

MURILLO'S TRUE  
PORTRAIT OF THE HOLY KING  
FERDINAND III IN CONTEXT

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FIRST PUBLISHED BY

Centro de Estudios Europa Hispánica (CEEH)

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28014 Madrid – Spain

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Printing

Advantia Comunicación Gráfica

ISBN: 978-84-18760-18-1

DL: M-1551-2024

Printed and bound in Spain

**Cover image:**

Detail of Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, *King Ferdinand III, called Saint Ferdinand*, c. 1671 [fig. 1.1]

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A detail from a painting, likely by Peter Paul Rubens, showing a cherub (putto) holding a scroll. The cherub has curly blonde hair and is looking down at the scroll. The scroll contains Latin text. The background is dark and shows other figures, including a hand reaching up towards a golden crown or halo at the top of the frame.

VERA DIVI FERDINANDI III, EFFIGIES  
TERRORUM EXTERMINATIO RESTITUTOR HISPAN

## CHAPTER 1

### THE ROYAL SAINT

## King Ferdinand III: His Life, His Death, His Face

### Introduction

On 17 March 1668 the body of the medieval King Ferdinand III of Castile and Leon was disinterred from his tomb. This consisted of three wooden caskets, one inside the other, located in the Royal Chapel of Seville Cathedral. A meticulous investigation by two physicians, a surgeon and a lawyer took place into the state of his corpse. It was reported on in the form of a four-page double-sided pamphlet produced by the most senior medic, with fifty years of experience, Dr Gaspar Caldera de Heredia.<sup>1</sup> Its main finding was that more than four hundred years after his death in 1252 the state of Ferdinand's body retained its 'true skin' from 'head to toe' apart from the calf of one leg, which was revealed to the bone.<sup>2</sup> Hairs were still found on his forehead and his eyelids were intact. Dr Caldera's judgement was that the body could not have been preserved in such a state for so many years unless there had been a divine miracle. If it had been corrupted, there would have been a fetid smell instead of the mysterious aromatic fragrance, neither 'amber, musk, civet nor cedar'

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1 Caldera de Heredia 1668.

2 'el dicho cuerpo, hallo estar entero, y de la cabeça a los pies continuada la *cutis vera*, que llaman los Médicos, en todos los miembros del dicho cuerpo, excepto la canilla de una pierna, que está descubierta de la rodilla al tobillo del pie'; *ibid.*, 2r.



Fig. 1.1 Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, *King Ferdinand III, called Saint Ferdinand*, c. 1671, oil on canvas, 170 × 114 cm. Spanish Gallery, Bishop Auckland

## CHAPTER 2

# THE REPRESENTATION OF KING FERDINAND III, 1620s–1640s

### In Rome: the official template

The visual arts played an important role in the campaign to canonise Ferdinand III. In Rome, the campaign to declare him a saint had begun in 1630 with the commissioning of an engraved print of the king from the Rome-based French engraver Charles (or Karl) Audran (1594–1674) [fig. 2.1].<sup>1</sup> The order was issued by Mateo Vázquez de Leca (1573–1649), a Seville-born cleric and art patron, and reported on by the priest Bernardo de Toro (1570–1643), who was the Spanish representative of Philip IV in the cause of King Ferdinand at the papal court. He was also in contact with the Seville authorities. His job was to persuade the pontifical court and the Sacred Congregation of Rites, the committee which would assess Ferdinand III's candidacy and advise the pope, of the virtues of this 'warrior for Christ'. In order to do so some two thousand impressions were ordered to be made of the Audran engraving, and a further twelve specially coloured prints showing Ferdinand wearing a blue and yellow cloak. The latter were sent to King Philip IV, Ferdinand's thirteen times grandson; other royal princes; the king's first minister and political 'favourite' (*valido*), Gaspar de Guzmán y Pimentel, Count-Duke of

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1 Wunder 2017, 79–80. Not to be confused with his brother Claude Audran, the Elder (1592/97–1677), who was in Paris in 1631; see the title page to R.P. Cornelius Cornelii, *Commentaria in Acta Apostolorum* (Paris, 1631), in the British Museum, London, 1895,1031.620.

Velázquez's scene was painted in 1634–35 as part of a series of battles for the Hall of Realms in Madrid's Buen Retiro Palace. Zurbarán was also called to court in 1634, probably at the request of Velázquez, to help decorate the Hall with two battle scenes and a cycle on *The Labours of Hercules*.<sup>31</sup> Having completed his task, Zurbarán returned to Seville the following year with the title of 'painter to the king'. In 1638 Alonso Cano, whom Zurbarán had bested in Seville, arrived at court in Madrid. He also was commissioned to portray several medieval Spanish monarchs, including Ferdinand III of Castile and Leon, but his vision of the king provided a novel twist for a secular rather than a sacred setting.

### At court in Madrid, the 1640s–1650s: Alonso Cano

Alonso Cano (1601–1667) was one of seventeenth-century Spain's most versatile artists, skilled not only as a painter but also as a sculptor and architect. His move from Seville to Madrid in 1638, where he had been appointed as a painter to the royal court by the then powerful Count-Duke of Olivares, King Philip IV's prime minister, was a significant moment in his career, allowing him to contribute to some of the Crown's most important artistic projects. Unlike Zurbarán he remained at court for fourteen years, apart from a period in 1644–45 when he was forced to flee to Valencia having been falsely accused of hiring the assassin of his murdered young wife.<sup>32</sup>

Cano's first artistic commission from the king came in 1639, when he was chosen, along with a group of seven other artists, to decorate the walls of the Alcázar's large Golden Hall (Salón Dorado) with a series of sixteen imaginary 'portraits' of paired, seated monarchs from the medieval kingdoms of Asturias, Leon and Castile through to the kings of the sixteenth-century Habsburg dynasty. The intention of the series was obviously partly genealogical, to represent the descent of the Spanish Habsburg monarchs from their Asturian ancestors. The Golden Hall played an important role in secular public ceremonies at the heart of the medieval Alcázar palace in the centre of Madrid. The Hall's name derived

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31 The series comprised ten paintings now found in the Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, P001241–P001250.

32 Stratton 2003.





## CHAPTER 3

# MURILLO AND FERDINAND III, KING AND SAINT

### Murillo and the quest for the iconic image, 1648–1652

By the 1640s the campaign to canonise King Ferdinand III had run aground both in Seville and at the royal court in Madrid. In 1634 Pope Urban VIII had issued a papal brief, the *Cælestis Hierusalem Cives*, that had halted the process of declaring Ferdinand a saint and threatened the existence of his established local cult by forbidding the veneration and display of haloed figures of anyone who had not already been beatified or canonised. The pope's new reforms of the canonisation process made it lengthier and more demanding. They required local saintly cults to have been celebrated from 'time immemorial' – at least a hundred years – before the person could be put forward as a candidate for official papally authorised sainthood. As a candidate from the distant past, but with a strong local cult, Ferdinand III had to be shown to be exempt from the new ban on illegal public cults by establishing that a popular devotion to him as a saint had existed from 'time immemorial', that is at least one hundred years before the publication of the decree in 1634. This route to sainthood was known as *per viam cultus*.<sup>1</sup>

In 1649 the new archbishop of Seville, Agustín Spínola Basadone (1597–1649) decided to reinvigorate the canonisation process after a pro-Hispanic pope,

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1 Quiles 2018, 129 n. 38, citing the copies of papal documents in the Seville Cathedral Archive, ACS, Sec. VIII, Varios, Leg. 33 (3), fol. 235, Roma, 20-VI-1630; Wunder 2001, 670; Wunder 2017, 80.



## CHAPTER 4

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# SEVILLE'S FESTIVAL IN HONOUR OF KING FERDINAND III TO PROMOTE HIS CANONISATION, 1671

### Murillo's artist contemporaries and their role in the celebrations

The festivities that Seville Cathedral launched in the final week of May 1671 to honour the holy King Ferdinand III of Castile and Leon were some of the most lavish and splendid that Seville was ever to see. They had to be, as their essential aim was to promote the king's official canonisation as Saint Ferdinand across the universal Catholic Church. On 3 March 1671 news reached Seville that Pope Clement X had beatified Ferdinand III in February. Unlike a canonisation, which celebrated a saint throughout the entire Catholic world, a beatification was geographically limited; in this case it was restricted to Spain and its realms.<sup>1</sup> The celebrations were originally scheduled to take place between 25 and 30 May 1671, concluding on the anniversary of the king's death and the feast day of his cult. But so great were the crowds of visitors to the cathedral that the decorative displays and art installations were kept on view until 8 June.

The centrepiece of the cathedral's celebrations was a huge, expensive and impressive, albeit temporary, structure called *The Triumph of Saint Ferdinand*, which celebrated the king's life and career. The monumental wood structure was some eighteen metres square in width and more than thirty metres high (36 *varas*), reaching almost to the cathedral vault. It cost 13,400 ducats to create, which was three times more than the city's budget

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1 Wunder 2017, 81 n. 42.



## CHAPTER 5

# THE CULT OF THE HOLY KING FERDINAND III IN MADRID AND CASTILE IN 1671

### In Valladolid

Under the impetus of Mariana, the queen regent, the promotion of Ferdinand III's image was not only encouraged in Seville and across Andalusia, including Jaén, Málaga and Murcia, but also extended into the heartland of the kingdoms of old Castile and Leon. On 28 March 1671 she wrote to the Valladolid cathedral chapter to advocate the celebration of the new cult, prompting its members to commission a statue of the holy king to be sculpted by Alonso de Rozas (c. 1625–1680) and painted by Diego Fuertes Blanco [fig. 5.1]. Rozas, who had settled in Valladolid in 1654, was considered the city's best sculptor in the second half of the seventeenth century. The cathedral authorities stipulated that his design must follow the print 'from the saint's information book', in other words the Audran engraving that had been published in Rome in the 1630s.<sup>1</sup> Commissioned in mid-April 1671, the polychromed sculpture was completed in time for the celebrations in the cathedral, marked with a mass and a procession of the statue on 12 July 1671. Valladolid Cathedral had only been inaugurated in 1668 and the celebrations for Ferdinand's cult in 1671 coincided with the festivities for the placing of a sculpture of the cathedral's patron Virgin in her new *retablo*. To a large extent the festivities and processions organised to celebrate the popular local patron Virgin overshadowed those for the royally

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1 'del libro de la información del santo'. Amigo 2004, 195; Martínez Llorente 2019, cat. 63, 361–63.

## The portrayal of the holy King Ferdinand III in literature: the case of Pedro Calderón de la Barca's *El santo rey don Fernando*

Pedro Calderón de la Barca's *El santo rey don Fernando* (The saint king Don Ferdinand) was one of twelve liturgical plays (*autos sacramentales*) printed in Calderón's life under his supervision. It was commissioned by the city of Madrid, though the queen regent intervened in its scheduling and performance locations.<sup>10</sup> The *auto sacramental* was a religious drama, a descendant of medieval mystery plays, which was performed in public places before crowds of clergy, religious confraternities and municipal dignitaries in celebration of a local saint or a key event in the liturgical calendar such as Corpus Christi, the religious feast which focused on the Holy Eucharist. When performed on Corpus Christi its religious theme was always the extolling of the Eucharist. Like all *autos sacramentales*, its text would have been approved for religious orthodoxy by the Spanish Inquisition before it was presented.<sup>11</sup>

The first performance of *El santo rey* took place on Corpus Christi in June 1671 at the Royal Palace before the monarch, his mother and his court. Other performances for the city of Madrid, the Royal Council and other councils took place opposite the Town Hall.<sup>12</sup> Unusually for Calderón, *El santo rey* was the only liturgical play he ever wrote that was in two parts, intended to be viewed consecutively. The first part was set outside Toledo and exemplified the triumph of the Christian virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity over heretics, Muslims and Hebrews respectively. It only mentioned King Ferdinand III's mission to reconquer Seville in its final verses. The reason for the *auto's* division into two parts may have been to ease the touring of the play in its two distinct instalments, after it showed in Madrid, to different and appropriate venues around Spain, such as Toledo, Córdoba and Seville.<sup>13</sup> The second part was divided into three sections: the first was the triumph of the virtue of Faith, as represented by the capture of Seville; the second, the miraculous creation of the *Virgin of the Kings*; and the third and last, the king's death and future sanctity.<sup>14</sup>

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10 Calderón de la Barca–Arellano, Escudero and Pinillos 1999, 7 and 10–11.

11 Kamen 1985, 204.

12 Calderón de la Barca–Arellano, Escudero and Pinillos 1999, 12.

13 Calderón de la Barca–Pinillos 2016, 17.

14 Calderón de la Barca–Arellano, Escudero and Pinillos 1999, 21.



## CHAPTER 6

# THE PORTRAYAL OF SAINT FERDINAND, 1670s–1800

This chapter will assess how the image of Saint Ferdinand evolved in Seville, at court in Madrid, and in viceregal Spanish America, from the late seventeenth century to about 1800, against the changing context from Habsburg to Bourbon rule in Spain. It will also question what the impact of Murillo's various images of the saint-king Ferdinand III was, if any, during that period.

### Competing with Saint Rose of Lima in Spanish viceregal America

By the time Seville celebrated the extension of the beatification of Ferdinand to Spain's empire in the Americas in May 1671, South America already had its own patron saint. Saint Rose of Lima (1586–1617), born Isabel Flores de Oliva in Lima, the capital of viceregal Peru (a Spanish imperial province which included most of present-day South America), was canonised on 12 April 1671. She was a Dominican nun of bi-racial heritage. Her father's family came from Spain, whilst her mother was from an indigenous family that had converted to Catholicism after colonisation. These mixed-heritage origins enabled her to represent both the Spanish colonisers and the indigenous population, especially those of mixed race (*criollos*) whose number was growing, as there was greater ethnic intermarriage and racial mixing in Spain's colonies than in England's equivalent in North America. Saint Rose's canonisation showed the local *criollo* population that they also could attain sainthood, in addition to demonstrating the success of Spain's evangelisation campaign. Consequently,



A recent survey of the iconography of Andalusian saints in the Americas has shown that none of the seventeenth- or eighteenth-century paintings of Saint Ferdinand were copies after or variants of any of Murillo's depictions of the saint.<sup>9</sup> In general paintings of Saint Ferdinand failed to make an impact against either the newly canonised first patron saint of South America, Saint Rose of Lima, or the long-established warrior-saints James the Greater and the Archangel Michael. It was not until the twenty-first century that a modern copy of Murillo's painting from Seville Cathedral was commissioned in 2008 from the Tucuman artist Isabel Yiyi Reguera for the cathedral of the Argentinian city of San Fernando del Valle de Catamarca.<sup>10</sup>

### In Seville

In Seville the many likenesses of King Ferdinand displayed in painted or sculpted form or as surrogate effigies and simulacra throughout the cathedral in May 1671 had successfully promoted and reinforced acceptance of an orthodox portrayal of the king. The established image was based on Audran's print, with its traditional attributes of imperial crown, sword and orb, allied to armour and costume associated with Habsburg royal portraiture, and was exemplified by the polychromed sculpture by Pedro Roldán and Luisa de Valdés y Morales [see fig. 4.4].

In 1698 Pedro Roldán created a slightly different figure of Saint Ferdinand for the church of the Hospital for Elderly Priests (Hospital de los Venerables Sacerdotes) than the one he had carved for Seville Cathedral. He still retained from the now orthodox image the attributes of orb or globe and sword (held in the left and right hand respectively), the bearded and goatee moustached features, as well as an ermine-trimmed cloak woven with castles and lions, but he posed the saint as a relatively small figure seated in a chair, partly reverting to the enthroned medieval image [fig. 6.3 and see fig. 1.5]. However, Roldán's choice of a seated pose for Saint Ferdinand was probably dictated by the fact that the church of the Hospital was jointly dedicated to Saint Peter and Saint Ferdinand, and the sculpture was

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9 López Guzmán and Montes 2017, 94–96, 98 and III–12.

10 Ibid., 92 and 94.



Fig. 6.3 Pedro Roldán, *Seated Saint Ferdinand*, 1698, polychromed wood, 120 cm high. Church of the Hospital de los Venerables Sacerdotes, Seville. Fundación Focus Loyola

## CHAPTER 7

# THE HISTORY OF MURILLO'S PAINTING: FROM SEVILLE TO BISHOP AUCKLAND

### Seventeenth and eighteenth centuries

Despite the research conducted over recent years into Murillo's true portrait of the holy King Ferdinand III, the Spanish Gallery *Saint Ferdinand*, questions remain as to who might have originally commissioned it in 1671. In the past it has been suggested that it might have been painted for the young King Charles II of Spain, to whom Torre Farfán's book celebrating the festival in honour of Ferdinand was dedicated, or the archbishop of Seville, one of the most important ecclesiastical figures in Spain.

Appointed to Seville in 1669 and arriving in the city in January 1670, Archbishop Ambrosio Ignacio Spínola y Guzmán (1632–1684) was the clergyman who oversaw the celebrations in honour of Ferdinand's cult in 1671. He was a devout, cultured man whose inherited art collection included paintings by Van Dyck and Titian. He would later become known as the 'archbishop of charity' for his support of Seville's poor during times of economic crisis.<sup>1</sup> His own artistic patronage included works by Murillo, as well as by Valdés Leal and his son Lucas, who painted the face of a table clock owned by the archbishop.<sup>2</sup> In 1673 Ambrosio Spínola paid the substantial sum of 1,000 ducats for Murillo's large altarpiece of a *Virgin and Child in Glory* to provide him with spiritual solace and inspiration in

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1 Quiles and Cano 2006, 45–46.

2 J. Rojas-Marcos González in Cano, Hermoso and Muñoz 2021, 240, cat. 62.

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This book was printed in 2024,  
the 800th anniversary of the campaign  
King Ferdinand III launched to conquer Al-Andalus,  
which culminated in 1248 with his capture of Seville.