

## ICHRPI congress, Paris 6-9 September 2006

‘1188 and all that: an intense parliamentary year in Europe’

José Manuel Cerda  
*University of New South Wales*

In the year 1066, Duke William of Normandy crossed the channel with one of the largest armies ever assembled in medieval Europe, and invaded Anglo-Saxon England, seizing the throne and the land after victory over King Harold. The Norman Conquest and colonisation transformed the cultural and political landscape of England and changed the historical course of the British Isles forever.

An assessment of the outcomes of such an event concerned medieval chroniclers as much as it has fuelled debates among historians and entertain the school curriculum for centuries. The Norman conquest was deemed so important an episode in English history, that a book entitled *1066 and all that*, was written by W.C. Sellar and R.J. Yeatman in 1930 to ridicule the teaching of historical events and the glorification of particular dates; a simplification of history identified with the Whiggish view of the world, so typical of nineteenth-century scholars. The historical parody of Sellar and Yeatman was made into a musical by the same name in 1938, it inspired the titles of several novels, and has been perpetuated by several editions since the 1930s.<sup>1</sup>

Has any event in the long history of parliament attracted that much attention? Has any particular date afforded such transcendence? If there is an equivalent to 1066 in parliamentary history, the prevailing historiography would not hesitate to single out the year 1188, date of the first European assembly to have included representatives from the cities. When entering San Isidoro Square in the heart of the Spanish city of León, a plaque nailed to one of the walls commemorates the event as follows: ‘Here, in 1188, Alfonso IX convoked *cortes* that, with the participation of popular representatives alongside the nobility and the church, became the first democratic assembly of Europe.’<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> See W.C. Sellar and R.J. Yeatman, *1066 and all that* (London, 1930) reprinted in 1993, 1998 and recently, in its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, in 2005. One example of titles similarly inspired is Paul Manning, *1984 and all that* (London, 1984). Explanations of some of the more fundamental postulates of Whiggish historiography can be found in E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (London, 1961), p. 21 and H. Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History*, (London, 1963), p. 132.

<sup>2</sup> This is my translation of the Spanish original as written in the plaque: ‘*En 1188 Alfonso IX convoca aquí Cortes con la participación de representantes del pueblo que, junto a la nobleza y la iglesia, se convierten en la primera asamblea democrática de Europa*’. I am grateful to Santiago Domínguez Sánchez, from the University of León, for assisting me in the transcription of this text. The political importance of this

One of the final clauses of a number of royal decrees traditionally associated with this meeting, proclaims that these were promulgated when King Alfonso ‘celebrated court [*curia*] at León with the archbishop and bishops and magnates, and with the chosen citizens of his kingdom.’<sup>3</sup>

The Curia of León summoned by Alfonso IX has been indisputably regarded as the very first parliamentary meeting in medieval Europe, the first one to have incorporated the citizens or the third estate into the political life of the kingdom, a primitive institutional manifestation of medieval democracy and the most emblematic historical precedent for constitutional reform in the nineteenth century. According to the traditional historiography, parliamentary assemblies will not assemble in England until the baronial revolt led by Simon de Montfort, who also summoned the knights of the shire to an assembly in 1264, and the citizens to a meeting the following year. These assemblies brought together at least three of the four parliamentary essentials outlined by William Stubbs in his constitutional historiography:

First, the existence of a central or national assembly, a ‘*commune consilium regni*’, second, the representation in that assembly of all classes of the people, regularly summoned; third, the reality of the representation of the whole people, secured either by its presence in the council, or by free election of the persons who are to represent it or any portion of it; and fourth, the assembly so summoned and elected must possess definite powers of taxation, legislation, and general political deliberation.<sup>4</sup>

More sophisticated approaches to the subject have departed from the constitutional anachronism of the traditional interpretations, but while the Oxford assembly of 1258 is no longer glorified by parliamentary studies, the Leonese court of 1188 is still regarded

---

meeting is also established in another plaque inside the cloisters of the *colegiata*, which records the words of Alfonso IX: ‘*A los comienzos de mi reinado, cuando por primera vez celebré Cortes en León, dentro de San Isidoro.*’ ‘At the beginning of my reign, when I celebrated *Cortes* for the first time, inside San Isidoro.’

<sup>3</sup> Texts associated with the important sessions of the Spanish medieval *cortes* were first collected by Manuel Colmeiro. His compilation and edition of the ordinances of the medieval councils and *cortes* is contained in *Cortes de los Antiguos Reinos de León y de Castilla*, Real Academia de la Historia (Madrid, 1861-1884) and has been an essential source for the historian of parliament since 1861. Refer to *Cortes*, p. 39: ‘*Decreta que Dominus Aldephonsus Rex Legionis et Galletie constituit in curia apud Legionem cum archiepiscopo compostelano, et cum omnibus episcopis, magnatibus et cum electis civibus regni sui.*’

<sup>4</sup> William Stubbs, *The Constitutional History of England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1873-78), p. 17. From the Latin: ‘the common counsel of the realm’, as defined by *Magna Carta* in 1215. According to Emile Lousse, a medieval parliament is ‘a political assembly composed of the representatives of the politically privileged order or orders of society, who act in the name of these orders and of all the country, on the one hand to watch over the maintenance of the privileges of the orders, groups and individuals and the conservation of the fundamental rights of the country, and on the other hand to offer the prince the counterpart of the rights and privileges recognised and conceded by him’ (In Antonio Marongiu, *Medieval Parliaments: A Comparative Study* (London, 1968), p. 51). On the other hand, Gavin Langmuir quotes Froidevaux’s definition of a council as ‘any occasion on which the king held discussions with a group of any size or composition, or was surrounded, alive or dead, by such a group for ceremonial purposes’ (Langmuir, ‘Concilia and Capetian Assemblies’, *Studies presented to the ICHRPI*, 18 (Paris, 1958), p. 29. Refer to H. Froidevaux, *De regiis conciliis, Philippo II regnante, habitis* (Paris, 1891). See also James Baldwin, *The King’s Council in England during the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1913), pp. 3-4. These traditional definitions have a tendency to exaggerate the institutional importance of thirteenth-century parliaments and the pre-parliamentary nature of twelfth-century councils.

by most historians as the first Spanish *cortes* and such view seems deeply entrenched in the popular conception of constitutional history, the struggle for political freedom and democratic rights, and the evolution of consensual governance. Interestingly, the exaltation of this assembly is not only the evident victim of the constitutional teleology of outdated approaches, but it also suffers from the lack of comparative insights. The Battle of Hastings, for example, was not the only military event that took place on English soil in 1066. Only three weeks earlier, a confrontation between Harold and the Norwegian Harald Hardrada at Stamford Bridge practically signaled the end of Viking hegemony, and decided England's future arguably as much as Hastings did. Moreover, a recent publication entitled *The forgotten battle of 1066: Fulford*, brings light to a battle between the northern earls and the Norwegian king two miles south of York, five days before the clash at Stamford Bridge.<sup>5</sup>

Equally, the Curia of León, assembled by Alfonso IX in July was not the only meeting to have shown parliamentary symptoms in 1188, nor was it the most important one. A council of Henry II and his continental nobles in January at Le Mans was the first of several European assemblies to gather in 1188. The meeting concluded just before the end of the month with the promulgation of an unprecedented tax on movables to assist crusading efforts and the granting of several privileges to those nobles venturing to the Holy Land. Henry crossed the channel shortly after, and on Thursday 11 February he was assembled with his nobles at Geddington in Northamptonshire to promote the crusade and seek approval to exact the same continental levy, now from his English subjects, an event described by the contemporary and possibly eye-witness account of Roger of Howden as a *magnum concilium* or "great council".<sup>6</sup> It can hardly be a coincidence that such events had a similar prelude to the promulgation of the Assize of Arms, a military edict first approved in July 1181, also at Le Mans, and enforced shortly after throughout England. The Saladin tithe, as it came to be known, implied such a novelty in 1188, that similar initiatives in France and Scotland were aggressively opposed by the nobles and finally frustrated. It was then collected in English parishes as an ecclesiastical aid, but the tenth was soon to become a model for royal taxation on movable property as well. The royal ordinances ordered that 'each man shall give in alms a tenth of his revenues and movables (but) clerks and knights who have taken the cross shall not pay this tithe, except for their own property and demesne...'<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Charles Jones, *The forgotten battle of 1066: Fulford* (London, 2006). This battle took place on 20 September, followed by Stamford Bridge five days later, and Hastings on 14 October 1066. The Vikings, however, did remain a constant threat to the British Isles throughout the reign of William I.

<sup>6</sup> See *Chronica Rogeri de Houedene*, ed. W. Stubbs, 4 vols., Rolls Series, 51 (London, 1868-71), ii.338: 'Dominus vero rex, statim postquam in Angliam applicuit, magnum congregavit concilium episcoporum, abbatum, comitum et baronum, et aliorum multorum tam clericorum quam laicorum, apud Gaitingtung: ubi in publica audientia recitari fecit omnia supradicta capitula, quae constituerat de cruce capienda.'

<sup>7</sup> The ordinances of the Saladin tithe are collected and translated in *English Historical Documents, II, 1042-1189*, ed. David Douglas and George Greenaway, second edition (London, 1981), pp. 454-4. They are originally included in Roger of Howden's *Gesta Regis Henrici Secundi Benedicti Abbati*, ed. W. Stubbs, 2 vols, Rolls Series (London, 1867), ii.30-2. See also William Stubbs, *Select Charters and other Illustrations of English Constitutional History* (Oxford, 1913), pp. 188-9. Although the *Gesta Regis Henrici Secundi* confirms that the levy was rejected in Scotland, the chronicle of Roger of Howden affirms that the tenth was effectively imposed by Philip Augustus over his French subjects. In Roger of Howden, *Chronica Rogeri de Hovedene*, ed. W. Stubbs, 4 vols., Rolls Series, 51 (London, 1868-71), ii.339: 'Philippus autem

A cold winter's day must have hardened the route for the nobles heading to the royal hunting lodge at Geddington, a village near Northampton, for a council that possibly stretched over two weeks.<sup>8</sup> The meeting appears to have been well attended, however, for according to the chronicle of Roger of Howden, there congregated were the bishops, abbots, earls and barons of the land, and many others, both clergy and laics.<sup>9</sup> The chronicle sources reveal the presence of the archbishop of Canterbury and the bishop of Durham, while a series of royal charters and notifications drafted early in 1188 were testified by the bishops of Norwich, Coventry and Lincoln, among others. More importantly, two notifications from the English king to Pope Clement III concerning the long-standing conflict between the archbishop and the monks of Canterbury, inform us that reconciliation was encouraged by the bishops and the magnates of the land, and that papal support for the primate was required by the king after taking counsel with all the bishops, abbots, religious men and barons of his entire kingdom.<sup>10</sup> Thus, only the meeting of a royal council attended by the kingdom's magnates was deemed an appropriate institutional setting for the resolution of an important dispute and the introduction of so extraordinary a tribute.

These assemblies, therefore, were no ordinary instances of governance, for they assembled most -or at least many- of the powerful men of the land in view of resolving ecclesiastical and military matters concerning the entire kingdom. Henry returned to Normandy in July and celebrated a number of *colloquia* or diplomatic conferences in Normandy and Anjou before dying in Chinon in July 1189.<sup>11</sup> The Council of Geddington thus turned out to be his last assembly on English soil, the political and institutional importance of which can hardly be overestimated.

Conciliar activity in 1188, however, was not only initiated by the assembly at Le Mans, but it was also in January when Alfonso II, king of Aragón, count of Barcelona and marquis of Provence, assembled with his nobles in the city of Huesca. Although the

---

*rex Francorum simili modo colligi fecit decimas redditum et mobilium hominum suorum per omnes terras suas,*' and *Gesta Regis*, ii.44. After the Council of Geddington, the bishop of Durham was sent to promote the crusade among the Scottish nobles and to press an unwilling King William to impose a similar tithe over his dominions. See *Gesta Regis*, ii.44, and A.C. Lawrie, *Annals of the Reigns of Malcolm and William* (Glasgow, 1910), pp. 271-3.

<sup>8</sup> According to Stubbs' itinerary of Henry II, the king was at Clarendon from 29 February. See William Stubbs (ed.), 'Outline itinerary', *Gesta Regis*, p. cxlvii.

<sup>9</sup> The Council of Le Mans is likely to have hosted an important attempt to resolve the dispute in January 1188, but it was at Geddington the following month that the conflict was subjected to a judicial hearing. Roger of Howden wrote: '*...magnum congregavit concilium episcoporum, abbatum, comitum et baronum, et aliorum multorum tam clericorum, apud Gaitingtung...*' (*Chronica Rogeri de Hovedene*, ii.338).

<sup>10</sup> See Gervase of Canterbury, *Gervasii Monachi Cantuariensis Opera Historica*, ed. W. Stubbs, 2 vols., Rolls Series, 73 (London, 1879-80), i.412. Other sources which may provide some peripheral information about the business of this meeting are *Gesta Regis*, i.323; 'Epistolae Cantuarienses: the letters of the prior and convent of Christ Church, Canterbury, from A.D. 1187 to A.D. 1199', *Chronicles and memorials of the reign of Richard I*, ed. William Stubbs, vol. II (London, 1865), pp. 172-3, no. 190; *Chronica Rogeri de Hovedene*, ii.335, Stubbs, *Select Charters*, pp. 188-9.

<sup>11</sup> These conferences were held at Gisors (August), Chatillon (October), Bonsmoulins (November) and at La Ferté Bernard (May 1189). See *Radulfi de Diceto Ymagines Historiarum*, ed. W. Stubbs, 2 vols., Rolls Series (London, 1876), ii.52-4, *Gesta Regis*, ii.49-50, 66, and *Chronica Rogeri de Hovedene*, ii.354.

meeting could not have lasted for too long, as the king spent part of January also at Barbastro and Monzón, the occasion was singled out by one of the royal diplomas as a “solemn court”, and was included in the sixteenth-century account of Jerónimo Zurita as one of the first “*cortes*” celebrated in the Aragonese kingdom.<sup>12</sup> The bishops of Zaragoza, Huesca, Tarazona, and Lérida, the abbot of the Monastery of Montearagón, and no less than a dozen of nobles and royal officials were present, if the witness lists of the diplomas are an appropriate indication of the attendance. And although the meeting appears to have been primarily an Aragonese affair in the noticeable absence of the archbishop of Tarragona, the bishop of Barcelona and the ultra-Pyrenean prelates, it was an occasion that prompted discussions described by Thomas Bisson as ‘responsive to proto-national expressions of custom and right.’<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the congregation of many powerful nobles at Huesca must have secured general assent for important concessions and privileges granted by Alfonso to the monasteries of Santa Cruz and Montearagón, and for a set of royal constitutions.<sup>14</sup>

Six months later, Alfonso of Aragón found himself among his nobles again, this time at Girona, an episcopal see in northern Catalonia. The meeting is not documented by contemporary sources, but a proclamation drafted at Vilafranca on 13 August 1188 establishing the peace and truce of God, is said to have resulted from the deliberations and discussions held previously at a royal court in Girona.<sup>15</sup> The king’s territorial proclamation effectively challenged some of the feudal structures of power and was, therefore, opposed by the Catalan nobles and eventually withdrawn at another royal court celebrated in Barcelona. Perhaps the Aragonese monarchy was not yet mature enough to introduce such changes or not coercive enough to impose them, but the events of 1188 reveal an unprecedented concentration of territorial legislation and the increasing importance of plenary courts for the development of central government and the transformation of feudal politics. The statutes of peace and truce enforced the royal prerogatives for territorial legislation but since they contradicted some of the fundamental lordship rights stipulated in the *Usatges of Barcelona* -the prevailing legal code for Catalonia- they required the general assent of the nobility. Like the English council at Geddington, the plenary courts summoned during the reign of Alfonso II provided the most appropriate setting for reaching such an agreement, which was first enacted at an assembly held in Fondarella in 1173 and then at the aforementioned Court of Girona in 1188. Thomas Bisson rightly reminds us that ‘Assemblies of the Peace and Truce were understood to represent the land in the traditional sense of being convoked by general

---

<sup>12</sup> *Alfonso II Rey de Aragón, Conde de Barcelona y Marqués de Provenza. Documentos (1162-1196)*, ed. Ana Sánchez Casabón (Zaragoza, 1995), nos. 455-6, pp. 602-5. See also Jerónimo Zurita, *Anales de la Corona de Aragón*, 4 vols (Zaragoza, 1967), i.291.

<sup>13</sup> T.N. Bisson, *The Medieval Crown of Aragon: A short history* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 56. According to Bisson, Alfonso’s courts at Zaragoza in 1164 and 1174 are also within this category.

<sup>14</sup> Jaime Caruana, ‘Itinerario de Alfonso II de Aragón’, *Estudios de Edad Media de la Corona de Aragón*, VII (1962), pp. 167, 239, *Alfonso II Rey de Aragón*, nos. 455-6, pp. 602-5. José María Ramos published twelve of these constitutions in ‘Constituciones de las Cortes de Huesca de 1188’, *Anuario de Historia del Derecho Español*, vol. I (1924), pp. 398-400. This document, however, was copied in 1924 from a manuscript copy stored at the library of the University of Zaragoza, it is incomplete and it reveals conflicting dating.

<sup>15</sup> *Textos Jurídics Catalans, Lleis i costums*, II/3, ‘Les Constitucions de Pau i Treva a Catalunya’ (segles XI-XIII), pp. 92-98. See also Caruana, ‘Itinerario’, p. 244.

summons and of being attended by all notables and lords of people.’<sup>16</sup> These new institutional features were some of the first manifestations of the parliamentary phenomenon in Europe and they are common to all the 1188 assemblies so far described. No reference is made to discussions concerning the Third Crusade at the assemblies summoned by Alfonso II in 1188, but the royal courts at Huesca and Girona met to promulgate statutes as general or as territorial as the tax imposed at the Council of Geddington in February. Furthermore, the domestic appeasement pretended by Alfonso’s statutes may have encouraged counts, barons and knights to take up the cross and join the European enterprise to the Holy Land.

A certain degree of internal unity and a truce among Christian kingdoms in dispute must have been an important factor in the success of the forthcoming crusade. Henry II of England and Philip Augustus of France held a *colloquium* or conference at Gisors in January 1188 to put an end to endemic hostilities along the Norman frontier and to unite forces against Saladin. The meeting can hardly be described as parliamentary for like all conferences, it was not a territorial assembly between a monarch and the kingdom’s nobility, thus summoned to discuss matters of general concern, but a diplomatic encounter between two or more rulers seeking to establish peace or an alliance.<sup>17</sup> It was at a general court, however, that the hostilities between the Spanish kingdoms of León and Castile were brought to an end, and an alliance between Alfonso VIII and Frederick I materialised.

Alfonso VIII summoned the nobles of Castile to meet at Carrión de los Condes the first week of July 1188, three months after the Council of Geddington and the Court of Huesca, and a month before the Court of Girona. Along with Alfonso VII’s imperial coronation at León in 1135 and Alfonso VIII’s regal accession at Burgos in 1169, the Curia of Carrión in 1188 features among the most eventful assemblies in twelfth-century Spain, and one that also gathered the parliamentary ingredients. It was attended by the political community of Castile to discuss issues and adopt measures concerning the king and kingdom.

According to the witness lists of diplomas issued on this occasion, the composition of the Curia of Carrión was perhaps worthy of a parliamentary session for there present were the archbishop of Toledo, the entire Castilian episcopate and no less than twelfth nobles and royal officials. No other venue but the chambers of the powerful Monastery of

---

<sup>16</sup> T.N. Bisson, ‘The Origins of the Corts of Catalonia’, *Parliaments, Estates and Representation*, 17 (1997), p. 41. The statutes of Girona are also included in *Alfonso II Rey de Aragón*, no. 472, pp. 622-6, and translated into English by Thomas Bisson in *Medieval Iberia, Readings from Christian, Muslim, and Jewish Sources*, ed. Olivia Remie Constable (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), pp. 167-172. For further reference, see Bisson, *Medieval Crown of Aragon*, p. 49. On the Curia of Girona, see also Bisson, ‘Origins’, p. 38. The political importance of the Peace and Truce is analysed in Karen Kennelly, ‘Catalan Peace and Truce assemblies’, *Studies in Medieval Culture*, 5 (1975), p. 51, in Alfonso García Gallo, *Manual de Historia del Derecho Español* (Madrid, 1959), p.168, and in Angus Mackay, *Spain in the Middle Ages* (London, 1977), p. 113.

<sup>17</sup> See *Chronica Rogeri de Hovedene*, ii.334-5 and *Gesta Regis*, ii.29-30. Phillip Augustus’ decrees concerning the debts of crusaders are printed in Dana C. Munro, ‘Urban and the Crusaders’, *Translations and Reprints from the Original Sources of European History*, vol. I (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1895), p. 15.

San Zoilo could have hosted such a momentous gathering, described by later sources as a “famous and noble court” and as “*cortes*”, and whose sessions are likely to have stretched at least over a month.<sup>18</sup> The meeting of territorial assemblies was very rarely acknowledged in the official records, but like at the courts of Burgos in 1169 and 1178, Medina de Rioseco in 1182 and San Esteban de Gormáz in 1187, the royal diplomas granted at Carrión in 1188 explicitly commemorate the assembly and reveal its business.<sup>19</sup> The closing lines of a diploma recording an exchange between the king and the Monastery of Sahagún proclaims that such transaction was made ‘the year in which Alfonso, the most serene king of Castile, knighted Alfonso, the Leonese king, in his court at Carrión.’<sup>20</sup>

The relevance of the events at Carrión comes afloat when considering the political context. The unexpected death of Sancho III in 1158 had weakened the position of Castile by leaving a three-year-old minor king on the throne, thus prompting the Iberian hegemony of León, then ruled by Fernando II. Thirty years later, however, political and military success had elevated Castile to such a predominant status, that Fernando’s son and heir to the throne of León found himself alongside the son of the Holy Roman emperor, paying homage to Alfonso VIII at a Castilian assembly in Carrión. A diploma confirming the privileges of the Monastery of Sahagún was drafted at Carrión when ‘Alfonso, the illustrious king of Castile and Toledo, knighted the son of the Roman emperor, whose name was Conrad, and gave him his daughter Berenguela to be his wife.’<sup>21</sup> The marriage had been arranged two months earlier at a conference, as stipulated in a treaty signed by the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa and Alfonso of Castile at Seligenstadt on 23 April. The wedding took place in July and the succession of Castile was resolved in the absence of male heirs, but the following year, the birth of Fernando - Alfonso’s son and heir- undermined the agreement reached at Seligenstadt and the marriage was annulled.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Some primary references to this court are: *El Reino de Castilla durante el reinado de Alfonso VIII*, ed. Julio González, 3 vols (Madrid, 1960), nos. 499, 505-6, pp. 857-63, 868-73; Julio Pérez Celada, *Documentación del Monasterio de San Zoilo de Carrión (1047-1300)* no. 61, p. 99; José A. Fernández Flores, *Colección Diplomática del Monasterio de Sahagún*, vol. IV, no. 1443, p. 436; *Primera Crónica General de España*, ed. R. Menéndez Pidal, 2 vols (Madrid, 1955), pp. 677-683; *Chronica Latina Regum Castellae*, ed. Luis Charlo Brea, *Chronica Hispana Saeculi XII, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Medievalis* 73, Turnholt, 1997, pp. 36-44; *Historia de rebus Hispaniae sive Historia Gothica*, ed. Juan Fernández Valverde, *Chronica Hispana Saeculi XII, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Medievalis* 62 (Turnhout, 1987), p. 246. One of the few secondary references to this meeting is in Gonzalo Martínez Diez, ‘Curia y Cortes en el reino de Castilla’, *Las Cortes de Castilla y León en la Edad Media* (Valladolid: Cortes de Castilla y León, 1988), p. 143.

<sup>19</sup> Among a handful of sources, some diplomatic references to these Castilian assemblies are included in *El reino de Castilla*, nos. 124-6, 295-7, 305, 396-8, 467-71.

<sup>20</sup> *El reino de Castilla*, no. 505, p. 870: ‘Facta carta apud Carrionem, era MCC XX VI, IIII nonas Iulii, eo anno quo serenissimus rex prefatus Castelle A. regem legionensem A. cingulo milicie curia sua in Carrionem accinxit.’

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 506, p. 873: ‘Facta carta apud Carrionem, era M CC XX VI, V kalendas Augusti...A. Illustris rex Castelle et Toleti, Romani imperatoris filium Conraddum nomine, accinxit in nouum militem, et ei filiam suam Berengariam tradidit in uxorem.’

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 499, pp. 857-63. See also the sources referenced in ns. 20-2, and Gonzalo Martínez Diez, *Alfonso VIII* (Burgos, 1995), pp. 47-8. Refer also to Ferdinand Oppl, *Das Itinerar Kaiser Friedrich Barbarossas (1152-1190)* (Vienna, 1978), p. 147.

It is difficult to establish a link between the meeting at Carrión and the Castilian contribution to the Third Crusade, but chronicle references to the discussion of crusading matters quickly followed the description of the assembly.<sup>23</sup> Whether Alfonso VIII joined Frederick, Henry II and Philip Augustus in taking the cross or not, the king of Castile had met a great deal of success in his own crusade against the Moors.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, his general curia at Carrión had been a most eventful occasion, which materialised an alliance with the German emperor, while establishing his lordship over the kingdom of León and, in consequence, cementing Castile's Iberian hegemony. Although the marriage of Berenguela and Conrad was soon annulled and the homage promises of the Leonese king soon vanished, the events at Carrión bear witness to Alfonso's military and political victories and the territorial expansion of his kingdom. Why has this assembly failed to attract comprehensive historical treatment? Why has it been left by parliamentary studies beneath the shadow of the Curia of León?

Alfonso IX became king of León on 22 January of 1188, but his first general court was not celebrated until July, shortly after his homage to Alfonso VIII at Carrión de los Condes. The Castilian assembly had humiliated the young monarch, but his general court at León captured the imagination of scholars and politicians and became an emblematic precedent for constitutional reform as well as the banner of movements to restrict monarchical power in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Interpreted as a political landmark, Alfonso's court at León has therefore consigned all the assemblies of 1188 to obscurity, and accordingly diverted the attention of parliamentary historians. This paper has aimed to provide historical treatment to the 1188 assemblies still overlooked by approaches, hopelessly seduced by constitutional teleologies.

Parliamentary assemblies emerged in Europe as a result of a gradual transformation and, more particularly, as a number of institutional changes came together in the second half of the twelfth century. But if a date is to be singled out as particularly significant, the year 1188 could not be overlooked. The Curia of León was not the first parliamentary assembly to have gathered in Europe, nor was it the most important meeting of 1188, for the presence of citizens can hardly be the novelty that gave birth to a new institution and inaugurated parliamentary history.

The year 1188, therefore, marks not the beginning but the end of an institutional transformation, one which saw small and infrequent feudal courts develop into regular territorial assemblies, attended by the political community of the realm to discuss important matters and give consent to measures of monarchical and general concern. Royal assemblies which gathered all these parliamentary features met frequently in England from the 1150s and in the Spanish kingdoms from the following decade until

---

<sup>23</sup> See *De Rebus Hispaniae*, p. 246: '*Hierosolymitani regni ad tempus negocia ministravit*', which is linked to the proposed marriage between one of Alfonso's daughters and Baldwin, the emperor of Constantinople.

<sup>24</sup> Like Henry II and Phillip Augustus, the German emperor also took the cross at Mainz Cathedral on 27 March 1188, and fought the armies of Saladin, dying in Saleph the following year. See *Chronica Rogeri Hovedene*, ii.356-9; *Gesta Regis*, ii.62-3, 89; *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Die Jungere Hildesheimer Briefsammlung*, ed. Rolf de Kegel (Munich, 1995), nos. 75-7, pp. 129-131.

1188. The Council of Geddington was one of the last general meetings of the twelfth century in England, as Henry's son and successor spent most of the following decade fighting in the Holy Land and imprisoned in Austria. No other plenary courts are reported for Castile after the Curia of Carrión and for León until the first decade of the thirteenth century. Only Alfonso II of Aragón assembled with his nobles during the 1190s.

The proliferation of important royal assemblies in 1188 signals the end of a parliamentary transformation and it is indicative of the increasing political role played by courts and councils as institutional occasions for monarchical governance, for general consultation and the approval of territorial legislation, measures and policies, and for the organisation of large-scale military enterprises like the Third Crusade. This was indeed an important year in the very early history of parliament, but such institutional significance is not only afforded by the events at the Curia of León, but also by the unusual concentration of territorial assemblies in other European kingdoms. This is my reading of the events of 1188 and all that.