Antoni Furió, Carlos Laliena, Pere Verdés

*Social Mobility, Economic Growth and Inequality in the Late Medieval Crown of Aragon (Aragon, Catalonia, Valencia and Mallorca, 13th-15th centuries)**

1. Introduction

Social mobility, both upward and downward, was a phenomenon that occurred in the Crown of Aragon during most of the late Middle Ages. Many families rose socially from one class to another or improved their position within their own group, while, conversely, many others fell down the social ladder and ended up disappearing in the mass of documentation that either confirms their social descent or simply fails to mention them. However, as in other kingdoms and territories of the Iberian Peninsula, it is possible to highlight three important moments in these processes of social mobility, linked to other significant phenomena in both Iberian and European history.

The first one is the great territorial expansion – the misnamed 'Reconquest' – of the Christian kingdoms of the north into the southern half of the peninsula, that is, into what was left of al-Andalus. This involved a vast process of colonisation of the territories taken from the Muslims with Christian settlers from the north or even from the other side of the Pyrenees. Tens of thousands of families, mostly but not only peasants, moved from the northern kingdoms to the newly conquered territories in search of land and freedom, in other words better living conditions – both material and social – than they had hitherto enjoyed in their regions of origin (Guinot and Torró 2007; Eiroa 2012; Garcia-Oliver 2015). Secondly, there is the reduction of inequality that followed the great calamities of the fourteenth century and in particular the outbreak and recurrence of the Black Death. Contrary to what is commonly believed, and despite the great mortality rates caused by the epidemic, and the chaos and disorder that followed it, the second half of the fourteenth century and the first decades of the fifteenth century were not necessarily a time of economic crisis or recession. Iberian societies, like those in Europe in general, did not take long to recover, to resume growth and to restore the social ladder to its previous dynamism

* Antoni Furió's work (Universitat de València) was funded via Grant PID2021-120838NB-I00, funded by MCIN/AEI/ 10.13039/501100011033 and by "ERDF A way of making Europe", by the "European Union", and CIPROM/2022/46, funded by the Generalitat Valenciana. Carlos Laliena's work (Universidad de Zaragoza) was funded via Grant PID2021-123286NB-C21, funded by MCIN/AEI/10.13039/501100011033 and by Grupo CEMA H20_23R, funded by Gobierno de Aragón. Pere Verdes Pijuan's work (IMF, CSIC) was funded via Grant PID2022-141368NB-C22, funded by MCIN/AEI/ 10.13039/501100011033 and by "ERDF A way of making Europe", by the "European Union", and 2021 SGR 01151 of the Generalitat de Catalunya.

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Referee List (DOI 10.36253/fup_referee_list)
FUP Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing (DOI 10.36253/fup_best_practice)

Antoni Furió, Carlos Laliena Corbera, Pere Verdés Pijuan, *Social mobility, economic growth and inequality in the late medieval Crown of Aragon (Aragón, Catalonia, Valencia and Mallorca, 13th-15th centuries)*, © Author(s), CC BY 4.0, DOI 10.36253/979-12-215-0667-9.19, in Angela Orlandi (edited by), *La mobilità sociale nelle società preindustriali: tendenze, cause ed effetti (secc. XIII-XVIII) / Social mobility in pre-industrial societies: tendencies, causes and effects (13th-18th centuries)*, pp. 379-418, 2025, published by Firenze University Press, ISBN 979-12-215-0667-9, DOI 10.36253/979-12-215-0667-9

(Epstein 2000; Jover and Morey 2003; Feliu 2004; Furió 2011; 2017; Viciano 2012; Álvarez Nogal, Prados de la Escosura and Santiago-Caballero 2020; Alfani 2020; Laliena 2022). In fact, not only social mobility *per se* but also ascent to a higher social class continued apace throughout most of the late Middle Ages. Only in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries did social boundaries become more rigid, and an evident process of the nobiliary and urban elites closing ranks and forming oligarchies took place (Bernabé 1994; Sabaté 1998; Narbona 2001; Fernández Trabal 2001). This can be considered a third phase of the processes of social mobility observed in the Crown of Aragon in the closing stages of the medieval period.

Taking these dynamics into account, this paper is divided into four sections. The first deals with the processes of social mobility associated with both the colonisation of territories taken from the Muslims in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and the impact of the Black Death and other calamities in the second half of the fourteenth century. The second section addresses both the shorter-range migrations, especially from the countryside to the city, and the dynamics of social mobility in rural and urban society. Although related to the latter, we wished to highlight, as a separate section, the case of the *conversos* (converts from Judaism), as an original and important phenomenon both quantitatively and qualitatively, and both its successes and failures, in the Crown of Aragon and the other Iberian states. Finally, the fourth section is devoted to some questions of approach and methodology, in particular political (from the lists of families who held public offices in certain cities) and economic ones (from tax records or wealth registers).

2. Geographical mobility and the dynamics of long-term economic and social change

In the course of a century and a half, between 1148 and 1300, the Crown of Aragon almost tripled its territorial extension, from around 43,000 square kilometres to over 115,000, successively incorporating 'New' Catalonia (west and south of the river Llobregat), Lower Aragon and the kingdoms of Mallorca and Valencia. This process gave rise to a vast movement of people in order to resettle the new territories with Christian colonists. In total, the number of settlers involved in this transfer of people from north to south and to the Balearic Islands may be assumed to be in the region of 100,000 (calculations based on Garcia-Oliver's 2015 estimates for the kingdom of Valencia), a figure so impressive that it could not fail to have important consequences both for the migrants and for those who remained in their regions of origin. Of the latter, in Old Catalonia (east of the river Llobregat), lords imposed the *remença* on their peasants, the obligation to pay for their redemption in cash if they wanted to leave the manor. This was designed to hinder and prevent them from fleeing to the lands of Valencia and Mallorca. As a result, their living conditions worsened and, in short, they were reduced to serfdom (Freedman 1988; 1993; To 2000; Benito 2003; Lluch 2005). This opened up a divide between the north-east of Catalonia, a region of scattered farms and servile men, and Catalonia south of the Llobregat, Lower Aragon, Valencia and Mallorca, where peasants were free men.

The peasants and settlers in general who moved to populate the recently conquered territories did so mainly in search of land and greater freedoms, of movement especially, attracted by the franchises granted by monarchs and lords to recruit settlers (Font Rius 1969-1983; Guinot 1991). Even the Muslim peasants who remained there after the Christian conquest did not see their freedom of movement or their legal status as free men diminished, although their social and economic conditions were worse than those of their Christian counterparts. In the feudal society that was being created in these new kingdoms and territories, peasant dependence was not expressed through attachment to the land, through servitude, but through other jurisdictional rights and, above all, the payment of agrarian rents in exchange for the land they had received and held in emphyteusis. Abundant land, better legal conditions and great possibilities to prosper and advance socially were the chief factors that had lured the new settlers.

Tab. 1. **Land concessions in the Valencian area, 1237-1244 (in *jovades*)**

Jovades	Landholdings	%	Arable land	%	
0.5	4		2		
1	842	46.5	842	19.6	
1.5	14		21		
2	359	19.8	718	16.7	
2.5	67		167.5	3.9	
3	158	8.7	474	11	51.8
3.5	2		7		
4	139	7.7	556		
5	55		275		
6	98	5.4	588		28.6
6.5	1		6.5		
7	9		63		
8	27		216		
9	1		9		
10	32		320		
12	2		24		
TOTAL	1,810		4,289		

ARITHMETIC MEAN	2.4
MEDIAN	2

Source: Furió forthcoming.

An extraordinary source is available for understanding both the human occupation and the distribution of the land expropriated from Muslims among the Christian settlers, as well as the earliest economic inequalities between them. These are the *Llibres de repartiment*, that is, the books of apportionment, distribution or allocation, dating from the thirteenth century, which have survived for the kingdoms of Valencia, Mallorca, Murcia and a large part of Andalusia. A sort of Domesday Book, but on a regional scale and not, as in the English case, for the entire peninsula. Tables 1 and 2, corresponding to the *Llibre de Repartiment* of Valencia show respectively the size of the land grants in the region of the city of Valencia – in the unit of measurement of the time, the *jovada*, equivalent to about 3 hectares – and the same, already converted into hectares (Furió, forthcoming).

Table 1 shows that the vast majority of grants (46.5%, almost half) were of 1 *jovada* (3 hectares) only, although there were also concessions of 3, 6 and as many as 12 *jovades* (36 hectares). However, more than half of the newly formed holdings were of 3 *jovades* (9 hectares) or fewer. Two things need to be taken into account: that these were essentially holdings on irrigated land, so the size – however small it may seem – was more than sufficient to ensure the survival and reproduction of a farming family; and that the intention of the king, in this case James I, was to set up self-sufficient single-family tenancies to ensure that the new settlers put down roots.

Tab. 2**. Land concessions in the Valencian area, 1237-1244 (in hectares)**

Hectares	Landholdings	%	Arable land	%
≤ 3	846	46.7	2,532	19.7
4-6	373	20.6	2,217	17.2
7-9	225	12.4	1,924.5	15
10-15	196	10.8	2,514	19.5
+15	170	9.4	3,679.5	28.6
TOTAL	1,810		12,867	

ARITHMETIC MEAN	7.1
MEDIAN	5

Source: Furió forthcoming.

In total, in this first phase of colonisation (between 1237 and 1244) 1,810 families settled in the countryside around Valencia, among whom almost 13,000 hectares were distributed (Tab. 2). The allocation was not homogeneous, and as a result society was hierarchical from the outset: half of the settlers, those possessing 3 hectares or fewer, owned only 20% of the land; a top stratum, around 10%, with holdings of more than 15 hectares, owned 30% of the total, while the rest of the land was distributed to groups holding between 4 and 15 hectares. This is not a homogeneous

society, because there are disparities in wealth, but the inequalities are not yet too pronounced. The same applies to a neighbouring region, that around Alzira, whose land was distributed between 1242 and 1249. In total, 2,533 hectares were allocated to 289 settler families, an average of around 9 hectares per family (Tab. 3). With the exception of around 30 grants larger than 9 hectares, the vast majority, 88%, held 9 hectares or fewer. The relative homogeneity here is more pronounced, with just over half of the settlers also owning just over half of the total land, while the poorest third own a quarter of the total and the wealthiest, just 12%, own less than a fifth of the land (Furió, forthcoming). There are no great differences in wealth here in the early stages of settlement, at the time of or immediately after the conquest.

Tab. 3. **Land concessions in the area of Alzira, 1242-1249 (in hectares)**

Hectares	Landholdings	%	Arable land	%
≤ 9	100	34.6	655.5	25.9
9	154	53.3	1386	54.7
10-29	34	11.8	462	18.2
30	1	0.3	30	1.2
TOTAL	289		2,533.5	

ARITHMETIC MEAN	8.7
MEDIAN	9

Source: Furió forthcoming.

Obviously, neither the data nor the figures obtained from them reflect the enormous social and economic inequality of medieval society. For a start, they only include unprivileged groups, most of whom were peasants. Nobles, knights and ecclesiastics do not appear in these documents, nor in tax sources, which generally exclude the privileged. Of course, feudal magnates, both lay and ecclesiastical, also benefited from grants of land by the conquering king, but these were castles, towns and villages, not parcels of land. We must insist: the wealth and poverty to be found in these sources is the wealth and poverty of the taxpayers – rural and urban dwellers, peasants, artisans and bourgeois, who are also the only people to appear in the tax registers. And for the central years of the thirteenth century, the period when the new feudal society was being constructed after the destruction of the old Muslim society, what these sources reveal is a relative initial equality, a certain initial homogeneity. Signs of inequality, however, were already starting to appear.

The case of Mallorca, shown in Tab. 4, is very similar to that of Valencia. The bulk of the beneficiaries of land grants – almost half, 47.6% – received between 30 and 70 hectares, most of them on dry land, as opposed to those in Valencia, which were on irrigated land. A very small percentage (2.6%) owned 30 hectares or fewer,

but almost half (48.8%) owned more than 100 hectares, with some landowners even holding more than 500 and 1000 hectares (Bisson 1968-1972).

Tab. 4. **Land concessions in Mallorca in the 13th century (in hectares)**

Hectares	Landholdings	%	Arable land	%
20-30	7	2.6	159.04	0.5
30-50	53	20	2,067.52	6.5
50-70	73	27.6	4,534.00	14.2
70-100	30	11.3	2,613.12	8.2
100-150	57	21.5	6,930.00	21.8
150-300	31	11.7	6,463.20	20.3
300-500	5	1.8	1,896.12	5.9
500-1000	6	2.2	4,697.36	14.7
+ 1000	1	0.3	2,056.16	6.4
TOTAL	264	99	31,787.96	98.5 / 99.8

ARITHMETIC MEAN	120.4
MEDIAN	72.5

Source: Bisson 1968-1972, 55.

After this initial homogeneity and equality (only relative, as we have seen), economic inequality increased, due both to demographic growth and, above all, to the inheritance system and the dynamism of the land market. In Old Catalonia, the prevailing system of indivisible inheritance concentrated the family patrimony in the hands of a single son, the heir, while the other sons had to seek their livelihood elsewhere, with only a minimal family endowment. In the rest of the Crown of Aragon, the divisible and equal inheritance among all the siblings entailed the fractioning of the family patrimony, which had to be recomposed by each new generation. Here, the peasant land market was crucial, both to recompose peasant holdings and to transfer properties, so that the richer peasants could accumulate a larger number of plots and more land, taking advantage of the indebtedness and insolvency of the poorest ones, who were forced to sell (Salrach 1995; Furió 1995; 1998; 2004; Furió and Mira 2005; To 1997; Laliena 2005).

Population and economic growth were to be abruptly interrupted by the Black Death and the other calamities of the second half of the fourteenth century, although this did not halt social mobility. Contrary to the assumption made by Álvarez Nogal et al. (2020), the epidemic did not set economies on a lower path of development, at least not in the whole of Spain. As Guido Alfani (2020) and other authors rightly point out, the shock caused by the Black Death was asymmetric. The pandemic and

the ensuing crisis did not affect all regions – either in Europe or within the Crown of Aragon itself, where Catalonia suffered more than Aragon and Valencia – and all people equally. As in any other crisis, there were winners and losers. The former, in Old Catalonia, included the *pagesos grassos* (wealthy farmers) who increased the size of their holdings with the annexation of the *masos rònecs* (ruined farms) abandoned due to the death or flight of their previous tenant farmers. In addition to the abandonment of many farms and their annexation by the surviving landowners, other consequences of the Black Death that favoured the peasants were the rise in agricultural wages, thanks to the shortage of labour, and the formation of a well-off peasantry throughout the peninsular Crown of Aragon, linked to the production of cash crops (wheat, rice, sugar, saffron). This improvement is also reflected in the increased consumption of material goods by peasant households. Quantitative research based on probate inventories and public auctions reveals that the Valencian peasantry possessed a wider and more specialised repertoire of food-related objects, for storing, cooking and serving their meals, particularly from the 1360s onwards. Compared to the period before the plague, expenditure on the consumption of goods made of ceramics and glass could have been twice or three times as high among peasant families. The same phenomenon of peasant prosperity and the emergence of a rural upper class occurred in Mallorca, where, as we shall see later, this led to the formation of a small local nobility that had its origins in old peasant families (Ferrer 2001; Mas 2000; 2003; Blanco de la Lama 2003; Jover and Morey 2003; Jover and Pons 2013; Furió 2017; Almenar 2018).

3. From the countryside to the city

3.1. Social mobility in the rural world

Although the main population movements in a southward and eastward direction took place in the thirteenth century, after the conquest and territorial expansion of the Crown of Aragon, migration continued – to the kingdom of Valencia especially – from Aragon (Navarro 2002) and Catalonia, but also from the north of France, Castile and Andalusia. This continuing influx of immigrants helped to mitigate the devastating effects of the Black Death and facilitated a speedier recovery. This recovery was also aided by short-range migrations, from the countryside to the city, from one city to another, or directly, as a final destination, to the four capital cities of the Crown (Barcelona, Valencia, Zaragoza and Ciutat de Mallorca). These movements were widespread, just as they were in the rest of western Europe.

There were three main types of social actors and motivations in these shorter or – in some cases – inter-regional migrations, always with the ultimate goal of achieving social and economic advancement. The first of them were salaried workers attracted by the greater opportunities offered by the urban labour market. On the one hand, we are talking about unskilled workers, former agricultural labourers, who did not hesitate to return to the countryside during the sowing season and especially at harvest time. And on the other hand, the numerous young men and women (coming, in the case of Valencia, from the interior of the kingdom and from the south of

neighbouring Aragon), who came to work as apprentice craftsmen or as servants and maids (Vaquer 1989; Sixto 1993; López Lorente 2021; Laliena 2023; Furió 2024). A second type of immigrant, who sought to improve their working and living conditions by making the most of their professional qualifications, were the artisans who moved from one place to another, always with their sights set on a large city (Navarro 1997a; Navarro, Igual and Aparici 1999). Finally, the last group of rural-to-urban migrants came from the ranks of the rural elites. This is the case of affluent peasants who, after accumulating land and wealth in the countryside, culminated their social ascent by moving to the city, while retaining ownership of their agricultural holdings as well as the credits and loans they had lent to their former neighbours, and likewise of notaries and other professionals of rural origin who also ended up settling in the city. Some of these wealthy peasants or their children would even attain noble status or a prominent place in the ecclesiastical hierarchy – such as Pope Callixtus III, the first Borgia pope, whose ancestors were rich farmers – at the end of a successful path of social advancement, based on economic prosperity or service to the monarchy or the Church (Batllori 1979; Navarro Sorní, 2005).

Tab. 5. **Nobles and lords of vilain/peasant origin (Majorca, 14th-15th centuries)**

Bernat Cerdà, peasant of the parish of Santa Margarida

- It has a large farm (*alqueria*) of about 700 ha.
- In 1331 he bought the tithe and manorial rents of another *alqueria*.
- In 1339 he bought another large farm (*rafal*).
- In 1346, although he was one of the main cereal producers in the area, he obtained most of his income from sheep and cattle farming.
- In 1361, he was granted the status of *ciutadà* (citizen).

His son **Antoni Cerdà** (1364) because of his wealth, had to own a horse to contribute to the defence of the kingdom.

- In 1374, he was an important sheep owner.
- In 1380, he invested in the council's public debt and, in the same year, his son Esteve became a juror (councillor).
- Esteve married twice, the second time to the sister of the largest landowner in the area.

Antoni Cerdà, born in 1390, obtained a doctorate in law and canon law at the University of Lleida.

- In 1447, archbishop of Messina; in 1448, cardinal; in 1449, bishop of Lleida; in 1455, bishop of Ravenna.

Gabriel Cerdà, nephew of the former, canon of the cathedral of Mallorca.

Antoni Cerdà, nephew of the former, a citizen and married to the daughter of a citizen. He leaves three children:

- Antoni, who pursued an ecclesiastical career and became a canon of Mallorca.
- Eleonor, married to a *donzell* (squire) from a family also with peasant roots.
- **Antoni Salvador**, the first-born son and heir, was knighted before 1506, thus culminating the social ascension of the family, lord of numerous large farms in the region.

Source: Mas 2000.

Many noble families in the kingdom of Mallorca in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, such as, among many others, Descatllar, Ripoll, Montaner, Ballester, Andreu, Truiols, Cerdà, Safortesa and Albertí, were descended from wealthy peasants, whose origins in some cases dated back to the thirteenth-century conquest and colonisation and who consolidated their position after the Black Death and the repression of the peasants' revolt in the fifteenth century. The Cerdà family, for example, were originally peasants from the parish of Santa Margarida who, after becoming wealthy during the fourteenth century, achieved the status of *ciutadans* (citizens). During the fifteenth century we find jurists and canons of the Cathedral of Mallorca among its members, and in the early sixteenth century they were knighted. (Tab. 5). Situated at the economic and social summit of the peasantry, these rural landowners already had more in common with the interests of urban landowners and the petty nobility than those of their fellow peasants. Their economic and social advancement was based on the accumulation of land and livestock, the leasing of tithes, rents and taxes, credit investment, and finally on a meticulous and costly marriage strategy that led them to be related to both the urban oligarchy and the landed gentry (Mas 2000; Jover and Pons 2013).

Enrichment does not necessarily entail social advancement, and this does not necessarily lead to ennoblement. These same fiscal sources, but also the notarial sources and in particular the *post mortem* inventories, give us powerful insight into the differences within the peasantry, from the day labourers with no assets other than the strength of their arms, to the rich farmers, whose wealth could equal or even surpass that of the knights with smaller estates. A few well-off peasants were richer than some noblemen, knights or squires. This, however, did not mean that their social consideration was higher or that they were allowed to sit at a knight's table. They had become rich by accumulating land or livestock, leasing mills, butcheries, tithes and manorial rents, as well as farming royal and municipal taxes, investing in commercial operations, private credit and public debt. They also monopolised local power, holding municipal offices. But they were still lowborn, illiterate and uncouth, even if they emulated the nobility in the consumption of expensive goods (and here material culture appears as another source for the study of social mobility) (Furió 2007; 2021; Benito 2012; Navarro 2012; Verna 2012; Aparisi and Royo 2014; Aparisi 2015; 2022; Garcia-Oliver 2017; Almenar 2018; Zamora 2019).

However, the sons of rich peasants could go further than their fathers, especially if they had studied and entered the service of the state or the Church. An important step was already taken if they managed to become notaries, but the condition of notary was acquired through practice. It was even better if they managed to study at university, obtain a doctorate in law and become a jurist, a lawyer. Jurists did get to sit at the nobility's tables, even marrying their daughters and eventually being ennobled themselves. Many jurists, themselves the sons of peasants, ended up as knights (on the social ascent of jurists and notaries, Cruselles 1992, Planas 1996; 2009). Upward social mobility was not only economic. One also had to cross social and cultural boundaries to acquire respectability, a quality that a rich peasant lacked, but which his educated son possessed. Studies and an ecclesiastical career are what enabled

Alfonso de Borja, the son of a Valencian farmer, to become Pope Callixtus III. Or Jaume Casanova, the son of a master builder (*mestre d'obra*) from Xàtiva, and Joan Llopis, the son of a notary from Valencia, after obtaining their doctorates in Bologna, to become cardinals (Cruselles 1986; Pons 2005; Fernández de Córdoba 2017). Others rose to the nobility by serving the king in wartime or in the administration of the state, such as, among many others, the Vic, Marrades and Mercader families. These are the most striking cases of a constant process of social mobility, which also had its negative side with the decline of formerly powerful lineages, and which can also be studied from the same sources that allow us to follow the rise of the successful families.

3.2. The urban world's greatest opportunities

The second area of study with regard to social mobility in the Crown of Aragon is the urban world. As in other European territories, the urban laboratory has been the main observatory for the analysis of this phenomenon during the late Middle Ages. However, the historiography on the subject is still insufficient, and in many cases the available data provide us with an impressionistic view (Laliena 2010; Igual 2018a). Nevertheless, we can glimpse some of its main features and we have illustrative examples that allow us to situate the Aragonese case within the international context.

A first circumstance that must be taken into account is the differences existing within the urban network. As in other parts of the continent of Europe, there is a great diversity of urban centres which we could classify according to their size, administrative function or economic structure. The social mobility that takes place in each of them has particular features, since the scale or the actors involved in this process vary depending on factors such as, for example, the greater or lesser preponderance of a socio-professional class; compare, for example, the extreme cases of Valencia and Castellón (Narbona 1995; Viciano 2008). Likewise, a specific feature of the Crown of Aragon and other peninsular kingdoms was the frontier nature of certain areas. As we shall see, this basically resulted in the important presence of an urban nobility, especially in the southern part of the kingdom of Aragon or in Valencia, which enjoyed privileges associated with warfare (Laliena and Iranzo 1998; Barrio 1998; Ríos 2016).

On the other hand, in order to analyse social mobility in the Crown of Aragon, we must also bear in mind the social scale on which it took place. Beyond the variants mentioned above, between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries the main reference point for observing the phenomenon is undoubtedly the municipal council, which generally enjoyed a high degree of autonomy and, despite some formal differences, was similar in structure everywhere (Narbona 2007; Barrio 2023). Specifically, belonging to one political stratum or another, holding office or participating in municipal finances, are clear indicators of upward social mobility (Iranzo 2005; Viciano 2008; Reixach 2018, 2019).

The urban community was however not limited to this municipal *universitas*, which did not constitute an impenetrable body, nor did it exclusively determine the

pathways of social ascent and descent. Indeed, there were also other parallel channels. These channels could be more or less connected to the municipal circuit, acting in many cases as catalytic elements. Thus, the holding of posts or the provision of services in royal or noble courts clearly contributed to the advancement of certain families (Reixach 2020). The ecclesiastical institutions were also affected by families' strategies of social advancement (Conesa 2020). Special mention should be made of the mobility observed within groups – in principle – outside the Christian sphere of influence, such as the numerous Jewish and Muslim communities (see, for example, the case of the Valencian Mudejar Alí Xupió: Ruzafa 1995).

Finally, a third element to bear in mind in the Crown of Aragon is the existence of a patchwork of territories which, it should be remembered, had political autonomy and consequently their own particular systems. We must also highlight the dense urban fabric and in particular the demographic and economic weight of the four large regional capitals. In addition to the rural workers and elites referred to above, merchants such as the Catalan Coscó in Zaragoza and Puig-roi in Valencia flocked to them from within the Crown (Mainé 2006; Narbona et al. 1995) and from abroad (especially but not only Italians and Germans: Igual 1998; Soldani 2010; Cruselles 2015).

In the Crown of Aragon, if we group the available works together, we can outline some dynamics which are comparable to those observed in other territories in western Europe, especially with regard to certain social classes. As elsewhere, the one that has traditionally received most attention in Aragonese historiography is the urban oligarchy or patriciate, regarded as the group that monopolised political, and also, to a large extent, economic power (Narbona 1998; Laliena 2010).

In general, the studies available for the capital cities of the Crown of Aragon, or other large urban centres, present the so-called 'honourable citizens' as the main members of the political and economic elite. This elite had diverse origins and was distinguished among other things by accumulating municipal offices, investing in rents (especially *censals*) and buying land or small manors that placed them on a par with the nobility (Sabaté 1998; Fernàndez Trabal 1999; Daileader 2004; Mainé 2006; Lozano, 2007; Cruselles 2018; Viciano 2018). Elsewhere, an important feature of the upper class was its presence in the political or jurisdictional bodies in these cities or, in the case of smaller cities or towns, its participation in the predominant economic activities in each of them (see, for example, the cases of Cervera, Castelló, Manresa and Alzira: Turull 1990; Viciano 2008; Fynn-Paul 2015; Bernabeu 2014). The group of the merchants is the one that has received most attention, although it is not always easy to define it precisely. In the cities of the Crown of Aragon mercantile activity could encompass a wide range of activities: trade, banking, taxation, and the supply of cereals. (Iradiel et al. 1995; Cruselles 2001; Igual 2010; 2013; Torre 2018).

Besides this, though, there was a common denominator: the opportunities offered by the economic growth that took place in the Crown of Aragon throughout the late Middle Ages. Despite the economic crises, the cities in this territory experienced an important boom in mercantile, financial and manufacturing activity, from the thirteenth century onwards especially. This development was markedly Mediterranean in nature, although it was not unrelated to the opening up of new horizons in the Atlantic. In parallel, economic activity related to taxation and public finances also

boomed. It is not surprising, therefore, that many merchants and bankers diversified their activities and also went into tax-farming or purchasing public debt; a phenomenon, the latter, which was especially significant in the Crown of Aragon (Narbona, 1992; Torre 2018; Viciano 2018).

It should likewise be noted that this economic situation (in both the public and private spheres) did not occur exactly at the same time in all the territories of the Crown of Aragon. Thus, up to the end of the fourteenth century, Catalan and Mallorcan merchants and financiers played a special role in the general scene (Reixach 2021). Subsequently, the Aragonese and above all the Valencians, who were the main beneficiaries of the advent of the new Trastàmara dynasty and the conquest of the kingdom of Naples, picked up the baton. This is shown by some of the examples already mentioned, and also those of families like Sorell (from dyers to knights), Vic (from *ciutadans* to nobles), Bou (from merchants to nobles) and Valleriola (from bankers to nobles), all of them from Valencia, or the Bell-lloc family, from Girona (Fernàndez Trabal 1995; 1999; Igual and Navarro, 2002; Navarro, 2015b; Torre, 2018).

Although manufacturing was not as important in the cities of the Crown of Aragon as trade, we can also observe clear examples of social mobility within the artisanal sector. It is no coincidence that the aforementioned economic and urban development which took place in the Crown of Aragon was also the result of the boom in certain manufacturing activities. The most important of these was undoubtedly the textile industry, which from the mid-fourteenth century benefited from the expansion of varied local production. This explains the prosperity achieved by many wool carders in the different territories of the Crown (in the kingdom of Valencia: Iradiel et al. 1995; Navarro 2000; Bordes 2006; Martínez 2010; Piqueras 2011; Llibrer 2014; in Catalonia: Daileader 2004; Reixach 2019). More specifically, we should also mention the importance acquired by the specialised production of silk fabrics, especially in the city of Valencia during the fifteenth century (Navarro 2000; 2015c).

The oral testimonies of some immigrants and written documents suggest that Ligurians first arrived in Valencia around 1457, and from then on the migratory flow was considerable. Between 1450 and 1525, notarial sources record the presence of several hundred silk workers, with different professional categories, often combined: merchants, masters and artisans *velluters, mestres de seda* or *seders* (velvet and silk craftsmen), who initiated the growth of an industrial activity with few precedents. The *Manifestació* of the Art of Silk in Valencia (1475) showed the commercial and productive hegemony of the Genoese in this activity, which did not wane until the second decade of the sixteenth century, when merchants from other parts of what is now Spain entered this commercial movement as a result of the expansion of silk factories in other Iberian regions. The foundation in 1477 of the *Art dels Velluters* in Valencia is an example of this predominance. The corporation was managed by Ligurian merchants as a consequence of their technical superiority and the demand for very specific products, produced exclusively by these silk merchants. In particular, the huge European-wide boom in black satins and velvets, which required special machinery – silk spinning wheels – and manufacturing and dyeing skills, explains the privileged position of Genoese immigrants. From an economic point of view, it is important to note that these immigrants were artisans with high technical skills, but whose

economic and social advancement took place in a Crown of Aragon where silk was an unregulated industry that it took a long time to organise (Navarro 1994; 1997b; 1999; 2015a; Igual and Navarro 1997).

One last factor to be taken into account in the processes of social mobility documented at the end of the Middle Ages in the Crown of Aragon is the cultural one. The leading exponents of this were jurists, notaries and, to a lesser extent, doctors. As we have said, the institutional development that took place during this period at different levels (royal, seigniorial, municipal, ecclesiastical) was fertile ground for the social advancement of individuals who had the necessary technical knowledge to ensure the proper functioning of the different governmental institutions. Likewise, in a context of economic growth, it also became essential to have specialists (above all, notaries) to provide legal security for the different businesses. Nor must the growing importance of medical professionals be overlooked in the face of periodic epidemics, to the point of their becoming fundamental figures in towns and cities, as shown by, among others, the cases of the Sarriera, Ros d'Ursins and Lacabra families, from Girona, Valencia and Zaragoza, respectively (Planas 1996; 2004; Cruselles 1998; Ferragud 2005; Graullera 2009; Marín 1998).

These professions did not always appear in the same social stratum, but this depended on the place, the privileges that regulated the municipal regime, and the prestige acquired by each individual. In general, jurists and doctors were the most highly regarded, probably because of their university training and small numbers. This explains why in several cities they appear as part of the patriciate, even being equated with the urban nobility (Planas, 1996; Mainé 2006; Lozano 2007; Reixach 2019; Batlle et al. 2007). Notaries did not always occupy the same position within the urban hierarchy. In some cities (especially smaller ones, although not exclusively) they were also part of, and even the most prominent members of, the local elite (Turull 1990; Iranzo 2005; Mainé 2006; Viciano 2008; Bernabeu 2014), but in others, such as Barcelona, Valencia, Mallorca or Girona, we find them on the second and third rung of the ladder (Günzberg, 2001; Planas, 2004; Batlle et al. 2007; Reixach 2019). Be that as it may, we have an extensive list of cases that show in all places the social ascent, to a greater or lesser extent, of those who worked in all of the aforementioned professions and their families (Narbona 1990; Planas, 1996; Barceló 2001; Ferragud 2005; Mainé 2006…).

Finally, we should remember the social mobility (upward and downward) that took place within the civil service, in the royal court especially, but also in manorial courts or ecclesiastical institutions. As we have pointed out, this pathway of advancement was sometimes associated in one way or another with the municipality, but there are also examples of individuals and families who basically made their fortunes outside the city council. The earliest urban elites of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were in fact formed around royal, seigniorial or ecclesiastical power, as municipal councils were still in the process of formation (Bensch 2000). Thereafter, during the fourteenth century, the enormous development of the state apparatus also explains trajectories of this kind. All this without forgetting the situations associated with the changes of monarch or dynasty, which involved the rise of certain families and the decline of others; for example, the accession of the Trastàmaras in the early fifteenth century, which led to the rise of the Marrades, Santàngel and Valleriola families and

the fall of the Vilaragut family (Igual and Navarro 2002; Batlle et al. 2007; Reixach 2020; Velasco 2022).

In all cases, we find examples of individuals or families belonging to different social and professional spheres. Thus, there are cases of members of the urban nobility or patriciate who consolidated or improved their social position in the service of the monarchy (Narbona et al. 1995; Batlle et al. 2007). Illustrative examples are also documented of merchants and bankers (some of them foreign) who did the same by taking advantage of the economic services they could offer the monarchy or other institutions (Baydal 2012; Navarro 2015b; Torre 2018; Reixach-Tello 2019; Reixach 2021).

4. A singular case: religious conversion as a pathway of social advancement

Between 1391 and 1414, the Crown of Aragon witnessed the large-scale conversion of the Jewish population in the main cities. This was partly the result of a series of violent pogroms that took place in the first of these years, the most obvious manifestation of which – apart from looting and some massacres – consisted of the forced baptism of a large number of people in extremely tense public ceremonies (Narbona 2013, Garcia-Oliver, 2019). King John I and some royal authorities tried to prevent these outbreaks of violence from spreading and succeeded in doing so in a number of important cities, including most of those in the kingdom of Aragon proper (Gampel 2016). However, social pressure on the Jews grew progressively in the following years and culminated a quarter of a century later when Pope Benedict XIII and King Ferdinand I organised a Disputation in Tortosa on the respective merits of the Christian and Jewish religions, as a result of which riots broke out anew and were again quelled by massive conversions. This phenomenon is well known because the descendants of these converts were accused a century later of continuing to practise Judaism, and an inquisitorial persecution was unleashed against them with dramatic results (Sesma 2013a). These social and cultural aspects have obscured the fact that this conversion was a phase of intense social and economic mobility among the urban elites of the Crown. The argument is simple. Many of the Jews who became Christians in the collective baptisms in the context of these massacres were undoubtedly artisans, shopkeepers, service sector workers or farmers. For all of them, men, women and children, integration in Christian society was a form of upward mobility, insofar as they were able to gain access to markets for goods, credit and labour that had hitherto been forbidden to them (López Juan 2024). Although they suffered discrimination in everyday life, the laws did not encourage such attitudes and would not do so until the beginning of the early modern period (Narbona 2006). But the most radical change took place in the upper classes in the cities, the patriciates. Within a very few years, these elites absorbed a group of formerly Jewish and now Christian magnates, who had enormous capital at their disposal and used it in economic areas to which they had previously had no access.

There are a large number of studies on the Jewish communities of the Crown of Aragon and many of them show that some of their members were involved in moneylending and operated in the credit markets of Christian society. A close

examination of this activity reveals (as Giacomo Todeschini pointed out in relation to the development of Hebrew moneylending in late medieval Italian cities in 2016) that Jewish moneylenders specialised in loans for consumption or the investment of small sums. In other words, a large number of small loans. Moreover, their predominance seems to have been widespread among the rural clientele, in both the areas of influence of the cities and those corresponding to the villages and rural towns where Jewish communities had formed in the fourteenth century (Aleixandre 2015; Schraer 2018; Furió 1993; García Marsilla 2002). Although authorised interest rates reached 20% and often exceeded it, short-term loans – with pledges – were a flexible and widely used instrument for rural populations. Jewish financiers also lent money in larger amounts to municipal councils in the form of *mutua,* or loans with high interest rates and short repayment periods. They were, however, not part of the great fiscal bonanza that began in the middle of the fourteenth century with the boom in public debt, channelled through the sale of rents/annuities (*censals* and *violaris*) (Sánchez 2009; Furió 2018). This lavish segment of the market was off-limits to Jewish businessmen. Apart from credit, Jewish merchants traded with Christians, for example, in drapery, but we do not know to what extent they were in a position to step outside the relatively narrow framework of the Jewish quarters to trade in certain essential goods. In any event, they were excluded from the circulation of goods such as wool or grain, which moved very large amounts of capital.

Conversion radically changed the mercantile prospects of some families who, with their traditional names – such as La Caballería in Zaragoza – or with new ones – such as Santángel or Roís in Valencia – were in a position to become part of the leading group in the cities and, in the medium term, to participate in municipal government and in the royal administration. Economic activity, political power and presence in the state apparatus were three exceptional advantages acquired with the change of religion. In Valencia, the new converts were quickly integrated in the municipal management and financing of the city and the *Diputación del General* (Narbona 2013; López Juan 2021). It is not easy, in the present state of our knowledge, to pinpoint the details of this process, which took place at the level of the large and medium-sized towns, as well as the Crown as a whole. There are two major difficulties. The first is homonymy: many converts adopted similar surnames in different localities and without any family or business ties between them. The most visible case is that of the converts called Santángel, who formed large groups of families in Zaragoza, Barbastro, Daroca and Valencia, and among whom there were some extraordinarily wealthy people, alongside others of far more modest means. The second difficulty lies in the dispersion of information regarding the fortunes of the elite *conversos*. In this respect, the Roís of Valencia are exemplary, since the confiscation of their assets by the Inquisition shows that their members together owned more than 7 million *sous* (approximately 636,300 florins). They were descended from a member of the Jewish family Najari, from Teruel, who had loaned large sums to the Community of villages of Teruel in the years 1380-1390. In 1417, Martín Ruiz, the initial convert, moved to Valencia where he started a successful wool trading business. Years later, not only was he a *donzell* (nobleman), but he had also founded a bank, with branches distributed throughout the cities of the western Mediterranean, which his sons inherited before being persecuted by the inquisitors (Cruselles 2013; 2019).

Another significant example is the merchant Jaime Sánchez de Calatayud, who operated between Zaragoza and Barcelona in the middle of the fifteenth century; the importance of his economic activity is shown by the export of wool from Aragon to Tortosa in various fiscal years: in 1444-1445 there were 123 tons (with Pere Servent); in 1446-1447, 125.5 tons (with Pedro Sánchez de Calatayud, his brother); and in 1449-1450, 131 tons. This volume of wool can be estimated at 146,400 sj. (14,640 fl.), 149,430 sj. (14,943 fl.) and 156,000 sj. (15,600 fl.), respectively (Sesma 2013b; Lozano 2004). The Sánchez de Calatayud family descended from a Jew, Alazar Uluf, or Golluf, baptised Luis Sánchez. His grandson of the same name became royal treasurer around 1470, a position inherited by his brother Gabriel Sánchez (d. 1505), while the other brothers held important positions in the royal treasury: Guillem Sánchez was *mestre racional* (the head of the Exchequer) in Catalonia, Alfonso was lieutenant to the treasurer in Valencia and Francisco, chief pantryman. The nephew of all of them, Pedro, was involved in the trial against the 'Banco de Valencia' in 1503 for the illegal export of gold coin from Castile to Valencia. This bank managed payments through exchanges between Castile, Aragon, Valencia and Italy in the context of the wars against France. Gabriel Sánchez had to pay between 3 and 6 million *maravedíes* (approximately 8,000 to 16,000 ducats) to cover for Pedro Sánchez when he was condemned (Lozano 2007; Ladero 1987).

Outside the mercantile sphere, *conversos* also made service to the Crown a means of social advancement. A paradigmatic case is that of Pau Rossell, who worked as a notary in the middle decades of the fifteenth century and had a solid career in the municipal government of Valencia. *Sots-obrer de murs e valls* in 1443, councillor for the parish of Santa Catalina in 1449 and *Justícia dels 300 sous* in 1450 and 1453 (Narbona and Bernabeu, 2021). He also wrote a book, the *Descendentia regum Sicilie*, which legitimised King Alfonso the Magnanimous' claim to the throne of Naples. Rossell was clearly an individual aligned with the political interests of the Crown, whose *converso* status did not prevent him from holding both representative and managerial posts in the Consell. His professional career, far removed from the commercial and credit sectors, is further proof of the rapid assimilation by converts of the mechanisms of social advancement typical of the Christian community (López Juan, 2024).

These data are too fragmentary, insofar as these families have not been examined in great detail, but there is no doubt that their social rise – throughout the fifteenth century – was closely related to the conversion of their ancestors at the beginning of that century.

5. A question of approach and method: levels of wealth and municipal positions

So far, we have reviewed the main ways or processes of social mobility which, from a general point of view, have been studied in the Crown of Aragon at the end of the medieval period. This study has been carried out mainly on the basis of prosopographical analysis and/or the data provided by notarial documentation. Thanks to this methodology, it has been possible to reconstruct in detail the trajectories of individuals, families or social groups in both urban and rural areas. As we

have seen, notarial documentation has also allowed us to observe the transformation of consumption patterns associated with the dynamics of social ascent. This type of study is however not as useful for reconstructing general trends in the evolution of social mobility in a given place or in the long term. To this end, Aragonese historiography currently has only two indicators for formulating hypotheses in this respect: registers of wealth and lists of municipal positions.

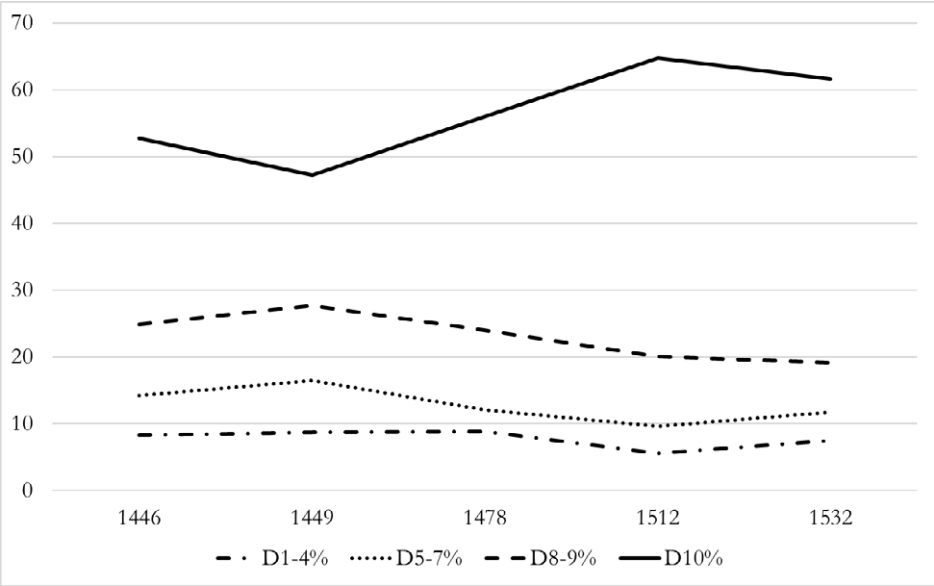
Before dealing with the former, it should be noted that in the Crown of Aragon it is not easy to attempt the quantitative approach, based on fiscal and judicial sources, as Gregory Clark has done for England. His methodology, based on onomastics, although suggestive, does not convince us. Clark distinguishes between six different origins of English surnames and assumes a strong association between surname type and economic status. And so, while the bearers of locative surnames belonged to the upper classes, occupational surnames (especially in the case of humble trades such as Smith, Carter, Taylor or Shepherd) belonged to the lower classes (Clark 2014).

We do not know if this method is suitable for the English case, but it is certainly not for medieval Iberia and in particular for the kingdom of Valencia and the Crown of Aragon, which is our area of study. In the Iberian Peninsula, the thirteenth century was characterised by the territorial expansion of the Christian kingdoms to the detriment of al-Andalus, an expansion that was not only military but also demographic and social, with the replacement of the Muslim inhabitants by Christian settlers, mainly Aragonese and Catalans. Many of these settlers, who had travelled hundreds of kilometres from their regions of origin, are recorded in contemporary documentation with locative surnames indicating their place of origin, such as the aforementioned family of the future Pope Callixtus III, who came from the Aragonese town of Borja, hence the family surname De Borja, "from Borja". The thirteenth-century colonisation was a period of great geographical and social mobility, with thousands of peasant families moving southwards in search of land and better living and working conditions. Most of the locative surnames correspond to these families and not to the upper classes, who were also rewarded with gifts of land in the new kingdoms. Conversely, among the Valencian nobility we find surnames related to trades (such as Ferrer/Smith, Mercader/Merchant or Escrivà/Clark) that are not related to the social climbing of families that had previously exercised such trades, at least in the two and a half centuries following the creation of the kingdom of Valencia.

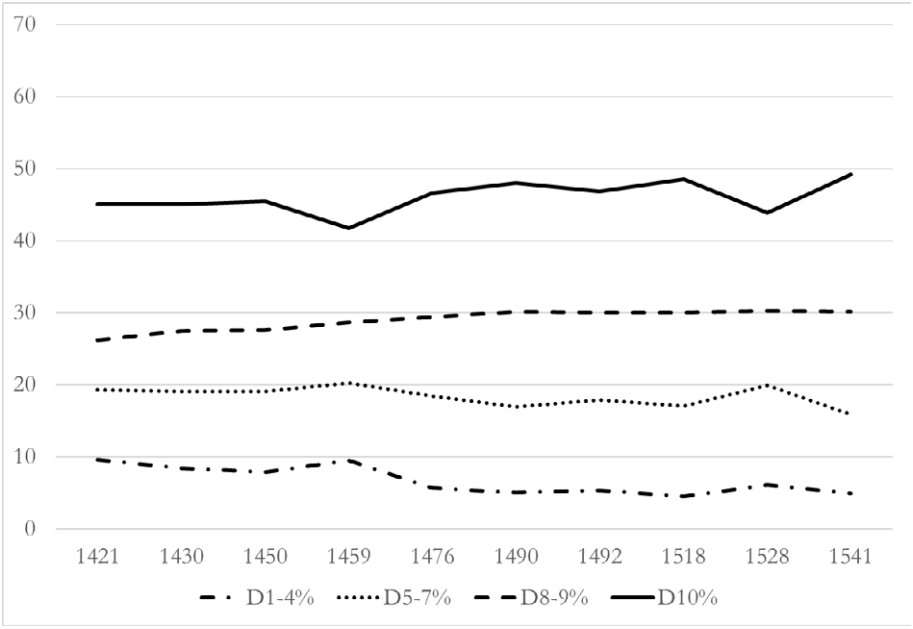
But onomastics is not the only method with which to attempt a quantitative approach to social mobility. The evolution of family wealth, from parents to children, can be traced over long periods of time from fiscal sources, in particular property registers drawn up to estimate the wealth of taxpayers and apply the corresponding tax. In the first instance, the studies dedicated to these registers allow us to observe that, from the mid-fourteenth century onwards, the cities and towns of the Crown of Aragon were the scene of a progressive increase in inequality (Ribalta and Turull 1992; García Montero 2015; 2020; Almenar, Chismol and Ruiz 2017; Morelló, 2017; Furió et al. 2020; Morelló et al. 2020; Reixach 2022; Tudela and Pascual 2023; Miquel and Verdés 2024). This means that not all members of urban society benefited equally from the economic growth that, as we have said, took place after the Black Death. As can be seen in Graphs 1-4, it was mainly the richest decile (the top 10%) of taxpayers who, to a greater or lesser extent, managed to accumulate a greater amount of

wealth during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This is most evident in the largest city, Ciutat de Mallorca, whose tax records contain a maximum of 3,552 declarations of assets in 1532-33. It is also quite clear in the case of the Catalan town of Cervera, where the population numbered about 1,000 households during the fifteenth century. It is less evident in the Valencian town of Castelló, in which there were fewer than 900 households during the fifteenth century, although an increase in inequality is detected at the end of the sixteenth century, when 1,239 taxpayers were counted. The place where least divergence is observed is another Catalan town, Igualada, whose population oscillated between 200 to 300 households until the middle of the sixteenth century (Furió et al. 2020; Tudela and Pascual 2023; Miquel and Verdés 2024).

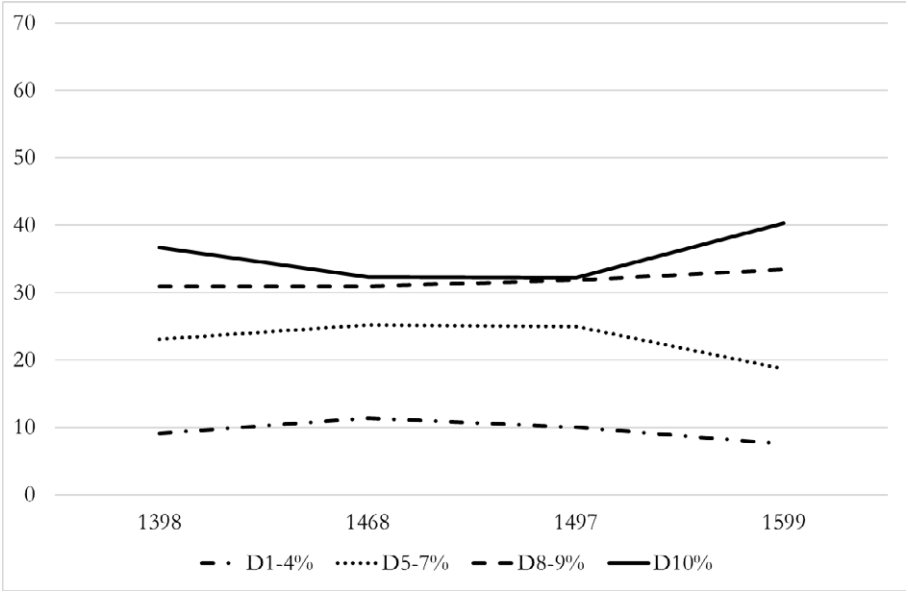
Graph 1**. Distribution of wealth in Palma de Mallorca according to *talles* (percentage/deciles)**



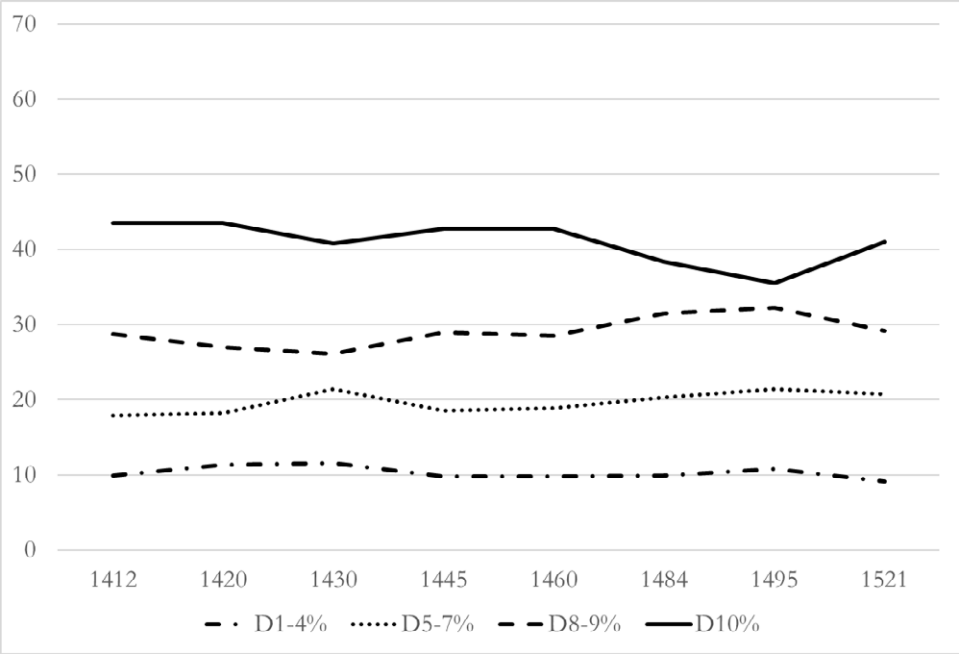
Graph 2. **Distribution of wealth in Cervera according to *talles* and *manifest* (percentage/deciles)**



Graph 3. **Distribution of wealth in Castelló according to *peita* (percentage/deciles)**



Graph 4. **Distribution of wealth in Igualada according to *talles* and *valies* (percentage/deciles)**



As well as this, tax documentation also allows us to observe who comprised the upper stratum of the aforementioned localities and how its composition evolved. Pending a more in-depth analysis of the available data, in the specific case of the Catalan towns of Cervera and Igualada we can observe some interesting dynamics in the families that occupied the upper decile. In the case of Cervera (Tab. 6), we have analysed who the ten main taxpayers were between 1400 and 1550 through a selection of six tax registers, one every 25 years approximately (that is, six generations). The names of the richest families are repeated from the mid-fifteenth century onwards, and there is also an increasing presence of ennobled lineages (known as *mossèns* or *donzells*). Another circumstance to point out is the importance of legal entities, especially religious institutions (monasteries, confraternities, commanderies) and the pious foundation (*marmessoria*) of one of the lineages, the Roqueta family, whose name appears throughout the period.

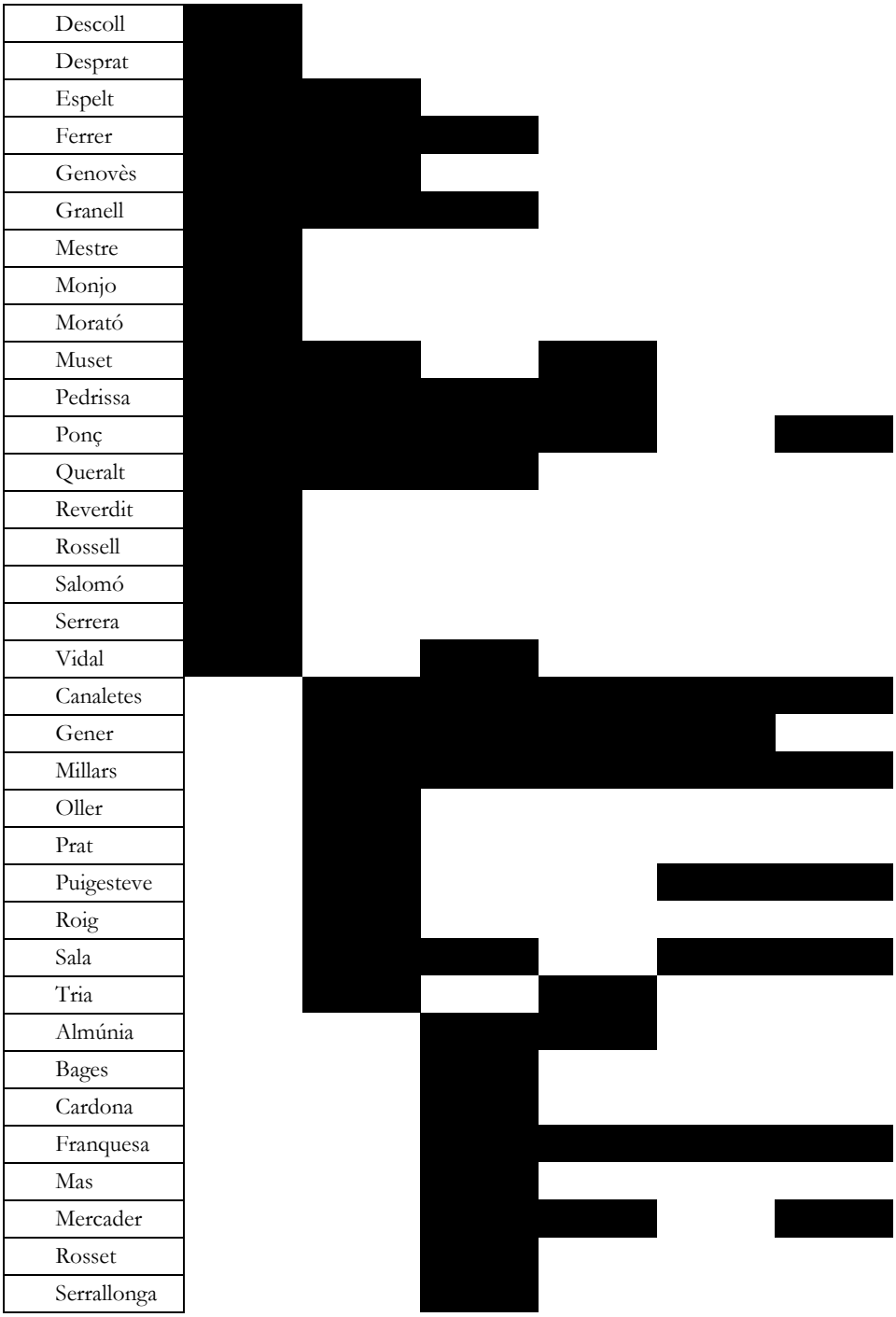
Tab. 6. **Top 10 richest people/taxpayers in Cervera (1421-1541)**

1421	1450	1476	1492	1518	1541
Serra, wife	Roqueta	Gilabert	Gilabert, *mossèn*	Altarriba, *mossèn*	Altarriba, *mossèn*
Roqueta	Gilabert, *mossèn*	Gilabert, *mossèn*	Altarriba, *mossèn*	Sacirera, *donzell*	Vilaplana, *mossèn*
Berga	Tàrrega, *misser*	Saciera, *donzell*	Boix	Gilabert	Gilabert, *mossèn*
Arnau	Sacirera, *donzell*	Martorell	Sacirera, *donzell*	Vilaplana, *mossèn*	Lledó
Vilagrassa	Gilabert	Boix	S. Antoni, command	Boix	Alentorn, *mossèn*
Borràs	Miquel	Asbert	Avellaneda, *mossèn*	Palau	S. Domènec, convent
Palau	Berga/Castellet	Avellaneda, *mossèn*	Jutglar	Vilaplana, *mossèn*	S. Esperit, brotherhood
Gilabert	Mir	Palau	Roqueta, *marmessoria*	Altarriba	Vilaplana, *mossèn*
Messina, wife	Asbert	Roqueta, *marmessoria*	Vilaplana, *mossèn*	Altarriba	Sacirera, *donzell*
Gilabert	Canelles	Miquel	Palau	Roqueta, *marmessoria*	Giscafrè

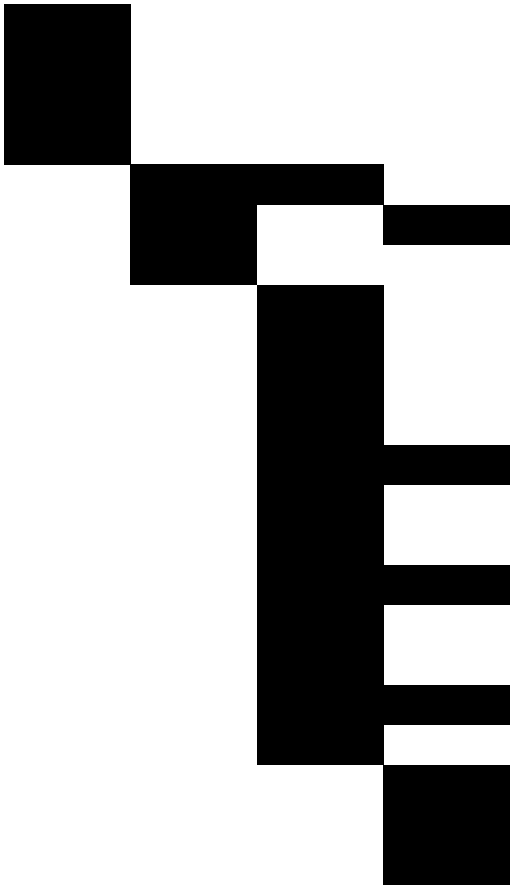
Source: Own elaboration.

As far as Igualada is concerned (Tab. 7), it can be seen who the 62 families (or different surnames) were that formed the top decile during the aforementioned period. Only two of these families (Cornet, Ponç) are named during the century and a quarter under consideration (1412-1537) and six (Cornet, Ponç, Canaletes, Millars, Puigesteve, Sala) during the century from 1430 to 1537. The renewal that took place after the Catalan Civil War (1462-1472) should also be mentioned, coinciding with a transformation of the town's economic structure. Specifically, after the civil conflict, Igualada went from being a town dedicated mainly to agriculture and trade to a centre more oriented towards the manufacture of textiles and leather (Miquel and Verdés 2024).

Tab. 7. **Families/surnames documented in decile 10 of Igualada (1412-1537)**


Descoll
Desprat
Espelt
Ferrer
Genovès
Granell
Mestre
Monjo
Morató
Muset
Pedrissa
Ponç
Queralt
Reverdit
Rossell
Salomó
Serrera
Vidal
Canaletes
Gener
Millars
Oller
Prat
Puigesteve
Roig
Sala
Tria
Almúnia
Bages
Cardona
Franquesa
Mas
Mercader
Rosset
Serrallonga

Tarragó
Vendrell
Viastrosa
Vila
Fries
Soler
Miquel
Bofill
Bonastre
Borràs
Catarró
Francolí
Llobet
Llull
Mateu
Sastre
Teià
Trullols
Vernet
Aguilera
Balp
Febrer



Source: Own elaboration.

Another place where social mobility can be analysed in more detail through tax records is the Valencian town of Alzira, specifically the quarter of Sant Agustí, made up mostly of peasants and craftsmen, for which tax data are available between 1426 and 1515. In total, 205 taxpayers are listed here in 1426, 248 in 1465, 146 in 1474, 139 in 1485, 124 in 1500 and 117 in 1515. Two different systems have been used to study and quantify social mobility here. The first is based on the determination of quintiles and movement from one to another, up or down, in a very similar way – though not exactly the same – to the one used by Francesco Ammannati in his intervention in this *Settimana* (Ammannati 2025). Thus, the 205 taxpayers in the Sant Agustí neighbourhood in 1426 have been divided into five quintiles of 41 families each, and the same has been done for the other years, logically with a different number of families in each one. There is no room here, nor is it the place, to explain the method in detail and provide full results, as it is still a work in progress. In any case, it can be advanced that of the 41 families in the fifth quintile, the richest in the neighbourhood, 9 (22%)

disappear and do not re-emerge in successive wealth registers, 10 (24.4%) drop down to a lower quintile (9 to the fourth quintile and 1 to the second) and 22 (53.6%) were still in the fifth quintile almost forty years later. More than half of the families in the fifth quintile remained unchanged in these 40 years at the top of the quarter's wealth. As for the families in the fourth quintile in 1426, 4 had disappeared by 1465, 8 had moved up to the fifth quintile, 10 had moved down (3 to the third quintile, 2 to the second and 1 to the first), while 19 had stayed put. And so on for the remaining quintiles, an operation that must also be conducted for all six time periods in order to confirm the results. The overall results, once they have been obtained, will make it possible to measure social mobility from one chronological cut-off to another over a timespan of almost 100 years. Two problems, however, should be noted. The first is obviously that of homonymy, since many families share the same surname and we cannot always be sure of the correspondences between them. The second has to do with the life cycle, since many of the cases of upward mobility correspond to young taxpayers who have hardly any assets in their early years – only what they have obtained from their parents as a dowry or *donatio inter vivos* when they marry or shortly thereafter – but who have increased it throughout their lives, thus moving from one quintile to another. By contrast, parents' property decreases as they distribute it among their children, thus moving down from one quintile to the next. There has definitely been social mobility in both directions, upward and downward, but within the same family and over the life cycle of two generations. In the end, however, the family's level of wealth has remained the same (Furió 1995, and forthcoming).

Tab. 8. **Social mobility in the quarter of Sant Agustí in Alzira (1426-1500)**

1426			1465			1485			1500		
N	*Taxpayer*	*Wealth*	*N*	*Taxpayer*	*Wealth*	*N*	*Taxpayer*	*Wealth*	*N*	*Taxpayer*	*Wealth*
1	Domingo Ferrer	303	11	Dº Ferrer	138	5	Dº Ferrer	164	7	Dº Ferrer	162
2	Miquel d'Aranda	176	3	Pere d'Aranda	180	9	P. d'Aranda	115	23	P. d'Aranda	35
4	Pere Barberà	136	23	Pere Barberà	97	7	Pere Barberà	128.5	4	P. Barberà	203
6	Joan Palau	131	24	Pere Palau	93	3	Joan Palau	177	1	J. Palau	261
			44	Joan Palau	65						
10	Antoni Vilabetran	113	1	A. Vilabertran	286	4	A. Vilabertran	172		*Disappears*	
18	Andreu Cleriana	85.5	2	Jaume Cleriana	235	1	Jaume Cleriana	252	17	J. Cleriana	87
27	Nadal Soler	69.5	6	Martí Soler	160		*Disappears*				
39	Llorenç Jordà	52.5	4	Ll. Jordà	180	13	Ll. Jordà	82			
			5	Ll. Jordà	169						

Source: Furió forthcoming.

The second system, rather than measuring mobility by moving up or down from one quintile to another, tracks the individual trajectory of different households. Table 8 shows the mobility of a dozen families in the same quarter of Sant Agustí between 1426 and 1500. The structure is the same in all five time periods: the order number, with number 1 being the richest of the taxpayers, their name, and the value of their wealth in *lliures* (pounds). The 205 families in 1426 and the 248 in 1465 have been placed in order according to the value of their assets. The table shows examples of both upward and downward mobility. The sons and successors of Domingo Ferrer, who in 1426 occupied first place, with a fortune valued at 303 *lliures*, dropped in 1465 to eleventh place with less than half the wealth Ferrer had possessed forty years earlier, although they subsequently recovered. By contrast, the Vilabertran, Cleriana, Soler and Jordà families, who in 1426 were between the tenth and fortieth fortunes, are to be found in the top five forty years later. One of them, Antoni Vilabertran, was even elevated to the status of squire. As in the previous case, we do not have enough room here to go into more detail. Suffice it to say that we are analysing both the urban neighbourhoods and the rural communities of the district of Alzira, which had some 1,600 families – about 8,000 people – in the first decades of the fifteenth century, whose patrimonies have been summarised and hierarchised in tables such as the one in the sample.

On the other hand, as we have said, we also observe some general trends in the evolution of social mobility through the lists of municipal positions in different municipalities of the Crown of Aragon. Thus, taking as a reference the very existence of urban oligarchies and the control they exercised over the municipal institution, everything seems to indicate that these were being shaped until the end of the fourteenth century, and that from then on, the upper stratum of urban society gradually began to close ranks (Bensch 2000; Daileader 2004; Turull 1990; Reixach 2018, 2019; Viciano 2008; Bernabeu 2014). In general terms, this was due to a greater initial permeability of this stratum, which could be explained by more intense geographical mobility of the population, the porosity of the legal concept of citizenship and, above all, the existence of a municipal institution still under construction; nor should we forget the effects of the Black Death in 1348 and its successive aftershocks. During the fifteenth century the urban oligarchy gradually became impenetrable to outsiders, due largely to the maturity of the municipal institution and the resulting control acquired by its leaders. This situation was only overcome at specific moments and by specific elements of urban society, who took advantage of external circumstances (for example, wars or royal interventions in local government) to penetrate the hard core of municipal power or to alter the existing status quo (Batlle 1986-1987; Bernabeu 2014).

The general increase in political conflict within local communities, from the end of the fourteenth century onwards especially, would be one of the most evident symptoms (or consequences) of this situation (Narbona 2004; Reixach and Verdés 2023). Historians have traditionally associated these conflicts with the negative effects of the so-called 'late medieval crisis'. However, as we have pointed out, the studies carried out in recent years for the Crown of Aragon show that, despite the economic difficulties and territorial differences, the final centuries of the Middle Ages were a time of economic expansion (Laliena 2016; Furió 2016-2017). Certainly, there

are cases documented of cities and towns that were severely affected by the difficult situations (epidemics, famines, wars, indebtedness) that arose during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Ultimately, however, the overall balance seems to be positive, at least from an economic point of view and across the whole of the Crown of Aragon. This was largely the result of increased commercial and manufacturing activity, as well as migration from the countryside and other parts of the country (Furió 2016-2017; Viciano 2019; Tortosa 2023).

As we have seen, in this context there were many urban dwellers who, in addition to the members of the patriciate, managed to prosper and demanded greater representation within the municipal institution. In the context of a political society divided into three 'hands' *(mans)*, these demands were capitalised in most cases by the so-called 'minor hand' *(mà menor)* and part of the 'middle hand' *(mà mitjana)*, basically made up of artisans and some merchants, respectively. The reaction of the 'greater hand' *(mà major)* or patriciate to this pretension is tremendously illustrative, especially the whole discourse elaborated from the fifteenth century onwards to highlight the 'honour' of its members, as well as their superiority, not only economic but also intellectual and moral (see, for example, the Catalan case: Fernández Trabal 1999). This phenomenon is also confirmed by the aforementioned urban conflicts, in which the 'popular' demands were often the result of the convergence of interests of the part of urban society that was increasingly disadvantaged and the well-off elements that longed for greater power on the local political chessboard (Reixach and Verdés 2023).

Tab. 9. **Evolution of political lineages in Castello during the 15th Century**

Decade	Political lineages/years	Index	Total lineages	Total index
1401-10	20	100	332	100
1461-70	8.8	44.3	255	76.8
1491-00	5.9	29.5	193	58.1

Source: Viciano, 2008, 45-46.

Unlike what we have seen in the case of the tax records, the available studies do not yet allow us to carry out a quantitative and comparative analysis of the evolution of the families that occupied the main municipal posts in the Crown of Aragon. This is due to the lack of a common, standardised methodology such as the one we have seen in the case of the study of inequality. Nevertheless, we do have some specific examples, where the figures clearly confirm the tendency towards the growth of oligarchies that took place during the fifteenth century in the cities of the Crown of Aragon and the consequent reduction of social mobility in the upper stratum. Thus, in the case of the aforementioned Valencian town of Castelló, it can be observed that throughout the fifteenth century the political group tended to shrink and, at the same time, the most powerful families monopolised more municipal posts. Specifically, from the end of the fourteenth century to the end of the fifteenth century, the number of different people who gained access to the main posts in the municipality was reduced by two-thirds. It is true that the decrease in population that also took place

during this period may condition this interpretation. However, as can be seen in Table 9, if we take into account the evolution of the total number of families documented in the town and those who held political posts, the conclusion is that, in proportion, the concentration of posts is much greater than the fall in population (Viciano 2008).

6. Conclusions

Social mobility in the territories of the Crown of Aragon during the late Middle Ages was related to geographical mobility, both long- and short-range, the legal and institutional framework, political evolution, and above all to the changing economic context, with stages of upswing and decline, in a general trajectory, nevertheless, of complex and diversified growth. As in other parts of Europe, demographic stagnation and the relative depression of agriculture after the Black Death were no obstacles to an evident commercial boom that affected all the regions of the Crown during the period from around 1380 to 1440. The expansion of trade based on wool, wheat and other products responded to intense demand on a European scale – Italy, southern Germany, Castile, the Low Countries – and showed a growing degree of integration in the most dynamic economic areas, especially the western Mediterranean. These products are related to agricultural specialisation, but some semi-luxury and even luxury wares, such as Catalan and Valencian cloth or Valencian ceramics, are also of considerable importance. In the course of this half-century, there was also a large-scale mobilisation of financial capital, facilitated by the development of credit instruments such as *censals* (rents), which sustained a high public demand for monetary resources. The central years of the fifteenth century, on the contrary, witnessed a divergence in the fortunes of the different regions of the Crown. On the one hand, the kingdom of Valencia and, above all, the capital, enjoyed an intensification of growth, thanks to a variety of favourable circumstances: the continuity of migratory flows, the consolidation of maritime circuits between Italy, Castile, Portugal and the Low Countries with a stopover in Valencia; the intermediation between Castile – and especially Andalusia – and Italy; the wealth of exportable products; contacts with Aragonese Italy – Naples, Sardinia and Sicily – and the development of a powerful mercantile and financial community. Conversely, internal tensions within the Barcelona elite led to increasing instability in Catalonia, and from 1460 to a confrontation with the monarchy and a civil war, the echoes of which lasted until 1480. The consequences of a conflict of this magnitude for the economy are obvious: devastation in rural areas, interruption of trade, financial crisis, and the destruction of fixed capital in practically every town and city. Aragon, for its part, suffered no such damage, but its location between Castile and the Mediterranean meant that difficulties on the Castilian and Catalan borders minimised trade and economic activity as a whole. Peace in Catalonia and with France, as well as the recovery of contacts with an economically expansive Crown of Castile, explain the return of growth from 1480 to 1510. This phase witnessed the evident growth of the population, which formed the basis of the demographic upswing of the sixteenth century.

Against this backdrop, it is possible to observe social mobility in general terms, but specific studies will still be needed to measure and describe it in detail. Despite these shortcomings, we are reasonably sure that it was a period of intense economic and social dynamism. Firstly, the capital cities of the Crown and some regions continued to attract migrants, as had been the case since the mid-thirteenth century. These migratory flows contributed to the success of Valencia, but they were also important in Zaragoza and other smaller towns. Some of the migrants came from the mountains and disadvantaged areas of the Crown itself, but there were many others who came from the Crown of Castile and from different regions of Europe, especially Italy. To some extent these movements explain the increase in economic inequality. It is not only that the rich became very rich during the final century of the Middle Ages, but also that in rural communities and towns there was a divergence between the local elites, with large families, economic means, the ability to invest in rents (*censals*) and various businesses, and the plebeian groups, with little land or small workshops, small families, dependence on wages, debts and a strong tendency to emigrate. It is true that real wages grew moderately, and with them the possibilities of popular consumption, but an analysis of the lists of inhabitants of some of these communities shows the continuity of well-off families and a sharp rise in poor families; in other words, downward mobility as a consequence of inequality.

On the previous pages we have seen that in the fifteenth-century Crown of Aragon – as in other Iberian territories – there was a reorganisation of the components of the economic elites. The move to the cities of some members of the rural elite, the rise of merchants and above all urban professionals to the ranks first of the patriciate, and in some cases even to the nobility, were signs of this upward social mobility at a time when social boundaries were still fluid, not rigid or closed as they would become at the end of the Middle Ages. The conversion of many Jews as a result of the pogroms of 1391 and the difficulties of the following two or three decades led a group of *conversos* to integrate with their wealth and financial knowledge in the patriciates of Zaragoza and Valencia, mainly. Towards the end of the century, with the inquisitorial persecution, this panorama became more complicated, but, with some exceptions, the very wealthy *conversos* avoided the crisis and maintained their economic positions. The integration of Italian merchants and artisans was also a factor in the transformation of the elite and of urban society as a whole. Some of these immigrants were members of extraordinarily wealthy families in their cities of origin and their residence in the capitals of the Crown was temporary, but others were commercial representatives or members of families of middle or low rank and their rise came about thanks to the commercial drive of Barcelona, Valencia or Zaragoza. A particular case was that of specialised craftsmen, such as the Genoese silk makers in Valencia, whose success depended on their professional skills in an artisanal environment in which the silk industry was underdeveloped.

In this period, the traditional channels of economic prosperity and social advancement remained in place, and in fact they were probably more effective than at other times. The example of the Borgia popes, who came from a family of peasants ennobled and elevated in the service of King Alfonso the Magnanimous, is indicative of the possibilities that royal and ecclesiastical administration offered. These possibilities were especially useful for the minor nobility – knights, squires, *donzells* or

gentry – who advanced thanks to their knowledge and bureaucratic skills. Many of these members of the minor nobility had a university education in law. At this time, universities such as Toulouse and Bologna had such students, destined to improve their position by serving in the state apparatus. These jurists, unfailingly qualified with the honorific title of *misser* (from the Italian *messer*), also rose socially in a more moderate way due to the progressive closing of ranks of urban governments. The introduction of systems of drawing lots from lists of persons eligible for public office meant, in practice, a firm restriction on the presence in these civic bodies of the artisan strata and the middle classes. Access to power in the cities made it possible to do interesting business, especially to intervene in tax farming or collection and the contracting of public debt. Unlike other European urban societies, the mercantile and artisan world of the cities of the Crown of Aragon was quite open and allowed for the advancement of apprentices and salaried workers, as well as the insertion of craftsmen from other towns and even foreigners. There were regulations for the craft guilds, which became more and more numerous from the beginning of the fifteenth century, but they did not seem to be very coercive. The introduction of new trades and the division of traditional ones raced ahead of the legislative possibilities of the cities and the monarchy, which facilitated this upward economic mobility within the manufacturing organisation. Finally, the importance of the public debt based on the sale of rents (*censals*) to consolidate certain forms of enrichment should be noted. Thus, Valencian nobles who owned manors that were barely profitable found in investment in *censals* an alternative instrument to secure their position. They were definitely not the only ones, in view of the enormous amounts of capital invested in the consolidated debts of the cities and provincial councils of the kingdoms.

Social mobility, both upward and downward – although the latter is more difficult to trace – was a characteristic feature of European societies, including the Crown of Aragon, in the late Middle Ages, both in times of economic growth and in those of crisis and recession. Despite the persistence of the trifunctional system – *oratores, bellatores, laboratores* – of the social order in the collective imagination, the boundaries between one class and another were not hermetic, nor did they prevent social advancement, and much less economic prosperity. It was even possible to climb from the upper strata of the peasantry to the nobility. The main routes were through service to the Crown or the Church, up to the highest hierarchies, and also in the great aristocratic courts. Other avenues for economic and social advancement were professional qualification and enrichment, as well as university education. In addition, appropriate marriage and inheritance strategies were used to preserve and increase the family's economic base and social prestige, as well as a culture of ostentation and social emulation, which marked the differences or helped to bridge them. In any case, a qualitative approach to provide us with characteristic examples of this upward or downward mobility, and a quantitative approach to establish its scope, dimensions and limits, are needed.

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