CHAPTER TWO

THE POLITICAL CONSTITUTION OF THE IBERIAN MONARCHIES

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INTRODUCTION

The creation of what are known as the Iberian (Spanish and Portuguese) monarchies was the more or less unforeseeable outcome of a series of political and dynastic processes. Despite their many individual peculiarities, the two monarchies had a parallel history, developing similar political and legal cultures, and, for 60 years between 1580 and 1640, they were united under the authority of the same Spanish Habsburg monarch. This chapter presents a summary of this parallel history and the gradual and interactive development of these traditions and forms of government. Although the period of the Union of the Crowns is dealt with in other chapters of this volume (Chapters 6 and 14), some attention here will be given to Habsburg Portugal. This chapter covers the period from the reign of Charles I of Spain and João III of Portugal (early sixteenth century) until 1700, the year which, in the Spanish case, marked the end of the Habsburg dynasty and its replacement by the Bourbons. This was a period marked by continuity, but also by debates about new forms of government of political entities characterised by their vast size and their unprecedented heterogeneity, and on the virtues of the Union of the Crowns.

As a result, this period was also characterised by enormous crises, caused by the introduction of new institutions or powers into the existing political system, but, above all, by the fraught relations between some of the territories (Aragon, Catalonia, Portugal, Flanders, and several territories in the Italian peninsula) and an increasingly assertive monarchy, progressively associated with the kingdom of Castile. The political history of the Iberian peninsula in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries could thus be seen as a multinational history, in which Portugal, among others, played a full and active part. The central theme of this chapter is the continuously shifting balance between the regions and the centre, and the relations between the various kingdoms and the monarchy. It does not seem premature to begin this chapter by recalling that both the Spanish and the Portuguese monarchies, and the former in particular, were “composite monarchies”, with their respective
monarchs claiming sovereignty and jurisdiction over a diverse multitude of territoyes in Europe, Africa, Asia, and America. Although this chapter analyses the political processes that affected the European territories of these monarchies, the multiregional or composite nature of these monarchies was a central element in the forms of government and contemporary political discourses.

THE CREATION OF THE IBERIAN MONARCHIES

The creation of the two Iberian monarchies was, in the first place, the result of matrimonial alliances, and secondly of conquests of peninsular territories. The true beginning of what would later come to be called the Spanish monarchy (or the “monarchy of Spain”) was the matrimonial alliance between Isabel, queen of Castile from 1474 onwards, and Ferdinand, king of Aragon from 1479. Before their marriage in 1469, the Iberian peninsula was divided into various kingdoms or crowns that were independent from one another: the Crown of Castile, with territories in the north, northeast, centre, south and east of the Iberian peninsula—the old kingdoms of Galicia, Leon, Asturias, Old and New Castile, Extremadura, Murcia, the so-called Basque provinces, and all of Andalusia, with the exception of Granada, the last Muslim kingdom in the peninsula. In both territorial and demographic terms, the Crown of Castile was undoubtedly the hegemonic power.

The kingdom of Portugal, which occupied most of the western Atlantic seaboard, was a fully constituted kingdom (within more or less its present-day borders) from the mid-thirteenth century onwards, remaining independent until 1580, and again after 1640. Since opportunities for further territorial expansion in the peninsula were increasingly limited, in the fifteenth century the Portuguese turned their attention to the conquest of lands in North Africa and the Atlantic. However, the Portuguese kings always remained alert to the possibilities of forming dynastic alliances with Castile or Aragon as a way of acquiring greater political influence in the peninsular context. The Portuguese overseas expansion was therefore not incompatible with closer Portuguese involvement in the Iberian political scene—on the contrary.

The other main political formation in the peninsula was the Crown of Aragon, comprised of kingdoms and territories in the eastern part of the Iberian peninsula and beyond the Pyrenees. These included Aragon itself, which had been a kingdom since the early twelfth century; Valencia, constituted as a kingdom in the mid-thirteenth century; the Principality of Catalonia, founded as such in the twelfth century; and the Balearic Islands, established as a kingdom in the fourteenth century. The territories of the Crown of Aragon had a long history of expansion in the Mediterranean, which accounts for the Catalan, and later Spanish, presence in Sicily, Naples, and Sardinia, from the fourteenth century onwards. Finally, straddling the northeastern fringes of the peninsula and present-day southwestern France was the kingdom of Navarre, the first Christian realm established following the Arab conquest, in the tenth century, and governed since the fourteenth century by a French dynasty, the House of Béarn.

The use of the word “Crown”, in the context of both Aragon and Castile, conveyed a certain idea of superiority in relation to the other Iberian territories, which continued to be classified as “kingdoms”, as in the case of Portugal, Navarre, and Granada. Significantly, the expression “Crown of Portugal” never came to be
used in official documents. In any case, following the conquest of the Algarve in 1249 the Portuguese sovereigns began to title themselves as the “kings of Portugal and the Algarves”, a change that was undoubtedly a symbolic expression of the desire to emulate or match their Spanish counterparts.

The marriage between Isabel and Ferdinand dramatically changed the political situation of the Iberian peninsula. It brought about the union of the two crowns of Aragon and Castile, and although this initial union was only limited—in other words, the kingdoms that composed each of the crowns remained autonomous from one another—it paved the way for other subsequent unions in the sixteenth century. In 1492, the armies of Isabella and Ferdinand conquered Granada, the last remaining Islamic kingdom on Iberian soil. In 1512, eight years after Isabella’s death, Spanish armies conquered the territories of the kingdom of Navarre, at the other extremity of the peninsula (see Chapter 1). Charles was Ferdinand and Isabel’s grandson, the son of Juana of Castile and Philip the Handsome, and, from 1517, the first Habsburg ruler of Spain. His elevation to Holy Roman Emperor, as Charles V, in 1519, succeeding his grandfather Maximilian, transformed the old monarchy created by Isabel and Ferdinand into a pan-European polity (see Chapter 3). Charles became the ruler of numerous territories scattered throughout the continent. In addition to the Iberian kingdoms, and being the head of the Holy Roman Empire, he ruled over a number of Italian territories—Sardinia, Naples, Sicily, and Milan—but also the Low Countries, the Franche Comté, and Burgundy.

The situation changed somewhat upon Charles’ abdication in 1556. He left the imperial title and its possessions—with the sole exception of Milan—to his brother Ferdinand, and the rest to his son Philip II. At the beginning of his reign, Philip II controlled the Crowns of Castile and Aragon, Flanders and Burgundy, a number of Italian territories—Sardinia, Naples, Sicily, and Milan—and many territories in the Americas. He was also to claim sovereignty over the Philippines from the 1560s onwards, and in 1581 Philip II became the king of Portugal as Philip I. It was also on Philip II’s initiative that what would turn out to be the last of the Spanish dominions in Italy was constituted—the State of the Presidi of Tuscany. It was from the reign of Philip II onwards that this union of kingdoms was converted into a composite monarchy, but that was also when this composite state came to be seen as Spanish, designated as the monarchy of Spain. Over the course of several decades, this monarchy was transformed into arguably the most powerful state in existence, with territories—albeit distant and, in some cases, disconnected from one another—in the four corners of the world (Elliott 2009; Fernández Albaladejo 1992; Gruzinski 2004; Thompson 2005).

THE CHARACTER OF ROYAL AUTHORITY

There has been much discussion about the coherence of a monarchy such as the Spanish, comprised of a series of kingdoms that remained autonomous from one another. There has also been no lack of debate regarding the true reach of monarchical power and its effectiveness in the absence of institutional centralisation, as in the Spanish and the Portuguese political systems. In addressing the paradox of a system in which the monarch claimed absolute and supreme power, but lacked the instruments to implement that power, historians have increasingly focused on the
symbolic power accumulated by the monarchs and their servants. A symbolic power which, expressed through images and political discourse, allowed for the creation of powerful bonds of loyalty with the monarch, and a surprisingly stable political system (Hespanha 1994; Bouza 1998).

In the Iberian monarchies, for a period at least until the mid-seventeenth century, there was profound reflection on political life and its main actors—in philosophical and legal treatises, mirrors of princes, treatises in defence of the cities, or in theatre plays, novels, and other literary genres. Although the members of the School of Salamanca (Francisco de Vitoria, Domingo de Soto, and many others) are the best known internationally, there were many other original and highly influential authors—such as Jerónimo Osório, the Jesuits Juan de Mariana, Francisco Suarez, and António Vieira, as well as authors whose main concern was the good government of cities, such as Castillo de Bobadilla, Salas de Barbadillo, or playwrights such as Gil Vicente, Lope de Vega, and Francisco de Quevedo (Hespanha 1994; Fernández Albaladejo 1992; Cardim 2001; Gil Pujol 2007, 2016; Feros 2000, 2004; Truman 1999).

When analysing the world around them, the inhabitants of the peninsula in the early modern period found that the element that gave coherence to all creation was the all-pervasive principle of a hierarchical order. God, it was said, ruled over all creation alone and unchallenged; the sun dominated the planets; man had been created as the master of all other creatures, not excluding his wife and children. When observing the natural and cosmic world, it appeared evident that harmony was the product of unity, and both were the measure of perfection. From this point of view, monarchy was considered the most perfect form of government because power was concentrated in just one person, thereby avoiding the conflicts and divisions that would inevitably result if this power were shared by many.

Even more important was the idea that monarchical power was “natural”. In other words, political writers believed that in each community, from the family unit to the monarchy, there was always one individual who was situated at the top of the hierarchy and acquired authority over the rest. Nobody summed this up better than the humanist Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda in the mid-sixteenth century:

The man rules over the woman, the adult over the child, the father over his children. That is to say, the most powerful and most perfect rule over the weakest and most imperfect. This same relationship exists among men, there being some who by nature are masters and others who are by nature servants.

(Sepúlveda 1941, 83; Bodin 1590, bk. 1, chs 3, 4, and 8)

While the principle of hierarchy was the basis of the “ideological constitution” of each of the monarchies, for royal authority to be effective, in practice, some basic obligations had to accepted by both the king and his subjects. The monarch was required to protect his subjects, to guarantee peace and order, to administer justice, and to protect the weak. To be sure, the king should be guided only by the desire to serve God, and greatest prestige would derive from his actions in defence of the Church. But, in early modern political discourse, the monarch was continually being reminded that royalty was not pleasure without duty, that his office was one that should be exercised with the same care and love that a father would bestow on his children.
The stability of the monarchy was thus based on the monarch’s good governance, but also on the subjects’ loyalty. The hierarchical constitution of authority justified the principle of loyalty and absolute obedience towards those who held authority at each level of society. In accordance with all laws, divine and human, the inferior owed obedience to the superior—the wife to the husband, the children to their parents, the subjects to their king—and no law or authority could “exempt” any subject, regardless of their position in the Commonwealth, from obedience to the king. Such theories had been in existence since the medieval period, but they would continue to be developed and extended from the sixteenth century onwards, to the point of being endowed with the most potent kind of symbolism: disobedience and rebellion against the king signified disobedience and rebellion against God. This sacralisation of the monarchy ensured that, as a substitute for God on earth, the monarch was owed complete loyalty and obedience, and any attempt to resist or, most gravely, to plot against the king’s life should be treated as a crime of lèse-majesté (Gil Pujol 2003).

**RULING A COMPOSITE MONARCHY**

As indicated in Chapter 1 of this volume, the two Iberian monarchies were distinguished by their contrasting constitutional structures: while the Spanish monarchy of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was fundamentally composite in nature, the Portuguese monarchy had a more unified structure (although the lands it controlled in the Atlantic and across Asia were not all equal in status). Despite this difference, in both the Spanish and the Portuguese case, the most important attribute was the dynastic nature of the monarchy. Dynastic, because the fundamental law of the monarchy was patrimonialist, which allowed the territories to be passed on to the successor through inheritance. The principal aim of the laws regulating royal inheritance was to maintain the unity and extension of the territories, obliging each monarch to leave them all to his heir, generally a male child, even if not the eldest. This rule could only be broken in agreement with the potential heir, as was the case in Portugal during the crisis of succession caused by the extinction of the Avis dynasty in 1580 (Cunha 1993). Or when Philip II decided to appoint his daughter Isabella Clara Eugenia and her husband the Archduke Albert as the administrator and potential heiress of the Netherlands, something that he did only after receiving the consent of his son and heir, the future Philip III. The well-known tendency of the Spanish monarchs to marry members of the extensive Habsburg family, a predilection that could also be observed among the noble families of the peninsula, responded precisely to the need to preserve the family inheritance, limiting the number of pretenders from competing dynasties, and thus reducing the possibility of territorial division and dispersal.

The dynastic character of the monarchy influenced the policies of the various royal governments, whose principal aim was the defence of dynastic interests, and of the status regis—the “state of the king” (Amelang 2006, 43; Skinner 2002). In the case of the Spanish monarchy, this state was also a composite one. In other words, it was composed of autonomous territories, a theme that is explored in Chapter 1 and which we shall return to below. The non-existence of a united and centralised monarchy meant that the monarch was increasingly placed on a higher plane, occupying...
a supra-territorial position that afforded a global perspective and enabled him to act appropriately in all matters of government (Arrieta Alberdi 2006, 129).

This is why, despite its increasing role as a ceremonial centre, the Royal Household or Court gradually established itself as the real centre of power, or at least the centre from which the monarch’s wishes emanated. Those who served the king, especially in positions of greatest importance—Chamberlain, grand equerry, lord high steward, royal stewards—became the king’s spokesmen, his intermediaries with other government institutions. It was also in this context that the high nobility gradually began to gravitate towards the royal court, to desire positions in the royal household, and generally to prize service to the crown. Everything indicates that this happened earlier in the Spanish context than in the Portuguese (Raeymakers 2017; Scott 2017).

From 1580 onwards, Spanish monarchs began to expand their authority, prerogatives, and influence over regional and local institutions by promoting an “administrative” system of government, which at least partially replaced a “judicial” system that had been previously dominant. This change reflected a new political discourse that was spreading throughout Western European polities, including the Spanish monarchy. Promoted by the ruling circles, this new way of conceiving political action, known as “reason of state”, was used to justify an increase in the ruler’s executive prerogatives and pre-eminence. The creation of executive institutions fully under the monarch’s control accompanied this change in ideology. Already under Philip II, numerous juntas (ad-hoc committees) were created and staffed by members of the monarch’s inner circle who were fully committed to implementing the king’s orders.

The most notable political reform at the time, however, was the appointment of a de facto prime minister, the king’s favourite. Especially from the mid-sixteenth century onwards and until the end of the following century, royal favourites became central figures in the governance of each of the two monarchies. Men such as Cristóvão de Moura during the reign of Philip II, the Duke of Lerma, during the reign of Philip III, the Count-Duke of Olivares and Luis Méndez de Haro y Guzmán, the Marquis of Carpio, during the reign of Philip IV, the Count of Castelo Melhor under Afonso VI, and various others during the reigns of Charles II and Pedro II, showed that the royal household, and the royal palace in general, were the centres of power throughout the early modern period. Although the rise of favourites was a European phenomenon, in the Spanish monarchy it was a strictly political and institutional one. The main function of the chief minister-favourite was to reinforce monarchical influence over regional and local institutions by appointing and promoting men of his confidence. It is not yet clear whether these reforms and initiatives were effective or whether they succeeded in making the government more “regal”, but they did create new tensions that would affect the monarchy until at least the late seventeenth century (Elliott 1984; Elliott and Brockliss 1999; Feros 2000; Escudero 2014).

There were other institutions whose primary function was the defence of royal prerogatives and interests. In the Spanish context, one of these was the Council of State, originally created in 1521 at the behest of Charles I. The idea behind the creation of this Council was “to establish a Council corresponding only to the monarch’s universal role”. During the reign of Charles I, the Council of State was composed of subjects from several of his European kingdoms, but this council underwent a process of “Hispanisation” under Philip II. Whatever its composition, the Council
was always the most important institutional embodiment of the king’s power and interests (Barrios 2015, 445). The second of the councils that attended to the king’s global interests was the Council of War. Originating in the Crown of Castile, and in existence from the reign of Charles I onwards, it became, along with the Council of State, a “supra-territorial institution above the kingdoms”, and once again its members were more interested in defending the interests of the king than those of each kingdom and territory that composed the monarchy (Barrios 2015, 469).

The Spanish and the Portuguese monarchs also had their representatives in each of the kingdoms and territories under their rule—viceroys or governors, depending on the importance of the territorial unit. The essential point is that viceroys and governors, men of the highest rank and women from the royal family, were again representatives of the monarch. “With the appointment of viceroys, the Spanish rulers had also tried to solve the problem of the absent king”, a problem that had existed since the beginning of the Portuguese and Spanish overseas expansion and, later, in almost all the kingdoms of the monarchy except Castile. Philip II was the last Habsburg king to travel outside the peninsula, and who visited almost all of the peninsular kingdoms at least once. The symbolic importance of viceroys was due to the fact that in this society “power was conceived of in a personal manner and the concept of the state as a sovereign and impersonal entity to which we owe our loyalty was practically non-existent … Thus, while the Spanish monarch might always be absent” from many of his territories, he had viceroys and other representatives “to make himself present there” (Cánepa 2014, 145). The territories or kingdoms in which the Spanish monarch relied on the services of a viceroy until 1700 were: Navarre, because of its history as an independent kingdom before its union with the Crown of Castile through conquest; the three kingdoms that composed the Crown of Aragon—Valencia, Aragon, and Catalonia; Portugal (between 1581 and 1640); Naples, Sicily, and Sardinia in Italy, and New Spain and Peru in the Americas.

The king of Portugal established a vice-kingdom in India very early on (1505) and chose to be represented in most of his territories by governors. In Brazil, for example, Portuguese royal authority was initially represented by governors-general (1548), but, after 1640, the Portuguese Crown began to appoint viceroys for that territory. As we have noted, Portugal, unlike Castile and Aragon, was not thought of as a composite territorial whole. However, this did not prevent the royal power in this kingdom from rapidly assuming imperial attributes, a phenomenon that was given impetus by its expansion into Asia (Marcocci 2011). At the very beginning of the sixteenth century, Francisco de Almeida and Afonso de Albuquerque, two central figures in the establishment of the Portuguese presence in Asia, had suggested to Manuel I that he should adopt the title of “Emperor”, alleging that the Portuguese sovereign deserved such an honour because he already counted several kings among his vassals. Further territorial conquests in Asia and the South Atlantic in the sixteenth century contributed to a more intense identification between the Portuguese royalty and the collective imperial imagination (Thomaz 1990). In any case, the image of the Portuguese monarchy was clearly bolstered by this atmosphere of imperialist triumphalism.

Although they all represented the king, the power and authority of these viceroys and governors depended very much on the specific political and institutional circumstances of each territory. Their powers were more important in those
kingdoms or territories lacking a strong local tradition, either institutional or political. In the case of the Spanish monarchy, the powers of the viceroy were greatest in the Americas, relatively more restricted in Portugal, Valencia, Aragon, and the Italian territories, and weakest in Catalonia, where the local institutions had a longer history and a more firmly consolidated authority (Cañeque 2004; Hernando Sánchez 2004; Cardim and Palos 2012; Rivero Rodríguez 2011). In the Portuguese context, meanwhile, the Viceroy of Goa had much broader political powers than, for example, the governor-general of Brazil.

RULING THE KINGDOMS

The old historiographical paradigm that maintained that the kings had absolute power has been radically questioned by new generations of historians in the last two decades. These authors have drawn attention to the important limitations imposed on monarchical power by the nobility, the parliaments of each kingdom and the advisory councils that supported the monarchs in the governance of the different territories. The traditional image which suggested that, in Portugal, royal authority had established itself at a particularly early stage has been questioned and attention has been drawn both to the extreme jurisdictional plurality that existed in the Portuguese kingdom and to the weakness of the royal power until the late seventeenth century (Jago 1981; Fernández Albaladejo 1992; Hespanha 1994; Thompson 1990; Amelang 2006; Feros 2004, 2014).

Thanks to these new historiographical perspectives, we can now understand the history of the Spanish monarchy as the history of a composite monarchy, made up of communities, and kingdoms that were not absorbed or eliminated by the monarchical-dynastic discourse and discipline. As far as its Portuguese counterpart is concerned, although it did not have a comparable composite structure, it was nonetheless internally heterogeneous, whether in jurisdictional and territorial terms or with regard to differences in individual status among its inhabitants. The assertive declarations of some monarchs who saw themselves as absolute rulers now appear more rhetorical and less convincing when seen from the perspective of the kingdoms, provinces, cities, and seigniorial institutions. We are now able to reconstruct the early modern period as a complex epoch in which those driving historical change may not be reduced to a few (monarchs and their leading officials) who dominated, and others who allowed themselves to be dominated. The most immediate results of this revision have been twofold: first, insistence on the autonomy and historical agency of formerly marginalised individuals and groups; and, second, deeper knowledge of “resistance” to the monarchical power, as well as of the possibilities and forms of that resistance, which were much more far-reaching than was previously considered possible.

From the sixteenth century—albeit building on older ideas—alongside the theories that defended the rights and powers of the monarch, another concept of “state” was being developed: the state of the Commonwealth, the respublica, the group of institutions that represented the kingdoms, provinces, and cities. Perhaps the clearest evidence of this more complex view of the state was the development of theories that considered the king to be a servant of the Commonwealth, who needed to take into consideration the interests of his subjects and respect the laws of the realm. In
both the Portuguese and the Spanish case, the contemporary discourse about royalty insisted much more on the question of duties and responsibilities than on the prince’s powers and rights. It is fascinating to observe that the metaphors most frequently used to depict the roles of the Spanish or the Portuguese monarch were those of a father, a judge, and a protector. According to the theories of the time, a stable and harmonious commonwealth could exist only if the monarch inspired the love, respect, and obedience of his subjects, and recognised that the interests of the king, his kingdoms, and vassals needed to be in full accord (Gil Pujol 2009).

Perhaps even more important than these general ideas about the rights and duties of a ruler was the reality that the monarch, even when endowed with supreme authority, did not possess the same level of power in all the territories that composed his monarchy. Among the essential elements of the composite monarchies was the fact that each of the territories had its own particular status determined in most cases by the forms adopted on its union with the monarchy. One of the paradoxes of the structure of the Iberian monarchies, in James Amelang’s words, is that

while the image of political organisation tended towards centralisation, through (often rather literal) incarnation in the figure of the monarch, reality headed in the opposite direction, towards considerable administrative decentralisation. The result of this paradox was, to use his term, a system of “pre-eminent monarchy”, credibly represented and interpreted as both unitary and pluralist at the same time.

(Amelang 2006, 43–44)

We are therefore dealing with a system based on negotiation between the different components of the monarchy, rather than one based on the unilateral imposition of royal authority. The key—James Amelang wrote following Antonio Manuel Hespanha—for

the effective functioning (of the Spanish Monarchy) ... was the relations between central government, focused around but hardly limited to the figure of the monarch, and a wide range of elites located at both the centre and the multiple peripheries of the imperial system. This “wide range” should moreover be taken quite literally, as it comprises groups as diverse as urban oligarchies; all levels of the territorial aristocracy, whose principal bulwark of power continued to be the seigniorial regime; state bureaucrats; the Church; merchant and financial interests; and the military, among others.

(Amelang 2006, 43–44, and 46)

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, authors defending the untrammeled power of the king believed that the government of the Spanish monarchy was a “regal government”, a government by one, and not a “political government”, a government by many. These views of the Spanish monarch, enjoying full authority and control over his government, stand in stark contrast with the views of many others. The main characteristic of early modern monarchical government was, according to the German author Samuel Pufendorf (1632–1694), its “irregular form” (respublica irregularis)—it was a type of government in which
we do not find that unity which is the essence of a completely established state, not because of a disease or fault in the administration of the country, but because the irregularity of its form has been, as it were, legitimated by public law or custom.

(cit. Feros 2014, 144)

The early modern Iberian monarchies were indeed respublicae irregulares: they were neither centralised, unified, nor uniform, and their government was not dominated exclusively by the king’s will.

Contemporaries shared the belief that none of the institutions, and certainly not the royal institutions, could monopolise the implementation of policies. In the Iberian political discourse, there was talk of a mixed government, which incorporated the plurality of institutions that represented distinct communities and powers. This type of government was made up of monarchical institutions (the ruler and his closest advisors, and those institutions that promoted monarchical interests), aristocratic institutions (members of the central elites—nobility and university-trained individuals also known as “letrados”), and popular or “democratic” institutions (parliament, city councils, etc.). In the early modern Iberian world, therefore, the maintenance of social order and the administration of justice, the principal functions of government, did not derive from the exclusive exercise of the monarchical authority, but it was fundamentally a negotiated order, one agreed upon between the monarchy, the various communities, social orders, kingdoms, and their representatives.

In the case of the Spanish monarchy, the other central institutions that did not form part of the “Royal Household and Court” were the Consejos (Councils). During the early modern period, 14 Councils were created within the Spanish monarchy to manage public affairs and to serve as the main conduits between the monarch, his kingdoms, and his subjects. It would be a mistake to view these Councils as a part of the “executive” government and as being fully controlled by the monarch and his officials. Since the early sixteenth century, the Councils were perceived as autonomous from the royal will and as representing the interests of regional elites. Counsellors possessed many important prerogatives: although appointed by the king, they held their offices in perpetuity; they acted as supreme judges in their jurisdictions; proposed candidates for major and minor offices; and distributed patronage. They also served as an important link between the monarchy, the kingdoms, and the cities—responsible for communicating royal orders, and, on the other hand, gradually assuming the function of transmitting the needs, expectations, and complaints of lower authorities to the king (Tomás y Valiente 1990; Feros 2000 ch. 1; Barrios 2015). Although he was no doubt exaggerating to some extent, Luis Cabrera de Córdoba, a late sixteenth-century historian, described the counsellors of Castile as “absolute” ministers, who “made the government of royal monarchy a republic … and out of habit they considered everything that they did not do or have command over to be an error” (cit. Feros 2000, 26).

The union between Castile and Aragon, established in 1479, had been based on the principle aeque principaliter, since the legal frameworks of these two political entities were maintained, including the status of the territories that belonged to the Crown of Aragon. In 1494, the Council of Aragon was established at the royal court. This body was later given the same status as the Council of Castile, created in
Both councils were granted the status of “Supreme”, indicating that, at least in theory, they were presided over by the king. They had the exclusive right to rule on lawsuits in each of their territories and were endowed with jurisdictional autonomy, in the sense that the lawsuits were settled within their own jurisdictional area (not outside) and by magistrates born in those territories. The existence of these two councils was important, for it was the foundation of the future polysynodial (multiple councils) system.

The union between Castile and Aragon also allowed for the creation of some councils that were to have jurisdiction over all the territories of the monarchy, the Council of the Inquisition and the Council of the Crusade, both of which were concerned with ecclesiastical matters. The Council of the Crusade, created in the early sixteenth century, was composed of several members drawn from other councils (the Councils of Castile, Aragon, and the Indies). With executive commissioners in each diocese, the Council of the Crusade was in charge of collecting various categories of taxes, including those granted by the papacy, which the Church paid in all the territories of the monarchy. The Council of the Inquisition, officially created at the end of the 1480s, was responsible for policing religious orthodoxy among all the subjects of the Spanish monarchs. This Council became the most powerful of them all if we consider the great influence that it had on the attitudes and behaviour of all those living under the aegis of the Spanish monarchs. The Council was at the top of a pyramidal structure composed of numerous religious tribunals or courts (Seville, Cordoba, Granada, Murcia, Llerena, Cuenca, Toledo, Santiago de Compostela, the Canaries, and Madrid in the Crown of Castile; Zaragoza, Valencia, Barcelona, Mallorca, Sardinia, and Palermo in the Crown of Aragon; Mexico, Lima, and Cartagena de Indias in the Americas), with hundreds of regional and local officials—and alongside them an even greater number of “familiars” of the Inquisition”, able to infiltrate the population of all social levels. With the exception of the monarchs and the members of the dynasty, all those who lived in the territories of the Spanish monarchy could be investigated, arrested, and tried by the Inquisition.

In Portugal, a consultative structure was also developed based on the royal court, most notably the king’s advisory councils, as well as the royal tribunals created in the first half of the sixteenth century: the Desembargo do Paço (the Supreme Court of Justice), the Casa do Cível de Lisboa (the Lisbon High Court), the Mesa da Consciência e Ordem (a consultative body responsible for administering the property of military and religious orders), and the Tribunal of the Inquisition. As for the territories outside Europe that had been conquered by Portugal, these were initially administered by the pre-existing organs of government and administration based in Lisbon. The Casa de Ceuta was created early on in this process (1434), subsequently being transformed into the Casa da Guiné e da Mina. It was later followed by the Casa da Índia, by all indications created in 1500. The royal council, on the other hand, took somewhat longer to become firmly established in Portugal, and the Council of State also appeared relatively late, only being created in the second half of the sixteenth century, during the reign of Sebastião I (Cardim 2004).

The political, demographic, and economic importance of the Crown of Castile led to the creation of other councils to enable more efficient administration of its kingdoms and territories. The most important of these was the Council of Finance (1523), responsible for “all income and expenditure, organising the collection of
— The political constitution —

rents and duties” (Ladero Quesada 1973, 12). The Council of the Military Orders was created to regulate and administer these noble corporate bodies that had been fundamental in the conquests of the Muslim kingdoms during the medieval period (Postigo Castellanos 1987 and 1995). Yet perhaps the most important of these Castilian councils was the Consejo de la Cámara de Castilla (Chamber of Castile), a smaller council composed of members drawn from the Council of Castile. Its most important role was identifying suitable candidates for “the positions of temporal government ... and those of spiritual government” in the territories that formed part of the Crown of Castile and to presenting them to the monarch for election. The Council of the Chamber of Castile was also responsible for scrutinising and advising on all the petitions from royal subjects requesting favours and posts from the monarch. Historians have seen this council as “the greatest expression of royal absolutism”, but it can also be argued that the enormous scope of its jurisdiction and its ability to propose thousands and thousands of candidates to the monarch gave the council tremendous political and social influence (Barrios 2015, 507– 514).

Without any doubt, from an institutional and political viewpoint the Crown of Castile was the best organised and structured territory of the monarchy. Like other kingdoms, Castile had a representative institution, the Cortes, which, from the mid-sixteenth century onwards, was composed only of representatives of the 16 most important cities. Representatives of the other two estates, the nobility and the Church, withdrew from the Cortes after Charles I’s reign. The number of cities represented increased from 16 to 18 in the seventeenth century, and each of them sent two representatives elected by the members of the municipal governments. The important thing to remember is that the Consejo de la Cámara de Castilla was charged with summoning the Cortes in the king’s name, and with setting the agenda and leading its debates. The main activity of the Cortes was the approval of taxes and funds requested by the monarchy. Between the 1580s and the 1630s, there is no doubt that the Cortes played a major role in the political and fiscal administration of the monarchy, but this changed after the mid-seventeenth century. Thereafter, the Cortes of Castile virtually ceased to meet, or did so only to confirm the royal heirs (Fortea Pérez 2008).

Historians have reminded us that, throughout the two centuries of Habsburg rule, Castile was a community of “substantial, semi-independent cities”, each governed by its own time-honoured laws, jealous of its historic privileges and rights. To be sure, the monarchy and the Council of Castile exerted a powerful influence over the cities through the so-called corregidores (governors or chief magistrates), appointed by the king on the recommendation of the Cámara de Castilla, to serve as the link between the centre and the most important cities of the Crown of Castile. Yet it seems clear that in a territory with a relatively weak parliament and without any autonomous institutions as a kingdom in its own right, the cities continued to be important centres of political action and resistance. This even made it possible for certain republican ideas to take root centred on the political life of the city—further proof of the great richness and diversity of political thought and discourses circulating in the peninsula. Both in the Portuguese context and in Castile and Aragon, various civic republican discourses began to appear, defending the freedoms of the cities and the preservation of their form of government, which involved the active political participation of the members of the urban elites (Gil Pujol 2007; Herrero...
In the case of the Crown of Castile, it was the cities—either individually or bound into urban leagues—that were most vehemently opposed to the monarchy’s taxation and political measures. From the Revolt of the Comuneros in the early sixteenth century to the revolts of Andalusian cities, especially Seville, in the second half of the seventeenth century, encompassing the revolts of the Castilian cities in the 1580s and the Basque cities in the 1620s, it was the urban communities, and not the regional authorities or the Cortes, that were responsible for the moments of greatest tension and resistance against the monarchy or the monarchical government (Mackay 1999; Knezevic 2017).

Although in some respects resembling its Castilian counterpart, and likewise composed of the native citizens of the various kingdoms that constituted the crown, the Council of Aragon did not have as much influence in these territories as the Council of Castile had in its own. However, this had less to do with the status of the Council, but rather the weakness of royal authority in those kingdoms, and the power and influence of the regional institutions and authorities. The Cortes or Corts in each of the kingdoms were more powerful and representative than the Castilian Cortes. Not only were the three social estates represented in these parliaments (nobility, clergy, and commoners), but they also had institutions (such as the Generalitat in the Principality of Catalonia) that maintained the function of the Corts when the assembly was not in session. Most of the inhabitants of the kingdoms of the Crown of Aragon had far more regular interactions with these local and regional bodies than the monarchical institutions themselves. It was the former institutions that many considered to be the real Fathers of the community, the defenders and protectors of the subjects and kingdoms. Nothing could be done without their involvement, certainly not the imposition and the collection of taxes. There were also important cities in the Crown of Aragon, but, unlike in Castile, the monarch could not rely on a network of corregidores, and we know that the cities were more closely linked with the regional institutions, once again, especially in Catalonia (Casey 1979; García Cárcel 1985; Gil Pujol 1989).

During the reigns of Charles I and Philip II, many other councils were created that had as their mission to help the monarch to govern other kingdoms and territories, while their members acted as representatives before the king and court of the interests of the different commonwealths. During the reign of Philip II, the Council of Flanders and Burgundy was established to help the monarch administer the territories that had originally belonged to the Habsburgs (Lecuppre-Desjardin 2016). This was a Council that suffered through the vicissitudes of these territories, as we shall see further on. Other territories were also administered with the help of Councils. The Council of Portugal was created in 1581, after Philip II became the first Habsburg monarch of that kingdom. The Council of Indies, on the other hand, helped to administer territories that were not kingdoms juridically speaking, but which were considered as such due to their size and the wealth that they produced, namely the Indies (Luxán Meléndez 1988; Barrios 2015, 533–538). The history of these two Councils, of Portugal and of the Indies, is recounted in other chapters of this volume.

In the reign of Philip II, other steps were taken to clarify the way in which the various parts of the Spanish monarchy were linked with one another in political and jurisdictional terms. Thus, the king ordered the creation of the Council of Italy, under...
whose purview were the affairs of Naples, Sicily, and Milan (Rivero Rodríguez 1998; Sabatini 2012). There is no doubt that the monarchy’s influence over its Italian territories was less direct and far-reaching than in Castile. With regard to the three largest territories, the most immediately striking feature is the consistency in the Spanish government’s behaviour towards the kingdoms of Naples and Sicily, and the Duchy of Milan, in terms of maintaining respect for their institutions, exhibiting familiarity with the forms of representation in each territory, the evident concern with reconciling tensions, actively searching for counterbalances through the concessions made to the different territorial bodies, and confirming the privileges of the cities and the urban classes, while at the same time maintaining the feudal prerogatives untouched (Ruiz Ibáñez and Sabatini 2009).

Yet, the respect for the institutions of each kingdom notwithstanding, the Spanish government did not renounce the possibility of exercising more direct forms of control in the political, administrative, and military spheres. The aim of reconciling these two apparently incompatible demands gave rise to a strategy that almost never required any direct interference with the existing state administrative bodies, but instead involved the creation of parallel structures, or that were superimposed on existing ones, as also happened in the government of Castile (Musi 1991). It was precisely in the administrative and financial spheres—less delicate than the political or military ones—that this strategy of juxtaposing instruments for the control of already existing institutions was combined with a policy for the integration of the territories into the larger structure of the monarchy. As a result of this monarchical policy, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Consiglio Collaterale was established in Naples, which was the highest advisory body to the viceroy. Also created around the same time was the Scrivania di Razione, an office that, without introducing any formal changes in the pre-existing administrative structure, was superimposed on the already consolidated organs of control, following a blueprint that had been successfully tested in Sicily during the preceding century (Giannone 1723, 377–390; Cernigliaro 1983). An analogous structure was also created towards the middle of the century in Milan, above all for managing the complex procedure for the new cadastral survey of the duchy (Zappa 1991).

Equally crucial for defining the constitutional profile of each of the Iberian kingdoms was the institutionalisation of their legal systems. Since the end of the fifteenth century, a network of tribunals, courts, and chancelleries had been gradually built up in each of these territories. In Aragon, one of the most notable bodies was the Justicia de Aragon, a tribunal that served as the court of appeal for cases relating to this kingdom, having also performed the important role of reconciling royal regulations with the legal framework in force in that territory (Arrieta Alberdi 2006). In Portugal, the judicial network also became more complex with the creation of royal courts of appeal (tribunais de relações), while, at the same time, a procedure was developed that was equivalent to that of the Justicia: the chanceler-mor (high chancellor) could refuse to seal those royal charters that ran counter to the legislation already implemented. From the late fifteenth century onwards, Portugal experienced a significant growth of its royal jurisdictional mechanism, in the shape of a series of new courts (the Desembargo do Paço, the Casa do Civiel de Lisboa, the Mesa da Consciência e Ordens, and the Court of the Inquisition).
The Castilian judicial network also became more complex during this period. Various courts and chancelleries, often very different in their nature and function, were created, and Castile developed a legal framework that was common to all of its different territorial components. Moreover, Castilian institutions and legal norms began to extend into and make themselves felt in all of the Iberian kingdoms. In the case of Portugal, its juridical interaction with Castile was conducted above all through the *lex regni vicinoris*, the legal principle that provided for the extension of “particular” laws to adjacent territories without this calling into question the independence of each of them (Clavero 1983).

**UNION AND DISUNION**

In various studies published in the 1990s, Sir John H. Elliott drew attention to the durability of the royal authority in the different kingdoms that formed the Spanish monarchy. Only Portugal and the United Provinces were able to break away from the monarchy from the late fifteenth century onwards. To explain this phenomenon, Elliott insisted on the need to deepen our knowledge of the different resources that had made this longstanding stability of the monarchy possible: “its administrative organisation, its capacity for coercion, and other more intangible resources—such as its capacity for maintaining the loyalty of its subjects through a combination of ideological persuasion and appealing to individual and collective interests” (Elliott 1992, 722). There has been a great deal of discussion about the fact that the Spanish monarchy, just like the Portuguese one, showed greater stability than other European monarchies during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Although popular revolts and dissent among the local or regional elites were common, until 1640 no revolt had called into question either the monarchy in general, or its nature as a composite monarchy. The main question is therefore why there were no major revolts in the Spanish monarchy, at least until the final decades of the seventeenth century?

Some historians maintain that the existence of a repressive apparatus, such as the Inquisition, promoted social and political order by suppressing the religious diversity and dissent that created civil and military conflict elsewhere in Western Europe. Yet this explanation of monarchical stability does not take into consideration other features of the Iberian political system. One of the keys to this stability seems to have been the loyalty to the monarchy demonstrated by a sizeable portion of the local social elites. We are now beginning to gain a better knowledge and understanding of the mechanisms and ideology that enabled the monarchs to maintain a profound cohesion between the many distant territories over which they claimed authority without any need for the creation and expansion of overtly repressive institutions. The main factor behind this was the existence of an important group of individuals who, in the course of their service in the different territories of this world monarchy, working at all levels of government, and in all sectors of the administration, defended the pre-eminence of the monarch and his interests, and advocated the continued permanence of the monarchical order. These individuals formed part of an extensive system of patronage that, through various hierarchical networks, united the monarch with all his servants in the various kingdoms that constituted the monarchy. Equally important was the existence of an army that included soldiers from almost all the kingdoms, which took part in conflicts both within and outside
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the peninsula. The copious literature on what has come to be called the “Spanish soldier” enables us to understand the importance of this army in the cohesion of individuals from various kingdoms, identifying with the monarchy of Spain and the interests of the Spanish monarchs.

No less decisive was the type of relationship that was established between the royal power and the noble, ecclesiastical and administrative elites. The synergies that these groups developed with the crown also help to explain the longevity of a social order that was profoundly inequitable and discriminatory. Both the king and the elites were also aware that leading and supporting more radical protests could pave the way for more egalitarian demands from the “popular” sectors of society. For this reason, whenever such a prospect arose, the king and the elites closed ranks to avoid a transformation of the social order that could call into question the existing status quo: the domination of a tiny minority over a vast subordinate majority, impoverished and practically deprived of the means for participating in the process of political decision-making (Casey 1979). These territorial elites had few doubts that their defence and support of the monarchical project would bring political stability, honour, and economic benefits for themselves (Piola Caselli 2008; Sabatini 2012).

But all this does not explain another reality: the numerous territorial crises, some with dramatic results, arising from the difficulties of incorporating the different territories or kingdoms that composed this global monarchy. It would be a grave mistake to judge the political situation of the monarchy by observing it only from its centre, from the royal court. As several historians have stressed in recent years, the Spanish monarchy was a polycentric political formation, which means that it should of course be analysed from the centre, but also from the perspective of the different kingdoms, starting with those that were less well integrated (Cardim et al. 2012). Not all of the kingdoms felt themselves to be equal partners in the construction of the Spanish monarchy, and not all of them wanted to be subsumed into a more unified and harmonised whole (Feros 2017, ch. 1).

The problems of integration and union were already evident in the Crown of Castile in the early sixteenth century. The well-known Revolt of the Comuneros (1519–1522) was an expression of the resistance of the citizenry to Charles I’s imperial project, which was perceived to have reduced Castile to the status of a marginal kingdom. Castile’s urban elites took Charles’ election as Holy Roman Emperor in 1519 as a sign that their kingdom would lose its pivotal position in the new order, in addition to its identity as a kingdom in its own right. The rebellion was essentially Castilian and urban, a reminder of the great influence of the Castilian cities within the monarchy created by Ferdinand and Isabel, but also an attempt to demonstrate the pre-eminence of Castile within the peninsular union (Sánchez León 1998). As I. A. A. Thompson has demonstrated, the defeat of the Comuneros in 1522 did not put an end to the Castilian-centred project—the desire of the Castilian cities to be given power and a central role in the design and preparation of monarchical political projects—as well as the development of what has come to be called a Castilian identity, or the feeling that Castile was the “patria natural” of its inhabitants (Thompson 1995). The defeat of the Comuneros enabled the transformation of Castile into the nerve centre and unifying agent of the monarchy. From this point on, the vast majority of the highest officials of the monarchy would be Castilians (natives of one of the various territories that formed the Crown of Castile), and the centres of royal
authority would be established in Castile. This was especially so during the reign of Philip II (1556–1598), who chose a small Castilian town, Madrid, situated near the geographical centre of the Iberian peninsula, as the seat of his court and capital. After overcoming some relatively minor crises in the late sixteenth century, Castile would become the most loyal and royalist kingdom in the Spanish monarchy. And, more importantly, the kingdom of Castile gradually came to see itself as synonymous with Spain and tried to transform its Castilian identity into the genuine Spanish one.

The difficulties of political and territorial integration were most clearly apparent precisely at one of the weakest points in the composite monarchy, the territories of Flanders or the Netherlands. Of course, the disagreements and subsequent conflicts in this case were not only the product of the monarchy’s political and institutional structure, but also of the growing confessional divide throughout Europe caused by the Protestant reformation. Indeed, of all the territories under the control of the Spanish Habsburgs, the Netherlands was the area where Protestant reform had spread most widely among the nobility and the urban elites. The reforms introduced by Philip II, which included the creation of new dioceses and the implantation of the Inquisition “in the Spanish style”, triggered the resistance of the nobility and the cities, who took these actions as confirmation that Philip II did not respect their privileges and liberties, or the role that the nobility played in the governance of these territories. Headed by William, Prince of Orange-Nassau, formerly Charles I’s vassal, the nobles became increasingly vocal in their criticism of a government that, ruined by the latest wars against France, lacked the means to impose royal policy or to expand its trade.

Although initially, between 1568 and 1570, the Spanish monarchy was able to pacify the Netherlands by sending a force of Spanish tercios led by the uncompromising Duke of Alba, its hold over the territory began to slip in 1572. Not even Alba’s replacement with other, more conciliatory governors was enough to arrest the disintegration of royal authority. Unable to maintain any longer the fiction of a rebellion against the royal government, but not against the king himself, the States-General of the Northern Provinces led by Orange officially deposed Philip II as the sovereign in 1581, while actively looking for new external allies against the formidable Spanish military power, turning first to France, and then in 1586 with England. The failure of Philip II’s attempts to resolve the conflict in the Netherlands by military means was recognised in 1598 when he decided, with the agreement of his son and heir, the future Philip III, to hand over the government of the loyal southern provinces of the Netherlands to his daughter the Archduchess Isabella Clara Eugenia, and her husband and first cousin, Archduke Albert of Austria. Philip II yielded to them the temporal sovereignty over the Netherlands, which could be made permanent if Isabella and Albert were to have any descendants. In 1609, the Twelve Years’ Truce brought a provisional end to the conflict in the Netherlands and in Europe in general. The Truce also confirmed the separation of the Netherlands into two entities that would then gradually become more and more differentiated from one another. The United Provinces were emerging as a de facto independent, prosperous territory, with a high degree of local autonomy, led by a dynamic commercial elite and a noble military elite. The lands that remained part of the Spanish monarchy were officially Catholic, although there were pockets of Protestants where the recovery from the war took a little longer. The relative autonomy of these territories ended when Albert died.
without descendants. The definitive (formal) separation of the Netherlands however did not take place until the beginning of the eighteenth century, as a consequence of the War of Spanish Succession (1700–1714), after which the territories of Spanish Flanders came under the control of the Austrian Habsburgs (Parker 1972; Esteban Estríngana 2002; Echevarría Bacigalupe 1998; Duerloo 2012).

But the most profound political and territorial crises were provoked by the more assertive and intrusive approach taken by the monarchy from the reign of Philip IV onwards, above all during the ascendancy of the king’s favourite the Count-Duke of Olivares (1621–1643). For the crown and its agents, the problems facing the monarchy were so urgent that they required a vastly expanded executive power attainable only through the increased presence and influence of the monarchy in each one of the kingdoms. This sense of political urgency led many to advocate the strengthening of royal authority as a *sine qua non* for the salvation of the monarchy. In other words, the only means by which the Spanish monarchy could maintain its power in Europe was a more centralised system of control and network of institutions that privileged the executive power that allowed for faster decision-making. This in turn required a definitive break with an ideology that postulated that the king was obliged to consult his subjects or follow their advice, and, even more importantly, it required the different kingdoms to renounce their rights and privileges and place themselves at the full disposal of the monarch and his programme of government (Elliott 1986).

The Count-Duke of Olivares, Philip IV’s chief minister, best articulated this monarchical frustration with the non-Castilian kingdoms: “Damned be the nations, and damned be the national men”, a reference to non-Castilian subjects who were fundamentally loyal to their own kingdoms and commonwealths. Such sentiments notwithstanding, Olivares offered proposals for the unification of the kingdoms under the royal aegis. He did not intend to transform the Spanish composite monarchy into one that resembled the French system of rule, with more integrated regions under royal authority. Instead, he and his allies wished to unite the various kingdoms behind their king. The problem, or fatal flaw, in his strategy was that the model for his new monarchy could only be Castile. In the famous “Gran memorial” (1624), Olivares wrote of “reducing the kingdoms in the style of Castile”, in what promised to be a major reconfiguration of the form of union on which the monarchy was based, especially in two main spheres: the military and taxation (Elliott 1986; Fernández Albaladejo 2009).

Olivares’ main goal was to furnish his king with political structures that would enable him to maintain Spain’s power in the world. Olivares was clearly prepared to negotiate with the kingdoms over the implementation of this new policy, and moreover he was under no illusion that these negotiations would be fraught. The king and his prime minister initially tried to impose a rather less ambitious scheme, unveiled by Olivares in 1625, and baptised as the Union of Arms. It was a “programme for mutual defence” of sorts, to which all kingdoms—peninsular, European, and American—would be obliged to contribute. Each kingdom would be committed to “providing and maintaining a fixed number of paid men, who would constitute a common military reserve for the monarchy as a whole”. Each individual kingdom’s quota of men was also determined (Castile and the Indies, 44,000; Catalonia, 16,000; Aragon, 10,000; Valencia, 6,000; and so on).
The consequences of this political assertiveness of the royal government under Olivares were different in each of the kingdoms. Some years ago, John Elliott drew attention to the “absence of revolution” in Castile in the mid-seventeenth century, and his question to other historians was a simple one: why did Castile not rebel if on the surface the same “pre-revolutionary” conditions prevailed in that kingdom as elsewhere? There were certainly debates in Castile on the reforms that were being introduced, and about the increasing pressure of taxation on the Castilian people, while important popular revolts did take place in the Crown of Castile. Yet neither the debates nor the revolts led to a general rebellion in Castile. However, rather than being a consequence of the absence of a culture of resistance in the kingdom, this seems to be at least in part due to an increasing identification of the future of Castile with the future of the monarchy as a whole. Another factor that has been highlighted is the political disunity within the Crown of Castile, which impeded collective action (MacKay 1999; Gelabert González 2001; Knezevic 2017).

Other kingdoms also succeeded in remaining relatively tranquil during the seventeenth century. This was the case with the kingdom of Aragon, which remained loyal to the monarchy during the great crises of the mid-seventeenth century, after being the epicentre of an earlier serious crisis, in the late sixteenth century (Gil Pujol 1989). Valencia was another instance of a stable and loyal kingdom. In the first decades of the sixteenth century, it was shaken by a series of popular revolts known as the Germanías, contemporaneous with and in some respects resembling the Castilian Revolt of the Comuneros, but the kingdom remained loyal and politically calm during the rest of the early modern period. It is, however, not very clear why this kingdom remained loyal, although everything seems to suggest that, unlike the Catalan principality, Valencia never developed strong “national” ideologies and institutions, and historians have shown that the links between the central elites and their Valencian counterparts were much closer than in any other kingdom apart from Castile (Casey 1979, 1995).

As for the regions of the Italian peninsula that were subject to Spanish sovereignty during the sixteenth century, uprisings were few and far between, and inconsequential in comparison with the “revolution” of the kingdom of Naples in 1647–1648. The political handiwork of the Count-Duke of Olivares was evident here, more precisely the tendency to solve the problem of the crown’s depleted resources, and the difficulty of raising or imposing new taxes in the non-Castilian kingdoms of the Iberian peninsula, by shifting the burden onto Naples and Sicily, especially the former of these two territories—even though in both cases the fiscal burden imposed on them was already relatively heavy. In the peripheral territories of the monarchy, there was an autonomist tradition that determined the point of political equilibrium between the crown and the local ruling classes—an autonomy that was essentially based on respect for the traditional prerogatives and freedoms of the nobility. Thus, before the crisis that was set in motion by the extraordinary demands necessitated by its military commitments, the monarchy’s financial needs were not in conflict with Neapolitan autonomy. The revolt of the kingdom of Naples in 1647–1648 was a complex phenomenon that went beyond a popular anti-feudal uprising, but is also not reducible to an independence movement for the separation of Naples from the Spanish monarchy. The revolt was rather driven by the desire for a realignment of the balance of power, a return to the order prior to the crown’s drive for greater
centralisation in the years leading up to the uprising, during which it had reclaimed the autonomy lost to the ruling elites of the Viceregal capital—through the repressive activities of the viceroy and the hegemonic position granted to some nobles, bureaucrats, and members of the capital’s commercial and financial bodies (Galasso 1972, 1994; Villari 1973; Ribot García 2004).

In the same way, the revolt of Messina in 1674 took place at the end of roughly three decades of changes in the political situation of the kingdom of Sicily within the “Spanish imperial system”, and the redefinition of the balance of power inside it. The string of revolts in 1647–1648 had reinforced the role of Messina as the true and proper locus of power on the island, capable of guaranteeing order and loyalty. In 1674, the two capitals had exchanged roles: Palermo was converted into a bastion of loyalty to the crown, while Messina had become a treacherous enemy (Villari 1979; Ribot García 2002).

However, despite the violence of the revolts in Naples and Messina, and other moments of great tension in Sardinia and Milan, in the last quarter of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Italian territories appeared to have been largely pacified, and their bond with the crown repaired. This relatively harmonious relationship may be seen as a consequence of three factors, which worked in conjunction with one another: first, once the repressive phase had come to an end, on the one hand, the jurisdictional prerogatives of the kingdoms’ own institutions were restored, while, on the other hand, the pressure on the periphery for the transfer of resources to the centre was reduced. At the same time, the traditional financial networks and mechanisms that closely involved the Italian territories in the management of the monarchy’s public treasury were reactivated. The longstanding nature of this collaboration accounts for the fact that the most notable anti-Spanish conspiracy in the early eighteenth century, the so-called Conspiracy of the Prince of Macchia in Naples, was not followed up in any way, while, on the contrary, Philip V’s visit to the capital of the largest of his Italian possessions greatly consolidated the new sovereign’s relationship with the kingdom, despite the fact that its detachment from the monarchy’s political orbit was imminent, and in fact occurred in 1707 (Granito 1861).

The tension between kingdoms’ rights and attempts to create a united monarchy was very pronounced in Portugal (fully discussed in Chapter 6) and Catalonia, and particularly in the latter. Already by 1600, the Catalans, or at least their elites, had begun to see the Spanish monarch as an absentee ruler (Spanish kings generally did not visit kingdoms other than Castile and lived mostly in Madrid or the Escorial) as well as a Castilian one, surrounded by Castilian advisors and steadfastly intent on Castilianising the monarchy. The main result was an increasing in the tensions between the kingdoms in Aragon and a monarch that Catalans started to be as Castilian. That, indeed, is what happened in 1640. A movement that began as a peasant uprising against the royal troops stationed in the kingdom, in anticipation of a French invasion during the Thirty Years War, was quickly transformed into a struggle to defend the kingdom and its liberties against a king accused of acting tyrannically. Not all Catalans aspired to independence, and even in the years following the 1640 revolt, many Catalans publicly proclaimed their loyalty to Philip IV and Spain. But the crisis of 1640 crystallised opposition to the crown’s centralising policies and encouraged the idea that the most important civil conflict was that of
Image 2.1 A pro-Catalan pamphlet contemporary of the 1640 crisis *Iustificacio en consciencia* (Barcelona, 1640)

Source: Courtesy of Universitat de València. Biblioteca Històrica
kingdom against kingdom. Perhaps more importantly, even if heretofore scarcely conceivable, it became possible to imagine a separate Catalan community, distinct from the other communities in the peninsula. This imagined community enjoyed unique political rights and freedoms and was also increasingly conscious of being a nation of Catalan people, not just a kingdom (Torres i Sans 2008).

The most consequential outcome of the revolt in 1640 was the separation of a significant part of the kingdom and its immediate integration into the French monarchy as a province without the rights that the kingdom had enjoyed within the Spanish monarchy. Although militarily defeated and reconquered by the Spanish monarch’s armies in 1652, Catalonia was reincorporated into the monarchy without formally losing any of its privileges, rights, or institutions. From 1640 onwards, internal divisions began to appear between Catalans who wanted to protect the rights and the separate identity of the kingdom and those who opposed any suggestion of independence and were prepared to publicly demonstrate their loyalty to Philip IV and Spain. The Catalan elites drew another lesson from this experience: the French monarchy was far more centralising and homogenising than the Spanish one (Elliott 1963).

**Image 2.2**  *L’Espagnol despouillé*, satirical engraving about the conquest of Perpignan by the French

*Source: Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, France*
The second half of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century were marked by major changes in both Iberian monarchies. In Portugal during the Braganças, the Cortes or parliament—which was larger than that of Castile—continued to play an important role in the government of the realm, having been summoned in 1641, 1642, 1645, 1653, 1668, 1673, 1679, and, finally, in 1697. Furthermore, from 1645 onwards, the representatives of Goa, Salvador da Bahia, and later São Luís do Maranhão, were authorised to participate in the Cortes of Portugal. In parallel with the lengthy debates being held about the jurisdiction of the Cortes in the area of taxation, the “assembly of the three estates” continued to intervene intermittently in matters relating to the succession. Its presence was felt at some of the key junctures for the crown, such as, for example, the coronation of each new king or the oath-taking of the princes and heirs. The royal circle were tolerant of the assembly’s occasional intervention in such an important sphere, although they also sought to underline that such participation was a limited and localised matter. Whenever the debate touched on more sensitive issues, royal

Image 2.3  The Immaculate, protector of the Portuguese in their struggle against the Spanish monarchy, ca. 1648
officers rapidly intervened, doing everything possible to direct the discussion and limit the meddling of parliamentarians (Xavier 1998). In any case, for many of those involved, an active Cortes was not incompatible with strong royal authority. Furthermore, in Portugal, as in most of the peninsula, there continued to be many more who were critical of the authoritarian and “absolutist” style of the kings of France—disparagingly referred to as “despotic”—than those who were inclined to praise the French monarchs.

In the late seventeenth century, there were many who noted that the Spanish monarchy lacked a common institution capable of fostering internal unity. The fact that each peninsular kingdom continued to have its own parliament or Cortes tended to be seen as yet another factor contributing to the internal disunity of the Habsburg monarchy, and the enveloping crisis only reinforced the idea that the assemblies of each kingdom made little contribution to the internal cohesion of the political body (Fortea Pérez 2001). Regarding the Crown of Aragon, after 1645, the parliament of Valencia never met again, but the kingdom’s other representative bodies were relatively active. In Aragon, after a gap of 31 years, the Cortes was once again convened in 1677, following the coup of John Joseph of Austria (Gil Pujol 2002). In Catalonia, in the 1670s and 1680s, one of the main bones of contention was precisely the role played by the Cortes. In 1684, the Cortes of Catalonia finally assembled and, throughout the 1690s other representative bodies remained in session, often clashing with the royal officers.

Despite these tensions and problems, the Spanish monarchy during the reign of Charles II (1661–1700) continued to function in a manner that allowed it to preserve its unity without significant territorial losses, while at the same time establishing the conditions for a degree of political and economic recovery. In this period, attempts were made to preserve the unity of the monarchy, above all by augmenting Catalonia’s role and participation. It was also a period in which a number of political initiatives were introduced, aimed at strengthening the royal government, and this during the reign of a monarch was considered to be the weakest in the history of early modern Spain.

**CONCLUSION**

The problems of the political and territorial composition of the Spanish monarchy were paradoxically resolved (at least in temporal terms) in the midst of what was the greatest crisis of the monarchy since the end of the fifteenth century. Charles II, the last of the Spanish Habsburg kings, died on 1 November 1700, at 39 years of age. The problem was not that the king had died young, however, but that he had died without leaving a direct heir. This precipitated an unprecedented dynastic crisis for Spain: the emergence of two foreign candidates for the throne and the outbreak of a military conflagration of more or less global dimensions known as the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–1713). Lacking a composite structure comparable to that of the Spanish monarchy, Portugal managed to avoid the dynastic and constitutional crisis that occurred in Spain. Nevertheless, many of the measures introduced in Portugal in the early eighteenth century reveal that it was also heading towards a more authoritarian conception of royal power (see Chapter 23).
NOTE

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