

Motivations and mobilization in rebellion and civil war: Iberia and Scandinavia, c. 1250–1350

Motivações e mobilização na rebelião e na guerra civil: Ibéria e Escandinávia, c. 1250-1350

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Abstract: This article expounds on how internal military conflicts and actions – rebellions and civil wars – were motivated in the Iberian and Scandinavian areas during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, with a particular focus on the kingdoms of Castile-León and Sweden. It also considers how military resources, both internal and external to the respective realm, were mobilized to carry out these actions. The article offers a comparison of experiences in the Castilian and the Swedish context vis-à-vis social dynamics, military composition, and outside support for contentious politics.

Keywords: military mobilization, rebellion, civil war, medieval Iberia, medieval Scandinavia

Resumo: Este artigo explora como os conflitos e ações militares 'internas' – rebeliões e guerras civis – foram motivados nas áreas ibérica e escandinava durante os séculos XIII e XIV, com um foco particular nos reinos de Castela e Leão e na Suécia. Também considera como os recursos militares, internos e externos ao respetivo território, foram mobilizados para realizar essas ações. O artigo oferece uma comparação de experiências no contexto castelhano e sueco em relação à dinâmica social, composição militar e apoio externo a política contenciosa.

Palavras-chave: mobilização militar, rebelião, guerra civil, Ibéria medieval, Escandinávia medieval

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Introduction: medieval rebellion

Motivating war in an ostensibly peaceful religious community such as Christendom – ideologically opposed to violence though almost constantly embroiled in conflict – was a problem faced by theologians throughout the Middle Ages. Yet motivating rebellion and civil war was even more demanding². In such cases, the theory of just war or the notion of defensive measures against hostile incursions were not relevant.

This paper expounds on how 'internal' military conflicts and actions – i.e. rebellions and civil wars – were motivated in the Iberian and Scandinavian areas during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In particular, it focuses on the kingdoms of Castile-León and Sweden in the period c. 1250-1350. The study will also consider how military resources were mobilized to carry out these actions and offer a comparison of experiences in the Castilian and the Swedish context vis-à-vis social dynamics, military composition, and outside support for such actions. The comparative analysis will be used to highlight idiosyncrasies in the two separate contexts (HAUPT & KOCKA, 2004, p. 26). By adopting a comparative perspective, focussing on the crowns of Castile and Sweden, but also considering the wider contexts of Iberia and Scandinavia respectively, I hope to demonstrate some of the distinguishing traits of military mobilization in opposition to the monarchy in these two peripheral areas during the Middle Ages.

Iberia has long been considered dissimilar to other parts of Western Europe during the medieval period, not least in relation to the military experience, because of its lengthy struggle against the Muslim domination in the Peninsula, the so-called Reconquest or *Reconquista* (GARCÍA FITZ, 2009; 2010). It is my contention that the Iberian military landscape was different mostly because of the independent nature of such forces as towns or municipalities on the one hand, and the Military Orders on the other. This in itself was conditioned on the particular circumstances of the Christian conquest of Muslim Iberia, the experience of a frontier society, but the oft-cited fact that the Iberian nobility was dependent on the furthering of the conquests for the establishment and consolidation of their lordships is perhaps not the most important point here (GERBET, 1997, pp. 67-68).

Most modern studies of the political developments in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries have viewed these from the perspective of state formation, thereby describing a centralizing process wherein noble violence is equated with civil unrest, crisis, and stagnation in governmental and state formation (cf. BERGQVIST, 2019a, pp. 623, 627). Since many scholars in the twentieth century identified progress and modernity with state formative processes, they disparaged private violence and the actions of non-state actors who opposed and resisted the initiatives of the monarchy. Marc Bloch, in his *Feudal Society*, while describing the limits of state action, refers to sovereigns who had to «spend long years in suppressing rebellions» and to the vassals who could justly wage war against the king in line with customary law (BLOCH, 1965, pp. 408-410, quote at p. 409). This attitude remains in many studies of the relationship between kings and nobles in the Middle Ages and permeate many historical narratives on noble rebellions and insurrections to this day. These actions are still equated with anti-modernization and nobles are made out as conservative or reactionary, if not altogether apolitical and self-interested (REILLY, 1993, pp. 183-184; GONZÁLEZ MÍNGUEZ, 2012, pp. 216-217).

² Civil war can signify dynastic disputes as well as factional conflicts that led to violent clashes between armed bands, which could be localized or affect the whole kingdom (See RUIZ, 2007, pp. 38-39).

In the context of the medieval Castilian nobility, several historians have described the magnates' actions as lacking political aims, preferring to emphasize the factionalism and opportunism of the noblemen (*ibid.*)³. According to Miguel Ángel Ladero Quesada, the Castilian nobility was not yet fully consolidated in the thirteenth century and lacked the political strength and homogeneity in political programme that could be found elsewhere in Europe (LADERO QUESADA, 2014, p. 150)⁴. Castilian nobles are unfavourably compared to those English barons who managed with determined effort to secure certain constitutional rights in the Magna Carta in 1215⁵. Surely, the English magnates were also guided primarily by short-term goals and were acting in defence of privileges and rights they perceived as traditional and customary. Is it reasonable, then, to assume that common political ideals and aims among the nobility was restricted to the English magnate class, and that their peers elsewhere in the Christian kingdoms of Europe acted without access to a similar platform of common ideas?

Descriptions of conflicts between the monarchy and nobility in medieval Europe have thus sided with the monarch, not least because most available source material is royal in outlook. Any noble resistance to state formative tendencies – regular taxation, uniform legislation, centralized administration and jurisdiction, etc. – has been regarded as countering the positive process of state formation and thus as detrimental to development (cf. LADERO QUESADA, 1998, pp. 125-127; DOUBLEDAY, 2001, pp. 4-5; VALENTE, 2003, pp. 2-4). Joseph Strayer, in his classic account *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State*, argues that the influence on policy decisions of «personal ambitions and grievances of the great men» was detrimental to development, and that aristocratic privilege and irresponsibility led to unprofessionalism in the state and hindered administrative efficacy (STRAYER, 2005 [1970], pp. 75-76, 86). I do not wish in the following to discuss at length whether insurrections hindered, delayed or stalled state formation, but would like to suggest that we reconsider the importance of noble resistance to the king as an important stage in the development of a political community wherein several actors and social groups not directly connected to the king's administration acquired a voice in politics and the ability to formulate their grievances.

Examining narratives of noble insurrections, rebellions, and civil wars provides a glimpse into the mindset behind these contentious politics. Often, certainly, magnates and other nobles must have acted with their own best interests at heart, and it has been easy for modern historians – just like Alfonso X (r. 1252-1284) did in reference to the rebellious noblemen in 1272 (GONZÁLEZ JIMÉNEZ, 1998, p. 63 [ch. 20]; LINEHAN, 1993, p. 490; MARTÍNEZ, 2010, pp. 344-351)⁶ – to dismiss talk of acting for the 'common good', the 'good of the realm', or for the community of the realm, as mere rhetoric and pretence. Nevertheless, it is my contention that the strategic actions of protest, negotiation, insurrection, and rebellion that the nobility used to resist royal power in the thirteenth century was an accepted and common form of political practice, despite royal attempts to impede them by charges of treason (DOUBLEDAY, 2001, p. 73; VALENTE, 2003, p. 4; CARLIDGE, 2019, p. 83).

3 Exceptions are mainly to be found in detailed studies of the noble rebellion against Alfonso X in 1272-1273 – wherein the reasoning of the nobility is taken seriously with regard to their political position and critique – such as those by ALFONSO ANTÓN, 2002, and ESCALONA, 2002. To these may be added the work of DOUBLEDAY, 2001, *passim*.

4 It is certainly doubtful that scholars of medieval English, French, or German history would concede that the nobility was a homogeneous group or stood behind a concerted political programme.

5 It should be noted that the actions of the English barons have sometimes been treated similarly, as lacking a fixed goal of constitutional resonance, the long-term effects of the Magna Carta then viewed as an unintended outcome. See BLACKBURN, 2016, p. xiv: «In England, the barons were prompted to rebellion against King John not by any commitment to any progressive political ideology, but rather by a conservative assertion of traditional customs and ancient liberties. Analogous developments taking place elsewhere in medieval Europe were of a similar character». A contrasting view is defended by David Crouch, according to whom the aristocracy had united behind a common view on how the realm should be governed (CROUCH, 2011, p. 78).

6 See also the analysis of the letter Alfonso X wrote to this son, by RODGERS, 1991-1992.

The right to resistance was a consequence of the king being bound by law to safeguard justice and otherwise act as a virtuous king must (BRIGGS, 2011, pp. 119-120), otherwise the people were not bound to him by their oaths or expectations of loyalty and could (or even should) protest misrule (VALENTE, 2003, p. 2). The potential justification of rebellion or even regicide was debated in medieval political theory, and though many relied on the same authorities, attitudes and ideas differed (NEDERMAN, 2018, pp. 137-150). To what degree these ideas were known or shared by nobles in medieval Europe is not entirely clear; they were seldom referenced in the context of the conflicts studied here.

Furthermore, these contentious politics were important not only in their own right, but because they created vehicles for criticism, venues for negotiation, and the need for the king to defend his actions and policies. Thus, they set up the path for access to a political voice for other social groups. This period, the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, is vital in the development of representative assemblies in many European kingdoms, wherein the different estates through representatives could have a say in political matters of utmost importance (WATTS, 2009, pp. 84-85).

Noble resistance and insurrections in this period often sprung out of criticism levelled against the king for his misrule, undue taxation, and introduction of legal reforms that disfavoured the privileged nobility. Far from being disruptive and violent as a rule, that resistance could often take the form of negotiation, show of force, or strategic violence, whereby the nobles would attempt to sway the king into retracting some of his decisions, making up for perceived injuries, or allowing them more direct control or influence in matters of state (VALENTE, 2003, p. 29; WATTS, 2009, pp. 83-84). The right to be consulted before the introduction of new or extraordinary taxes was one of the reasons for the development of the assemblies above mentioned (WATTS, 2009, p. 227-229).

Certainly, noble resistance also took the form of direct military confrontation and sometimes led to civil war. Such actions gradually became more suspect, and labelled treason by the king – often in concord with Roman law (WALLÉN & HAMRE, 1966; IGLESIA FERREIROS, 1971). The nobility would of course defend their right to resist (*ius resistendi*) an unlawful king who did not fulfil his obligations. The explicit motivation used is often – and this is true for Castile as well as for Sweden – that they are defending the good of the realm and wish only to return to the old customs and legal traditions by which they abided by under previous kings. Nonetheless, how problematic was waging war against a fellow Christian?

Theory and practice of medieval warfare and civil war

For Don Juan Manuel, the fourteenth-century Castilian magnate, author, and man of politics, war against the Muslims – presented as a Reconquest of lands previously lost by Christians to the Moors (the *pérdida de España*) – was easily legitimated. It was a justified war to reconquer Christian territory, an endeavour sanctioned by God, and one in which any casualty was deemed a martyr (BELTRÁN TORREIRA, 1987, pp. 42-45). This was part of an overarching ideological construction surrounding the idea of the 'Reconquest', founded on the basis of two fundamental ideas: those of the *just war* and the *holy war* (GARCÍA FITZ, 2010, pp.165-168; HENRIET, 2016). There were connected to an overarching notion of crusade, prevalent in all of medieval Christendom. In Sweden, the *Revelations* of Saint Birgitta proclaimed the sanctity of this endeavour, and her harsh criticism of King Magnus Eriksson (r. 1319-1364) partly hinged on his inability to successfully complete campaigns of conquest and conversion in the eastern Baltic, in the name of crusade – the failure of the just war had to mean the king was unworthy of the task (ANDERSSON, 1928, pp. 126-135; GILKÆR, 1993, pp. 134-137).

Of course, war against other Christians was another matter entirely. Whether against internal or external enemies, war was fundamentally viewed as an evil, and as such should be avoided whenever possible. The best-known literary work of Don Juan Manuel, the *Conde Lucanor*, echoes the anxiety of its author to have been brought up and lived through warfare, sometimes against Christians and sometimes against Moors, and often at odds with kings who are his lords and neighbours («*siempre me crié et visque en muy grandes guerras, a vezes con cristianos et a vezes con moros, et lo demás sienpre lo ove con reys, mis señores et mis vezinos*»). He points out that he always took care, with respect to other Christians, never to start war. (JUAN MANUEL, 2014, p. 554). It could, however, be just. In the aristocratic and chivalric mentality, the ultimate goal of war and rebellion was always, it would seem, to gain or restore honour (BELTRÁN TORREIRA, 1987, p. 42). Honour was the be-all and end-all of violent actions. Could honour be preserved or regained in a rebellion against a legitimate king? According to the idea of *ius resistendi*, a king who had neglected his duties – primarily upholding justice – or violated the law of the land, or the rights and privileges of his people, could be resisted lawfully. To oppose him would then not be considered a disloyal or unjust act (RAU et al., 2016, pp. 8-9).

In medieval Sweden, this right was defended by Saint Birgitta, who at one point incited Swedish noblemen to rebel against King Magnus Eriksson, whom she felt had betrayed the trust God placed in him. This critique used legalistic terminology and was partly founded on political ideas that clearly belonged to the highest aristocracy. Birgitta attacked the king's abusive economic policies, his failed war efforts, and his inability to maintain the integrity of the realm, and raised allegations as to his sexual reputation (FERM, 1993; GILKÆR, 1993, pp. 2016-2216; LUNDQVIST, 2003, pp. 140-143).

Who, then, had the right to declare a king in violation of his duties? The ultimate safeguard of the *ius resistendi* would of course have been the declaration by pontifical or other important ecclesiastical authorities that the king ruled unlawfully. As is the case of any military campaign or violent conflict, the backing of clerical authorities confirmed a sense of legitimacy on the endeavour (GARCÍA FITZ, 2010, p. 162). It seems, though, several noble insurrections or acts of resistance took place without the previous declaration by the papacy of kingly misconduct. Often, the noble critique of the king was formulated along the lines of their hurt dignity or damaged honour.

If the king had done them harm repeatedly, Iberian magnates deemed it within their right to sever all ties to him. Castilian kings lost the allegiance of important noblemen to neighbouring kings several times throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In 1254 Diego López de Haro reneged on his allegiance to Alfonso X and became the vassal of Jaime I of Aragón (MARTÍNEZ, 2010, pp. 295, 299), while his son Lope Díaz de Haro became a vassal of the French King Philip III in 1281. A number of noblemen unable to come to terms with King Alfonso went into exile in Granada during their rebellion of 1272-1273 (MARTÍNEZ, 2010, p. 334). This practice was still valid, at least in the eyes of the noblemen themselves, in 1336, when Don Juan Manuel renounced his allegiance to Alfonso XI (r. 1312-1350) (GIMÉNEZ SOLER, 1932, pp. 622-624).

Several other motivations for the rebellion can be found in the documentary and historiographical evidence. The *Crónica Geral de 1344* is one of the most detailed accounts of the continued criticism of Alfonso X into the final decade of his reign, and among the grievances included there are three main points: unlawful killings; the removal of the *fueros*, which deprived the noblemen of important privileges; and the ruination of the land by undue taxation and bad currency (MARTÍNEZ, 2010, pp. 466-469). This list is telling because it offers evidence of noble concern not only for economic and legal developments, but also for the idea of their personal safety and the right to fair trial (cf. RAU et al. 2016, p. 6).

Papal declarations could equally target the rebels. After deliberation, Pope Martin IV decided in 1283 to declare his support for Alfonso X as legitimate king and condemn the *infante* Sancho for his betrayal in mobilizing the realm against his father in an attempt to wrest control over governmental functions. Sancho was excommunicated and the entire kingdom placed under interdict by order of a papal bull of August 9 of that year (MARTÍNEZ, 2010, 494-495). Papal displeasure or even excommunication was without doubt a significant and meaningful factor in these contexts, but it had no decisive part to play in deciding the outcome of the conflicts militarily. Though Magnus Eriksson had already faced violent opposition, his excommunication by Pope Clement VI in 1358 due to unpaid debts to the papacy contributed to ecclesiastical opposition, further rebellions, and the king's eventual deposition.

In fact, armed resistance and opposition to the king had an unclear legal status (VALENTE, 2003, pp. 12-13; STRICKLAND, 2012, pp. 183-186). Even literary narratives about feuding and rebellious noblemen that seem to promote the idea of resistance as a viable political action and necessary check on royal power are ambiguous, and «acknowledge that revolt is morally and legally dubious» according to Luke Sunderland (SUNDERLAND, 2017, p. 17). Since laws were in the process of being codified, promulgated, and rewritten during this period, royal policies were increasingly targeting resistance to royal power and criminalizing acts of that order under the category of treason (STRICKLAND, 2012, pp. 164-169). Nonetheless, feudal legal conceptions lived on, and at least in certain circles were considered more legitimate than new royal laws⁷. It was by reference to these customs that Castilian noblemen of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries could renounce allegiance to their 'natural' lord and king and become the subject of another. Similar ideas were present in thirteenth-century England (STRICKLAND, 1996, pp. 231-235; STRICKLAND, 2012, p. 171).

Conflicts and contributions of military actors in Sweden

In thirteenth-century Sweden, a group of magnates known under the name '*folkungar*' were responsible for several insurrections against the monarchy, beginning early in the century. The first for which sources are relatively reliable was spearheaded by Holmger Knutsson, took place in 1247, and was backed by the commoners of Uppland. The rebels were defeated by the king's forces at Sparsåtra, and their leader executed. Sources for these events are still scarce and lacking in detail and context. From the annals of Sigtuna (*Annales Sigtunenses*) we learn that: «This year the commoners of Uppland lost the victory and their freedom at Sparsåtra, and they were taxed with *spannskatt*, *skeppsvist* and other burdens» ((MCCXLVII: «et eodem anno communitas rusticorum Vplandie Sparsætrum amisit victoriam libertatis sue et inopite sunt eis spannale et skypuiste et honera plura», ANNERSTEDT, 1876, p. 4; LÖNNROTH, 1959). This brief mention of the battle and its seeming consequences has led scholars to connect the resistance of the *folkungar* with the centralizing tendencies and new taxes imposed by the monarchy in the mid- to late thirteenth century (LINE, 2007, pp. 117-118). By 1251, the *folkungar* attempted a new insurrections, supported by Danes and Norwegians and German hired soldiers, but were again unsuccessful. After several of the insurrections, the magnate leaders were executed (1251, 1280) and their estates confiscated by the crown, demonstrating the application of the new Roman law precepts on treason (ROSÉN, 1962, pp. 142-143).

⁷ This is very clear in the case of the noble rebellion against Alfonso X in 1272-1273, when the replacement of the customary *fueros* with newly promulgated law codes was a major point of contention.

The traditional historical narrative posits that aristocratic insurrections and power struggles between different families which contended for kingship were replaced by intra-dynastic struggles when the Bjälbo dynasty became firmly established as the Swedish royal line, though Sweden formally remained an elective monarchy until well into the sixteenth century. These struggles were the so-called brothers' feuds, of 1275-1280 and 1303-1318. In modern historical scholarship, aristocratic insurrections or rebellions have generally been treated very differently in scholarship from struggles for the throne among competing claimants or rivals from the same ruling family. While the former has often been seen as apparent critiques of royal policies (possibly even with relevance to constitutional developments), the latter have been treated firstly as succession crises. Nonetheless, these conflicts around succession or competing claims to the throne can also demonstrate displeasure with royal misrule and thus signify criticism of the ruling king or his policies.

In the attempt to depose King Valdemar Birgersson (r. 1250-1275), his brothers Magnus and Erik enlisted the support of the Danish king, Erik (V) Klipping, who for a large sum paid out in silver handed over control of 100 men from his own host. The two brothers also recruited 700 German and Danish men-at-arms under the leadership of Count Jakob of Halland and the Danish marshal (*marsk*) Stig Andersen Hvide. These military resources had to be recruited abroad. Did this mean appropriate military personnel were not available domestically? Probably – at least not to the rebels. At the decisive battle of Hova in 1275, the mounted soldiers (heavy cavalry) seemingly proved to have a pivotal role in the rebellious brothers' victory (ROSÉN, 1966, p. 245). According to the extant sources, which are often less than credible – e.g. the partisan rhymed chronicle *Erikskrönikan* – King Valdemar's host was composed largely of peasant soldiers, perhaps recruited according to traditional domestic methods of military mobilization.

It is tempting to identify in the victory at Hova an impetus to creating incentives for the domestic aristocracy to present mounted heavily armed and armoured soldiers in the king's service, though some claim this was nothing new. Further incentives were created in 1280, with the ordinance of Alsnö (*Alsnö stadga*), promulgated by the victorious Magnus Birgersson (r. 1275-1290), through which tax exemption was introduced as recompense for military service. The king needed to tie the magnates' retinues to himself and to be able to demand military performance in the name of the realm. A general tax exemption on their lands was the compensation he offered. Swedish men were previously required to fulfil the *landvärm* and *ledung*, the first only in defensive matters – if their region was invaded by a hostile force – the second also offensively. This second duty was gradually replaced by a tax, and in 1280 by the service of mounted warriors (LJUNGQVIST, 2014, pp. 193-198). However, the military capabilities of the Swedish peasants did not entirely diminish in importance over the course of the Middle Ages.

The administrative and legal reforms carried out in Sweden during the second half of the thirteenth century must be understood as a vehicle that allowed the king to mobilize domestic military resources in service of the monarchy.⁸ This has to be connected to the practical circumstances, conditions, and outcome of the previous conflicts – the insurrections of the *folkungar*, the deposition of Valdemar Birgersson among others – in several ways and on several levels. Foreign models and inspiration were crucial to transformations in the way threats were countered (cf. SKOOG, 2018, *passim*).

Another important legal statute was the ordinance of Skänninge (*Skänninge stadga*), promulgated four years later (1284). It further demonstrates that the followers of the domestic noblemen, the private hosts, were a vital military resource in Sweden at the time, one that the king feared and saw a need to restrict (HERMANSON, 2009, p. 153).

8 Cf. HELLE, 1964, pp. 101, 133-134 concerning Norway. In the 1270s, exemption from taxation was added to the compensation given the magnates for the further military services required since the new legal stipulations of 1273.

In this ordinance, the king stipulated a prohibition against *lønlek samband* – secret congregations, especially between magnates. It was also one instance in a series of stipulations that restricted the size of the host of mounted warriors a single nobleman (depending on his class) was allowed to have accompany him when he travelled throughout the realm (HILDEBRAND, 1983 [1884], pp. 648-649).⁹

Early in the next century, after the ignominious death of the rebellious dukes Erik and Valdemar, who had been imprisoned and starved to death by their brother King Birger Magnusson (r. 1290-1318), the nobility came together to depose Birger, and led a mobilization of representatives of the commoners of the realm (NORDBERG, 1995, pp. 24-26; SARTI, 2019, p. 585). The conflict between the dukes and their brother had involved the Norwegian and the Danish crown, and led to a situation wherein foreign policy and inter-Nordic alliances were inextricably tangled with civil war and internal affairs (WESTMAN, 1904, pp. 172-173). The political and military manoeuvring of Duke Erik Magnusson in hindsight appears to have had the aim of securing a power-base in an area between the central areas of Norway and Sweden, backed by the Norwegian king, who was the duke's father-in-law (CHRISTENSEN, 1980, p. 36). The Norwegian king, Haakon, attempted to use his connection with the Swedish duke to secure influence along the strategically valuable coast of Halland and Scania, but Duke Erik proved more adept at securing his own interests than the outlawed Danish noblemen whom the king of Norway had previously used to similar ends (BAGGE, 2010, pp. 97-100).

The call to arms at the brothers' death was sent out to all parts of the realm, and in a few cases *Erikskrönikan* give us the names of those noblemen who mobilized the commonalty in the various regions: Karl Elinesson in Småland, the lawspeaker Birger Persson in Uppland, and the future regent Matts Kettilmundsson in Västergötland (PIPPING, 1963, vv. 3982-3989; ROSÉN, 1939, pp. 305-306). These forces would be crucial to the outcome of the uprising, and point to the importance of mobilizing non-noble military personnel. When one side in a conflict was able to gather a fighting force through general mobilization, the opponent would seldom be able to muster a quantitatively equal force, and needed to respond by hiring elite forces, as Sverre Bagge has demonstrated for Norway (BAGGE, 2010, p. 81). This is a pattern that repeats itself in these conflicts.

In Sweden, kings regularly thanked the commonalty of certain regions for their support in military matters. Several examples of this are known from the thirteenth century, for instance Magnus Birgeresson's letter from 1280 to the inhabitants of the province of Hälsingland, wherein he asked them to forgive him the extraordinary taxes they had gracefully paid to support the crown in a time of war and devastation (SDHK, no. 1124). Again, though, Birger Magnusson's ability to withstand the insurrection initially was due to foreign involvement; the support of the Danish king, Erik Menved, helped make the struggle more equal when Birger's son returned with 600 conscripted Danish knights to challenge the rebels (ROSÉN, 1939, p. 295; SUNDBERG, 2010, p. 207).

Other scholars have noted the paramount importance of 'international' alliances during this period, and how 'combined forces' were essential to success (FAGERLAND, 2002, pp. 118-124). Not only that: inter-Scandinavian alliances were a fundamental aspect of the political culture of the period (*ibid.*; BAGGE, 2007). In the unsuccessful rebellion of the deposed Magnus Eriksson against the ruling king of Sweden, Albrecht (of Mecklenburg, r. 1364-1389), the Danish king supported the rebels, while German princes and the Hanseatic league sided with Albrecht. However, the outcome of the conflict was decided that time by internal forces. While peasant forces, unhappy with the local rule of Albrecht bailiffs, came together to assist in overthrowing him, Albrecht's ultimate backing by the Swedish aristocracy was tantamount to victory in the end, though it came at a high political price for the

9 HILDEBRAND argues that noblemen's followings were significantly larger in times of war.

king. By the end of the unsuccessful rebellion against King Albrecht, the king had to concede important duties to the Council of the Realm, thus imposing severe limitations on royal power (SDHK, no. 9987). He accepted a document (dated 9 August 1371) – a sort of ‘electoral capitulation’ or assurance¹⁰ – wherein were specified, for example, that the king should not choose his bailiffs or castellans with the aid of the council, but that the council should decide among men born in the realm, yet hearing the counsel of the king. Hereby his royal authority was severely limited and circumscribed (ROSÉN, 1962, pp. 220-221). This document vindicated the rights of the magnates or aristocracy as a co-governing entity in the Swedish Kingdom.

Conflicts, contribution, and collaboration of military actors in Castile

The general strategy in war in this period tended towards raids of destruction by smaller or larger forces, or prolonged sieges. This did not differ much whether the enemy was Christian or Muslim, external or internal, nor did it differ depending on which societal order was involved. «Warfare involved everyone: kings, nobles, clerics, Military Orders, and town militias», and so there were several distinct sectors of Castilian society which could be expected to wage war successfully (O’CALLAGHAN, 2002, p. 150; GARCÍA FITZ, 2007). This was significant for the development of internal conflicts and contentious politics in the form of insurrections or civil wars.

The nobility was geared towards warfare, its *raison d’être* in the Iberian Peninsula perhaps more than elsewhere (BERGQVIST, 2019, p. 624). It should not be ignored, however, that bishops, in the Iberian as well as in the Scandinavian context, had considerable military capacities. Whether or not they personally fought, they were part of the military leadership and machinery (GARCÍA FITZ, 2010, pp. 157-162; SKOOG, 2018, pp. 234-236).¹¹ The clerical elite was also part of the political elite. They were important members of the royal or regnal councils, in Castile as well as in Sweden.

The participation of towns and Military Orders in the political landscape was in large part dependent on the formation of formalized *hermandades*, oaths of brotherhood, from the thirteenth century onwards (SUÁREZ FERNÁNDEZ, 1951; O’CALLAGHAN, 2002, p. 128), though some scholars have seen the growing domination of the urban oligarchies towards the latter part of the Middle Ages as an end to more widely shared public authority in the Castilian towns. The Military Orders were also susceptible to similar transformations towards the end of the period. A significant development in twelfth and thirteenth-century Castile was the rise of other powers besides the landed nobility to political prominence. One of these was the urban elites. Castilian towns became an essential factor in military matters from the mid-twelfth century onwards. These municipalities were required by law – as set down in the *fueros* – to contribute militarily to the king’s exploits and summons to war (O’CALLAGHAN, 2002, pp. 128-129). They were obliged to contribute to the war effort for three months, according to the *Fuero Real* and the *Siete Partidas*. The *concejos* (councils) of the towns were often dominated by the group known as *caballeros villanos*, mounted soldiers who were exempt from royal taxes and with time came to emulate the nobility to a constantly higher degree. In Sweden, the relatively low military capacity of the towns – manned as they usually were by smaller garrisons – did not earn them a similar degree of autonomy, though some of them were an important factor in defensive operations (SKOOG, 2018, pp. 297-353).

¹⁰ Which in medieval Denmark was a frequently recurring phenomenon.

¹¹ Cf. ANDRÆ, 1960, pp. 161-171; for Denmark, see CHRISTENSEN, 1945, pp. 153-157.

1282 is a particularly poignant year in the history of Castile. In that year, *infante* Sancho is called to a meeting of the estates (an unofficial *Cortes*, as it were) in Valladolid (LINEHAN, 2008, pp. 185-190). It should be clear that the *Hermandad general*, just as the overall practice of forming *hermandades*, was influenced by the *Cortes*, or at least preconditioned by the existence practice of summoning *Cortes*. That representative institution was a relatively long-standing tradition of calling representatives among the ecclesiastics, nobility, and townsfolk to an assembly where they could directly engage in debate over essential and current political matters. The *Cortes* of Castile and León had origins in the royal council, the *curia regia*, but beginning in 1188 for León (*Cortes de León*) and 1250 for Castile (*Cortes de Sevilla*), the assemblies included not only prelates or noblemen, but also the good men (*hombres bonos* or *omnes buenos*), who were designated representatives of the municipalities (PROCTER, 1980). However, the *Cortes* were not a powerful institution as such, but a venue for the voicing of political discontent, mainly for the nobility but increasingly for other sectors in society. It held no autonomy to oppose the king, in fact it depended on him, but the practice of summoning *Cortes* must have contributed to the limiting of royal authority in so far as he depended on the acquiescence of the estates for certain decisions, e.g. in regards to extraordinary taxes (DOUBLEDAY, 2001, p. 109; WATTS, 2009, pp. 227-229). Similar developments of the representative assemblies – *herredagar*, later *riksdagar* – took place in the Swedish realm, though the delegates of the people in Sweden were never representatives of the towns, but rather of the commoners in the distinct regions or counties (*landskap*) (SCHÜCK, 2005). The basic idea here is of course that the people – the good men of the realm – should have a say in matters pertaining to all who inhabited the kingdom (*quod omnes tangit*, etc.), and that the noblemen had a right to speak their voice and have the king listen and take their advice into account (RAU et al., 2016, pp. 7-8).

In Castile, the Military Orders originally – during the late twelfth and first half of the thirteenth century – upheld a certain degree of autonomy and would thus have been an independent military power to reckon with. Kings would with time attempt to subsume the Orders into their organizational schemes and state mechanisms, attempting to win their loyalty as subjects of the crown (O'CALLAGHAN, 1980; AYALA MARTÍNEZ, 1991, pp. 457-465)¹². In the early fourteenth century, it is clear that the Military Orders had to a certain extent become an instrument of the crown, which could call upon them in conflicts both internal and external (AYALA MARTÍNEZ, 2002, pp. 37, 40-41; PLAZA PEDROCHE, 2018, p. 99). Yet they reserved the power to demand certain privileges in return. The reciprocity of the relationship is particularly evident in the pact of brotherhood (*hermandad*) entered into by the masters of the Orders of Santiago, Calatrava, and Alcántara in 1313 at Villanueva de la Sierra. The document states that they are as one, a single voice, come together in service of the king, Alfonso (XI), in defence of his lordship and territory (*señorío* and *tierra*) (NOVOA PORTELA, 2008, pp. 92-95). The next paragraph goes on to detail that the king – or the regent in his place – should defend and uphold their privileges and liberties, and the customs and law of the land: «que nos guarde, e mantenga nuestros privilegios, e libertades, e nuestros usos, e nuestras costumbres y los fueros de las nuestras tierras» (NOVOA PORTELA, 2008, apéndice, doc. 5, p. 93).

In the so-called rebellion of *infante* Sancho, who deposed his father and on dubious grounds claimed the crown and kingship for himself – in all but name – the collusion of several sectors of society was instrumental. The support of the nobility, whose military resources were not negligible, was crucial in this rebellion as well as in that of Enrique II in 1366-1369 (GAUTIER DALCHÉ, 1970-1971, p. 246; GONZÁLEZ MÍNGUEZ, 2009, p. 46). The involvement of the Military Orders not least has been indicated as another essential factor in the wresting of *de facto* royal power from the ageing Alfonso. The decision on the part of the Military Orders and their masters

12 On the Military Orders and their relationship to state powers, see also JOSSERAND, 2001.

was of utmost importance to the *infante*, and the documentary evidence attests to his willingness to grant favours to these Orders so as to enlist their support (GONZÁLEZ JIMÉNEZ, 2009, pp. 328–331). In theory, they could otherwise be expected to come to the king's aid against enemies outward and inward (CONEDERA, 2015, pp. 92–95). However, as we saw earlier, the Military Orders had a conflictual relationship with the monarchy, since there was a push towards autonomy and an attempt to defend their own interests first and foremost, in the face of any aggression or act of defiance. The Military Orders depended directly on papal support, institutionally and financially, and existed in a state of double loyalty due to their allegiance to the king as their natural lord (RODRÍGUEZ GARCÍA, 2014, p. 103). Later, the Military Orders would undergo a transformation that made them less monastic and more *seigneurial* in outlook and structure (*señorialización*). In this later period, kings began to view the Military Orders as part of the power-grubbing nobility.

Sancho was initially successful, despite the papacy siding with Alfonso, because he had militarily resourceful internal and external forces on his side (RODRÍGUEZ GARCÍA, 2014, p. 60–61). Examining the documentary evidence in the case of Sancho's revolt, this would suggest that the Military Orders were deemed the primary military resource not in direct service of the king. To sway their masters to his cause was crucial in creating a situation wherein the complete overtake of governmental responsibilities was possible.

Even though most towns sided with Sancho, some of them remained loyal to Alfonso, which contributed to bringing civil war to the kingdom (MARTÍNEZ, 2010, pp. 447–450). Sancho was also favoured by the neighbouring kings of Aragón and Portugal, a pattern that would be repeated in the case of rebellious tendencies within Castile during the minority of Sancho's son Fernando IV. In that case, the contribution of the neighbouring kingdoms took the form of direct military incursions (GONZÁLEZ MÍNGUEZ, 2008, pp. 347–348). It speaks most clearly to attempts by these kings to sway the balance of power between the kingdoms by using temporary political unrest and instability in Castile. In that regard, it is similar to the actions of the Danish and Norwegian kings in the Scandinavian context, during the thirteenth century (BAGGE, 2010, pp. 89–90).

One of the most important developments in this period that concerns us here, not just in Castile but in Aragon as well, was the regular occurrence of the *hermandades*. They had some ecclesiastical forerunners but coalesced around the time of the deposition of Alfonso X and the subsequent civil war in 1282–1284 (NIETO SORIA, 2008, p. 54). This *hermandad general* of 1282 would stand as a model for similar brotherhoods until 1325 (GONZÁLEZ MÍNGUEZ, 1991, p. 58). Though the target in that situation was the king's perceived misrule and malpractices in the context of law, taxation, and monetary policies, the *hermandades* would grow to become a vehicle of opposition not mainly against kings, but against noblemen (GONZÁLEZ MÍNGUEZ, 1991, pp. 54–55).

In Castile, the most advantageous period for these brotherhoods was the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, when they had a pivotal part to play in the conflictual politics of the time. In connection with Sancho's rebellion in 1282, the minority of Fernando IV (1295), and the minority of Alfonso XI (1312–1317), the monarchy was either weak or in dire need of support (FUENTES GANZO, 2008, p. 425; RUIZ, 2004, p. 150), and then key players would look to the towns and other military resources outside their own for aid. The minorities of these two kings were periods of great civil disorder and unrest, when struggles for the regency and local noble violence ravaged a society in crisis (RUIZ, 2007, pp. 37–41).

In 1366–1369, Castile was once again embroiled in civil war. The reigning king was Pedro I (r. 1350–1369), the son of Alfonso XI and María of Portugal, considered by many of his subjects to be a tyrant who called himself king («*aquel malo tirano que sse llamau Rey*», *CORTES*, 1863, pp. 2:147). The complaints and grievances against him were many: he persecuted the Church, undermined justice, disparaged customary liberties, and rejected the

Cortes (VALDEÓN BARUQUE, 2008, pp. 19-21). The bloody acts and political murders perpetrated by the king – including the executions of several half-brothers and his cousin Juan, whose dead body according to Pedro López de Ayala's account was defenestrated – were part of the «growing legend of Pedro's cruelty» (RUIZ, 2007, pp. 78-79; DEVIA, 2010). The illegitimate half-brother of King Pedro, Enrique de Trastámara, sought to depose his brother, seeking assistance among a coalition of magnates, and later gaining the support and military aid of the kings of France and Aragón, Charles V and Pere IV. The rebel Enrique would defend his uprising and claim to the title of king by referring to the voluntary election by representatives of all the estates: prelates, noblemen and knights, cities and towns (VALDEÓN BARUQUE, 2008, pp. 21-23). Here, the cooperation of all the estates of Castilian society became an ideological vehicle, justifying and legitimizing a military intervention against the hereditary king primarily by the efforts of foreign military elements, such as the companies commanded by Bertrand du Guesclin. These foreign forces were forced to confront an army of English under Edward the Black Prince, which despite initial success suffered heavy losses and withdrew from the war. After the defeat at Nájera and a brief French exile, Enrique returned by way of Aragón to Castile, and soon the Trastamarian camp included supporters among the high nobility and several important cities and towns: Valladolid, Palencia, Ávila, Segovia, etc. During this stage of the war, there were no pitched battles, rather siege warfare dominated, until the decisive battle at Montiel in 1369 (VALDEÓN BARUQUE, 2008, pp. 23-25). The progress of the Castilian civil war is reminiscent of the entanglement of international relations and internal power struggles in the Scandinavian Middle Ages. The importance of foreign military involvement can hardly be overstated, and again reminds us of the difficulty in separating categories such as civil war from larger international conflicts.

Conclusions

The backing of foreign powers (principally neighbouring kings) could certainly be a decisive factor in armed internal strife, in Castile as well as in Sweden. Their support might be a handing over of troops, but could also take other forms, sometimes aiding more to the legitimization efforts and international relations than practical military endeavours. Whether material or ideological, these alliances meant rebels could be fairly sure they would not be attacked by neighbouring kings during or following the military campaigns. The ability and capacity to secure the support of militarily resourceful groups was key to successful insurrections or victory in civil war. Who these groups were depended on the geographical context, since social dynamics and the distribution of military resources differed greatly.

So did legal principles, though there were many shared ideas between the most widely spaced areas of medieval Europe. Motivating and legitimating your actions, so that they appeared lawful and justified, was necessary in order to enlist support. In the Castilian case, the backing of foreign kings seems to have been more in the lines of tacit understanding, passive support, and perhaps to confer legitimacy on the rebellious endeavour in the 1280s, whereas in the 1360s the foreign military involvement was crucial to the outcome. Meanwhile, in the Swedish context the mobilization of troops necessary to succeed in defeating the king's party probably warranted external military support due to lack of professional domestic military personnel. The diversification of military capacities within the Castilian realm made this redundant in some cases. The study shows that international politics were an indispensable part of contentious domestic politics, and that when a general internal mobilization to oppose the king was not forthcoming, seeking aid from foreign princes or mercenary troops was a commonly recurring phenomenon.

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