

THE FAMILY CORRESPONDENCE OF FERDINAND I¹

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GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CORRESPONDENCE

For all those interested in political history of the Early Modern Period, the correspondence which Ferdinand I (1503-1564) maintained with close family members is undoubtedly a highly valuable and exciting source. It reveals the ways in which the most important members of the House of Habsburg thought about the great questions of their time, what information was available to them, how they reached decisions and how they intended to put these into practice. In the family correspondence we receive background information on the three most important problems of the 16th century, which were constants both in the life of Ferdinand I, and his older brother Charles V (1500-1558): the religious divisions within and without the Habsburg sphere of power and the closely associated relationship between pope and emperor; the very tense relations to France, which led to several armed conflicts; and finally the fight against the Ottomans.

The source from which we can draw this information, however, is pronouncedly heterogeneous. Although it is contemporary in the sense that all the letters in question date from the 16th century and have Ferdinand either as the sender or the addressee, it was not passed down to us in the form we know it today, namely as a unified corpus in book form dating up to the year 1536. The idea of putting all the family letters of Emperor Ferdinand I, both those written by him and those he received, together in one corpus dates back to the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries.² Ferdinand I himself did most likely not intend to gather the whole correspondence he had with his closest family members.³

The expression *family correspondence* may even be misleading, inasmuch as this correspondence hardly deals with family, private, or intimate matters. The content of the correspondence that Ferdinand conducted with his closer relatives is predominantly political in nature.⁴ For Ferdinand's correspondence, the term *family* should not be used to refer to ideas of the 21st century which suggest shared life and familiarity. Family here means only closer blood relatives and their spouses. The family correspondence of Ferdinand I also has nothing to do with the *epistolae familiares* in the style of Petrarca, with letters whose esthetic form is as important as their content.⁵ The letters that Ferdinand received from his immediate family members and those which he wrote them do not show any particular preoccupations with questions of form, and can in no case be described as stylistically or literarily demanding. The interest in these letters can only be found in linguistic questions and even more so in their content; and

¹ This text is a slightly revised and updated translation of LAFERL (2004); it is reproduced here with the kind permission of the editors. Translated by Christopher F. Laferl and Michael Doyle Ryan.

² Cf. FELLNER (2001), pp. 42, 46-47.

³ In this context, the manuscripts Blau 595, 596 and 597 and, for example, Weiß 291 in the Vienna Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv should be mentioned.

⁴ Cf. also the prefaces of the individual editors of the volumes of the correspondence published so far by Ferdinand I, especially vol. 1, p. XVII.

⁵ Cf. Mireille FRAUENRATH: „Brief“. In: Rainer HESS/Gustav SIEBENMANN/Mireille FRAUENRATH/Tilbert STEGMANN (Hg.): *Literaturwissenschaftliches Wörterbuch für Romanisten*. Tübingen 1989, pp. 39-41.

again here, those uninterested in the political and dynastic problems of the time will be disappointed. They are not concerned with abstract political theory; they deal primarily with the maintenance and expansion of power of the House of Habsburg, in short with concrete politics of the 16th century. This is the central topic of correspondence. Of course, they also reveal how the members of the Habsburg family stood in relation to one another, how this relationship was determined by the belief in the primogeniture and by patriarchy, and how economic issues played a role in politics. In comparison with the latter, more personal topics are of far less importance; questions concerning the health of members of the House of Habsburg, reports about births and deaths in the family, and finally, some marginal remarks about hunting, the main passion of the aristocracy of the 16th century, can only be found sporadically.

THE CORRESPONDENCE PARTNERS

By definition, Ferdinand I's family correspondence focuses on Ferdinand himself, the Habsburg prince born in Alcalá de Henares in 1503, whose mother tongue was Spanish (or better Castilian).⁶ From his childhood and early youth, which he spent primarily at the court of his maternal grandfather, Ferdinand the Catholic (1452-1516), in Spain, only few documents have survived, e.g. letters to him or letters from his paternal grandfather, Emperor Maximilian I (1459-1519), to him.⁷ Of equal importance for the edition of the family correspondence is certainly Ferdinand's correspondence with his siblings Eleanor (1498-1558), Charles, Isabella (1501-1526), Mary (1505-1558) and Catherine (1507-1578). Since they were born and grew up in very different places, the letter was the only way to achieve personal contact with each other. Some of the children of Philip "the Fair" or "the Handsome" (1478-1506) and Joanna of Castile "the Mad" (1479-1555) did not get to know each other until very late, and in some cases did not even share the same mother tongue. Thus, we can hardly speak of brothers and sisters in a modern sense, of people who shared experiences in their childhood and youth. Charles, Eleonore and Isabella grew up in the same place, in the Netherlands, at the court of their aunt Margaret of Austria (1480-1530) in Mechelen/Malines. Ferdinand, who grew up in Spain, was to spend four years of his youth (1517-1521) at Margaret's court, where he not only actively practiced French, but also became familiar with the Burgundian cultural heritage. His sister Mary was also educated in Mechelen, but was then brought to Innsbruck, where she lived together with Ferdinand's future wife Anne (1503-1547), who belonged to the Jagiellonian dynasty and was the sister of Louis II (1506-1526), the heir of the Hungarian and Bohemian crown, who in turn married Ferdinand's sister Mary. Only Catherine spent her childhood near her mentally ill mother in Tordesillas.⁸

Although for some of the six Habsburg siblings who grew up in different places neither a special emotional closeness nor a shared cultural and linguistic formation were possible, they were nevertheless connected by two other factors, which weighed more heavily in the 16th century than today, namely by the same descent and the same aristocratic education.

⁶ Since the term Spanish was preferred to the term Castilian outside the Iberian Peninsula in the 16th century, only Spanish will be mentioned here.

⁷ Ten letters from the years 1514 to 1517, missing from the first volume of Ferdinand I's correspondence, were only printed in 1984: see COLE SPIELMAN/THOMAS (1984).

⁸ Cf. the short biographies in HAMANN (1988).

Until the end of the 1530s, aunt Margaret, the governor of the Netherlands, and Ferdinand's brothers and sisters were the chief potential correspondence partners, although in addition we must as well take into consideration the wife of Ferdinand's brother Charles, Empress Isabella (1503-1539), and the spouses of his sisters, the aforementioned Louis II, Francis I of France (1494-1547), Eleanor's second husband, Christian II of Denmark (1481-1559), Isabella's husband, and John III of Portugal (1502-1557), the husband of Catharine. Of all these potential family correspondents, however, Ferdinand maintained closer correspondence only with Margaret, Charles and Mary of Hungary. It is relatively unlikely that many letters with the other sisters and their spouses were lost over time, since the majority of the concrete political questions concerned only Ferdinand, Charles, Margaret and Mary. The exchange of letters with the latter also only intensified after the death of her husband Louis II in the Battle of Mohács (1526), which turned Ferdinand into the heir of Hungary and Bohemia. It goes without saying that Ferdinand, under the changed circumstances, had to intensify the contact with his sister, now the queen dowager of Hungary and Bohemia, if he did not want to completely lose his Hungarian and Bohemian heritage. But even after the share of the Jagiellonian lands in Hungary, which neither the Ottomans nor the princes of Transylvania had contested, seemed safely in Ferdinand's hands, correspondence with his sister did not simply come to an end. Firstly because she had to remind her brother time and again of her claims to the goods she was entitled to as queen dowager of Hungary, and secondly because following the death of her aunt Margaret in 1530, she succeeded her as governor in the Netherlands and thus continued to play an important political role in Habsburg politics.

At the end of the 1530s, the circle of Ferdinand's potential pen partners became wider as his own children and those of his brothers and sisters grew older. Above all, the contact to his eldest son Maximilian II (1527-1576) and Maximilian's wife Maria of Spain (1528-1603), a daughter of Charles V, and his nephew Philip II of Spain (1527-1598) would become of great importance. As the research conducted thus far reveals, the correspondence with his other two sons, Ferdinand of Tyrol (1529-1595) and Charles of Inner Austria (1540-1590), should not be underestimated. For the correspondence with his daughters, many of whom married important princes and kings, more detailed research is still lacking.⁹

LANGUAGE – FORM - CONTENT

As mentioned before, Ferdinand's family correspondence revolves mainly around politics. This was the main reason why its edition was so important for historical research in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which viewed the study of political history as their main task. Since the correspondence partners were some of the main actors on the European political stage of the 16th century, it is highly unlikely that it will lose its status as a major source of political history in the future.

⁹ As part of the FWF-funded research project P18113 on the correspondence of Ferdinand I, the letter material to be edited was collected in the relevant archives in Vienna, Brussels, Simancas and Paris until the end of Ferdinand I's life in 1564. The corresponding lists can be found in this database as well as on the website of the Faculty of Modern Languages and Literatures of the University of Salzburg: <https://www.uni-salzburg.at/index.php?id=62915&MP=44700-200607%2C200731-200747%2C107-44803>.

The Habsburgs, who are of interest here, wrote to each other in several languages. This was due to the various political functions which had been assigned to them for dynastical-ge-nealogical reasons, but also due to the customs of letter writing of the time in question. Apart from a few letters in Latin, Spanish and German, most of the Ferdinand's family correspondence is in French. For the years leading up to 1534, the following numbers can be given regarding language use: Spanish, Latin and German each account for 7.5% of the letters, while more than 75% are in French. In 1535, 84% of the letters were in French, 11% in German, 3% in Latin and only one letter in Spanish. In 1536, French letters again predominated with 80%, German 19%, and only one letter in Latin.¹⁰ These figures would be misleading if they were applied equally to all correspondence partners, because not all of them used the four languages in the same way. Of the main correspondents, Ferdinand, Charles, Margaret, and Mary all regularly used French. The correspondence between Margaret or Mary and Ferdinand is almost exclusively in this language, but between Ferdinand and Charles, Latin, German and Spanish letters can be found frequently.

The question now arises whether the four languages were used indiscriminately by the two brothers, or whether the choice of language is significant for the nature of the letter in question. The salutation and the concluding greeting formula alone make it clear that the chosen language is not just an arbitrary linguistic vehicle, but on the contrary reveal a certain context and intention. The significance of the correspondent's language choice only becomes clear when the relationship between language and content is examined more closely. The choice of language alone does not permit direct inferences on the subject matter discussed, but its treatment does. In this respect, there are major differences between French and Spanish on the one hand, and German and Latin on the other.

German and Latin letters usually deal only with a single subject. This fact is complemented by the habit of writing several letters in German in a single day. Since it is unlikely that Ferdinand's and Charles' secretaries were unable to deal with several subjects in a single letter, nor that on a single day so many different messages requiring an immediate answer arrived consecutively, the reason why each subject was addressed in a separate letter, although sender and addressee remained the same, must be sought elsewhere. German and Latin are mainly used for official letters, and they tend to contain less information, but instead give an account of different subjects of political nature in front of a larger audience. These letters are so-called ostensible letters, which were not only intended for the respective addressee, i.e. for the emperor or his brother and locum tenens in the Empire, but for a larger circle of persons. Neither Charles V nor Ferdinand I desired only to inform the other in German or Latin about the diverse topics concerning the Empire. They also wished to show a larger public what they were doing, or intended to do, when they used these two languages. Since, however, in each of these matters different persons and institutions were concerned to whom these letters could or should be shown, none of these subjects could be dealt together with others in a single letter. The difference between the Latin and German letters is found both in regard to their subjects and their

¹⁰ *Korrespondenz Ferdinands I.*, Vol. 5 (2015), pp. 21 und 27.

addressees. If these were outside the Empire, Latin was usually used. Letters whose topics concerned Hungary, the Ottoman Empire or Russia were written in Latin. German was usually chosen for affairs within the Empire, but Latin was also chosen in exceptional cases.¹¹

In contrast to the German and Latin letters, those written in French and Spanish do not only have a less rigorous form, but also usually deal with several topics. In addition, they were not only of a political nature, but sometimes of a more "private" character. For instance, the Habsburg siblings regularly exchanged news about births and deaths in the family.¹² In contrast to the German and Latin letters, the French and Spanish letters did not serve as official correspondence between the Emperor and his main representative in the Empire, but rather as an actual exchange of information. The assumption that these letters were only meant for the addressees and their closer circle of advisers is also confirmed by the fact that some of these letters were sent in encrypted form. That the main correspondence language between Charles, Ferdinand and Mary was French is a consequence of the fact that French was Charles' first language and thus the language he, the head of the family, felt most comfortable in. Of course, Mary and Ferdinand also had an excellent command of French.¹³

There is no difference between the Spanish and French letters either in content or form. If Spanish was closer to the addressees than French, as was the case for the royal couple of Portugal or Empress Isabella, then the use of Spanish is self-explanatory. The same applies to Ferdinand's ostensible letters to Charles concerning Spanish affairs. The reason however as to why Ferdinand chose to write some letters to his brother Charles in Spanish, not dealing with Spanish matters, as is particularly noticeable in the period between February 1531 and January 1532, can only be explained from a contextual point of view. The question as to why Ferdinand corresponded almost exclusively in Spanish during this period becomes even more pressing when one considers that Charles continued to write to Ferdinand in French during this period. The respective whereabouts of the constantly travelling Charles cannot have been decisive for Ferdinand's decision to write Spanish or French, because in the years 1533 and 1534, which the emperor spent mainly in Spain, Ferdinand wrote to him not in Spanish but in French. The preferred use of Spanish in 1531 and early 1532 must therefore have other causes. If we were to juxtapose the scarce information available to us about the travel activities of Ferdinand's secretaries, we could infer that the travel activities and the absence of the secretary he used for French correspondence, Desiderius de Simandres, during this period led Ferdinand to use his Spanish secretary, Cristóbal de Castillejo, for the correspondence with Charles at that time.

The question of the secretaries' presence at court raises another problem of importance, namely that of the relationship between letters written by one's own hand and those written by secretaries. In general, it can be said that Ferdinand usually wrote and replied to his sister Mary personally, but the correspondence between him and his brother Charles was mostly – so it seems at least in light of our current state of knowledge – brought into its final form by secre-

¹¹ The principle of writing ostensible letters in the language that was important for the subject in question is also evident in the correspondence between Ferdinand and Mary. Ferdinand usually writes his sister in French, but if he turns to the kings or queen widows of Hungary, he chooses Latin.

¹² Cf. LAFERL (2019).

¹³ For syntax in the language use of Ferdinand and Karls see HOFINGER (2014).

taries. In one case, Ferdinand even expressly asks Charles not to bother writing to him personally.¹⁴ Unfortunately, a conclusive assertion on this matter is hardly possible, since the correspondence between Ferdinand and Charles has largely only been preserved in copies which do not give us any information as to whether the originals were written by the brothers themselves or by secretaries. In conclusion, however, it can be stated with certainty that the factors of content, addressee and secretary presence were decisive for the language in which the originals were written.

THE PRINTED EDITION OF THE LETTERS: STRUCTURE, HISTORY, ARCHIVAL STORAGE

The letters printed in the edition of the *Family Correspondence of Ferdinand I* are scattered in the most diverse archives in Europe, and in none of these archives do they represent a uniform collection. Therefore, as the first editor Wilhelm Bauer remarked in light of the archival situation, there is always the "embarrassing feeling" of never knowing whether all material in question has actually been collected for the edition. Despite this uncertainty, it has become clear in the last hundred years that most of the relevant letters can be found in the *Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv* of Vienna and in the *Archives Générales du Royaume/Algemeen Rijksarchief* in Brussels.

In Vienna, the manuscripts *Blau 595, 596 and 597* and the holdings *Belgien PA* are of considerable interest. The manuscripts *Blau* were produced in 1558, the year Charles V died, and collated by Jérôme de Cock, Ferdinand's then French secretary. In the manuscripts *Blau 595 and 596*, Ferdinand's chancellery almost certainly copied the originals of Charles to Ferdinand, while in *597* the concepts still preserved from Ferdinand's letters to Charles were copied.¹⁵ The *Belgien PA* holdings, which were rearranged in the 1970s and 1980s, contain letters between the two brothers, as well as between Ferdinand I and his sister Mary of Hungary and between other correspondence partners, e.g. between Mary and Nicolas Perrenot de Granvelle (1486-1550), Charles' chancellor. Of course, individual letters can also be found in many other holdings of the archive, especially in the *Reichsakten in genere*, the *Reichstagsakten*, the *Staatenabteilung* or the *Kleinere Reichsstände*. In Brussels, the holdings of the *Conseil d'État et Audience* and the *Secrétairerie d'État Allemande* are particularly noteworthy.

Many letters from or to Ferdinand whose existence is known only through other letters and postal invoices have not been found, despite intensive searches in the two mentioned archives or in other important institutions, such as the *Archivo General de Simancas*. Though several pieces of Ferdinand's family correspondence were not printed in the edition because they were not found by the editors, there are many letters which have been published elsewhere; especially by GÉVAY (1840), LANZ (1844-46 and 1845), FERNÁNDEZ ÁLVAREZ (1973-1981) and KOHLER (1990). At the end of the 20th century, the research team at the University of Konstanz (Horst Rabe, Heide Stratenwerth and Christine Roll) collected large amounts of material

¹⁴ *Korrespondenz Ferdinands I.*, Vol. 3 (1984), No. 669/4. Even in 1535 Charles' knowledge of German might still have been modest.; cf. *Korrespondenz Ferdinands I.*, Vol. 5 (2015), No. 896/7.

¹⁵ *Korrespondenz Ferdinands I.*, Vol. 1 (1912), p. XIII.

on Charles V in many archives throughout Europe which are as well of great importance for the *Family Correspondence*.¹⁶

The structure of the *Family Correspondence of Ferdinand I* has remained relatively unchanged since 1912, the year in which the first volume was published. The head of each piece consists of the number of the letter¹⁷, the name of the correspondent, the date and place, the detailed summary (*Regest*) and archival information.¹⁸ In the main body, the text is reproduced in its entirety, divided into paragraphs by the editors according to content criteria. The individual paragraphs have been marked by Arabic numerals to facilitate orientation both in the summary and in the commentary. The first two volumes contain text-critical information in the form of footnotes; starting with volume 3, the text-critical apparatus has been integrated into the commentary. At the center of the commentary are explanatory notes on the contents of the letter, especially on the persons and facts mentioned; furthermore, additional archival and printed material is cited. Starting with volume 3, the explanations in the commentary points are much more detailed than in the first two volumes. These contain further bibliographical details which can only be found at this location; only recurring references are listed separately.¹⁹ Volumes three to five, on the other hand, have their own detailed bibliography. Each volume contains an index in which entries of persons, places and objects can be found. With the exception of the second volume, the respective editors provide detailed information on the archival situation and the contents of the correspondence in the preface. The first and third volumes also contain information on the editorial guidelines, while the first and second volumes contain information on the conveyance of letters.²⁰ The fifth volume brought a significant innovation in one respect:

¹⁶ The results of the Konstanz project were available for a long time on the website of the University of Konstanz from all over the world. Now however they can only be consulted via printed lists, which can be found in various academic libraries, such as the Historical Institute of the University of Vienna.

¹⁷ Letters that have been indexed are marked with an asterisk in the edition. The numbering of the first volume begins with no. 1 and reaches up to no. 261; in the second volume it begins again with no. 1 and starting there it has been numbered continuously (the last letter mentioned so far in volume 5 has no. 1059). Letters which were only found after the printing or completion of the main part of the respective volume can be found in various supplements.

¹⁸ Here you will find information on the localization of the source (location, archive, holdings with fascicle details) and on the form of transmission (original, concept, copy; copy by hand or secretary). The return note is then reproduced. If the letter has already been printed elsewhere, the corresponding bibliographical information can also be found here in abbreviated form. In the digital edition, the corresponding pages of the older printed version are also given.

¹⁹ *Korrespondenz Ferdinands I.*, Vol. 1 (1912), p. XLIII, und Vol. 2/1 (1937), p. XVII–XVIII.

²⁰ In particularly important cases, special couriers, sometimes also envoys or ambassadors, delivered the letters, but often they were simply handed over to the more or less regular mail of the family taxis. The fact that not infrequently high-ranking envoys had to deliver the letters represents a disadvantage for historians in that in exactly these cases the letters themselves contain only a reference on which the messenger would report in further detail. In some cases, we have received the corresponding instructions, in others we lack precisely this important information. The length of the letters' journey depended mainly on two factors: the distance, which varied greatly according to the Habsburg siblings' willingness to travel, and the political situation. It goes without saying that a letter from Vienna to Regensburg or Northern Italy was shorter than a letter from Prague to Toledo, and that in times of war with France the land route from Central Europe to the Iberian Peninsula was out of the question. Letters from Ferdinand to Spain were therefore very often sent by land to the Netherlands and from there by ship to the Spanish north coast or by land to Italy and from there by ship to Catalonia. From Austria to the Netherlands, the journey usually took around 25 days, but sometimes the letter arrived within a week. Even a duration of up to two months between dispatch and arrival was not unheard of. After Spain, it was between 33 and

both the introduction and the summaries were printed not only in German, but also in English. This is intended to make the letter texts, which are of interest for historical research in many European countries and beyond, more accessible to an international audience. The same applies to the index; it was designed in such a way that it can also be used by users who are not proficient in German.

As early as the end of the 19th century, the edition of the Correspondence was initiated by the *Commission for Modern Austrian History*. Wilhelm Bauer then began the preparatory work for the first volume (1514–1526). This was published in 1912 in the book series edited by the *Commission (Veröffentlichungen der Kommission für Neuere Geschichte Österreichs)*. After a longer break, not least in part due to the First World War, Wilhelm Bauer and Robert Lacroix published the next volume in 1937 and 1938 (1527–1530), which is divided into two subvolumes. If the break between the first two volumes was 25 years, that between the second and third should be even longer, namely 35 years. The third volume (1531–1532) was edited by Herwig Wolfram and Christiane Thomas; Wolfram and Thomas were responsible for the first two subvolumes, which were published in 1973 and 1977. Gernot Heiss as well took part in the third subvolume, which was published in 1984. The fourth volume (1533–1534) was published by Christopher F. Laferl and Christina Lutter in the year 2000; Christiane Thomas again made a considerable contribution to the preparatory work. The fifth volume (1535–1536) was published by Bernadette Hofinger, Harald Kufner, Christopher F. Laferl, Judith Moser-Kroiss and Nicola Tschugmell in 2015. The work on the sixth volume (1537–1538) and the seventh volume (1539–1540), for which mainly Harald Kufner and Christopher F. Laferl are responsible, has essentially been completed and is currently being prepared for printing.²¹

Looking at the time that has been needed for the publication of these five to seven volumes (from 1898 to the present day), it must be noted that the time span which has been required for the edition of the correspondence is many times larger than the actual period which has already been edited (1514–1536) or prepared for the edition (1537–1540). There are, however, reasons for this discrepancy. The scattered position of the material to be edited, the often difficult to read manuscripts of the correspondents and their secretaries, the use of four different languages, the extensive archive commentary, and finally the fact that after Robert Lacroix, no editor could dedicate himself exclusively to the work on the edition, made it impossible to proceed more swiftly.²²

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71 days. See Correspondence by Ferdinand I, vol. 1 (1912), pp. XXIII–XXX, and vol. 2/1 (1937), pp. X–XV.

²¹ The work on the years 1535 to 1540 was supported by two projects (P18113 and P21016) of the Fonds zur Förderung der Wissenschaftlichen Forschung (FWF) and supported by the Department of Romance Studies of the University of Salzburg and the *Commission for Modern Austrian History*. The printing of the 5th volume of Ferdinand I's Correspondence was also supported. (2015) was supported by the FWF (PUB 145-V18).

²² Cf. LAFERL (2001), p. 371.

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