

The parliamentary calendar of Spanish and English assemblies in the twelfth century, *Parliaments, Estates and Representation*, 26 (2006), pp. 1-17.

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SUMMARY

In studying the origin of parliamentary assemblies, historians have tended to overlook the institutional importance of a variety of circumstantial aspects, such as the changing temporal patterns and the calendar which determined the meeting of royal gatherings in the medieval period. Most studies have concentrated almost exclusively on the constitutional and fiscal developments negotiated between monarchs and the community of nobles, and the political transformation that shaped the institutional path of feudal courts. While acknowledging the importance of those much studied processes, the following article will instead shed some light over the frequency and temporality of Spanish courts and English councils throughout the twelfth century, and suggest a correspondence between these changing patterns and the advent of the parliamentary phenomenon in Europe. This analysis will concentrate on the rhythm experienced by royal assemblies from the 1150s to the 1180s, thus challenging the traditional dates for so long believed to mark the beginning of parliaments in England and the Christian kingdoms of Spain.

The origin of parliamentary assemblies in Europe is a theme that has attracted a great deal of historical scholarship and fuelled an everlasting debate over the past two centuries. It has been dogmatically established that “true” parliaments were not to be found before the thirteenth century and, moreover, that a precise date could be determined for the very first parliamentary meeting. In the ideological framework of the constitutional historians of the nineteenth century, the name parliament could only be afforded to an assembly that constituted a restriction to monarchical prerogatives, particularly those relating to taxation and legislation. Royal assemblies before the thirteenth century appeared too docile in the face of royal desires to be identified a “true parliaments”, using the term once employed by Antonio Marongiu.<sup>1</sup>

The search for particular dates and constitutional landmarks, however, has been superseded by new approaches that view the genesis of these institutions as a gradual transformation; a long process of evolution comprising numerous changes, extending over centuries.<sup>2</sup> But what were these changes and when were they concentrated enough to

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<sup>1</sup> I have explored some of these traditional approaches to the origins of parliament further in José M. Cerda, ‘Towards a new paradigm for the study of the origins of parliamentary assemblies in the Spanish kingdoms and England’, in *Proceedings of the 53<sup>rd</sup> Conference of the ICHRP*, eds. J. Sobrequés et al., 2 vols. (Barcelona, 2005). The evolving institutional terminology is another peripheral aspect which has generally been overlooked by parliamentary historians. I have suggested some points in José M. Cerda, ‘The English royal councils in the twelfth century: terminological change and the linguistic road to parliament’, in *Kapitoly z dějin stavovského a parlamentního zřízení*, eds. Jiří Georgiev and Jan Kysela (Prague, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> The traditional approaches to the early history of parliament are well represented in the work of Manuel Colmeiro (ed.), *Cortes de los Antiguos Reinos de León y de Castilla*, Real Academia de la Historia (Madrid, 1861-1884) and *De la constitución y del gobierno de los reinos de Castilla y León* (Madrid, 1855). See also Fidel Fita and B. Oliver (eds), *Cortes de los antiguos reino de Aragón y de Valencia y principado de Cataluña* (Madrid, 1896-1917) F. Palgrave (ed.) *Parliamentary Writs and Writs of Military Summons* (London, 1827-34)

suggest the advent of the parliamentary phenomenon? How did they alter the physiognomy of the so-called “pre-parliamentary” meetings when these parliamentary symptoms were most clearly manifested?

The forthcoming piece will suggest answers to these questions by analysing the general or territorial meetings of Spanish royal courts and English councils throughout the twelfth century, and especially those which assembled between 1154 and 1188. This crucial period for the understanding of the parliamentary phenomenon begins with the accession of Henry II to the English throne and ends with the death of Fernando II of León and the convocation of general assemblies in all the kingdoms subject to the present study. The year 1154 is conveniently close to the accession of Fernando II of León, the minorities of Alfonso VIII of Castile and Alfonso II of Aragón, and 1188 is also close to Henry II's death. Moreover, this temporal framework is particularly appropriate when it is considered that with the exception of the Crown of Aragón, very few English and Spanish assemblies gathered between 1190 and 1210. Therefore, unlike all other studies of the medieval *cortes*, this analysis takes 1188 as the end of a phase in the evolution of parliament rather than as the iconic beginning of an institution.

From the 1150s then, all kingdoms subject to this study enjoyed decades of expansion and consolidation which strengthened the position of monarchy, assisted the gradual centralisation of governance, the promulgation of territorial legislation, judicial and administrative reforms, and thus shaped the development of royal assemblies. These changes were not only the result of favourable circumstances peculiar to the Spanish kingdoms and England, but they were also prompted by a transformation affecting all of Western Europe from the second of the twelfth century.

Only the studies of Antonio Marongiu (1949), Thomas Bisson (1973) and Alec Myers (1975) stand as European perspectives into the earliest history of medieval parliaments. Incorporating some of the progress made in the field in the past thirty years, the present study will revisit the subject comparatively by analysing the changes that affected the temporal patterns and the calendar of these meetings in the kingdoms of Castile, León, Aragón, and England from 1100 to 1188, and particularly those that followed the accessions of the aforementioned monarchs.<sup>3</sup> However circumstantial these changes may seem, the study of the frequency of royal assemblies in this period provides some data of considerable institutional importance, most of which attests the parliamentary phenomenon.

King Henry II was crowned at Westminster on 12 December 1154. The *Chronicon Monasterii de Bello* reports that ‘the Christmas following, the most excellent king held his council at Westminster and, when all the business was disposed of, he sailed to Normandy about his affairs.’<sup>4</sup> A Christmas council was hardly an exceptional event in medieval

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and Parry, C.H., *Parliaments and Great Councils of Britain and Ireland* (London, 1839). Also illustrative of the historiography of this period is Juan Sempere, *Historia del derecho español* (Madrid, 1846).

<sup>3</sup> Alfonso II of Aragón was also count of Barcelona, a city that will host a number of assemblies subject to this thesis. While the comparative works of Antonio Marongiu, Thomas Bisson and Alec Myers affiliated to the old approaches, they are necessary and useful references for those studying subject comparatively.

<sup>4</sup> *Chronicon Monasterii de Bello*, *The Chronicle of Battle Abbey*, ed. and trans. by E. Searle, Oxford Medieval Texts (= OMT) (Oxford, 1980), pp. 160–61.

England, and yet could this gathering be characterised as a typical English assembly in the twelfth century? Did councils normally meet at Christmas? How regularly or frequently did councils and courts assemble? Are these circumstantial aspects of assemblies in any way signals of the parliamentary phenomenon?

Rarely have these questions been entertained in parliamentary studies, perhaps in the belief that the analysis of political assemblies could benefit only superficially from such circumstantial scrutiny, and even less from studying gatherings traditionally regarded as 'pre-parliamentary'. The following pages will seek to demonstrate that, on the contrary, much can be discovered about the nature of assemblies by analysing and making sense of their patterns of frequency and regularity. After all, in considering these circumstantial aspects we place these assemblies in a historical context outside which they cannot be properly conceived and understood.

### The frequency and periodicity of assemblies

The Anglo-Saxon *Witenagemot* or *Witan* is said to have assembled periodically three times every year: at Christmas in Gloucester, at Easter in Westminster and at Whitsuntide in Winchester.<sup>5</sup> This is not to suggest that assemblies met only in those abbeys, nor that their meetings were restricted to such feasts. But if Anglo-Saxon and early Norman assemblies have any claims to regularity and periodicity, this is the rhythm they seem to have followed. In analyzing this pattern in Spain, Stanley Payne believed that 'the Leonese monarchy, like its Visigothic predecessor, was accustomed to convene periodic meetings of a royal council (*curia regia*) to advise on major policy matters and establish a sort of consensus.'<sup>6</sup> But if the *palatium regis* of the Asturian-Leonese kingdom assembled regularly or periodically before the last quarter of the eleventh century, the sources are silent about it.<sup>7</sup> It is only from the reign of Alfonso VI (1072–1109) that important meetings of the royal court seemed to enjoy some frequency.<sup>8</sup>

The *Provisions of Oxford*, promulgated at the meeting of a royal council in 1258, established that 'there are to be three parliaments a year,'<sup>9</sup> and in 1283 Pedro III of Aragón-Catalonia 'issued a constitution promising to summon once a year in Catalonia an assembly of nobles, clergy and townsmen.'<sup>10</sup> But contrary to such written dispositions, the

<sup>5</sup> Primary references to the periodicity of the meetings of the *Witan* can be found in *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ed. D. Whitelock (London, 1961), p. 164 for the year 1087 and in William of Malmesbury, 'Vita Wulfstani', in *William of Malmesbury, Saints' Lives: Lives of SS. Wulfstan, Dunstan, Patrick, Benignus and Indract*, ed. and trans. by M. Winterbottom and R. M. Thomson (Oxford, 2002), p. 83. See also F. Liebermann, *The National Assembly in the Anglo-Saxon Period* (London, 1913), p. 17; H.G. Richardson, 'The Coronation in Medieval England', *Traditio* 16 (1960), p. 127.

<sup>6</sup> S. G. Payne, *A History of Spain and Portugal* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1973), 2 vols., I, p. 81.

<sup>7</sup> See G. Martínez Díez, 'Curia y Cortes en el Reino de Castilla', *Las Cortes de Castilla y León en la Edad Media* (Valladolid, 1988), 2 vols., I, p. 111. The only meeting clearly reported by diplomatic sources is the *palatium* which gathered in León on 28 July 1017 to proclaim a series of territorial laws. (Martínez, p. 114). See also L. Vázquez de Parga, 'El Fuero de León,' *Anuario de Historia del Derecho Español*, 15 (1944), p. 480 and A. García Gallo, *Manual de historia del derecho español* (Madrid, 1967), vol.1, p. 166, and L. G. de Valdeavellano, *Curso de historia de las instituciones españolas de los orígenes al final de la Edad Media* (Madrid, 1977), p. 455.

<sup>8</sup> Important gatherings took place in 1075, 1077, 1086 and 1089. See Martínez, pp. 118-9.

<sup>9</sup> G.O. Sayles, *The Functions of the Medieval Parliament of England* (London, 1988), pp. 69–70.

<sup>10</sup> A. Myers, *Parliaments and Estates in Europe to 1789* (London, 1975), p. 64.

initiative of summoning parliaments and *cortes* remained a monarchical prerogative in the thirteenth century, and parliaments were not assembled periodically.<sup>11</sup> Paradoxically, periodicity has been generally identified as an essential institutional feature and a constitutive ingredient of any parliamentary assembly. In the words of H.G. Richardson and G.O. Sayles, 'periodicity implies definition: there cannot be a periodical occurrence of something that is not defined.'<sup>12</sup> In light of such an approach, the ill-defined and irregular courts and councils of the twelfth century were accordingly regarded as 'pre-parliamentary assemblies,' and the study of their frequency was thus neglected. But how regularly did English and Spanish royal assemblies meet in the twelfth century? What temporal patterns can be established when compared to the frequency of gatherings in the eleventh and the thirteenth centuries?

Spanish and English assemblies of the twelfth century were not summoned periodically but met more regularly and frequently than has been hitherto assumed. If parliaments were to gather three times a year in the thirteenth century, the frequency of the assemblies which preceded them was much less. During the reign of Queen Urraca (1109–1126), royal assemblies are reported to have met at an average rate of 0.52 per year, a frequency comparable to the councils of Henry I (1101–1135), which gathered at an annual rate of 0.65, and to those of her Aragonese contemporary, Alfonso I (1104–1134), with 0.4 courts meeting per annum.<sup>13</sup> These figures are far from impressive, especially if we take into consideration that many of these assemblies were heavily dominated by ecclesiastical business, and that hardly any seem to have been attended by all the bishops and magnates of the realm, perhaps with the exception of some councils held by Henry I.

For the second quarter of the twelfth century, the frequency of meetings provides confusing patterns. Alfonso I's successor, the monk Ramiro II (1134–1137), is reported by the documents to have met with his nobles at a rate of 1.25 per annum, but such reports are less than reliable.<sup>14</sup> Conversely, the rate dropped for Count Ramón Berenguer (1137–1162) to 0.44, and to 0.35 for Alfonso VII of Castile-León (1126–1157). It must be noted, however, that the history of the Crown of Aragón in this period is poorly documented, in the absence of chronicle accounts of any substance. This cannot however be predicated of Alfonso VII's reign, which is conveniently recounted by the *Historia Compostellana* and the *Chronica Adefonsi Imperatoris*. Alfonso's English contemporary, King Stephen, gathered his nobles at a rate of 0.73 assemblies a year, indeed a surprising figure given the

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<sup>11</sup> See A. Marongiu, *Medieval Parliaments* (London, 1968), p. 56, and J.S. Roskell, *Parliament and Politics in Late Medieval England* (London, 1981–83), p. 448. In regard to the convocation of the Castilian *cortes* in the thirteenth century, see J. Manuel Pérez-Prendes, *Las Cortes de Castilla* (Barcelona, 1974), p. xiv.

<sup>12</sup> H.G. Richardson and G.O. Sayles, *Parliaments and Great Councils* (London, 1961), p. 36. See also Sayles, *Functions*, p. 17.

<sup>13</sup> These calculations have only taken into consideration those assemblies of the realm summoned by the monarchs to discuss issues concerning the kingdom. English assemblies are explicitly reported in the chronicles, while in the absence of such sources, Spanish assemblies are deduced from the unusually large concentration of bishops, magnates and barons, who occasionally appear in the witness lists of royal diplomas.

<sup>14</sup> Two of Ramiro's seven gatherings are exclusively described in Zurita's sixteenth-century *Anales de la Corona de Aragón*, 4 vols., I, ed. A. Canellas López (Zaragoza, 1967), liii.171–3, liv.177, 180–3, 186, 188–9.

anarchical character normally attributed by historians to this period.<sup>15</sup> This estimate, however, is only marginally superior to the frequency of Henry I's councils.

During the thirty-one years of Alfonso VII's reign, an estimated total of nineteen assemblies gathered, but many of them were legatine councils or ecclesiastical assemblies, summoned by the archbishops of Toledo or Compostela primarily for the discussion of ecclesiastical matters. If we follow Bernard Reilly's estimates, then the rate climbs up to about 0.51 assemblies per annum, but such calculations ignore the institutional distinction between royal and ecclesiastical assemblies. Furthermore, Reilly is prepared to suggest that it is not unlikely that 'there was at least one general council held each year, during the Christmas season broadly defined, and in at least half of the years of the reign, another held about the Easter season or when campaigning ended in early fall.'<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, it was customary for assemblies in the medieval period to meet during the Easter and Christmas seasons, so that Reilly's assertion may not be more than a plausible assumption. His study of Alfonso's government suggests, moreover, that 'it is no exaggeration to say that during the reign of Alfonso VII the "general council", as distinct from the peripatetic royal *curia*, had become a regular practice and a constituent part of the government.'<sup>17</sup> It is imperative then to agree on a definition of such assemblies. He suggests that 'if one defines a general council as any meeting during which a royal charter was confirmed by at least twelve bishops, more than two thirds of the total, no fewer than sixteen councils appear to have been held. That is roughly one every two years,'<sup>18</sup> and that results in our estimate of 0.35 climbing to 0.51. Reilly's criterion for defining a general assembly is a persuasive method of identifying important meetings where the literary accounts remain silent or unclear. But it overlooks the possibility that a strong episcopal presence, even if the emperor participated in the granting of diplomas, could just as well be a sign of an ecclesiastical assembly or a legatine council. The composition of an assembly provides the institutional historian with valuable information, but it is also necessary to know who summoned the meeting and for what purpose, in order to discover its institutional physiognomy. This is particularly relevant in the absence of explicit chronicle reports.

Reilly is no less optimistic when analyzing the frequency of Queen Urraca's courts in claiming that 'it does not seem adventurous to conclude that a general curia ordinarily met twice a year, at least after the very troubled years from 1109 to 1112.'<sup>19</sup> Such frequency considerably surpasses the estimate of 0.52, but this is only because his study includes assemblies which could be considered to be ecclesiastical in nature. Admittedly, frequency estimates will always vary in accordance with the different definitions of a royal assembly. Reilly's account of Alfonso's reign is indeed the most useful study written in English, and a

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<sup>15</sup> Donald Matthew has recently challenged the traditional view of Stephen's reign, arguing that an anarchical situation required the meeting of councils. This might also explain that assemblies met more frequently under Urraca than under Alfonso VII. See D. Matthew, *King Stephen* (London, 2002).

<sup>16</sup> B. F. Reilly, *The Kingdom of León-Castilla under Alfonso VII: 1126–1157* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), p. 158.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158.

<sup>19</sup> B. F. Reilly, *The Kingdom of León-Castilla under Queen Urraca: 1109–1126*, (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 254. Reilly identifies no fewer than eleven general courts during the reign of Urraca. But in considering the presence of five or more bishops, out of a total of thirteen confirming charters, as a sufficient threshold for an assembly, then sixteen other general meetings can be added to the list.

most valuable scholarly oasis in the midst of institutional approaches exclusively concerned with constitutional aspects. But when it comes to estimating the frequency of assemblies in Castile-León, his views may be compared not only with the present study but with the very erudite analysis of Gonzalo Martínez Díez. He suggests that the narrative and diplomatic sources identify only four plenary courts during the reign of Urraca, and points out that Reilly's estimate of eleven meetings results exclusively from an inadequate criterion of attendance.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, it is difficult to believe that the chronicles and royal clerks would choose to ignore or fail to report the meeting of such momentous gatherings. In order to make sense of such disparities it is necessary to return to the subject of definitions, for while Reilly's general councils are simply the enlarged meetings of the *curia regis*, Martínez's estimates refer specifically to the gathering of plenary courts. The figures presented in this study acknowledge an institutional distinction between these two definitions, and thus our estimate of 0.52 assemblies per annum stands at the midpoint between those two studies. In any case, a comprehensive institutional study of the twelfth century leads to the conclusion that none of Urraca's courts was as general or as plenary as the assemblies that gathered after the 1160s.

Reilly's generosity is matched by G.B. Adams' study of the councils of King Henry I. In this case, however, our disparity is not as considerable as the calculations made for Spanish assemblies. According to Adams, councils assembled on twenty-seven occasions between the years 1100 and 1135.<sup>21</sup> This estimate is primarily based on the chronicle descriptions of the composition of these assemblies. Thus, according to Adams, Henry's ordinary court was enlarged and turned into a general council with the convocation of the '*proceres totius regni*', that is all the magnates of the kingdom, on twenty-seven occasions. If all these gatherings were indeed assemblies of the realm, then our estimate of 0.65 gatherings per annum should be amended and increased to 0.77. Like Reilly's figures, Adam's estimates are based on the premise that there was no significant distinction between royal and ecclesiastical assemblies. When looking at the main narrative sources for the period, we find no more than twelve assemblies properly described as *concilia*. Adams' numbers become even less defensible if we search for the term '*generale concilium*', which is only applied to the ecclesiastical Council of London in May 1127.<sup>22</sup>

Admittedly, if all these figures are partly arbitrary and depend ultimately on the definition of assemblies, it is certainly the case that important changes in the frequency of meetings began to occur from the 1150s in England, and from the following decade in the Spanish kingdoms. Alfonso VII's son, Fernando II of León, assembled his nobles and bishops at a rate of 1.35 meetings per year, and the figures for his Spanish neighbours, Alfonso II of Aragón and Alfonso VIII of Castile, were 1.73 and 1.10 respectively. At the same time, Henry II met with his English nobles at an annual rate of 1.31 assemblies. It is interesting to note that the intensity of conciliar activity appears to have followed similar patterns in England and in the Spanish kingdoms. Impressive as they may seem, these figures are still modest when compared to the three annual parliaments and the regular meetings of the *cortes* in the centuries to come. As we have said, however, such periodicity was only on paper, and quickly became part of a list of unfulfilled monarchical

<sup>20</sup> Martínez, 'Curia y Cortes', pp. 122–3.

<sup>21</sup> G.B. Adams, *Councils and Courts in Anglo-Norman England* (London, 1926), pp. 110–17.

<sup>22</sup> John of Worcester, *Chronicon Iohannis Wigornensis*, ed. and trans. by P. McGurk, OMT, 3 vols (Oxford, 1998), vol. III, pp. 168–9.

promises. If councils and courts were not periodical in the second half of the twelfth century, they were not for this reason less intensively convened than the assemblies of the following century. After all, the convocation of the assembly of the realm, whether it is to be named a parliament, a court or a council, remained ultimately the fruit of a royal prerogative.<sup>23</sup>

The frequency rates we have so far presented have taken into account the length of each reign and the total number of meetings, but if the figures may not reveal patterns of periodicity, they do show a great deal of regularity, especially if we consider that all of these monarchs spent many of those years outside their territories. Let us take, for instance, the reign of Henry II. A total number of at least forty-six councils met in England from 1154 to 1189. Although this is a rather conservative estimate, it is nevertheless an impressive figure if we consider that Henry spent no more than one third of his thirty-five-year reign in England. David Carpenter's calculations break down the king's presence to 43 per cent of his time in Normandy, 20 per cent somewhere else on the Continent, and 37 per cent in the British Isles.<sup>24</sup> If this was indeed the case, then our estimate of 1.31 councils per annum would dramatically increase to 3.53 when considering only those years the king spent in England. This rhythm is considerably closer to the regularity of assemblies in the following century. Such frequency is peculiar to the reign of Henry II, and in identifying particular periods of conciliar intensity, the numbers become all the more extraordinary. In 1155, for example, just a year after Henry's accession, five councils are reported to have assembled; and from 1175 to 1177, undoubtedly the most intense period of the century, no fewer than sixteen gatherings were staged for a meeting between the king and his nobles in England. Such conciliar intensity may be understood in the light of the historical circumstances. Roger of Howden tells us that in 1155,

...being the second year of the reign of Henry, son of the empress Matilda, the said king returned from Normandy to England, and caused nearly all castles, which had been erected in England in the time of king Stephen, to be demolished, and issued a new coinage, which was the only one received and current throughout the realm; he also established peace in the kingdom, and commanded the laws of king Henry, his grandfather, to be observed inviolably throughout the whole of his kingdom, and in many matters followed the advice of Theobald, archbishop of Canterbury.<sup>25</sup>

Henry was then busy undoing his predecessor's arrangements and restoring order and peace after years dominated by lawlessness and violence. Holding several councils shortly after his coronation was perhaps the most successful method to put such policies into effect. But if the king thought to have everything under control, violence and disorder

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<sup>23</sup> See J. O'Callaghan, *The Cortes of Castile-León 1188–1350* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989); Thomas Bisson, 'Prelude to Power, Kingship and Constitution in the Realms of Aragón, 1175–1250' in R. Burns (ed.), *The Worlds of Alfonso the Learned and James the Conqueror* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), and G.O. Sayles and H.G. Richardson, *The Functions of the Medieval Parliament of England* (London, 1988).

<sup>24</sup> D. Carpenter, *The Struggle for Mastery, Britain 1066–1284* (London, 2003), p. 193.

<sup>25</sup> Roger of Howden, *Chronica Magistri Rogeri de Houedene*, ed. by W. Stubbs, 4 vols., Rolls Series (=RS) (London, 1868–71), I, p. 215. Translated from H.T. Riley, *The Annals of Roger de Hoveden*, 3 vols (Felfinch, 1996), vol. II, p. 255. See also *Chronicon Monasterii de Bello*, pp. 155–6.

returned to haunt his own government, when his sons Henry, Richard and Geoffrey led a rebellion on the Continent. The fighting lasted several months and resulted in a royal victory. Peace was finally achieved at a diplomatic *colloquium* convened by Louis VII of France between Gisors and Trie in 1173.<sup>26</sup> But as the Continental uprising was brought to an end, Henry faced new challenges from the Scots, who were profiting from the king's absence and had joined the rebellion by invading Northumbria. William of Newburgh's *Historia Rerum Anglicarum* reports an assembly of English nobles that gathered at Newcastle in 1174 to deal with the Scottish invasion. Henry was not present at the meeting, and the Scots were pushed back northwards by an English army, while William the Lion was captured at Alnwick. The same year, William and Henry signed the Treaty of Falaise, which imposed heavy duties and conditions on the Scots, one of which was the recognition of Henry II's lordship over the Scottish king. Homage was paid to Henry in the Council of York in August 1175, when William was finally released.<sup>27</sup> King William's homage, however, was simply one among many of the reparations that Henry II sought, for the rebellion had loosened his grip not only on Angevin affairs and in the endemically violent lands of Northumbria, but also over the rest of England. At the Council of Woodstock in July 1175, the king prohibited the rebels of 1173–74 from attending court without special summons; and a month later, at the Council of Nottingham, he sought to punish those who had violated forest legislation while he was fighting in Normandy. The king's measures were evidenced in a forest assessment registered for Nottinghamshire in the Pipe Rolls of 1175, and by the narrative of Roger of Howden:

In this year, also, the king, the father, impleaded all the clergy and laity of his kingdom who, in time of the wars, had committed offences against him in his forests, and as to the taking of venison, and exacted fines of them all, although Richard de Lucy gave a warranty that all this was done with his sanction, and by command of the king, sent from beyond sea.<sup>28</sup>

Partially at least, the councils of 1175 became the occasions for public reparation and atonement, as well as the restitution of general order and royal control. Henry was determined to restore the *status quo* of 1172, and the gathering of the realm seemed to be the most effective channel to do so. It is possible, then, to suggest that such conciliar intensity was the natural sequence to years of turmoil, much like the period 1139–41, when the anarchy of Stephen was perhaps at its peak, and which also coincided with particularly intense years for the meeting of councils.<sup>29</sup> A similar pattern can be found in

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<sup>26</sup> See J. Gillingham, *The Angevin Empire* (London, 2001), p. 34, and F. Barlow, *The Feudal Kingdom of England, 1042–1216*, fifth edition (London, 1999), pp. 282–3.

<sup>27</sup> Gillingham, *Angevin Empire*, p. 26. See also R. Mortimer, *Angevin England, 1154–1258* (London, 1994), p. 141, and C. Daniell, *From Norman Conquest to Magna Carta* (London, 2003), p. 59. The 1173–74 rebellion is treated in detail by Jordan of Fantosme's chronicle, ed. and trans. by R.C. Johnston (Oxford, 1981). See also *Gesta Regis Henrici Secundi*, ed. W. Stubbs, RS (London, 1867), 2 vols., I, pp. 94–5; William of Newburgh, *Historia rerum Anglicarum*, ed. R. Howlett in *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II, and Richard I*, RS (London, 1884–90), 2 vols., I, p. 198; Roger of Howden, II, p. 82; *Chronicon Monasterii de Bello*, pp. 87–8, and Robert de Torigni, *Chronica Roberti de Torigneio, Abbatii Monasterii Sancti Michaelis in Periculo Maris*, ed. R. Howlett in *Chronicles*, 4 vols., IV, p. 267.

<sup>28</sup> Roger of Howden, vol. II, p. 79; Riley, *Annals*, p. 398.

<sup>29</sup> No fewer than five councils met in England from 1139 to 1141, a number which considerably surpasses the 0.73 annual average for the reign of Stephen. Though some of these councils were legatine, their main business was the restitution of peace and order and thus all correspond to the typical conciliar patterns in



the kingdom of Castile-León in the year 1114, when three assemblies were convened with a view to repairing the anarchical circumstances afflicting Urraca's realm.<sup>30</sup>

Like the kings of England, the Spanish monarchs spent considerable time outside their lands. In this context, the estimates of conciliar frequency we have provided for the Spanish kingdoms can justifiably be increased, thus appearing almost equally impressive as the figures under Henry II. Alfonso VIII and Fernando II spent long years fighting the Moors and pushing their frontiers southwards. The territorial hostilities with Navarre and the campaigns of the Reconquest seem to have kept Alfonso occupied for most of the years 1172–73, 1176–77 and 1180–89.<sup>31</sup> While it is true that the preparation for war was an infallible catalyst for the meeting of councils, monarchs could not summon the nobles and bishops of the realm for the duration of the conflict. A period plagued with meetings of royal courts in Castile preceded and followed the coming of age of its king in November 1169, an event which was celebrated by one of the most important courts of the century, and one believed by some historians to be the very first Castilian *cortes*.<sup>32</sup> Six other courts are likely to have met between 1169 and 1170, thus marking out a period of intense conciliarism, which takes our frequency average of 1.10 up to 3.5 courts per annum. Perhaps the 1169–70 Castilian courts fulfilled a similar function to Henry II's 1155 councils in asserting the authority of an incoming monarch. Just as Henry's accession ended years of disorder and lawlessness in England, Alfonso's majority and the *curia* in Burgos ended a decade of violence prompted by Fernando II's coveting of Castilian lands. After the death of the Emperor Alfonso VII, the kingdom of Castile-León was divided between Sancho III and Fernando II, but the former died in 1158, leaving a three-year-old infant on the throne of Castile. Taking advantage of this, Fernando of León occupied some Castilian territories, including Toledo in August 1162, and gathered with the magnates of Castile and León at Soria in 1163 to secure the infant's vassalage and exercise some control over his custody and lands.<sup>33</sup> The meeting was dominated by disputes between the Leonese and the Castilians, and especially between the king of León and the powerful Lara family over the regency. But before Fernando II could publicly establish his lordship over Castile, the

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this period. These are the councils of Oxford in June 1139, Winchester in August 1139 and April 1141, Salisbury in December 1139 and Westminster in December 1141. See William of Malmesbury, *Historia Novella*, ed. and trans. by E. King and K.R. Potter, OMT (Oxford, 1998), pp. 22, 25–8, 46–51, 58; William of Newburgh, I, p. 35; John of Worcester, pp. 284, 278; Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum, The History of the English People*, ed. and trans. by D. Greenway, OMT (Oxford, 1996), cap. x.12, p. 450.

<sup>30</sup> See *Historia Compostellana*, ed. E. Falque Rey, *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis*, (CCCM) LXX (Turnhout, 1988), pp. 129, 169. In Spanish: *Historia Compostelana*, trans. E. Falque Rey (Madrid, 1994), pp. 238–51.

<sup>31</sup> G. Martínez Díez, *Alfonso VIII* (Burgos, 1995), pp. 112–34.

<sup>32</sup> See J. González, *El Reino de Castilla en la época de Alfonso VIII*, 3 vols. (Madrid, 1960), vol. II, pp. 211–6, notes.124–6. Refer also to A. Salvá, *Historia de la Ciudad de Burgos* (Burgos, 1915), pp. 147–8, I. García Rámila, 'Las Cortes de Castilla', *Revista de Archivos, Bibliotecas y Museos*, 69 (1925), p. 93, F. Martínez Marina, *Ensayo histórico-crítico sobre la legislación y principales cuerpos legales de los reinos de León y Castilla* (Madrid, 1808, reprinted in 1966), p. 64, and F. Martínez Marina, *Teoría de las cortes o grandes juntas nacionales de León y Castilla*, 3 vols (Madrid, 1813), reprinted. by J. Martínez, *Biblioteca de Autores Españoles*, vol. CCXIX (Madrid, 1968), pp. 138–9. Their views are primarily based on Florián de Ocampo's *Las quatro partes enteras de la Crónica de España que mando componer el rey D. Alfonso llamado el Sabio*, Biblioteca Nacional (Madrid), MS R/52 and R/30757, f.387v–388r.

<sup>33</sup> Martínez, *Alfonso VIII*, pp. 28–30.

infant king was secretly taken from the council.<sup>34</sup> The boy Alfonso was secretly rushed to the city of Atienza, and so were Fernando's Castilian ambitions dashed, for as *De Rebus Hispaniae* describes, the king and his nobles were in the meantime waiting for the infant to return from his sleep.<sup>35</sup> As Alfonso consolidated his position in the 1170s, Castile recovered the lands lost to León during his minority, and the boundaries were finally set in the *Colloquium* of Fresno-Lavandera in June 1183.<sup>36</sup> It is perhaps in this context that the intensity of conciliar activity in 1169–70 should be understood.

The Leonese courts of Fernando II also enjoyed a period of intensity from 1180 to 1183, when they met on fifteen occasions. Like most of the Castilian courts of 1169–70, these meetings can only be inferred by analyzing witness lists and the evidence of consultation in the royal diplomas, because no chronicle accounts for the Spanish kingdoms are extant for this period.<sup>37</sup> Such is also the case for the courts of Alfonso II of Aragón, which gathered seventeen times from 1167 to 1171, and four times in the year 1164. The frequency of the 1164 courts may be explained by the very same context which surrounded the 1155 councils of Henry II and the 1169–70 courts of Alfonso VIII, for Alfonso II had become the Aragonese ruler at Ramón Berenguer's death in 1162. Alfonso II became marquis of Provence in 1166 and received homage from several adjacent territories thereafter. Accordingly, conciliar intensity from 1167 to 1171 may well be related to his trans-Pyrenean policies and military campaigns. Alfonso's opposition to the count of Toulouse turned him into an ally of Henry II, who was at the time campaigning in his Angevin territories. So while 1167–71 was an intense period of conciliarism for Alfonso II, it was conversely a time which saw the gathering of only one English council, at London in June 1170, for Henry spent most of the period 1166–74 outside England.<sup>38</sup> Circumstances not unlike these faced the kingdom of Castile from 1179 to 1181. Alfonso VIII's mind was probably occupied with the southern frontier and the endemic occurrence of campaigns might have determined years devoid of assemblies. On the other hand, the scarcity of meetings in the 1160s is more probably a manifestation of the political shortcomings that usually accompanied a minority.

Admittedly, it is difficult to single out the factor or factors which determined the frequency of meetings, but it is nevertheless clear that conciliar intensity from the 1150s in England, and from the 1160s in the Spanish kingdoms, is extraordinary and certainly unprecedented. In sum, if the councils and courts which assembled in the second half of the twelfth century were not periodical, they were at least very frequent, for their

<sup>34</sup> R. Jiménez de Rada, *Historia de rebus Hispaniae sive Historia Gothica*, ed. J. Fernández Valverde, CCCM, vol. LXII (Turnhout, 1987), VII, p. 238. See *Crónica de Veinte Reyes*, ed. by G. Martínez Díez et al. (Burgos, 1991), XIII, pp. 270–1, and *Primera Crónica General de España*, ed. R. Menéndez Pidal, 2 vols. (Madrid, 1955), vol. 2, p. 670, and *Anales de la Corona de Aragón*, I, pp. 241–2.

<sup>35</sup> See *Historia de los Hechos de España* ed. and trans. by J. Fernández Valverde (Madrid, 1989), XVI, 285–6. See also Martínez, *Alfonso VIII*, pp. 30–32.

<sup>36</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 67–70, and J. González (ed.), *Regesta de Fernando II* (Madrid, 1943), pp. 315–321, no. 46.

<sup>37</sup> If it is appropriate to infer the meeting of royal gatherings from the diplomas, these Leonese courts met in Mayorga, Coyanza, Benavente, Toro, Ciudad Rodrigo and Salamanca in 1180; Mansilla, Castrotoraf, Salamanca, Benavente and Mayorga in 1181; Astorga in 1182; Coria and León (2) in 1183.

<sup>38</sup> The absence of councils in England infallibly coincided with the king's Continental visits and campaigns or his travels to Ireland. This is the case for the years 1156, 1159–62, 1167–69, 1171–74, 1178, 1183 and 1187.

regularity seems to have been interrupted only by war.<sup>39</sup> The view of Richardson and Sayles is that the distinction between councils and parliaments in the thirteenth century is that the latter met periodically.<sup>40</sup> The authors might have been enticed by the clauses of the *Provisions of Oxford*, but the evidence overwhelmingly suggests that periodicity was not an institutional reality first appropriated by thirteenth-century parliaments, but remained a forgotten or suppressed feature inscribed in unbinding constitutions. And just as in the case of the English parliaments, the convocation of the thirteenth-century *cortes* was primarily determined by royal needs and desires. Pedro Porras argues that 'there was no predetermined periodicity that determined the meeting of the *Cortes*, which usually gathered when the king needed to fulfill some personal objective.'<sup>41</sup> As an alternative to this non-existent periodicity then, the parliamentary phenomenon seems to be in part embodied in changes in the frequency of political gatherings from the 1150s and 1160s onwards. But were the circumstantial aspects of the parliamentary phenomenon reduced to the frequency of assemblies?

#### The calendar of assemblies: feast days and crown-wearings

Some degree of periodicity has traditionally been predicated for the Anglo-Saxon royal assembly, which appears to have met on the great feasting periods of the year: Christmas, Easter and Whitsun.<sup>42</sup> The corroboration of such periodicity is not the aim of the present study, but the early Norman courts seem to have followed the Anglo-Saxon custom. Did this pattern continue in the twelfth century? A resolution of this question is best approached by way of a review of those English councils which are clearly reported by the sources as having assembled on Christmas day, Easter Sunday or Whitsunday.

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<sup>39</sup> Some authors, like Robert Bartlett, believe that Angevin councils continued to meet periodically. If this is the case, they did not follow the festive patterns of their Anglo-Norman precedents. See R. Bartlett, *England under the Norman and Angevin Kings, 1075–1225* (Oxford, 2000), p. 143. See also J.R. Maddicott, 'An Infinite Multitude of Nobles: Quality, Quantity and Politics in the Pre-Reform Parliaments of Henry III', *Thirteenth Century England* 7 (Woodbridge, 1999), p. 17. Nilda Guglielmi, on the contrary, thinks that the Castilian and Leonese courts did not meet regularly in the twelfth century. See no. Guglielmi, 'La Curia Regia en León y Castilla (I)', *Cuadernos de Historia de España*, 23–24 (1955), pp. 67–8. However, she admits that the *Primera Cronica General* may provide some evidence for such regularity. During the second year of Sancho III, this chronicle says: '*pues que ouo visto su regno et sus pueblos et fechas sus cortes*' (p. 495).

<sup>40</sup> Richardson and Sayles, *Parliaments and Great Councils*, p. 9: 'we have assemblies of the same composition, some of which, those meeting at fixed terms, are parliaments, while others, meeting occasionally and not periodically, are not parliaments.' See also pp. 12–13.

<sup>41</sup> P. Porras et al., *Historia de España VII, La época medieval: administración y gobierno* (Madrid, 2003), p. 116. I have translated the quotation from the Spanish: '*si el rey convocaba a quien creía oportuno, también decidía reunir a Cortes cuando le parecía conveniente, no existe periodicidad alguna prefijada para la reunión de las Cortes, que solían producirse cuando el rey necesitaba cumplimentar algún objetivo de su interés (conseguir recursos económicos, darle publicidad a un texto jurídico, hacer jurar al heredero de la corona, etc.)*'

<sup>42</sup> It is likely that this practice was consolidated in the late Anglo-Saxon period for, as Liebermann points out, 'though several Teutonic tribes on the Continent used to assemble periodically at fixed times, and though the English church decreed in 673 and 786 that every year two synods should be held, in English states no rule seems to have existed on which day or how often the witan were to meet.' Liebermann, *National Assembly*, p. 46. See also M. Biddle, 'Seasonal Festivals and Residence: Winchester, Westminster, and Gloucester from the Tenth to the Twelfth Centuries,' *Anglo-Norman Studies* 8 (1986), and J. Green, *The Government of England under Henry I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 19–24.

During the reign of Henry I (1110–1135), of a total of twenty-three dated meetings no fewer than four gathered on Whitsunday, these being the councils of St Albans on 9 June 1101, London on 24 May 1108 and 13 June 1109 and New Windsor on 29 May 1110. According to Cheney's medieval calendar, all these dates coincide with the Sunday of Whitsun, which is the day when Pentecost was celebrated.<sup>43</sup> This figure may not at first appear surprising, but its importance is revealed when compared to the meetings of Stephen and Henry II. Not a single royal gathering is registered on Pentecost day from 1135 to 1154, and during the thirty-six-year reign that followed only one assembly is reported to have met on Whitsunday. An excerpt from Hugh the Chanter's *History of the Church of York* reinforces the customary importance of Whitsun during the reign of Henry I. Early in 1109, 'when the king returned to England, many of the men of Canterbury came to meet him, making great offers and greater promises, urgently beseeching him not to suffer the dignity of the church of Canterbury to be impaired. The king told them to wait till Whitsun.'<sup>44</sup>

A festive pattern is also revealed by the number of councils which gathered on Easter Sunday. Out of a total of twenty-three dated assemblies from 1110 to 1135, two appear to have commenced on the feast of the Resurrection of Christ, one assembly out of twelve during the reign of Stephen, and three out of forty-three during the years of Henry II. Absolute numbers may say little, but the percentages are 8.6, 8.3 and 6.9 for the consecutive reigns, thus showing a gradual regression of this occurrence.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, the number of councils which began on Christmas day gradually decreased throughout the century. It was customary for festive courts to take place from Christmas day and occasionally be prolonged to the feast of the Epiphany in the first week of January. Although business concerning the realm and political discussions did take place at some point during these celebrations, these courts were primarily devoted to feasting, religious ceremonies and celebrations, all of which were only peripheral to the governance of the realm.<sup>46</sup> Additionally, there is also an important terminological distinction between a Christmas court and a council of the realm, for the former was generally identified by the sources as *curia*, the latter as *concilium*. Nevertheless, not all of those Christmas gatherings were festive courts, because some were actually assemblies of the realm (described by the sources as *concilia*) and met more frequently before the 1160s.<sup>47</sup> Admittedly, more

<sup>43</sup> C.R. Cheney (ed.), *A Handbook of Dates*, new edn. revised by M. Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 217, 184, 225, 194.

<sup>44</sup> Hugh the Chanter, *History of the Church of York, 1066–1127*, ed. by C.H. Johnson et al., OMT (Oxford, 1990), pp. 38–41.

<sup>45</sup> The Easter councils which are specifically dated by the sources are: Winchester on 29 March 1103, Windsor on 14 April 1107, Westminster on 22 March 1136, Wallingford on 10 April 1155 (though it was actually described as *post Pascha* in a year when Easter Sunday fell on 27 March), Worcester on 20 April 1158, and Windsor on 1 April 1179. The medieval calendar may be checked in Cheney, *Handbook*, p. 228.

<sup>46</sup> All gatherings dealt with political issues in one way or another, but according to the sources, conciliar discussions of matters concerning the governance of the realm became more prominent than ceremony and feasting in the second half of the twelfth century.

<sup>47</sup> I have been able to identify the following Christmas councils: Westminster 1100 and 1102, Windsor 1126, Westminster 1135, Salisbury 1139, Westminster 1154 and 1155, and Lincoln 1157. The Council of Westminster 1135 possibly met on 22 December. See *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum*, 3 vols., II, *Regesta Henrici Primi, 1100–1135*, ed. by C. Johnson and H.A. Cronne (Oxford, 1919–69), nos. 488, 308, 619, 354, 1442; *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum*, III, *Regesta Regis Stephani ac Mathildis imperatricis ac Gaufridi et Henrici ducum normannorum, 1135–1154*, ed. by H.A. Cronne and R.H.C. Davis (Oxford, 1913–69), nos. 189, 787–90; William of Malmesbury, ii.15; v.392; Hugh the Chanter, p. 217, Henry of Huntingdon, vii.37; John of

assemblies are likely to have met during the Whitsun, Easter and Christmas seasons, but here we are particularly interested in those councils which were specifically summoned for the feast days, for such a convocation is likely to reveal a fundamentally festive dimension to the meetings of the realm.

In sum, 39 per cent of Henry I's councils appear to have followed the Anglo-Saxon festive calendar, in contrast to 25 per cent of Stephen's and only 16 per cent of Henry II's. These figures climb up exponentially if we consider the number of assemblies which met on other important religious days, like the first Sundays of Advent and Lent, Michaelmas, Epiphany, the Purification of the Virgin Mary, Corpus Christi and Rogation. But interestingly, four of the seven councils of Henry II which assembled on Christmas day, Whitsunday and Easter Sunday took place in the 1150s, thus revealing that only three councils were summoned on festive occasions for the other twenty-five years of his reign. The following decade, therefore, seems to be the period when English councils more clearly dissociated themselves from the traditional festive calendar and met instead whenever the *status regni* or the *negotium urgente* demanded it. In other words, the rhythm of conciliar activity from the 1160s was more determined by the current state of the realm and the urgency of business than by the celebration of traditional feast days. Is it possible to suggest then that councils became less festive and more political in nature? And if this is the case, can this transformation be identified as yet another symptom of a true parliament? Perhaps this is too much to speculate, but the figures are certainly telling.

At the festivals of Christmas, Whitsun and Easter it was customary for kings to wear their crowns, and indeed this was one of the central components of ceremonial kingship displayed at assemblies. But if the meetings of the realm increasingly began to take place outside those festive occasions, what occurred to the royal ritual of crown-wearing? Not surprisingly, the intimate relationship between festive councils and crown-wearing meant that the decline of the former is likely to have escorted the demise of the latter. And so it was, for according to the sources, crown-wearing at English councils became increasingly rare throughout the twelfth century and seems to have completely vanished after the 1160s. In December 1139 the chronicler John of Worcester reports that King Stephen '*ibidem Dominicam Nativitatem celebraturus, et pro more regio coronam dignitatis portaturus,*' (he celebrated Nativity Sunday [Christmas], and wore his crown according to royal custom).<sup>48</sup> But one of the most politically loaded passages of Henry of Huntingdon's *Historia Anglorum* laments that

...after Christmas [1139], King Stephen drove Nigel, bishop of Ely, out of his bishopric, because he was the nephew of the above-mentioned bishop of Salisbury, for whom the king's feelings of hatred he had now extended to his kin. But to say where he was at Christmas, or at Easter, is of no importance. At this time, to be sure, the ceremonies of the court and the custom of royal crown-wearings, handed down from the ancient line, had completely died out; the huge store of treasure had by now disappeared; there was no peace in the realm, but

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Worcester, pp. 278–9; *Chronicon Monasterii de Bello*, pp. 152, 160; Robert of Torigni, iv.182; Roger of Howden, i.216.

<sup>48</sup> John of Worcester, pp. 278–9.

through murder, burning, and pillage everything was being destroyed, everywhere the sound of war, with lamentation and terror.<sup>49</sup>

Henry of Huntingdon's nostalgic observation is important in that as the customary periodicity of royal gatherings faded away so too did the predominance of festive and ceremonial components at the meeting of councils. But was he trying to establish a link between the decline of crown-wearing and the depletion of the funds of the treasury? Logically, the pompous display of royal rituals and ceremony at assemblies could hardly be a priority for a crown treasury in bankruptcy. Such luxurious display of royalty is likely to have been a rather expensive event, and costly enough to leave a trace in the accounts of the Pipe Rolls. '*In conducendis coronis regis ad Wirecestre...*', registered the rolls in reference to the Council of Worcester, which assembled in April 1158, and is said to be Henry II's last crown-wearing.<sup>50</sup>

Conversely, if the civil war of Stephen's reign emptied the treasury and brought England to financial ruin, a steady recovery is generally acknowledged for the decades which followed. Why then did crown-wearings disappear? Why did all of Henry II's crown-wearing councils take place in the 1150s, when the financial state of the crown was probably at its worst? Were these ceremonial displays really dependent on the financial situation of the crown? Henry publicly wore his crown at the meeting of the councils of St Edmund's and Lincoln in 1157, and Worcester in 1158.<sup>51</sup> At Worcester, the king is reported by Roger of Howden to have sworn to wear his crown no longer,

...being the fifth year of the reign of king Henry, son of the empress Matilda, the said king caused himself, a third time, together with his wife Eleanor, to be crowned at Worcester, at the festival of Easter; and they came to the offertory; they took off their crowns, and offered them upon the altar; vowing before God, that they would never in all their lives wear them again.<sup>52</sup>

It is difficult to find an explanation for the king's decision at Worcester, but as peculiar as it may seem, the scene is also described in the chronicle of Ralph of Diceto, who reports that after the third coronation of Henry at Worcester and the celebration of Mass, the king was not crowned thereafter, '*post celebrationem divinatorum coronam super altare posuit, nec ulterius coronatus est.*'<sup>53</sup> Henry's motivations pose a very complex case for the institutional historian. Was his position so cemented in 1158 that he could dispense with

<sup>49</sup> Translated in Henry of Huntingdon, pp. 722–5.

<sup>50</sup> *The Great Rolls of the Pipe, 1155–1158*, ed. J. Hunter, Record Commission (London, 1884), p. 175. The cost accounted for this item is xiii.s. viii.d. Such expenditure is perhaps touched upon in the words of G.O. Sayles in reference to these ceremonies: 'Then the king wore his ceremonial crown; a votive mass was celebrated; chants (*laudes*) were sung in his honour; there were feasting at which the titular officers of the royal household performed their honorific duties. It would have been an affront to the king for any magnate without good excuse to absent himself.' G.O. Sayles, *The King's Parliament of England* (London, 1975), p. 21.

<sup>51</sup> A reference to the Council of St Edmund's (May 1157) can be found in *Chronicon Monasterii de Bello*, pp. 174, 176. The Council of Lincoln (December 1157) is briefly mentioned in Roger of Howden, vol. I, p. 216.

<sup>52</sup> This is H.T. Riley's English translation in *The Annals of Roger de Hoveden*, vol. I, part 2 (Felinfach, 1996), p. 256, of the Latin in Roger of Howden, vol. I, p. 216. Note that Roger of Howden's calendar follows the regnal year and thus he refers to the year 1159 instead of 1158.

<sup>53</sup> Ralph of Diceto, *Radulphi de Diceto Ymagines Historiarum*, ed. W. Stubbs, 2 vols., RS (London, 1876), vol. I, p. 302.

the ceremonial display that accompanied crown-wearings? Interestingly, there was no novelty in the assemblies of 1157 and 1158, which could have easily found their place among the councils of Henry I and Stephen, for they responded just as well to the customary institutional patterns established in the late Anglo-Saxon period. According to Sayles, annual crown-wearings were established as early as the tenth century, and Richardson's study of English medieval coronations suggests that 'the early Norman kings planned to wear their crown on the three great feasts of Christmas, Easter, and Whitsun at three of the greater abbeys, Westminster, Winchester, and Gloucester.'<sup>54</sup> As we have seen, this practice was maintained during the first half of the twelfth century. The 1157–58 councils did not meet at the customary locations but they continued to meet on the customary occasions. The councils of St Edmund's, Lincoln and Worcester gathered on Whitsunday, Christmas day and Easter Sunday respectively, and Henry II is said to have worn his crown.

If frequency patterns changed immediately after the accession of Henry II, the festive character of gatherings remained just as typical. It is only in the 1160s, and more specifically since Henry's return from Normandy in 1163, that crown-wearings were entirely forced out of royal assemblies, and thus the festive aspect of gatherings appears to have weakened.<sup>55</sup> If such a trend may not be explained in terms of the financial situation of the crown, why did crown-wearings grow out of fashion? Richardson reminds us that 'Henry II and especially Richard I were largely absentee monarchs and that a crown-wearing in England must have been momentous. But in the thirteenth century, as Henry III's passion for crown-wearings grew, the distinction between a crown-wearing and a coronation must have become sharp and emblematic.'<sup>56</sup> However, this hardly resolves the question, because crown-wearings were recurrent during the reign of Henry I, a monarch who spent many years of his reign outside England.

Spanish assemblies may well have met systematically on particular feast days, but there is no substantial evidence to support such a claim. Nor is there much proof that the practice of coronations and crown-wearings was customary, perhaps with the notable exception of the imperial coronation of Alfonso VII in 1135. 'Having dressed the king in a fine cloak woven with wonderful skill' – describes the *Chronica Adefonsi Imperatoris* – 'they placed on his head a crown of pure gold and precious stones.'<sup>57</sup> A diploma granted to the cathedral of Sigüenza commemorates the scene in one of its final clauses: '*eo anno quo dominus Adefonsus imperator sumpsit coronam imperii in Legione*'.<sup>58</sup> Though coronations

<sup>54</sup> Richardson, 'The Coronation', (1960), p. 127. See also Sayles, *King's Parliament*, pp. 21–2.

<sup>55</sup> According to Richardson, crown-wearings were not abruptly discontinued during the reign of Henry II, but they became much rarer than during his grandfather's reign. See Richardson, 'The Coronation', p. 127. It is likely, however, that Richardson is guided by the evidence connected to the councils of the late 1150s. Generally speaking, crown-wearings disappeared thereafter, or they were not reported. Exceptions can be found in the premature coronations of heirs to the throne.

<sup>56</sup> Richardson, 'The Coronation', pp. 134–5. In agreement with Richardson, Sayles argues that the prolonged absences of Henry II meant that crown-wearings went out of vogue, but were resumed under John and Henry III. Sayles, *King's Parliament*, p. 24.

<sup>57</sup> Translated into English in Barton and Fletcher (eds), *The World of El Cid*, pp. 70, 193, from the Latin in 'Chronica Adefonsi Imperatoris' ed. by A. Maya, in *Chronica Hispana saeculi XII*, CCCC LXXI.i (Turnhout, 1990), p. 70.

<sup>58</sup> P. Rassow, 'Die Urkunden Kaiser Alfons VII. von Spanien. Eine paläographisch-diplomatische Untersuchung', *Archiv für Urkundenforschung* 10 (1928), p. 424 [June 1135, Toro].

were undoubtedly carried out at the beginning of each reign, this is as explicit and descriptive as Spanish sources get when referring to them in the twelfth century. This is not to suggest that Spanish royal rituals were comparatively modest and differed much from the ceremonial standards of European kingship. But the absence of narrative sources for the second half of the twelfth century severely limits the historian's perceptions of such events and probably explains the lack of interest of secondary studies in the subject.

In sum, from the 1150s and 1160s onwards, Spanish courts and English councils began to assemble with unprecedented frequency to the point of reaching some degree of regularity, if not periodicity. Furthermore, this intense frequency also meant that gatherings began increasingly to meet outside the systematic calendar of feast days, thus prompting the demise of crown-wearings and, in general, a gradual decline in the traditional festive component of assemblies. Can all these changing aspects of assemblies in the twelfth century thus be related to the parliamentary phenomenon? Should some of these patterns be identified as symptoms of a parliament? The study of the temporal circumstances of twelfth-century councils and courts provides at least a necessary platform when analysing the accidental makeup of thirteen-century institutions.