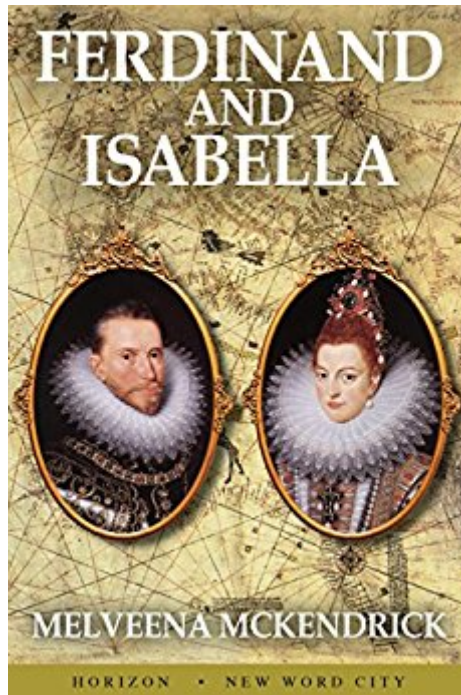


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Ferdinand And Isabella



Synopsis

King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain are most often remembered for the epochal voyage of Christopher Columbus. But the historic landfall of October 1492 was only a secondary event of the year. The preceding January, they had accepted the surrender of Muslim Granada, ending centuries of Islamic rule in their peninsula. And later that year, they had ordered the expulsion or forced baptism of Spain's Jewish minority, a cruel crusade undertaken in an excess of zeal for their Catholic faith. Europe, in the century of Ferdinand and Isabella, was also awakening to the glories of a new age, the Renaissance, and the Spain of the "Catholic Kings" - as Ferdinand and Isabella came to be known - was not untouched by this brilliant revival of learning. Here, from the noted historian Melveena McKendrick, is their remarkable story.

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Customer Reviews

I bought this because I didn't know much more about Ferdinand and Isabella than that they financed

Columbus. If you read only one book on this fascinating couple and their era, it would be good to spend your time with this one. It's comprehensive and packed with interesting detail, but also a fast read. I was amazed at what these two clever people accomplished in their lifetimes -- profoundly changing Spain and the whole world forever. The book starts with a fairy tale-like story about the teenaged prince Ferdinand sneaking into Castille to meet Isabella. He was disguised as a tender of mules for a group of traveling merchants and even had to wait on his "masters" to keep up the disguise. The trip was dangerous because the reigning King Henry (Isabella's brother) and others in Castille strongly opposed the marriage. When the couple were married, they had to borrow money to pay for the week-long celebrations. The book provides interesting background on the history of the Iberian peninsula, which had been mostly ruled by Muslims for 500 years. There is a good summary of the reconquest of Spain from the Moors by the Christian kingdoms starting in the 1100s. At the time of the marriage of Ferdinand and Isabella, Moors still controlled the Kingdom of Grenada in the south. The author also describes some of the incompetence and poor behavior of previous Spanish monarchs -- especially Isabella's father and brother -- that had crippled the Kingdom of Castille before. It took ten long years from the time of their marriage until Ferdinand and Isabella were able to control all of Spain. They struggled through a civil war, then had to reduce the power of aristocratic factions. They created a justice system that controlled rampant lawlessness, and increased revenue to the central government without excessively taxing the majority of their people. They built roads and bridges, and reformed the Church to lessen abuses that led to the Reformation in Northern Europe. Queen Isabella was such an active monarch -- traveling all over her kingdom for different tasks -- that all five of her children were born in different towns. Reading the book, one senses that these were two very clever people who had a relatively good marriage. When Isabella died in 1504, she ordered that she be buried with Ferdinand so that "our bodies may symbolize and enjoy beneath the ground the close relationship that was ours when we were alive."

I liked this book a lot. It covered the time period concisely but with enough detail to make it interesting. I learned a lot about them, the time they lived in and the pressures that shaped some of their history-affecting decisions. The writing style and editing, combined with the rest makes this book easy to rate one of the few five stars I have given.

Ferdinand and Isabella, was an amazing royal couple, the type rarely seen in the history of nations. Full of energy, determination and devotion to their people and to each other, they lifted old Spain

from feudal anarchy into the European renaissance in a short lifetime. One cannot help but wonder how did they achieve all this in such a short period, and so efficiently. Malveena Mcknendrick, the author of this book, with a fluent but brief style tells us their story - a bright and optimistic one, but with a somewhat troubled ending. One can only marvel at Isabella's sacrifices riding on horseback (often while pregnant) through the plains and hills of central Spain trying to unite her people and motivate them into a more independent and modern life style. She was fighting not only the remaining Moors but an old feudal system in the clutches of lords, dukes and financial giants of the previous age. Thanks to her religious strength and a supportive husband, she was able to overcome huge obstacles and win the love and respect of her people. The tail end of the struggle, however, was tedious at both the national as well as the personal level. Liberating Granada, the last territory under the Moors, was bloody and merciless ending with a crushing defeat of the remaining Moors. In a way it was also embarrassing; after all, those Arab rulers had been in Spain for more than 750 years and were nearly, if not entirely, as Spanish as the original natives. One feels the author has underplayed the harshness with which the Spaniards dealt with this remaining minority. It was not unusual to see the Spaniards publicly butchering men, women and even children in the course of fighting. More detailed account of these ruthless acts are found in other books by renowned historians (see for example Stanley Lane-Poole's book " The Moors in Spain") . No less alarming was the manner in which Ferdinand and Isabella dealt with the Jewish minority. True, the Jews in Spain were a disliked minority. But to give them an ultimatum to either convert to Christianity or to leave the country was not acceptable by any human standard. It ended in a torturous mass exodus with catastrophic results. Not much later the same treatment was applied to the Moors who had brought so much glory to Spain both in urban development and in academia. Until today images of that remarkable culture are there to see in their grand, monumental architecture visited by thousands of tourists every year. These two catastrophic acts toward minorities have undoubtedly left an indelible black spot on the reputation of Ferdinand and Isabella. How are we then to judge these royal figures? There seems to be little doubt about their positive contributions to Spain as a country and to its native people. In fact it could be said that they had indeed planted the seeds of today's modern Spain. But what about their human-relations records ? Here, surely, they don't score as well. We have already seen how ruthlessly they dealt with the Moslems and the Jews and how they forced most of them into exile. Then came the Inquisition, which was intended to prevent heresy and also to control those who converted from Judaism and Islam. Its punishments were severe and contrary to religious teachings (including burning violators at the stake). In later years it was highly criticised as cruel and unreligious. Altogether, however, these acts left a dark impression

of harshness and intolerance about the royal couple for centuries to come. It is said that, toward the end, Isabella, burdened by several disasters, and having lost her only son, as well as a daughter, a brother in law and a grandson, had resorted to wearing black robes and living a lonely and reclusive life. Her sorrow, her grief and pain were too deep for words. One cannot but wonder: Is this perhaps nature's way of reminding those in power of the need to be kinder and more forgiving toward those lesser mortals? Fuad R. Qubein Jan. 2016

This was an interesting book and did clear up a lot of missing pieces in my mental jigsaw puzzle of Spanish history. It did lack pace however, and was a little bland, almost reading as notes towards a thesis. This may not be complimentary to the author with what in fact, is a difficult topic, involving hours of research. However, I rather think the modern trend is to be entertained as well as educated and a piece on historical fact perhaps does need some embellishment to take it into the realm of being "based on fact". By publishing a book, one is after a market. Both interesting characters and I would have liked more on them but Isabella's role has come to mean a lot more to me and she was definitely, it would appear, "the power behind the throne" with Ferdinand being far more moderate. A quiet read if not pulling you to the edge of your seat.

This is a pretty good book about King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella. It was not very long. It only took 2 or 3 hours to read. It is about the King and Queen from different parts of what is now modern Spain. The book talks about the alliances and marriages of the different monarchs in Europe at the time. It also talks a lot about the removal of the Jews and the Moors from Spain at the time.

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