The Iberian World
1450–1820
Fernando Bouza, Pedro Cardim, Antonio Feros

The union between Portugal and the Spanish monarchy
(1581–1640)

Publication details
Jean-Frédéric Schaub
Published online on: 18 Sep 2019

How to cite :- Jean-Frédéric Schaub. 18 Sep 2019, The union between Portugal and the Spanish monarchy (1581–1640) from: The Iberian World, 1450–1820 Routledge
Accessed on: 11 Oct 2023
CHAPTER SIX

THE UNION BETWEEN PORTUGAL AND THE SPANISH MONARCHY
(1581–1640)

Jean-Frédéric Schaub

TWO CLOSE SOCIETIES

To understand the political and social processes that transformed relations between Portugal and Spain during the period of the Union of the Crowns, it is essential to turn our back upon the question of national identity and sovereignty. If we were from the outset to imagine this period as a kind of Babylonian captivity for the Portuguese soul, it would be no use pursuing historical research on the matter. Our interpretation would be simple: the union of 1581 was a political and institutional aberration and the separation of 1640 signalled the inevitable return to normality. Such a version of history mistakes the effects for the causes. In the teleological version that all nationalisms share, two distinct—if not incompatible—identities are bound to engender two different sovereignties. In such a scenario, the passing of time is divided into three stages. A period of socio-genesis for the two nationalities; then a union imposed unilaterally by one side to the detriment of the other; finally, a process of liberation giving way to the creation of a situation that fits the results of the aforementioned socio-genesis. As a working hypothesis, we can imagine another scenario, also in three stages. A period of institutional distinction and, simultaneously, intense social, cultural, spiritual, and even political interpenetration from the start of the sixteenth century; a Union of the Crowns resulting from the Aviz family’s dynastic exhaustion and Portugal’s profound weakening in the wake of the tragedy of Alcácer-Quibir (1578); a period of profound tearing of the secular links woven between the two societies due to the length and brutality of the so-called Restoration War (1640–1668), and to other conflicts of interest between the two monarchies, for instance regarding the demarcation of the two empires in southern Portuguese America.

In the architecture of this book, the imperial and colonial issues are dealt with in specific chapters. For this reason, the present chapter focuses almost exclusively upon the peninsular dimension of the Union of the Crowns. It is clear, however, that the European and non-European dimensions of the issue are not dissociable
Nevertheless, its subject centres on the moment of the Union of the Crowns. It is worth recalling some of the instances of interpenetration between the two societies of Portugal and Castile-Aragon. There were the intermarriages of the early sixteenth century (Manuel I of Portugal married successively two daughters of Isabel and Ferdinand, Isabelle of Aragon and Maria of Aragon; Charles V married Isabelle of Portugal, daughter of Manuel I; Dom João III was married to Catherine of Austria, sister of Charles V, who was Queen Regent during part of Sebastian I’s minority; Philip II’s first wife was Maria Manuela of Portugal, eldest daughter of Dom João III), which show that the two dynasties, Aviz and Habsburg, were linked even more tightly at the time than the Habsburgs of Spain and the Bourbons during the seventeenth century (Drumond 2001). The dynastic links were so tight between the House of Aviz and the descendants of Isabel and Ferdinand that the ordinances of King Manuel I specified that the charges and offices of Portugal could only be conferred upon natives of the kingdom, as if to guard against the potential arrival of other pretenders (Terassa Lozano 2012).

In both polities, dynastic legitimacy was founded on the saga of the Christian conquest of the Iberian peninsula’s Islamic territories, as demonstrated by the existence of military orders. From the fifteenth century onwards, there was a strong strategic convergence and tactical support in the deployment of the Iberian presence in North Africa, from the capture of Ceuta by the Portuguese in 1415 to that of Orán by the Castilians in 1509. We can also point to the significant participation of the Portuguese in the conquest of Tunis by Charles V in 1535. At the time, the imperial ideology consisted of a collection of common links shared by lettered elites and governors from the two societies, who drew upon the same political language (Rodrigues 2011). A demand for exclusivity regarding overseas conquests was included in the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494. This issue should be interpreted in two ways: on the one hand, the two Iberian empires stood together to defend their common right to overseas conquest, to the exclusion of all other European powers; on the other, they developed a certain rivalry, as could be seen at the archipelago of the Moluccas in the mid-sixteenth century, for example (Valladares 2001; Lobato 2013). There was the common experience of a brutal treatment of the Jewish question, followed by the segregation of New Christians, as well as the presence of a Holy Office of the Inquisition in both countries (Marcocci and Paiva 2013). In addition, there existed a great linguistic fluidity between the two societies, at least among educated circles, as shown by the usage of Castilian as a language of haute culture in the Portuguese printed book production and the royal courts, or by the reception of Gil Vicente’s theatre in the court of the King of Spain (Buescu 2004).

There was also a strong flow of professors and students, especially in the universities of Salamanca—where there was a highly significant “nation” of Portuguese students—and Coimbra, where Martín de Azpilcueta and Francisco de Suárez both taught. Between them, as with other kingdoms, Portugal and Castile shared sources of law such as canon law and ius commune. Both the compendiums of laws adopted by the Cortes and each of the kingdom’s royal ordinances were individual to them, although only to a certain extent, as was demonstrated by the frequent usage in Portugal of the Siete Partidas of King Alfonso X of Castile. More generally, though, in instances where the rules remained silent over some unprecedented case or other, there existed a mechanism for borrowing the laws of the neighbouring country.
For this reason, the situation prior to 1581 was marked by a great permeability of the two juridical systems. On the other hand, the Union of the Crowns led certain Portuguese jurists to come up with a more solid definition of the kingdom’s law, by emphasising all that distinguished the latter from the one in effect in Castile (Clavero 1982). In the documentation of the Consejo de Castilla, prior to the union, the category of foreigner (extranjero) refers to countries like France, England, and Rome, but also to four kingdoms: Aragon, Catalonia, the kingdom of Valencia, and the kingdom of Portugal. For the magistrates of the council, the foreign nature of Portugal was of the same type as the foreign nature of Aragon. During the period of the Union of the Crowns, a number of Portuguese publicists and jurists—among them Pedro Barbosa de Luna, Manuel Severim de Faria, João Salgado de Araújo, and Lourenço de Mendonça—sought to demonstrate that the Portuguese were the best “Spaniards” in the peninsula (Cardim 2014). This theme has a dual significance. On the one hand, it indicates that the notion of a common, and perhaps even unified *Hispania* was not absent from the political imagination in Portugal. On the other hand, it shows that the influence acquired by the Crown of Castile at the heart of the Iberian cluster inspired the emulation of the other realms and dominions, who hoped that belonging to Spain would amount to more than an alignment with Castile. The fanciful notion of a definitive relocation of the capital of the Spains from Madrid to Lisbon surfaced numerous times. It was buoyed up both by the wilful beliefs of certain Portuguese subjects and the double language of the royal entourage (Bouza 1994).

**THE PROCESS OF DYNASTIC UNION**

The period of the Union of the Crowns is bracketed by two identical phenomena. Philip II in the early 1580s and John IV in the early 1640s each had the opportunity to hand out a large number of titles of nobility (Monteiro 1998; Monteiro and Cunha 2006). Because of this, each of the two monarchs was able to forge an elite that owed him their noble standing and would therefore be loyal to him. In 1580–1581, Philip II inherited the tragic situation resulting from the disaster of Alcácer-Quibir. In 1578, it was not only King Sebastian who was missing from the scene. With him were hundreds of nobles, heads of families, who had either perished or been taken captive as prisoners. As pretender to the throne, Philip II had proved himself generous in the activity of buying back these captives. Numerous families, nonetheless, had lost their head of house. For this reason, once installed upon the throne of Portugal, the monarch was in a position to raise an entire cohort of middle-ranking gentlemen to the rank of titled nobility. Likewise, when John IV seized power in 1640, numerous aristocratic families chose fidelity to the Habsburg King (Bouza 2000). They were in exile in Castile, awaiting a reconquest by the King of Madrid. They had lost titles, land, and inheritance to the Portuguese crown. In his turn, then, the Braganza King found himself distributing goods and honours to new families thereby attached to the new dynasty. In 1581 and in 1640, each of the two monarchs was able to forge a new elite that was dependent on their royal grace. In both cases, this was a decisive factor that accounted for the stability of the two regimes: that of the Habsburgs in Portugal for some 50 years at least, and that of the new dynasty of Braganza following the uprising of 1 December 1640.
The Union of the Crowns occurred in the wake of a troubled period. Two kings died in a year and a half: Sebastian on 4 August 1578, then his successor and uncle, Cardinal Henry, General Inquisitor of Portugal, sexagenarian and heirless, on 31 January 1580. With the death of Henry, midway through the sessions of the Cortes of Almeirim, a dynastic crisis was unleashed. Because he sensed his imminent death, the Cardinal King named a commission of five governors who were charged with resolving the question of his succession. A regime of five intermediary governors took charge of the process of designating the new king. This college was formed by Jorge de Almeida, Archbishop of Lisbon, João de Mascarenhas, High Commissioner of Finance, Francisco de Sá de Meneses, Grand Chamberman to King Henry, Diogo Lopes de Sousa, President of the Tribunal of the Casa do Cível, and João de Telo Meneses, who had been Ambassador to Rome. Three pretenders stood out among the others: Philip II, direct descendant of Manuel the Fortunate by his mother Isabel of Portugal, wife of Charles V; Catherine Duchess of Braganza, also a direct descendant of Manuel by her father Dom Duarte; and António Prior of Crato, another descendant of the same king but as an illegitimate son of Dom Luis. João de Telo de Meneses was the only one of the five governors who opposed the candidacy of Philip II. Undoubtedly, numerous peoples favoured the Duchess of Braganza, but she was a woman. Others wanted to rally around the Prior of Crato, but he was a bastard.

Ambassador Extraordinary of Philip II to King Henry, Cristóvão de Moura was a Portuguese gentleman. He had wended his way into the heart of the Prudent King’s court as a member of the house of Doña Joanna, daughter of Charles V and Isabel of Portugal. During the entire period of the dynastic transition, by means of seduction, conviction, threats, and the distribution of enormous amounts of money to buy loyalty, Cristóvão de Moura won over a growing number of Portuguese figures who were crucial to Philip II’s cause. The king led a campaign to capture the inheritance of the Aviz dynasty, which mobilised all the political resources of the period. His jurists hammered out legal arguments to demonstrate that he could outweigh his competitors in the legitimate order of succession of King Manuel I’s descendants. His ideologues evoked the unification of the old Hispania with a view to constructing an empire the likes of which had never been seen before. His agents in Portugal and his administrators in Spain bought back the gentlemen being held captive in Morocco, multiplied their promises of promotion, and corrupted those who showed reticence. But the partisans of the Prior of Crato demonstrated their ability to organise armed resistance against Habsburg’s ambitions. The Duke of Alba was sent at the head of an important expeditionary force to crush the opposing side. The Duke of Alba’s military intervention was successful—unlike the situation with the rebellious Dutch. However, the operations that he led were no “cake-walk”. António’s partisans defended themselves at various points. The victory of the Castilian army at Alcântara in August 1580 put an end to the hopes of those supporting António, who was nonetheless acclaimed as king during a meeting of the Cortes at Santarem in June 1580. After this defeat, Philip II’s rival pulled back to the Azores. There his partisans converted the island of Terceira into a miniature kingdom loyal to António, until its conquest by Philip II’s army in the summer of 1583. To these various tactics we must add the most spectacular one of all: the king’s arrival in his new kingdom and negotiations with the Portuguese Cortes assembled at Tomar in April 1581 (Bouza 1987). This assembly permitted Portugal to retain
Image 6.1  Genealogy of António, Prior of Crato, candidate to the Portuguese Crown in 1580. His portrait in oval is at the centre, half-length, face to the right, looking at the viewer, wearing ruff, with his genealogical tree around him, linked by tree branches and leaves; three coats of arms above, ca. 1580–1583

Source: © The Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved
jurisdictional autonomy under a Union of the Crowns, which was comparable to
the agreements between Isabel and Ferdinand in the late fifteenth century, and to
the circumstances from which Scotland would benefit 20 years later following King
James VI’s accession to the throne of England. The ecclesiastical order received
assurances with regards to royal patronage (Palomo 2004). After a long negotiation,
Philip II of Castile and Aragon was hailed King of Portugal by the Cortes under the
Portuguese title of Philip I.

CONTRACT AND COMPROMISE

The installation of Philip I (II) in Lisbon between 1581 and 1583 had a significant
political impact. Through this long sojourn, the new King of Portugal demonstrated
to his subjects that he assumed his role as Portuguese monarch, thereby guaran-
teeding that the kingdom and its empire would remain intact and not be confused
with other territories. In this respect, the illusion was nonetheless short-lived. From
1583 onwards, the Prudent King returned to Castile and entrusted the government
of Portugal to his nephew the Cardinal Archduke Albert of Austria, with the title of
vicereoy and the function of General Inquisitor of Portugal. In doing so, he abided
by one of the fundamental rules established at Tomar. If the king was absent from
Portugal, he could only be represented by a member of his lineage with the title
of vicereoy, or failing that by a council of five governors, all of whom had to be
Portuguese, like the one that had formed an interim government following the death
of King Henry I (Olival 2012). After 1583, the King of Portugal’s presence in his
kingdom declined. King Philip II (III) did not visit the kingdom until 1619, 20 years
after his ascension to the throne and even then he did not remain long in the capital
of the Portuguese empire. For his part, Philip III (IV) was taken unawares when the
Duke of Braganza seized power in December 1640, before he had been able to make
the trip to Lisbon, as his father and grandfather had done.

The agreements forged with the institutions of the Portuguese monarchy served
principally to ensure that the new King of Portugal observed the kingdom’s jurisdic-
tional autonomy. Unlike with the Crown of Aragon, the institution of the Royal House
of Portugal was not abolished. The titles of court officials continued to be attributed
to Portuguese figures (Labrador Arroyo 2009). The system of councils established
during the second half of the sixteenth century (like in Castile) was maintained: a
final court of appeal (notwithstanding the royal grace) relating to all matters ruled
upon by the tribunals (the Desembargo do Paço); a council of finances (Veeduria da
Fazenda); a council of religious affairs with jurisdiction over patronage, diocesan
justice, and military orders (Mesa da Consciência e Ordens); a council of the Holy
Office of the Inquisition; and a State Council that oriented the king’s decisions in
all matters concerning the kingdom’s expansion and its relations with other powers.

These were the pillars of the exertion of royal power in Portugal. When the mon-
arch was absent from the Portuguese kingdom, which was around 57 years out of
60, the Council of Portugal had to sit in close proximity to him, wherever he might
be. This council had, in principle, to be composed of noblemen, prelates and high
magistrates, all of whom should be Portuguese. Its basic function was to embody
and represent all of the other councils of the Portuguese monarchy—who sat in
Lisbon—to the king while he resided at Madrid, the Escorial, or in Valladolid.
The principle of Portugal’s autonomy must therefore be understood in the sense that the jurists attributed to the term at that time. The hierarchy upon which the entire internal system of jurisdictions rested could leave no place for interventions from the Castilian jurisdictions. In principle, the neighbouring kingdom’s currency and language had no value whatsoever in Portugal. Religious patronage and the affairs of the Inquisition, like military orders, could only be decided via the Portuguese councils. Yet this king was also King of Castile-Aragon, thanks to the Union of the Crowns. In this respect his concern for Portuguese issues was inscribed within a geostrategic framework that applied to all of his crowns. Of course, an institution like the State Council of Madrid was invited to pronounce upon problems emerging in the Portuguese empire from the reign of Philip I (II) onwards. This council commanded no administration, nor did it have any jurisdiction, but it provided the king with advice over decisions concerning the preservation of the monarchy’s integrity, its potential expansion, and diplomatic relations with other powers. Yet this function, to the extent that it concerned Portugal, was also carried out by the State Council that sat before the viceroy in Lisbon, as well as by the Council of Portugal in Madrid, which embodied all of the Portuguese councils, in close proximity to the king. In other words, in the context of the Union of the Crowns, the creation of strategic decisions over the empire’s future rested upon several royal institutions that were not exclusively Portuguese.

In an even clearer example, the management of the defence of Portugal and its possessions was not the sole purview of institutions of the Portuguese Crown. In this regard the situation was ambiguous from the very outset of the Union of the Crowns. The acclamation of Philip I (II) was presented as the result of a harmonious agreement between the new king and the assembled body of Portuguese society. But this did not detract from the fact that Portugal was also conquered militarily by Philip II. In light of this, the king could have placed the kingdom of Portugal under the juridical regime reserved for conquered territories—that is to say, the abolition of the local jurisdictional system. We know that nothing of the sort occurred. However, the military dimension of the process of the Habsburg’s recognition was not forgotten. In fact, this conquest was not completed until the summer of 1583, when the Marquis of Santa Cruz crushed the partisans of the Prior of Crato who exerted control over the island of Terceira. The use of arms in the new king’s takeover process resulted in the installation of Spanish garrisons (presidios) at various points along the Portuguese coast, as well as in the Azores and Madeira. The presence of these troops remains ambiguous. As in other European countries during the same period, the establishment of a garrison presented a double façade: to protect and survey. Three points are worth highlighting if we wish to avoid interpreting this phenomenon by contemporary criteria. On the one hand, in the seventeenth century the presence of troops stationed in a town or a town’s outskirts was regarded as an attack on urban liberties and privileges, including in Castile. This is why in both Portugal and Castile the municipal authorities, as an assembly of magistrates, defended the distinction of ordinary laws over any form of military privilege when conflicts broke out between citizens of the town and soldiers from the garrison. On the other hand, the financing of Spanish garrisons established on Portuguese coasts and archipelagos was meant to be funded by the Castilian treasury, without Portuguese subjects having to contribute. This principle was generally respected, except in case of supply crises or
delays in salary payments, which could lead to mutinies. Therefore, Portugal found itself protected more or less by a kind of permanent army that existed in addition to the urban militia system, but without having to pay for it. Ultimately, the dissentious texts from immediately before the Restoration of 1640 and the justificatory ones from immediately after did not give a particularly significant place to the question of the existence of presidios as marks of a loss of sovereignty. As we shall see below, there were other matters that fuelled the partisans’ arguments for a regime change.

AN UNCERTAIN EVOLUTION

The historiography formed from the nineteenth century onwards under the influence of Luis Augusto Rebelo da Silva created a presentation of the evolution of the Union of the Crowns that was organised around the three reigns: Philip I (II) from 1581–1598; Philip II (III) from 1598–1621; Philip III (IV) from 1621–1640. It is presented as a three-part cycle—love, indifference, divorce—that corresponds to the arc of the three Habsburgs’ attendance of their Portuguese subjects. That is to say, the period is characterised by an evolution stretching from a maximum of adhesion to a maximum of rejection, or from a scrupulous respect of the pact of Tomar to the systematic violation of the latter. Research conducted over the course of some 30 years in the archival collections of the two monarchies continues to offer contradictions to this overly simplistic scenario. Certainly, the popular revolts that broke out in the provinces of Alentejo—particularly in Évora—and in the Algarve in 1637 and 1638, took place at the end of this period, at the time of the “divorce” between Portugal and Philip III (IV). However, large-scale revolts also broke out under the reign Philip I (II) (Bouza 2010). Undoubtedly a large part of the elite adhered to the new dynasty in 1581. Yet a number of high-profile families, and others of lesser status, chose fidelity to the Habsburgs in 1640, at the price of permanent exile in Castile.

If we examine the formation of ideological and political alternatives to the de facto situation created by the Habsburgs’ acclamation, the love-indifference-divorce model does not fare any better. Indeed, it was during the first three decades of the new regime that António Prior of Crato, and later his sons, embodied a dynastic alternative from their exile to the European courts (London, Paris, the Hague) and via networks of correspondents in Portugal. Likewise, it was at the start of this period, and not at the end, that the myth of King Sebastian’s possible return produced concrete repercussions in the form of the appearance of false Sebastian(s) (Hermann 1998). Thus, the Habsburgs’ opposers drew upon alternative solutions that were founded upon on solid and operative ideological corpuses, at the beginning of the Union of the Crowns, rather than during the final decades. This situation was delicate at the time of the Restoration in 1640. Indeed, the choice of the Duke of Braganza as founder of the new dynasty required a formidable effort to justify his ascension to the throne (Costa and Cunha 2006). The latter was neither a supporter of António, nor was he the reincarnation of Sebastian: how could he profess to be the king “yearned for” by the Portuguese for 60 years, in the depths of their hearts? The avalanche of books published in the aftermath of 1st December 1640 was intended to explain and justify the self-evident nature of the Restoration, as well as the legitimacy of the new dynasty. This intense textual production should be interpreted as an effort to provide some political, ideological, spiritual, and juridical
substance to the change. It masked the simultaneously improvised and unexpected nature of the Restoration and conferred an air of providence upon him.

Nor does the degradation from love to divorce coincide with the distribution of strategic and military failures and successes during the 60 years of the Union of the Crowns. Indeed, it was precisely under Philip I (II) that the Spanish Armada set sail, after its assemblage in Lisbon, with a sizeable Portuguese fleet whose lead vessel was commanded by the Duke of Medina-Sidonia. It was still under the reign of the first Habsburg of Portugal (1589) that the English pirate Francis Drake anchored his fleet at Peniche and launched an assault on Lisbon, after attacking Coruña in Galicia. The presence of the English troops, on land and at sea, was an astonishing humiliation for Philip II. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that Drake had the intention of sparking an uprising in favour of the pretender Dom António Prior of Crato, and that, in spite of Drake’s assistance in men and arms, Dom António was supported by almost no one in Portugal. The capitulation of the French at the hands of Portuguese troops in Maranhão put an end to the project of an “equinoctial France” in the Amazonian region in 1615, and this was under the reign of Philip II (III). Yet the seizing of territorial control from the Brazilian colony in that region was decided upon and organised from both Lisbon and Madrid (Marques 2005). Likewise, when the Luso-Castilian armada chased the Dutch from Salvador da Bahia in 1625, under the reign of Philip III (IV), the dream of a strong strategic and political integration between Castile and Portugal seemed more likely than ever (Schwartz 1991; Marques 2011). Undeniably, however, two authentic disasters occurred precisely under the reign of the third and last of the Habsburgs of Portugal. These consisted firstly of the loss of Hormuz—the key to the Persian Gulf—to an Anglo-Persian coalition (Almeida Borges 2015) in 1622, and then the conquest of the Brazilian sugar region of Pernambuco by the Dutch in 1630 and the installation of Maurice of Nassau in 1637.

INSTITUTIONAL VARIATIONS

The Council of Portugal was always meant to sit as close to the king as possible. It represented the kingdom and its institutions to their legitimate sovereign. For this reason, the council’s activities were followed carefully from within Portugal. Whatever befell the institution served as a measure of the status retained by the kingdom of Portugal under the Union of the Crowns. The council members attempted to avoid any changes being made to the initial state of operations of the council, which could have no other president than the king himself. When a proposal was made in 1601 to designate a president other than the king in order to improve the council’s functioning, a number of Portuguese figures protested. They saw this change as signifying Portugal’s demotion to the rank of a mere province (Schaub 1998). The council owed its existence to the sole fact that the King of Portugal did not reside in his kingdom. But if the sovereign were ever to come to Lisbon, the Council of Portugal would lose its very reason for being, since business would be undertaken directly with the councils of the Portuguese polysynody in the capital. In 1612 it was proposed that Philip II (III) should come to Lisbon to convocate the Cortes and receive the oath of the three estates. In accordance with the principle described above, the council’s duties were suspended. As it transpired, however,
the departure was delayed from one month to the next. When it became evident that the trip would never take place, certain Portuguese magistrates and gentlemen demanded that the council resume its duties. In effect, the combination of the king’s absence and the council’s retirement spelled the political end to the status obtained in 1581.

Not only could the Council of Portugal be formed solely of Portuguese figures (unlike the Council of Italy, where half of the members were Castilians), but the King of Portugal had to be represented in Lisbon by a member of his family. This was the case at the start of the period with the Archduke Albert (1583–1593) and at the end, with the Duchess of Mantua (1635–1640), cousin of Philip III (IV). Between these two figures, the rule of the five Portuguese governors was not frequently respected. Thus, it was the Portuguese favourite of Philip I (II), Cristóvão de Moura, Marquis of Castelo Rodrigo, who exerted the role of viceroy under the reign of Philip II (III) from 1600 to 1603, and then again from 1608 to 1612 (Martínez Hernández 2011, 2013). This was also the case, under Philip III (IV), for Dom Diogo de Castro, Count of Basto, who was sole governor in 1630 and 1631 then again from 1633 to 1635, this time under the title of viceroy. Installing a viceroy who was unrelated to the king constituted a breach of the rules established at the beginning of the Union of the Crowns. Yet it was also impossible to designate a viceroy who was not Portuguese. The most problematic case was undoubtedly that of Diego de Silva y Mendoza, upon whom Philip II (III) conferred a portion of the presidency of the Council of Portugal from 1605 to 1616, and later the Viceroyalty of Portugal from 1617 to 1621. With regards to this great figure, it was the question of nationality that was raised most frequently. He was born in Castile to a Castilian mother, Ana de Mendoza de la Cerda, and a Portuguese father, Ruy Gomez da Silva, who had accompanied Isabel of Portugal to Castile when she married Charles V and become one of the main favourites of the Prudent King. Could Diego de Silva y Mendoza, known by his title of Count of Salinas, be taken for a Portuguese aristocrat? In order to root him firmly within the Portuguese nobility, Philip II (III) in his role as King of Portugal attributed him the title of Marquis of Alenquer in 1616. Even so, voices murmured that his Portuguese nationality remained dubious (Gaillard 1982; Terrasa Lozano 2012; Dadson 2015). Only Philip I (II) respected the rules over the designation of the person (or group) to represent the king in his absence. In naming his cousin Margaret Duchess of Mantua in 1634, Philip III (IV) came up with the most honourable possible solution for the kingdom of Portugal (Schaub 2001).

RISING TENSIONS

The 1630s were marked, like almost everywhere else in Europe, by rising tensions. The general growth of fiscal pressure was the main cause of conflict between societies and their princes. Portugal was no exception. In Castile the estates negotiated step by step at the Cortes of 1626 and 1632, to accept the financial demands presented by the king’s favourite, the Count-Duke of Olivares. In Portugal, the stated goal in 1631 was to extract a steady annual revenue of 500,000 cruzados (the renda fixa) from the kingdom, without negotiation. Indeed, King Philip III (IV) had strongly resisted convoking the Cortes, out of fear that they would demand
more in favours than they would consent to in new taxes. Nonetheless, the era of the Count-Duke of Olivares was characterised less by the level of fiscal pressure than by the production of a coherent ideology. This was aimed at levelling the status of the monarchy’s different territories in order to force them to contribute to the combined effort of their collective defence. Despite being reserved for the king alone, the “union of arms” memorandum (1624) (Elliott, de la Peña, and Negredo 2013) was known about at least in part by others. The increasing demands that Olivares was directing at Portuguese cities and institutions were interpreted as steps in a plan that was aimed at reducing Portugal’s autonomy to nil. The closest collaborators of the Count-Duke of Olivares had to come up with all sorts of strategies for obtaining new financial resources: demands for donations from the kingdom’s main cities; taxation on all sorts of products from meat to wine (real d’água); deductions on the annuities of offices accorded by the king (media annata). Those who objected to paying these sums could rely on the chance to assign them a negative political and ideological signification in light of the rank that the kingdom of Portugal had been awarded in 1581. The outcome was a series of anti-fiscal revolts—such as the so-called Maçaricas revolt in Porto in 1629—followed by a kind of generalised revolt in Alentejo in 1637, whose epicentre was in the town of Évora, and all across the Algarve in 1638 (Oliveira 1990, 2002). These events have been interpreted, retrospectively, as an augury of the “revolution” that took place on 1 December 1640. Such an interpretation is hardly useful; it is enough to appreciate the breadth, the spread, and the duration of these protest movements to understand that entire swathes of the Portuguese population were disposed to launch into dangerous political combats.

The malaise that had descended upon part of the kingdom and its king was also fuelled by the disastrous consequences of the war that Castile was determinedly waging against protestant Holland. On this account, we can say at this point that Olivares was led astray by optimism or even blindness. He had certainly not taken stock of the difficulty of the task in hand. Behind the brilliant taking of Breda in 1625 lay a multitude of difficulties. The objective became increasingly unattainable as Olivares gathered other powers around him by virtue of his politics, starting with Richelieu’s France, which entered into the war in 1635. For Portugal, the interminable “war of Flanders” had two very weighty consequences. In the colonial domain, solidarity with Castile made Portuguese overseas territories the targets for Dutch and English navigators and corsairs. The Azores—a stop-off for transatlantic crossings and vessels returning from the Indies—paid the price. But above all it was Maurice of Nassau’s takeover of the region of Pernambuco that struck hardest at spirits and revenues, since the Dutch seized a large number of sugar plantations whose products were habitually sent to the principal ports of Portugal (Cabral de Mello 1998). To this initial loss, we should add that of the slave trading post of São Jorge da Mina in 1637, also to the Dutch (Ferreira 2010). In Portugal itself, the embargo on all commerce with the Netherlands had very negative consequences upon one essential economic sector: the production and exportation of sea salt from Aveiro, Setúbal, and Alcácer do sal (Schaub 2001). Maintaining solidarity with Castile in her political confrontation with the Dutch was a catastrophe for Portugal’s economic interests.
THE CRISIS OF THE LATE 1630S

If the rejection of fiscal pressure and the absurdity of the confrontation with the Netherlands constituted the two structural motors of the quarrel, it was a set of particular political circumstances that led to the uprising in 1640. Aside from the anti-fiscal revolts, the decade of the 1630s was also marked by the rise to power of two political figures who concentrated the intensity of all the resentments: Miguel de Vasconcelos and Diogo Soares. The former was successively brother-in-law and father-in-law of the latter, with Soares taking the role of Secretary of the Council of Portugal in Madrid, and Vasconcelos that of Secretary of the Council of State in Lisbon. As a result, correspondence about subjects of the utmost sensitivity passed through their hands, in direct communication between the two. They were placed at the service of the political programme designed by the Count-Duke of Olivares. Their savoir-faire consisted in pressuring influential Portuguese figures into accepting financial and strategic decisions made at the court in Madrid. To bend their interlocutors to their will, in both Lisbon and Madrid, they availed themselves of a formidable weapon that no one before them had previously dared to use. They knew the exact state of the abusive alienation of the crown’s assets from which several hundred families of gentlemen, prelates, and magistrates were benefiting. They did not hesitate to carry out a kind of blackmail against the heads of these families, demanding support from them over certain decisions and, in exchange, shelving inquiries into ill-gotten goods acquired to the detriment of the throne. To the brutality of this process they added an insulting tone, which they employed even against aristocrats of a higher rank than their own. The loathing kindled by Miguel de Vasconcelos was the reason behind the failed firearm attack launched against him in 1634 (Oliveira 2002). Then, at the time of the takeover of the royal palace of Lisbon on 1 December 1640, partisans of the Duke of Braganza put him to death in his study. His body was thrown out of the window, stripped naked, and dismembered in the public square.

Without risk of being anachronistic, we can suggest that the Count-Duke of Olivares launched a particular political regime. His position as favourite to the king placed him above the councils of the monarchy and modified institutional procedures. His actions were also accompanied by a specific ideological output. He conceived of the government as a mission aimed at transforming the order of things and overcoming inherited situations. As a result of this, the king’s favourite and the latter’s close confidants became the object of highly disparate complaints. To name but one example from among all of the grievances directed at them: Olivares’ rumoured Judeophilia. This accusation rested on the fact that, following the royal bankruptcy in 1627, Portuguese businessmen of converso origin were welcomed with open arms as the new financiers of the king (Sanz Ayán 2013). The charge also led to a resurgence of tensions born under the reign of Philip II (III), in response to the negotiation of a royal pardon for Jewish conversos who had been condemned by the Inquisition (López-Salazar Codes 2010). Therefore, not only did Olivares’ regime jeopardise the political tradition that assured Portugal’s autonomy and its rank in the monarchy, but it also opened the door to all sorts of religious turpitude. It still remains for us to examine what occurred for the uprising to take place, and for support to be garnered in its favour.
UNDERSTANDING THE SUCCESS OF JOHN OF BRAGANZA

The rejection of the olivarist project and the abhorrence of the favourite’s closest confidants were not enough to instigate a change of dynasty. The evidence of this lies in the fact that the revolts in the two large provinces of Alentejo and the Algarve were brought under control, by negotiation and by force. As for the Duke of Braganza (who became John IV after 1 December 1640), he did not associate himself with the revolts, despite the fact that the eye of the storm was situated in his seigniorial lands. Furthermore, over the course of the following year, he accepted the role of captain general of the armed forces stationed in Portugal under the authority of the Vicerine, Margaret of Mantua. In spite of all the combined skill and brutality of Soares and Vasconcelos, the renda fixa did not find its way back into the royal treasury. The king was faced with an unsolvable dilemma: it was impossible to obtain a fixed and unconditional sum without negotiation with the Cortes of Portugal, yet it was too risky to convene an assembly that would haggle over every aspect of the financial negotiation. Those Cortes, if they had been convened, would have been marked by the fact that Philip III (IV) had not seen fit to make the trip to Lisbon, almost 20 years after his accession to the throne, and by the state of tension in which the cities, the clergy, and part of the aristocracy could currently be found. To avoid this dilemma, Olivares’ Portuguese confidants suggested that he convene Portuguese aristocrats, prelates, and magistrates to Madrid on an individual basis. The idea was to force them to stay for a period at the king’s court and to draw out of them, one by one, a promise to support his fiscal demands once they were back in Portugal. This manoeuvre had the effect of forcing dozens of important Portuguese figures to migrate to the capital of Castile. Because of this, during the years 1639 and 1640, Portugal found herself deprived of numerous influential and power-wielding families. The resulting situation allows us to understand two phenomena. The first is the large number of members of the Portuguese elite who, finding themselves in Castile at the time that John of Braganza seized power, chose fidelity to the Habsburg King (Bouza 2000). The second is the freedom of manoeuvre that was therefore afforded to partisans of the rupture who, having remained in Portugal, found themselves freed of the presence of influential opponents.

On this basis, the success of John of Braganza’s coup d’État finds a certain number of rational explanations. The new king took power of a kingdom that was partially emptied of its authorities. In these conditions, it is barely surprising that his seizure of power was applauded in the kingdom’s main cities when his envoys announced the news. On the one hand, he confiscated the inheritance and title of those figures who chose fidelity to Philip III (IV), to gratify new title-holders who had been won over to his cause. On the other hand, in the summers of 1641 and 1642 important political trials were launched against aristocrats, magistrates, and bankers suspected of gathering intelligence for Spain; their execution in the public square served as a warning for others. In handwritten form during the months that preceded the coup, and in published format thereafter, there flourished an abundant literature aimed at explaining and justifying the change of dynasty (Torgal 1982; Curto 1988). Here, we must be careful not to mistake the effect for the cause. Therefore, the production of arguments aimed at legitimating the rupture of the
Union of the Crowns contributed decisively to the definition of a Portuguese identity that was different from the Castilian identity, if not from the Spanish one. To this we must add the considerable impact of the extremely onerous war of attrition upon the frontier populations, in terms of creating among the latter a shared sense of solidarity against an enemy that was increasingly regarded as external to them. The combination of these factors allows us to appreciate more keenly why Portuguese society seemed more disposed to hand over the funds demanded by the Braganza King than they had been with the Habsburg. It was political and social processes, rather than a pre-existing feeling of nationhood, that provided the keys to the new dynasty’s success.

WORKS CITED


