

## **SOME HERALDIC TRACES OF QUEEN ISABEL, CONSORT OF KING CHRISTIAN II OF DENMARK**

Por

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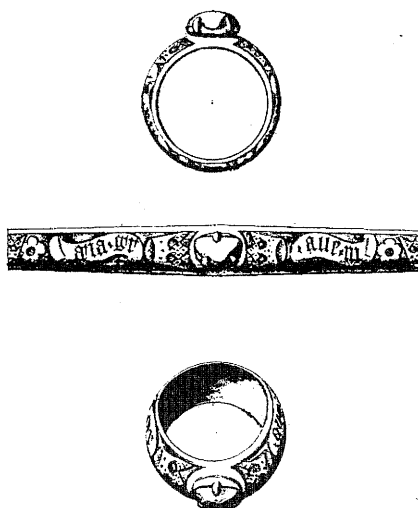
*Académico Correspondiente*

Isabel - In Denmark normally called Elisabeth - was born 1501 in Brussels and died 1526 at the castle Zwijnaerde near Gent. She was a daughter of Felipe, Archduke of Austria, Duke of Burgundy and King of Spain, and Juana of Castile and Aragon. Her grand parents were Maximilian, Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, and Maria of Burgundy and Fernando of Aragon and Isabel of Castile respectively. So she bore arms with Austrian, Burgundian and Spanish quarterings. Isabel grew up in the Netherlands where she was brought up by her aunt, the Regent Margerita, together with her brothers and sisters; all of them became emperors or queens.

Christian II (1481-1559), who became the last ruler of all three Scandinavian kingdoms - Denmark, Norway and Sweden- allied himself through marriage with a great Catholic dynasty when he in 1514 married the 13 years old Isabel in Brussels by proxy. Christian, who had become King of Denmark and Norway the year before, insisted that the wedding took place on the 11<sup>th</sup> of June as he on that very day was crowned in Copenhagen. It was Trinity Sunday, and on that day in 1397 Eric of Pomerania had been crowned

King of the Scandinavian Union. The recovery of Sweden was Christian's political aim, and for that purpose he needed the support of the mighty Hapsburg dynasty. The National Museum in Copenhagen is keeping a ring which - according to the tradition - was the wedding ring of Isabel. Three open crowns are engraved in the golden ring with a blue stone in it, thus representing the arms of the Scandinavian Union (and of Sweden as well). It is imaginable that Christian might have given his bride such a ring in order to demonstrate his dynastical interests.

Isabel did not come to Denmark until 1515. In the beginning she had to tolerate a Dutch girl, Dyveke, the King's mistress, who, however, died suddenly in 1517. Nevertheless, affectionate feelings grew up between the King and Isabel. She learned Danish and became a mother of a son and two daughters. On an altarpiece from about 1515, originally in the church of St. Maria in Elsinore, now in the National Museum, Christian II and Queen Isabel are



Drawing from the 18th century of the ring which, according to the tradition, was the wedding ring of Queen Isabel. The Danish National Archives, collection of manuscripts, Langebek's drawings of seals etc.

depicted kneeling in front of each other and with their shields hanging on a small tree between them.

Isabel's mother-in-law, Queen Christine, who came from Saxony, had, before she died in 1521, 72 shields of her and her husband's ancestors and of their own children and their spouses as well carved in wood for the church of the Franciscan monastery in Odense. In 1805 the church was demolished, and most of the interior was dispersed. Very few of the wooden shields exist today,



Christian II and Queen Isabel depicted with their coats of arms between them on an altarpiece originally in the church of St. Maria in Elsinore, about 1515. The Danish National Museum.

but among them that with the arms of Isabel with the fields of Castile, León, Aragon, Sicily, Austria, Granada, Burgundy Ancient and Brabant. The crowned and coloured shield is now kept in the National Museum<sup>1</sup>.

In 1520 Christian II had been crowned King of Sweden in Stockholm. During the ceremony ambassadors of his brother-in-law, Emperor Carlos V,

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1.- Birgitte BØGGILD JOHANSEN: *En vidtøftig dronning på gale veje - eller: Lidt om heraldikken i dronning Christines gravkor i Odense*, in Poul Grønder-Hansen (ed.): *Arvesølv. Studier fra Nationalmuseet tilegnet Fritze Lindahl* 2003, p. 107126.

presented the insignia of the Order of the Golden Fleece to the Scandinavian King. The coat of arms of Christian II as a Knight of this illustrious order of knighthood may be seen in the Cathedral of St. Bavon in Gent<sup>2</sup>.

In 1523 it was all over. Christian II went for some years into exile with his family and settled in Lier in the Spanish Netherlands where Isabel died very young in 1526. She was buried in St. Peter's abbey church in Gent. King Christian's herald, the Emperor's herald and four other heralds assisted at the funeral, all wearing their tabards. The coats of arms of the deceased Queen were carried in the funeral procession, probably those that were later hanging at the cenotaph which her husband commissioned the sculptors Jan de Smytere and M. de Smet to execute<sup>3</sup>. In a lozenge supported by angels the quarterings of the King are impaling Isabel's Spanish-Austrian-Burgundian arms. The lozenge is surrounded by the arms of her paternal and maternal ancestors. Above the cenotaph a memorial tablet was placed showing the arms of the Emperor, King Christian, Queen Isabel (in a lozenge) and separate shields with the arms of Denmark, Sweden and Norway. Christian II wanted to have himself regarded as a King of the Nordic Union having good relations to the Imperial House of Hapsburg. The sepulchral monument, the hatchment and the memorial tablet were destroyed in 1578 by iconoclasts and in 1810 by French troops. But from still existing drawings of them, carefully made by Aerent van Wijnendaele about 1560 and kept in the archives of Gent, we know how they once appeared<sup>4</sup>. When the mortal remains of Isabel in 1883 were going to be re-buried in Denmark, where Christian II ended his life in 1559 as a State prisoner but on easy terms, copies of the drawings were made and are now kept in the Danish National Archives and reproduced in this article<sup>5</sup>.

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2.- Nils G. BARTHOLDY: *Die Wappen eines nordischen Vlies-Ritters im ausgehenden Mittelalter-König Christian II. (1481-1559)*, in "Las armerías en Europa al comenzar la edad moderna y su proyección al nuevo mundo", Actas del VII Coloquio Internacional de Heráldica Cáceres 1991, Madrid 1993, p. 37-53.

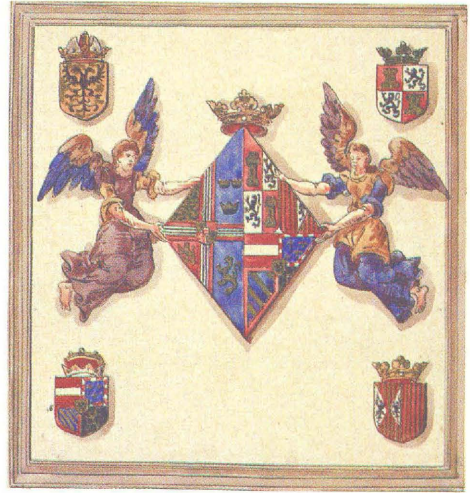
3.- J. F. WILLEMS: *Isabella van Oostenrijk*, in Belgisch Museum II, Gent 1838, p. 229. - Chr. H. KALKAR: *Isabella von Oesterreich, Gemahlin Christierns des Zweiten, Kánigin von Dánemark*, in Archiv für Staats- und Kirchengeschichte der Herzogthümer Schleswig, Holstein, Lauenburg und der angrenzenden Lndder und Stüde, V, Altona 1843, p. 518.

4.- R. A. C. van DRIESSCHE: *Het mausoleum van Isabella van Oostenrijk († 1526)* in de Gentse Sint-Pieters Abdijkerk, in Handelingen der Maatschapp~ voor Geschiedenis en Oudheidkunde te Gent, 44, 1990, p. 125-138.

5.- Ministeriet for kirke- og Undervisningsvxsenet, kontoret for kirkevaesenet, JJ 127/1883.



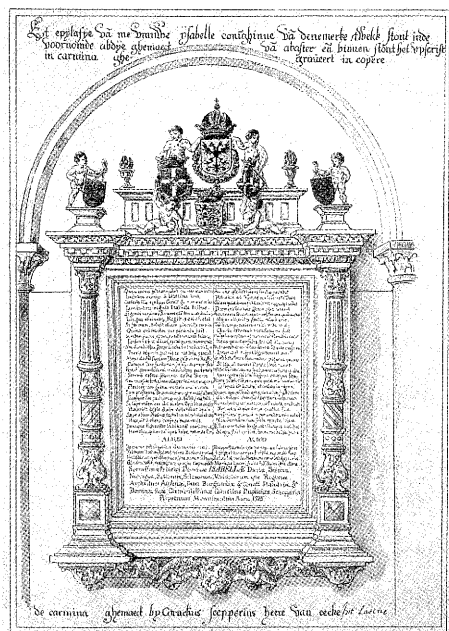
Wooden shield with the arms of Isabel carved before 1521 for the Franciscan monastery in Odense, Funen. The Danish National Museum. Reproduced from Danmarks Kirker.



Hatchment of Queen Isabel in St. Peter's abbey church in Gent. Drawing copied in 1883. Photo: The Danish National Archives.



Cenotaph of Queen Isabel in St. Peter's abbey church in Gent. Drawing copied in 1883. Photo: The Danish National Archives.



Memorial tablet in St. Peter's abbey church in Gent showing the arms of Emperor Carlos V, King Christian II, Queen Isabel and separate shields with the arms of Denmark, Sweden and Norway. Drawing copied in 1883. Photo: The Danish National Archives.



Great seal of Christine, daughter of Christian II and Queen Isabel, 1564. The Danish National Archives, collection of seals. Photo: The Danish National Archives

Christian II's and Queen Isabel's son died as a boy. In 1546 Christian had formally abdicated. But their two daughters living abroad never recognized the abdication. Dorothea, married to an Elector of Pfalz, styled herself Princess and Heir of Denmark, Norway and Sweden. The younger sister Christine, who had first been married to a Duke of Milano and later to a Duke of Lorraine, was even more ambitious. In her great seal from 1564 she calls herself Queen of the three Nordic kingdoms, etc. and displays her paternal arms impaled by those of Lorraine. The crowned shield is dexter surrounded by the shields of her father and sinister by the shields of her mother, Isabel.