

Elliott, John H. y Negredo del Cerro, Fernando (eds.), *Memoriales y cartas del Conde Duque de Olivares. Correspondencia con el Cardenal Infante Don Fernando (1635-1641)*, Madrid, CEEH y Marcial Pons, Ediciones de Historia, 2021, 977 págs. ISBN: 9788415963134

In 1634, Philip IV sent his younger brother, the Cardenal Infante Fernando, then Captain General of Milan, to Flanders with reinforcements from the army of Lombardy. Fernando fought his way across Germany, defeating the Swedes at the battle of Nordlingen (September 1634) -described by Olivares with typical hyperbole as “the greatest victory of our times”-entering Brussels in early November 1634. Ferdinand continued as Governor of Spanish Flanders until his death, aged just 32, in November 1641. During those years the Cardinal-Infante wrote not only to his brother (his letters now in Simancas, in the Estado series), but also to Philip IV’s valido, the Conde-Duque of Olivares; it is this latter correspondence –or part of it– which was drawn on by Elliott in his massive biography of Olivares published in 1986 to note the valido’s response to the developing crisis in the peninsula itself in 1640 and which is now edited by Elliott and Negredo. The edition supplements the selection of Olivares’ letters and papers edited by John Elliott and José F. de la Peña which was published in 2 volumes in 1978 and 1981 and reissued (2013) in 1 volume in the series “Los Hombres del Rey”.

But this is not the entire correspondence, some of the letters published here referring to others that do not appear to have survived; nor is it based upon the original letters, which no longer exist. Instead, what we have here are 164 letters, the first written by the cardinal-Infante five months after his arrival in Brussels, the last written by him four months before his death. Of the 164 letters, all but one of which were originally written by the correspondents, 98 were from the Cardenal Infante and 66 from the Conde-Duque (only in 1639, the peak year for surviving letters –38– do those of Olivares outnumber those of Fernando); all 164 are based on copies found in various archives, inside and outside Spain, including the Bayerisches Staatsbibliothek in Munich, the archive of Casa de Miraflores, Madrid, and the British Library in London.

Great care and effort has gone into the editing of the correspondence. The spelling and punctuation have been modernised, with priority given to making the text intelligible to the modern reader rather than to palaeographic purity. That we know this is testimony to the enormously impressive editorial material which accompanies the letters. There are two aspects to this editorial. Firstly, there are the introductory essays. These include one by John Elliott on ‘El Conde-Duque y el Cardenal Infante’, a brief general essay on the relations between the two men, and another by Manuel Amador González Fuertes on “La correspondencia “de mano propia” entre el Cardenal Infante y el Conde-Duque”, which provides both a detailed account of the editorial method and a description and analysis of the correspondence. These

two essays are followed by two others which seek to put the correspondence in more specific context; that by Fernando Negredo del Cerro on “La política centroeuropea de la Monarquía hispánica (1635-1641): un contexto para la correspondencia” refers to the letters in the course of a broad analysis of Spanish policy in central Europe in the second half of the 1630s; that by Alicia Esteban Estríngana, “Olivares y el Cardenal Infante en el gobierno de Flandes: el desafío franco-holandés a la conservación de las provincias entre 1635 y 1641” cites the letters insofar as they locate the experience and place of Flanders in the developing crisis of the Spanish Monarchy of the later 1630s. These last two essays are substantial independent studies in their own right.

Having worked our way through this invaluable preliminary material we reach the letters themselves, but that is not the end of the remarkable supporting editorial apparatus. Each letter is accompanied by an extraordinary wealth of explanatory information in the form of often extensive footnotes. These not only indicate variants in phrasing between different versions of the individual letters in the surviving copies in the different archives but also explain references in the letters to, for example, individuals which in many cases are substantial minibiographies. There is a real embarrassment of riches here.

As noted above, to some extent we are already familiar with the content of those letters written by Olivares used by Elliott, who also commented in his biography of the Conde Duque on the relationship between the latter and the Cardenal Infante. But with this edition we have not only the full text of the letters cited by Elliott, but also other letters sent by Olivares as well the other side of the correspondence, such that we can learn a little more about Fernando. Relations between Olivares and Fernando had improved over the years, a development reflected in the Cardenal Infante’s adoption of the more familiar form of address in his letters. Nevertheless, there were tensions: Fernando complained -unsuccessfully- to Olivares about the latter’s creature Pierre Roose, while by the time of Fernando’s death Olivares appears to have become disappointed with and more critical of the king’s brother, even if that disenchantment was not clearly or fully articulated in their private correspondence. As for the broader situation, we learn a great deal –although little that is fundamentally new– about the challenges facing the Captain General of Flanders in wartime. Recurring topics of the exchange between Olivares and the Cardenal Infante include, not surprisingly, the constant problem of supplying Flanders from Spain, a challenge exacerbated by the new problems which emerged in 1640.

It is not inconceivable that other letters exchanged by Olivares and Fernando will be found in the future. But until that happens this is an excellent critical edition of those of which we are now aware and, should any others be discovered the critical apparatus in this volume will surely remain of enormous value, as it will be to anybody wishing to understand Spanish policy and performance in Germany and Flanders -indeed across Europe- in the later 1630s, and throughout the reign of Philip IV. It is a splendid addition to the growing “Hombres del Rey” series – and astonishingly good value at the price.

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