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MONOGRÁFICO · SPECIAL ISSUE

THE LAST COUNCILLORS OF STATE
BEFORE THE DYNASTIC CHANGE (1699)

LOS ÚLTIMOS CONSEJEROS DE ESTADO
ANTES DEL CAMBIO DINÁSTICO (1699)

THE LAST COUNCILLORS OF STATE BEFORE THE DYNASTIC CHANGE (1699). INTRODUCTION

LOS ÚLTIMOS CONSEJEROS DE ESTADO ANTES DEL CAMBIO DINÁSTICO (1699). INTRODUCCIÓN

Rafaella Pilo¹ & Christopher Storrs²

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The idea of coordinating a collection of biographical essays about some of the men raised by Carlos II of Spain to his Council of State in late November 1699 arises out of our own recent researches³. The need to clarify the dynamics which led to those promotions (of a total of ten during 1699)⁴ and to understand whether they favoured individuals who were linked with a francophile «party» in Madrid and to what extent they actually benefited the French cause in Spain: these are the questions which have led us to focus on this subject⁵.

On 29 November 1699, Carlos II in a single elevation –the last of his reign– promoted nine new Councillors of State, one sixth of the total number of councillors appointed by the last Spanish Habsburg⁶. This was by no means the only multiple promotion of the reign –witness those of 15 January 1666 (8), 30 September 1674 (5), 10 August 1680 (7) and 26 June 1691 (7)⁷. Nor was it the largest single promotion ever made to that body, 13 councillors having been appointed by Philip IV on 18 April 1624⁸, but it was the largest single promotion made by Carlos II and sufficiently striking to both merit comment and divide opinion at the time and later. The imperial ambassador in Madrid, Count Harrach thought that all but two of the new councillors –Medinaceli and Santisteban– were not really deserving of their elevation⁹, although his view was clearly influenced by his assessment of its bearing

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 3. PILO, 2014: 487-94; PILO, 2016: 73-93; PILO, 2017, 107-24; STORRS, 2012: 21-53; STORRS, 2015: 273-93; STORRS, 2018: 17-37; STORRS, 2018: 217-49.
 4. BARRIOS, 1984: 169, pp. 403-408.
 5. The same question is approached, but from a rather different direction, by RIBOT GARCÍA, 2010.
 6. RIBOT GARCÍA, 1994: 135; FERNÁNDEZ NADAL, 2009: 69 (citing Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid, Estado, legajo 248, expediente 29 for the decree appointing the new councillors). Christopher Storrs and Rafaella Pilo thank Carmen Fernández for very kindly providing them both with a copy of this invaluable study.
 7. Calculations based on list of appointments to Council of State in BARRIOS, 1984: 384-403.
 8. ELLIOTT, 1986: 34.
 9. Harrach to Emperor, no date but after 29 Nov 1699, in PRINCIPE ADALBERTO de BAVIERA and GABRIEL MAURA GAMAZO, 2004: II, 1128-30.

upon the resolution of the Spanish succession issue which was then exercising monarchs and ministers throughout Europe. Appointment to the Council of State was a royal prerogative¹⁰, but Harrach and many others saw the multiple promotion as the work not of the king himself but of Carlos II's second consort, Mariana of Neuburg, and one which reflected the triumph of her faction at Court¹¹.

Earlier, in November 1698 Carlos II had drawn up a second will, modifying that which he had prepared two years before in September 1696, after consulting the Council of State. According to the later will, Spain and the entire Monarchy would pass, should Carlos die without children, to the young Electoral Prince of Bavaria, José Fernando. In some respects this coincided with the efforts of Louis XIV and William III to resolve the problem of the Spanish succession without war, except that their solution –embodied in the partition treaty of October 1698– had threatened the integrity of the Monarchy, which Carlos's second will did not. Unfortunately, however, in February 1699, the designated main beneficiary of both projects died¹². Subsequently, in June 1700, and following the conclusion after lengthy negotiations of William III and Louis XIV's second partition treaty in March of that year, the Council of State advised the king to entrust the Monarchy to Louis XIV's grandson, Philip of Anjou¹³. After consulting Pope Innocent X, who also supported the French solution, Carlos II decided to follow the advice of the Council of State in his third and final will of October 1700¹⁴. But why did this leading organ of the Monarchy so emphatically endorse the French candidate? The present collection of essays seeks to throw some light on this crucial development.

According to Gabriel Maura Gamazo, Duke of Maura, whose studies of the reign of Carlos II remain influential¹⁵, the francophile element within the Council of State had been deliberately reinforced by Mariana of Neuburg following the death of the Electoral Prince of Bavaria and the so-called «Oropesa riots» which erupted in Madrid in the spring of 1699. Mariana's influence seemed to be reviving thereafter and –increasingly alienated from the Court of Vienna– she exploited her opportunity with the clear and evident intention to reinforce her own «party» or faction. Seen in this light the appointment of so many councillors of state in November 1699 appeared to strengthen a francophile tendency that had been cultivated, not without difficulty, since the 1680s, thanks to the diplomatic efforts of Louis XIV's ambassadors in Madrid¹⁶.

However, it remains unclear whether these individuals were in fact pro-French, and thus part of the attempt to construct «protection networks» which were

10. VON KALNEIN, 2001: 74-5.

11. Schonenberg to Stanhope, Madrid, 12 Nov. 1699, en LORD MAHON, 1844: 196-7; Operti to duke of Savoy («Altezza Reale»), Madrid, 3 Sept. and 26 Nov. 1699, Archivio di Stato, Turin/Lettere Ministri/Spagna [hereafter AST/ LM/ Spagna], m. 43 and m. 45.

12. RIBOT, 1994: 145-55; BÉLY, 2015: 259-272, and pp. 266-267.

13. LEGRELLE, 1895 (2nd edition; original edition: 1888-1892, 4 vols.), to be found in <<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k3777372/f1.image>>, consulted on May 10th 2018.

14. BÉLY, 2015: 270.

15. RIBOT, 2016: 91-107.

16. MAURA, *Vida y reinado de Carlos II*, 2 vol., Espasa-Calpe, 2nd ed. Madrid, 1954, vol. II: 321 and following.

intended to achieve the desired dynastic change, or whether on the contrary those councillors in fact had no concrete bond with or commitment to the French «party»¹⁷. This is the principal reason why outlining the career *itinerata* of some of the ministers designated in 1699 seems to us not only interesting but important: our intention is that these political biographies, should function as a useful interpretative tool, especially if we consider that, unfortunately, this biographical approach or method represents one of the great lacunae in the historiography of this period¹⁸.

The collection opens with Luis Ribot's essay on the Duke of Santisteban del Puerto, a study of the long, and primarily Italian career path which transformed the Duke into an expert Minister; as for Cinzia Cremonini's essay, it reconstructs the dynamics which led the Prince de Vaudemont, a character with a pronounced European connection –close to the Almirante of Castile in Spain itself and to William III in terms of foreign policy– to the council of State. David Martín Marcos, in treating of the Duke of Medinaceli focuses on his undisputed loyalty –later demonstrated during the Macchia conspiracy, in this way identifying the key quality which justified his nomination to the Council of State; Rocío Martínez López studies the case of Pedro Manuel Colón de Portugal, Duke of Veragua, promoted Councilor because of his deep knowledge of Italy and its politics, but also in consequence of his flexibility and his powerful family connections. The collection concludes with Roberto Quirós Rosado's essay on Francesco del Giudice, the only ecclesiastic among the councillors promoted in 1699, in a piece which reveals the various stages in his career and the sometimes contradictory choices which characterized his political biography.

One important common thread that emerges from the collection –others will become apparent– is what we might call the crucial «matter of Italy»; it is very apparent that a deep knowledge and understanding of Italian politics and policy was regarded as an essential element for the identification and pursuit of an effective domestic and foreign policy, one able to withstand the blows sustained at the hands of a vigorous French hegemonic power in Europe.

In order to appreciate the significance of the contributions which follow we need to remind ourselves of the role and the importance of the council of State. That body was, as Philip IV had made clear as recently as 1662, the premier Council in a well-established and mature system of polysynody which was a distinctive feature of the government and politics of late Habsburg Spain, its pre-eminence due to the fact that it dealt with the most serious matters of state¹⁹. It existed to advise the King on the gravest issues affecting Spain and the wider Monarchy: war, peace –and by 1699 the succession– enjoying a central role in policymaking

17. On the «protection networks» intended to secure the succession, see PILO, 2014: 481-482. See also RIBOT, 2010: passim.

18. In the congress «*Quadri d'insieme. La storiografia italiana negli ultimi vent'anni (secoli XV-XVIII)*» held in Cagliari in September 2016, Marcello Verga, while acknowledging the real differences between the early modern world and contemporary public debate, suggested the «biographical way» as a possible solution to current demands for a «public history». Fortunately, in Spain, this lacuna is now being made good with the Real Academia de la Historia's *Diccionario Biográfico Español*.

19. Royal order, 26 June 1662, in BARRIOS, 1984: 529.

throughout the seventeenth century²⁰. The almost unique role of the Council of State in articulating and co-ordinating policy and strategy across the global Spanish empire needs to be stressed in the light of some of the more recent writing about the Spanish Monarchy, a historiography which encourages us to downplay the role of the council. In recent decades the idea that –as professor Elliott expressed it so well some decades ago– the Spanish empire was a «composite state» (rather than a monolithic empire of the sort familiar to historians of nineteenth and twentieth century empires) has been developed further by historians for whom the Monarchy was something arguably even looser, what some call a «polycentric monarchy» – almost a confederation or alliance of virtually independent polities, and alliance of elites, with little by way of effective central, institutional coherence, apart perhaps from the Habsburg dynasty²¹. Clearly, there is much to be said for this insight, which has underpinned much invaluable research on the more informal, non-institutional ways this polity functioned, and on the way local concerns might have to be taken into consideration by policy makers. Thus in the summer of 1696, towards the close of the War of the League of Augsburg or Nine Years War (1688-97) the Marquis of Leganés, Governor of Milan was obliged to agree to the neutrality of Italy (which was the work of Carlos II's erstwhile ally, Victor Amadeus II, Duke of Savoy, and his new ally Louis XIV of France, but which was opposed by William III); this followed pressure to accept the offered neutrality from the Milanese elites who feared a Franco-Savoyard conquest of the duchy²².

However, this research, its assumptions and conclusions also poses the problem of just how this global polity was co-ordinated. In order to answer this, as Cinzia Cremonini suggests in a very insightful comment in her essay, we need to revisit the entire system of councils and more particularly the role of the Council of State, with its co-ordinating political and strategic function. More than any other body in the Monarchy, the Council of State, which comprised men who were not narrowly or simply Castilian or even Spanish (whatever that meant in 1699), had to and did take a global view of the challenges facing the Monarchy, and co-ordinated the other councils in seeking to meet those challenges. It is very clear, for example from Luis Ribot's splendid study of the revolt of Messina (1674-1678) that to understand its course –and not least its failure– we must consider the role of the Council of State in overseeing the response of the Monarchy²³.

The Council of State played much the same role in the Nine Years War, which ended barely two years before the mass elevation of 1699. In 1690, for example, the Council discussed how best to deploy the galleys –those not only of Spain itself but also of Naples, Sicily and Sardinia– in the Mediterranean²⁴, and in 1693 debated whether the Monarchy should continue fighting or make peace with Louis XIV.

20. WILLIAMS, 2006: 123.

21. CARDIM, HERZOG, RUÍZ IBÁÑEZ, and SABATINI, 2012; HERRERO SÁNCHEZ, 2017: 17-89.

22. Earl of Galway to lord Lexington, Vigevano, 28 Sept. – 8 Oct. 1696, in MANNERS SUTTON, 1851: 221-2.

23. RIBOT, 2002. In 1676 the council of state insisted on the appointment of a Councillor of State to the junta de armadas for precisely this reason, consulta of council of State, 18 Jan 1676, Archivo General de Simancas, Estado [hereafter AGS/E/], 2702, in BARRIOS, 1984: 633-4.

24. STORRS, 1998: 12-13.

Throughout that same conflict the Council of State co-ordinated the diversion of resources –money, men, grain– from Naples, Sicily and Sardinia towards Milan and for the benefit of the Duke of Savoy²⁵. In 1699 and 1700, following the conclusion of the Nine Years War, the Council of State oversaw the Monarchy’s response –i.e. the activities of the councils of War and the Indies– to the Moorish attack on Ceuta in north Africa and that of the Scots in central America. The Council of State, was also consulted on key political, military and other appointments²⁶.

The distinctive role of the Council of State is perhaps the reason that it differed in composition from most other councils. Whereas those other councils –Aragon, Castille, Flanders, Italy, War, Finance and so on– might include títulos and grandes (in the role of president or governor), they were largely staffed by letrados, those trained in law, whereas the Council of State was the preserve of the titled nobility. This provides us with an opportunity –much needed– to rethink the role and capacity of Spain’s governing elite, and more specifically that of the títulos and grandes. This relatively small group –although growing in size in the later seventeenth century²⁷– has been largely dismissed by an almost uniformly negative historiography. The Spain of Carlos II it has been argued –drawing on the observations of Spaniards and foreigners²⁸– was one in which the combination of a weak King (Carlos II, as minor and adult) and the legacy of the effective alienation of resources and authority by previous monarchs meant that Spain was in effect an aristocratic republic²⁹. Not only that, but the aristocrats into whose hands power fell were aggressive, arrogant and, selfish, and intent only on an unseemly struggle for power in order to secure the rewards of office –mercedes of all sorts– which many needed in view of their economically straitened circumstances³⁰. The political struggle it is generally assumed, was hardly informed by principle or a concern for the public good, while many of those caught up in it were hardly capable, at a time when the hard pressed Monarchy most needed able, public spirited men to run it. Some historians seem to look forward to the títulos and grandes receiving a well-deserved come-uppance under the first Bourbon³¹.

This image is too negative, and sometimes borders on caricature. Some individuals no doubt conformed to the stereotype but not all, while some of the supposed evidence must be read critically: the English envoy, Stanhope, extracts from whose correspondence are easily available in print, was in many respects prejudiced against Spain and its ruling elite, although even he acknowledged on one occasion in 1692 that the Almirante (father of the Almirante promoted in

25. Consulta of Council of State, 8 Sept. 1694, AGS/E/3656/4.

26. Operti to marquis de Saint Thomas, Madrid, 2 Sept. 1700, AST/ LM/ Spagna, ms. 43 and ms. 45.

27. FELICES de la FUENTE, 2012: 134.

28. See Stanhope to Nottingham, Madrid, 22 May 1691, SP 94/ 73 f. 32, cited by KAMEN, 1980: 226. The occasion for this widely cited comment was a problem created by the count of Oñate’s control of the Spanish Post Office. For a more striking example of grandee power, cf. the role of the duke of Aveiro in forcing the fall of Oropesa, outlined in Stanhope to Nottingham, Madrid, 7 June 1691, SP 94/ 73 f. 42.

29. THOMPSON, 1990: 69-98; KAMEN, 1980: 247-9.

30. KAMEN, 1980: 226-59; GONZÁLEZ MEZQUITA, 2007.

31. KAMEN, 1980: 254.

1699) while arrogant initially changed his manner subsequently, while Aguilar was not at all haughty³². Certainly, most of the titled nobles and grandees, including the nine elevated in 1699 were ambitious for themselves and their families (or houses) –as most politicians were in other countries, for example those Carlos II's contemporary and ally, William III had to deal with in England as he oversaw England's re-emergence as a major European power in the 1690s³³. Certainly, too, political antagonisms might parallel and inform rivalry over office and more, witness Leganes's long struggle with Medina Sidonia over the office of Treasurer General of Aragon³⁴. But that does not mean that they were not able, with a clear knowledge and grasp of what was best for the Spanish Monarchy. Indeed, as has already been made clear, most of Councilors appointed in 1699 –like their predecessors– were men of wide experience, experience which they brought to bear to good effect in the Council of State. Reading the consultas of the Council of State before and after 1699 one is struck less by the occasional selfish factiousness than by a sense of able, intelligent men grappling with serious challenges to the Monarchy and suggesting a variety of plausible, reasonable solutions to those problems. In the debates in the Council of State in 1690, for example, on how best to deploy the galleys in the light of intelligence reports about enemy movements and plans, the various councillors differed but their positions were well-founded and rationally articulated³⁵. Many of the other issues –and resulting consultas– dealt with by the council of state were relatively uncontentious. As for the ability and experience of the councillors of state, the biographical essays which follow suggest that the men who were promoted in November 1699 had a wealth of relevant experience to draw on, that they did so and demonstrated what we might recognize as a very pragmatic concern for the public good, the good of the Monarchy.

32. Stanhope to Nottingham, Madrid, 4 June 1692, SP 94/ 73 f. 63.

33. KENYON, 1958: 240-300.

34. Operti to duke of Savoy, Madrid, 12 Nov. 1699, AST/LM/Spagna, ms. 43 and 45.

35. STORRS, 1998: 12-13.

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