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Ecclesiastics and political state building in the Iberian monarchies, 13th-15th centuries

Publicações do Cidehus

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Publisher: Publicações do Cidehus
Year of publication: 2016
Published on OpenEdition Books: 18
octobre 2016
Serie: Biblioteca - Estudos & Colóquios



<http://books.openedition.org>

Electronic reference

BRANCO, Maria João ; VILAR, Hermínia Vasconcelos. *Introduction In: Ecclesiastics and political state building in the Iberian monarchies, 13th-15th centuries* [online]. Lisbonne: Publicações do Cidehus, 2016 (generated 26 October 2016). Available on the Internet: <<http://books.openedition.org/cidehus/1543>>. ISBN: 9782821874169. DOI: 10.4000/books.cidehus.1543.

The text is a facsimile of the print edition.

Introduction

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The role of clergymen in the construction of royalty in the closing centuries of the Middle Ages has been the object, especially after the 1980's and in the context of French and Anglo-Saxon historiographies, of some studies of central importance, which nowadays constitute absolute references for research.

Framed by a historiographical context which took the analysis of the construction of the Modern State as the ultimate goal of research and, in a second stage, as a crucial element for understanding the construction of medieval royalty, the study of the clergy' role in the central and final centuries of the Middle Ages has been confirmed, time and again, as a fertile field of investigation.

In this context, two parallel lines of research have been pursued. One of them sought mainly to identify the levels of participation of the Church and its institutions in the construction of European medieval royalty - be it through their contributions in doctrine and law, or through the shaping of inhabited space, in which the Church's organizing and defining role was pioneering. The second line, developing in the wake of the studies and reconstructions of the institutions' social composition, has attempted above all the identification of actors and the reconstruction of careers, in a methodological context where the adoption of a prosopographical treatment has often been dominant.

At the level of the Iberian Peninsula, too, the role of the Church and its men in the construction of medieval royalty has been the object of reflection – both in the context of wider analyses and in that of sectorial approaches. Such reflection focuses either on individual paths or on institutional groups. This, however, is still an unfinished endeavour, namely in what concerns the establishment of tables comparing the various peninsular kingdoms.

The project *The European Dimension of a Group of Power: Ecclesiastics and the political State Building of the Iberian Monarchies (13th-15th centuries*”¹ attempted precisely to insert itself at the meeting point of those two lines of investigation, and to answer the bigger challenges of Historiography in this field.

¹ PTDC/EPH-HIS/4964/2012

Assembling an inter-university team, it brought together researchers from 5 Portuguese universities (Évora, Nova, Lisboa, Coimbra and Porto) and 3 Spanish universities (Salamanca, Complutense de Madrid and Lérida), as well as consultants from the universities Complutense de Madrid, St. John's College in Oxford and St Etienne².

The book now being published is one of the outcomes of the work undertaken by the Iberian inter-university team. It confirms the possibilities opened up by teamwork and compared perspectives, as well as the need to pursue this approach in order to clarify the circumstances and conditionalities of a relationship from which both sides benefited.

Thus the studies gathered here seek to return to the question of the Church's and clerics' contribution to the construction of royalty, approaching the peninsular context in a comparative way and analysing that contribution on different levels.

In the section titled *Kings and clergy: royal service and political loyalty* we gather analyses of very diverse scope – from individual case studies to the research of groups of specific men – all having in common the awareness of the importance of royal service in the formation of individual careers and of the clergy's role in the central administrative structure. Ultimately this is a discussion of the various possibilities of this articulation. The priority yardstick used for analysis and comparison is, as we have mentioned, the space of the Peninsula – hence the confluence of studies on Navarre, Portugal and Castile, joined by the specific contribution on Provence (for the similarities and contrasts it allows) in a world where relationships depended on episcopal, not royal, power.

The case of Navarre is particularly paradigmatic, given this kingdom's specificities: the existence of a single diocese and a necessary relationship between a monarch and a bishop. This text is one of the pioneering approaches to this subject regarding this geographical space.

Most studies, however, are devoted to the Portuguese and Castilian spaces.

Three case studies, based on the reconstruction and analysis of individual trajectories, show us how members of different layers in ecclesiastical hierarchy took part in, and

² This PROJECT was supported by FEDER through the Program COMPETE and by National Funds through the FCT in the scope project "DEGRUPE – *The European Dimension of a Group of Power: Ecclesiastics and the political State Building of the Iberian Monarchies (13th–15th centuries)*", with the reference FCT "PTDC/EPH-HIS/4964/2012". The Members of the research team were : Ana Jorge (Catholic University of Portugal); Armando Carvalho Homem and Cristina Cunha (University of Porto); Maria Helena Coelho (University of Coimbra), Maria Amélia Campos and Anísio Saraiva (fellowships – University of Coimbra); Hermenegildo Fernandes (University of Lisbon), André Leitão and Hugo Crespo (fellowships – University of Lisbon); Hermínia Vasconcelos Vilar – main researcher (University of Évora), Maria João Branco (New University of Lisbon); José Luis Martín Martín (University of Salamanca), Oscar Villarreal Gonzalez (University Complutense of Madrid) and Flocel Sabatté (University of Lleida) and the Project consultants were Peter Linehan (Cambridge University), José Manuel Nieto Soria (University Complutense of Madrid) and Thierry Pécout (University of Aix-Marseille).

made use of royal service in articulation with their religious careers. Thus, as concerns Castile, the three cases in point are prime examples of the diverse forms which royal service could assume, and of the benefits reaped on both sides. In addition, they illustrate clearly how the analysis of clerical participation in the construction of medieval royalty cannot be limited to the higher strata of the secular clergy.

While in the cases of Gómez Garcia and Friar Alfonso de Burgos we are dealing with the careers of kings' confidants and clergymen who managed to reach key posts in ecclesiastical hierarchy, Oscar Villaroel in turn brings us the particular case of a minor cleric whose rise is dependent solely on service to the king.

Centred on the Castilian case, these three studies clearly portray the diverse life paths of the group of clergymen who surrounded the peninsular crowns, as well as the importance assumed by ecclesiastical careers in the workings of social mobility, in the context of medieval society.

As concerns the studies about Portugal considered here, we should stress one aspect which has to do with a concrete research option, linked to the chronology chosen. Unlike other historiographies, in the Portuguese case the study of the construction of royalty and, more specifically, of the Church's role therein, has been centred preferentially in the centuries before the 14th, often coinciding with research on the first reigns and the process of independence and construction of the kingdom. Hence the choice of the 14th century for the production of these partial but significant analyses. One of the chapters deals with the body of officials who made up the royal chancery during the 14th century, seeking to understand the changes to the social, intellectual and political characterization of the men who occupied one of the key centres of central administration, one of the most sensitive power spots in the process of the monarchy's construction. This was an organ of government which was, or could become, a privileged stage for the clerics' actions, but where royal interference was felt increasingly as the 14th century unfolded.

Another article – focusing on the comparative study of the careers of two clerics assigned to conduct diplomatic affairs during the period of strife which marked the beginning of king João I's reign – opens a window to the world of diplomacy and to the role played by the clergy in the new monarch's designs. At the same time it shows us a specific area of royal service which seems to grow in importance, especially throughout the 15th century, in inverse proportion to the loss of influence felt at other levels of the administrative structure. The third contribution, still dedicated to the Portuguese reality, strives again to achieve a global portrait of a group of men in the service of the king. This time however,

working in a direction opposite to the previous one, it analyses the documents from a monarch's chancery – king Fernando in this case – in order to determine the body of clergymen in his service.

Comparative analysis of various instances of royal service, observed in different geographical spaces, lends the first part of this book its structure. In turn the articles included in its second part – “*A power among powers*” – attempt first of all a reflection on two issues. The first one is the way in which different powers, from royal to pontifical and urban, made use of ecclesiastical benefices and intervened in the space of religious action. The second one is the role of university training -- especially in Law -- in defining ecclesiastical elites.

Both the study on chapter benefices and the one devoted to the chaplains in the service of the monarchs of Castile stand as good examples of the constraints shaping the administration of ecclesiastical benefices, and of the way in which these became centrally important in the dynamics of reward for loyalty or service, even when involving entities whose space of intervention was not clearly defined by law.

The central position occupied by royal and pontifical power very often had to compete with local influence, organized around the municipality or the political elites who dominated the urban spaces in question. The study on Santiago de Compostela stresses this question, through its analysis of a three-way relationship among powers facing off in a city which was an archiepiscopal see as well as the religious see of the kingdom of León.

Also, the study on the parochial network of Coimbra emphasises something which tends to be forgotten, namely the process of organization of religious space brought along by the definition of the parochial network in different dioceses, during the 12th and 13th centuries, in the Portuguese kingdom. The resulting grid, despite some variations in later centuries, represented a first attempt at organizing the space which was conquered and integrated into the then-new political unit of Portugal, and lay down foundations which, in some cases, were reused in grids drawn up at later times.

The survey on interventions by cardinals in Portugal at the time of the Avignon papacy shows us, very clearly, how the presence of the pope's power was felt, in various and recurrent ways, in Portugal: Avignon sought to secure effective control of both the practices and the revenue of the country's ecclesiastical structure. Traces of memory that were also studied base on the documentation chapter of Oporto in an introductory study to a very important archive.

The period coinciding with the Avignon Papacy is covered by the study on Portuguese law students in Italy. As mentioned above, university training as a criterion for recruitment, for the fruition of top benefices in the ecclesiastical structure, became ever more pressing throughout the 14th and, especially, the 15th century. Qualification in Law had already been common in many figures of the higher Church hierarchy in the 13th century, in the various peninsular kingdoms. The novelty now was the exponential increase in the number of students, masters and doctors at law, and the need to obtain a University degree if one wished to join a chapter or rise to a bishop's seat.

The growing importance of Law in society in the final centuries of the Middle Ages, and of University degrees as a key element in the recruitment of officials in general, constitute easily acceptable explanations for the increasing importance of this criterion. But we should also bear in mind that the growth in the number of students and holders of degrees among ecclesiastical and administrative elites does not imply, in a medieval society, any idea of expansion or any trend towards universal education. Rather it is consistent with a growing tendency towards the definition of criteria for entry into these groups, now increasingly set apart, additionally, by learning.

In closing, the studies gathered in this volume offer new contributions for our knowledge of the role and intervention of clerics in the construction of royalty in the Iberian Peninsula, while at the same time they show us some of the most recent lines of research adopted in the study of these subjects.