

Spain's golden age essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In what ways and to what extent does the concept of Spain's 'Golden Age' apply more specifically to the reign of Philip II than to the whole of the period 1474-1598? Justify your answer by reference to the similarities and differences between the periods before and after the accession of Philip II in 1556.

The phrase 'Golden Age' is used to describe the period of rule in Spain in 1474-1598. During this time, there were four monarchs ruling; Ferdinand and Isabella both sat on the throne in 1479-1516, Charles between the years 1516-56, and Philip, his successor between 1556-98. According to Jill Kilsby, the phrase 'Golden Age' "is bound to be instigated and enjoyed by the rich elite classes alone". I agree with Kilsby to some extent, however, monarchs cannot rule without support and advice from government, who therefore, play a vital part in producing a 'Golden Age'. Also, the giving of royal patronage due to a monarch's success can involve the gentry and normal folk.

I believe a 'Golden Age' is how successful a monarch rules with the following factors. Their government should be stable and supportive with little disagreements to the decisions the monarch makes. The monarchs should be financially and economically stable throughout their reign. Military success to gain territorial expansion is of importance, however, internal peace, order and national/international unity in my opinion is more important.

Confidence in a monarch regarding their nation and identity is of vital importance to contribute to the overall perception of a nation. Religion is

likely to be the most contributing factor in causing riots and wars. The success of a monarch and how they deal with differences in religion is vital in portraying a successful 'Golden Age'. Philip II ruled from 1556-98, and his form of governing was far from the same as his father's. He preferred staying in one place to make decisions rather than move around the country with a body of advisors. As a result of Philip's reluctance to delegate, his workload mounted up.

This resulted in Philip being the only one who knew all the details of matters, leaving his advisors with little knowledge and little advice to give. The government of this time was very unstable, being both "reluctant to and incapable of making major decisions fast". This posed problems, which continued throughout Philip's reign. They did not know how to deal with inflation, and there were problems not only in Spain, but in other countries of the empire. Opposition to Philip arose, showing the working of the Spanish government at its most ineffective.

There were elements of success to Spain's government. It became more centralised during Philip's reign, as central government offices were set up in Madrid, making it easier to be called upon. There was also success abroad in the Indies. Philip's advisors (the juntas) were of more use to the king, than the government at this time. Philip was at war with France at the beginning of his reign, and as he was suffering financially, he had to end this war.

He was left a large amount of debt by his father, giving him no choice but to cancel payments on all of his debts in 1557. Philip was declared bankrupt on three occasions and had to finance many wars. Inflation was another hurdle

for Philip, as he had to find means of funding government, the military and naval requirements. The only option to overcome this was to reduce expenditure, increase income and borrow.

These proved to be of some success to Philip as his financial position increased. However, Philip's financial policies were unpopular. But, Philip managed to receive a large amount of annual income from the Indies, in the form of silver and custom duty taxes. Overall, there was never enough income for Philip to deal with the financial difficulties of his reign, and he was never able to fully pay back his borrowings. Philip had little military success, but managed to increase his empire by a large amount.

Firstly, there were two rebellions against Philip in 1567 and 1572, because of his policies in the Netherlands. The success over the moriscos in 1568, whose fighting "marked by cruelty and massacres were eventually defeated by government forces in 1570", was an overall failure as Philip's method of dealing with those not captured or made slaves was not successful. Philip's Armada failed in 1588 as "more than half the ships sent were destroyed and 15,000 men died". The king could not accept defeat and retaliated by "seizing all English ships in Spanish ports for English piracies in the west Indies". Philip planned to invade Ireland, giving him a closer base to invade England, but this failed as Philip lost his second Armada.

At home, rebellion broke out in Aragon in 1591. "The lesser nobility suspected that this was Philip's first step in taking away their local power". Philip sent in his army to resolve the problem. A religious military victory was

won on behalf on Philip by his half brother Don Juan, as he beat the Turks in 1570. Philip's increase in territories began outside of Europe.

He captured Buenos Aires in 1580 and the Philippines. Portugal was also added to the Empire. " Not only did the Spanish overseas empire grow considerably in size but, with the inheritance of Portugal, he also acquired the vast Portuguese Empire. Philip's reign began with a period of relative calm.

He was at peace with France for many years. However, as French Protestantism grew, France were at war with the Catholic family of Guise. Religion was more important to Philip as he took up sides with the family of Guise. Philip also had Protestant enemies in the Netherlands, where his " lack of understanding was to lead to mistakes in his dealings with the Netherlands" and England, who were a good ally before Philip became monarch. Philip's confidence grew as he made a good decision in hiring Farnese as his advisor. Farnese had " already shown his considerable political and military abilities at such battles as Lepanto.

" However, Philip failed to take Farnese's advice when they were on the verge of conquering the Netherlands, and decided to intervene with French and English matters. Philip had an advantage at the beginning of his reign, as he " understood the religious, crusading character of his subjects". But, he was in an international minority, as he had to defend Catholicism " not only against Protestantism but also against the threat of Islam". Catholicism was in danger from Protestants in the Netherlands, where Philip's aims were to " impose despotic rule over the states and make them a base from which

to force the Protestant countries in Europe to reintroduce Catholicism. He planned to increase the number of bishops from four to eighteen", and hoped this would " increase his control over the Church in the Netherlands".

The Moriscos were a major problem in Granada. Moriscos were forced to change their religious views if they wanted to remain in Spain or they were to return to their own country. In return they were to " attend mass and performed the outward signs of the Christian religion", if they were to stay. With no means of Philip knowing, they still practised their religion. With the demands of the Christian clergy in the 1560's, Philip put forward more harsh conditions, forbidding them " to use Arabic, to wear their distinctive dress, to read Moorish literature, or to follow any other of their traditional customs".

A revolt, which lasted two years followed, the government forces defeating the Moriscos in 1570. The Moriscos not killed or made slaves were sent to other areas of Spain, ending hope of the continuation of Moriscos religion in Spain. Philip's involvement in France's religious policies included him trying to become King of France as he wished to prevent a Protestant sitting on the throne as they would pose a threat to Spain, and in England, his Armada was considered a " religious crusade on behalf of Catholicism against the Protestant Elizabeth before it was too late". Both of these ventures were failures.

Philip's aims as monarch, were to " protect and maintain his empire, preserve and defend Catholicism, and ensure good and just government in his lands. " Even though the above statements of what I believe to be a personal rule are not very successful on Philip's part, we must not overlook

the good points about his reign. His Spanish Empire had expanded in America, he was successful in keeping out Protestantism in his states of the Empire, and he won significant victories against Islam. Philip had ruled his empire for 42 years and “ brought about the union of all the kingdoms in the Iberian Peninsula”. He was the ruler of a vast empire, and for most of his reign the majority of his peoples seem to have been generally content with his rule”. Ferdinand and Isabella reigned from 1479-1516.

Both seemed to be successful leaders as they worked closely, “ in harmony” together. Their reign began with a stable government, as “ Isabella made sure that Ferdinand played an active part in the governing of Castile. ” This resulted in Ferdinand dealing with the foreign policy of Aragon and Castile, as he had experience in “ both politics and military affairs”. Many of the ordinary folk were called upon to sit on councils, which made up the central administration of government. This portrays a very stable and ordered government, which involved the advice and opinions of the people who mattered in society, and who carried the voice of most of the nation. Unlike Ferdinand and Isabella, Philip did not have a stable government, and as his government did not consist of members of the ‘ middling sort’, who believed he was trying to interfere with his affairs, he was not able to hear their needs making most of his policies unpopular.

However, this does not mean that his policies were unsuccessful as there was little rebellion against them. Ferdinand and Isabella inherited war at the beginning of their reign, putting a strain on their finances from the beginning. The only option was to increase their income, but Spain was a poor country and had civil wars to fund. “ The wars fought against France in

Italy and in Roussillon cost an exorbitant amount. " Ferdinand and Isabella spent very little on themselves, as they needed funding for the court, the army and the ambassadors. The Church held a significant position in ensuring financial support, usually to fund wars.

The Pope " allowed them to collect the taxes on the clergy usually given for crusades", and also gave grants. Financial policies such as customs duties had to be increased to meet with the financial demands. Like Ferdinand and Isabella, Philip inherited war at the beginning of his reign. Both reigns suffered financially, however, Philip did not have financial support from the Church, as did Ferdinand and Isabella. He had to strive on his financial policies, which were successful, but unpopular.

The funding of wars dented these monarch's finances heavily. Military success and territorial expansion highlighted both reigns, Ferdinand and Isabella encountering more success. The main most important war was fought throughout most of Ferdinand and Isabella's reign - The Inquisition. This was not a physical battle, but a battle to remove Jews from Spain if they refused to convert to Christianity. The Inquisition proved costly and damaged the economy. As Jews left, the monarchs feared that Muslims would ally with the enemies of Spain, and Isabella pressed for harsher policies to be put upon them, making many convert out of fear.

Heavy taxes were placed upon them, encouraging a revolt. " A force was sent into Granada, and the revolt was put down in three months of bitter fighting. " After putting faith in Christopher Columbus in his voyage to the new world, where the discovery of American islands was made, Ferdinand

and Isabella feared other countries might put a claim on their discovery. The Inter Caetera was issued in 1493, which “ confirmed the Spanish rights to the new lands in South America.

” They claimed the Canary Island, after Portugal gave up their fight for the islands. The first attempt to recover Cardagne and Rousillon by force from France failed, however, France turned their attentions to Italy, giving up the provinces. Naples was a valuable gain from France for the monarchy as it produced good grain and revenue. The next gain for the monarchs was Navarre, becoming part of the Crown of Castile after Ferdinand invaded and gained control from France. The Jews for Ferdinand and Isabella were very much like the Moriscos for Philip.

They caused trouble, and took a lot of time to deal with them, using great force and revenue. The battles fought in Ferdinand and Isabella's reign were successful even though they were few. Philip's battles were also successful, however, more effort seemed to be put in, as they took longer to end. As there was little national unity or support for Philip, war times were that much more difficult, considering Ferdinand and Isabella had national backing and the backing of the Pope, with finances. Philip did not have a stable well-trained army, even though he won battles, but Ferdinand's army with their equipment were “ the most feared fighting force in Western Europe.

Although both monarchies had military success and gained substantial land, Ferdinand and Isabella seem more successful as their movements were ordered and financed more successfully.

Philip seemed to concentrate on overcoming territories almost impossible to break such as the Netherlands, whereas Ferdinand and his army looked to land such as North Africa, where a military operation was less likely to overturn them. Ferdinand was a strong ruler and was described as “ never preaching anything except peace and good faith. The war in Granada was described as the “ prestige and security brought to the monarchy by the victory in Granada were enhanced by the peace and order Ferdinand and Isabella secured in their kingdoms. ” The government during Ferdinand and Isabella's reign was very ordered and stable.

There was also peace between Portugal and Spain after the Canary Islands were conquered, and close links formed to cement relationships with Portugal and England. Spain's national confidence was very high and their identity was widespread. In war he was to display personal bravery and a capacity for inspiring those who fought under him”, Ferdinand's many victories in the early wars, “ increased the monarch's prestige among the other countries of Europe. The use of ambassadors in ally countries to negotiate on behalf of the Spanish crown was very successful. Philip's confidence was rather high during his reign, as was Ferdinand and Isabella's; however failing to take his advisors advice left Philip in a weak position.

Philip's national identity was not very high as he was not at peace and did not have support from many countries and was not at peace. Neither Ferdinand nor Isabella was extreme in religious issues. However, the conquest of Granada saw the Pope give Ferdinand and Isabella the title of ‘ Catholic Monarchs’. There was also the Inquisition, “ the concern for the Christian religion” being the most likely reason for its introduction. Like

Philip, Ferdinand and Isabella's three major elements in their religious policy were: " The treatment of the Jews, the Muslims and the converses.

" They also attempted to reform the Christian clergy to gain more control over the Church, but it was " much more a continuation of the policies of previous years. But the Pope agreed to them making all Church appointments in Granada and the Canaries. Bishops were also appointed to set a good example. Ferdinand and Isabella's religious policies were fairly successful, however, Philip's were not, even though his main focus.

Ferdinand and Isabella had much more support from the Spanish and the Pope, most definitely having an influence on their success. Overall, I believe there was more success to Ferdinand and Isabella's reign than Philip's, even though they faced the same problems, such as financial.

Charles I became King in 1516. Charles was a stranger to Spain therefore being unaware of their culture. Charles was very willing to govern the way the Spanish wanted, even though the Cortes had started badly so he carried out reforms already began by Ferdinand and Isabella. An effective government depended completely on Charles.

He made sure he did not " completely rely on his secretaries. " He wished to play a personal part with every issue. Philip was very much the same as his father in this sense, as he dealt with his issues by himself. However, the rest of Philip's government was very much different.

Charles had a battle to gain the trust and respect of his nation, whereas Philip had much more time to concentrate on central government. Overall, the two governments were fairly successful. Charles inherited a weak

financial position, as did Philip. Charles had to “ obtain money to pay the expenses incurred in becoming the Holy Roman Emperor. ” He had finances from Cortes; however, Castile voted many grants of money and contributed most finances. Charles had to finance the whole of his empire, but there were difficulties in meeting his financial needs.

Most were spent financing wars and the upkeep of his empire. Charles had to borrow as a result of the lack of finance. The only way to improve his financial position was to end his wars “ And this he felt unable to do. ” None of Charles' wars were fought in Spain, however the Spanish had to fund these wars. This is the reason why Philip had to declare bankruptcy at the beginning of his reign.

Both of these monarchs had suffered financially as a result of their weak financial start. Charles was made Holy Roman Emperor in 1519 which, dissatisfied Spain greatly, as they believed Charles would be drawn away from his duties as King. The first revolt was from the Comuneros, which broke out before he left to be crowned Holy Roman Emperor. “ All seemed to have been resentful of Charles leaving Spain. ” Charles “ dealt firmly with those who had taken part in the revolt. ” The second major revolt came from the Germanias who were “ A Christian brotherhood of armed volunteers from the poorer classes which had been formed to defend the Valencia coast against Muslim pirates.

” They rebelled because Charles seemed less interested in remaining in Spain. Charles also fought wars against Protestant group, the Illuminists and Erasmists. However, Protestantism was quickly eliminated from his empire.

With Regards to Charles' territorial expansion, " The Americas and Spain were only a part of Charles' personal empire. " Philip had very little military success but expanded his father's empire further. Charles did have military success but this was overshadowed by the financial trouble he was in.

He was more concerned with the people of Spain and what they wanted, whereas Philip was more concerned with gaining territorial expansion from wars. The beginning of Charles' reign saw him make an ally with France. From 1522 there was " A period of calm and growing acceptance of Charles by the Spanish". There were no major events after the two revolts as Charles had " learnt from previous mistakes. " There was national unity as Charles was an " effective ruler. " In non-Castilian kingdoms there was satisfaction that Charles was prepared to respect their particular laws and privileges.

Philip was very much the opposite. He did not have much internal peace, as he did not consider the needs of the Spanish, there was not much order under his rule and very little national unity. Charles had a lot more of these, which probably made him a more successful ruler. Charles had very little religious problems, resulting in national unity. Protestantism was eradicated and he introduced penalties for Protestants bringing books into Spain without a licence.

This protected the Catholic faith, however, it could be argued that this resulted in a loss of culture. He had the same problem " that the converted Jews and Muslims were only nominal Christians", as did Ferdinand and Isabella and Philip. Religion was the most important factor to Philip during his reign, and may have overlooked other more important aspects at certain

times. Charles on the other hand, dealt with religious issues as they arose and did not try to enforce religion on to other countries.

He was content with running his Empire and concentrated more on the needs of the Spanish rather than his own gain. Overall, I believe Charles' reign was much more successful than Philip's in almost every aspect. There were strong and weak points about all three reigns, financial difficulties the main problem, as they all inherited weak financial positions. There were elements of success to Phillip II's reign to each of the points I defined as what a 'Golden Age' really is, but still many unsuccessful.

Ferdinand and Isabella on the other hand had quite a lot of success, and understandably why historians believe this to be the beginning of the 'Golden Age'. Reformations were carried out regarding religion, and things changed for the better without offending many people. Charles seemed to be quite similar as he was successful with many of his policies, with little resentment. The mistakes at the beginning of his reign could be as a result of him being a young King and a stranger to the country.

However, he worked hard to overcome this problem, by listening to what the Spanish wanted, eventually leading to a successful reign, continuing the 'Golden Age'. Philip's reign, however, was in my opinion, not part of the 'Golden Age'. He did actually increase his Empire, but the combination of what a 'Golden Age' is does not particularly apply to him. The successes of the previous monarchies outnumbered the failures, but this is not the case with Philip, which is why I believe the 'Golden Age' spanned across the years 1479-1556 only.