

**Introduction: Diplomatic dimensions and parliamentary assemblies
in the late medieval Crown of Aragon**

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For nearly two decades, several articles (Batlle & Busqueta; Ladero; Piña) have reflected on the progressive renewal of political history in the historiography of the Christian Kingdoms of Iberia in the late medieval period. Considerable advances have been made, thanks to the dedication of numerous researchers who have taken stock of some of the principal elements of this transformation. Indeed, this evolution has brought renewed attention to the political dimensions of historical analysis, turning the tide of a transformation that had been in motion since the decades of the mid-twentieth century (Nieto).

In this regard, it is notable that traditional political history was bypassed by the principal currents of historiographical renewal that had appeared since the first manifestations of the French *Annales* School in the 1930s, at least until the global transformations that emerged in the 1980s. This was, in a certain manner, a reaction against the practices that had dominated contemporary historical science since its inception, centered around the construction of the liberal Nation-States and based upon a chronological description of facts that was considered political simply because it had some relationship with a “national” history. This was, therefore, a positivist sort of history, as it was purely descriptive, and generally centered around the great historical personalities or the most relevant political events, although isolated from other contemporary realities –those of a social, economic, and cultural character. As a historical methodology, it was exclusively *événementielle* according to its principal critics, whether these were *Annales* or Marxist historians, or those who merely practiced any manner of social, economic and cultural history, for it relegated to the background any analysis of political realities, judging them of lesser relevance for an understanding of past societies.

Indeed, while there were areas of historiography that continued to employ the traditional methods of political history, the most powerful and innovative currents of the second half of the twentieth century would invest in new methodologies and practices, which were open to the study of many other aspects of the social realities at hand. All the same, the 1960s saw the appearance in the United States of the New Political History, with contributions from sociology, anthropology, and social psychology – scientific disciplines which would mark one of the paths of this renewal (Bogue 1968, 1980). In parallel to this, toward the end of the 1970s, the French *Nouvelle Histoire*, which was strongly influenced by cultural history, would lead to the examination of political matters from an anthropological point of view, thereby stimulating interest in new questions, such as theories of the symbolism of power (Dosse). Elsewhere, two major international research projects on the origins of modern States (developed at the *Centre National de Recherche Scientifique* and the European Science Foundation in the 1980s and 1990s) would make a definitive contribution to the renewal of political history, offering important advances in content, materials, thought, and scientific methodology (Genet; Blockmans & Genet; Bonney 1995, 1999).

Thus the new political history is characterized by the central focus of the object of study, not on concrete political facts, but on the relationships and structures of power, interpreted in terms of their social, economic and cultural contexts, with the aim of arriving at an understanding of the key principles that lie at the base of historical

change. Therefore, within this renewal, it was crucial to incorporate criteria originating in other social and human sciences to complement the different branches of history that developed in parallel to them. Consequently, in addition to such cultural aspects dealing with the legitimization and symbology of power, the new political history also analyses other aspects as they relate to the development of political structures, such as legal systems, the institutions of government, administration, and justice, the mechanisms of representation, the political elites, taxation and public finance, war and diplomacy, collective identity, and public opinion. Moreover, it has incorporated or revisited other methodologies and genres, such as prosopography, biography, and historical narrative, as its historiographical vision, though initially limited, broadened to encompass the quantitative, comparative, and long-term dimensions, that is the total sum of what concerns the social whole.

In this way, political history has been able to remove itself from the exclusively factual and national plane to ultimately integrate and combine itself with social history in its broadest sense. Nevertheless, as John Watts has warned (9-33), the renewal process taking place over the last few decades has still been constrained to some degree by the three grand paradigms –the crisis of feudalism, the chaos of war, and the appearance of the modern State– which have to a certain extent limited overall analyses, as they do not contribute toward a general explanation of the political transformations that dominated Europe as a whole from the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries. Watts proposes the view that in the general European scope, for the purposes of studying the growth processes of state structures and central government institutions from the second half of the thirteenth century onwards, this paradigm should not only apply to the central figure of the State, but to all of the institutional structures that developed at the time –seigneurial, municipal, ecclesiastical, professional, etc. This multiplication of articulated powers generated enormous potential for conflict at every level, whether of a military, political, social, or economic nature, and this paralleled the processes of affirmation and legitimization of each of these institutions, causing a growing politicization of society, which Watts himself has termed “the making of polities”.

Moreover, this growth of powers, institutions, administrations, public justice systems and governments was molded by a common political culture that provided a shared language and set of values to the different players that led the process. This also relates to recent studies on the diverse contractual practices that developed in the late middle ages with the aim of articulating the nature of the relationship between the rulers and the ruled, a series of works that brought additional essential elements into the renewal of political history (Foronda 2007, 2008; Foronda & Genet). In any case, whatever the paradigm to which these recent authors subscribe, what is certain is that the analysis of the political has recovered its central place in historiography, showing its fundamental value in explaining historical changes through their basis in the economy, in social structures and in cultural values.

On another plane, beyond this reevaluation, it should be noted that the basic presuppositions of traditional political history, which combines narration with the chronological explanation of events, still remain indispensable as a solid basis for any new analysis. In this sense, it should also be underlined that the definition of political facts remains closely related to the context of the territory and the institution selected for the development of the research study, which in this work centers around the Crown of Aragon. Thus, within this overview of a renewal of political history that we have just outlined, there are two principal aspects that will form the basis of analysis in the articles we have brought together here: first, the diplomatic dimensions of monarchy;

and secondly, the parliamentary assemblies that brought together the estates and the king.

1. Practice and diplomatic relations in the Aragonese monarchy

For a long time, the historiography of the Crown of Aragon has relied on the immense wealth of documentation in the royal Aragonese archives from the middle of the thirteenth century onwards (Torra), examining this content in what pertains to the diplomatic relations linking the monarchy's activities of representation and political negotiation. However, such works of purely factual character have remained outside the currents of historiographical renewal, for medieval diplomacy was always, as indicated by Miguel Ángel Ladero (461), the poor cousin of the political history of the Iberian Peninsula, as it was "burdened by the view that in those centuries there was no real organized diplomacy." This opinion comes to us from canonical classical works such as those of Garrett Mattingly and Donald E. Queller, and more recently from the works of Matthew S. Anderson, which have been much discussed in the last few decades, resulting in new investigations that incorporate the methods and elements of intellectual and cultural history (Watkins).

In the case of the Crown of Aragon, however, the most important renewal did not occur until very recently, with the work of Stéphane Péquignot on the diplomatic activities of the envoys of James II (1291-1327), a monarch who arrived from Sicily and in whose reign occurred extremely important reforms and developments in the bureaucratic and archival structures. In Péquignot's work, an ample study is made of the modes of transmission of information, from the diplomatic representatives and their socio-cultural relationship to each mission, to the methods of exposition, dialogue and negotiation with the receiving instances of the embassies, and the influence of these activities on the other institutional powers of the Crown. In short, his work has brought us an entire series of previously unexplored elements which have influenced all studies undertaken subsequently, including some of those in this collection.

First, Damian J. Smith, following in the footsteps of recent works that take advantage of the valuable information provided by the chronicles of the Aragonese monarchs (Aurell, Cingolani), focuses upon the *Llibre dels fets* of James I (1213-1276), which he translated himself into English with Helena Buffery, bringing renewed attention to the importance of food, both in the preparation of military campaigns and in the development of diplomatic relations. Of particular interest are its ritual and symbolic functions, already brought to light by Brian Hayden and by Montserrat Piera in the monographic issue coordinated in this same journal. The banquets served to take important decisions during the reign of James I. For instance, there were meetings at the table that took place just before the outset of the conquests of Mallorca and Valencia, and James I offered different foods to Muslim dignitaries to earn their favor. In this last case, he even entertained the practice of recognizing and respecting the ritual obligations of their religion, clearly highlighting the symbolic and cultural as represented in diplomatic relations.

Next, Mario Orsi, a specialist on the expedition to the island of Sardinia undertaken in 1354 by Peter the Ceremonious (1336-1386) in his determination to suffocate the revolt of Marianus IV of Arborea (Orsi 2007, 2008, 2009, 2012), examines diplomatic relations leading to armed conflict, a fact that is key to understanding the history of Sardinia during the second half of the fourteenth century (Cioppi; Crabot; Gallinari 2003, 2009; Lafuente, 2001; Meloni). As stated the famous aphorism of Clausewitz ("war is the continuation of politics by other means"), Orsi analyzes in extremely fine detail the events that took place in 1353, utilizing both Aragonese and Sardinian

sources, and taking into account the diverse geographic aspects that relate to territorial dominion, as well as the anthropological elements linked to the expansionism that is an inherent part of feudal lineages (Guerreau; Morsel). In this way, he is able to overcome the constraints of classical nationalist political history, and to further elaborate the models of feudal power that struggled to establish authorities of the provincial or “regnal” type (to use the terminology of Susan Reynolds).

Another specialist on the history of Aragonese war in the decades of the 1350s and 1360s, José Vicente Cabezuelo, offers us a detailed relation of the naval campaign fought between the fleets of Peter the Ceremonious and Peter I of Castile (1350-1369) from May to July of 1359. The information provided in the chronicles, and that which it has been possible to extract from the Archives of the Crown of Aragon, offer abundant data on several aspects of naval warfare and the War of the two Peters itself, adding to the constellation of studies on the subject that have been published in recent years, such as those of Eduardo Aznar, Juan Manuel Bello and Alejandro Martín, Albert Estrada, Maurice Keen, Maria Teresa Ferrer (2001), Francisco García Fitz (2007, 2011), Donald J. Kagay, Mario Lafuente (2012, 2014), María Jesús Melero, Jorge Sáiz (2011, 2012), Anna Unali and Julio Valdeón (2002). Moreover, in a manner consistent with the new fiscal and financial history of the Crown of Aragon (Baydal 2009, 2012, 2014; Bertran, Furió & Sánchez; Furió, Sánchez & Sesma; García Marsilla; Morelló; Menjot & Sánchez 2006, 2011; Ortí; Ortí & Sánchez; Sánchez 1995, 2003, 2009), Cabezuelo’s perspective also sheds light on the close relationship between diplomacy, war, taxation, and the development of government institutions.

That same war between the monarchs of Aragon and Castile constitutes the subject of the next article by Mario Lafuente and Santiago Simón, which provides us with an unprecedented and crucial new fragment on the 1363 *lèse-majesté* trial against the Aragonese monarch’s brother, the Infante Ferdinand, who played a major role not only in the revolts of the Union against Pedro the Ceremonious in Aragon and Valencia from 1347-1348 (Baydal, 2013; Ferrer, 1987; Rodrigo 1987, 2014; Simón), but also in the conflict between Castile and Aragon that began in 1356 (Díaz; Estepa; González Mínguez; Lafuente 2012, 2014; Valdeón 2002). Thus, in addition to providing interesting insights into the political and social consequences of the growth of monarchic power from the end of the thirteenth century, the authors, following Jean-Pierre Poly and Pierre Bourdieu, analyze the “synchrony existing between the strategies of the agents of political power, on the one hand, and the juridical field that regulates them and at the same time legitimizes them, on the other”. Indeed, through their citations they irrefutably demonstrate the manner in which the process, opened after the death of Infante Ferdinand, formed part of a political strategy leading to legitimate the aspirations of Henry of Trastámara, allied to the Aragonese king, to become the monarch of Castile, as it ultimately occurred (Valdeón 2001).

Finally, Rafael Narbona deals with the reign of Alfonso the Magnanimous (1416-1458) (Agostino & Buffardi; Corrao 2005; Ryder), made possible by the arrival to the throne of Aragon of the Trastámara dynasty after the interregnum and the Compromise of Caspe in 1410-1412. Our knowledge about this figure has undergone a veritable revolution in the last three years thanks to the commemoration of its sixth centenary (Belenguer; Casals; Falcón; Ferrer 2015; Gimeno 2012a, 2012b, 2013; Sesma 2012; Sesma, Laliena & Monterde). While showing that it is at this moment when it truly became a “Crown of Kingdoms”, as it was now that it came about the final phase of the process of political decentralization that consolidated the individuality of each of its territories (Sesma 2005), the author addresses an ancient topic in Valencian historiography: the significance of the nearly-continuous seat of the royal court of the

Magnanimous during six and a half years in the city of Valencia, which thus served as the capital city of the Crown. According to the traditional view, this was a symbolic concession made by the Valencian rulers, who served the king faithfully, despite the fact that it was prejudicial to the king's political and economic interests. Yet, Narbona shows that the presence of the court in this city in the service of the monarch produced multiple benefits for the urban oligarchies.

2. Courts, parliaments and colloquia in the territories of the Crown of Aragon

The recent work by Michel Hébert, *Parlementer: Assemblées représentatives et échanges politiques en Europe occidentale à la fin du Moyen Âge*, which focuses on all Western Europe but particularly on England, France, and the Crown of Aragon, has become a milestone for the knowledge and understanding of parliamentary assemblies by virtue of its overall vision and the tireless labor that went into the gathering and interpretation of the main related aspects of the institutions of representation for political communities. So many principles are addressed there, and in such depth, from the reasons for summoning the assemblies to the identities of those sitting in them, including an examination of the methods of representation, procuration, negotiation and voting, in addition to the analysis of the material elements of their organization, development, and the written records of the assemblies, that it will become the fundamental point of reference for the vast majority of parliamentary studies done in the next years. It is a guide as well as a counterpoint, and serves to clarify the traits and particularities of each territory in the context of the parliamentary culture common to Europeans, as Hébert himself explains.

In this sense, the Crown of Aragon is a good example of the differences that can arise between the diverse territories in terms of their models of parliamentary representation and negotiation, because, although they share many common features, there are still dissimilarities derived from their particular historical trajectories and the social structure of each of them. Thus, for example, even the terminology can be different, for in the territories located in the Iberian Peninsula, namely Aragon, Catalonia and Valencia, the term *curiarum* was used to refer to the parliamentary assemblies, whereas in the Italic Kingdoms, the terms used were *colloquium* in the case of Sicily and *parlamentum* for Naples and Sardinia. Moreover, the importance of the assemblies was different in each place: while in the Iberian territories there were permanent institutions derived from them, the Deputations of Aragon, Catalonia and Valencia, which assumed important political functions, the same process did not occur in the Italic realms.

However, at least in Sicily, the general assemblies had a marked legitimizing power (Marongiu; Corrao 1996; Romano), as Salvatore Fodale shows in his contribution, where he even states that the parliamentary meetings had a “constitutive power” at certain moments of serious political crisis. As regards the other “overseas” territories that formed part of the Crown of Aragon, unfortunately no article can yet be relied upon for the parliaments of the Kingdom of Sardinia, where over the course of the last thirty years, the tasks of transcribing and editing the *Acta Curiarum Regni Sardiniae* have been underway. However, in the case of the Kingdom of Naples, Elisabetta Scarton has contributed to the monograph with an interesting article on the parliaments of the second half of the fifteenth century, which have increased the interest generated in them over recent years (D’Agostino; Hébert 1998; Hernando; Scarton 2006, 2011; Scarton & Senatore; Senatore). In particular, the lack of Neapolitan documentation has been overcome through the analysis of the diplomatic correspondence from Florence and the Sforzas, which offer previously unknown information on the parliamentary assemblies,

just when it appears that the institution took on a greater power, during the reigns of Alfonso the Magnanimous (1442-1458) and Ferdinand I (1458-1494).

As for the Iberian territories of the Crown, Germán Navarro provides for us in this monograph with an initial interim report on the ambitious task of publishing the *Acta Curiarum Regni Aragonum*, which has been underway since 2006, and which will be updated in future years, providing a much broader documentary foundation for the interpretation of the Aragonese courts, taking into account those made by authors such as Luis González Antón (1975a, 1975b, 1977, 1978, 1980, 1989), Esteban Sarasa, and Luisa Maria Sanchez (1994, 2004). Rogerio Tostes focuses on the case of Catalonia, whose medieval parliamentary proceedings were published approximately one century ago, because it was the only territory to receive the attention of the project in charge of publishing the *Cortes de los antiguos Reinos de Aragón y de Valencia y del Principado de Cataluña*, of the *Real Academia de Historia* (even before Josep Coroleu and Josep Pella had studied the institution, which has recently become the subject of a wide bibliographic compilation by Eva Serra). Specifically, following such authors as Joel Blanchard, Fritz Kern and Kenneth Pennington, Tostes undertakes a valuable analysis of the semantic changes produced throughout the fourteenth century in the Catalan courts, in their role as the center of confluence between the forms of feudal rationalization and the values arising from reinterpretations of Roman Law, for example regarding the concept of “common good”. Thirdly, the courts of the Kingdom of Valencia are the subject of the article by José Antonio Alabau, who, starting with an examination of new documentation from the assembly dated 1437-1438, presents an exemplary analysis that serves as a complement to the knowledge we already had about one of the basic mechanisms of parliamentary negotiation, the *greuges*, or the trial of the claims made by the estates before the monarch during parliamentary sessions (Febrer; Ferrero; Gascón). In this case, one can say that, despite the publication endeavours of the last two decades (Muñoz 2008, 2009), there are still many proceedings of the Valencian courts that have yet to come to light.

Finally, the other realm belonging to the Crown of Aragon, the Kingdom of Majorca, had the particularity of possessing an institutional structure in which there were no proper Majorcan courts, as Antoni Mas explains thoroughly in his article. Instead, Majorcan subjects could sometimes, for particular occasions, form part of the Catalan courts, given their historical and demographic links to the Principality of Catalonia. It is this relationship that Mas examines, on the one side through an analysis of the epistolary sources from the city of Majorca, and, on the other, through the political and identity-asserting discourse of the rebels during the *Revolta dels Forans* of 1450-1453, which pitched this city against the towns on the island. In his conclusion, Majorcan peasants identified with their Catalan origins, as opposed to what happened in urban oligarchies, who promoted a stronger and specifically Majorcan identity. In sum, this article reinforces the tradition of studies that examine collective identities in the territories conquered and colonized by Catalans and Aragonese in the thirteenth century, namely Valencia and Majorca (Barrio; Baydal 2008; Ferrando; Guinot; Mas 2005, 2014, 2015; Rubio; Viciano).

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