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**Joaquim Albareda, Manuel Herrero Sánchez (ed.),
Political Representation in the Ancien Régime, New
York, London (Routledge) 2018, X–331 p., 5 fig., 3 tabl.
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While Hasso Hofmann's seminal study on »representation« is referenced several times, this volume contains little legal-historical or legal-philosophical material on that concept. Indeed, some of the best contributions effectively argue that the very demise and end of what is commonly – and what many jurists in the past – understood to be important tools of »representation«, such as the Castile Cortes, »did not eliminate representation of the kingdom; it merely changed the scenario in which it manifested itself« (Fortea Perez, p. 280). Direct negotiations with cities »modified the mode, but not the substance of the negotiations between the kingdom and the king« (Bernardo Ares, p. 286).

Let us consider this finding carefully: Past Canon and Civil Law jurists would have been stunned to hear that the end of more general estates and the changing of negotiations to those between the king and his council on the one hand and individual cities, families or other smaller units on the other was just a »change of scenario«. But indeed, any early modern European monarchy needed to keep communicating and negotiating. No royal bureaucracy in the early modern period could replace those processes.

What has happened in this volume is that highly problematic assumptions about the nature of »absolute monarchy« as a kind of one-man-show with some royal bureaucracy attached have once again been taken at face value to then find that, indeed, *no* early modern monarchy could do without massive local and regional support. Indeed, all monarchies, whatever their constitutional premises, needed to recruit that support not least via myriad ways of negotiations. If that communication and negotiation is (once again) translated into »participation«, however uneven, and this kind of »participation« »into republicanism«, then indeed Castile is turned into »a veritable monarchy of urban republics« (Sanchez, p. 320). The alleged dichotomy between (English and Dutch) »republicanism« and French and Spanish »absolutism« may have been refuted, but at the cost of entirely watering down any meaning »representation« may have had as a research concept. This very line of criticism was of course already levelled against the two volumes of Quentin Skinner and Martin van Gelderen¹



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¹ Martin van Gelderen, Quentin Skinner (ed.), Republicanism. Volume 1:
Republicanism and Constitutionalism in Early Modern Europe; Volume 2:

on »republicanism«. Don't take me wrong: In the most recent contribution of John Morrill, myself and ten other scholars on monarchy and elites² neither »representation« nor »republicanism« are the analytical vantage points. Albareda's and Sanchez' volume has its important value not because it enlightens us about »representation«, but in many essays we learn indirectly of how little use any general concept of »representation« as an analytical starting point really is, whatever past jurists and theologians may have theorized.

For one, the functioning liberal-democratic-parliamentary regimes surviving in Europe until the year of the Berlin Olympiad in 1936 (Czechoslovakia, Switzerland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Britain, the Netherlands) had hardly many common characteristics during the Early Modern period, at least not in terms of »representative assemblies«. The revival of parliamentary regimes after 1945 came with the victory of Britain and the U.S. in (Western-) Europe in World War II and then with victory, for all accounts and purposes, in the Cold War. But the Dutch, the British, the Swiss among some others can nevertheless claim the survival and strength of general estates into the 18th and 19th century and some continuity of modern parliamentarism and constitutionalism from there. None of that of course changes the fact that the sheer pluriformity of what has been dubbed »republican« during the early modern period defies any common denominator whatsoever, apart from not being hereditary monarchical. Neither »absolutism« nor »republicanism«, thus, in current usage, as in this volume, have a clearly identifiable substance. 'Representation' was a source term in the past and had a number of meanings. But these meanings were not necessarily the basis for the influence of elites on the politics of the monarchy.

The present volume is thus neither about »Political Representation in the Ancien Regime« (»representatio« was meant to be a legal term, primarily, anyway) – just about one third of the volume deals with scattered and rather unconnected examples from France, Scotland, German Imperial cities and Genoa – nor about this new series' alleged goals of »worlds of knowledge«. It does however on about 200 pages mainly detailed classic political and institutional histories of the communication between crown and subjected people in Aragon and Castile, sometimes by what is partly and often misleadingly understood to be representative assemblies, partly by other means. For the reader who reads Spanish but finds it tough going these are very helpful chapters. The purchase of the book is thus strongly suggested. There are not too many examples of English translations of Spanish scholarship. And the reading of this scholarship is of course indispensable. (The wonderful volumes from the Fundacion Carlos de Amberes for example are, of course, in Spanish.)



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²The Values of Republicanism in Early Modern Europe: A Shared European Heritage, Cambridge 2002.

² Robert von Friedeburg, John Morrill (eds.), Monarchy Transformed. Princes and Their Elites in Early Modern Western Europe, Cambridge 2017.



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Wim Blockmans helpful introductory hints that the strength of a given dynasty and the economy of scale of a given monarchy are important issues to consider when understanding modes of communication (and not necessarily of theories of representation) are followed nowhere in the volume: Marin's account of »representation« in the kingdom of Sardinia has not a line to consider the economy of scale and the effect of geography on the Island for understanding the politics of this polity.

Gilbert Larguier, Marie-Laure Legay and Antoine Follain give more or less helpful basic introductions to the estates in Languedoc, in other French provinces and in villages. Carlo Bitossi, Thomas Weller and John R. Young venture into Genoa, German Imperial Cities and Scotland. Really helpful as political and constitutional introduction are the contributions of Tomàs de Montagut, Gregorio Tomàs Latorre, Carmen Pérez Aparicio, Luiss Guia Marin, Joaquim Albareda, Josep Capdeferro, Eduard Marti, José Ignacio Perez, José Manuel de Bernardo Area and Susana Truchuelo on the Crowns of Aragon and Castile and the various estates in the kingdoms and principalities associated with them. Many of the contributions indirectly confirm any number of older stereotypes about why, in particular under the pressure of war, early modern assemblies had a hard time. The case study of Genoa explicitly states the problems of factions and the shaping of city politics by outside powers (p. 95–98). Some other essays make stunning statements, such as Capdeferro on Catalonia about its »political culture of King-in-Parliament [...] going back to the early Middle Ages« (p. 231).

Again, anyone wishing to include the all-important Spanish monarchy into teaching will want to have these essays in the English language at hand, because there are not many English translations of Spanish scholarship. Also, the attack by Sanchez in his concluding chapter on the incredible simplistic dichotomic model of Ann Catherine Isaacs and Maarten Prak is fully justified (Sanchez p. 319–320): Still in 1996, Isaacs and Prak had sorted cities and urban economies into a republican side and agriculture into a monarchical side of governments. They had somehow overlooked the vibrant urban scenes of the kingdom of France (Marseille, Bordeaux, Lyon, Toulouse) and of the Spanish Monarchy (Barcelona, Sevilla, Malaga: both monarchies were of course so much larger than for example the Dutch Republic that the quantitative weight of rural inhabitants and agriculture in comparison to the Dutch republic prove little).

This volume thus provides both, very useful information on various Spanish principalities, not least for teaching purposes, but also lots of food for thought. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion, however, that the »magic concepts« of »republicanism« and »representation«, while they motivated studies that taught us so much, have run their course of time.



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