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FERDINAND II OF THE HOLY ROMAN GERMANIC EMPIRE. LOOKS AT HIS ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

The following article develops and reflects on aspects of the life of the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Ferdinand II of Habsburg. We were deeply interested on this aspect of his biography because it includes transcendental subjects such as the Thirty Years' War. Citing exceptional writers who focused their articles and books mostly on the aforesaid war, we collected enough information to determine the influential and important role of Ferdinand II.

KEY WORDS: biography - Ferdinand II - History of Culture

FERNANDO II DEL SACRO IMPERIO ROMANO GERMÁNICO. MIRADAS AL ENTORNO

RESUMEN:

El siguiente artículo desarrolla y reflexiona aspectos de la vida del emperador del Sacro Imperio Romano Germánico, Fernando II de Habsburgo. Nos interesamos profundamente en este aspecto de su biografía debido a que relata temas tan importantes como el de la Guerra de los Treinta Años. Citando autores excepcionales que enfocaron sus textos en la mencionada Guerra, recopilamos suficiente información para determinar el papel tan influyente e importante de Fernando II.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Biografía - Fernando II - Historia de la Cultura

1. INTRODUCTION

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1.1 Ferdinand II of the Holy Roman Germanic Empire. Hapsburg Dynasty

The following paper will deal mainly with the importance and influence of the Roman Germanic Emperor, Ferdinand II. We will start this brief account by making an introduction to the important and reigning Hapsburg Dynasty to which Ferdinand II belonged.

Knowing that Fernando II was very influential during his reign as Emperor of the Holy Roman Germanic Empire, this paper will focus primarily on developing and highlighting his role in the Thirty Years' War.

As clearly expressed by Pavel Marek in his text *The Spanish and Papal Dynasty in the Imperial Court of Ferdinand II*, the relationship between the members of the Hapsburg House led them to be what they were. During his reign in Spain, Phillip II deemed it necessary that both the Emperor and the King should be involved to achieve, one way or another, religious and economic stability at that time. Realizing how irresolute his relatives in Vienna were, he commanded that a court be installed order to convince them to engage more fully in the imperial policy of Spain. "*The situations in both branches of this house were very tense,*" says the aforementioned author. (Marek, 2008, p. 113-114)

1.2 Ferdinand II and his accession to the throne

After almost entirely having the Emperor's will to support the Spanish King and protect the Holy See at all costs, the protestants began to win battles. Upon his allying to France, the pope at that time inspired some insecurity and uncertainty that made protestants, if you will excuse the repetition, protest. (Marek, 2008, p. 115) According to Miguel Lasso de La Vega and Lopez de Tejada, (*The Embassy in Germany of Count de Oñate and the Election of Ferdinand II*. Madrid, 1929), it was not until Ferdinand of Styria acceded to the throne as King of Bohemia, this being the way in which, according to Marek, "*(...) the Spanish and papal diplomats at the Viennese court acted with consistency (...)*" imposing their choice. (Marek, 2008, p. 117)

In accordance with the writer Lasso de la Vega and Lopez de Tejada, I consider that Marek affirms the above because the man who would be known later as Ferdinand II was known to defend the Catholic religion to the hilt; after all, this was the main interest of the Court and that is why, among other things, they looked after his being elected. (De la Vega and Lopez de Tejada, 1929)

2. OBJECTIVE

Peter H. Wilson considers the war that was to start to be one of the most horrific ones in history. In a very interesting way, Manuel Alcaide Mengual tells the causes of the Thirty Years' War; however, I will focus primarily on highlighting the influence and participation of Ferdinand II. (Alcaide Mengual, S / F, p. 2-3)

In the Catholic Encyclopedia, Marin Spahn states how Protestantism in Europe was a process with ups and downs; by that I mean that we cannot consider the cause to

have been only one or a few; conversely, that breeding ground was expected to grow and ferment the necessary environment to trigger a war that could have started for religious reasons; however, the reason for the war will no longer be only one as time goes by. Nonetheless, he clearly states that the key factor for that war to break out was Protestantism.

3. METHODOLOGY

From the approaches of several authors-researchers, reasoned assessments were made in discourse analysis in order to develop reflective statements about the debate. The documentary and bibliographic methods were the background to obtain the results presented herein.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 Biography of Ferdinand II

Going into this subject in more depth, Ferdinand II was an active member of the Habsburg House, he was the son of Charles II and Maria Anna of Bavaria. Aided by his relatives, he came to be King of Bohemia and, due to his devotion to the Catholic religion, as he noticed an air of Protestantism in his land, he decided to start the rebellion that took place first in the city of Bohemia (Sturmberger, 2013).

Also, based on the texts by Robert Bireley and Cicely Veronica Wedgwood, both being entitled *The Thirty Years' War*, the same author describes Ferdinand II in much more detail. Both texts point out that he was kind, benevolent, an impressive monarch fully devoted to believing in the greatness of his dynasty. He spoke German, Italian and Spanish, so we assumed his education was rather complete. He felt a particular passion for hunting, the religious books, among other things. His policy was primarily based on religious principles; however, we will see below how these principles were not the most important thing many times. They define him as an indecisive man depending on the advice of his Jesuit confessors; nonetheless, I disagree with this affirmation and quote Martin Spahn, who defines Ferdinand II as a person who acted very inflexibly and at his convenience. So much so that the same author who states that the emperor was indecisive affirms in his work that Ferdinand II showed great strength in the development of the war as regards his decision making – for instance, enlisting Wallenstein again when everyone wanted otherwise –. His engagement was important and influential during his time because of his characteristic passion for his devotion to religion and his strict and inflexible religious policy (Sturmberger, 2013).

4.2 Protestantism and the Thirty Years' War

From different criteria, some authors state that, definitely, the way Protestantism was banned in those places where the Dynasty reigned made its inhabitants rebel and various disturbances arose in which we will not focus now, without intending to subtract their importance and influence . (Spahn, 1999) (Wilson, 2009) So much so that Burkhardt, in his monograph *The Thirty Years' War*, tries to contrast how we can consider the aforementioned War to be the greatest accumulation of military clashes

in history, (Gotthard, 2001, p.152) so, if we are going to develop this paper by highlighting the important aspects of the war, let us turn to our main goal, Ferdinand II.

Spahn says that *"the struggle between the nobility and the dynasty peaked during the last decade of the reign of Rudolf II (1576-1612)."* Placing us in context, we know that this peak occurred just a little before Ferdinand II came to power, initially as King of Bohemia and later as Emperor of the Holy Roman Germanic Empire (Spahn, 1999). It is striking how few authors define the significance of the step from being a king to being an emperor; however, Spahn extols such ancestry by stating that this, one way or another, would ensure the *"imperial dignity of his family."*

Importantly, at that time not all Catholics were on the same side and this, among other things, further complicated the possibility of uniting to form such an imposing empire as, for instance, the Roman. (Mejía Vallejo, 2006, p. 58-59-60).

Knowing that Ferdinand II was not loved in Bohemia, among other things for his devotion to the Catholic religion – there are also some people who think that his decisions were somewhat radical – we must know that this contempt brought about several important and influential situations in the life of Ferdinand II, such as *"The Second Defenestration of Prague"*, a challenge for him to keep fighting. (Mejía Vallejo, 2006, p. 58)

4.3 Economic Situation, a determining factor for the War to start

The emperor being completely sure that he wanted to go on, he assumed that the dynasty was not ready for war yet and we can see it in the text by Spahn and, in contrast to what Peter Wilson claims by alleging that the economic situation of the time was not easy to bear, corroborating this, in turn, with what Pavel Marek says, concluding that it was necessary and crucial to have much capital to cope with such a situation. Ferdinand II was aware that a lot of money and a very large army would be needed to win the confrontations to be carried out; therefore, he waited for the right time.

It was only when Ferdinand II was helped by Maximilian of Bavaria, the owner of the largest army throughout the Empire, and by Spain and Portugal which sent troops and other aid, that he decided to start and take the step of eradicating the protestant party. (Spahn, 1999).

4.4 Maximilian and Ferdinand II united for the same cause

According Spahn, *"Maximilian so terrorized the Protestant party, which had formed the Union since 1608, that it was completely dismantled."* After the first battle, in which they were victorious, Ferdinand took possession of the territories and began to expand his empire. (Spahn, 2009) This is the time in which what started as a small confrontation in Bohemia would gradually become one of the most significant Wars in history.

4.5 Yearning to succeed

Interestingly, in a movement first started for the urge to eradicate Protestantism, Ferdinand not always stayed on the same side. (On the side of those who wanted to eradicate Protestantism). I do not mean that the emperor was a traitor to his cause, but I do think that, in a very clever way, assimilating that the extension of the war was imminent and always keeping his *"target"* in mind, he could handle the situation and accepted that he had to include any person, Bohemian, Protestant, etc in his movement. Once again, Spahn gives us the example of this, it is *"Wallenstein, a Bohemian nobleman, the ablest of all the mercenary leaders (...)"* he proposed to keep a bigger and stronger army the same way as his enemies. Relying on this, Ferdinand appointed him general, knowing that he was adding a person on the other side to his cause. On the other hand, it is important to quote Pavel Marek, who states that Wallenstein's army was composed of Protestants and Catholics. At one point, -later- Ferdinand II even agreed to add a Lutheran to his cause. (Spahn, 2009) These are clear examples of the insights of Ferdinand II; we can realize he was obsessed about winning the war and about achieving it by winning the forthcoming battles, doing what was necessary to achieve it. (Sturmberger 2001)

Something curious happens, we must notice how this person who was added to the army of the Emperor without being a Habsburg and without necessarily sharing all the principles that governed the empire led so many battles and conquered more territory. It is even more interesting that Ferdinand II, who considered Maximilian to be the only one really able to coordinate events of which a successful result could be obtained, was proud of his decision.

The Habsburg dynasty gained so much respect that even those who did not belong to the Habsburg House but were protected by them were respected. (Spahn, 1999)

4.6 The empire of Ferdinand II of Habsburg

I think it is important to point out that, as many authors state, the emperor Ferdinand II somehow took advantage of his power and, many times without the consent of the people, *"he revived other imperial privileges that had fallen into disuse"* (Spahn, 1999), thus generating a revelation supported, from my viewpoint, by the population that was not necessarily Protestant.

Making reference to the unity of the Roman Empire, with its exceptions, I will establish a contrast regarding this Empire. Ferdinand II had so much influence and power of action that his people, without his being imposing and already being a people almost 50 years before he came to power, was aware of the fact that by having him as an emperor they would depend on the Empire only for very specific matters, affirming and assimilating that the decisions made by the Emperor would somehow be the ones influencing them directly, positively or negatively (Vallejo Mejía, 2006).

After a time of war, without going any deeper into the transcendence of each battle, we will move forward to the moment in which Nuncio Carlos Caffa, with the blessing of Wallenstein, the aforementioned general of troops of the Emperor, requested him to bring the war to an end at the Holy Empire, in order to focus on forthcoming problems with the Turks. (Marek, 2008)

At that moment, the scenario was uncertain for all except Ferdinand II, he was clear-minded. In general, the Empire considered the cause for which they all fought to be lost; they supported this affirmation, among other things, by saying that the Emperor added any kind of persons to the movement. (Sturmberger, 2013)

This sign of strain between the emperor and the other states of the empire was imminent. They were otherwise minded, mainly as regards Wallenstein, and requested that he be dismissed. (Spahn, 2009)-(Marek, 2008). According to Sturmberger, his dismissal was achieved at the first instance; shortly afterwards, the Emperor realized it was necessary to have him back. Due to the discontent of the most important figures of that time, the Emperor was forced to dismiss Wallenstein again and have him murdered. This way, once again we see how Ferdinand II acted at his convenience.

Later on, yearning to keep his family in the throne, after finishing reorganizing his territories – which would steady his power and influence on the Empire once again – he made his son accede to the throne as King of the Romans. (Spahn, 2009)

5. CONCLUSIONS

Quoting the review by Sturmberger, using the book by Cicely Veronica Wedgwood – which was previously referred as a basis – we will conclude that the contemporaries of his time considered Ferdinand "a saint made a monarch" (Sturmberger, 2013) and his opponents branded him as a tyrant.

The writers mentioned in the previous paragraph believe that those in charge of writing history in the Roman-Catholic era of the nineteenth century ennoble this figure and consider his role to have been fully determinative; while liberal historians underestimate his importance. Modern historians believe that Ferdinand II should be acknowledged for the great importance of turning the provinces of Austria into a single whole.

Finally, I would like to end in an open way with an affirmation made by the writer Axel Gotthard claiming that Ferdinand II was to many *"As corrupt in his legal consciousness as Wallenstein himself."* (Gotthard, 2001: p. 153)

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