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'Unions et germanies' Armed Mobilisation, Plebeian Politicisation and Historical Memory in the Kingdom of Valencia (Fourteenth-Seventeenth Centuries)

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Abstract

Although the 'Unions et germanies' were forbidden, popular movements arose in the Kingdom of Valencia that expressed themselves mainly through judicial means, but sometimes also resorted to arms. Analysis of the actors' capacity for agency is therefore complex. In particular, the *Germania* (1519-1522) revalued the participation of the urban majorities in public affairs, based on the armed and legal mobilisation of the city's artisans. Other grievances throughout the Kingdom of Valencia strengthened the movement. The conflict was radicalised, giving rise to armed actions against privilege that redefined its trajectory. The classist writings of the chroniclers repudiated this collective violence. The adoption of rational choices to achieve objectives reveals the political subjectivity created by the war, which marked the memory of the commoners. A widespread resistance kept alive their banners, which became the cultural substratum of later struggles. The essay rescues the forms assumed by plebeian political identities in the sixteenth-century conflict, inscribing them in the cycle of collective action that began with the Union (1347-1348) and ended with the *Second Germania* (1693), also comparing the potentialities of these dissimilar experiences.

Keywords: Commoners, Conflicts, *Germania*, Militias, Politicisation

Medieval and early modern Western Europe experienced a wide variety of revolts. All of them were firmly defeated and punished, but some, because of their qualities, survived the oblivion to which they were condemned by chroniclers and apologists of the victors. This article focuses on the politicisation of the subalterns in the context of these disruptive actions. It takes as its object of study the forms, practices and languages through which alternative constructions of power were expressed. Furthermore, it revolves around the continuity of traditions of struggle that transcended

the barriers of time; the memory that the subalterns held about the political forms that emerged during past conflicts, their functions in the face of new challenges and their legacies for the future. In particular, the history of the Kingdom of Valencia was marked by persistent levels of conflict, which can be revealed by following the traces of several experiences of armed mobilisation that took place between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries. These conflicts were called ‘unions’ or ‘germanies’ by the bodies of power that ultimately incorporated them into the list of violent and criminal associations forbidden by the legal codes. In the face of this condemnation, the reconstruction of the complete cycle of collective action re-signifies the importance of each struggle and its political qualities.

1. *Historical Memory and the Politicisation of the Commoners*

Like puzzle pieces, similar but always different, each collective manifestation retains a particular singularity. However, in an analysis covering a long period of time it is necessary to define common aspects that allow for a global approach. First, we start from the consideration of the subject as the protagonist of actions. We define the subject, in a broad sense, as a subaltern actor in terms of the unequal distribution of power in the societies of its times, but with profound differences within this group in terms of levels of wealth, status and social integration. The commoners were the non-privileged participants in the conflicts of the time, mostly against the patricians; but also, from a political perspective, we understand the plebeian question as a quality, as a limit to existing powers, as potential resistance (Foucault 2019) due to the disruptive potential of the commoners to change the public scene.



Figure 1 – Effects of *bad government in the countryside* (detail), Ambrogio Lorenzetti, Palazzo Pubblico in Siena, 1338-1340 (License Creative Commons CCO)

This quality was built on the experience of mobilisation and lies at the origin of action as a collective reworking, in which cultural models, forms of behaviour and the moral assumptions that feed them play a key role (Thompson 1995). Collective practices are the result of the interaction between lived experiences and inherited traditions. In this universe, 'cultural repertoires' define the set of means available to a group to express its claims, as the expressive patterns of the sector that develops an action, making the challenge visible. It is a collective reworking of ideas, traditions, languages, symbols and values that enables a group to identify itself as such. This reworking presupposes the rationality of the collective actor in the selection of responses that cannot be viewed as deviant behaviour or as the product of manipulation by external agents. On the contrary, every social movement implies a rational action based on a strategic approach that is interpreted from a political perspective, as it constitutes a collective challenge that is constructed by taking advantage of opportunities that allow for dissent, is inserted into confrontation and gives rise to identity constructions (Lorenzo Cadarso 2001).

From this perspective, social conflict acquires a political character, as groups organise themselves in defence of common interests and their practices lead to public transformations (Tilly 1995). Power relations take on particular meanings as they constitute a field of opposition to the regime, based on the attitudes and behaviours of the mobilised groups. The insurrectional society is characterised by an ideological radicalisation and a broadening of the public sphere that allows for an experience of political activation that gives rise to new identities. This interpretation gives value to what generates the conflict in terms of its development (Benigno 2000). Thus, instead of emphasising pre-existing grievances or conditions of possibility, we focused on the phenomena of the politicisation of the subaltern classes, on manifestations and practices that sought to give them expression and create feelings of belonging (Burstin 2005; Oliva Herrer 2018).

These actions mostly adopted violent languages, understood as those that subvert the norms of behaviour that govern societies. Violence appeared as an instrument of struggle through organised and directed actions to achieve specific objectives according to determined ends (Majo Tomé 2013). The instrumental character of violence is mainly observed in war. As a collective practice in different historical experiences throughout the Hispanic world, this violence created a political subjectivity, outlining a potentially dangerous identity for the social order that could be constituted as a coherent subject for action (Martínez 2019). Alongside these violent forms, historical sources have recorded the emergence, during the conflicts, of counter-cultural elements, carnivalesque and festive manifestations that hark back to the comic universe of Rabelais (Bakhtin 1987), and which sought to challenge the dominant social values. The interpretation of the commoners' symbolic and violent practices must consider their complex interaction with the presence of the invisible and objective violence that structures the social whole (Žižek 2010).

The emphasis on challenging actions requires a dynamic consideration of conflict. To this end, we follow Clausewitz's reflections. He understood war as a 'continuation of politics using other means', as a 'political act'; thus, it finds its logic in the power relations established by insurrection and its *raison d'être* in the dialectic of confrontation (2007, 48)¹. Such a proposal breaks with the conception of politics as consensus. On the contrary, every conflict 'will be all the more political the closer it approaches the extreme point of constituting a kind of friend-enemy grouping' (Schmitt 1998, 17). Politics is rupture and disagreement; it exists 'when the natural order of domination is interrupted by the institution of a part of those who have no part' (Rancière 1996, 25). This perspective gives centrality to antagonism, which is based on a field polarised by

¹ Unless otherwise stated, all translations are mine.

the necessary relationship between revolutionary and counter-revolutionary forces. Within this dialectic interplay, processes of radicalisation, which are intended to disrupt existing political relations, become important (Mayer 2002; Benigno 2020). The significance of a conflict thus lies in the level of ‘political potentiality’ achieved in terms of disruption. This assessment becomes comprehensible in a long-term analysis that retrospectively conceives each moment of rupture as yet another piece of one single conflict. Such an approach makes it possible to reconstruct traditions of struggle on the basis of the memory of the subalterns. Shared memory, transmitted and socially constructed knowledge, is not developed by official instances, nor does it coincide with the registers of power. It is revealed in the conversion of political forms created during past conflicts and transformed into starting points and cultural repertoires of later collective actions, as was the case of the *Germania* (1519-1522) in the Kingdom of Valencia.²

2. *The Germania and the Emboldenment of the Commoners*

As an expression of the first crisis of the feudal system, the *Germania* of Valencia was one of a series of late medieval European conflicts: the Foránea revolt in Majorca (1450), the Catalan War of the Remences (1462-1486), the Irmandiños in Galicia (1467-1469), the Cornish rebellion (1497), the Udine carnival in Italy (1511), the Hungarian peasant uprising (1514), the Castilian Comunidades (1520-1521), the Peasants’ War (1525) in Germany and the Pilgrimage of the Grace in England (1536-1537), among others. In the Hispanic Monarchy, the political opportunity for collective action opened with the death of Ferdinand the Catholic in 1516. His reign was characterised by royal interventionism, and his death had an undeniable impact on the Crown of Aragon, as well as the dynastic crisis provoked by the rise to power of Charles V (García Cárcel 1975; Terol i Reig 2000). The *Germania* conflict was a consequence of difficulties deriving from the economic growth of the fifteenth century, the so-called Golden Age: generalised indebtedness, particularly of the municipal treasury; growing feudalisation due to the offensive of a ‘belligerent nobility’ and alienations of the royal patrimony; and royal interference and the oligarchisation of the representative bodies in decision-making, as opposed to the majority social weight of the urban trades. Political exclusion and marginalisation, as well as the arbitrariness of judicial and fiscal systems, constituted the collective grievances that fed the *Germania* in the capital city of the Kingdom of Valencia (Belenguer Cebrià 2001).

The starting point for the building of the *Germania* was the local authorities’ call for the formation of an armed militia in 1519 to defend the coast from the Barbary-Turkish threat during the political crisis. The result was an enlistment of the guilds, and ‘the city was left with the commoners alone, and these were licensed and commanded to assemble and elect captains and other officers of war, and to make other preparations of arms and things pertaining to war’ (Viciàna 2005, 16). The *adehenament*³ was the origin of the armed *Germania*, providing a first framework of military organisation. In the kingdom, ruling oligarchies either allowed or hindered compliance with compulsory military enlistment, and different positions influenced the trajectories followed by local militias. Defensive mobilisation became an element of political resistance, as the ‘people in arms’ began rethinking the conditions of existence with the constitution of the *Germania* (Pardo Molero 2001; Pérez García 2017). Its governing body, ‘the Board of the Thirteen Syndics of the People’, assumed the democratic representation of the

² Place names are given in Valencian, therefore the kingdom is denoted as ‘Valencia’, while ‘València’ refers to the city.

³ The *adehenament* is the call to military formation in groups of ten men.

unrepresented. It adopted a program against the nobility and in defence of the Royal Patrimony with measures of fiscal restructuring, public debt reduction, judicial equity and, above all, the widening of participation through the strengthening of the *Consell General* with the integration of artisans and artists as jurors. As a result of its success, the *Germania* spread throughout the kingdom due to a deliberate policy on the part of the trustees, as well as a spontaneous process of support, based on royal permission, not only for arms, but also for the movement itself (Vallés Borràs 2000). There was also regional solidarity from the towns and cities belonging to the crown, but also from the manorial towns that were trying to get reintegrated into the royal domain. Between 1520 and 1521, the movement reached its greatest extent, affecting the towns of Xàtiva, Alzira, Oriola, Ontinyent, Biar, Alcoi, Elx, Sagunt, Alacant and Albaida. Each of these territorial struggles had their own motivations, which converged with the capital's struggle (Pérez García 2021; 2022).



Figure 2 – First map of the *Regne de València*, Abraham Ortelius, 1568, (E)mancipa-Ment, Cullera-València (License Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0)

The increase in their numbers and demands coexisted with a process of gradual radicalisation between June 1520 and June 1521, due to the dialectical interaction with the reactionary forces that resisted the new political scenario. In this spiral, the questioning of the seigniorial regime led to attacks on property and the tearing down of gallows and jurisdictional symbols. In the meantime, preparations for repression began. The territorial nobility, who feared for their interests, opted for a military solution to end the conflict, obtaining the king's imposition of a viceregal authority favourable to their cause and, finally, the criminalisation of the *Germania*. The abolition of taxes through direct action in Valencia played a central role in the political turnaround. This sequence and the concurrence with the struggles in the rest of the kingdom deepened the antagonism between 'wolves and lambs'. The latter came from the guilds, the

rural lands and the middle classes (notaries, artists and merchants) along with some members of the clergy. Opposed to the lambs were the nobles, owners of jurisdictional lordships and knights who monopolised municipal power in the capital. In the kingdom, some oligarchies discretely backed the revolt, based on pre-existing disputes with seignorial interests. This social division between privileged and non-privileged sectors generated differences within the movement. Some of its members adopted and pushed for more radicalised positions. The individual, guild or jurisdictional motivations in the different local Germanies fed this joint commitment on the part of what Fuster called ‘captains of the *avalots* [riots] and of the war’ (1992, 31, my italics). This ‘plebeian quality’ was developed by the conflict itself, and the raising of war banners acted as a turning point. The majority of the movement’s members carried out military actions between June 1521 and December 1522, while a group with more moderate objectives began negotiations to avoid the punishment that was imposed from October 1521 onwards.

In this trajectory, the plebeian warriors adopted different fighting methods, with selective violence directed at certain targets according to their own ends, constantly redefined by confrontation with enemy forces. Throughout the process of radicalisation and by means of *avalots*, parades and direct action, the movement controlled the political scene, but, at the same time, exerted pressure to deepen the course of the insurrection. When the war began, the movement deployed a military and political offensive against the enemies of the *Germania* that changed its composition, its rank and file and its leadership, acquiring a revolutionary identity. Finally, as a result of military defeats, surrenders and the advance of repressive forces, the movement held out in the loyalist royal cities. There were attempts to revive the movement, with fleeting incursions, which succeeded in sabotaging control of the kingdom for several years. During the unfolding of these struggles, activism fuelled the politicisation of the subalterns through identity building, political practices and cultural expression. This politicisation was the result of the experience of armed mobilisation itself, the methods and meanings of which gradually changed. It was born out of the militia ideal of brotherhoods and confraternities, where military and political leaders were forged; the militia was essential as a form of pressure for reform. With radicalisation, this citizen militia became a belligerent army with its own companies, confronting the nobility’s forces on the battlefield, with arms becoming the main way of defining social antagonism. This function was deepened by the loss of royal legitimacy and the emergence of a *de facto* source of justification based on military victory. Weapons made it possible to achieve their aims. The movement was subject to a dual tendency which, because of the necessities of war, pushed it towards a centralised leadership, while the plebeian organisation became more and more based on popular assemblies. Over time, successive defeats and surrenders turned the organised army into a formation of militiamen, who encouraged the continuation of the war as a way out of the adverse scenario, having lost any possibility of reincorporation into legality. These irregular combat troops continued a focused resistance with incursions into lands reduced to obedience (Vallés Borràs 2000; Pérez García 2017). With this late partisan character and the appearance of messianism, the crusade ideal gained momentum, turning the *agermanats* into soldiers of Christ called to defeat the Antichrist at the end of time, capitalising on earlier prophecies of the Crown but in a subversive direction. The *Encobert*, as the expected Messiah came to be known, became embodied in successive leaders of commoner origin who took their place after each execution, successfully achieving public destabilisation (Pérez García and Catalá Sanz 2000). In each case, in this way, armed mobilisation provided capacity for the political interpellation of the *agermanats*.

The politicisation of the subalterns was reflected in the transformation of the fighting slogans which, in those days, acquired more importance than programmatic declarations. Thus, the battle cry of the *Germania* was ‘against the noblemen (*cavallers*) and in defence of the Royal

Patrimony', as the Thirteen of Valencia communicated to those of Ontinyent in June 1521. As the conflict progressed, other harsher and more determined slogans appeared; for example, 'Death to the nobles' or 'Death to the Moors', who formed part of the nobility's infantry forces against the *agermanats* in the battle of Gandia; or the slogan 'Alarm, the *Germania* are coming', which was heard in L'Olleria during Captain Torró's attempt at resistance in Ontinyent. But over and above these fleeting expressions, *Germania* in arms gave rise to political creations of identity. The name *agermanats* did not come from the protagonists of the conflict; they were the *adehenats*, who obeyed the defensive mandate of the king and elected their trustees. The name 'Union and Germania' came from their detractors and from official documents, giving the movement criminal connotations as a subversive conspiracy to denounce its illegality, recalling the earlier events of the fourteenth century. However, in its radicalised course and as in other conflicts, *agermanat* became a nominalised adjective referring to a state rather than a condition, susceptible to change in meaning according to circumstances, but always indicative of an opposition born out of conflict. Both the *sans culotte* in the eighteenth century and the *agermanats* in the sixteenth century became constituted as political categories expressing a self-definition; an ideal type that endowed the popular classes with a collective identity, to stimulate a sense of belonging and define a distinction against their enemies (Burstin 2005; Terol i Reig 2022). As the war wore on, internal differences deepened between those who fought for the cause of the people to the end, and those who collaborated in submitting to the obedience of the rebel centres. Thus, another identity was born, but in opposition: the concept of *mascarat* (masking), which legitimised violence against traitors. Accusation was a way of identifying those who put on the mask of loyalty, expunging any individual involvement in a now criminalised movement. *Mascarats*, in the sense of traitors, first appeared in the thirteenth-century Song of the Crusade, according to Duran (1982). In the *Germania*, it became an insult, and in the summer of 1521 it was forbidden by royal order on pain of death. In the course of the revolt, the concept was used extensively. Curiously, once the *Germania* was put down, possession of the title of *mascarat* was flaunted, and acquired the opposite meaning, that of fidelity (*ibid.*).

To these antagonistic identities we must add the political figure of the resistance. In March 1522, a plebeian *Encobert* appeared who, appropriating the messianic royal propaganda, incarnated it in a subversive sense and gave new legitimacy to the *agermanat* movement. His early assassination gave way to successive incarnations of commoners who assumed that name. This new leadership came to compensate for the consequences of Bellús, the last armed battle, by trying to maintain the morale of resistance with anti-aristocratic and millenarian arguments on the part of a faction of the *Germania* of Xàtiva. The plebeian political creation, the second *Encobert* recorded in the chronicles, was coined by the peasant Julià and the silk velvet weaver Pere Valladolid before the capitulation of the city. Despite this, the political fiction of the *Encobert*, as incarnated in successive commoners, was able to successfully give continuity to the *Germania* and undermine the control of the victors. If the last royal pardon for the *Germania* crime came in 1531, chronicler Miquel Garcia had noted a few years earlier that Alonso de Victoria's attempt to 'revolt against the king' and to 'make himself an Encobert' was thwarted (1984, 395-396). The same happened to a new conspiracy in 1542. The political alibi became a persistent and widespread phenomenon in popular culture (Pérez García and Catalá Sanz 2000; Terol i Reig 2022).

Rebellious practices were part of plebeian politicisation. An egalitarian line was imposed in taxation and justice, and the sovereign order of the unprivileged. These practices took on a political character because their actions went beyond military needs. The belligerent *Germania* challenged the manorial rule and all privilege, targeting the heart of the existing social order. It adopted anti-seigniorial measures with the *de facto* restitution of jurisdictions to the royal

domain and the annulment of grants awarded by the monarch, with the occupation of noble castles and fortresses, together with the removal or equalisation of taxes and charges. Taxation took centre stage with the abolition of taxes and charges in the city of Valencia by means of direct action in February 1521, a decisive measure during the events. Chroniclers narrated the day when a group of people went to the places where taxes were collected and shouted

Viva el rey, fuera derechos: y no se paguen más, que no hay derechos, y así huyeron los cogedores, abandonando la casa, tablas y libros: y los de la turba sediciosa, siempre voceando, rompieron los cuños y sellos y libros y mesas y asientos. (Escolano 1611, 1521-1522)⁴

Due to pressure from a section of the movement, and the natural logic of a conflictual dynamic, the *Germania* finally eliminated all taxes, abolishing the traditional mechanism of differentiation between social actors. During the civil war, they opted to take control of the tithes in several places such as Alzira, Ontinyent and Alcoi. A clear counter-example was offered by the radical *Germania* of Sagunt. The local syndics, in need of resources, adopted an egalitarian fiscal regime (Pérez García 2021; 2022). The cases confirm the importance of the fiscal agenda and highlight the questioning of pre-existing inequalities. The *Germania* in arms set itself up as an alternative power, seeking to abolish the nobility and to set up a new popular nobility of *agermanat* captains, who would take on the chivalric missions described by Ramon Llull centuries earlier: the defence of the faith, the fight for justice and the protection of the poor (Vallés Borràs 2000). An attempt was made to eliminate the bases of the social and economic power of the nobility by means of the forced baptism of Valencian Muslims, depriving the enemy of resources. The annulment of the legal personality of these vassals was carried out to the detriment of manorial revenues and to settle accounts for their military collaboration on the side of the noblemen (Benítez Sánchez-Blanco 2001).

During the armed mobilisation through until the end of the conflict, the *Germania* had a cultural side that contributed to radical plebeian contestation. First, the artisans of the different guilds occupied the public space. The *Germania* began when eight thousand men, in war order and with eighteen flags, paraded before the monarch's envoy. Català confirmed that, dressed in silk, maroon, taffeta and brocade that 'looked like Flemish ... all the trades passed before the cardinal shouting aloud: Long live the King' (1984, 14). These acts were a latent threat. Gathering in a square, parading through the city carrying arms and flags, ringing bells and drums and shouting assumed the character of public defiance (Oliva Herrer 2018). Furthermore, the sources confirm the presence of degrading forms of humour, the generalisation of irony and mockery, the festive firing of artillery, the ostentation of luxurious clothes, the use of games, ritual and ceremonies normally forbidden to commoners. This atmosphere of euphoria and freedom, due to the armed mobilisation, consecrated the centrality of the public square and its metaphors against the rich and powerful. This was followed by the inversion of social roles, as in the case of the *Encobert*; according to some chroniclers, 'as he was king, he armed knights and made nobles out of those who wanted to be nobles in Valencia and Alzira' (Garcia 1984, 365). These cultural manifestations contributed to delimit an antagonistic field of political opposition (Parma 2021).

In addition, there was a constant concern for the memory of the Valencians. The political leader, Sorolla, harangued that the *Germania* 'durará más que el estado militar de este reino, que va ya de caída, y no ha de quedar memoria de los caballeros, pues que ha sido la causa

⁴ (Long live the king, no more taxes (*derechos*): and pay no more, there are no more taxes, and so the collectors fled, abandoning the house, the tables, and the books: and those of the seditious mob, always shouting, broke the seals and stamps and books and tables and seats).

de moverse el pueblo' (Viciano 2005, 169).⁵ During the radicalisation in the capital, violent attacks on property also attempted to eliminate any noble record; the commoners 'durará más que el estado militar de este reino, que va ya de caída, y no ha de quedar memoria de los caballeros, pues que ha sido la causa de moverse el pueblo' (192).⁶ The destruction of all written records and memories for the new times grew in importance as an integral part of a dialectic of confrontation. This memory to be built for the people linked its destiny to the triumph in the struggle and demonstrated, by its very existence, the radical, autonomous and sovereign will acquired by the subalterns due to the conflict itself.

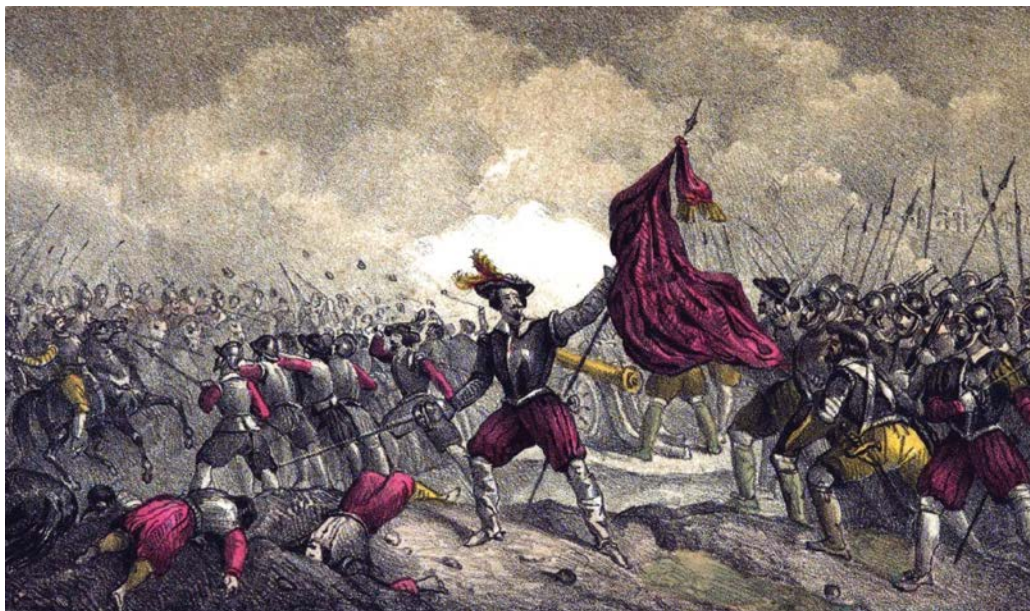


Figure 3 – *Battle of Gandia*, 25 July 1521, in Ameller V. (1853), *Los mártires de la libertad española*, Madrid, Luis García (License Creative Commons CCO)

The *Germania* was finally defeated on the battlefield, punished by hanging and economic impositions, and denied by the accounts of the chroniclers and the apologists of the victors. The *agermanats* were defeated militarily, with the fall of Almenara, Orpesa-Castelló and Oriola being the most notable defeats. The climax of the armed confrontation was reached in July 1521 with the victory in the battle of Vernissa in Gandia against the troops of the nobility and the viceroyalty. However, the concentration of royalist forces achieved successive capitulations, the resignation of the Thirteen of Valencia being the most notable. The vital centre of the movement moved to Xàtiva, which continued the struggle until December 1522, together with Alzira. Captains and trustees from Alacant, Oriola, Alcoi and Ontinyent and others from the kingdom had taken refuge in the fortress of Xàtiva. This armed militancy of the commoners conditioned the repressive strategy, which was accentuated as the reaction achieved greater effective control

⁵ (will last longer than Noblemen of this kingdom, which is already in decay; and there must be no memory of the knights, for it has been the cause of moving the people).

⁶ (took all the deeds he [the nobleman] had for the preservation of his estate ... and burnt them, saying: Nay, let there be no memory left of the viscount our enemy).

of the territory. The punishment of the defeated was harsher than in other conflicts, combining executions with collective and communal economic charges, confiscation of goods and fines on guilds, people and places. The judicial processes demonstrated the breadth and depth of the movement (Pérez García 2021; 2022).

At the same time, a dominant political narrative was constructed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It condemned and stigmatised the conflict, banishing it from the memory of Valencia. Several narratives converged in a unanimous condemnation. In the viceregal court of the Duke of Calabria, short works were written with the aim of highlighting the triumph of the noble leaders as classical heroes. Humanist writers also severely discredited the *agermanats*. In this sense, Luis Vives wrote: ‘aquello fue rabia ciega, no discusión. La plebe no sabía que quería ni por que había empuñado las armas’ (quoted in Parma 2023, 406);⁷ for his part, Juan de Molina described the *agermanats* as a ‘escuadrones de ladrones’ (*ibid.*)⁸. These writings regarded them as being distinguished solely by anger, disorder and madness. They also praised those who liberated Valencia from the ‘furiosas y sangrientas manos de extranjeros, rebeldes, desobedientes y salteadores de caminos’ (Molina 1522, quoted in Parma 2023, 40).⁹ The chronicles of the event, with omissions and misrepresentations, tended to reinforce the seditious and deliberate character of the leaders, making the popular support and mobilisation throughout the kingdom invisible. The evils were presented as the work of a small number of people, foreigners or ‘hubo en las Germanías sólo plebeyos y gente baja que estos no fueron ni son de consideración alguna ni se puede aplicar la culpa sino a ellos solos’ (Viciano 2005, 153; see also Iborra 2021 and Terol i Reig 2022).¹⁰

Despite efforts to deny it, the *Germania* was the disruptive movement with the greatest political potential inside and outside the kingdom. The impact of the *agermanats* had effects in Catalan, Aragonese and Mallorcan lands; with a demonstrated proselytising activity in the Kingdom of Majorca, where another *Germania* emerged around 1521 when the Valencian *Germania* had been radicalised, acquiring, from the beginning and until its defeat in 1523, a greater level of violence as it adopted more clearly defined class lines. The nobiliary pressure to exterminate the Valencian conflict was a reaction to this projection, since, according to some arguments, ‘the Kingdoms of Aragon and Catalonia were affected by the same evil’ (Català 1984, 23). In these territories there had been fleeting attempts to group people together in public spaces, which did not last over time. The fame of the *Germania* spread not only because the Valencian leaders travelled through these lands on their embassies to the royal court, but also because of the actions taken by the movement, which circulated as news through different channels among the towns. Thus, in Barcelona, posters were affixed in squares and on corners, and in Girona, letters from Valencia were read out publicly and passed from hand to hand. The decisive measure for the radicalisation of the *Germania*, the abolition of taxes and duties, had a special impact. The event was taken up as a banner and rallying cry throughout the region. The artisans shouted in the streets of Girona: ‘Long live the king, no impositions and death to the bad council’. In the letter to the Marquis of Vélez, it was reported: ‘se pregonó que todo hombre que quisiese libertad, que fuese con sus armas a cierta parte de la ciudad. Quieren decir que esto es que se quieren eximir de los grandes derechos que pagaban, de los no pagar y

⁷ (that was blind fury, not an argument. The mob did not know what it wanted or why it had taken up arms).

⁸ (squadron of thieves).

⁹ (furious and bloody hands of foreigners, rebels, disobedients and highwaymen).

¹⁰ (some few of the commoners and low people, who were not and are not of any consideration nor can the guilt be applied to them but to them alone).

otros dicen que también hay rebelión' (quoted in Duran 1982, 130).¹¹ A succession of different actions became known outside the kingdom because of 'por lo hecho en Valencia' (*ibid.*)¹² and, in some cases, as in the anti-seigniorial conflicts of the Castilian Comunidades, because of the *agermanat* influence itself, arousing class and political fears that also explain the exemplary punishment (Duran 1982). Inland, as Manuel Ardit (2012) affirmed, the *Germania* constituted the most formidable anti-seigniorial revolt in Valencian history. Despite the attempt to banish it from historical memory, the baptisms of Mudéjares carried out by the *agermanats* during the radical stage, with temporary damage to the manorial economy, were later validated by the crown, opening the door to an unstable situation that made future convulsions possible until the irreversible structural change brought about by the decree of expulsion in 1609 (Benítez Sánchez-Blanco 2001). The spill-over into radical contestation of the social order had definitively disrupted the Christian-Muslim relations on which seigniorial domination was based. This disruption of systemic violence also made the belligerent *Germania* valuable for future struggles.

3. *The Complete Cycle of Valencian Collective Action*

The significance of the *Germania* transcended the frontiers of its time, and its political potential is revealed through comparison with other Valencian experiences with similar motivations. The struggle against the nobility and feudal rule, in response to the offensive of the privileged sectors, was generally carried out through judicial complaints. However, this path was punctuated by collective actions that paved the way for the construction of movements of different magnitude and duration. Placing the *Germania* in perspective, we can reconstruct a cycle of action lasting through until the loss of effectiveness of the repertoire. The starting point was the War of the Union (1347-1348), the first armed popular mobilisation predating the events of 1519-1522. The itinerary ends with the *Second Germania* (1693). The inventory of the Valencian struggles does not end with these conflicts. We have left out of the analysis, for example, the Morisco revolts of the Serra d'Espadà (1526) or that of Muelas de Cortes south of Gandia (1609), whose agents and demands were different from those of the historical *Germania*. Nor do we analyse the violent instances of unrest in 1391 and 1455, because they were fleeting and reactive struggles that did not grow into comparable movements. Moreover, the conflict of 1693 only followed other attempts such as L'Horta in 1663, Valldigna in 1672 and Camp de Morvedre in 1689 (Ardit 2012). However, its claims, its territorial settlement and its very name place it as the point of arrival of the *agermanat* struggle. This triptych of armed mobilisations between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries, with their similarities and differences, highlights the qualitative importance of the *Germania* in arms in the sixteenth century.

The first rupture between king and kingdom opened up an opportunity for action with the War of the Union. The creation of the Kingdom of Valencia by James I, the Conqueror, in 1238, was the culmination of the *Reconquista* process. The distribution of land among its participants led to rapid seigneurialisation. The crown allowed a progressive alienation of prerogatives and the feudalisation of the royal castles. The government of towns and villages was left in the hands of upstanding citizens, with artists, notaries, merchants and jurists flourishing alongside them. The creation of the kingdom provoked reactions among Aragonese noblemen

¹¹ (it was proclaimed that every man who wanted freedom should go with his weapons to a certain part of the city ... by this they mean that they want to exempt themselves from the heavy duties they were paying, not to pay and others say that there is also rebellion).

¹² (what had been done in Valencia).

to the impossibility of extending their lordships; a situation that led to a succession of dynastic wars, including the confrontation with king Peter IV, the Ceremonious. Valencia, like Aragon, demanded the reintegration of its liberties, which it considered violated by the royal decision to abolish the privileges granted in 1288, but especially by the appointment of his daughter Constanza as heiress instead of the king's brother, James of Urgel, in violation of the tradition of succession that prevented women from receiving such a mandate. The issue was to be resolved in the *Corts Generals* and not by royal arbitration. Peter IV's position did not change, and the formation of the Union was inevitable as a way to assert the voice of the kingdom. Royalist officials were accused of committing all sorts of abuses: arbitrary prosecutions, improper charges and invasions of local jurisdictions or unjustified confiscations. The demands of the movement included the redress of grievances and the limitation of the monarch's power (Fuster 1992; Baydal Sala 2013). The confrontation led to a civil war. First the city revolted and then all the royal villages joined one after another. The Council of Valencia proposed a sworn union: first by political means and then by means of an urban uprising through the extensive network of parishes and the corporate structure of the trades. A general militarisation was promoted to defend the interests of the royal patrimony against the authority of the king and the lords: a watershed moment that would later mature in the *Germania*. The armed formation was followed by institutionalisation as a political movement based in the capital, and the pact with Aragon was signed, proclaiming a common programme. On the opposing side, an assembly in Vila-real gave rise to the monarchist party that was ironically christened *Germandat* or *Fraternitat*. Weapons determined the fate of the warring sides.



Figure 4 – Codex of the *Furs de València*, Palau de Cervelló in València, 1329.
(Author Joanbanjo, Wikimedia Commons, License Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0)

Mass mobilisation, in the form of militias that supported the decision of the ruling oligarchies, was the preeminent characteristic of Valencian unionism. This coalition differed from the nobiliary nature of the Aragonese coalition in that its imprint was provided by the popular uprising, with the clear leadership of the bourgeoisie, the participation of the artisans and the mass mobilisation of the common people. The vast majority of the members of the movement came from the citizenry and the craft guilds (Rodrigo i Lizondo 1975). This composition was a consequence of the critical context in which it developed. Dissatisfaction with fiscal policy was latent and the insurrectional nature of the movement allowed other overlapping conflicts to emerge. The union was interpreted by the rural vassals as an ally in the face of the plundering by the lords who supported the king. The agrarian crisis had reached its peak with the emergence of the bubonic plague; the political crisis also grew with the weakness of a monarchy bent on carrying out constant military campaigns, which led to an increase in taxes and to indebtedness of the municipal powers (Terol i Reig 1994). To this we should add the interference of royal officials in local economic affairs and the increase in insecurity struggling from the struggle of factions. All these problems affected the artisan sector, motivating extensive participation in the unionist endeavour (Martínez Vinat 2018).

The Union was the first mobilisation of trades, and, for the first time, social antagonism took root through the alignment of the territorial nobility with the enemy. The royalist forces included the most powerful lords, some of whom were associated with the king as holders of court offices and members of military orders such as Montesa and Calatrava. In previous years, the city-dwelling knights had refused to pay the neighbourhood contributions intended to alleviate the situation of the municipal public funds. Tensions between the citizens and the territorial nobility were long-standing, stemming from the obstacles the nobles imposed on the free communal use of pastures, firewood and other materials throughout the kingdom (Rodrigo i Lizondo 1975). The inclination of the nobility towards the monarchist party was the expected corollary of the growing seigneurialisation. The alienation of royal patrimony by the crown had an effect on the unionist struggle, which was led by a citizen oligarchy with the aim of defending the integrity of the royal domains. For the populations of the kingdom, it represented a way of resolving their conflicts by the quicker method of rebellion, leaving aside the everyday means of opposition to the manor or the village or the city, by means of the courts. In the 1340s, a new wave of alienations gained momentum. The monarchy's spiralling expenditure had led to this growth and, as a result, the taxation of the villages that supported the royal estate intensified. Many of the Unionist nuclei were villages that formed or had traditionally formed part of the royal patrimony; for example, Alzira, Morvedre, Llíria, Cullera, Corbera, Castelló, Ontinyent, Bocairent, Biar, Castalla and Xixona (Terol i Reig 1994; Baydal Sala 2013). The division between the popular and the aristocratic sides was expressed under the unionist and monarchist banners respectively. The fourteenth-century conflict was the clearest precedent of the struggle between privileged and non-privileged that showed its greatest potential under the protection of the *Germania*.

The war began in December 1347 and the Unionists achieved military successes at Bétera and La Pobla. A royal expedition against the capital failed and the king fell into the hands of the Unionists, who forced him to accept their demands. When the armed people burst into the royal enclosure, hundreds of people with trumpets and drums forced the monarch to dance in a humiliating way, and he was the object of mockery and derision during a gigantic carnival ceremony. The situation went on for months until the court left the city. On arriving in Terol, the king went back on his promises. The advance of the plague and the failure of the Aragonese union changed the scenario. The royal offensive led to the total defeat of the Ara-

gonese coalition at the battle of Épila in July 1348; Valencian unionism became isolated and degenerated into an anarchic and radicalised force. Under the leadership of Captain Joan Sala, the Unionists were finally defeated at the Battle of Mislata in December of the same year. The Union was destroyed and the repression was swift and brutal, but also selective and exemplary. Twenty-two Unionists were executed, among them Joan Sala, who was forced to drink the molten bronze of the Union bell, whose tolling had called for popular mobilisation. The king's victory succeeded in annulling certain concessions but did not abolish the 'pactist system' and preserved municipal autonomy (Rodrigo i Lizondo 1975). It was only with Ferdinand the Catholic that royal interventionism triumphed, and his death opened the way for a rethinking of the king-kingdom relationship with the *agermanat* struggle. The War of the Union thus acquired less political potential, measured in disruptive terms, since collective action was always subordinated to tensions between the Crown, the nobility and the citizen oligarchy. Although the Unionist movement was supported by the Commons, the political initiative was always in the hands of the urban patriciate. This subordinate nature of mobilisation gave it a lesser capacity for interpellation in comparison with the brotherhood.

However, that first confrontation and other medieval military actions were important in the cycle of conflict, as they enabled concessions and privileges to be obtained from the crown, which constituted the legal channels for actions in the sixteenth century. The crown, seeking to impose its hegemony on the peripheral territories, formed alliances to curb private ambitions, sometimes paving the way for popular mobilisation. This allowed the consolidation of an ideological horizon, which explains the legalistic positions of the *agermanat* movement in its beginnings, as well as its later disruptive positions, in the face of the real failure to fulfil its duty to defend its domains. The royal privileges that protected both the adhesion and the primary actions of the *Germania* originated in this late mediaeval period. This was the case of the privilege invoked for the election of artists and craftsmen as jurors. This was granted after a revolt of the people against the nobles in 1275, a movement led by Miquel Peris that also received the name of Union. The actions were characterised by the toppling of noble houses and the departure of the people with war orders to burn and plunder Moorish places in the seigniorial domains. The revolution was put down, the organisation disbanded, the leaders punished and some fled. Every sanctioned privilege was uprooted by collective action that seeped through the cracks of royal and nobiliary domination. In the social division of the late Middle Ages ('majors, middle and minor') formulated by Eiximenis, the appeal to the royal privileges won by the latter actors was an instrument to impose the will of the majorities on political decisions (Zurita 1610, III, ch. 49).

The war gave the guilds an experience of mobilisation, a first step in becoming aware of their social supremacy. As early as 1342, the guilds had demanded greater participation in government decisions and the creation of a commission to supervise the actions of the executive. A restrictive measure by the monarchy revoked the privilege of 1283, which had granted them the right of assembly. This was a response to the liveliness of the citizens' trades, whose demands had transcended the strictly economic framework to include matters of urban policy. The royal decision helped to bring the citizen sector and the trade associations closer together. The Union demonstrated the weight of the trades that would later become the soul of the *Germania*. Both the major trades, which enjoyed political representation, and the minor trades, which lacked recognition, took part in the movement. The trades belonging to the flourishing textile crafts, in particular weavers, shoemakers, brokers and tailors, took centre stage. The list of signatures of the craftsmen who came to the Council to take the oath of support for the Union demonstrated their importance. Of the total number of signatories from the city of Valencia, more than a

third came from these guilds. Subsequent repressive measures also highlighted the importance of local associationism. In the Courts of 1349, the corporate veto was re-established and the rights of association were restricted. The representation privileges of craftsmen were annulled, and political exclusion was established. After the end of the repressive period, the professional guilds gained new strength from 1353 onwards (Martínez Vinat 2018).

In the course of this armed experience, collective organisations were consolidated which gave rise to the later *agermanat* movement. From the fourteenth century onwards, brotherhoods and confraternities emerged in the Kingdom of Valencia. Based on the ideal of brotherhood, they acquired a dual character: they postulated a religiosity marked by charity and devotion but also evolved into defence associations due to their links with the artisan world. Gathered around a patron saint, they established a rudimentary social security system by collecting subsidies for the protection of the sick, widows and orphans. Their development was linked to different political situations. At the beginning, trades were structured, and brotherhoods and guilds were formed. In the thirteenth century, royal privileges granted autonomy and the right of assembly to devotional confraternities. The rest remained forbidden and associated with forms of subversion. At the end of the thirteenth century, the trade guilds acquired prominence and gained participation in municipal government and administration. In fourteenth-century Valencia, the repression of the associative movement persisted, but the repeal of prohibitions favoured its expansion. The confraternities developed a social psychology that gave them a sense of belonging and strength in the face of the arbitrariness of the powerful (Iradiel 1993). The defeat of the Union resulted in the elimination and restriction of privileges, but it was only temporary, as they gained strength in the second part of the century. Proof of this lies in the creation, in 1365, of the company of 'Centenar de la Ploma', an urban militia of different trades which, years later, founded its own guild under the name of St. George. In the fifteenth century, this 'Confraria de Sant Jordi' guarded the Senyera (Valencian flag) in ceremonial acts, a symbol of local freedom and the armed defence of their rights in the urban emblem. In the *Germania*, this same brotherhood became the epicentre of the movement and its demands (Pérez García 2017). Moreover, under the protection of the Union, traditional forms of armed mobilisation gained strength. Urban militias, as a system of political-military organisation in the medieval city, were instruments for maintaining the status quo. Armed actions were justified in defence of freedoms that had been disturbed and undermined by the enemy. These formations made immediate military recruitment possible, following the citizen's crest, Lo Rat Penat, and enshrined a form of *de facto* enforcement of justice without the specific permission of the king. The city's main defensive force was also a factor in the conflicts, due to its close relationship with corporate institutions. These ambivalent forms of repressive-military organisation and, at the same time, possible elements of resistance, remained in force until the seventeenth century.

The centrality of war in the Valencian Late Middle Ages was essential as a political condition for the conflict of the Brotherhoods: indebtedness, oligarchisation, alienation of the Royal Patrimony and interventionist attempts by the monarch that were expressed as a monolithic reality under the reign of Ferdinand the Catholic (Narbona Vizcaíno 2006). In the face of this power structure, the violent urban sociability of the previous period took root in subjects with war potential, engendered in these battles. In the transition to the modern world, violence was not an accidental or sporadic phenomenon. It permeated the feelings, behaviour and life of the Renaissance in a period when no institution monopolised the effective use of force. The frontier character of the city and the kingdom led to social militarisation, to the predominance of warriors and military virtues, and to the participation of broad social sectors in warfare, fostering a 'type of mobility'. The Union contributed to the formation of a vague

conglomerate of ‘plebeian warriors’. As the Unionist movement became more radical, it took on disruptive features. A new magistracy was created, that of the war captain, who was endowed with exceptional powers. This unionist war captain was the origin of ‘war and *avalot* captains’ who transformed the *Germania* into a revolutionary movement. This ‘plebeian warrior’ was an asset exploited by the expansionist monarchies but was also a source of concern for the powers-that-be. In the seventeenth century, they were criminalised and transformed into miscreants or brigands. Historical destiny made them outlaws, due to the state’s progressive monopoly of force. But before that, in the sixteenth century and with the *Germania*, it became a channel for the expression of egalitarian aspirations (Pérez García 1990).

In short, the peculiar articulation of war and politics in the fourteenth century precipitated the mass popular uprising that opened a cycle of conflict. An anti-seigneurial mentality emerged as a product of antagonism and, at the same time, subjects and forms of collective organisation showed their strength, providing a channel for future mobilisation. The *Germania* was the highest point of plebeian power, as it gained autonomy and defined its own goals. After the defeat of 1522, the word *agermanat* was added to the list of banned associations. Doomed to oblivion, the movement survived in the memory of the subalterns. Thus, in 1693, the cry ‘Long live the poor, and death to bad government’ gained momentum in the kingdom. The rural rebels tried to create another insurrectionary community. Of these new insubordinates, the authorities noted that ‘seeing so many together, with arms in hand, they began to call themselves the army of the *agermanats*’ (Conca Alonso 2021, 160-170). More than one hundred and sixty years after the sanctioning of the last royal pardon, one of the most important jacqueries in Europe broke out, paying homage to the ‘*Germania del Regne*’ (Conca Alonso 2021, 154).

The event takes us back to an era marked by revolts and secessions on the European stage. The policies of the princes and their wars led to a deluge of new taxes, and life became more difficult during the ‘iron century’, the century of soldiers. In this context, many turned against their governments, blaming them for their misfortunes. The 1640s saw four major revolts within the Monarchy of Spain, in Catalonia, Portugal, Sicily and Naples. All the conflicts took place in peripheral territories that maintained a traditional autonomy as the basis of the political balance between the crown and local interests. The need to increase contributions shook the existing order and opened a space for the questioning of the dominant oligarchies by the ‘peripheries in arms’ (Elliot 1996; Parker 2006). Since 1635, the Kingdom of Valencia had been receiving continuous royal requests for men, money and supplies for the Catalan and Italian war fronts. However, in 1690, places like La Marina were reluctant to contribute to the *tercios* (Spanish troops) and, a year later, the powers of the *junta de leva* (recruitment board) were extended. The towns that did not contribute were those that later became involved in the *Second Germania*. All in all, the kingdom underwent an expansionist phase in the seventeenth century, but the subjugation of the local institutions to the Crown meant that economic growth was conditioned by increasingly costly exactions for the Valencians (Conca Alonso 2021). Thus, under the reign of Charles III, the War of the League of Augsburg against Louis XIV’s France had a double effect on the Valencian territory, as it increased the physical and human contribution necessary for the defence of Catalonia and, at the same time, led to the bombardment of Alacant. In addition to the abuses of the era of royal economic exactions, the local coastline was also defenceless. A riot broke out in the capital against French residents; rioters demand they leave the city with ‘stones and shotguns’. The viceroy was forced to enlist the militia, but without arming the plebs. The war contributed to the aggravation of the conflict but did not directly provoke it because it did not provide the reasons for a new *Germania* (Espino López 2011).

The material context in which the conflict took place was one of economic growth in the kingdom from the middle of the century onwards, with greater agricultural production, diversification and commercialisation. The rationalisation of the manor and agrarian reorganisation were the basis for prolonged economic and demographic growth and the development of commercial agriculture in Valencian lands. Marginal and less productive lands were abandoned in favour of other lands formerly populated by Moriscos, which were more profitable. Legal claims against the manorial regime that posed obstacles to these expectations of economic growth constituted the first step in the conflict of 1693. Behind them were wealthy peasants with sufficient economic and intellectual capacity to put forward their demands. The *agermanat* movement resented the burdens imposed on them as an obstacle to development. By legal means, they tried to redefine the conditions of the lease, but the lords created obstacles to the procedures. Attempts to revert many former royal territories to the Crown increased at this time. But growth also led to the concentration of ownership and the progressive loss of property by the rural majority. An increasingly impoverished peasant sector faced the demands of the manor, along with the rents it had to pay to the rich peasants on whom it depended. Part of the population subject to the manor was forced to cultivate other people's land and to seek other means to satisfy the onerous burdens, especially those who lived on less productive land. Once the legal route failed, these impoverished vassals, in need of a reduction in the levies, continued their demands through rebellion. Francesc García, a neighbour of Ràfol d'Almúnia, leader of the *agermanats*, and other condemned men were day labourers with no registered assets. Misery and prosperity intersected and coincided in the same protest (Furió 1995; Ardit 2012; Conca Alonso 2021).

On a comparative scale, the two Germanies shared common features: their programme in defence of the royal patrimony, their anti-aristocratic drive, their slogans against bad government, the religiosity of their ideas and a political dynamic that led to armed action. Another fundamental point of convergence is to be found in their geography. The present-day central *comarcas* (regions) were where the revolt of 1693 broke out, an area densely populated by New Christians, where the seigniorship reached its greatest extent and where the most important noble titles in the kingdom were held. The *comarcas* had been populated in the past by Muslims and were the main site of the forced baptisms that paved the way for the expulsion of Moriscos in 1609 (Conca Alonso 2021). The population charters drawn up a posteriori fixed the manorial burdens and gave the lords control over the election of officials and agricultural production, the use of firewood, pastures and game, as well as the instruments of processing and commercialisation. The peasants argued that the imposed obligations, which exceeded the established ones, were illegal because they contravened the privileges of the Reconquest and, therefore, they were justified in not paying the manorial charges, and they expressed their desire to become towns under the direct authority of the king. They based their position on fiscal arguments; questioning the amount of taxes, they did not demand their reduction but rather their suppression (Torró Gil 1993; Pérez Aparicio 1998).



Figure 5 – *Embarkation of Moors in the 'Grao de València'*, Pere Oromig, 1616
(Public domain images, License Creative Commons CCO)

The 1693 attempt did not produce actions comparable to those of the sixteenth century. It was a minor challenge in political terms due to its fleeting nature, the weakness of its army and its social isolation. It was a rural-based anti-nobility uprising, led by the vassals of La Marina, La Safor, El Comtat and the Albaida valley. In the first stage, they presented their demands peacefully, from January to June 1693. When their objectives were frustrated, an armed revolt took place between 9 and 15 July, which led to repressive actions and clandestine resistance. At the beginning of the year, some villages in the southern mountains began to mobilise to prevent the payment of the manorial levies. The viceroy urged them to send representatives to Valencia to legally present their demands, which were soon rejected. The representatives of thirty-five Valencian towns presented a memorial of grievances to the king. The Council of Aragon refused to intervene, declaring that the Royal Audience was the competent court and had already rejected the vassals' claims. At the same time as the legal action, a climate of social unrest was growing in the Valencian countryside, and attempts were made to curb it with imprisonment, radicalising the conflict and resulting in sedition. Tensions increased at harvest time, when the peasants refused to pay their rents. Francesc García carried out a subversive campaign in La Marina, claiming that the king was inciting them to take up arms against the powerful, a harangue that extended its reach to La Safor. In June, the residents of Carlet and Benimodo, Ràfol d'Almúnia and Petrés denied their lords the partitions. The trigger for the armed actions was the arrest in the town of Vilallonga of peasants who had refused to hand over part of the harvest that belonged to the Duke of Gandia as the holder of eminent domain over the land. On the same day as the intimidating act, four hundred peasants from the neighbouring villages gathered to go out in procession. The crowd grew to three thousand men, who marched with drums and banners, shouting 'long live the

poor and death to bad government', under the invocation of the 'Verge del Remei' (Our Lady of Remedy) and St. Vicent Ferrer, the most popular of Valencian saints. The arrests were the catalyst for a widespread insurrection of the population of the counties marked by *agermanat* violence. The rebels managed to free those imprisoned, taking Vilallonga, which lacked defences. They continued their march towards Albaida and reached Muro. According to the witnesses, they also shouted 'death to the traitors', and threw their hats and saddlebags in the air as a sign of victory. The forces of the governor of Xàtiva, by order of the viceroy, cut them off. After the failure of the negotiation that was intended to avoid the confrontation, a fight ensued between highly disproportionate forces. Four hundred men on horseback, with two pieces of artillery and accompanied by a like number of the kingdom's militia, averted the danger of the revolt spreading; they put it down in a single battle at Setla de Nunyes, near Muro de Alcoi, on 15 July. All the dead, some ten or twelve, belonged to the *agermanat* side. The rest fled to the mountains (Furió 1995; Conca Alonso 2021). The conflict remained a fleeting insurrection. The rebels had no chance of defeating the enemy, as they lacked organisation, combat experience and weapons, unlike the sixteenth-century *agermanat* captains.

The importance of the *Second Germania* lies in its demands. The memorial presented by more than thirty-five lordships in the Kingdom of Valencia denounced the large amount of taxes levied by the lords, higher than those granted by the population charters, and questioned the legality of the levies, appealing to royal privileges that proved the expiration of some of them or directly freed them from paying duties for being inhabitants of the kingdom. Far from asking for their reduction, they demanded their elimination (Conca Alonso 2021). The suppression of seigneurial burdens as a demand synthesised the long Valencian social struggle, together with the defence of royal domain, which meant not only fair taxation, but also the maintenance of their political autonomy. The Valencian lordship was characterised by the absence of territorial dominion and by the weight of jurisdiction in the administration of justice, which were also the cause of anti-seigneurial conflict. Domination was not only manifested in strictly economic terms; there was also a more important political component of reinforcing the power of the feudal lords over the peasant communities. The royal domain allowed the vassals full ownership of the land, they bore fewer taxes, but the communes also enjoyed considerable autonomy. Within the framework of anti-tax demands, a coherent programme was forged. The elimination of manorial tributes demanded by the *Second Germania* sought the establishment of a new political regime with no place for the feudal nobility and their jurisdictions, and the monarchy's repressive response left no doubt as to the class that supported it (Torró Gil 1993).

Fundamentally, the conflict acquired capital importance in the cycle of collective action by revealing the place of the first *Germania*. It re-signified the previous plebeian wars at their most critical moment, as the rural conflict of the seventeenth century affected the same geography where the forced baptisms of Moriscos of 1521-1522 had taken place. The actions of 1693 can be interpreted as a by-product of those past acts, that sought and achieved the rupture of the existing material structure. However, such actions revalued the defeat and the ensuing punishment, turning the sixteenth-century movement into a cultural repertoire of struggle, confirming its scope and potentiality. When they created a militia organisation in La Font d'en Carròs, the peasants chose Josep Navarro, a surgeon from Muro, who called himself 'General of the army of the *agermanats*', as their military leader. They saw themselves as the successors of a revolt that had taken place far back in historical time. Assuming the name *agermanats* was linked to the banners in defence of the royal patrimony, raised in blood and fire by the first *Germania*, and to their actions against the nobiliary forces that had temporarily interrupted the systemic violence. The interruption explains this semantic appropriation so distant in time, since, despite repression and oblivion in official

history, it had left an indelible mark as the greatest challenge to privilege. The *Germania* ‘was kept alive among the popular classes of the kingdom through collective memory and orality; (it was) a movement that sought to resume and win’ (Conca Alonso 2021, 154).

The movement of 1693, though limited in time, was decisive: it represented a synthesis of the struggle against the lords developed in the kingdom in a long historical cycle of collective action. The rivalry ended outside this cycle when, under the cover of the War of Succession, the manorial system on which these persistent warring worlds were based was abolished. Because the challenge was of lesser magnitude, the seventeenth-century revolt involved limited repression. Criminal charges were brought against Francesc García, Josep Navarro and eight other captains, all of whom were absent, and some twenty prisoners were imprisoned after the battle. Most of the leaders were later arrested and executed (Conca Alonso 2021). Everything seemed to be over, but resistance continued. After the military defeat, squads of knights went around the villages demanding payment and new attempts at insurrection appeared. The movement continued through the courts. Pérez Aparicio wrote that ‘with legality as a weapon, bordering on collective or individual disobedience, the vassals continued to harass the feudal regime, not with their faces uncovered to avoid military defeat, but behind legal provisions to validate their rights’ (1998, 250). After the *Second Germania*, claims against the lords continued in the form of legal demands for reintegration into the Crown, for improved contractual conditions, especially about the division of fruits, and in the form of disputes over the exercise of jurisdiction or the control of the municipal government. At the same time, in various places and at various times, farmers refused to comply with the levies in whole or in part. The repression had produced no more than a false closure, as exemplified by the anonymous letter that circulated, a year after the events, from hand to hand and from village to village, calling for people to go to Valencia to demand rights with ‘bullet and gunpowder’ (Espino López 2011; Conca Alonso 2021). The uprising did not take place, but those words of unknown authorship were a parable of the struggle against the nobility that had not ended. The eighteenth century finally saw the abolition of the seigneurial regime, which closed the breach opened by the egalitarian *Germania*. Thus, those ‘captains of the avalots and the war’ had at last been avenged, renewing the war between wolves and lambs, and allowing new and uncomfortable plebeian barbarisms to continue, through different methods, the political fight for survival.

4. Conclusion

For centuries, in the Kingdom of Valencia, there were different experiences of armed mobilisation that involved the voice of the subaltern. In the sixteenth-century conflict, the *agermanat* movement created a space for action that was not bestowed but rather constructed through the collective experience. This collective experience fostered autonomous mobilisation, operating beyond legal constraints, as the antagonism within the traditional patrician-plebeian contradiction intensified. In this warlike confrontation, the *Germania* in arms gave birth to forms of politicisation, identity building and forms of contestation against privilege that were significant not only in its own times, but also for the years to come. The movement was part of a cycle of conflict that developed through both legal means and disruptive action. It inherited a legacy of fourteenth-century unionism, which included the experience of an armed mobilisation that demonstrated the social primacy of the subalterns and outlined the antagonism against the arbitrariness of the nobility. The *agermanat* struggle spread further into the seventeenth century, a corollary to their claims against the lords, which demonstrated the conversion of the *Germania* itself into a crucial piece of a cultural repertoire of political struggle. This historical

survival was a product of the plebeian quality that achieved a rapid but decisive disruption of systemic domination. This disruption, while defeated in the battlefield and in the narratives of the victors, was incorporated into the historical memory of the subalterns.



Figure 6 – *Rocroi, el último tercio* by Augusto Ferrer-Dalmau, 2011
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