

How effectively did Ferdinand and Isabella deal with the problems of law and order and the imposition of royal authority in the kingdoms?

There are conflicting views among historians as to whether Ferdinand and Isabella successfully managed to assert royal authority in the kingdoms. Some historians, such as Kamen, believe 'the taming of the Castilian aristocracy was an outstanding achievement'. But others, for example Murphy, think 'the power of the nobility in Castile remained largely unaffected'. When Ferdinand and Isabella married in 1469 and began to rule the kingdoms of Aragon and Castile together there were a number of problems facing them. In Castile there was still unrest among Joanna's (a rival claimant to the Castilian throne) supporters. In addition to this were general problems with law and order, seeing as there had been a lengthy period of royal weakness in Castile prior to the War of Succession. There was also the weakness of the central government, which was having difficulties in raising taxes and there had been a severe reduction in crown lands, as they had been taken or given to over mighty nobles.

In order to establish royal authority and deal with the problems of law and order in the kingdom of Castile Ferdinand and Isabella used, among others, the following methods; Peripatetic Kingship, the Santa Hermandad and corregidores. Peripatetic Kingship was the first method employed by Ferdinand and Isabella to impose authority. This style of kingship was medieval in origin and it meant that the monarchs would travel through Castile, meeting leading nobles and citizens and dealing with any potential problems personally. For example, revolt in Galicia in 1485-86. The Santa Hermandad (Holy Brotherhood) was a temporary medieval organisation used to establish law and order. Isabella made them a permanent widespread and severe force in 1476 dealing with crimes, such as, murder, theft, rape, rebellion and wilful damage. They were used as a source of money and troops for the Granada War. Corregidores were royal officials appointed by the Crown to supervise the affairs of Castilian towns, including public order and administrative matters. However there are arguments about the success of the corregidores. Methods used to control the nobility were simple and involved the use of threats, bribes, honours and privileges. To keep nobles on side they were also exempt from taxation. The Military Orders had grown powerful during the medieval period. They were aristocratic, wealthy and seen as dangerous by Ferdinand and Isabella, so between the years of 1476 and 1494 when the mastership of the Castilian orders became

vacant Ferdinand was elected master for life, therefore limiting the aristocracies power.

There were however ways in which Ferdinand and Isabella were not successful in asserting control. The corregidores in particular were unsuccessful. Many towns refused to accept them constantly complained that they were inefficient and favoured the nobility. They were also subject to local pressures, because although the Crown appointed them they were paid locally. Ferdinand once attempted to extend their use to Aragon, but failed. The Military Orders were also not as successful as the monarchs would have liked, for by the time of Ferdinand's death in 1516 the Aragonese Orders remained outside of his control. As Ferdinand was only present in Aragon for less than three years of his thirty-seven year reign it is clear that control in the kingdom was delegated to a number of subjects who acted on the King's behalf. When Ferdinand considered introducing the Hermandad into Aragon common resistance led to its suspension within a year and further attempts to re-establish it were opposed by the Aragonese nobility. There were also failures with regards to control over the nobility, because power at a local level still laid with the nobles and some, such as, the Count to Lemos in Galicia. Also upon the death of Isabella in 1504 many rejected the authority of Ferdinand.

It appears that, although Ferdinand and Isabella managed to effectively deal with the problems of law and order and the imposition of royal authority in the kingdom of Castile they were not as effective in doing so in Aragon. Ferdinand's absence is likely to be the most important factor in this. Even though Ferdinand heard of the problems in Aragon he never personally went to resolve them as he did in Castile with Isabella. He left this to his viceroy's. In Castile, however the nobility were successfully weakened somewhat when land taken after 1464 was reclaimed by the Crown. Many Castilian nobles also served the monarchs faithfully in Spain and abroad.