



CHAPTER 1

Global Context and the Rise of Europe: Iberia and the Atlantic

Historians remain convinced of the importance of the changes that occurred in the European economies between 1450 and 1550. Whether these processes are seen as the result of a partnership with Asia or as the beginning of the European miracle, the scale of the transformation is undeniable. It would affect the entire planet (Jones 1981). Changes such as these were the result of the convergence of global forces, manifested above all in the development of a technology that made possible the oceanic discoveries and overseas expansion. But, fundamentally, they were the outcome of internal transformations that took place in the institutions that regulated social life, in the structure of landlords' rents, property rights, and political systems. The coincidence of these two processes unleashed a series of unexpected opportunities.

GLOBAL LINKS AND INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGES IN EUROPE AND THE IBERIAN PENINSULA

The Global Forces and the Portuguese Atlantic Expansion

Ever since Marco Polo's famous voyages to China, the Italian city-states, and above all Venice and Genoa, had initiated a series of contacts with Asia whose effects in Europe were immediately felt (Fernández-Armesto 2006). Trade in silks, spices, and other products characterized by their

high price in relation to their weight would be one of the keys to the rebirth of the Mediterranean, the formation of banking capital, and the emergence and development of the techniques of commercial exchange. If the European elites fought among themselves on the battlefield, in their claims to prestige and in their efforts to immortalize their lineages, then equally they competed in their search for the exotic, their intention being to outstrip their rivals in the consumption of oriental spices and silks and in experimenting with the aesthetic and hedonistic effects of extremely expensive products imported from the Orient (Brotton 2002). In this way, and despite not being manifested in high volumes of trade, the demand for such goods would change the international commerce of this period. It would also spark oceanic exploration, which would be the result of the search for new sea routes by which to acquire these luxury products. Furthermore, Flynn and Giraldez (2002) have argued that the increasing value of precious metals, and particularly of silver, in Europe is due to the China's shift towards the collection of taxes in this metal, which increased the world demand for them.

Yet, it would be a mistake to reduce this primitive globalization of Europe to changes caused by contact with the Far East. Something more than the desire for these products was needed before the leap overseas could be made, and this was also related to the interchanges between civilizations. From the medieval period, contact between the different civilizations of the Mediterranean produced a range of cultural and scientific exchanges (Abulafia 2011). The Iberian Peninsula being the crossroad of Christian, Arabic, and Jewish cultures, it brought together the most advanced forms of knowledge of the age in the fields of arithmetic, trigonometry, and cartography. This cross-cultural fertilization was crucial for expansion. The knowledge acquired by the Mallorcan school of cartography; the science that was transmitted from the *Fenix de las Maravillas del Mundo*, written in 1268 by Ramón Lull; and the expertise of the Mallorcan Jew Abraham Cresques, among others, would pass to Lisbon, which at the time benefited from an effervescent intellectual atmosphere thanks to the enthusiasm of Henry the Navigator and a brilliant group of marine adventurers, Christopher Columbus among them. The cross-fertilization of ideas that flourished in Iberia resulted in developments such as the translation into Latin of the Ptolemy's *Geographia*; the progress made in the representation of meridian and parallel lines; the use of the compass and, shortly afterwards, of the astrolabe, which meant that it was easier to check and correct routes at sea; and the use of the Iberian caravel, a creative

hybrid that mixed the advantages of the Northern and Southern European ship types.¹ Even inventions such as the printing press, of Chinese origin, helped to reduce the chances of error in the reproduction of maps (Bagrow 1964, pp. 65 and ff.). From the fourteenth century, Europe appropriated another Chinese invention, gunpowder, thus acquiring the military capability necessary to undertake its expansion.

The so-called rise of the West, which is often considered a unique phenomenon in human history, can be overrated. It was not an exceptional event. The world had lived through similar processes at other times—for example, in classical Rome, in the steppes of Mongolia—and on many occasions. Indeed, something similar was happening at the time. From the medieval period, Arab merchants had been systematically extending their reach into North Africa and towards South East Asia. From ‘Asia Minor’, the Ottomans expanded into the Maghreb and the Balkans (Casale 2010). Even in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, European expansion, always identified with the Atlantic navigation routes, had its counterweight in the extension of Moscow’s territories towards the Ukraine and the Orient (Céspedes 1990; Kennedy 1988, Chap. 1; Darwin 2008, pp. 118–25). These processes were important, not only because they provide a relativist perspective that challenges the historical exceptionalism with which the history of Europe is sometimes viewed but also because they created the communication networks that made the old continent’s expansion a step towards globalization.

So how, in this context of expansion, did Iberians venture into the Atlantic? An extraordinary array of resources available to the Portuguese and Castilians led to their voyages of discovery along the coastlines of Africa. Moreover, these ventures were also the result of local forces that connected to global developments.

Portugal’s Atlantic vocation only began during the fourteenth-century crisis. It is not surprising, therefore, that the first significant leap from the Iberian coastlines, the natural frontier of these kingdoms, should have led to the conquest of Ceuta (1415). The Portuguese were seeking an entrepot much as they would in Ormuz or Macao more than a century later (Thomaz 1994, p. 23). Overseas expansion also entailed a way of continuing the *Reconquista*, which had transformed itself into a means of reproduction and social development in this society. Some historians have

¹For the cartographical improvements, see Bagrow (1964, pp. 65–107). On the techniques of navigation, Chaunu (1977).

understood, therefore, that although these explorers were searching for wheat fishing banks and other primary materials (Godinho 1969), the true reason for their expansion cannot be found in the need for foodstuffs, as Portugal's population had been practically stagnant since the Black Death. (Thomaz 1994, p. 17; Mattoso 1997, p. 327).² Nor could early overseas expansion have been the enterprise of a nascent bourgeoisie taking its first commercial steps. Rather, above all else it entailed a way of giving free rein to the expansive needs of the nobility and the internal conflict that it was generating within Portuguese society during this period (Thomaz 1994, p. 27 and *passim*). This line of action, which remained important until the adventure launched from Ceuta that cost the life of King Sebastian (1578), would be completed with the exploration of the Saharan coasts and the Atlantic islands. To this end there existed incentives linked not only to local forces but also to globalization itself, such as the need for African gold and the desire to secure it directly, thus cutting out intermediaries, the Saharan traffickers; this option was ever more important as general prices were falling and so the purchasing power of gold was rising (Vilar 1969; Godinho 1969).

The phases of this expansion are well known, and there is no point in setting them out again here.³ Often presented as private enterprises—and even as having a non-Portuguese component—Portuguese expansion would quickly assume a handful of definitive characteristics. It was frequently marked by a system of *razias* (very common during the *Reconquista* and based fundamentally upon piracy and raiding) in search of slaves, gold, malaguetta pepper, and other products. As was often the case in imperial ventures of the day, these *razias* were usually undertaken in the hope of securing concessions and privileges from the king who, from an early stage, reserved the so-called right of conquest and taxes levied on general commerce for himself. Moreover, at the same time, a peculiar phenomenon emerged—the ‘merchant state’ (Thomaz 1994). That is to say, the king assumed the role of trading directly and—it almost goes without saying—claimed for himself the monopoly over gold deposits, such as those of San Jorge da Mina. Moreover, if the monarch often offered concessions to trade, conquer or raid from points on the coast, from 1469

²This having been said, Thomaz proposes a close correlation between immigration from the north eastern zone of the country, the most highly populated, and the repopulation of the Atlantic islands (1994, p. 17).

³See Godinho (1969), Parry (1990, Chap. 6), and Chaunu (1977).

he also proceeded to lease royal rights to merchants. In this way he broke with the system that depended upon concessions to *fidalgos*, nobles in general, *escudeiros*, and adventurers who had not always been born in Portugal (Thomaz 1994, p. 137). This was a system that sought to externalize the costs of the enterprise to the king and addressed the difficulty of mobilizing human resources that were very limited but, at the same time, created many problems of control for the Crown.

The outcome would be a society of few ties or links that would seek stability by conceding advantages to the *casados*, that is, those men who contracted matrimony and settled down more or less definitively overseas. It was also one that intensively tested the social codes of the metropolis—above all else it challenged the traditional frontier between merchants and nobles, who were often all corsairs—and began a process of intermingling with local societies that would give rise to figures such as the famous *lançados*, armed men who undertook pillaging operations, usually by traveling on the great rivers (Disney 2009, vol. II, pp. 51–2). These groups came to exercise an enormous power of mediation between the metropolis and the local tribes, particularly with regard to commerce and piracy.

This rather unstructured system did not, however, prevent the formation of a genuine framework tying together the different points of this empire. Moreover, from the middle of the century, commerce began to impose itself upon the various raiding activities, to which it was, in any case, very closely related. By then, the Portuguese had arrived at Cape Verde and, thanks to the autonomy of navigation that the caravel bestowed upon them, were pressing ahead with the colonization of the Azores (Disney 2009, vol. II, pp. 32–3, 92–3). Indeed, on these islands they had begun to expand the cultivation of sugar cane, a luxury product in this period and a symbol of social distinction (Mintz 1986), as well as the production of wine in Madeira and other products in the different areas of the archipelago. These same forces built upon themselves: sugar further increased the need for slaves (Lisbon was an active market from the very beginning), who could be captured in the conquered territories or elsewhere along the African coastline, thus feeding the plantations and further strengthening the momentum towards exploration and conquest. At the same time, the increasing supply of gold fostered the development of trade in the area and also in Portugal, as well as stimulated commerce between Portugal and Europe. It has often been pointed out that products exported to the *feitorias* (enclaves for trade and military actions) did not constitute a large volume of commerce. Nevertheless, these exports, however limited,

stimulated the trade in goods from Europe and, above all, Morocco; this situation particularly ensued with respect to the wealthier *feitorias* like San Jorge da Mina (Disney 2009, vol. II, pp. 60–1). By 1475 hopes were growing that Africa could be circumnavigated and Asia reached by sea (Thomaz 1994, pp. 142–5).

By this juncture—after 1478 and a long period in which the adventurers’ actions were the norm—the Castilians controlled the Canary Islands and, with Genoese financial backing, began to extend the cultivation of sugar. As in other episodes of this age, this expansion responded to global stimuli and employed financial and technical resources with a markedly transnational component. In 1492, and above all thanks to Portugal, the Atlantic was opening up and becoming a dangerous but promising theatre of action for the Iberian peoples: its currents and winds were known; the economy which would later come to characterize it had begun to take shape; people, animals, and plants were now circulating among its seas and islands (Russell-Wood 1992). And the sea passage to Asia was open.

Towards a European Poly-nuclear Recovery

European Recovery and Property Rights

A large number of explanations have been advanced for Europe’s economic recovery. During the last decades of the twentieth century, a debate took place that showcased unilateral explanations such as those of Postan (Malthusian), Wallerstein (Marxist with an accent on relations of commercial dependence), and Guy Bois or Brenner (also Marxist, with emphasis on the relations of production). All offered important insights.⁴ Yet the most plausible general explanation should not only encompass a combination of them but also include the effects of institutional transformations and the evolution of agrarian property rights. The recovery, in any case, was based upon regional processes of different rhythms and intensities that only in their second phase created synergies sufficient to constitute a general phenomenon across the whole of Europe.

It was logical that from a very early stage, Lisbon, Seville, or Guadalquivir Valley, all of them linked to Atlantic commerce, should experience rapid growth. Toulouse, involved in the trade of *pastel* dyes since 1430 and also

⁴ See Postan (1966), Bois (1976), Wallerstein (1979), and Brenner (1993).

connected to international trade, experienced significant expansion. In northern Italy the profits from this new commerce were invested in agricultural improvements and urban economies, such as those of Florence and Genoa, which expanded between 1444 and 1460 (Goldthwaite 1980, p. 33; Heers 1961, pp. 504–5). However, many other regions experienced serious problems. Immersed in the Hundred Years War, Normandy's agrarian production fell intermittently until 1450, while its commerce suffered 'alternative phases of depression and recovery'. Breton commerce went through a similar pattern of boom and bust, and Catalonia, ever more marginalized from the main maritime artery that ran from Genoa to Mallorca, Valencia, and Granada, could not react.⁵ The Hundred Years War affected the volume of traffic in the English Channel, the very sea that was destined to serve as the great artery of European trade from the second half of the fifteenth century. The precariousness of the emergent fiscal systems forced governments to finance these wars by manipulating their currencies, thus provoking more uncertainties for commerce. Above all else Europe desperately needed more money. Specie was now required not only for long-distance commerce but also for more modest operations, even if in effect this meant using 'black money', copper coins of low value (Spufford 1988). In such a situation, monetary instability entailed negative consequences. Furthermore, the elites' demand for goods from the Orient provoked a continual drainage of metals away from Europe, the result of which was a serious monetary deficit that was impossible to overcome through the established channels of securing gold and silver.

From 1460 to 1470, a pattern of expansion can be discerned, although this was not yet a general one. Nevertheless, regional circuits had begun connecting to each other more firmly. Fear of social uprising had led to a highly sophisticated system for supplying food in many European cities, something which was also positive for growth. The agrarian multi-activity (domestic industry, the muleteer trade, local or low-scale peddling, etc.), and crop-diversification (i.e. the cultivation of products for the market combined with those destined for self-consumption), widened the spectrum of resources available to the peasantry, thus advancing demographic and economic recovery. As a result of these and other changes, in France

⁵ On Normandy, see Bois (1976, pp. 63–4, 117–22) and Mollat (1952, p. 542). On Brittany, Touchard (1967, pp. 377–8); for Catalonia, Vilar (1962, vol. I, pp. 419–20).

the proportion of children per family rose from 1:1 in 1350–1410 to 1:4 in 1440–1510 (Neveux et al. 1975, p. 140).

Are we facing a situation of lower seigniorial pressure upon agrarian activities leading to an improving standard of living for the peasantry, as set out by G. Bois many years ago (1976)? It is probable that a change along these lines did occur in many areas. But the factors behind this situation were more complex than the French historian allowed. In addition to the burden of the rents and seigniorial taxes, the peasantry also faced new demands made by the monarchy, whose fiscal system was increasingly developed and effective in many regions. Moreover, landlords' incomes were also subject to a logic of extensive increase because of the foundation of new estates, which meant that the pressure fell on an increasing number of peasant families. And yet, notwithstanding these observations, we might also consider a series of factors which Bois did not contemplate and which might even lead us to strengthen his overall interpretation. The growth of seigniorial demands upon an ever-increasing number of vassals and peasants frequently affected a rural population that had been, until this point, free of seigniorial charges. Therefore, these new extractions perhaps had fewer detrimental effects, at least in the short term. Furthermore, if landlords and royal tax collectors now demanded to be paid in coin, then this encouraged the commercialization of agrarian products by the peasantry as a means of obtaining the cash needed to pay these new extractions. It must also have given impetus to the rural manufactures and their commercialization as well as to the transport systems—especially the carting sector. Additionally, there were many great nobles who actively sought to attract trade fairs and weekly markets to their domains as a source of income and, therefore, a means of sponsoring commercial and industrial activities.⁶

In this context the opening up of the German silver mines provoked a 'pre-revolution' of prices (Braudel and Spooner 1967). But, what could be the importance of a factor that affected only a marginal aspect of the economy of the time, such as prices and the circulation of high-quality specie? In reality, the flow of money acted in the context of an incipient urban network that would be decisive in providing dynamism to crucial zones of overland trade, such as those of the imperial territories. From this moment the Rhine artery served for the diffusion of English and Flemish textiles into the markets of central Europe. The valley of the Rhone and

⁶For Castile, see Ladero (1994) and Yun (1987). For England, Wilson (1959).

the fairs of Lyon served to unite Northern and Central Europe with the south of France and Catalonia, where Germans sought light dyes and saffron. The Central European region also developed, as German industries (fabrics, copper, and iron) expanded into Silesia and Bohemia.

This network gave rise to a system of fairs based upon centres such as Lyon, Nuremberg, Frankfurt, Vienna, or Krakow, which were also connected with the Brabant region, Castile, and Flanders (Pach 1968, pp. 310–1). The heart of Europe was recovering thanks to this more fluid overland commerce, and this energizing circuit was completed after the conclusion of the Hundred Years War (1453) and the pacification of Castile (1479), dragging in its wake goods such as Castilian wool, Ibizan salt, Biscayan iron, and the wines of Oporto. This trade brought the North Sea into closer contact with the Mediterranean (Childs 1978).

Europe witnessed the birth of a new model of economic expansion, one which had its roots in a closer linking of the peasant economies with the market; a broader spectrum of productive activities; a more fluid and better-organized overland commerce, which was completed by the inter-linking of decisive circuits of maritime trade; and the overall advances in the sophistication and security of international commerce as well as the mental apparatus and horizons of Europeans.

This expansion cannot be explained by subordinate economic relationships between the distinct regions. The European recovery appears in principle to be better explained by the model of poly-nuclear growth set out by H. Van der Wee (1990) or J. Israel (1990), than by a system of hierarchical relations, as Wallerstein suggested some time ago (1979).

The Iberian Peninsula

This broad tide had a dramatic impact upon the Iberian Peninsula, where growth was not delayed once the different forces began to combine and reinforce a series of arteries binding internal commerce with the zones of the coastal areas.

The Atlantic areas were, by now, exhibiting signs of incipient dynamism. In Andalusia, from the fifteenth century, the flow of Sudanese gold towards the coast of North Africa had attracted the Genoese who, pushed forward by their fierce rivalry with the Venetians, had established themselves in Malaga, Cadiz, and, later, Seville. The presence of the Ottoman Turk in Asia Minor and the reduction of the production of sugar in Egypt left the market open to the Genoese, who expanded into Madeira and the Canary Islands. On the coastal estates of Huelva's local aristocrats

in southern Castile, nobles such as the Medinasidonia and Niebla gained access to abundant African fisheries and the wheat of the Maghreb. The Canary Islands, conquered by Castile, served as a magnificent bridgehead from which to extend the cultivation of sugar cane (Fernández Armesto 1982, pp. 13–5). The abundance of available lands in the Guadalquivir Valley fed continual emigration from the north and advanced the formation of great noble estates producing food crops for the swelling cities. But the Andalusian axis was nothing more than a part of a line of expansion that had another pivot on the Portuguese coasts and, more concretely, in Lisbon. In this way a tendency was carried out that led to a greater dependency upon Castile's economy and society, and that would be the basis for Portugal's political neutrality (Thomaz 1994). Here contacts with Africa and the Canary Islands fed the slave trade, while the docks saw the arrival of unprecedented quantities of wood, peppers, sugar, gold, wine, and other products coming not only from Africa but also now from the Madeira islands and the Azores (Disney 2009, vol. II, pp. 84–93). Lisbon and Oporto were becoming the most dynamic parts of the Portuguese economy; the products that passed through these hubs were found, in increasing numbers, in Antwerp (Van der Wee 1963). The Atlantic front, running from Cadiz to Oporto, was establishing itself as more and more relevant to European patterns of trade. A key factor in all of this was the gold brought from the Sudan to Portugal, which also fed trade with the north of Europe and was crucial for the strengthening of the Atlantic front of the Old World. Not only Portugal but the whole Luso-Atlantic area would be now more closely linked to the north of Europe.

This vitality was equally discernible in the strength and vigour of the Cantabrian ports, which served as arteries connecting the north of Europe with the interior dynamism of Castile and the Duero Valley.⁷ Castilian merchants were favoured by changes in the Flemish markets and by the production of new and lighter cloth of a high quality (Van der Wee 1988, pp. 329–36). This thriving commerce, reflected in the foundation of the *Universidad de Mercaderes*, a trade guild, and, in 1494, in the *Consulado de Burgos* (Consulate of Burgos), would be accompanied by the development of maritime insurance and the export of wool, salt, wine and Basque iron

⁷ On the connections with Britany, see Touchard (1967). Childs (1978) studies the links with England and Munro (1973) stressed the positive effects on Castilian wool trade of the English protectionist bullion acts.

to satisfy the increasing demand generated by the European economy's recovery. It was also accompanied by an ever-growing trade in the import of fabrics, artwork, and luxury items from Flanders.⁸

The activation of Mediterranean trade was accompanied by a displacement of the commercial centre of gravity from Barcelona to the Mallorca-Valencia axis and the increasing presence of the Genoese in these areas. This network incorporated two trade routes: one came from the East and the Near East; another ran from Genoa to North Africa. But the expansion of Genoese interests into Castile and Portugal would also enhance the connections between the western Mediterranean and the north of Europe (Iradíel and Sarasa 1989, pp. 103–6).

These axes of expansion linked to international commerce converged in the Iberian inlands and were the basis for an impressive development of commerce and financial techniques on the peninsula. Furthermore, this part of Europe was a crossroad that necessarily saw its dynamism reinforced.

Institutions, Political Economies, and Regional Forces

From the fourteenth century, the demographic problems derived from the Black Death tied into difficulties originating from the involvement of the Iberian kingdoms in various phases of the Hundred Years War, as well as a series of internal conflicts which, in turn, became mixed up with factional disputes.⁹ But if the problems had common roots, the responses, set out in the respective polities' institutional systems, underlie their different patterns of economic recovery.

It should not surprise us that *Portugal* should be one of the first territories to recover economically. The stability of its political system was a decisive contributing factor to this recuperation. But behind this phenomenon there stood the imperial expansion itself, which strengthened the king economically, as he controlled taxes paid by the Cortes, another stabilizing factor. The abundance of African gold afforded the Crown a greater degree of monetary availability and helped to avoid currency devaluation, thus providing security to domestic commerce (Thomaz 1994). But, above all, such an expansion offered an outlet for aristocratic tensions, reduced the degree of internal conflict, and afforded the chance to reduce the pressure

⁸ Bilbao (1987, pp. 51–2); Van der Wee (1988, p. 330) Childs (1978, p. 89 and Chap. 4).

⁹ For a synthesis of the political history of this period and the role of war, see Mackay (1980).

on peasants and vassals (Thomaz 1994). At this moment the new property systems were consolidated: these were based on *enfiteusis* (in which land was conferred by estates through long-term lease agreements) which offered good farming conditions to peasants. Moreover, the development of Atlantic trade favoured the growth of population centres between Galicia and Lisbon, with the riverside settlements—above all, those of the Tagus—also benefitting. This also improved the conditions for commercialization of peasant produce, some of whose goods (above all, wine) were henceforth exported to the north of Europe.

This process did not lead to the disappearance of differences between the more populated region to the north of the Tagus and the more sparsely populated areas to the south, towards the Algarve, which were also positively affected by the new commerce and enjoyed climates and soils that were kinder than those of the Alentejo. Moreover, this pattern was consistent with a certain difference originating in the respective institutional systems: to the north, the seigniors wielded enormous authority; in the large zone to the south of the Tagus, the great councils, sometimes under the domination of the Military Orders, shaped the society and institutions that regulated the assignment of resources (Mattoso 1997, pp. 528 and ff.). From 1450 population began to grow for the first time since the Black Death, and by around 1500 it had superseded its levels in 1348 (Mattoso 1997, p. 333). From this point the growing workforce helped to maintain the expansive rhythm of the noble economies.

According to the most common interpretation, in the Crown of *Castile*, the abundance of available lands after the demographic crisis served to strengthen the development of sheep and livestock breeding and, consequently, of an economy based upon wool exports.¹⁰ This is, however, only part of the picture. The recovery would depend to a great degree upon the institutional framework and how it came to regulate the assignment of economic resources. A key development was the rise of a new fiscal system based on two types of taxes: the *tercias* (the two ninths of the tithe ceded by the Church to the Crown) and the *alcabala* (a local tax of Muslim origin set in theory at 10% of commercial transactions). The latter was conceded initially only as an annual service by the Cortes but became permanent without ever being formally renewed by them. Contrary to what would happen in the Crown of Aragon, the King of Castile retained a high degree of freedom of action over both the collection and use of taxes of this sort.

¹⁰This traditional view is set out in the classic study of Klein (1979).

It was one thing to create laws, consolidate royal jurisdictions, and obtain taxes yet quite another to ensure their enforcement, integrity, and collection. In fact, since the fourteenth century, and in a climate characterized by continual conflict, the Castilian sovereigns had found themselves forced to alienate the right to collect *tercias* and *alcabalas* to the nobility; they were also compelled to create new seigniorial estates as a means of maintaining clients in this group. Thus, the royal demesne, theoretically inalienable, was progressively reduced. To exacerbate this situation, the collection of royal taxes was not at all easy on the noble estates. As a result, by 1450 the economic basis of the new nobility had been established: large-scale livestock herding, landownership, and alienated royal incomes.¹¹ And this pattern was not only applicable to the aristocracy but also to the ecclesiastical institutions. Moreover, in exchange for their help, a few monarchs had ceded privileges, jurisdictions, and even royal taxes to the cities.¹² Thus, the cities' rights of lordship (urban *señorío*) and their control over common lands and privileges became more defined. As might have been expected, many of these privileges and sources of income were acquired by towns represented in the Cortes, and many of these were cities situated in the Duero and Guadalquivir Valleys. The development of this institutional system helped to shape the patterns of economic growth. Even when facing considerable geographical obstacles, the emergent urban networks served to advance the greater integration of large economic spaces. The consequent links and connections were visible in commercial routes which, in turn, fed into the larger international networks described above. From the coasts of Cantabria trade flowed down, invigorating the economy of the Duero Valley. From Seville, the arteries ascended up to Toledo, passing through Córdoba and La Mancha. The commerce of Lisbon would tie in with the fairs of Medina del Campo and the Duero regions and with the traffic of Seville in the Guadalquivir Valley. A multitude of annual fairs and weekly markets scattered throughout these regions served to tie the local economies with the international circuits. The strengthening of the cities facilitated the concentration of agrarian incomes in them, which in turn fed their economic activities and thus benefited a growing group of artisans and businessmen.

¹¹ Suárez (1975), Martínez Sopena (1977), Quintanilla (1979), Cabrera (1977), Mata (1987), Atienza (1987).

¹² Rucquoi (1987, vol. I, pp. 293–310), Diago (1993, pp. 181–206), Sánchez (1989), Jara (2000).

The other side of Castile's institutional development—the strengthening of the seigniorial estates of the nobility and the Church—would also have positive effects for economic growth. The emigration of peasants towards the south obliged many landowners of the northern Meseta to try to retain their population; to this end they ceded the right to use extensive tracts of land to rural communities, a trend which would increase agrarian output. The possession of *alcabalas* and *tercias*, as well as the privileges to stage markets and fairs, redoubled the interest of the aristocracy in sponsoring trade and in settling populations in their lands. In Andalusia, the great estates situated near important urban centres took advantage of a more regular pattern of commercialization and benefited from the arrival of a workforce and the growing urban demand (Collantes 1977).

In addition to the increasing production of cereals, wine, olive oil, and other products, economic expansion was evident but the livestock economy. In the case of sheep, production was organized into local and regional guilds or unions (*mestas*), as well as in the great association called the Honourable Council of the Mesta (Bishko 1978). Economic growth took place in the industrial and commercial sectors. With regard to the first, change was evident in the potential of the urban guilds but also in the emergence in some areas of a rural and urban cycle often controlled by a merchant-businessman (a real *verlager*, in many senses). The flowering of these commercial and financial activities was evident in many cities. Burgos and Seville are the best known examples (Pike 1978; Casado 1987).

The evolution would be subtly different in the Crowns of *Navarre* and *Aragon*. The repopulation formulas applied there were similar to those of Castile and had given rise to the emergence, next to the feudal nobility, of towns with well-defined seigniorial jurisdictions and diverse ethnic and religious populations. But these regions' emergence from the crisis had been different, and some institutional variations are visible.

Navarre had been hemmed in between France, Castile, and Aragon, three of the most powerful political formations of the period, a fact that reduced its opportunities for overcoming the crisis through territorial expansion. Only a policy aimed at ensuring diplomatic equilibrium among its three neighbours—and, above all, between Castile and France—allowed the kingdom of Navarre to survive as an independent political entity until 1515. As a result of this inherent limitation, the fiscal capacity of the kingdom was lower. As in Castile, the *alcabalas* were appropriated by the high nobility (Usunáriz 1997, p. 71). But the difficulties in increasing the yield of these taxes limited the scope for the extension of the nobles' incomes, a trend

which redoubled the conflict between the different factions of the kingdom, in which the nobility played an important part.

The territories of the Crown of Aragon (the kingdoms of Aragon, Mallorca, and Valencia and the principality of Catalonia) also displayed marked differences to those of Castile. The Cortes were characterized by a system of a balance of power between king and kingdom that was much more formalized institutionally than in Castile. These assemblies' greatest strength lay in their capacity to pass legislation and the fact that they were convened periodically and as separate assemblies representing the kingdoms or, as was the case in Catalonia, the principality. As in Castile, the royal patrimony had been exhausted, above all in Aragon. But the power of the Cortes and the Delegations of the Cortes (*Diputació*) would impose noticeable limitations on the monarchy's capacity to create an independent and efficient fiscal system. A good deal of royal income would come from the monarch's negotiations with cities such as Zaragoza, Barcelona, Valencia, or Palma de Mallorca to obtain cash advances in exchange for royal privileges, financed through the sale of municipal bonds (*censals*). These procedures would restrict the possibility of conferring royal incomes upon the nobility in the way that had occurred in Castile and led the Aragonese nobility to overcome the crisis by reinforcing its jurisdictional rights and its capacity to change the legal framework in the Cortes. In the kingdoms of Aragon and Valencia, the large size of the *Morisco* (originally Islamic) communities and their social weakness allowed landlords to increase peasant servitude and the duties on family production.¹³ But the Christian vassals were not to escape the demands of the nobility either, as a good part of its income was based upon monopolies, tithes, and 'various other forms of payment and taxation, but always very high ones'. Likewise the landlord retained important privileges of precedence in the sale of products, which, in markets that were less developed than those of Castile, also had a negative effect on peasant commercialization of any surplus (Lacarra 1972, pp. 135–6, 175).

The effects of this institutional framework in shaping models of economic growth in the Crowns of Navarre and Aragon were obvious. As in nearly all of Europe, the very favourable relation between population and available land created adequate conditions for expansion. But formal

¹³The Cortes of 1423, 1436, and 1461 renewed the landlords' 'right to mistreat' their vassals and consecrated their judicial autonomy, which became the crucial part of the agreement between king and kingdom in some areas (Iradíel and Sarasa 1989, p. 648).

political institutions would shape the different patterns of development and the distinct political economies of each kingdom.

The strip of land that encompasses today's regions of Navarre and Aragon was perhaps the least dynamic in economic terms. In both territories the urban network was less developed or depended too heavily upon the macrocephaly of Zaragoza, around which it gravitated. The new aristocracies were not as active as their Castilian counterparts in promoting commerce, due to their incomes depending less heavily upon it. Agriculture had a number of strong points. A *Morisco* agriculture existed, often based upon irrigation systems and exhibiting high levels of productivity. The extension of the *enfitensis* system fed peasant commercialization. But, in contrast to Castile, the payment of land rents in proportion to production, as well as the landlord's monopolies upon the sale of agrarian products, limited peasant commercialization and the chances of developing an agrarian and population growth cycle similar to that of Castile. The urban network was less dense in Navarre and Aragon than in Castile. This fact, together with a trade pattern based upon exports by major merchants of commodities obtained by leasing seigniorial rents, reduced the positive effects of commerce upon producers. Economic growth was palpable, and symptoms of improvement can be perceived in the living conditions of peasants and in the expansion of the livestock economy (Laliena 1987). But these areas' demographic and productive dynamism lagged behind that of Castile.

From the point of view of its resource endowment, Catalonia was one of the peninsula's areas with the greatest economic potential. Nevertheless, in Catalonia, an increase in the landlords' pressure upon vassals unleashed situations of social instability and had negative effects on economic growth even more serious than those of Castile. The issuing of municipal bonds diverted capital away from commercial development. The macrocephaly of Barcelona created provisioning problems and accentuated its dependence upon wheat imported by sea. This situation not only contributed to increase the city's debts due to the need to pay for foodstuffs but also encouraged the flight of money out of the principality and thus contributed to monetary instability. The shift of Genoese trade towards Valencia and Seville worsened the state of affairs. Moreover, as R. S. López and Vicens underlined years ago, Catalonia did not count upon a domestic market in its hinterland that would have allowed it to 'face the onslaught of the crisis' (Vicens Vives 1974, p. 213). The Catalan economy recovered, but the recession would last until the end of the fifteenth century.

In Valencia there existed the vestiges of serfdom—in particular this was true among the *Morisco* population—and a very solid pattern of seigniorial jurisdictions, even when set against the authority of king, had emerged as the solution to the problem of the maintenance of aristocratic power. As in the kingdom of Aragon, the relative autonomy guaranteed to the landholders in the enforcement of the terms of contracts served as the basis for the collection of incomes derived from their lands. In addition to share cropping, the renting out of individual farms (by *enfiteusis*) and monopolies, as well as the *tercias*, constituted important parts of landlords' income. Some of these landlords, as was the case with the Gandía family, also received important incomes from sugar mills. As in Aragon, the crisis had helped to strengthen the position of a minority of well-off workers. The dimensions of the farms they owned were to increase, as did other factors or trends in their favour. But, above all, and in contrast to Aragon and Catalonia, the shift of international trade towards Valencia made it one of the peninsula's more important commercial and artisanal centres. With 70,000 inhabitants in 1480, its role as intermediary between the Mediterranean and the hinterlands of Castile and Aragon intensified, at the same time as its industrial base grew and expanded (to incorporate wool and silk textiles, paper, the printing press, and—of course—construction) (Furió 1995). In these circumstances a commercial agriculture developed which produced goods for both local markets and export. It was based on the direct commercialization of peasant production thanks in part to the favourable conditions created by the *enfiteusis*. Next to non-traded cultivation, the growth of market-oriented products such as sugar cane and the white mulberry tree (tied to the production of silk) also became stronger. This does not mean, however, that we can speak of a regional growth marked by harmony and balance. The capital's overwhelming demand for resources compelled the authority to source wheat from Castile and Sicily, and paying for these imports had to be met by the exportation of sugar and, above all, silk.

A similar combination of factors explains Mallorca's economic expansion. Even if a good part of the nobility had ploughed their investments into municipal debts, the crisis had favoured them by the formation of farmsteads of a considerable size which would give rise to a form of agriculture that was intensively commercialized and based upon a paid labour force, replacing obsolete and residual forms of slavery. As it became increasingly important to the Mediterranean trade systems thanks to the Genoese alliance, Mallorca appeared to have strengthened its (by now)

traditional commerce with Africa and with areas of Italy and the Iberian Peninsula. In turn these links had positive consequences for its industry. Yet the Mallorca economy was a long way from being a balanced one. Exports seldom compensated for imports of Sicilian wheat and the acquisition of municipal bonds by Catalan merchants accentuated the flow of money out of the island.

SOCIAL CONFLICTS AND POLITICAL REGIMES

Aristocratic Lineages, Local Oligarchies, and Conflict

The great estates are preserved best by extending them, and since they cannot remain unchanged it is inevitable that they decline unless they are expanded.¹⁴

These were the words that an astute observer, don Pedro Pacheco, marquis of Villena and favourite of Henry IV of Castile (1424–1474), used to refer to a structural phenomenon in European societies of his time: the expansive logic of the aristocratic houses and estates. Several decades later, Nicolò Machiavelli devoted his *Il Principe* to the problem of the *stato* which had to be preserved (*conservato*) and often expanded in order to maintain the prince's status. This expansive dynamic was linked to the conflictive environment of the time, in which the only means of preserving bloodline, status, and prestige was through a continual struggle for power against peers. Events in France, and especially the process of the formation of great seigniorial estates, which were sometimes spread out or scattered over considerable distances, provide a good example of how families could accumulate new resources (Nassiet 2000). The Portuguese case (described above) provides further evidence of this dynamic. As in Castile, a crisis had emerged in the oldest aristocratic lineages (e.g. the Sousa) (Thomaz 1994, pp. 443, 458–9), but a new generation had emerged whose clashes would reach previously unseen proportions and would result in expansionist tensions.¹⁵ If today's businesses live in a world of economic competition determined by market share and technological progress, the noble houses

¹⁴Del Pulgar, (1971, p. XIV).

¹⁵Mattoso (1997, p. 454) has pointed out that one of the keys of the noble houses' behaviour was their necessity to 'acrescentar' (expand) their dominions.

of the 1400s existed in a context of military-political conflict that drove them to expand their estates and to fight for political and economic resources. This was their way of avoiding extinction.

The historiography has also emphasized the political context, particularly the idea that in a highly fragmented institutional and jurisdictional system, maintaining status with respect to peers required violence, which therefore became normal. In this way, the political structure's main component, jurisdiction, overlapped with the lineages' internal conflicts. The study of these features of medieval societies shed new light on the dynamics of the epoch's political economy.

This expansionism was also rooted in the internal dynamics of the family and the lineage. Until well into the modern period, the seigniorial family had to live beneath the spectre of extinction. As in all classes wielding high disposable incomes in the *ancien régime*, birth rates were very high. But, at the same time, martial activities brought a high mortality rate, above all in sons, which resulted in a limited capacity for biological reproduction (Clark 2007). This having been said, it is now known that the need to guarantee masculine line of succession led to practices which markedly encouraged the birth rate, not only in regard to sex but also in the speed and frequency in the celebration of second nuptials. But, more important—and as happens in businesses today—the behaviour of these groups was determined by their perceptions and short-term anxieties and not by long-term statistics (which are of course the backbone of modern studies). It is known that many families found themselves having to provide new political and economic resources for their offspring, provisions made in the hope that they would live to inherit them. Quite frequently these arrangements were made during the childhood or even before the birth of a beneficiary. For these reasons there was, in the short term, a clear and recurring desire to ensure the expansion of estates and resources.¹⁶

The predominance of the extended family pattern among the aristocracy and the extension of its webs of kin solidarity towards distant relatives and social and political clients accentuated the desire to expand the patrimony as a way to satisfy the promotion of the collateral and secondary members of the lineage. The same effects drove the need to provide dowries and favourable marriage alliances for female members, who were also

¹⁶ Many examples of these practices can be found in the collection of studies edited by Costa and Rodrigues (eds.) (2004).

crucial to the families' economic and political strategies. In the Iberian kingdoms, the institution of *mayorazgo* (entailed estate) or the *morgadio* in Portugal, aiming at preserving the patrimony intact for the eldest son, redoubled the desire to search for new estates with which to compensate second-born sons. These institutions also compelled families to pay higher dowries to facilitate favourable marriages or the entrance of daughters into the Church.¹⁷ Lawsuits and disputes over rights of succession, a manifestation of this inner conflict, ate up increasing quantities of money and resources, thus feeding the need for more.¹⁸ This dynamic within the ruling families unleashed friction for the control of areas of strategic importance.¹⁹ Advances made in military techniques and fortifications, and the consequent increase in the cost of these technologies, reinforced the need for expansive policies (Cooper 1991, vol. I.1, pp. 83–6).

The political economy of the estates reinforced this outcome. The exercise of seigniorial power led to the cession of part of the seigniorial income to local forces or agents in order to cement alliances, thus enhancing the expansive logic of the estates and the conflict inherent in them. Increasingly widespread possessions led to greater monitoring and administration costs and so created a vicious cycle in the expansion of these estates.²⁰ Political and social competition entailed additional costs of legitimization and patronage, namely, expressions of cultural magnificence springing from the chivalric mentality displayed in concepts such as 'the life of fame' (*la vida de la fama*) and immortalized by the most cultured noble patrons, such as Jorge Manrique, in stunning works of art. This familial munificence also had to be manifested in artistic patronage and the foundation of religious establishments that could support relatives and clients within the household.²¹ This spiral of escalating commitments, which reinforced the anxiety for expansion and the search for additional estates and resources, must have been quite common in this era. Around this time, another Castilian noble,

¹⁷ Although from a later period, the dowry of 85,000 ducats that the *Almirante* of Castile paid to the Count of Benavente, setting this sum against his income, can be added to the previous example. *Osuna*, leg. 424, Archivo Histórico Nacional (hereafter AHN).

¹⁸ See the case of the Mendoza family in Nader (1986, pp. 129–54).

¹⁹ See the case of the conflict between the Stúñigas and Mendozas in Ladero (1982, p. 173).

²⁰ See the case of the Benavente and their need to multiply the number of administrative units (*mayordomías*) in *Osuna*, leg. 424. AHN.

²¹ See Cabrera (1977, pp. 325–30) or the testament of the Duchess of Albuquerque in 1476 in *Diversos de Castilla*, leg. 37, n. 36, s.f. Archivo General de Simancas (hereafter AGS). Yarza (1993).

don Gómez Manrique, expressed the ‘agony’ of the lords and monarchs due to the fact that ‘the more land/they have in more dominions/the more immense agonies/they face night and day with payments and wars’.²²

One of the main outcomes of this need to expand estates was the noble’s quest to secure royal demesne and voracity for the usurpation of Crown taxes which, as we have seen, were essential components of the political confrontation. This would be crucial to political developments.

These trends coincided with two convergent features of late medieval societies: first, the urban patriciate’s involvement in a similar dynamic of conflict and its predisposition for expansion; and second, the increasing importance of urban government for the reproduction of the patriciate’s status.

One could state that there were demographic reasons for this first feature, if we consider the high index of family turnover within wealthy nonaristocratic groups in Old Regime Europe and the pressure or need that it created for the expansion of their own patrimony.²³ But this was especially true when they had evolved more towards noble forms and felt the same types of social pressures and constraints as the high nobility, which was a normal process in fifteenth-century Castile and Europe in general.²⁴ Moreover, the process of internal change that this group was experiencing was in itself a source of tensions and a catalyst for internal conflicts. Though a uniform model of evolution never existed, the cases of Valladolid, Guadalajara, Segovia, and Córdoba offer good examples. Here the patriciate families lived in a state of permanent internal tension that very often superimposed itself upon aristocratic and dynastic rivalries and was also intimately linked to family or clientele strategies as well as to the need to increase their political and symbolic power within the *ayuntamientos* (town halls). The entrance of the Jewish *converso* families into the ranks of the patrician elite certainly did not smooth over these clashes but rather created new disputes.²⁵

But this was just a part of the story. The strengthening of the towns and cities as they acted as agents for the *Reconquista* and the emergence of this

²² ‘Cuanto mayores tierras/tienen en más señoríos,/más inmensas agonías/sostienen noches e días con libranças e con guerras/’.

²³ This is the main argument of Clark (2007), which, as we will explain below, is taken here in a different way. The material and visual culture of the period, of which Memling’s portrait of a merchant family is a good example, is very expressive in this respect.

²⁴ In the case of Castile, this social ascension was materialized in what Suárez (1975) called the formation of a ‘new nobility’.

²⁵ See examples in Rucquoi (1987, vol. II, pp. 189–213), and Yun (1980).

urban elite had led to the growing importance of the urban *señorío* and the *ayuntamientos* as spaces of power and political action, as well as their serving as key factors for the preservation of the political and economic capital of the oligarchies and the middling nobility. Thus, the expansion and preservation of the urban *señorío* and its privileges also became the spigot for the patriciate's political conflicts with the big landlords and the king. Underpinning those conflicts, there was also a line of political thinking according to which the king's main obligation was the defence of the royal demesne and patrimony, including the taxes (principally the *alcabalas*) voted by the Cortes and paid mainly by the cities. This idea also explains the continuing protests made by the cities in the Cortes against the alienation of the demesne as well as their bargaining with the Crown over their eventual support for the concession of political and economic privileges in exchange of voting new services (Haliczzer 1981). No doubt, this political position by the cities implied a contradiction of great impact and significance, in that the patriciate families were often allied with particular aristocratic households but collectively opposed their interests before the Crown. But this situation would also open up one of the most important lines of conflict until the end of the sixteenth century (Chap. 4).

A dynamic of this sort was not only the result of the needs of the great lay lords and the urban patriciate. It was also derived from the growth of ecclesiastical institutions. In order to understand this, it is necessary to consider that the church hierarchy was an institution in itself—with its own dynamic but also subject to specific interest groups—and, at the same time, a safety valve for tensions originating in the heart of the aristocracy and the urban elites. A large number of individuals from both groups entered into the great ecclesiastical institutions and through them, and their extraordinary influence, contributed not only to the reproduction of the interests of the different families but also to smooth over their own conflicts (see also Chaps. 4 and 5). The result was a high degree of tension: first, because, as we have seen, the need to support these institutions through donations further increased the basic imperative that drove forward both the patricians and aristocrats; and, second, because church institutions expanded not only by receiving donations but also by purchases or usurpations,²⁶ which clashed with the expansion of the noble estates and threatened the royal demesne, contributing in this way to cities' uneasiness (Cabrera 1977, pp. 140–72; Owens 1980, 2005).

²⁶ Gavilán (1986, pp. 185–225), Mata (1987, vol. I, pp. 145–71), Pérez-Embid (1986, pp. 371 and ff.).

A similar process was taking place in many rural communities where, at the same time as a system of power based upon the *concejo*, the peasant community, was being set in place, a group of well-off peasants was able to establish itself and to grow progressively stronger. From the *remensas*, the elite of the peasant society of Catalonia, to the Castilian *labradores* (a sort of yeomen) who enjoyed a strong degree of representation in the village town halls, this group extended its capacity for political action both within rural communities and beyond them. Its political activities were mainly directed to protecting the collective rights of communities, which of course guaranteed the *concejo* significant privileges or advantages. The importance of the right to use the communal village fields, in conjunction with the significant extension of these common lands in this period, bound these well-off peasants to the rest of the peasantry. At the same time, this defence of the commons also became the main reason for conflict with the landlords, who usurped these resources in spite of the specific alliances that they often established with the well-off peasants.

To complete this portrait, it has also been said that the growing dynamism of both urban and agrarian societies led to friction in the heart of the cities and mid-ranking towns. The gap between a highly dynamic minority on the one hand and the artisans and the overflow population of low-skilled or unskilled workers on the other created conditions ripe for uprisings. Above all this was the case in the populous cities of the south, such as Córdoba and Seville, and in centres such as Valencia, Barcelona, or Zaragoza. As we shall see, tensions resulted in conflicts involving accusations of ethnic or religious impurity; they also led to struggles between rival groups and lineages that challenged the traditions of coexistence and gave vent to popular demands manifested more or less explicitly (Mackay 1972).

Isabella and Fernando: From Crisis to War and Expansion

Bargaining Power

These tensions became more evident from the middle of the century when Henry IV (1425–1474) applied an erratic policy in Castile. Known as ‘Henry of the Favours’ (*Enrique de las Mercedes*), on account of his efforts to win over the high nobility by conceding taxes and parts of the realm, he also attempted to deal with the claims by the Cortes, taking measures to

balance out the situation by introducing the so-called *tasa de señoríos*.²⁷ Yet these measures proved largely inadequate, and the king had to initiate a policy of monetary devaluation. The outcome was a reaction by the nobles, whose incomes in cash were depreciated, and the cities, whose commerce was adversely affected (Mackay 1981, pp. 87–104). He was also unable to control local revolts. In the cities of Andalusia and Galicia, a series of conflicts between urban or rural noble factions exploded and even paved the way to more radical peasant protests, leading the authorities to unite to suffocate the rebellion (Valdeón 1975, p. 171). Complaints about the usurpation of royal patrimony led to uprisings in many of the towns (Haliczer 1981).

In the Crown of Aragon, the tensions became very evident during the reign of John II (1398–1479). In Catalonia the rebellion of the *remensa* peasants, infuriated by the efforts of the landlords to overcome their problems by resurrecting the old feudal rights, superimposed itself upon the pre-existing conflict between the urban factions of Barcelona. Here, the tension was between the so-called *Busca*, mainly artisans, and the *Biga*, composed of members of the patriciate, financiers, and those whose incomes derived from the city's debts (*censals*). The former were in favour of a protectionist policy and monetary devaluation that ensured the competitiveness of their goods in the international markets. The latter were inclined to call for monetary stability, hoping to retain the value of their *censals*. Conflicts within the nobility and the patriciate were also seen in Zaragoza, Teruel, Huesca, Mallorca, and Valencia, where different factions locked horns to secure a slice of the available political and economic resources. In Navarre the tensions between different factions with a pronounced noble character (the *beamonteses* and the *agramonteses*) took the form of an authentic civil war that pitted prince Charles of Viana against his father, John II of Aragon.

Traditional historiography usually considers the marriage of Isabella and Ferdinand as a turning point in this process, the outcome of which was political order. Probably it was. Yet the 'Catholic monarchs' were not able to impose an unrestricted form of absolutism, as has sometimes been suggested. Political stability was rather the outcome of social transactions and bargaining with the elites.

²⁷The 'tasa de señoríos', often considered a concession to the nobility on the grounds that the king acknowledged the landlords' right to collect the *alcabalas* within their *señoríos*, was in fact a mutual concession between king and nobles (Yun 2004, p. 62) See also *Nueva Recopilación*, lib. IX, tit. XV, f. 93 v.

Isabella and Ferdinand's arrival on the throne was the result of a long period of political instability and a civil war. By this juncture a sector of the aristocracy had taken to the idea that the only way out of the near-permanent chaos that threatened the established order was a strong monarchy. There were sound political reasons for this conclusion, but economic ones were also important. The civil war in Castile had demonstrated to many members of the elite the need for a strong monarchy that guaranteed the political and fiscal system (Haliczer 1975, 1981, pp. 56–8; Perez 1989). The same could be said of the Catalan nobility and the elites of Barcelona, who were ever more convinced of the need for the king's arbitration. Castilian cities were at this point convinced that they had to 'subordinate their own ambitions to the conservation of the "power and union of the royal crown"'.²⁸ The movement of the *Hermandades*, coalitions or 'brotherhoods' of cities that signed pacts for mutual defence, reflected the need for domestic pacification.

For these reasons the ability of the Crown to push through reforms depended upon a policy of negotiation and bargaining which was often twofold. In Castile the creation of the Royal Council consolidated the power of the king over the nobility. But this same council continued to protect the corporate jurisdictions of the nobles, Church, and cities. The creation of the regional courts, the *Audiencias* and the *Chancillerías* strengthened the superiority of the king's justice over the landlords' private jurisdictions. But, crucially, the lay and church estates retained their courts, and they continued, therefore, to exercise their power of enforcement as first instance courts. The reform of the Castilian fiscal system was also highly significant. In the Cortes of 1476, the kings managed to obtain a huge service, but they were again reminded of their duty to preserve the integrity of both the realm and royal taxes. The consequence was a series of measures aimed at the closer control of the royal debt and at limiting any further usurpation or donation of the royal patrimony.²⁹ These measures culminated in 1480 when the *juró's* interest rates (paid by the Crown) were decreed and orders were given that all those who had

²⁸ González Alonso (1988, p. 254). This idea was made very clear in the reminder of the Cortes of Ocaña (1469) to the king that he was obliged to rule and keep peace in the kingdom. *Patronato Real*, 69, doc. 18. AGS. The idea was also very prominent in Castilian politics, as similar notions were expressed in the Cortes of 1455, *ibid.*, 69, doc. 14, fol. 14. AGS.

²⁹ All grandees of the kingdom were obliged to swear that they would never usurp the royal patrimony, and it was also decided to limit the grants and concessions given by the kings (*Nueva Recopilación*, Lib. IX, Tit. VIII, ley XV and Lib. V, Tit. X ley III).

received or usurped the royal demesne since 1464 had to return it.³⁰ But, at the same time, this policy was a long way from proposing a complete break with the nobility or the erosion of its institutional and economic power. The application of these measures was done in a very selective way depending on the families involved. Moreover, acceptance of the restoration of the royal patrimony provided the nobility a means of consolidating part of its achievements over the previous decades, at the time that the kings increased their incomes and improved their means of collection while the cities achieved a political success that they could exhibit before the eyes of the kingdom.

The same was true in Catalonia. Here the uprisings that followed the Cortes of 1481 convinced Ferdinand that the only means of proceeding was through agreement. The so-called Sentence of Guadalupe (1486) recognized the right of the landlords to maintain their leasehold upon the land (*dominio eminente*) and jurisdictional control over their estates, thus guaranteeing them part of their income. But the same Sentence also recognized the freedom of the peasantry and abolished the landlords' so-called bad practices. Overall this measure resolved the conflict by benefitting the landlords and more powerful peasants and recognized the social changes that had occurred over the previous centuries at the expenses of the lower peasantry (Vilar 1962, vol. I, p. 509). Ferdinand was not, therefore, a liberator king who subjugated the nobility to the benefit of the peasants: rather he played the role of an arbiter who guaranteed existing social relationships. Something similar happened in the kingdom of Aragon, where the Sentence of Celada (1497) consecrated the power of the landlords, recognizing their privileges and power to the detriment of the rights of the peasantry.

Royal policy with regard to cities was also double-edged. The kings employed all available means to increase their control over them. The institution of the *corregidor*, an official representing the king in the town councils, became a permanent feature of the political landscape and the Crown put in place a series of reforms aimed at limiting the involvement of the great nobility and restricting the penetration of local government by noble clienteles (Lunenfeld 1987). The intervention of the Crown was aimed at the appointment of skilled personnel to town and city offices, which was also a way to increase its power for arbitration among local factions (Belenguer 1976, pp. 197–201; Amelang 1986, p. 41). During most of the

³⁰ *Patronato Real*, Libro 15, AGS.

reign, the *alcabalas* were collected through their being rented out, a measure that demonstrated royal authority and exasperated local oligarchies who complained that it frequently resulted in excessive collections.³¹ The *Santa Hermandad*, based on the model of the urban *hermandades*, was converted into an instrument under the ever more direct control of the monarchs (Lunenfeld 1987, pp. 47–9). But on the other hand, the cities and their oligarchies retained a high degree of autonomy. For this reason peace brought with it a sudden deluge of confirmations of city and town privileges.³² Many *corregidores* fell into the subtle but complex networks of local factions, rivalries, and solidarities, and the power and influence of many aristocrats upon urban clientele networks were notable in big cities such as Córdoba, Seville, and Murcia, and others, particularly in the South. In the Crown of Aragon—and not only there—the overall consequence of these reforms was the strengthening of the oligarchies and of the direct channels of communication between the monarchy and the cities, something which served to strengthen both of them and allowed them to bypass the Cortes, which often were too slow and unwieldy in this regard.³³ In Castile the farming out of tax collection was to be selectively and gradually replaced by the *encabezamientos* of cities, a system by which the tax collection was ceded to the local councils which, therefore, gained fiscal autonomy. This system was destined to constitute one of the cornerstones of both the political system and of the patterns of economic behaviour over the coming decades (Chap. 4). All of this came accompanied by a strengthening of the power of the municipal authorities in the management and regulation of guilds and corporations, as is showed by the case of Cuenca (Iradíel 1974, pp. 86–97).

Foreign Wars for Domestic Peace

As important, if not more so, for political stability was the war against the *Nazari* kingdom of Granada. The fact was perfectly understood at the time, to the extent that, as late as 1580, Jerónimo Zurita would write:

³¹ See the case of Córdoba in *Actas Capitulares*, 12, 22 de mayo, 28 de junio, 5 de julio, Archivo Histórico Municipal de Córdoba (hereafter AHMC) and *Registro General del Sello*, julio 1506, s.f. AGS.

³² *Registro General del Sello*, legs. 147501 to 147507 (from January to July 1475) *passim* AGS.

³³ See the case of Barcelona in Amelang (1986, pp. 41–2). In Zaragoza and Valencia, dialogue was crucial for the concession of subsidies paid by emitting more *censals* which were highly attractive to the patriciate (Belenguer 1976, p. 45).

Princes ... should remember that this [domestic peace] can only be properly achieved by conquest and conflict, which have to be sustained perpetually for the glory and prosperity of their state and the growth of their dominions.³⁴

With these words the chronicler and historian of the Crown of Aragon set down the expansive principle that Fernando del Pulgar had previously detected in many noble households. The difference was, of course, that Zurita was writing about the monarchy as a whole. What he possibly did not know was that this period—the conflicts that stretched from the War of Granada (1482–1492) to the arrival of Charles V in 1517—was to be decisive. Not only did this cycle of conflict, which continued with the Italian wars and the expansion into Africa, represent a key moment for the continuity and expansion of a seigniorial society. It would also be a key moment in the refinement of a theory about how to finance these wars and the role of the kingdom and of the king's patrimony to this end.

The effects of the war upon the relationship between the monarchy, the cities, the aristocracy, and the Church are difficult to exaggerate. The campaigning, in fact, began as a medieval conflict, with nobles and towns mobilizing troops and armed retinues and leading them on the battlefield. But this struggle also marks the beginning of the 'military revolution', the character and impact of which will be discussed below. Thus, in its last phase, the war would require unprecedented levels of expenditure, military technology, and manpower. It therefore presented the monarchy with what was to become the great problem facing the fiscal systems in the early modern period: the financing of a military apparatus that no longer was sustained purely by the nobility or the cities but rather depended upon a more sophisticated financial system and a more centralized logistical apparatus.

The immediate outcome was for the Crown to appeal to the *auxilium* of the nobility, consisting now not only of military assistance but also of the advancement of money, on the proviso that compensation would be made at the end of the war by the Crown's turning a blind eye to the taxes and lands usurped by the nobles. In this way, a system was established which kept some medieval features of the *auxilium* and subsequent royal

³⁴ Jerónimo Zurita, *Historia del rey don Hernando el Católico: de las empresas y ligas de Italia*, Zaragoza, 1580, vol. 1, p. 5 (edition by A. Canellas López and revised by M. Canellas and A. López, Zaragoza, 1989, 6 vols.).

compensation. But this was done not only by conferring jurisdictions and feudal rights upon the nobles but also by recognizing the revenues and rights that they had misappropriated. With regard to the urban oligarchies, war presented a unique opportunity to establish a relationship of mutual commitment with the monarchy, thus opening the door to the possibility of the conferral of titles of nobility or even of estates in the new domains won in the fighting (Gerbert 1979).

The conflict also affected relations with the Church and led to the creation of new revenue streams. Preached as a crusade and in part financed by bulls sold and promoted in sermons by churchmen, it gave rise to the concession by Rome of two services that would continue after 1492, the 'crusade' (*cruzada*) and the 'tenth' or 'subsidy' (*décima* or *subsídio*). It is highly significant that, though they had to be negotiated with the Pope, both were beyond the control of the Cortes, meaning that they quickly became, in Ladero's words, 'the object of envy of the other European kings'. Moreover, to help finance the conflict, the Pope conceded to Ferdinand the title of Grand Master of the Military Orders and, with it, a basic source of patronage. This gave him the support of a nobility seeking to enjoy the estates and honours of these organizations. Thus, the war not only enhanced the alliance between the monarchy and Church but also led to new sources of income and patronage that 'overlapped with the previous one without replacing it' (Ladero 1973, pp. 238, 245) and that was at the free disposal of the Crown with no limit imposed by the Cortes.

The War of Granada was an episode in a much larger cycle of events, one which had already led to the conquest of the Canary Islands and which would also lead to the campaigns in North Africa. These conquests had a religious component but also were aimed at securing access to Africa's gold, slaves, and land, mainly for sugar production (Fernández-Armesto 1982). The outcome was, again, a reinforcement of the relations between the Crown, the nobility, the Church, and the towns. The former extended its domains. The Church again projected the conflict as a crusade, which brought it increasing economic and political resources and, in turn, justified the prolongation of the concession of the *tercias* to the Crown. The members of the urban patriciate found ways of achieving social and economic advancement in these campaigns. Accords were signed with the Genoese investors in sugar plantations, thus strengthening links to a group that was destined to serve as the financial nerve system of the empire.

This effort to project power abroad was extended from 1494 with involvement in the Italian Wars against France. Aimed at defending Aragonese interests, this conflict was in large part financed by Castilian funds and served as a way of testing the mettle of many second-born sons of the Castilian nobility. Thus the novelty in this cycle of war abroad lay not in its political or diplomatic consequences but rather in the justification for conflicts fought in distant lands whose purpose was not the defence of the kingdom of Castile itself nor the defence of Christendom. While the War of Granada was fully justified by the age-old duty of Christian kings to defend Christendom, the Italian campaigns did not appear to fall under the same umbrella. This difference was even more significant in that the wars of Italy were not at all cheap. Through them new military strategies led to long, expensive and exhausting conflicts (Hale 1985, pp. 48, 63).

A large part of the funds that paid for these campaigns came from the ecclesiastical subsidies and the *cruzada*. But one other important innovation emerged: now debts accumulated from contracts (*asientos*) for the payment of troops in Naples and Sicily, where in effect Aragonese interests were being defended, were being met with services voted by the Cortes of Castile. In other words, the cost of a conflict that was difficult to justify from a strictly religious perspective and went against constitutional principles established throughout Europe was being levied upon the kingdom of Castile (see Chap. 4). How were the wars of Italy helping to defend Castile or Christendom? Was the King of France really the enemy of Christendom?

The line of response to such questions was developed by Ferdinand himself, who in the text of the Holy League convened by the Pope expressed the notion that France was acting against the interest of Christendom, an argument that was to be repeated later on in the Cortes of 1512.³⁵ And a few years later, in 1515, the convocation of the Cortes once again turned on similar criteria and referred to the obligation to defend the Church of Rome, using ideas justified by a comparable conceptual framework. In this way, the war in Naples reinforced a series of inter-linked—but not always harmonious—interests and established an innovative line of argument that would be key to the political, institutional, and, therefore, economic evolution of Castile and, indeed, of Spain as a whole.

³⁵ *Patronato Real*, legs. 60, f.26 and 69, 49. AGS.

To recapitulate: Isabel and Fernando had arrived at a certain equilibrium—an unstable one, it is true, but an equilibrium nonetheless. Navigating through negotiations and pressures leading in different directions, they had succeeded in momentarily lessening the structural tensions within the elites. Their policies would result in different political systems. In Castile they had engineered one of relative fiscal centralization, with a certain capacity for obtaining funds from the Cortes. In Aragon, the fiscal system had evolved to a far lesser degree. War had been crucial in this process and had served to satisfy the expansive needs of the nobility, the urban patriciate, and, indeed, even the Church. But finally, it had not resolved the basic problem of the alienation of royal patrimony, and at the same time, it created a new series of tensions with the Cortes in Castile—the debate over the use of the taxes and services of the kingdom for campaigns which did not benefit it directly, a theme which would be central to subsequent Iberian history, as we shall see.

*Portugal: The Bases for a Precocious and Enduring
Political Stability*

Between 1449, when the Crown managed to pacify the last concerted attempt at noble rebellion, and 1822, when Brazil was lost, Portugal lived the longest period of political stability enjoyed by any European country in the early modern period (Thomaz 1994, p. 131). This stability, largely due to the imperial regime, had some parallels in Castile. As we have just seen, this kingdom was not free from tensions similar—or even identical—to those seen in other polities of the time. Mattoso (1993, p. 459 and ff.) has even written that the coexistence of the nobility appears to have been based on the continuous discord. However, as in Castile, efforts had been made to channel existing tensions. From the end of the fifteenth century, the nobility's needs for social consolidation and extension started being satisfied by overseas campaigns initiated by the Crown and even by involvement in the Castilian wars on Granada (Thomaz 1994). At the same time, the Crown had made several attempts to satisfy the noble lineages' expansive tendencies by ceding possessions belonging to the royal demesne (Disney 2009, vol. I, pp. 132–40). But, above all, the involvement of many lineages in the imperial project had served to alleviate tensions; revealingly, many second-born sons—whose status was directly threatened by inheritance rules—were present in these wars of conquest (Thomaz 1994). To the extent that the empire was also a commercial venture, it also offered a considerable number of members of the urban classes ways to

satisfy their needs. The blurring of boundaries within the African ventures—and, above all, in the colonies—served to dilute the frontier between these groups, providing each with what it most desired: the merchants acquired noble status, and the nobility obtained money and wealth. Portuguese Atlantic expansion had thus served the same purposes as the War of Granada, which it, in fact, predated.

In the overall Western European picture (see above), the Portuguese case was also peculiar in certain regards. Here the ‘domain state’ continued to be the outstanding feature of its development. A sizeable part of the Crown lands was ceded and recovered in successive cycles, a process that created tensions in the kingdom and its councils. But, much more important, Atlantic expansion had allowed the amplification of this patrimony and expanded the king’s revenues. Around 1459, in response to the wars with Castile, the Cortes had ceded to the king the *sisá* tax, very similar to the Castilian *alcabala* and administered by the municipalities (Mattoso 1993, pp. 521–4).³⁶ But colonial revenues allowed for the development of a fiscal system that only demanded a limited commitment from the kingdom.

The result was a situation very similar to that of Castile, although some important degrees of nuance are needed in our analysis. In these conditions, the monarch retained a high degree of power. This was consistent with the efforts to strengthen royal justice (Mattoso 1997, p. 516). The Cortes had become an integral part of the political system, but its advance was less important in comparison with the situation in Castile, principally because of the lesser development of the tax state in Portugal. This fact, together with the expansion of foreign trade, helps to explain the very limited evolution of the urban network and its polarization in Lisbon and Oporto. The equilibrium between Crown and nobility was increasingly obvious, even if the relationship was governed by tensions and periodic concessions, above all after the series of crises and was periodically deepened by the temptation among the nobility to turn its loyalty towards the Castilian monarch. The promulgation of the *Ley Mental* (1434), which recognized that the seigniorial estates belonged in the final instance to the king, who was periodically required to renew his conferral of them upon the nobility, contributed to creating a difficult equilibrium but one which

³⁶ It is worthwhile underlining that one of the reasons for the cities believing that the king was facing financial difficulties was not only his involvement in wars but also the concession of his patrimony to the nobles.

led to overall stability. It is important to note that, in this context, the House of Braganza had distinguished itself and managed to be the exception to end-of-century attempts to recover parts of the royal patrimony that ceded over the previous decades (Disney 2009, vol. I, pp. 134–5). This reduced the gap with the ruling house of Avis and created a considerable distance between that family, the Braganza, and the rest of the *fidalgua*. But, in any case, the oppressive tendencies of the nobility towards its peasantry, if considerable, could be tempered, and, this being the case, it was possible to maintain forms of land cession and property rights similar to *enfiteusis*.

The resulting political economy would not lead to the disappearance of tensions which were, after all, structural. But it did create an institutional framework that was crucial to understanding the history of Portugal in the coming centuries. It is very revealing that, in contrast to other areas of the Iberian Peninsula, there were hardly any movements or protests resembling the *Comunidades* or *Germanías*.

IBERIAN STATE FORMATION IN EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

Comunidades and Germanías

The political equilibrium established by the Catholic Kings was broken by Isabella's death in 1504, and this rupture would unleash the *comunero* and the *agermando* rebellions of the years 1519–1521.³⁷ These were not isolated events but rather sprang from constitutional problems that were present, in one form or another, across Europe. But, above all, they deserve to be considered from the perspective of the development and consolidation of the elites which have been mentioned previously, even if the historiography dedicated to them has almost always pointed in another direction.

The economic growth and the wars of the last decades of the fifteenth century alleviated the internal tensions. But these tensions, being structural in nature, had to manifest themselves in many ways. By 1500 it was again obvious that many aristocrats needed to expand their incomes and to obtain loans. They were involved in constant competition to secure revenues, sometimes even usurping the royal patrimony and the demesne

³⁷ For a detailed analysis of these movements, see Perez (1976) and Durán (1982).

lands held by the towns.³⁸ These abuses even provoked serious exchanges between the *corregidores* and the high nobility (Haliczer 1981, pp. 91–123). On many occasions struggles of this sort were extended into the cities through the noble clienteles and sometimes even involved the lowest social strata of the city.

In Castile, the instability was increased by the mounting burden of the monarchical apparatus, which had the same need to expand its income as did the nobility. These needs were aggravated by the campaigns in North Africa and the outbreak of war in Italy. Taking these factors into account, it is possible to explain not only the continual demands for the increase in taxes made on behalf of the Crown during the first decades of the century but also the resurgence among the cities of the doctrine stressing the absolute need to secure the restitution of royal patrimony.³⁹ In the Crown of Aragon, a similar increase in royal spending had led to a general rise in the ‘services’ (in effect, taxes) of cities such as Valencia, Barcelona, or Mallorca (Durán 1982).

Insofar as it had overseen an important phase of economic development, the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella had strengthened even further the tendency towards social change in some urban environments. Many cities had witnessed the strengthening of an urban elite formed not only by members of the lower nobility but also by merchants, lawyers, and university graduates, who were educated in a concept of legality which the monarchy itself sometimes failed to respect. Economic development had also reinforced a sector of artisans, a sort of middle class. But in all of these cities, the chasm between the rich and powerful on one side and the poor,

³⁸ See, for example, Aragon in Abadía (1998, p. 66) and some Castilians cases such as the Duke of the Infantado and the Count of Benavente in *Osuna*, leg. 410, exp. 58, and leg. 418, exp. 4, núm. 4; AHN. *Cámara de Castilla*, legs 3, f. 181 and 172, leg. 2, and others. AGS. On the usurpation of lands, see Cabrera (1977). For the particular case of Córdoba, see *Actas Capitulares*, 2 and 31 December 1518; 3 January 1519; 1 March and 27 April 1520; and 24 September 1522. AHMC. The fights between nobles were very well described by Corona (1958). For the Crown of Aragon, see Durán (1982), Serra (1988, pp. 49 and ff.), and Colás and Salas (1982, pp. 70–1).

³⁹ On her deathbed, Queen Isabella herself voiced her concern about the *alcabalas* that had not been reclaimed from the nobility (those of ‘toleration or permission’, as they would come to be known) and her desire for the rules of redemption set down in 1480 to be applied with rigour. *Patronato Real* (libros de copias) libro 18, ff. 192 v^a–194^a, AGS. The text is included in the famous *Cédula de Medina del Campo* of 24 November 1504. A complete version can also be found in *Nueva Recopilación*, Libro IV, título XV, ley, I.

vagabonds, and politically displaced on the other had grown alarmingly. This generated urban tensions which were often blended with anti-Jewish sentiments and actions and an increasing rejection of the *Morisco* minority (Yun 1980). All of these tensions contributed to an atmosphere of desperate millennialism that coincided with the strengthening of the theory that underlined the inalienability of the royal demesne and the need for collective action for the ‘common good’ and against tyranny (Maravall 1970, pp. 108–33).

Despite these similarities, the dynamic of the *Comunidades* and that of the *Germanías* was to be different.

The *Comunidades* of Castile reflected to a large degree the problems set out above. By 1520, the discontent expressed itself in demands for the reform of the fiscal system. But it was not only a question about the volume of taxes but also about their genesis and use. It is often forgotten that Charles V sought to claim services from the Cortes in order to pursue his dynastic and personal ambitions, something which, obviously, appeared to go against some crucial constitutional principles (Perez 1989, pp. 26, 33 and ff. and Chap. 4). On top of this came the dissatisfaction of the cities represented in the Cortes due to the interference of royal power in their affairs and the usurpation of the royal demesne over the previous years. Furthermore, many of the *alcabalas*, whose collection had been ceded to the cities since 1494, were again farmed out to the highest bidder, which provoked a storm of criticism not only from the urban elites but also from the lower ranks of craftsmen who had seen their taxes rise during a time of successive bad harvests and economic difficulties.

Moreover, Charles V had the dubious merit of radicalizing the discontent of the Cortes when, in 1518 and with the intention of attracting the nobility to him, he acknowledged the right of the ‘great nobles and knights’ to collect the *alcabalas* and sought to raise more taxes without attempting to reclaim a single square foot of the royal patrimony that had been usurped over the previous years. At the same time, his claim to be able to appoint foreigners to offices in the Castilian administration went not only against the interests of the nobility and the patriciate of the cities but also against the most deeply entrenched political principles of the time, while his absence from Castile could easily be interpreted as a separation between the king and his kingdom in the political sense—rather than in the physical one—of the term.

If these tensions provided the catalysts for rebellion, they were also extremely important in shaping events and the subsequent evolution of the

conflicts. A rebellion that began with a certain aristocratic passivity quite quickly took a dramatic turn of events, with the popular mobilizations at municipal level, the creation of the *Junta*, a sort of council of towns, and a process of radicalization in both cities and countryside. During this initial phase, we see a divided aristocracy that, later on and with a few exceptions, quickly closed ranks when the rebellion assumed a markedly anti-seigniorial character (Gutiérrez Nieto 1973). But even this solidification of the nobility against the rebellion was marked by a certain reticence and hesitation, the intention being to prevent the king from triumphing immediately and to secure grants, favours, and reparations as rewards for their efforts on his behalf. We also see that the cities went as far as to organize an action in defence of the integrity of the 'kingdom' and were also clearly made nervous by the movement against the aristocracy, although they were carried along by the revolt and later revived their most trenchant criticisms of the nobility for its misappropriation of the royal patrimony. And, above all, we find that when the community, led by craftsmen and the urban middle class, became radical and conflicts began to emerge between cities, their urban estates, and their lands, and when the anti-landlord campaigns in the countryside became more virulent, the disquiet and unease began to spread among the very leaders of the *comuneros* themselves. These elites therefore acted against a movement that clearly threatened to subvert the established order—an order that they were not only duty-bound to defend but that it was also in their interests to protect.

The *comunero* movement might well have changed the balance of power and altered the course of history. In fact, when compared with the conflicts of the fifteenth century, what is surprising is the highly developed political theory espoused by its leaders. But, looking back at previous events, the eventual outcome cannot be said to have been a surprise: the great winner was the Crown, and the result was a new political equilibrium that consecrated the existing relationships of power and institutional systems. This would be decisive for the pattern of economic development.

The *Germanías* also revealed the basic problems of this society. The need to enlarge the incomes of the landowners had been manifested in the extension of the jurisdiction of the nobility and clergy. At the same time, in the absence of a fiscal apparatus as developed as that of Castile, the nobility had increasingly subscribed to the *censals* sold by the cities. The dynamic that it created had to be different to the one in Castile and, obviously, had to affect the physiognomy of the conflict in a different way (Durán 1982, p. 414). Industrial development—above all in Valencia and its surroundings—had

reinforced the power of the artisans at a moment when municipal power was becoming increasingly elite in nature, thus creating a crucial tension. The coincidence of these factors with increasing fiscal demands paved the way for protest and a rebellion which invoked the need to sanitize public finances and to root out corruption in the administration.

This discontent coincided with rural upheavals against the landlords and was exacerbated by the effects of plague and the danger of attacks by pirates and bands of nobles. The wave of protest gave rise to several different movements in the areas around Valencia and Barcelona; Lerida and many other areas of Catalonia, as well as in the south of Aragon, were also affected. In these zones, where the municipal reforms begun by King Ferdinand were creating better conditions, the uprisings would take the form of violent but very localized episodes. In contrast, in the city of Valencia and in Mallorca, the movement of the *Germanías* would come close to being a genuine revolution. Here, the Council of the Thirteen, which basically represented the craftsmen, raised the flag of the *libertats* (freedom). Its programme aimed not only at municipal reform and the overhaul of the justice system, both of which, it was alleged, had become dominated by the gentlemen (*cavallers*), but also the re-establishment of the municipal patrimony on a healthy footing and the disappearance of the taxes created to deal with the accumulated debt.

All of this led to a revolutionary programme which had the Italian republics as its model and which also resulted in an attack upon the *Moriscos*, considered a pillar of the seigniorial machinery. The end came in the form of a seigniorial reaction that would crush the revolution. In Mallorca the diffusion of the movement into the rural areas appears to have been provoked by the demands of the *forans*, the rural population around the capital, to redistribute the payment of the taxes between the city and the surrounding countryside, which was also subject to these new impositions (Durán 1982, *passim*).

As with the *Comunidades*, the *Germanías* were the product of a society that had seen marked commercial growth and was searching for new formulas of political organization. Both led, essentially, to the same conclusion—the shoring up of the argument that the monarchy presented the solution to the problems of the time. However, to the extent that these were structural problems with very deep roots, neither conflict can be said to have been the solution to these difficulties but rather the clearest manifestation of them. They also presented, perhaps, a cause for reflection for the ruling groups in both kingdoms.

*Western Monarchies. The Iberian Kingdoms in Comparative
European Perspective*

It is not difficult to recognize different models of political organization and institutional evolution in Western Europe around 1520. To a certain extent, all of the models can be seen as a means of overcoming the tensions of medieval societies, and all would leave their imprint on the political economies and, therefore, on the subsequent patterns of economic development of the different areas of the continent.

In *France* the monarchy was strengthened with a relatively efficient system for the mobilization of resources and as a result the Crown was capable of extending its patronage ties towards the ruling groups of society. The policy of territorial unification had led to the extension of the dominions of the king at the cost of the independent or semi-independent princes (Provence and Brittany, above all), at the same time that a new fiscal system had been established, developed, and linked to the needs of the army. Despite the complexity and territorial diversity of the system, a distinction can be made between direct taxes such as the *taille*, which fell on property, and indirect ones such as the *gabelles*, which were levied on the purchase of a handful of products. A large part of the tax collection system was, moreover, under the control of the *generaux des finances* and was controlled by the King's council.⁴⁰

Yet a system of this sort was some way from serving as the basis for an unchallenged absolutism or a unified institutional system. Considerations of political theory and institutional framework compelled the Crown to enter into a series of pacts which were similar in form and scope to those of the Iberian Peninsula (see Chevalier 1994). The doctrine of Gallic Church, which protected the independence of the Church not only from the interference of the Pope but also from the meddling of the king and which had been consecrated in the Pragmatic Sanction of 1438, had set down the rules of this equilibrium. However, the king's ability to meddle in ecclesiastical patronage had increased considerably. The Concordat of 1516 had set down a new status quo with Rome. In this accord the Pope was freed of any theoretical subjection to conciliar authority, and the king increased his scope for patronage in the Church. The result would be an

⁴⁰ See Chevalier (1994). In 1524 Francis I created *Tresorier de l'Epargne* (1524), which would manage the incomes arriving to the central treasury and allocated financial administration to the *Conseil d'Etat*. More details in Wolfe (1972, pp. 86 and ff.).

ever greater involvement of the Church in the interests and programme of the Crown, which exercised its right to nominate clergy to benefices to favour the great families of the kingdom. The Gallic Church thus emerged as an institution in which the powers of the Crown on the theoretical and institutional levels were limited but which, in reality, was closely tied to the interests of the king.

Even more evident was the political and institutional *entente* with the urban patricians. The first step in understanding this must be to recognize that the authority of the king was not homogeneous. If he had ample powers in some areas, then in others—this was the case in Languedoc—the provincial estates not only voted the taxes, but they could also determine the form that they took; it was even quite usual for the collection of these revenues to be the responsibility of these local powers. From 1484 the King of France had to wrestle separately with this multitude of *états provinciaux*, something which required considerable efforts and obliged him to make specific concessions from which the cities in general and the urban elites in particular often benefited. In addition, the sale of offices ended up creating another form of relationship (and balance) between the Crown and the urban elites, at the same time as the issuing of municipal *rentes*—debt bonds, very similar to *censales*—subscribed to in the majority of cases by the patricians increased their interests in the regular functioning of the fiscal-financial system which guaranteed them the collection of their yields.⁴¹

Nor were the high nobility alienated from the new political construction. As in Castile, the aristocracy had gained control of the collection of certain royal taxes during the reigns of Charles VI (1368–1422) and Charles VII (1403–1462); but, on the other hand, it was denied the right to collect the *taille* in many areas. This limitation did not deprive it, however, of the chance to profit from the process. Not only did the nobility consolidate its exemption from the payment of certain taxes, but very shortly it also converted itself into the principal beneficiary of the rafts of

⁴¹ Russell Major spoke of ‘an increase in popular participation in government’ (1980, p. I), and B. Chevalier lucidly described the agreement between the king and the ‘bonnes villes’. In his view the system was grounded on the king’s respecting the autonomy of the cities when collecting taxes in exchange for cash advances. This system guaranteed the cash available to the king, lowered his tax collection costs, and reduced the jurisdictional conflicts. The cities, for their part, retained a part of the fiscal income and could shift the fiscal burden to the countryside (1987, pp. 144–9).

pensions and offices granted by the Crown; the payment of the salaries due to the holders of these positions depended, of course, on a healthy royal patrimony. From 1516, thanks to royal patronage, the great families also increased their presence in ecclesiastical offices. Given these developments, it is not surprising that historiography, led by the work of Russell Major (1981), has rejected the idea, proposed by M. Bloch, of the inexorable decline of the French aristocracy. The strength of the aristocrats is even more clear if we consider that, in addition to the extraordinary revenues derived from the Crown, many high nobles were able to increase their regular or ordinary incomes and to manage successfully their private patrimonies and estates.

As in many areas of Castile and Portugal, this interlinking of mutual interests at the summit of the monarchy would confer stability upon the political system and, therefore, support the established social order. The reinforcing of the rural community, the increasing economic power of a peasantry that had diversified its sources of income as it emerged from the crisis, and the formation of a peasant elite which found itself caught between the preservation of the forms of local government and an alliance with the great landlords halted the process of deterioration of rural society (Neveux et al. 1975, pp. 134–55).

Though things were quite different in *England*, a few determined early steps had also been made towards the process of political centralization. Whereas in France the Parliament (*États généraux*) had been unable to transcend regional interests, from a very early stage, the monarchy of England was required to form a relationship with its Parliament that represented ‘the community of the kingdom’. But this difference did not imply that in England there had been a greater development of the kingdom as a fiscal unit nor that new and undreamt of possibilities now lay before the king, his high nobility, leading clergy, or urban *rentiers*.

The English Crown had maintained the greater part of its demesne estates and patrimony. Moreover, the incorporation into the Crown of the estates of extinguished noble families during the Wars of the Roses and the reorganization of the royal lands by Henry VII (1485–1509) served to keep it intact as a provider of considerable sources of income. At the same time, the lands of the Crown could be used as a fountain of royal patronage through their temporary cession to the nobility. However, the chances of exploiting the fiscal system of the kingdom and the development of the tax system were much smaller than in France or Castile. The king could recur to subsidies granted by Parliament, but these had to be approved

and renewed by the assembly and were even controlled by it through its capacity to oversee the collection and use of these monies. In reality, in the fifteenth century, the financial resources of the Crown were comparatively meagre. Aside from the monies collected from the royal estates, its regular permanent revenues depended upon tolls and other impositions of a feudal type which did not provide the quantities—nor anything like them—that were collected in Castile through the *alcabalas* or in Portugal through the *sisas* and the empire (Russell 1988, pp. 31–8).

At the same time, the main forum for political relations between the king and the kingdom was Parliament. This had been the case since the time of the war with France. More than simply a gathering of delegates representing different cities and their urban patriciates, the House of Commons represented the kingdom as a whole. Given the very low level of development of the jurisdictional and fiscal functions of the cities and their relatively minor demographic importance, their relationship—direct or indirect—with the Crown was much less decisive for the political equilibrium of the kingdom than was the case in France or Castile. In the last instance, Parliament cannot be described as a gathering of deputies who were dependent upon and controlled by their respective local oligarchies but rather a group that made little or no effort to seek to increase the privileges of the municipalities. Although the political equilibrium and the reproduction of the social system depended to a large extent on the bilateral relationships that bound the king to the aristocracy, gentry, and Church, these relations were catalysed largely through Parliament. If Westminster was to see its political role diminished during the reign of Henry VII (1457–1509), the impact of this relationship upon the model of overcoming the medieval crisis was already established.

All of this created a situation that was subtly different from that of France. If, thanks to the improvements in the management of the Crown lands, the King of England had increased his chances of using patronage to control the nobility, then the limited character of this type of transaction (which, in any case, was not easily extended over time), the control of Parliament over a large portion of other royal finances and the very limited development of the royal bureaucracy—without doubt, England represented a much less evolved form of tax state than did Castile or France—made it very difficult for the monarchy to subsidize the nobility in a systematic and generous way. At least it could not do so to the point that the needs of this group were met during the fifteenth century (Dyer 1989, p. 47). It is very probable that this situation had been one of the causes of the attack launched by the English

aristocracy upon the peasant and communal village economies in some parts of the countryside and whose most obvious manifestation lay in the enclosure of communal lands. The figures presented by R. Allen demonstrate that these enclosures were especially intense towards 1524. At the heart of all of these changes lay the fact that, in distinction to Castile and France, the English rural community had never developed its military powers.

From the perspectives of the kingdoms of France and England, the peculiarities of the Iberian Peninsula may be seen in a clearer light.

The parallels are obvious. As has been emphasized, the case of Castile offers some noticeable similarities with France. In both kingdoms relatively strong fiscal systems were emerging and would allow for a certain degree of royal autonomy (with the limitations that we will see). These fiscal systems also became a way to nurture aristocratic incomes.

But, even then, the differences between Castile and France were noticeable. In France these transfers to the nobility consisted mainly in the appointment to offices and the concession of temporary or lifetime grants. In Castile the contemporary equivalent was the *encomienda* of the military orders and the offices in the army and administration. But the lion's share of these transfers consisted in the more or less legal cession of *alcabalas*, *tercias*, and parts of the royal patrimony, which provided the nobility with a permanent and regular source of income. Thus, the economic bases of the Castilian aristocracy were to be even stronger than those of their French counterparts, and part of the agreement's renewal would consist in a pact of silence regarding the rents that had not in fact been given by the Crown but simply usurped by the nobles—and which were, therefore, of dubious legality in the eyes of the Cortes. (See Chap. 4 below.)

At the same time, the case of Castile goes against a certain number of the ideas set out a few years ago on the role of these extraordinary incomes as a mechanism that reduced the pressure of the landlords on the peasantry. Without doubt, these revenues and concessions did have this function at certain moments, but the history of Castile until (at least) 1520 demonstrates that access to the royal fiscal system did not prevent the nobles from trying to extend their lands by assuming control or ownership of soils belonging to communities or the royal estates themselves. In other words, the aristocrats sought revenues from additional sources.

Comparison of the models of the different polities of the Crown of Aragon and the kingdom of Navarre invites a number of observations. Looked at as fiscal systems, the similarities with England and, therefore, the differences from France and Castile are clear. In none of these

kingdoms did the monarchy succeed in establishing a fiscal system that was as accessible (and as easily manipulated) and developed as was the case in France or Castile. In these polities, as in England, the most important source of income that the kingdom offered its ruler (the ‘subsidies’ of one kingdom; the ‘services’ of another) could not be alienated or conferred upon the aristocracy or could only be done so with considerable difficulty. Pensions and offices offered the best and, indeed, almost the only means of patronage and of overcoming the nobility’s economic problems. But at the same time—and in contrast to the situation in England—the Crown of Aragon had established fiscal-financial relationships with a number of cities (above all Pamplona, Zaragoza, Barcelona, Valencia, and Palma de Mallorca) that clearly did provide the urban oligarchies with an additional source of income in the form of *censals*.

Nor can the relationships between landlords in these kingdoms and their vassals be easily identified with those of England. In all of these areas, the effort to overcome the difficulties faced by the nobility had been expressed in the pressure applied upon vassals and lands. But the results would be very different from what is usually referred to (although often debated) for England. In the kingdom of Aragon and, in certain respects, in Valencia, the power of the nobility would be directed not only towards the acquisition of additional land but also—and mainly—to deepening its existing rights of jurisdiction and even forms of forced labour, something which in turn was favoured by the presence and numerical importance of a *Morisco* minority, which was seriously disadvantaged in terms of its rights and legal conditions. In Catalonia the tensions in the heart of the aristocracy were overcome thanks to formulas designed to provide the nobles access to the ecclesiastic tithe (*diezmo*) and that led them to share cropping. These revenues, in contrast to the English model based upon the extension of aristocratic properties, would provide the predominant type of rent available to these groups. They would constitute along with the *censals* and a number of incomes derived from royal offices, the nobles’ most important source of income. At the same time, the Sentence of Guadalupe had made it as difficult for the principality to follow the Aragonese model as the English or the Castilian ones. This was because it had allowed a free peasantry to consolidate itself, liberated from many of the landlords’ demands and among whom it was possible to find a rural elite with rights over the soils that it farmed, a feature which would serve to paralyse any attempt by the great families to accumulate territories by force. The case of Mallorca also has its own specific characteristics. Here the possession of *censals* would give the

nobility in general a significant portion of the revenues extracted by the centralized fiscal system and the municipal financial apparatus. But, progressively, the agrarian relationships pivoted upon the formation of large latifundia whose effective control would be ceded in the form of ‘posessions’, an arrangement that would lead to a limit on the availability of lands for the lords and nobles (Jover 1997).

The differences and contrasts between Portugal, France, and England also deserve attention. In Portugal the royal financial system had begun to develop, as in France and Castile, and the kingdom was increasingly involved in a tax system of notable proportions. But the development of the empire, and the funds obtained from it, would progressively marginalize the importance of the kingdom’s contribution. Thanks to the empire, the needs of social reproduction of the *fidalgos* had been given an outlet, and this would limit their interest in strengthening their jurisdiction or acquiring peasant property (this does not, obviously, mean that no incentives existed for these actions). The Portuguese imperial venture also led to an urban jurisdictional network that was weaker than its counterpart in Castile and in which only some cities such as Lisbon and Porto exercised considerable force and weight.

This overview of the very different political, institutional, and economic trajectories found in the history of Western Europe makes clear that the Iberian kingdoms did not present any exceptional or unique paradigm. On the other hand, it is evident that a number of models emerged, each subtly different, even if many common denominators can be found.

* * *

The Iberian kingdoms had been the great protagonists of the phase of globalization that initiated the ‘rise’ of the West. This was in part due to the convergence of global forces (the circulation of technical knowledge and previous commercial development) but can be explained above all by the action of forces and needs that were present across all of Europe and that would materialize in Iberia in a very specific way. The elite’s need for consolidation and extension, and in particular the needs of the nobility, had been at the root of the first leap into the Atlantic and can be seen as little more than a continuation of previous actions and practices typical of the *Reconquista*. The involvement of the peninsula in ever-expanding commercial routes, allied to changes in the institutional system and property rights, had helped the economic recovery and brought about a certain

relaxation of the tensions between the social classes. At the same time, important lines of tension were emerging: the fight for the royal demesne, the debate over the use of the kingdom's resources, and the importance of royal patronage, thanks to its increased ability to capture resources and consequent tensions over their use, were among the most important of these points of prospective conflict. In any case, and despite the difference between them, two exceptional powers—Castile and Portugal—were emerging, both driven by clear expansive vocations and able to nullify internal tensions as they established their respective empires. The different institutional patterns that would condition the political economies of the Iberian World were more or less consolidated by 1520.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

