

The Iberian union

The disappearance of Dom Sebastião – whether *encoberto* or fallen in battle – plunges Portugal into serious troubles. There are no direct heirs to the throne (King Sebastian was childless): how can the problems of succession be avoided? The only alive brother of the dead king Dom João III, the elderly- and sick- cardinal Henrique, once ascended the throne, makes an attempt. He writes to the Pope: Seen the exceptionality of the situation, let his Holiness allow me to have children. I am not looking for the sensual pleasures: at my age and given my health conditions, it would be absurd. Avoiding to my Country instability, wars and riots is what I want. But the times, those times, are not the most suitable times. In order to regain credibility in the face of the pressing Lutheran Reform, the Roman Church is predicating discipline and severity. Thus, the Pope, perhaps “advised”, surely influenced by Philipp II, King of Spain, refuses the authorisation. This is a big problem for the new Portuguese king.

And it is not the only problem. The prisoners of Alcacer Quibir are to be ransomed and a significant amount of money is necessary. A lot of money. Anyway, the Cardinal-king, is able to bring back home the most part of them. At a huge cost, however.

But on the other front, the front of the succession, things are not as easy. The game is played between the descendants not of Dom João III -- whose line is extinguished or, better yet, will be extinguished with the death of Cardinal Henrique -- but of Dom Manuel *o Venturoso*. The best cards are in the hands of a nine –year- old child, Ranuccio, the son of a king’s granddaughter, Maria, and of the Flanders’ governor, Alessandro Farnese. But Portugal cannot have a child on the throne: a severe economical crisis requires quick interventions and firm hand.

Also the elder sister of Maria, Catarina, duchess of Bragança, has in her hands good cards, but she plays them poorly because she is worried to compromise herself and to lose her wealth and properties due a hasty move. Advised by her husband, she does not take a clear position, and waits for the moves of the other pretenders to the throne.

Maria’s cousin, Antonio, the former prior of Crato, is, on the contrary, a determined individual. Illegitimate grandson of Dom Manuel, Antonio can count on many followers in the Country. He is educated, is a survivor of the Moroccan disaster and the only male descendant of *O Venturoso*’s line. His uncle, the Cardinal-king, however, dislikes him and does not lose occasion to thwart his efforts. He revokes a decree that legitimates Antonio and, even though only for few days, exiles him. When he summons the Cortes to have their advice about the succession to the throne, Dom Henrique does not mention his nephew: the game must be played between Catarina of Bragança and the King of Spain Felipe II, he claims.

Felipe II (Philip the Second) has got solid connections with Portugal. His first wife, Maria Manuela, the mother of the unfortunate Dom Carlos dead in mysterious circumstances, was the daughter of the King Dom Manuel. And Felipe II is also nephew, on his mother’s side, of king Dom Manuel himself. At his side he has blood ties and authority, but, in particular, the best infantry of those times: the *tercios* (the regiments, the battalions) of the Duke of Alba.

Felipe II plays his game skilfully: he promises and assures, persuades and flatters, bribes and threatens. Many people, in Portugal, are swayed, one way or another: the aristocrats and the clergy hope to acquire privileges and wealth, the traders hope to receive customs advantage. Paradoxically it is the Spaniards who are discontent: they are unwilling to share power and business with the Portuguese.

When Dom Henrique dies in the early years of 1580, Antonio proclaims himself king, Catarina gives-up; Emanuele Filiberto of Savoy – related with Dom Manuel – remains silent and Felipe II sends his *tercios* and his fleet to Portugal. Antonio withstands for a short time, then he is compelled to leave his Country. Some months later, with the help of

France and England, he will try his revenge by leading a rebellion in the Azores, but without success. In Portugal, now, few stand by his side: Felipe II's era has begun. "I am dying *in* and *with* my homeland", Camoes will say on his deathbed(1580).

However, at the beginning, Portugal does not seem to suffer significant political or economic damage. It maintains its own autonomy, its own currency, its own laws, its own language (" There is a stone that prevent the imposition of the Castilian in Portugal: Camões' poem", comments Felipe II) its own administration , even tough it must uniform its foreign policy with Spain's foreign policy. But the social peace and the internal stability are deemed-- or they seem to be deemed -- worth this price.

By law, Spaniards are not allowed to hold administrative, ecclesiastical or judiciary positions, unless they are members of the Royal family and married with Portuguese. Felipe II (The First of Portugal) himself, called the *Prudent King*, spends two years in Lisbon. His political commitments do not prevent him from writing affectionate letters to his daughters, who remain in Madrid . He wants to know about their education, about the works in progress at Aranjuez, where a superb royal palace is being constructed. He envisions the splendour of the gardens during spring and the birds fitting from branch to branch, from tree to tree. This attitude appears to be astonishing for a man considered cold, calculating, unscrupulous, sinister- a man in front of whom, at court, everybody trembles even just in his mere presence. This fear is so palpable that an affirmation, *Sosèagos* (calm down) , by which the king tried to calm down his scared interlocutors, has passed into history .