Their second son was Infante Jaime, who renounced the succession due to his deafness, and was created Duke of Segovia. His descendants are considered by legitimists to be the senior line of the House of Bourbon.

The reign of Alfonso XIII began with the trauma of the Spanish American War, in which Spain lost to the United States the Philippines, Cuba and a host of Pacific possessions. A period of social unrest ensued, despite Spain's neutrality during the first world war, which was exacerbated by poor constitutional government. The defeat of the Spanish Army at Rif, in Morocco in 1921, led to further unrest, culminating in a military coup and the establishment of a dictatorship under Primo de Rivera. His regime was opposed by continuing civil unease, growing opposition within the Army, and finally he was deposed in 1930. Nevertheless, Alfonso was tainted by association. With the growing international economic storm, and with continuing government

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Below:
King Felipe with Queen Letizia and Leonor, Princess of Asturias and Infanta Sofia of Spain

failings, unpopularity caused Alfonso to flee the country, and the Second Republic was proclaimed. Settled in Rome, Alfonso died in 1941, having renounced his rights in favour of his only surviving son, Infante Juan.

Juan, Count of Barcelona, went into exile with his father in 1931, and developed a career as a naval officer in the British Royal Navy. In 1936, he was sent by his father to Madrid to participate in the military uprising which heralded the Spanish Civil War. However, its leader, General Mola, sent him packing. General Franco declared Spain a Monarchy in 1947. However he suspected the democratic tendencies of Juan, and their relationship deteriorated.

Franco tinkered with an alternative Prince Alfonso, Duke of Cádiz, elder son of the Duke of Segovia. He had married Franco's granddaughter, María del Carmen Martínez-Bordiú y Franco. However, the marriage collapsed, and his Spanish aspirations faded, although his legitimist Bourbon claims persisted.

Franco then turned back to the heir to the throne, the Count of Barcelona. Despite his suspicions of the Count's democratic tendencies, he did a deal that the Count's son would succeed him as Head of State, and therefore as King. In 1969, this was formalised, and six years later on Franco's death, Juan Carlos succeeded to a restored Spanish Monarchy. Infante Juan formally renounced his rights in 1977, underlining Spanish legitimacy. The 1977 Spanish constitution also asserted the succession in the Bourbon tradition, thereby scrapping the disposition of Franco.

Infante Juan died in 1993, and was afforded a funeral with honours due to a King, being buried in the Royal Crypt near Madrid. He had married Princess Maria Mercedes of Bourbon-Two Sicilies, the daughter of the second marriage of his uncle Prince Carlos. They had one son, King Juan Carlos, and three daughters. He lived in exile during the second world war in Switzerland with

his mother, and later at Estoril in Portugal.

Juan Carlos, initially in exile with his parents, moved to Spain in 1948 under the agreement with Franco, and embarked on a military career. In 1969 he took up his formal role as Heir under the formal title of Prince of Spain. Outwardly, he was supportive of Franco, but privately, he was in constant touch with his father in Estoril, opposition leaders and exiles. As King, he pressed for reform, and the Falangists increasingly realised that their cause was slipping away. In 1981, an attempted military coup at the Parliament Building was foiled, and King Juan Carlos appeared in full uniform as Captain-General of the Armed Forces on television to proclaim his unambiguous support for the legitimate democratic government. This fatally undermined the insurrection, and cemented the loyalty of the people for the restored monarchy.

In 1962, he had married in Athens Princess Sophia, daughter of Paul, King of Greece, of a dynasty descended from the first King, Prince George of Denmark, second son of King Christian IX, who had been selected by the Great Powers to become King of the Hellenes, in 1863. They had two daughters, and a son, Felipe – the current King of Spain.

The reign of Juan Carlos presided over a Spain which went through a thorough transformation, as it joined the European Community in 1986. His reign, however ended in disappointment. The effects of the prolonged recession, an unwise shooting expedition to Botswana, and his own ill-health, culminated in his abdication in 2014, at the age of 76.

Felipe VI, King of Spain, was born in Madrid in January 1968. He was educated in Spain, Canada and the United States. As a modern monarch he has taken a series of steps unexpected of the ancient Bourbon dynasty.

He has discarded ancient tradition by neither marrying a foreign princess nor a daughter of a family of Spanish grandees. Born in 1972, Letizia Ortiz Rocasolano, was a journalist and TV news anchor. She was a divorcée, following a brief marriage. The announcement of their engagement in 2003 caught the media unawares. They married a year later at the Almudena Cathedral in Madrid, in the presence of members of the world's royal families, and Presidents of most Latin American Republics. They have since had two daughters.

King Felipe has restored the popularity of the Monarchy in Spain during very difficult times, and introduced a number of modernising reforms to his court, to bring it into line with the expectations of the twenty-first century.

In this State Visit, accompanied by Queen Letizia, he is treading in the footsteps of illustrious predecessors, but doing so in a contemporary way. We welcome Their Majesties, and wish them a long, happy and successful reign. **F**



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