

## Political power in the Kingdom of Valencia during the 14th century. Breakdown or development?\*

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### ABSTRACT

The 14th century has traditionally been considered a century of crisis, unrest and political breakdown around Europe, given the preponderance of wars, civil clashes and skirmishes with external enemies. In the Kingdom of Valencia, too, we can find these constant struggles for land and power, yet at the same time, just like all over Europe, we can also witness the gradual growth of the institutions of administration, governance and justice spearheaded by the Crown and the different political actors. Indeed, this process of political development did not preclude violence, but it did establish the foundations of a powerful institutional system which gained ground throughout the 15th century.

**KEYWORDS:** polities, Crown, estates, Valencia, 14th century

In November 1300, James II reached the city of Valencia and ordered Valencia's royal universities to send armed peons to the Castilian land of Murcia, which the monarch's forces had just occupied, taking advantage of the fact that Ferdinand IV of Castile was still a minor. Just a few years later, the northern part of the region of Murcia, from Alicante to Oriola, where half of the population was Muslim, had joined the Kingdom of Valencia, substantially enlarging the borders that James I had established decades earlier.<sup>1</sup> In June 1398, however, the city of Valencia organised and led a military campaign against the Zayyanid emirate of Tlemcen in the Maghreb, with an expedition of 30 armed vessels and 7,500 combatants. Known as the "Holy Armada", this expedition was in retaliation for the Muslim sacking of the Valencian town of Torreblanca in the northern part of the kingdom the previous year.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, at the beginning of the century, the kingdom's legal and institutional system was still under dispute, since the majority of the nobles rejected it. This became clear in a conflict with the royal boroughs over the territory's tax contribution in 1315: "most of the other nobles, knights and *infançons* are not, nor do they want to be, with these universities in a *fur* (legal

code), that is, in the *fur* of Valencia, under which all of these universities and this kingdom are populated".<sup>3</sup> To the contrary, one century later, despite the dire political strife that divided Valencians into two factions upon the death of Martin the Humane in 1410, the different parliaments organised by each side to decide on the succession of the Crown claimed to speak on behalf of "the entire community of the kingdom" and, in fact, they were clearly comprised of different estates.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, during that century, Valencia had gone from a territory still coalescing, created by James I in the mid-13th century with the conquest of the former Islamic *taifas* of Valencia, Xàtiva and Denia and expanded a few decades later with the aforementioned counties of Murcia, to another with fully consolidated borders that would remain virtually unaltered until 1707.<sup>5</sup> It had also gone from a country in which the Muslim population was as large as the Christian to one in which Muslims were in the minority, around one-third, even though they still played a crucial role for the elites, since the Muslim inhabitants were more intensely exploited than the Christians because of their ethnic identity.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, it had already taken the step from being a kingdom in which the leading nobles defied the legal order as the monarch and royal boroughs tried to impose their designs, to one led, yet still strongly disputed, by the elites in the city of Valencia. Indeed, this city, along with Catalonia and Aragon, had become the nerve centre of an economic, political and institutional system that had carved an important niche for itself among the states that were shaping the future of the Crown.

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In short, despite the known bumps in the road caused by wars, shortages and epidemics, the 14th century was actually a century of growth and overall political development, especially in the Kingdom of Valencia, which had been founded just shortly before. However, this growth and development was marred by conflict both with external enemies and among internal political agents, a common phenomenon around Europe, as recently noted by John Watts.<sup>7</sup> This is why in our brief survey of political power in Valencia during the 14th century – its least-known century – we shall analyse not only the leading figures who managed the administrative mechanisms and decisions on the population, namely the Crown and the three estates of the Kingdom (the Church, the nobility and the royal universities or municipalities with their own local government), but also the events that sparked the external and internal disputes while also shaping a powerful administrative structure and a clear collective regional consciousness. To this end, we shall examine not only the material and jurisdictional foundations of each of these agents but also the gradual institutionalisation of their power.

### THE POWER OF THE CROWN

In the *Furs de València* (Charter of Valencia), the regional code of law officially promulgated in the first Courts of the Kingdom of Valencia held in 1261, James I (r. 1213-1276) claimed that “at the beginning all things were of our domain and did not reach those who would take them and receive them for reasons of either religion nor Church, such that they must always be called and judged as a royal estate”.<sup>8</sup> This Catalan-Aragonese monarch was certainly acting very differently than he had done shortly

before in Mallorca and Ibiza, where even prior to beginning the conquest campaigns he had agreed to divvy up the land and jurisdictions with a series of feudal magnates including the Count of Roussillon, the Count of Empúries, the Viscount of Bearn, the Bishop of Barcelona and the Archbishop-elect of Tarragona.<sup>9</sup> In contrast, during the 1231 to 1245 conquest of the Islamic lands that became the Kingdom of Valencia, James I served as the absolute peak of the feudal pyramid and distributed the occupied domains according to his own designs. What is more, even though during the early phases of the war he had to divvy up most of the occupied lands among the nobility, knights, prelates and military orders of Catalonia and Aragon which had helped him militarily, after the conquest of the city of Valencia in 1238, he allowed himself, now enormously strengthened, the luxury of keeping almost the entire area that stretched towards the southern boundary of the new kingdom for himself.<sup>10</sup>

In this way, almost half of the kingdom was directly in his hands in the mid-13th century. His leadership in the conquest had led the monarch to gain an exceptional point of departure to impose his power over the inhabitants as a whole, since in addition to the main towns he also retained extensive stretches of the territory. This was the backdrop when he also tried to impose his full legal domain, as we shall see below. However, after the end of the century that vast land mainly went to the Church and especially the nobility, particularly after the 1320s, in line with the rise in military financing needs and the very royal policy of creating a sympathetic nobility. On the one hand, the cost of the Crown’s campaigns after the conquest of Sicily in 1282 and especially the series of wars that ran practically uninterrupted after the occupation of Sardinia in 1323 was that the monarchs from Peter the Great (r. 1276-1282) to Peter the Ceremonious (r. 1336-

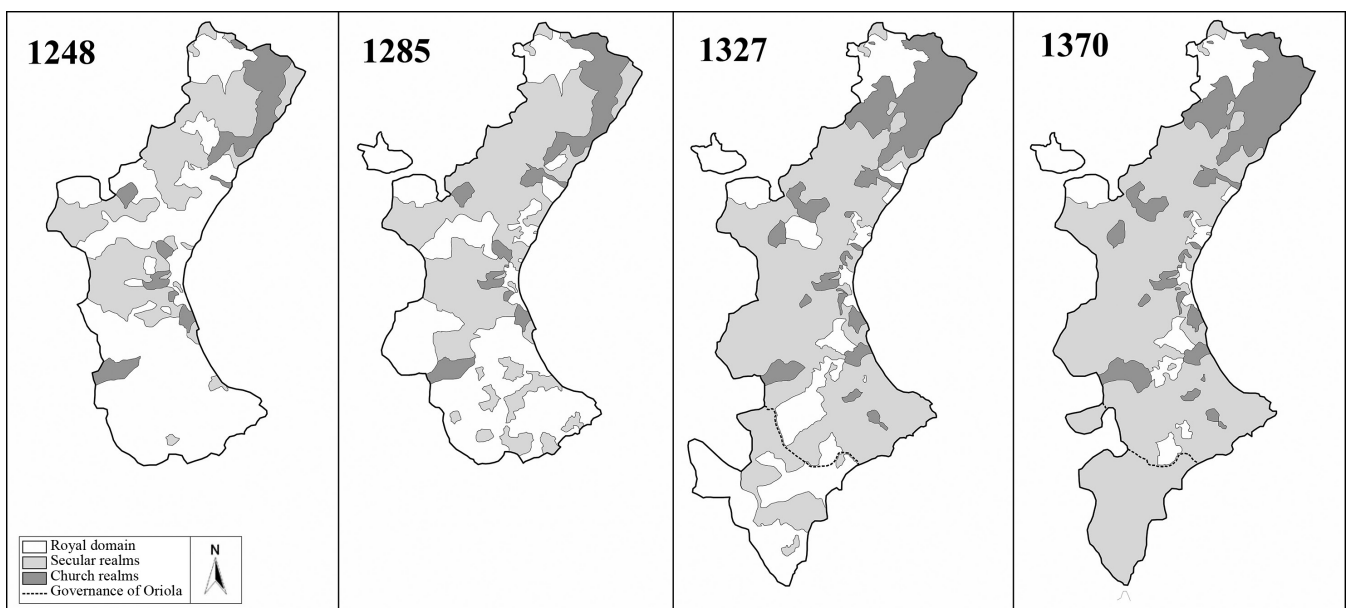


FIGURE 1. Evolution of the realms in the Kingdom of Valencia, 1248-1370.

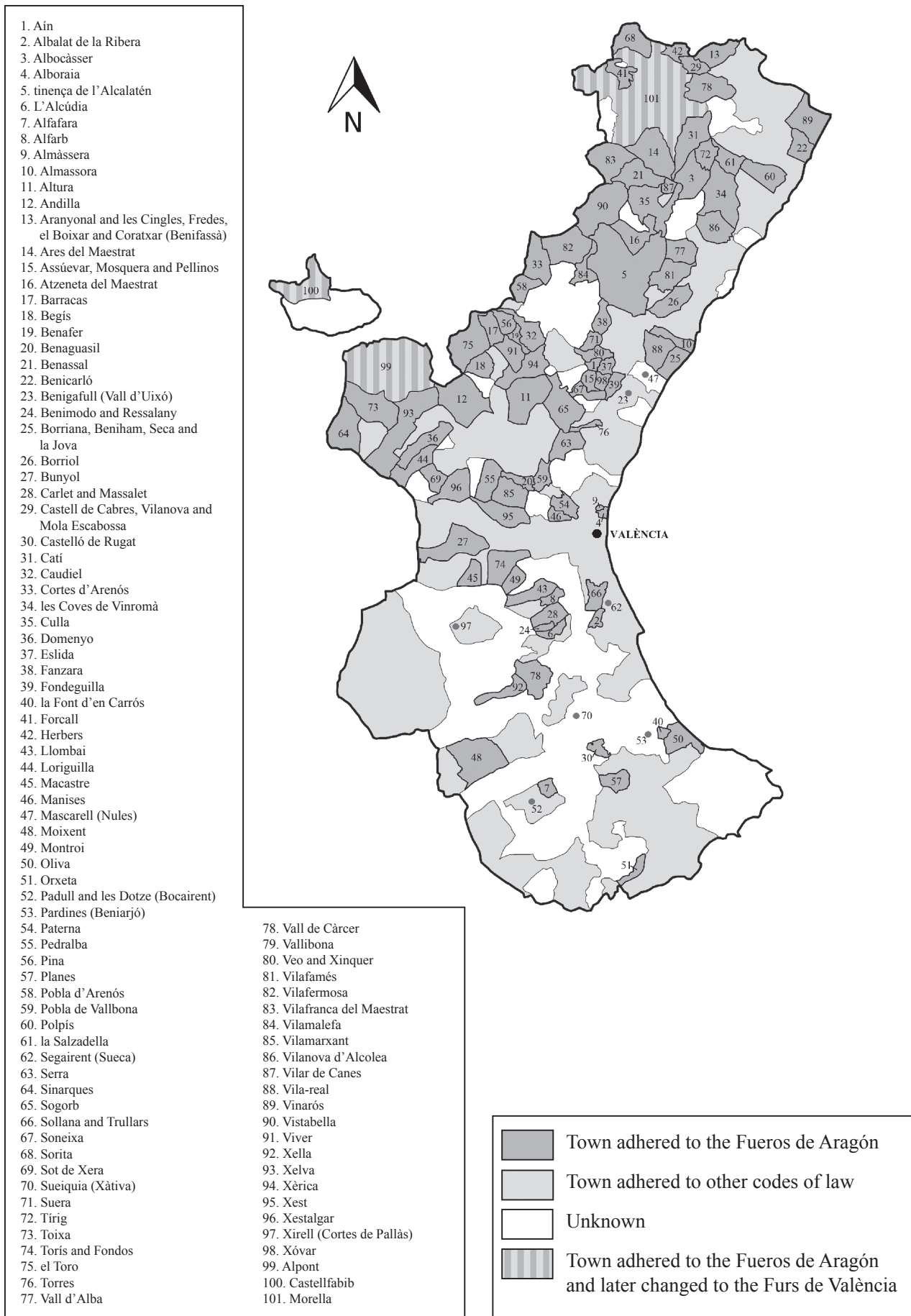


FIGURE 2. Distribution of the Fueros de Aragón and the Furs de València during the 13th century.

1387) had to sell many of their possessions in order to get funds. On the other hand, the participants in those conflicts, such as Roger de Llúria and Bernat de Sarrià, were also rewarded with major domains, as were certain members of the royal family, like queens and princes, who thus occupied the highest echelon of the nobility in the Kingdom of Valencia. As a result, by the 1360s the monarchy's possessions had been vastly reduced, and barely 10% of Valencian territory belonged to the king, a situation that would not begin to be redressed until the end of the century (see Figure 1).<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, beyond its material foundations, the evolution of the Crown's jurisdictional power was similar, going from a highly favourable point of departure to a somewhat disadvantageous endpoint during the 14th century. Specifically, in the early days of James I's conquest, he divided the occupied domains primarily among the Aragonese nobility and knights and allowed them to populate them with their own *Fueros de Aragón* (the code of laws from Aragon), just as he had allowed to apply the *Usatges de Barcelona* (the code of laws from Catalonia) to the majority of Catalans who had conquered Mallorca and Ibiza. However, the king totally shifted tack after conquering the city of Valencia in 1238 and publishing an extensive code of laws called the *Costums de València* which he sought to impose over the entire kingdom, just as he promulgated them in the subsequent Courts of 1261 under the name of the *Furs de València*. His intention was clear: to increase the power of the Crown and the royal estate over the people, lands and things through a new set of laws that claimed to extend over the entire territory at the expense of the authority of the other lords, despite the fact that practically half of the kingdom, especially the northern and inland regions, was populated under the *Fueros de Aragón* (see Figure 2).<sup>12</sup>

Firstly, acceptance of Valencia's laws meant acknowledging the monarch's pre-eminence when exercising certain prerogatives of justice, while inversely, keeping the *Fueros de Aragón* allowed the lords to avoid interference in their judicial decisions. Likewise, the choice of one code of laws over another also determined the possibility of establishing monopolies and taxes: if the *Furs de València* were accepted, the king had the monopoly on installing mills, oil presses, ovens, taverns or grain exchanges and selling salt, while he could also demand the payment of tolls, portage taxes, grazing taxes, redemptions from the army and other similar collections. To the contrary, if the *Fueros de Aragón* were maintained, the lords had the right to all of this. Similarly, access to natural resources was also at stake: in the *Furs de València* the king declared the free use of all forests, rivers, pasturelands and quarries in the kingdom, with special powers for the residents of the city of Valencia, which the Aragonese lords rejected, as they wanted to maintain private use of everything that lay inside their domains.

In consequence, James I's decision in 1261 sparked a true power struggle between the nobility of Valencia with

Aragonese roots, the majority at the time, and the Crown and the royal estate of Valencia. Indeed, the dispute escalated to a civil war in the 1280s and significantly obstructed political relations until the Courts of 1329-1330, where an intermediate solution was reached: the vast majority of nobles who applied the *Fueros de Aragón* consented to adopting the *Furs de València*, while Alphonse the Benign (r. 1327-1335) and the royal estate agreed to amend the *Furs de València* to recognise the concession of the "*mixtum imperium*" for all lords who had landholdings populated with a minimum of fifteen Christian families or seven Muslim families. The king also gave up monopolies and exactions of rights outside his direct domains, while the use of natural resources remained in dispute, as we shall discuss below. In short, the lords gained much of the jurisdiction over their domains, except the rulings that entailed penalties of mutilation or death, which remained in the hands of royal justice, with the exception of cases in which an express concession of "*merum imperium*" had been made by the king.

Therefore, the Crown had to give up the sweeping jurisdictional aspirations sought by James I in the mid-13th century, a fact which was aggravated by the constant transmission of "*meri imperii*" throughout the 14th century, in line with the aforementioned process of disposal of the royal assets. However, despite this, the legal situation of the monarchs was ultimately much more beneficial for their interests than it was in Aragon, for example, as clearly stated by a royal official in the late 15th century: "His royal majesty knows to what extent the *Fueros de Aragón* notably derogate the royal pre-eminences and constrain royal authority, contrary to the *Furs de València*, which are very obedient to the royal pre-eminences and do not curtail royal authority".<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, despite the fact that the Crown's favourable initial situation gradually eroded, we should also bear in mind that during the 14th century it gained via the development of an administration that not only tended to its direct domains but also acted with increasing authority and legitimacy as the maximum body of governance and justice.

First of all, since the mid-13th century there had been a general bailiff chosen by the king, for the length of time he wished, who was in charge of receiving and tallying the emoluments from his direct domains via a network of subordinate local bailiffs, who were chosen by the official himself, at least in the 14th century, when a general bailiff just for the former Castilian lands around Oriola was also established. Specifically, the bailiffs were in charge of collecting the revenues, urban taxes, monopolies and ordinary taxes paid in the royal boroughs, as well as the penalties and compositions imposed by the justices – the royal justice officials on a municipal level – and the tariffs applied to exports. What is more, they tried to enforce the bans on exports for certain products, were in charge of the sound physical condition of the royal castles, and worked as appeal judges in minor cases which involved Jews and Muslims from the royal domain, as ordinary

judges at the voluntary request of both parties, or as special judges assigned by the king in any kind of lawsuit.<sup>14</sup> In this sense, even though the post has not been studied in depth for the 14th century, a survey of the account books and revenue inventories that we possess indicates that they were being given more and more responsibilities. For example, while the general bailiff collected around 222,000 *solidi* from Valencia, Xàtiva, Morella, Morvedre, Alzira, Castelló de la Plana, Borriana, Lliria, Ontinyent, Cullera, Alpont, Castellfabib, Ademús, Biar, Xixona and the Muslim community of Uixó in 1315, one century later, in 1415, the sum from these same estates owned by the king totalled 515,000 *solidi* as a result of not only the growth in agricultural production and business transactions but also the penalties imposed by the bailiffs and justices.<sup>15</sup>

In fact, throughout the 14th century we can detect an increase in the status of the general bailiff of the Kingdom of Valencia; it was a job occupied by jurists without a noble title during the first part of the century, while during the second it started to shift to knights from families such as the Boil, Pardo de la Casta and Marrades. On the other hand, the aforementioned justices were officials chosen by the monarch from a list of three presented by the municipal council of each royal boroughs, who served as ordinary judges of the Crown in the sweeping jurisdictional townships of the king's landholdings. Obviously, the "*mixtum*" or "*merum imperium*" of the domains within those townships remained in the hands of the respective lords who owned them, yet the justices nonetheless operated as their appeal courts, and their activity also seemed to increase throughout the century, as proven by the fact that in 1321 the institution in the city of Valencia had to be split into one justice for criminal cases and another for civil cases and this last one was split into one justice for civil cases worth no more than 30 *solidi* (later 50 *solidi* and even later 300 *solidi*) and another justice for the other civil cases.<sup>16</sup>

Outside the royal boroughs, the power of the Crown was exerted over the entire territory via the figure of the attorney general of the Kingdom of Valencia, an official chosen by the monarch for the length of time he wished. This post came to be called the governor general after the mid-14th century, when, just like the general bailiff, there was a different attorney-general's office or government for the southern region of Oriola. In fact, even though we do not know much about the evolution of the post during the second half of the century, that was apparently when the governor general's competences stabilised as the delegated authority who often substituted for the king. He was the supreme commander of the royal armies, received the homages, held authority over the castles in fief, military summoned the same feudatories of the Crown and defended the integrity and peace of the territory against external enemies and outlaw gangs. He also worked as an appeals judge in the second instance, resolved cases of "*merum imperium*" – which implied mutilation or the

death penalty – in the domains where this power had not been transferred, in the case of both Christians and Jews and Muslims, and issued rulings in fiscal causes which involved a royal official and in "*causes consistorials*" (municipal causes) in which one of the parties was a royal municipality. In fact, his court of justice was the remote ancestor of the later Royal Audience of Valencia.<sup>17</sup>

Regarding the person chosen to occupy the post of attorney or governor, at the peak of the royal administration in the 14th century it tended to be a high-ranking nobleman, with a brief period of exception during the 1350s, when it was limited to knights in order to ensure their obedience after the revolt of the Union. However, regardless of the individual who held the post, throughout the course of the century we can also seem to detect a stabilisation and increase in their activity all over the kingdom, with the central seats in Valencia and Oriola and two others in Borriana and Xàtiva that depended on Valencia. Indeed, this development was accompanied by the juridical territorialisation of the Furs de València which we saw above, as well as the transfer to Valencian lands of other unique posts centralised in the royal court at the turn of the century: the vice-chancellery – Domingo Mascó was the first vice-chancellor assigned exclusively to the affairs of Valencia in 1387; the office of the Master Rational – Berenguer Minguet was appointed the Master Rational (*magister rationalis*) of the Kingdom of Valencia in 1419, even though there had been special delegates for Valencia since the end of the previous century; and the archives of the royal administration.<sup>18</sup>

In short, over the course of the 14th century, despite the economic and political difficulties experienced by the Crown, the fact is that its governance was spreading, intensifying and institutionalising in the Kingdom of Valencia thanks to the acceptance of the Furs de València and the notable development of the royal courts of justice and key posts such as the general bailiff, the general governor, the vice-chancellor and the Master Rational, with all their ancillary administrative structures. The Crown directly owned fewer assets than in the 13th century, but the legitimacy and stability of its power had increased by being disputed, agreed upon, mediated and shared by the other social sectors around the territory.

## THE POWER OF THE ESTATES

At the time that the Kingdom of Valencia was created in 1238, the Courts had sporadically been meeting in Catalonia and Aragon for a few decades with the participation of the Church, the nobility and increasingly frequently the royal universities. Although they had not yet attained the monarch's political and control authorities that they would gradually acquire after the end of the 13th century, they did already exist as a forum where the leading political agents from each territory could assemble.<sup>19</sup> In the case of the Kingdom of Mallorca, James I and his succes-

sors did not decide to call Courts of their own, but instead the Mallorcans had to go to the Courts in Catalonia, when they did attend Courts. Valencia did not seem to have any Courts of its own at first – at least there are no traces that the 1238 *Costums de València* were made public at an assembly of the Courts but instead at a simple gathering of magnates and leaders from Catalonia and Aragon – until James I decided to summon the first Courts of Valencia in 1261 in an attempt to impose the validity of the *Furs de València* over the entire territory with the approval of all the estates.<sup>20</sup> The fact that the new kingdom had Courts of its own makes Valencia stand out from the other late mediaeval conquests on the Iberian Peninsula and triggered a particular political jostling among the different members of the estates that received lands and gradually coalesced inside the Kingdom of Valencia.

### The Church

Among the magnates that signed the publication of the *Costums de València* in 1238, there were seven prelates: four Catalans, the archbishop of Tarragona and the bishops of Barcelona, Vic and Tortosa, along with three from Aragon, the bishops of Zaragoza, Huesca and Tarazona.<sup>21</sup> Obviously, the network of church dioceses and parishes and establishments of the military, monastic and mendicant orders had not yet developed in Valencia, although they would in the coming decades. However, a series of men of the Church specifically from Valencia were summoned to the Courts of 1301-1302, namely the bishop and council of canons of the cathedral of Valencia and the abbots of Benifassà and Valldigna, who were joined by the bishops of Tortosa and of Albarracín-Sogorb and the masters of the Temple and the Hospital from the Crown of Aragon, who also held lands in the Kingdom of Valencia.<sup>22</sup>

First of all, the diocese of Valencia, which was a suffragan of the archdiocese of Tarragona, was far and away the largest in the territory, although it had to share with the diocese of the Catalan city of Tortosa, which had received an extensive church demarcation in the northern part of the kingdom as the result of a previous promise from the monarch, and with another diocese that had two sees, the Aragonese city of Albarracín and the Valencian city of Sogorb, which was, nonetheless, actually small and not very well endowed. What is more, after the incorporation of the southern lands near Oriola in 1308, the bishop of Cartagena, the diocese to which it belonged, also held competences in the Kingdom of Valencia, although he was never part of the Church estate of the Courts since he was from Castile and thus constantly embattled with the leaders from Oriola, who wanted a diocese of their own. On the other hand, the military orders established in Catalonia and Aragon also received domains in Valencia, especially the Orders of the Temple and the Hospitallers in the northern part, most of which were folded into the new Order of Montesa, which was founded in 1319 as the outcome of disappearance of the Templars and was exclusive to Valencia. Finally, during the 13th century, only two

large Cistercian monasteries were founded: the one in Benifassà, with domains in the mountainous north, and the one in Valldigna, on the kingdom's central coast. The Mercedarians also created a monastery in Santa Maria del Puig in 1240, the Carthusians in Portaceli and Valldecris in 1272 and 1385, and the Hieronymites in Cotalba in 1388. However, given that they were redemptive or enclosed orders, they did not participate in the major political debates.<sup>23</sup>

Therefore, the Church was a weak estate as a whole throughout the 14th century: few in number, with not very large domains and a somewhat secondary role, unlike the situation in Aragon and especially in Catalonia, where there were archbishoprics (the one in Zaragoza since 1318 and the one in Tarragona since its conquest in the 12th century), and larger, more politically active bishoprics and abbeys (Zaragoza, Huesca and Tarazona or Montearagón, San Juan de la Peña, San Victorián, Veruela, Rueda and Piedra in Aragon; and Tarragona, Elna, Lleida, Urgell, Vic, Barcelona, Lleida and Tortosa, and Ripoll, Amer, Santes Creus, Poblet, Sant Miquel de Cuixà, Sant Cugat del Vallès, Banyoles, Besalú, Vilabertran, Sant Feliu de Guíxols and Sant Joan de les Abadesses in Catalonia). In fact, the Church estate of the Valencian Courts remained stable throughout the entire century, and the Courts were still attended by the same members as in 1301-1302, with the occasional addition of the commanders of the Castilian order of Santiago, which held possessions in the Kingdom of Valencia, and the Order of the Hospital, which had retained the domain of Torrent near the capital of Valencia.<sup>24</sup> Likewise, regarding its territorial coverage, the Church domains never managed to hold more than 15% of the entire kingdom and an even smaller percentage of the population, since the only establishment with truly abundant possessions was the Order of Montesa, created – as mentioned above – in 1319; in fact, it was the largest Valencian seigniorial estate in the period, with more than 60 towns and around 30,000 vassals.<sup>25</sup>

This is why we should stress that the masters of Montesa did play an extremely important political role throughout the century, generally showing steadfast support for and concurrence with the Crown, which had founded it. This is shown by the fact that the master Pere de Tous was in charge of organising the royalist side that sought to put down the revolt of the Union waged in 1347.<sup>26</sup> Likewise, given the vast size of their Church jurisdiction and their important symbolic role as the leading prelates in the kingdom, the bishops of Valencia also engaged in notable political activity, either as collaborators with the Crown (as advisors and chancellors), as middlemen among the different social agents, such as in the dispute between the supporters of the *Furs de València* and the *Fueros de Aragón*, or as a party directly involved in political struggles, especially during the bishopric of Jaume of Aragon, the grandson of James II and cousin of Peter the Ceremonious, between 1369 and 1396.<sup>27</sup> In any event, as men-

tioned above, despite the utmost importance of the Church in mediaeval society and the fact that the prelates also participated in the disputes over the ownership of domains, the Church estate of Valencia never played as significant, manifest a political role as it did in other European territories because of its initial status and evolution compared to the noble and royal estates.

### The nobility

The eleven noble magnates who signed the *Costums de València* in 1238 were all either Catalan (Ramon Folch de Cardona, Pere de Montcada, Guillem de Montcada, Ramon de Peralta and Ramon Berenguer d'Àger) or Aragonese (Pedro Fernández de Azagra, Artal de Luna, Pedro Cornel, Jimeno de Urrea, Jimeno Pérez and García Romeo).<sup>28</sup> In this case, most of them were from Aragon, as were those in the noble estate during the early decades in the development of the Kingdom of Valencia because of their prominent participation in the early phases of the conquest. In fact, as mentioned above, the first lands handed out by James I, especially in the northern and inland regions of Valencia, were primarily populated by Aragonese laws, a situation which was fated to create a strong party coalescing around the defence of those laws starting in 1261, when the monarch himself tried to impose the *Furs de València* everywhere. Despite this, the fact is that the inherited nobility in Valencia was usually characterised by its weakness compared to its counterparts in Catalonia and Aragon.

Indeed, in Catalonia there was a vigorous titled nobility, such as the counts of Roussillon, Empúries, Urgell, Pallars and Ribagorça and the viscounts of Bas, Cabrera, Rocabertí, Castellnou and Vilamur. Meanwhile, noble power in Aragon had reached the point of instating a caste of wealthy men or barons on whom a dense feudal-vassallic network of knights and *infançons* depended, forming two different estates in the Courts, the upper nobility and the petty nobility. In fact, even though founding myths were created in Catalonia and Aragon that framed the nobility as the origin of the country, such as the knights who accompanied Otger Cataló and the mountain men "who won the lands without king", in the Kingdom of Valencia "James I first, he of the glorious memory" was always conjured as the true father of the country.<sup>29</sup> His leadership and favourable starting position at the time of the conquest, particularly after 1238, certainly prevented the Valencian nobility from ever getting excessively powerful. Indeed, the Crown tended to hand out medium-sized or small realms – some of them extremely small – and avoided creating noble titles specific to Valencia, which did not start to be granted until the second half of the 14th century. In consequence, there were not as many nobles and knights with lands in the Kingdom of Valencia as in Catalonia and Aragon, and there was not such a complex network of vassalage.<sup>30</sup>

Given this state of affairs, only 27 noblemen and knights were summoned to the Courts of Valencia held in

1301-1302, while almost 40 were summoned to the 1299 Courts of Catalonia and around 50 to the 1300 Courts of Aragon.<sup>31</sup> The power differential between the noble classes of the different regions can also be seen in the campaign to conquer Almería in 1309: of the almost 1,300 knights who came in the different contingents, 48% were from Catalonia, 43% from Aragon and only 9% from the inherited nobility developed in the Kingdom of Valencia. Furthermore, while the leading Catalan and especially Aragonese barons summoned retinues upwards of 30 armed horses, the Valencians had no more than fifteen.<sup>32</sup> In fact, among those summoned to the aforementioned 1301-1302 Courts of Valencia, with the exception of a few nobles with close ties to the Crown such as Bernat de Sarrià, the only ones who were truly powerful were from the royal family itself, such as Jaime de Xèrica and Pedro Fernández de Híjar, the sons of James I, and Jaime Pérez de Sogorb, the son of Peter the Great, whose domains also spanned Valencia and Aragon. In this sense, there was an overwhelming majority of noblemen and knights from Aragonese families, 19 to 27 of them, compared to just five with Catalan roots and three from elsewhere, including Sicily (the Llúria and Pròixida families) and Genoa (the Carròs family).

In fact, as outlined above, the conflict over the application of the *Fueros de Aragón* or the *Furs de València* in the Kingdom of Valencia was the prime dispute that coloured political relations among the nobility, the Crown and the royal estate from the Courts of 1261 until the Courts of 1329-1330. During that entire period, much of the noble estate, most of whom were from Aragon, led by the successive Barons of Xèrica with the support of the nobility of Aragon, remained united in defence of their own laws. Until that date, they refused to approve the new *Furs de València* in the Courts and to fiscally contribute to the Crown like the other Valencian estates; however, after the agreement reached at that time the vast majority of noblemen and knights joined the political workings of the Kingdom. Only a handful of magnates, especially those who held baronies on the border between Valencia and Aragon such as the Barons of Xèrica, Luna, Arenós and Urrea, continued to apply the *Fueros de Aragón*, so although their alliance remained steadfast, it no longer extended throughout the majority of the noble estate.<sup>33</sup>

In consequence, after 1330 the majority of the nobility in favour of the *Fueros de Aragón* disintegrated, and, in fact, the Valencian nobility with Catalan roots began to grow until becoming the majority when the Courts were called in the mid-14th century. This nobility also had close ties to the service of the Crown, such as the aforementioned Llúria, Carròs and Pròixida families, as well as the Vilanova, Riusec, Boil, Tous and Escrivà families. Others came from urban families of ennobled merchants and jurists, such as the Soler, Ripoll, Rabassa and Marrades families, and only a few seemed to behave a bit more independently, including the Centelles, Vilaragut, Maça, Roís de Corella and Calataiud families. Beyond that, the

line of succession of the Xèrica family died out in 1369 and its main domains were returned to Peter the Ceremonious, who decided to grant them to his younger son, Prince Martin, for whom he created the Countship of Xèrica in 1372. A few years earlier in 1356, the same monarch had established the first noble title in Valencia, the Countship of Dénia, which he granted to his cousin and the grandson of James II, Alphonse of Aragon – the elder brother of the aforementioned bishop of Valencia. With the realm of Gandia and the former possessions of Bernat de Sarrià, who had also died without heirs, this became the most important barony in the kingdom at the time, with more than 10,000 vassals. It was elevated to the Duchy of Gandia in 1399.<sup>34</sup>

All told, given their overall weakness and customary dependence on the Crown, it should come as no surprise that the vast majority of nobles and knights in Valencia supported the royalist side in the revolt of the Union from 1347-1348 led by the city of Valencia. Still, in addition to a series of urban knights, some members of the petty nobility also joined the movement, a clear sign that since the agreement on the Furs there had been deepening inter-estate ties and a kind of permeability among the urban and knightly leaders.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, after the resolutions of 1329-1330, the members of the nobility were able to begin participating in the governments of the royal municipalities as justices, *mostassafs*,<sup>36</sup> magistracy and councillors, posts which had been off-limits to them until then. In fact, it seems that right around this time the nobles and knights began to move en masse to the city of Valencia, the main site where power was concentrated in the territory.<sup>37</sup> This obviously helped the members of the elites gradually engage in politics, yet it did not eliminate the struggles among them regarding either the rivalry between the estates or the material power over each realm.

Specifically, the huge strides in the seigneurialisation of the country over the century, along with the tax contributions required by the Crown to maintain the spiral of war campaigns that lasted from the conquest of Sardinia in 1324 until the end of the war with Castile in 1369, led to constant conflicts between the estate of the royal boroughs and the nobility. On the one hand, the increase in seigneurial realms both inside and outside the jurisdictional boundaries of the royal municipalities resulted in heightened struggles over issues of justice and access to material resources; indeed, the use of pasturelands by the city of Valencia was the particular focal point of many of these disputes, as we shall recount below. On the other hand, both the royal estate and the Crown increasingly forced the nobility to contribute to the joint military efforts through general subsidies approved in parliamentary assemblies, a phenomenon which sparked resistance but ended up being consolidated with the creation of the *Diputació del General* (General Council) in the 1360s. At the same time, there were also many disagreements over the urban contribution of the nobles and knights living in the royal boroughs, which were usually resolved via taxa-

tion, although their rates were proportionally lower than those of the rest of their inhabitants.<sup>38</sup>

Ultimately, the confluence of rising conflict and the gradual integration of the elites from the estates living in the city of Valencia yet with landholdings all over the territory, without clear cohesion or leadership, ended up paving the way for the banditry which would dominate the kingdom between the late 14th and early 15th centuries.

### The city of Valencia and the royal universities

The Costums de València granted in 1238 were actually an extensive municipal code of laws meant for the city that James I had just conquered. The monarch intended to apply them to all the land he planned to seize, but he had not yet occupied all of it nor did all the places he had conquered until then follow these laws. In fact, the prologue to the code itself specified that they were “the customs and establishments of the kingdom and the city of Valencia”,<sup>39</sup> such that they reserved special attention and a series of exclusive powers for the capital. Thus, apart from the Crown, the city of Valencia benefitted the most from the Costums and, in fact, when that their name became the Furs de València in 1250 a series of privileges granted until then to the urbs was added to the code. For example, the first chapter of the Furs granted the city a huge jurisdictional district measuring more than 600 square kilometres within which it held vast legal power over the privately-held domains nestled within it – in contrast to Barcelona’s difficulties in this sense. Likewise, the second chapter exclusively granted the inhabitants of the city of Valencia total freedom to use pasturelands in any part of the entire kingdom, regardless of the realm to which it belonged.<sup>40</sup>

On the other hand, we should bear in mind that the power of the city was exclusively held by the families of the urban leaders, especially merchants, moneychangers, drapers and jurists overwhelmingly with Catalans origins who monopolised the magistracies of the government from which the nobles and knights were totally excluded. The citizens had managed to establish this through a royal privilege in 1245 and it continued, with a brief five-year hiatus during the reign of Peter the Great (r. 1276-1285), until the agreements of 1329-1330, which partly opened justice, the *mostassafs*, the magistracy and the Municipal Council to the nobility.<sup>41</sup> Likewise, we should also bear in mind that Valencia was far and away the most populous, important and wealthy town in the land; it had 20,000 inhabitants in the 1270s, a figure which only continued to grow and which, despite the terrible plague in 1348, reached almost 30,000 in the 1360s. By then it must have accounted for almost 15% of the total population in the kingdom, joined by around 10,000 inhabitants who lived in its outskirts. In fact, that was where the complex irrigation system inherited from Al-Andalus was developed to maintain the extensive, productive farmlands that nourished and supplied the urban growth.<sup>42</sup>



Given this, the role played by the city of Valencia in the political system of the kingdom was essential from the very start. Its power had reached the point where in 1286 – 13 years before Barcelona – it managed to release itself from the obligation to contribute monetarily to the king whenever he requested it, which allowed it to have greater margin of action when gaining political compensations in fiscal negotiations. What is more, its economic importance was such that in the numerous subsidies to the Crown documented in the mid-14th century, its contribution always accounted for half or more of the total granted by the royal estate.<sup>43</sup> In line with this, Valencia initially held a clear leadership position within its estate, especially during the dispute over the *Furs* versus the *Fueros*, given that all the royal villages were governed by the *Furs de València* with the exception of Borriana, which was populated under the *Fuero de Aragón* in 1233, and Vila-real, founded within the township of Borriana several decades later, until they renounced it at the Courts of 1329-1330. Likewise, all the gatherings of the Courts until the mid-14th century were always held in the city of Valencia itself, and even in the general subsidies granted during the 1330s and 1340, the capital acted as a separate estate, with its own deputies and administrators different to those of the nobility, the Church and the other royal boroughs.

In fact, until then Valencia was the only town in the kingdom with the rank of city – apart from Sogorb, which was usually held by important barons – and it fashioned itself, as it did throughout the entire era of the *Furs*, as the “mother of all cities and villages in the Kingdom” and as the “mother and head of the entire kingdom”.<sup>44</sup> However, that situation of absolute pre-eminence and leadership would shift after the revolt of the Union, led by the capital in 1347 with the support of the majority of the royal estate but opposed by two of the most important towns in the Kingdom, Morella and Xàtiva. In fact, at the end of the conflict, Xàtiva was rewarded by Peter the Ceremonious with the title of city, despite the repeated protests of the Valencian leaders.<sup>45</sup> In this sense, within the context of a constant loss of members through the Crown’s disposals of assets throughout the century, the skeleton of the royal estate was made up not only of the city of Valencia but also seven main towns, namely Xàtiva, Morella, Morvedre, Alzira, Castelló de la Plana, Oriola and Alicante, as well as a few that were not quite as large, including Borriana, Vila-real, Bocairent, Ademús, Alpont, Castellfabib and Castalla.

They stood alongside the leaders of Valencia in its defence of the *Furs de València* and the integrity of the royal assets numerous times, but they also clashed in an increasingly open fashion over the city’s aspirations to impose its power over the entire estate and the kingdom. In a parliamentary assembly held in 1321, for example, the town representatives asked to have the same “graces, franchises and freedoms” as Valencia, but James II denied their request: “because there is a reason why the city has

more prerogatives than the towns of the kingdom”.<sup>46</sup> What is more, as mentioned above, the unity of the estate’s action was clearly shattered during the revolt of the Union, and the outcome of the conflict with the victory of the Crown heralded a major revision and reduction of the capital’s privileges in 1349, which would remain in force until 1382.<sup>47</sup> In fact, during the second half of the century, we can detect a shift in the families who held the power in the capital, with slightly more participation by the knights and a closure of the routes of participation and decision-making on the Municipal Council, which must have helped spark the revival of banditry.<sup>48</sup> At the same time, in the 1390s, while Valencia was increasing its direct seigniorial power by adding Morvedre and Cullera, which it gained after the war with Castile concluded, the personal assets of the Prince Martí, which included the Countship of Xèrica, a series of royal boroughs with Xàtiva at the helm formed a league with the noble estate and Church to deal with the capital’s interventionism in the use of the kingdom’s natural resources.<sup>49</sup>

The main bone of contention was the issue of the use of the pasturelands, which, as noted above, were freely available around the entire kingdom for the inhabitants of the city of Valencia. The only exception was the *bovalars*, which were zones exclusively reserved for the livestock of each realm, delimited with the supervision of the Crown. There was a constant spate of lawsuits, and Valencia actually established a court of its own to issue rulings; more than 300 cases were brought before this court in barely three years during the mid-14th century and they involved more than 90 different towns all around the kingdom. Given this, the capital had to deal with members of the royal and other estates. For example, in 1380 Xàtiva, Morella and Alzira undertook joint lawsuits against this situation, while in 1395 the militias of the city of Valencia occupied the viscounty of Xelva – the third largest title in the kingdom, created just a few years earlier – and dispossessed its lord, Pedro Ladrón de Vilanova, over an issue related to the transit of livestock. Finally, in 1403 King Martin issued an arbitral ruling in the Valencian Courts which confirmed the inhabitants of Valencia’s privilege over the pasturelands, but he made the conditions more stringent, regulated the procedure in the event of conflict in greater detail and established the need to signal the *bovalars* of all the towns in the kingdom.<sup>50</sup>

Yet the conflicts continued to mount, and it should come as no surprise that while the city of Valencia declared itself in favour of Urgell during the Interregnum of 1410-1412, Xàtiva, Morella and Morvedre took the side of the Trastámaras. As is common knowledge, this dispute escalated to unleash a civil war in Valencia.<sup>51</sup> In short, throughout the 14th century, the royal estate went from unity and indisputable leadership of the capital to fragmentation and confrontation among some of its leading members, who also sought the support of the noble and Church lords in yet another display of the gradual mutual interaction and involvement of the political actors as the

century wore on. Valencia's dream of imposing its will over the entire kingdom, bolstered by the privileges that James I sought to grant it in the mid-13th century, was strongly questioned throughout the entire 14th century. Yet at the same time, it grew and gained ground as the political, social and economic capital of a land which showed major integration: it was the seat of the leading institutions, the place of residence of the elites and the nucleus that concentrated the most mercantile, military and financial enterprises. Yet this consolidation in no way staved off conflict; instead, it was an essential, intrinsic factor in the very process.

### THE EVENTS AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

Generally speaking, the 14th century can be divided into three main phases in the politics of the Crown of Aragon. The first one approximately corresponds to the reign of James II (r. 1291-1327), which was characterised by a stage in which the affairs triggered by the conquest of Sicily in the 1280s were resolved, along with a kind of political appeasement and deepening of the institutional foundations of royal power. The second one spanned the central decades of the century, more or less from the conquest of Sardinia in 1324 until the end of the war with Castile in 1369. It was shaped by a constant succession of wars against external enemies – such as the Sardinians, the Genovese, the Nassarites, the Marinids and the Castilians – and by the revolt of the Union in Aragon and Valencia internally, as well as by the acceleration in the process of constructing a stable general tax system mediated by the leaders of the estates via the Courts. Finally, the third phase came in the last third of the century, when the different members of political society struggled intensely for control over the political and institutional system that resulted from the changes that had taken place in the previous stages.

Obviously, these sweeping general stages were expressed uniquely in each territory according to its own socio-political conditions. In the case of the Kingdom of Valencia, the first phase was totally dominated by the dispute over the *Furs de València* versus the *Fueros de Aragón*, even though James II had managed to partly mitigate it after reaching the throne by his recognition in the Courts of 1292 that the *Furs de València* should be general for the entire land but that there was a series of lords and realms which had the special privilege of using the *Fueros de Aragón*. In any event, that situation was not the parties' desired state of affairs, and the clash lay dormant, as seen in the outcome of the subsequent Courts of 1301-1302: the chapters on justice approved were not incorporated into Valencia's body of law, nor was the subsidy approved managed generally and shared by all the estates. Instead, the royal universities granted one while the nobles and knights granted another much smaller donation exclusively meant to wipe out the debts that the Crown

had with them, in contrast to the parallel Courts in Catalonia and Aragon, where the subsidies granted were managed by both estates in a mixed, joint fashion.

What is more, while the Courts in Catalonia and Aragon met up to seven times during the reign of James II, in Valencia there were only four parliamentary assemblies because of the clash between the supporters of the *Furs de València* and the *Fueros de Aragón*. In fact, in the Courts of Valencia of 1314 and 1325, no legislative or fiscal agreements were reached because of the open wound over this dispute. James II tried to heal it in 1321 by summoning the main parties involved in the conflict, but no agreement was reached despite the repeated rounds of negotiation. Later, in 1326, after nine months of assemblies and treaties, the defenders of the *Furs de València* and the *Fueros de Aragón* reached an agreed-upon solution with the assistance of the Bishop of Valencia. However, it was never put into place because of the illness and death of Jaume II shortly thereafter.<sup>52</sup> Likewise, his governing actions gave rise to two important events in the political history of the Kingdom of Valencia. The first was the conquest of the lands in Murcia near Oriola between 1296 and 1304, their incorporation into the territory and their joining the jurisdiction of Valencia via their own attorney general. The second was the creation of the Order of Montesa in 1319 with the assets of the vanished Templars in Valencia, coupled with the vast majority of possessions of the Order of the Hospital, which came to be owned by masters faithful to the Crown such as Arnau de Soler (1319-1327), tutor of the eldest son of James II, Pere de Tous (1327-1374), Albert de Tous (1374-1382) and Berenguer March (1382-1409).<sup>53</sup>

Therefore, it was not until the reign of Alphonse the Benign in the Courts of 1329-1330 that a solution to the issue of the *Furs* versus the *Fueros* was found, a milestone which launched a new political era in the Kingdom of Valencia. Only a handful of magnates kept the *Fueros de Aragón*, while the vast majority adapted to the *Furs de València* during the 1330s and 1340s, as the capital and most of the royal estate had insistently been pursuing since the 13th century with the support of the Crown. Nonetheless, that was precisely when the differences between the city of Valencia and the monarchs were catapulted into the foreground, beginning with the gradual disposal of the royal assets. Despite the promise secured from James II in 1319 – immediately after his eldest son, James the Senseless, refused to marry and inherit the throne – not to divide the territories of the Crown or give up its direct domains, the fact is that numerous royal boroughs were transferred thereafter. Gandia, Dénia, Pego, Corbera and Elx were given to his sons Pere, Joan and Ramon Berenguer during the reign of James II himself; and Morella, Xàtiva, Morvedre, Alzira, Castelló de la Plana, Oriola, Alicante and Guardamar were given during the reign of Alphonse the Benign to his wife, Queen Elionor of Castile, the last three towns to their son, the *Infant Ferdinand*.

That clash led first to the mutiny led by the jurist of Valencia Francesc de Vinatea in late 1331 and later to the persecution of Queen Elionor of Castile upon the death of Alphonse the Benign and the accession to the throne of their first son, Peter the Ceremonious in 1336. Elionor was defended by Baron Pedro de Xèrica, who maintained the *Fueros de Aragón* within Valencian territory, and the issue was not solved until the Courts of 1339, which confirmed the cessions made to the *Infant* Ferdinand but the return to the royal assets of the ones transferred to the queen. Despite this, the expansionist and military policy of the Crown led Peter the Ceremonious to dispose of many more assets and to considerably increase the fiscal pressure on the royal boroughs, which had to resort to municipal debt for the first time. Furthermore, his authoritarian behaviour, especially after the 1344 incorporation of the councillors from Roussillon from the court of James III of Mallorca, who disdained and avoided the code of laws of the *Furs de València*, sparked the revolt of the Union in 1347, led by the city of Valencia with the support of much of the royal estate – except Morella, Xàtiva, Borriana, Vila-real, Ademús and Alpont – and the popular echelons of many noble and Church estates.<sup>54</sup>

In fact, the royalist fraternity which was organised against them, and which sparked a civil clash, was led by none other than Pedro de Xèrica, now serving Peter the Ceremonious, the Master of Montesa Pere de Tous and other nobles like Gonzalo Díaz de Arenós, Alfons Roger de Llíria and Gilabert de Centelles. After a year and a half of conflict – simultaneous to the revolt of the Union that had emerged in Aragon, which was, however, aristocratic – the rebellion in Valencia was totally crushed and the monarch imposed severe economic penalties, namely the payment of ten-year taxes which consolidated the spread of the indirect taxes and public debt on the local scale, along with political penalties, with a reduction in privileges, the direct intervention of the magistracies from the city of Valencia and the monarch's refusal to call the Courts of Valencia.<sup>55</sup> This situation, however, was completely wiped out after the start and development of the war against Castile between 1356 and 1369, which led to the appearance of the *Diputacions del General* in Catalonia, Aragon and Valencia to manage the collection and administration of the huge general subsidies needed to organise the defence of the land against the constant, multiple attacks from the troops of Peter the Cruel.<sup>56</sup>

In fact, in Valencia the *Diputació del General* was the crystallisation of temporary bodies that had previously existed. While in Catalan and Aragonese lands, the nobility had refused to grant any subsidy to the monarch for over half a century – since the Courts from the beginning of the 14th century – the Valencian nobility had granted them after the agreements of 1329-1330, initially through a five-year subsidy granted in those same Courts, and later with another three-year subsidy approved in the Courts of 1340, which was managed by deputies of the nobility, the Church, the city of Valencia and the royal towns. In

this sense, it is likely that the new situation of the estates intermingling and the relative weakness of the nobility made this possible. Regardless, when the conflagration with the Castilians came, the Crown, whose assets had been weakened by the process of disposals associated with previous wars, had to resort to the assistance of its subjects and accept frequent Courts and the estates' management of the subsidies in order to conserve the integrity of its domains. Indeed, from 1358 until 1401, the Valencians held up to twelve different assemblies of the Courts.<sup>57</sup>

In any event, after the utter turmoil unleashed by the conflict against Castile had subsided, there were still other wars – against the French, Sardinians and Genovese – but at a pace that was not as challenging to the Crown. Given this, a new period got underway in which the political society of each territory interacted with the institutions and the composition of power that had coalesced previously.<sup>58</sup> In the case of Valencia, as explained above, both the justices and the royal officials had increased their activity, while some posts that until then had been centralised began to be decentralised. At the same time, the question of the *Furs* versus the *Fueros* had ceased being a prime issue, and, in fact, the nobility had no longer primarily Aragonese origins, while the city of Valencia had gradually come into focus as the main hub of political, economic and social power throughout the entire kingdom. As discussed above, the capital itself had ceased being the uncontested leader of the royal estate and was subjected to a process of oligarchisation of its leaders after the revolt of the Union. The *Diputació del General*, on the other hand, had opened another front of power that the different political agents sought to control, while the courts of the king and the prince and the posts that depended on them grew steadily.

In fact, the Courts in the last third of the 14th century particularly strove to define and outline the competences of the royal officials such as the governor, the general bailiff and the justices, while also trying to keep watch over or challenge the curiae, councillors and advisors surrounding the monarchs and heirs to the Crown, who, as stated in the General Courts of Montsó of 1383, “are like wild mushrooms, growing quickly in little time”.<sup>59</sup> As a whole, the political society and institutionalised power associated with both the Crown and the kingdom had grown, and rather than being attacked or disputed as they had been in the past, they were the object of attempts to control them by the leading elites. The latter had also been forging family or political bonds in an increasingly malleable way, such that the direct clashes among the estates noted until 1330 had been replaced by an array of more open, varied alliances. In short, the conflicts were no longer targeted as much at trying to change or contradict the existing structures as at trying to shape and control the mechanisms of a political and institutional system that was increasingly consolidated and entrenched around the territory as a whole.

This is how banditry came to dominate the Kingdom of Valencia during the last quarter of the 14th century – and even until the enthronement of Ferdinand of Trastámara

in 1412 – in its fierce struggle to seize the trades and posts in the royal milieu, the government of the kingdom and the urban magistracies. Specifically, the elites were divided into two main factions, one led by Vilaragut, Soler, Boil, Tous and Marrades, and another by Centelles, Díaz, Vilanova, Pròixida and Pardo de la Casta. The latter was a bit more aristocratic and also occasionally supported by the main magnates in the region: both the brothers Alfons and Jaume d'Aragó, that is, the Count of Dénia and the Bishop of Valencia, and the Master of Montesa, Berenguer March. In fact, those two major factions were the ones that politically harnessed the support of the top pretenders to the succession upon the death of Martin the Humane in 1410: Count Jaume II of Urgell, who had the assistance of the former, and the *Infante* of Castile Ferdinand de Trastámara, who was favoured by the latter. Indeed, the Interregnum led to a new civil war in the Kingdom of Valencia in which the pro-Urgell faction was in the majority in the city of Valencia and among much of the royal estate, while, just like during the revolt of the Union, the pro-Trastámara side had the support of Xàtiva and Morella, the two main royal boroughs which questioned the hegemony of the capital.<sup>60</sup>

Ultimately, the political instability shown by Valencian society at that time was quite different to the instability that had existed in the 13th century and the first half of the 14th century, which was less cross-cutting. It was somehow an instability caused by the growth, development and gradual spread of the institutions of governance and administration in all spheres. In any event, that process was mediated by the very historical evolution and particular characteristics of the territory of Valencia, including a weak nobility compared to Catalonia and Aragon, a pre-eminent role of the Crown favoured by the *Furs de València*, and the city of Valencia's steadfast bid for leadership, as it sought to impose its power over the kingdom as a whole. Regardless, by the early 15th century nobody could dispute the political integrity of the territory or its institutional and legal entity; to the contrary, they all struggled to occupy its power structures and speak on behalf of the kingdom and all Valencians, a collective self-awareness which, in fact, ended up exploding throughout that other century.<sup>61</sup>

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