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Spaces of Power of the Spanish Nobility (1480–1715):[1] Introduction

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Taking their cue from the French historian Jonathan Dewald—who countered Alexis de Tocqueville's nineteenth-century view of aristocratic "decadence" by noting that the European nobility had demonstrated great flexibility and an admirable ability to renovate itself despite the profound changes that took effect from the sixteenth century to the French Revolution—historians of Spain have recently begun to re-evaluate the Spanish nobility's similar aptitude for adaptation.[2] Their studies have rejected the conventional perception of the aristocracy as subjugated by an absolutist royal power, highlighting instead the continuous collaboration between noble elites and the Spanish Monarchy during the early modern period. Indeed, numerous studies, when investigating the latter's polycentric nature and its strategic methods of survival, have noted the transnational nobility's adaptability and the crucial role they played in ensuring the monarchy's political framework through participation in state bureaucracy and in governmental military and ecclesiastical posts.[3] Other studies have focused more exclusively on the

1. This special issue arose from the research project MINECO: *Adversa Fortuna. Las élites ibéricas en la encrucijada (1516–1724). Desafíos, oportunidades y estrategias en la gestión del fracaso.* Ref. PID2019-106575RB-100.

2. Jonathan Dewald, *The European Nobility (1400–1800)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 7–13. For a brief bibliography of Spanish nobility studies, see Pablo Orduña Portús, "Un acercamiento a las élites nobiliarias de la Modernidad a través del análisis del panorama historiográfico europeo y navarro," *Príncipe de Viana* 244 (2008): 395–413.

3. See Bartolomé Yun-Casalilla, ed., *Las redes del imperio: élites sociales en la articulación de la Monarquía Hispánica, 1492–1714* (Madrid: Marcial Pons Historia, 2009); Pedro Cardim, Tamar Herzog, and José Javier Ruíz Ibáñez, eds., *Polycentric Monarchies: How Did Early Modern Spain and Portugal Achieve and Maintain a Global Hegemony?* (Sussex: Academic Press, 2012); Charles Lipp and Mattew P. Romaniello, eds., *Contested Spaces of Nobility in Early Modern Europe* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2013); Juan Hernández Franco, José A. Guillén Berrendero, and Santiago Martínez Hernández, eds., *Nobilitas. Estudios sobre la nobleza y lo nobiliario en la Europa Moderna* (Madrid: Doce Calles, 2014); and Yuen-Gen Liang, *Family*

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different means by which the Spanish nobility constructed their image and their hierarchical representation, examining their agency and patronage of various kinds of cultural and creative activities during this period.[4] These studies have shown that the nobles utilized the majority of such "spaces" for the purpose of intellectual and political discussion, and that these spaces became authentic conduits for specific views and social behaviour.

Few studies, however, have focused on the many and varied spaces through which the Hispanic nobility exercised power and wielded their political influence by promoting, by diverse means, their dynastic, familial, or personal status. Despite the royal court's reinforcement when Philip II moved his permanent residence to Madrid in 1561, the nobility's traditional places of power did not disappear.[5] Instead, aristocratic sites expanded even further with the formation of new locales on the periphery of the royal court itself, whether at European and American viceroyal courts, in convents and monasteries, or at other noble courts pertaining to independent states that, while not directly forming part of the Spanish Monarchy, actively collaborated with it. In all these spaces, the titled nobility made sure to exhibit the distinctive cultural signs of their seigneurial power, as they acted as mediators, adaptors, or buffers against potential conflict at the royal court, while at the same time taking part in the tensions and strains of their own class.

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and Empire: The Fernández de Cordoba and the Spanish Realm (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

4. Giovanni Muto and Antonio Terrasa Lozano, eds., *Estrategias culturales y circulación de la nueva nobleza en Europa (1570–1707)* (Madrid: Silex, 2016); Marcella Aglietti, Alejandra Franganillo Álvarez, and Antonio López Anguita, eds., *Élites e reti di potere: strategie d'integrazione nell'Europa di età moderna* (Pisa: Pisa University Press, 2016); Carmen Sanz Ayán, Marcella Aglietti, Santiago Martínez Hernández, *Identità nobiliare tra monarchia ispanica e Italia* (Rome: Storia e Letteratura Edizioni, 2019); Santiago Martínez Hernández and Daniele Edigati, eds., "Nobleza genio y autoría en la alta Edad Moderna Ibérica," special issue, *Cuadernos de Historia Moderna* 44.2 (2019), dx.doi.org/10.5209/CHMO; and Carmen Sanz Ayán, "La imagen de la nueva nobleza titulada en reinado de Carlos II a través de las dedicatorias," in *L'Espagne de Charles II, une modernité paradoxale (1665–1700),* ed. Marina Mestre Zaragoza (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2019), 205–31.

5. Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London and New York: Verso, 2003), 79–80; Helen Nader, "Noble Income in Sixteenth Century Castile: The Case of the Marquises of Mondéjar, 1480–1580," *The Economic History Review* 30.3 (1977): 411–28, doi.org/10.2307/2594876.

This special issue, dedicated to the spaces of power of the Spanish Monarchy, brings together eight articles that cover three centuries: from the reign of the Catholic monarchs Isabel of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, to the Habsburg reigns of Charles V, Philip II, Philip III, Philip IV, and Carlos II in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, to the Bourbon monarchy of Philip V, Louis XIV's grandson, in the first half of the eighteenth century. The articles address the political dynamics not only of the nobility's traditional centres in Aragon, Castile, and Portugal, but also of new centres of power such as the viceroyalties of the New World and Italy, whose interactions with the Spanish Monarchy contributed to its duration by facilitating its ability to adapt, even when these alternative spaces of power sometimes conflicted in specific geographic areas and at certain times with the Madrid royal court. In these conflicts it is almost always possible to identify three phases regardless of the chronological period we are analyzing: the nobles' initial reaction against or opposition to the king was followed by other actions that included negotiation and, finally, accommodation.

Santiago Martínez Hernández thus explains how, throughout the early modern period, the Spanish Monarchy's noble houses maintained and strengthened their own provincial courts, while simultaneously building other, more reduced spaces near the royal court. He reveals a "spatial practice" in cases of noble families—the dukes of Medina Sidonia, Arcos, Medinaceli, and Béjar, among others—who were called "anti-court" for their conflictive relations with Madrid and whose distinctive behaviour at their own provincial courts was also intended to differentiate them from other nobles. In the mid-sixteenth century, nobles at the royal court in Madrid increasingly built suburban villas at the court's periphery in order to "flee" from the court without having to abandon it altogether. These residences served as both complementary and alternative points of reference for the cultural, political, and social life of the court itself. They offered aristocrats protected yet privileged spaces whenever they wished to remove themselves for a time from court for any reason, even as a form of self-exile.

The court's permanent installation in Madrid progressively attracted nobles seeking the king's patronage; by contrast, the previous reign of Charles V, relying on an itinerant court, had experienced the growth of traditional noble courts. This period is well described by Diego Pacheco Landero in his article on the seigneurial court of the 3rd Duke of Alburquerque, located in the

town of Cuéllar, Segovia province, in the heart of Castile. The duke, Beltrán de la Cueva (1526–60), was in many ways a typical Renaissance Spanish noble: he owned an exceptional library stocked with romances of chivalry and converted the dynasty's feudal castle into an impressive palace where, demonstrating transformations over time in the use of space, he hosted, as patron of the arts, many writers such as the playwright Hernán López de Yanguas (1487–1550?). López de Yanguas's brief plays, which followed the style of Juan del Encina (1468–1529), known as the father of Spanish drama, were most likely represented at the ducal court's festivities. Modelling the political principles upheld by Charles V, their plots exalted the emperor's historical exploits. His dramatic staging of monarchical ideals at a noble court as a gesture of political alliance exemplifies how traditional noble courts often supported cultural and political imperial strategies, consolidating the symbiotic relations between the monarch and the nobility.

Along with the traditional provincial courts, there existed complementary centres of power whose unifying force stemmed from delegitimized or discredited royal cadet branches. Disenfranchised by political events, their leaders sought other spaces where diverse nobles congregated for specific political purposes that at times proved problematic, at other times useful to the official power structures that protected them. In her article on the daughter of Enrique IV of Castile, Juana "la Beltraneja" (1475–79), Susannah Humble Ferreira analyzes one such space, the convent of Santa Clara de Santarém, Portugal, which, like the convent of the Descalzas Reales (Royal Discalced) in Madrid, formed what could be called a feminine claustral court that drew nobles seeking information, protection, and patronage from the royal women who had professed or resided in the convent.[6]

The Portuguese convent of Santa Clara became an informal court when Juana, known by the sobriquet of "la Beltraneja" for her presumed illegitimacy—she was said to have been fathered by an ancestor of the Duke of Alburquerque, also named Beltrán de la Cueva—took up residence there after the war of succession between Castile and Portugal (1475–79). The war

6. For royal women at the convent of the Descalzas Reales, see Magdalena S. Sánchez, *The Empress, the Queen, and the Nun: Women and Power in the Court of Philip III of Spain* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998). See also the catalogue of the 2019 Royal Palace exhibition, *La otra corte. Mujeres de la Casa de Austria en los Monasterios Reales de las Descalzas y de la Encarnación* (Madrid: Patrimonio Nacional y Fundación Santander, 2019).

was lost by Juana's supporters, who fought against the Catholic monarchs for Juana's right to the Castilian throne. After Isabel I claimed the throne as the deceased king's half-sister, Portugal assumed an officially neutral stance to keep peace with Spain, whereby Juana's presence became a political embarrassment. Once the peace treaty of Alcácovas-Toledo was signed, she was cloistered and her political agency considered nullified. However, she maintained certain authority and informal power even within the convent. Humble Ferreira's thorough exploration of chronicles, family documents, and correspondence reveals that Juana's family and personal networks with other members of the nobility continued to influence Portuguese diplomatic relations with Spain, as her unique status aided in pressuring Isabel of Castile in numerous international negotiations.

Another space energized by the political power of the nobility was that of the courtiers and courtesans at the service of the Spanish queens. The emergence in such intimate surroundings of a powerful figure helps to define the Spanish aristocracy's political culture, as in the case of the interactions between the queen consort, Maria Anna of Palatine-Neuburg (1667–1740), wife of Spain's last Habsburg king, Carlos II (1662–1700), and the Countess of Berlepsch, and her German *camarilla*, or clique. The space of power created by the countess and her circle did not consist solely of the queen's foreign allies; it also included titled Spanish nobles, or grandees, who were necessary to the group's efficacy. By carefully analyzing their activities as well as the new court practices of these foreign nobles, Marguerite Valentine Kozák highlights the significant role they played at the Madrid court in the last decade of the seventeenth century, as they formed new networks and kinds of influence within the court. She especially emphasizes the vitality that the queen's confessor, Gabriel Pontifeser di Chiusa, infused in the group on his arrival in 1692. Pontifeser di Chiusa was successful in implementing close ecclesiastical, diplomatic, and court bonds between Spanish and foreign nobles, thus ensuring stable relations among the recently arrived German courtiers, the Spanish nobles, and the queen herself.

After Carlos II died without heirs in 1700, the change from the Habsburg to the Bourbon dynasty, which initiated the Spanish War of Succession between France and Austria and their respective alliances (1700–15), compelled Spain's traditional nobility to adapt yet again to new circumstances. Antonio López Anguita researches the centre of power forged at the royal court by Marie Anne de la Trémoille, Princess of Ursins (1642–1722), *camarera mayor*,

or chief lady of the bedchamber, to Queen María Luisa Gabriela of Savoy (1688–1714).[7] Similarly to the Countess of Berlepsch's role at María Anna of Palatine-Neuburg's court, the Princess of Ursins cleverly carried on what might be called a political tutelage, acting as an informal delegate for Louis XIV's interests in Madrid. However, she also deployed her personal influence in favour of the Spanish nobles who collaborated with her. López Anguita traces the rise of three Spanish grandees: Pedro Manuel Colón of Portugal, 8th Duke of Veragua; José Solís y Valderrábano, 1st Duke of Montellano; and Rodrigo Fernández Manrique de Lara, 2nd Count of Frigiliana. As allies of Philip V, the first Bourbon king, and directly linked to the princess's court circle, the nobles made sure to strategize in order to strengthen their position in the new dynasty. López Anguita shows that this powerful noblewoman, besides serving as a privileged mediator between Madrid and Versailles, knew how to construct a court microcosm of her own. By joining her circle, the Spanish grandees achieved two objectives: they improved their personal situation, and they kept the princess informed of the tensions between the Spanish nobility and the French nobles recently arrived at court in order for her to mitigate any potential problems.

Other spaces of power within the Spanish Monarchy's polycentric structure of governance were those of the vicereines. As Alejandra Franganillo Álvarez comments in her study of Neapolitan vicereines, although the viceroys' multivalent function has received critical attention, few studies have focused on their wives. During the seventeenth century, all the vicereines who ruled Naples belonged to Spain's high nobility, as was the case of Mencía de Mendoza Zúñiga y Requesens, 8th Countess of Benavente (1603–10); Catalina de Zúñiga y Sandoval, 6th Countess of Lemos (1599–1601); and Leonor de Olivares, 6th Countess of Olivares (1631–37). Moreover, the latter two were sisters of Philip III's and Philip IV's powerful royal favourites, the Count of Lerma and the Count-Duke of Olivares, respectively. All three vicereines played a significant symbolic role in Neapolitan civil and religious festivities and ceremonies; but more importantly, they established extensive political networks. In researching the noblewomen's abundant correspondence, Franganillo Álvarez has been able to trace how they constructed their own noble circles as complementary to

7. The office, created in 1526 by Charles V following Burgundian court etiquette, was responsible for managing all that was related to the household and service of the queen. The noblewoman holding the post accompanied the queen at all times and wielded authority over her household personnel.

those of their husbands. Their letters show that they successfully solicited and distributed dignities and favours among members of noble families and their clientage, as well as functioning as intermediaries for the Spanish Monarchy, a role that the Countess of Lemos played exceptionally well with the papacy.

Karoline Cook similarly analyzes the strategies of the Indigenous pre-Hispanic nobility linked to the viceroyalties of Peru and New Spain. Once integrated into the social and political structures of the Spanish Monarchy, they fully appropriated the customs and habits of the Spanish aristocracy through systems of patronage to affirm their privileges. Cook relates that, as had occurred in Spain from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century with the Nasrid nobility that originated from the Emirate of Granada, the descendants of the Aztec and Inca nobilities endeavoured to obtain noble titles and consolidate their inheritance rights to their ancestral lands by means of primogeniture. The success of their petitions, which were based on the concepts of vassalage and cleanliness of blood, rested on diverse strategies taken over the course of several generations.

Recent studies have demonstrated how Indigenous nobles sought to establish connections with the peninsular aristocracy through marriages, godparentage, and patronage.[8] Cook focuses above all on their military service to the Spanish Monarchy and their efforts to compose family and genealogical histories linking their pre-Colombian lineages to royal service. Their petitions emphasized their activities at the viceroyal courts so as to prove their complete assimilation to the representational and legitimized monarchical apparatus of the New World territories. At the same time, she investigates the relational networks created by the descendants of Inca and Aztec nobles in Madrid between 1600 and 1630 who interacted with the established peninsular noble families at the royal court to successfully obtain noble status and their entry into the military orders. What Cook makes evident, therefore, is that the promotional strategies implemented by the Peninsular nobility at the centre of the Spanish Monarchy were amply known and deployed as well by the Aztec and Inca nobilities.

Other peripheral courts of the nobility with considerable political agency emerged in small states—in this case, in northern Italy—that did not directly

8. Antonio Terrasa Lozano, "De la corte del Cielo a la hagiografía genealógica. Santidad y nobleza en los siglos XVI y XVII," *Lusitania Sacra* 32 (July–December 2015): 53–79.

form part of the Spanish Monarchy but functioned as its satellites. Blythe Alicia Raviola analyzes the formal and informal diplomatic roles played by one such court, that of the duchy of Savoy. The minor enclaves, headed by nobles related to the principal Savoy branch in Turin and sometimes to the Spanish nobility, became increasingly important in sustaining the strategic balance among the northern Italian states. The active presence of their leaders in various international affairs and their relational potential contributed to the Spanish system's flexibility; in many cases, these nobles acted as agents of the monarchy. Raviola emphasizes the role played by the noble branches of the Savoy dynasty in the second half of the seventeenth century.

The strong dynastic relations between the Savoy duchy and the Spanish Monarchy, however, hark back to the sixteenth century, during Philip II's reign. From then until the early eighteenth century, the duchy and, above all, its noble satellites acted as formal and informal diplomatic liaisons in the Spanish Monarchy's service. As Raviola explains, the noblewomen at these courts actively participated in diplomatic politics. In the second half of the seventeenth century, Olympia Mancini, a niece of Cardinal Mazarin who had been raised at Louis XIV's court, married a second son of the Savoy-Caragnano branch, and grandson of the Infanta Catalina Micaela, Philip II's daughter, achieving significant status in Turin, Paris, and Madrid. Her mother-in-law, María of Bourbón-Soissons, married to the Prince of Carignano, also held an influential and privileged position at the Carignano provincial court, although at times diplomatic tensions flared between the courts.

In their analyses of the diverse spaces and representations of power carved out by the high nobility, from prevailing provincial courts to lesser-known alternative and complementary locations, the articles in this special issue demonstrate how the nobles successfully deployed their influence at both the core and the periphery of the Spanish Monarchy. Through their versatility and compliance at various courts and the royal court itself, noblemen and noblewomen made sure to acquire advantageous positions of their own. Noblewomen in particular created networks that until now have been little studied as regards their group dynamics—networks integrated by both men and women, as men especially realized their importance and sought to belong—and that generated synergies of social and political influence. From the aspirant queen to the Castile throne, Juana "la Beltraneja," and the key female players during the reigns of Carlos II and Philip V, to the cosmopolitan aristocrats of

the minor Savoy states and the Neapolitan vicereines, noblewomen remained important practitioners of informal diplomacy in their own right. Whether cloistered in a convent or residing at their provincial courts, at viceroyal courts in Italy and the New World, or at minor courts in Savoy, the nobles of the Spanish Monarchy who feature in these articles adopted the same negotiating strategies of survival and accommodation used by other early modern European aristocrats, with equally successful results.[9]

9. William Beik, *Absolutism and Society in Seventeenth Century France: State Power and Provincial Aristocracy in Languedoc* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511583797; and James B. Collins, *Classes, Estates, and Order in Early Modern Brittany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511562587.