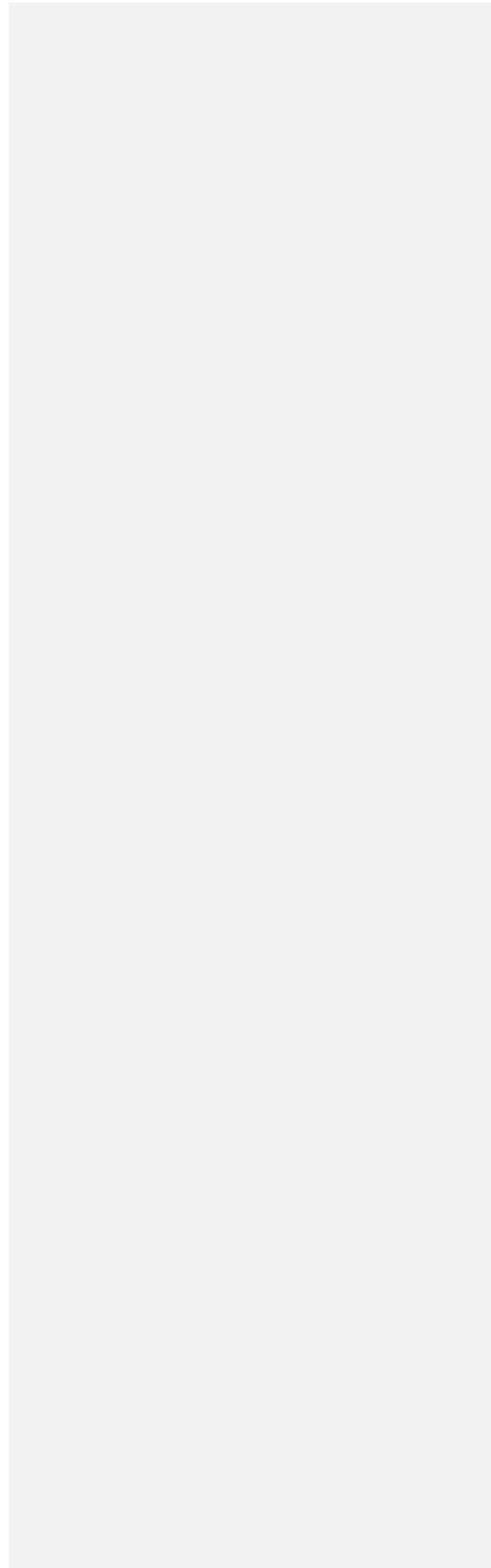


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The Divine Origin of Kingship in Medieval Royal Charters of León and Castile

Propaganda in Diplomatic Preambles

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Abstract

This study focuses on the analysis of the notion of the divine right of kings in medieval Christianity and, specifically, in diplomatic sources from the Crown of León and Castile in medieval Spain, as manifested in the preambles of royal documents. Starting with a general characterization of the main ideological and thematic features surrounding the divine origin of royal power, the focus is then shifted to trying to assess these features against a selection of specific examples extracted from the preambles of royal documentation from Asturias-León and Castile throughout virtually the entire period of the Reconquista. This broad temporal perspective allows for the observation of the consistency and permanence of a genuine propagandistic discourse on royalty, while also enabling to ascertain the modulation of telling changes and renewed emphases arising from each moment within this evolution.

Keywords: Kingship; diplomatics; preambles; Castile; chancery; propaganda

In this study, we aim to provide an overview of the timeless theme concerning the divine origin of royal power, as manifested in the preambles of royal diplomas created during medieval times in the northwest Hispanic kingdoms (the whole of Asturias-León-Castile). The concept of the divine right of kings is indeed deeply entrenched in political thought across Europe, and its roots can be traced through a vast and diverse array of sources and cultural testimonies from that era. However, our specific focus centres on the royal propaganda style evident in these diplomas, particularly within the diplomatic clauses that are naturally best suited for expressing these ideological contents — among which preambles stand out prominently.

First, we will establish the relevance and utility of our chosen approach, focusing on the study of preambles as a valuable tool for understanding the ideology and political mindset of the time. Subsequently, we will place the theme of the divine origin of royalty within the broader context of medieval Western European politics, with a specific emphasis on the Hispanic region. Finally, we will analyze a series of representative preambles spanning various periods in the evolution of diplomatic practices within the chosen region, ranging from the origins of Asturian diplomas to the Trastámara chancery. This will allow us to confirm the enduring nature and essential stability of concepts related to our study field over the long term, as well as to observe the nuanced variations introduced during different eras and reigns.

Preambles, between Rhetorics and Diplomatics

When examining the preambles that accompany certain diplomas, it is only natural to pay some attention, even if only tangentially, to a dimension that is genetically and constitutionally interwoven into their fabric, namely, their rhetorical essence. Preambles could roughly be considered as the written counterparts, within the realm of diplomatics, to *exordia* or *proemia* in rhetorical discourse: both serve to prepare and engage the mind of the recipient (whether a listener or reader) to the message being transmitted by the act of communication (*captatio benevolentiae*), while also offering some kind of general introduction and justification to the message conveyed.

Given that the art of oral discourse and, therefore, rhetoric — the science of organizing and delivering *orationes* — historically precedes diplomatics — the discipline concerned with drafting and presenting documents —, it is only natural to recognize the precedence of the oral *exordium* or introduction as a model upon which that part of the document fulfilling a similar function and commonly referred to as the preamble will subsequently be articulated. However, it is also common to assign alternative designations to this preamble, occasionally leading to some ambiguity or indefiniteness, straddling the realms of oral and written discourse (among such, *prologus*, *captatio benevolentiae*, *arenga*, *exordium*, *proemium*).¹ In accordance with this relationship (almost a true genetic lineage), it should come as no surprise that there is a constant exchange of procedures, *topoi* or commonplaces, and specific formulations between the domains of rhetoric and diplomatics, concerning this part of the diplomatic tenor that is undeniably among the most inherently rhetorical due to its very nature.²

In the context of medieval literary theory, *ars dictandi* prose manuals sought to define the preamble based on the model of the analogous rhetorical element, namely, the *exordium*. If today we wish to overcome, for the sake of clarity, the terminological overlap that existed then between rhetoric and diplomatics, we could attempt to distinguish the *exordium* as the part of the discourse specific to rhetoric, while considering the preamble or *arenga* as its counterpart belonging to the diplomatic tenor: oral *exordium* versus written *arenga*, in short. However, in those manuals, things were never quite so distinctly separated, with the *exordium* consistently prevailing as the original and dominant prototype. By his authority, Cicero will once again provide the classical definition that medieval Latin would preserve, transcending the era known as the Dark Ages; according to this definition, the *exordium* is that discourse element which prepares the listener's mind for what follows:

The exordium is the part that appropriately prepares the listener's mind for the rest of the discourse.³

Repeated by Cassiodorus and others, this Ciceronian definition echoes throughout the medieval times in so many *ars dictandi* manuals; for example in Hugo de Bolonia's *Rationes dictandi prosaice*:

¹ Ruiz Calonja, 'Valor literario de los preámbulos de la cancillería real catalano-aragonesa en el siglo XV', p. 296.

² Laffon Álvarez, '*Arenga Hispana*: una aproximación a los preámbulos documentales de la Edad Media', pp. 136–37.

³ Exordium est ratio animum auditoris idonee comparans ad reliquam dictionem: Cicero, *De inuentione*, I, 15.

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In effect, the exordium, according to Cicero's definition, is the part that appropriately prepares the listener's mind for the rest of the discourse.⁴

Or in Conrad of Mure's *Summa de arte prosandi*:

This exordium, or proverb, or plea for goodwill, is the speech by which the listener's mind is made receptive, benevolent and attentive, and inclined to hear and accept what follows more willingly.⁵

In this last cited work, the definition of the *arenga* (our diplomatic preamble) is given separately, with the same purpose of serving the *captatio benevolentiae* and also referring to its ornamental or decorative character within the text:

Arenga is a certain preface that is placed before to win goodwill, and pertains to ornamentation.⁶

The fact that the *exordium* (or preamble) must prepare the listener's (or reader's) mind for what follows imposes the necessity that it be related to the topic of the discourse (or diploma). The opposite was considered a defect of the speaker or writer, and the precepts of the time continually warned against such a vice or inconvenience:

But some say that the exordium is nothing other than a plea for goodwill pertaining to the effect, as you will hear in rhetoric. However, it is most necessary that the exordium matches what follows, and even every part of it.⁷

Salutation is followed by the *arenga*. And this *arenga* is a proposition harmonious both in words and sense, interspersed — if it pleases the drafter — with quotations, which must be placed at the beginning and occupy its place in such a way that it not only does not differ or conflict with what follows, but indeed fully enhance its meaning. Otherwise, it would be something monstrous, as if a horse's neck were attached to a human head.⁸

This last cited text, from a thirteenth-century Saxon *Summa prosarum dictaminis*, not only refers generically and traditionally to the *exordium* but specifically to its diplomatic manifestation: the *arenga* or preamble. It is particularly eloquent: it places this element at the beginning of the diploma; it imposes that it must be a proposition in accordance with the whole, not only in the terms employed (*uerborum*) but also in the concepts or reasons (*sententiarum*), in such a way that its coherence with the overall text completes or perfects the meaning of the piece. And to further caution the student against the carelessness of appending any inappropriate preamble to a document, an easily

⁴ Est uero exordium, secundum Tullianam definitionem, oratio idonee comparans animum auditoris ad reliquam dictionem: Rockinger, *Briefsteller und Formelbücher des elften bis vierzehnten Jahrhunderts*, p. 57.

⁵ Exordium hic, seu prouerbum, seu captatio beneuolentiae, est oratio per quam auditoris animus redditur docilis, beniuolus et attentus, et inclinatus allicitur ut eo libentius audiat et admittat quae subsequuntur: Rockinger, *Briefsteller und Formelbücher des elften bis vierzehnten Jahrhunderts*, p. 465.

⁶ Arenga est quaedam praefatio quae ad captandam beneuolentiam premititur, et facit ad oratum: Rockinger, *Briefsteller und Formelbücher des elften bis vierzehnten Jahrhunderts*, p. 467.

⁷ Quidam autem dicunt quod exordium nihil aliud ut quam captatio beneuolentiae quandoque ab effectu ut in rhetoricis audietis. Exordium uero summi debet quod sequentibus conueniat et etiam cuilibet parti (Orleans' *Ars dictandi*): Rockinger, *Briefsteller und Formelbücher des elften bis vierzehnten Jahrhunderts*, pp. 107–08.

⁸ Salutationem sequitur arenga. Et est arenga concors et uerborum et sententiarum positio, auctoritate aliqua — si dictatori placuerit — interserta, quae ita praemitti debet et in principio obtinere suum locum, ut a subsequente materia non solum non discrepet et discordet, immo per omnia sibi perficiat sensum eius. Esset enim alias monstruosum, tamquam si humano capiti ceruix iungatur equina (*Summa prosarum dictaminis*): Rockinger, *Briefsteller und Formelbücher des elften bis vierzehnten Jahrhunderts*, p. 218.

memorable image is invoked: it would be ‘as if a horse’s neck were attached to a human head’.

From all of this, we must retain something fundamental: the main reason for the variation in the different formulas of preambles used lies in the imperative to adapt them to different themes, contexts, and degrees of solemnity or stylistic differences, as appropriate in each case. And thus, the criticism — that will come much later — regarding preambles, as formulaic elements that usually do not relate to the object of the document,⁹ is founded — when it is fair — either on the exception to the rule or on the incompetence or lack of talent of specific drafters, rather than on a generalizable characteristic of these elements of the diplomatic tenor.

Diplomatics has meticulously and diligently addressed the study of the different parts and elements of documents, both in terms of their overall composition and their separate evolution as such.¹⁰ The specific study of the preamble, as a diplomatic element with its own characteristics, can benefit from the analysis of other formulas, inasmuch they share features that can be approached through a common methodology. However, it should not be forgotten that the preamble, in addition to its specific character and function, bears a distinctive trait: unlike other elements of the diplomatic tenor, it is *optional*. Its inclusion in the document is conditioned by custom and the general form of the diploma according to the used templates, but ultimately depends on a certain fundamental freedom on the drafter’s part as to include it or not. Furthermore, the inclusion or omission of the preamble does not affect the legal validity or effectiveness of the resulting document in any way. In this sense, Arthur Giry’s assertion that the preamble is not an ‘essential part’ of diplomas¹¹ is fair, considering that, as Conrad of Mure reminded us, it is chiefly an element of ‘ornamentation’ and lacks inherent legal value or effects *per se*.¹²

The fact that the preamble is not a fixed or necessary part of the diplomatic tenor, but rather an optional one, leads to at least two interesting consequences. First, it allows for a certain freedom and inventiveness on the part of the drafters. This begins with the decision to use a preamble or not for a given document, but continues with details such as its specific form, length, and the possibility of including citations within it,¹³ among others. Many of these crucial choices, influenced by the culture and style of the drafters, often result in alterations and noteworthy innovations. Second, since the preamble is not an essential ingredient in every document, a distinction regarding importance or solemnity tends to emerge between those that include it and those that do not.¹⁴ While medieval literary theory recognized and recommended acknowledging this difference,¹⁵

⁹ ‘The preamble [...] consists indeed of general and often banal considerations, *without a direct link to the purpose of the document*, but taken in the order of ideas that is supposed to have inspired the author’, Giry, *Manuel de Diplomatique*, p. 537 (the emphasis is ours).

¹⁰ For example: Lanham, *Salutatio Formulas in Latin Letters to 1200. Syntax, Style and Theory*.

¹¹ ‘The preamble never was an essential part of documents’: Giry, *Manuel de Diplomatique*, p. 538.

¹² ‘It does not have any legal value’: Guyotjeannin, Pycke, Toek, *Diplomatique médiévale*, p. 76.

¹³ The Saxon thirteenth-century *Summa prosarum dictaminis* stressed that preambles could include citations according to the drafter’s will: ‘si dictatori placuerit’: Rockinger, *Briefsteller und Formelbücher des elften bis vierzehnten Jahrhunderts*, p. 218.

¹⁴ Michel Zimmermann considers if ‘the presence or absence of a preamble [establishes] a hierarchical typology of documents’: Zimmermann, *Auctor et auctoritas. Invention et conformisme dans l’écriture médiévale (Actes Colloque Université Versailles-St-Quentin-en-Yvelines 1999)*, p. 339.

¹⁵ Ludolf of Hildesheim, *Summa dictaminum*: ‘Forma privilegiorum talis est: salutatio premittitur [...]; deinde sequitur arenga, si est arduum negotium’. Rockinger, *Briefsteller und*

it is definitely not systematic or absolute. In fact, preambles are often missing in royal charters, which provide the main scope for our study here.

A Question of Appraisal

The attention and consideration that preambles have received over time have experienced striking oscillations between disinterest and maximum curiosity. The prevailing paradigm of nineteenth-century positivism made possible judgements like that of Theodor Sickel when he claimed that preambles were ‘often almost devoid of meaning’.¹⁶ As we have seen, an authoritative and influential representative of classical diplomatics, such as Arthur Giry in his influential manual, characterizes preambles as ‘often banal’ and acknowledges the frequent criticism that they become arbitrary and untimely when they do not align well with the theme of the document in which they appear.¹⁷ Due to this consideration, as Giry reminds us, some earlier scholars had even recommended disregarding these elements, either by not copying them in transcriptions or omitting them in the publication of documents¹⁸ (an extreme view that Giry does not share, as his manual indeed provides interesting suggestions for the systematic study of preambles).

From the same period as Giry’s manual, there is Albert Babeau’s seminal study on the preambles of French royal documentation (covering both medieval and modern eras, spanning the entire *Ancien Régime* up to the Revolution).¹⁹ Babeau’s work was a pioneer in the trend of revaluing preambles as formulas that are increasingly seen as less empty and more full of interest, to the point where they appear as an interesting object of study in their own right. However, undoubtedly the most distinguished representative of this historiographical trend is the Austrian historian Heinrich Fichtenau, whose studies on the topic contributed to consolidate this shift in direction and paved the way for further research.²⁰ The key factor behind this change in attitude toward preambles lies in recognizing their importance as the ‘essential element’ in terms of intention, ideology and meaning which their drafters intended to confer upon the documents bearing them.²¹

In the last decades of the twentieth century, fuelled by new orientations and trends in historiographical work (such as those associated with the *Annales* school and later the paradigms of so-called postmodernity), a ‘new political history’ emerged. This new approach draws on the history of culture and mentalities while also benefiting from contributions from neighbouring disciplines within the social sciences, such as anthropology and sociology. Its goal is to establish new conceptual frameworks for analyzing the domain of politics in its broadest sense within the study of the past. Within this context, preambles have been subject to renewed attention²² as elements of the

Formelbücher des elften bis vierzehnten Jahrhunderts, pp. 377–78. Durante, *Speculum iuris*, II, iii, § 6, n. 19: ‘si autem arduum sit negotium, incipias cum praefatione’ (Venecia, 1602, II, p. 791).

¹⁶ Sickel, *Acta regum et imperatorum Karolinorum digesta et enarrata. I. Urkundenlehre*, p. 169.

¹⁷ Giry, *Manuel de Diplomatique*, p. 537.

¹⁸ Giry, *Manuel de Diplomatique*, p. 543.

¹⁹ ‘[Preambles] contain valuable lessons for history and the philosophy of history’: Babeau, *Les préambules des ordonnances royales et l’opinion publique*, p. 3.

²⁰ Chiefly, Fichtenau, *Arenga. Spätantike und Mittelalter im Spiegel von Urkundenformeln*.

²¹ ‘The essential element concerning what the diploma, having a propagandistic function, intended to signify’: Fichtenau, ‘Note sur l’origine du préambule dans les diplômes médiévaux’, p. 3.

²² ‘There was a time when the arengas of privileges were passed over rapidly in order to get to the supposed meat. Then Heinrich Fichtenau and others taught us to look at these as sources for current

diplomatic tenor that stand out due to their intentionality, their ability to convey politically significant meanings, and their relevance in the deployment of propaganda and representation of the powers and institutions behind the document.

Medieval Diplomats and Propaganda

Various historiographical contributions have solidified the use of the key concept of propaganda as relevant when approaching the construction and expression of political discourse in the medieval times. Although there has been debate about the possible anachronisms of applying this concept — which certainly makes all sense and is especially relevant in relation to the realities of the contemporary world — to the Middle Ages, it seems reasonable, at least by analogy, to use it to describe and understand a wide range of phenomena related to the dissemination of messages concerning political actors and actions.²³ These messages are intended to influence their recipients through various means.

The means of propaganda in the Middle Ages present a rich variety of modalities, ranging from sermons or proclamations in the realm of oral communication to iconographic programs in the visual domain. Not to be forgotten are the different genres and possibilities related to written culture:²⁴ within this latter context, diplomas certainly hold a prominent position. Their creation — whether carried out within stable organs of power such as chanceries²⁵ or independently of these offices by the diplomas' beneficiaries or incidental scribes —, involves certain recognizable and, to some extent, comparable elements of 'official pretension'. Such elements relate to the themes, programs, and objectives of propaganda, and support the dissemination of the idea and image that the power wishes to convey about itself and its actions.²⁶

Albert Babeau, both due to the period in which he wrote and because his study comprises not only the medieval era but also extends up to the eve of the Revolution, referred in somewhat 'typical nineteenth-century' terms to the relationship between the preambles of royal diplomas and 'public opinion'.²⁷ Although it is clear that in the

conceptions of royal authority and the nature of the polity': Reuter, 'The Medieval German Sonderweg? The Empire and Its Rulers in the High Middle Ages', p. 195.

²³ Makdisi, Sourdel, Sourdel-Thomine, *Prédication et propagande au Moyen Âge. Islam, Byzance, Occident*; Cammarosano, *Le forme della propaganda politica nel due e nel trecento*; Aurell, *Convaincre et persuader: communication et propagande aux XII^e et XIII^e siècles*.

²⁴ 'At the level of genres, as we know, medieval political theory does not present itself homogeneously [...]. Glosses, commentaries, treatises, and philosophical, legal, and theological works often addressed political issues, more or less extensively [...]. Historiography, hagiography, sermons, poetry and theater were all occasionally capable of evoking political problems': Verger, 'Théorie politique et propagande politique', pp. 30–31.

²⁵ Arizaleta, *Les clercs au palais. Chancellerie et écriture du pouvoir royal (Castille, 1157–1230)*.

²⁶ 'Diplomas are not only legal instruments. They also constitute tools of communication and, consequently, tools of power. A diploma, because it consists of formulas that can be repeated from one act to another, is capable of conveying a certain image of the monarch who issued it. The terms used therein are often revealing of the adopted ideological stances, and the choices guiding the creation of these acts are equally significant': Sirantoine, *Imperator Hispaniae. Les idéologies impériales dans le royaume de León (IX^e-XII^e siècles)*, p. 202.

²⁷ '[Preambles] make us aware of the relationships that princes maintained with the nation, their concern for public opinion. [Royal charters] show that the sovereign representing the state wanted to win

medieval era, the effort to influence public opinion was not as conscious and articulated as in contemporary journalism, and even though the very notion of ‘public opinion’ as such may seem controversial and anachronistic when applied to medieval times, the possibility of connecting the production of preambles with the more or less conscious and operational desire to influence the mindset of the time is suggestive. It rightly highlights an important element that we will later relate to the concept and practice of propaganda.

In many cases, preambles serve as true manifestos,²⁸ full of self-awareness and purpose. They intentionally deploy ideas and images related to the legitimization and representation of power. Additionally, they reflect various notions, both conscious and implicit, associated with the ideology and culture of their authors. As a result, preambles become clear points of interest for studying propaganda and political thought, as shall henceforth become apparent.

The Divine Origin of Royalty: Ideological Foundations

One of the oldest and most universal ideological foundations for legitimizing and projecting power, in general, and royalty in particular, relates to the presentation of the divine origin of that power. Based on this origin, that power can be understood and defined in more or less strict terms of sacralization.²⁹ Setting aside — yet without forgetting — the field of implications of all kinds that this topic has in a broad anthropological context, when it comes to Western tradition, we can primarily refer to its foundation according to an ideological line that coherently traces back to the biblical-patristic basis of Christian thought. This tradition was destined for extraordinary dissemination and enduring influence.

In the Old Testament, God is presented as the true king and sovereign, invested with the functions of ultimate power.³⁰ The kings of this world are therefore divinely ordained: for the Hebrew people, not only were their own kings given by God,³¹ but foreign monarchs as well.³² The special connection between the monarch and divinity was primarily expressed among the Hebrews through the anointing ceremony: the king is the Messiah (meaning ‘anointed one’) of God.³³ Within this Old Testament tradition, the king is not primarily a legislator but, above all, a judge. His main and characteristic

over public opinion before demanding obedience’: Babeau, *Les préambules des ordonnances royales et l’opinion publique*, pp. 3, 4.

²⁸ ‘Every preamble is a program, or still better, a mirror’: Guyotjeannin, ‘Les actes d’Henri Ier et la chancellerie royale dans les années 1020–1060’, p. 92.

²⁹ Figgis, *The Divine Right of Kings*; Bloch, *Les rois thaumaturges*; Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies. A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*; Meyers, Wolfram, *Medieval Kingship*. Erkens, ‘Religiöse Herrschaftslegitimierung im Mittelalter’.

³⁰ For instance: Ps. 46. 3; 46. 8; 47. 3; 75. 8; 92. 1; 95. 10; 95. 13; 97. 9; 98. 1; Isa. 33. 22. García Trapiello, *La autoridad política en la Biblia. Origen y desarrollo en el Antiguo Testamento*.

³¹ 1 Kgs. 2. 15; 1 Chr. 28. 5; Wis. 6. 3; Dan. 4. 14.

³² Isa. 45. 1. Vaux, *Instituciones del Antiguo Testamento*, p. 151.

³³ 1 Sam. 9. 16; 10. 1; 2 Sam. 2. 4; 5. 3. Vaux, *Instituciones del Antiguo Testamento*, pp. 155–57, states that only with the end of the kingdom, anointing, originally related to kings, was transferred to priests.

attribute is to administer justice in accordance with the legislation, which is of divine origin and also binds the king.³⁴

The tradition regarding the divine origin of power is assumed and updated in the New Testament³⁵ and will become part of Christian ‘political theology’ right from the start.³⁶ Christ, as both God and Messiah (or Anointed One), will consistently be characterized as a king.³⁷ The kingdom of God serves as a ‘political archetype’ for conceiving earthly kingdoms,³⁸ and the kings of this world, by analogy and representation, will be defined as images and vicars of God, not only because of their role as earthly monarchs (mirroring the position of the sole Monarch in the heavens) but also because of the divine origin of their power.³⁹ The Christian idea that kings derive their power from God, with all its consequences (Christian redefinition of the notion of royalty,⁴⁰ adjustment of royal functions,⁴¹ reflection on the moral duties of kings), reaches a pan-European extension in the horizon of the medieval West.⁴² This idea will lead to important doctrinal developments in literature and some definite practical consequences in the styles of representation of royal power to be found in contemporary charters’ formulae.

In the European context, the most solid immediate reference for the development of these notions can be located in the Carolingian period: building partly on the foundations of Merovingian tradition in this regard,⁴³ the Carolingians take decisive steps forward⁴⁴ and create typologies destined for significant endurance, pivoting around central traits such as the royal anointing and the title *Dei gratia*.⁴⁵ Charlemagne himself would be called ‘father and defender of the Christian people, given by God’ (by Paul the Deacon),⁴⁶ ‘father and lord, king and priest’ (by Paulinus of Aquileia),⁴⁷ and even ‘holy father’ (by Alcuin).⁴⁸ In art, the representation of monarchs in the tradition that traces back to Carolingian models will be adorned with attributes of sacralization, such as the hand of God over the head of the sovereign, His anointed.⁴⁹ Later theological

³⁴ Justice, as a royal function: 1 Sam. 8. 5; Prov. 16. 12; 25. 5; 29. 14; Isa. 9. 6. ‘To judge’ as meaning ‘to rule’: 2 Kgs. 15. 5. Also the king is bound by the law: Deut. 27. 19; 1 Kgs. 8. 58; 2 Kgs. 23. 3.

³⁵ *Non haberes potestatem aduersum me ullam, ullam, nisi tibi datum esset desuper* (John 19. 11). *Non est enim potestas nisi a Deo: quae autem sunt, a Deo ordinatae sunt* (Rom. 13. 1).

³⁶ Kantorowicz, ‘*Deus per naturam, Deus per gratiam*. A note on mediaeval political theology’

³⁷ Leclercq, *L’idée de la royauté du Christ au Moyen Âge*.

³⁸ García Pelayo, *El reino de Dios, arquetipo político: estudio sobre las formas políticas de la Alta Edad Media*.

³⁹ Gierke, *Teorías políticas de la Edad Media*, p. 134; Maccarrone, ‘Il sovrano *vicarius Dei* nell’alto medio evo’; Ullmann, *Principles of Government and Politics in the Middle Ages*.

⁴⁰ Redeyllet, *La royauté dans la littérature latine de Sidoine Apollinaire à Isidore de Seville*.

⁴¹ Marongiu, ‘Un momento típico de la monarquía medieval: el rey juez’.

⁴² Boureau, Ingerflom, *La royauté sacrée dans le monde chrétien (Colloque de Royaumont, mars 1989)*; Blanchard, *Représentation, pouvoir et royauté à la fin du Moyen Âge (Colloque Université Maine 25–26 mars 1994)*.

⁴³ Le Jan, ‘La sacralité de la royauté mérovingienne’.

⁴⁴ Jong, ‘*Sacrum palatium et ecclesia*. L’autorité religieuse royale sous les Carolingiens (790–840).

⁴⁵ Schramm, *Kaiser, Könige und Päpste. Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Geschichte des Mittelalters*.

⁴⁶ *quam dedit Omnicreans Rector miseratus ab alto / Christicolum populis defensoremque patremque*: Wiegand, *Das Homiliarium Karls des Grossen auf seine ursprüngliche Gestalt hin untersucht*, p. 14.

⁴⁷ *dominus et pater [...] rex et sacerdos [...] omnium Christianorum moderantissimus gubernator*: *MGH Concilia II. Concilia aevi Karolini I*, p. 142.

⁴⁸ *sancte pater*: *MGH Poetae Latini aevi Karolini I*, p. 257. Also, in another letter, Alcuin referred to Charlemagne as follows: *vir a Deo electe [...], filii Dei [...], miles Christi*: *MGH Epistolae 4: Epistolae Karolini aevi II*, p. 241.

⁴⁹ Staubach, *Rex christianus, Hofkultur und Herrschaftspropaganda im Reich Karls des Kahlen*.

developments aimed at specifying the respective spheres of action between *regnum* and *sacerdotium*, as exemplified by Hugh of Fleury, will characterize the king as an image of the Father in the kingdom, just as bishops represent the Son, thus suggesting a possibility of subordinationism between the two.⁵⁰ A coherent line of recognition of the divine origin of royal power can be traced back to diplomatic forms from the Carolingian era.⁵¹

In the Hispanic context, the venerable and common reference can be traced back to the Visigothic era; the sphere of conceptions about royalty coined in the councils of the Spanish Church and in the wake of Isidorian thought will form a substrate present in the ideological developments of subsequent centuries.⁵² Both the councils and various legal texts and doctrinal works of the time are rich in notions regarding the divine foundation of royal power. In the Third Council of Toledo (589), king Recared I is called *sanctissimus*.⁵³ Saint Isidore applies the expression *gratia Dei* to king Suintila in his *History of the Goths*.⁵⁴ In the Sixteenth Council of Toledo (693), the idea of the king as God's vicar is recorded, and kings are referred to as ministers of God in the *Leges Visigothorum*.⁵⁵ Consistent with this characterization of the king as *alter Christus*,⁵⁶ the highly influential ideas that Saint Isidore will project for the future include his consideration of justice and piety as the most important virtues of the king⁵⁷ and, above all, the association of royal power with rectitude: *rex eris si recte facias*,⁵⁸ as Isidore so influentially puts it, drawing from Horace.⁵⁹

⁵⁰ Verumtamen rex in regni sui corpore Patris omnipotentis optinere uidetur imaginem, et episcopus Christi. Unde rite regni subiaccere uidentur omnes regni ipsius episcopi, sicut Patri Filius deprehenditur esse subiectus, non natura, sed ordine, ut uniuersitas regni ad unum redigatur principium: Hugh Of Fleury, *Tractatus de regia potestate et sacerdotali dignitate*, p. 468.

⁵¹ Dum, iuxta apostoli dictum, omnes potestas sublimatur a Domino, et quatenus post Deum in regia manet potestate [...]: *Supplementum Formularum Marculfi*, no. 6 (Zeumer, *Formulae merovingici et Karolini aevi*, p. 109); Quem diuina pietas sublimatur ad regnum [...]: *Formulae Marculfinae aevi Karolini*, no. 25 (Zeumer, *Formulae merovingici et Karolini aevi*, p. 123); Si liberalitatis nostrae munere de beneficiis a Deo nobis collatis locis Deo dicatis aliquid conferimus [...]: *Formulae imperiales e curia Ludouicij Pii*, no. 26 (Zeumer, *Formulae merovingici et Karolini aevi*, p. 305).

⁵² Orlandis, 'El rey visigodo católico'; Valverde Castro, *Ideología, simbolismo y ejercicio del poder real en la monarquía visigoda: un proceso de cambio*; Grein, 'Isidoro de Sevilla y los fundamentos de la realeza cristiana en la Hispania visigoda (s. VII)'; Andrade, 'Mito e monarquia na Hispânia visigótica católica'.

⁵³ Martínez Díez, Rodríguez, *La Colección Canónica Hispana. V. Concilios Hispanos: segunda parte*, p. 50.

⁵⁴ Isidore Of Seville, *Historia Gothorum*, 62.

⁵⁵ Barbero, Vigil, 'El pensamiento político visigodo y las primeras uniones regias en la Europa medieval'.

⁵⁶ Barbero, Vigil, *La formación del feudalismo en la Península Ibérica*, p. 175.

⁵⁷ Isidore Of Seville, *Etymologiae* IX, 3, 5 y *Sententiae* III, 49, 1–4.

⁵⁸ Isidor Of Seville, *Etymologiae* IX, 3 y *Sententiae* III, 4, 8. Furthermore, it can be noted that this association points to a critical point of profound connection between thought and speech in the realm of the Indo-European languages, namely the genetic relation between *rex*, *regere* and *(di)rectus*: originally, it was up to the king to establish the community's bounds by drawing straight lines (whereupon his function associated to righteousness and justice): Benveniste, *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes. 2. Pouvoir, droit, religion*.

⁵⁹ *at pueri ludentes, rex eris, aiunt — si recte facies*: Horacio, *Epistulae* I, 1, 59–60.

Early Asturian-Leonese Diplomatics

The first period in the historical development of diplomatic discourse within the scope of the kingdoms of the northwestern Iberian Peninsula comprises the early developments of diplomatics in the Asturian-Leonese kingdom before the establishment and organization of the royal chancery as an institution with regular functioning. A word should be said about the conditions that apply to the process of creation and validation of royal documents within this extended period, which ranges from the early Asturian diplomas studied by Barrau-Dihigo⁶⁰ and others, to those of Alphonse VI and Urraca of León. Regarding the production of documents with the king as the legal author, it is not straightforward — and even a controversial issue at times — to determine in each case to what extent the making of such royal diplomas occurred according to more or less consistent practices or within a more or less distant radius from the immediate environment of the monarch and the court. An embryo of what would later become a chancery organized as a central office for issuing and validating royal documents is already recognizable during the times of Alphonse VI and Queen Urraca. However, there is reasonable consensus among specialists to postpone the foundation of that regular and fully organized royal chancery until the reign of Alphonse VII, especially following his imperial coronation.

During this initial period of Asturian-Leonese diplomatics, up to the reign of Alphonse VI and Urraca, we can observe some key traits related to the circumstances under which royal documents were created:

1. The relevance of the redaction carried out by the recipient of the document or by scribes on occasion. Drafters and scribes worked on royal diplomas either at the king's court or in some episcopal or monastic *scriptoria*, the latter often being the same beneficiaries of the granted documents. Regardless of where and how these diplomas were crafted, there must have been some basic conditions for their acceptability as royal documents, based on established formal criteria and practices. In fact, some sort of 'chancery memory' associated with these practices often resided within the very ecclesiastical institutions where royal diplomas were actually produced.⁶¹
2. General adherence to some shared ideological background rooted in Hispanic tradition, tracing back to certain redaction models inherited from the Visigothic era, through the collections of Toledo councils and other sources, such as the *Visigothic Formulas*.⁶²

⁶⁰ Barrau-Dihigo, 'Notes et documents sur l'histoire du royaume de Léon. I. Chartres royales léonaises. 912–1037', pp. 349–54.

⁶¹ According to Barrau-Dihigo's supposition, beneficiaries used to draft an early version of each document, later to be revised by the royal notaries: Barrau-Dihigo, 'Étude sur les actes des rois asturiens (718–910)', pp. 7–8. Emilio Sáez thought that maybe this later revision was in fact not always — maybe never — done: Sáez, 'Notas y documentos sobre Sancho Ordóñez rey de Galicia', p. 68. Pilar Blanco Lozano, speaking of Ferdinand I's charters, states that such documents were 'not drafted by the royal chancery': Blanco Lozano, *Colección diplomática de Fernando I (1037–1065)*, p. 16.

⁶² Zeumer, *Formulae merovingici et Karolini aevi*; Gil, *Miscellanea Visigothica*; Canellas López, 'De diplomática hispano visigoda: colección documental'.

3. Intimate relationship — partially based on the previous premises — between the forms of royal diplomas and those found in contemporary private documentation, before any recognizable ‘distinct chancery style’ is established.

Considering these traits, it would be safe to assert that, prior to the definitive institutional consolidation of the royal chancery as a distinct entity, the discourse about royalty was not solely an internal product of the kings’ own propaganda, but rather it was significantly influenced by broader societal culture. This influence manifested through a continuous ‘contamination’ or fluid exchange of formulas between royal and private documents, with ecclesiastical scribes playing a prominent role. These scribes, when drafting royal diplomas, brought their own cultural background, memory, and expertise to the task.

Undoubtedly, ideological developments on the notion of royalty and its divine origin in this time are shaped against a background of traditional common references that ultimately can be traced back up to the Visigothic era.⁶³ It is customary to state in the wording of diplomas that the king holds his position by the will of God (*nutu Dei* or *nutu diuino*).⁶⁴ There is a direct link from the ninth of the Visigothic Formulas, where it can be read that the king owes his realm to ‘celestial largesse’ (*caelesti largitate*):⁶⁵

If our offering is compensated by divine benefits, it is of minimal worth everything that we offer, what we are, what we live, as well as our possession of the kingdom and dominion over things that we have received through heavenly generosity; but if every such offering is weighed according to the amount and sincerity of faith, we do not consider so insignificant what is dedicated to God by a great faith.⁶⁶

With some differences in wording, this formula will directly inspire several preambles to royal charters, from the early times of Alphonse III and Garcia, to those of Ferdinand I.⁶⁷

In the preamble of a donation by Ramiro II to the monastery of Celanova, it is emphasized that the kingdoms and the power of kings depend on divine will:

To the Saviour of all things and Redemptor, Who allows for kingdoms, heaven, earth and the power of kings.⁶⁸

⁶³ Isla Frez, *Realezas hispánicas del año mil*; Ubieto Arteta, ‘El origen divino de la realeza’; Nieto Soria, ‘Imágenes religiosas del rey y del poder real en la Castilla del siglo XIII’; Nieto Soria, *Fundamentos ideológicos del poder real en Castilla (ss. VII–XV)*.

⁶⁴ Thus, for instance, referring to Sancho I and Vermudo II: Isla Frez, *Realezas hispánicas del año mil*; Ubieto Arteta, ‘El origen divino de la realeza’, pp. 82, 85, 87.

⁶⁵ *Formulae Visigothicae*, no. 9; Zeumer, *Formulae merowingici et Karolini aevi*, p. 579. In a diploma from King García’s reign, dated August 30, 912: *et regno praediti et rerum praesentium nutu Dei sumus caelesti largitate locupletati* (Lucas Álvarez, *El reino de León en la Alta Edad Media. VIII. La documentación real astur-leonesa (718–1072)*, R-1, doc. no. 77). This formula will be widely used in Ferdinand I’s reign: Lucas Álvarez, *El reino de León en la Alta Edad Media. VIII. La documentación real astur-leonesa (718–1072)*, R-1, docs. nos 408, 411, 417 y 421.

⁶⁶ Si beneficiis diuinitus nostra compensetur oblatio, parui penditur quod offerimus, quod sumus, quod uiuimus, quod ueri capaces quodque regno praediti et rerum domini sumus, caelesti largitate percepimus; sed quoniam omnis oblatio pro fidei quantitate et sinceritate pensatur, non putamus esse minima quae magna fides Deo consecrat; Zeumer, *Formulae merowingici et Karolini aevi*, p. 579.

⁶⁷ Floriano Cumbreño, *Diplomática española del periodo astur. Cartulario crítico*, doc. no. 143 (Alphonse III, 891); Barrau-Dihigo, ‘Notes et documents sur l’histoire du royaume de Léon. I. Chartres royales léonaises. 912–1037, doc. no. 1 (García, 912); Lucas Álvarez, *El reino de León en la Alta Edad Media. VIII. La documentación real astur-leonesa (718–1072)*, R-1, docs. nos 408, 410, 411, 417, 421 (Ferdinand I, 1050, 1056 y 1059).

⁶⁸ Saluator omnium et redemptori [...], qui regna, caelum, terram regesque potestas [...] permittis [...]: 941, August 11. Ramiro II’s grant to the monastery of Celanova: Lucas Álvarez, *El reino de León en la Alta Edad Media. VIII. La documentación real astur-leonesa (718–1072)*, R-1, doc. no. 185.

In the preamble of a donation by Sancho I to the monastery of Sahagún, it is indicated that the king holds the realm by divine commission, for the benefit of the people entrusted to him:

Although the almighty God has granted to us the pinnacle of our kingdom for the peoples' sake, and entrusted the governance of so many subjects to our royal care [...].⁶⁹

In another royal donation to the monastery of Sahagún, attributed to Alphonse VI, the invocation of divinity continues as a preamble with an indirect citation from Proverbs 8. 15–16, indicating that the world is governed and moderated by God, under Whom kings and rulers reign:

Under the dominion of the Creator of all things, who arranges and governs everything created from nothing by the sceptre of His imperial power, by Whose command kings rule, princes reign, and the world itself is governed and maintained in its proper state.⁷⁰

In a later donation by the same king to the church of Toledo, the preamble states that no power can be held or endure unless it comes from God:

Because without God no power has any being or duration [...].⁷¹

It is noteworthy that similar terms expressing these ideas appear consistently in the preambles of other later diplomas issued by Alphonse VII. In an important charter of confirmation issued in favour of the monastery of Sahagún, the preamble evokes the providential change operated in the kingdom, shifting from a state of dissipation and anarchy after the passing of King Alphonse VI to the current situation, where royal authority has once again been reinstated under Alphonse VII:

Since the kingdom of Spain, after the death of my grandfather Ildefonso, has been oppressed by many disturbances and calamities, and is now almost dissolved, the Almighty, by Whose gift kings reign and princes rule, has deigned to effect a change for us [...].⁷²

And in a confirmation to the monastery of Oña, the preamble once again reminds us of the source idea behind all these ideological elaborations: the Pauline notion of God being the ultimate source of all power on earth:

Because all power owes its being to God [...].⁷³

⁶⁹ Quamuis omnipotens Deus pro utilitatibus populorum regni nostri culmen tribuerit et moderamine plebium non paucarum regiae nostrae curae commiserit: 960, April 26. Sancho I's grant to the monastery of Sahagún: Lucas Álvarez, *El reino de León en la Alta Edad Media. VIII. La documentación real astur-leonesa (718–1072)*, R-1, doc. no. 231.

⁷⁰ Sub imperio Opificis rerum, qui omnia ex nihilo condita imperiali Suae potentiae sceptro disponit ac regit, Cuius nutu reges imperant, principes regnant et mundus ipse in proprio statu moderatur et regitur: 1093, April 3. Alphonse VI's grant to the monastery of Sahagún: Gamba, *Alfonso VI. Cancillería, curia e imperio*, doc. no. 123.

⁷¹ Cum nulla nisi a Deo potestas habeat esse uel durare: 1103, April 3. Alphonse VI's grant to the Church of Toledo: Gamba, *Alfonso VI. Cancillería, curia e imperio*, doc. no. 174.

⁷² Quoniam Hispaniae regnum post mortem aui mei Ildefonsi multis perturbationibus et calamitatibus oppresum, iamque pene dissolutum nobis Omnipotens, Cuius dono reges regnant et principes imperant, commutare dignatus est: 1136, March 21. Alphonse VII confirms the possessions of the monastery of Sahagún: Lucas Álvarez, *El reino de León en la Alta Edad Media. V. Las cancellerías reales (1109–1230)*, Alphonse VII's register, doc. no. 220.

⁷³ Cum omnis potestas a Deo habeat esse: 1149, March 26. Alphonse VII confirms privileges to the monastery of Oña: Rassow, 'Die Urkunden Kaiser Alfons' VII. von Spanien', p. 396.

The Era of the Latin Chancery: From Alphonse VII to Ferdinand III

We can now pinpoint a significant shift, regarding organization, during Alphonse VII's reign. Specifically, it relates to the establishment of a true royal chancery as an office with regular functioning, full institutional and legal personality, conceived as the hub for elaborating royal memory. A first quantitative observation is evident: the increase in the number of royal documents (forty-one preserved from the time of Alphonse V, compared to 676 from Alphonse VII).⁷⁴ While some personnel from the episcopal see of León still contribute to drafting royal diplomas,⁷⁵ over time, during this reign, the recipient's role in the preparation of the acts gradually yields to the regular functioning of the chancery. This institution is destined to become the focal point for producing and disseminating ideology and propaganda concerning the nature of royal power and its projection within society.⁷⁶

During the initial years of Alphonse VII's reign (1116–1135), when the production of royal diplomas appears to have been dominated by scribes from the Compostela Church, under the guidance of Archbishop Diego Gelmírez,⁷⁷ most preambles adhered to traditional themes, closely aligned with the general pious ideas prevalent in contemporary private documentation. However, some preambles stand out with elaboration traits specifically tailored for royalty. Some such preambles justify the duty and inherent interest of royalty in supporting, endowing, and defending churches and sacred places — an idea, it is said, *evident even to the least erudite, certain even to the less educated*: a writing style and concept that would persist throughout the remainder of Alphonse VII's reign:

It is certain, even to the less educated, that it is in the royal majesty's own interest not only to protect and defend churches and sacred places from any offence, but also to visit, support and honour them piously and religiously through the distribution of alms and benefactions, thus achieving absolution from its own excesses.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Sierra Macarrón, 'La escritura y el poder. El aumento de la producción escrita en Castilla y León (ss. XI–XIII)', pp. 255, 258.

⁷⁵ When the royal chancery issues charters in Leon, these bear exactly the same handwriting as the diplomas drafted by the Leonese episcopal see: Sierra Macarrón, 'La escritura y el poder. El aumento de la producción escrita en Castilla y León (ss. XI–XIII)', p. 255.

⁷⁶ 'The great institution concerned with more or less systematic creation and diffusion of political rhetorics': Nieto Soria, 'Les clercs du roi et les origines de l'État moderne en Castille: propagande et légitimation (XIII^e-XV^e siècles)', p. 299.

⁷⁷ According to Bernard FOL. Reilly, the Compostela Church drafts up to 85% of Alphonse VII's royal diplomas prior to 1135: Reilly, 'The Chancery of Alfonso VII of León-Castilla: The Period 1116–1135 Reconsidered', p. 256.

⁷⁸ Regie maiestati interesse etiam minus eruditis certum est, ecclesias et sacra loca non solum ab iniuria tueri et defendere, uerum etiam helemosinarum et beneficiorum largitione in Dei obsequium et suorum excessum remissione pie et religiose uisitare, fouere et honorare: 1126, February 10. Alphonse VII grants Alcalá to the Church of Toledo: Lucas Álvarez, *El reino de León en la Alta Edad Media. VIII. La documentación real astur-leonesa (718–1072)*, p. 225 (Alphonse VII's register, no. 80). Also, with slight variants, in nos 86, 88 (p. 226), 93 (p. 227), 100, 102 (p. 228), 116, 117, 118 (p. 230), 136 (p. 233), 159 (p. 235) and with more significant elaborations in nos 212, 219, 258, 260, 261, 279, 308, 311, 341, 419, 424, 430, 437, 443, 461, 501, 518, 524, 536 (pp. 242–84).

The third stage of Alphonse VII's chancery unfolds starting from 1135, the year of the crucial imperial coronation in León, and continuing until the end of his reign. During this period, 'the rise of the *magistri* among the royal notaries'⁷⁹ begins under Chancellor Hugo. The definitive maturity of the chancery, solidly organized in a way that would project into the future, is closely related to the influence and presence of Romanist jurists (also perceptible in the *Chronica Adefonsi Imperatoris*). This influence is evident, among other traits, in the use of classical imperial formulas, such as the phrase *quod placuit excellentissime maiestati domini imperatoris*.⁸⁰

Furthermore, the theme of the divine origin of royal power is consistently present in these formulas. It can be directly linked to the drafting of diplomas by the interested monastic communities. However, the underlying ideological foundation remains consistent, progressively enriched with new developments in composition over time. For instance, in the preamble of a confirmation by Alphonse VII to the monastery of Vega, the obligations of kings toward the Church are related to the notion that they receive their crowns from the 'supreme King of kings':

Those to whom the earthly kingdom's diadem is granted by the supreme King of kings should diligently watch over their entrusted duties according to the will of the Lord, to the best of their abilities.⁸¹

Much of the wording and doctrinal elaboration of the theme in the Emperor's chancery became standard practice throughout the entire Latin chancery era in León and Castile, persisting until the reign of Ferdinand III. Even after the separation of León and Castile following Alphonse VII's death, the fundamental continuity in addressing topics related to royalty remained unaltered in both ensuing chanceries that for some time would evolve separately. During the period spanning from 1157 to 1230, the Leonese and Castilian chanceries maintained close ties (including a constant exchange of documents) and shared some form of collective memory rooted in common traditions. These traditions undoubtedly stem from the well-established models and forms that had already shaped chancery practice during Alphonse VII's reign.

In a confirmation granted by Sancho III of Castile to the church of Osma, it is openly stated that God is the dispenser and moderator of all realms, allowing for a new citation from Proverbs 8. 15–16:

Since God is the giver and ruler of all kingdoms, it is fitting that earthly kings, who reign through Him, serve Him.⁸²

A characteristic ending, which appears first in diplomas of Sancho III of Castile and later in some of his successor Alphonse VIII, indicates the convenience of serving and pleasing God, since 'without Him' the king cannot maintain the earthly kingdom, nor achieve the everlasting one:

⁷⁹ Iglesia Ferreirós, 'Escuela, estudio y maestros', pp. 314–15.

⁸⁰ Gouron, 'Aux origines de l'influence des glossateurs en Espagne', pp. 345–46. Linehan, *History and the Historians of Medieval Spain*, p. 272 (note 15).

⁸¹ Quibus a summo regum Regi terreni regni diadema conceditur, debent pro commisso officii cura iuxta beneplacitum ipsius Domini, quod possunt, administranda sollicitudine uigilare: 1151, March. Alphonse VII confirms some possessions to the monastery of Vega: Lucas Álvarez, *El reino de León en la Alta Edad Media. VIII. La documentación real astur-leonesa (718–1072)*, p. 287 (doc. no. 562).

⁸² Quoniam regnorum omnium largitor ac moderator est Deus, dignum est ut reges terre, qui per Eum regnant, seruiant Ei: 1154, January 14, Soria. Sancho III of Castile confirms possessions to the Osma Church: González González, *El reino de Castilla en la época de Alfonso VIII*, vol. II, p. 25 (doc. no. 12).

Since the dignity of royal clemency must always diligently intend to incessantly please the omnipotent God, in Whose hand the hearts of kings are known to be [Prov. 21. 1], and to strive to serve Him with devout intention, for without Him neither any earthly kingdom can be preserved, nor the eternal one can be acquired.⁸³

In the preamble of a donation by Ferdinand II of León to the Compostela Church, there is no direct reference to the king. Instead, he is described as a participant and dispenser of the goods and faculties entrusted to him — products, like the monarch himself, of divine creation. The implicit idea is that the king possesses the realm by God's grace and concession, but only insofar as a creature and handiwork of God:

Since those things that are subject to use, were created by the Supreme Creator of all things for human use in the future and freely given to us, it is fitting that we offer something in return to the omnipotent God for those things and rights that He entrusted to us [...] moreover, we are even more obliged to give to Him, who created us out of nothing in His own image and likeness, and through Whom we possess all things.⁸⁴

In King Alphonse VIII's chancery, there is a great richness and diversity of preambles,⁸⁵ among which some stand out in relation to the theme of the divine origin of royal power. In a donation by this Castilian king to the monastery of Sahagún, it is stated that the care of their subjects belongs to kings by divine authority:

We know that by divine authority, kings bear the responsibility of caring for their subjects [...].⁸⁶

In a diploma from 1174, issued from the same monarch's chancery, it is indicated that the care of religious individuals has been entrusted to the power of kings by the Supreme celestial monarch:

The royal power, granted by the Supreme King of heavens, is permitted to readily protect ecclesiastical institutions and religious men.⁸⁷

Additionally, in a donation to the church of Burgos it is considered especially fitting for royal authority to serve the One who grants health to kings:

⁸³ Quoniam regiae clementiae dignitas ad hoc debet sollicite semper intendere, ut omnipotente Deo, in Cuius manu corda regum esse noscuntur, ualeat sine intermissione placere, et Ei studeat pia intentione seruire, sine Quo nec regnum potest habere terrenum, nec acquirere sempiternum: 1156. Sancho III of Castile to the monastery of Veruela: González González, *El reino de Castilla en la época de Alfonso VIII*, vol. II, doc. no. 24 (variants in docs. nos 25, 29, 30, 35, and 50).

⁸⁴ Quoniam ea quae usibus subiecta sunt, humanisque usibus pro futura a Summo rerum omnium Creatore sunt creata et nobis gratis donata, dignum est ergo ut omnipotenti Deo de rebus et facultatibus Suis, super quas nos constituit dispensatores, aliquis aliquanto offerentes reddamus [...] multo magis tenemur dare Ei qui nos ex nihilo creauit ad imaginem et similitudinem Suam, et a Quo et per Quem omnia possidemus: 1165. Ferdinand II of León grants to the Compostela Church: Lucas Álvarez, *El reino de León en la Alta Edad Media. VIII. La documentación real astur-leonesa (718–1072)*, Ferdinand II's register, doc. no. 157.

⁸⁵ Martín Prieto, 'Invenición y tradición en la cancillería real de Alfonso VIII de Castilla (1158–1214)'; O'Callaghan, 'Ideas of Kingship in the Preambles of Alfonso VIII's Charters'.

⁸⁶ Regum esse auctoritate diuina nouimus subiectorum gerere curam: 1165, October 29. Alphonse VIII grants to the monastery of Sahagún: González González, *El reino de Castilla en la época de Alfonso VIII*, vol. II, doc. no. 75.

⁸⁷ Regiae potestati a Summo Rege caelorum concessum est ecclesiastica loca atque religiosis uiris ea sponte committere: 1174, August 12. Alphonse VIII endows a monastic community with a church: González González, *El reino de Castilla en la época de Alfonso VIII*, vol. II, doc. no. 208.

There is nothing that befits the royal power more than serving Him who grants salvation/health to the kings [...].⁸⁸

During the reign of Alphonse IX of León, the preambles of certain Compostela diplomas emerge as noteworthy in this regard. These diplomas directly favour the Church of Compostela, and it is highly probable that this see played a significant role in their composition. For instance, in a concord with the Compostela canons, the king figuratively acknowledges that he did not receive the kingdom due to his own merits but rather ‘solely through the intercession’ of the Apostle:

Although not as I should, I express my gratitude to God so much as I can, because He granted me understanding, enabling me to see from which evils He has delivered me and to recognize the blessings He has graciously bestowed upon me and my kingdom, and all this not due to any merits of my own, but solely through the intercession of the glorious Apostle James [...].⁸⁹

In other such diplomas, the preambles are constructed around the appropriate citations from the book of Proverbs:

Nothing is more fitting, just or useful for royal glory than to serve Him, by Whom it reigns [Prov. 8. 15], in all things, and from Whom it hopes to reign in eternal bliss.⁹⁰

The wisdom of the Father speaks through Salomon, saying: ‘By Me kings reign, and lawgivers write justice’ [Prov. 8. 15–16], and again: ‘The heart of the king is in the hand of God, and wherever He wills, He inclines it’ [Prov. 21. 1]. Therefore, since the hearts of kings are inclined toward good by the King of kings, it is fitting that they generously grant freedom to the churches of God, which are called the house of the Lord by the Lord Himself, and that they protect them with privileges, increase them with benefactions, and honour them.⁹¹

Additionally, in a constitution concerning the Jacobean pilgrims, it is emphasized that those who have received the principality of the kingdom from God have a duty to protect these pilgrims:

Those who have assumed the leadership of the kingdom from the Lord are obliged to protect all those placed under their rule by God’s command [...].⁹²

⁸⁸ Nihil est quod magis deceat regiam potestatem quam Eum qui dat salutem regibus seruire: 1174, August 28. Alphonse VIII grants a monastery to the Church of Burgos González González, *El reino de Castilla en la época de Alfonso VIII*, vol. II, doc. no. 210.

⁸⁹ Quamuis non quantas debeo, quantas tamen possum gratias ago domino Deo, Qui mihi tribuit intellectum ut uidere ualeam a quibus me liberauerit malis et agnoscere possim quae bona mihi ac regno meo conferre dignatus fuerit, nullis meis exigentibus meritis, sed sola gloriosissimi apostoli Iacobi intercession: 1204, noviembre 11. Alphonse IX gives back some vineyards to the canons of Compostela: González González, *Alfonso IX*, doc. no. 193.

⁹⁰ Regiae sublimitati nihil decentius, iustius, nihil utilius quam Ei deseruire in omnibus per Quem regnat, per Quem sperat in aeterna se beatitudine regnaturum: 1211, abril 21. Alphonse IX grants the castle of Traba to the Church of Compostela: González González, *Alfonso IX*, doc. no. 271.

⁹¹ Sapientia Patris per Salomonis loquitur, dicens: ‘per Me reges regnant, et legum conditores scribunt iustitiam’, et iterum: ‘cor regis in manu Dei est, et ubi uoluerit inclinabit illud’. Quia ergo corda regum per Regem regum inclinantur ad bonum, primum est ut ecclesiis Dei, quae domus Domini dicuntur a Domino, libertatibus donare, priuilegiis munire, munificentis augere debeant et honore: 1216, agosto 20. Alphonse IX confirms the foundation of the church of San Lorenzo de Bogallido: González González, *Alfonso IX*, doc. no. 339.

⁹² Cum his qui principatum regni suscepti a Domino uniuersos sub collato sibi a Deo regimine constitutos aliis suae protectionis fouere teneantur: Without date. A law on pilgrims: González González, *Alfonso IX*, doc. no. 667.

The Switch from Latin to Castilian in the Chancery

The accession of Ferdinand III to the throne of Castile can be seen as a seamless continuation of the well-established practices of Alphonse VIII's chancery, still very much preserved after the brief transitional reign of Henry I. When Ferdinand III was later also proclaimed king of León in 1230, the reunification of both crowns did not significantly alter the diplomatic tone of royal documents.⁹³ The key to understanding this lies in the figure of chancellor and chronicler Juan de Soria (aka 'de Osma').⁹⁴ His lengthy tenure at the helm of the chancery during most of Ferdinand III's reign serves as a crucial link to the earlier Latin tradition's formulas (and as a restraint against introducing vernacular language into royal diplomas).⁹⁵ Notably, Juan de Soria authored an intriguing historiographical work known as the *Chronica latina regum Castellae*. This has allowed scholars to explore the ideological alignment between that chronicle and the contemporary diplomas issued from the chancery, both focused on the propagandistic projection of royal values and representations.⁹⁶ A thought-provoking question raised by Amaia Arizaleta⁹⁷ is whether the royal documents from this period served as the very repository where official regal memory found refuge during the extended historiographical silence in Castile just before Juan de Soria's chronicle emerged. Perhaps Juan de Soria drew upon the very diplomas he handled and prepared in the chancery as a quarry or foundation for his chronicle (or memoir) reconstructing the events of the reign.

The majority of Ferdinand III's documents bearing preambles are concentrated in the early years of the reign (especially between 1218 and 1222). This period holds importance for two reasons: firstly, it marked the effort to solidify the position of a newly crowned king through skilful documentary rhetoric; secondly, it witnessed numerous confirmations of earlier diplomas, particularly those issued by Alphonse VIII. Notably, these initial preambles exhibit remarkable vitality in their choice and variation of formulas, many of which have deep roots in the chancery practices of previous reigns. This variation led Julio González to consider whether the chancery kept a record of the formulas used until at least the end of 1222 to prevent complete repetition.⁹⁸ In fact, while some formulas do recur verbatim, a deliberate effort to introduce variation remains evident.

From the beginnings of King Ferdinand III's reign, there is prominently a royal grant of revenue in salt from Atienza to the monastery of Cluny. Its preamble employs

⁹³ Ostos Salcedo, 'La cancellería de Fernando III, rey de Castilla (1217–1230): una aproximación'; López Gutiérrez, 'La cancellería de Fernando III, rey de Castilla y León (1230–1253). Notas para su estudio'.

⁹⁴ Rodríguez, 'La preciosa transmisión. Memoria y Curia regia en Castilla en la primera mitad del siglo XIII', pp. 314–15.

⁹⁵ Fernández-Ordóñez, 'La lengua de los documentos del rey: del latín a las lenguas vernáculas en las cancellerías regias de la Península Ibérica', p. 330, and table in p. 331.

⁹⁶ Fernández-Ordóñez, 'La composición por etapas de la *Chronica latina regum Castellae* (1223–1237) de Juan de Soria'.

⁹⁷ Arizaleta, 'Topografías de la memoria palatina: los discursos cancellerescos sobre la realeza (Castilla, siglos XII y XIII)', pp. 54–55.

⁹⁸ González González, *Reinado y diplomas de Fernando III*, t. I, p. 520.

the traditional citation from Proverbs 8. 15–16 with an elegant turn of phrase: ‘It is fitting that (kings) appear to reign through Him by Whom kings reign’:

Since it is fitting that those who reign appear to do so through Him by Whom kings reign, by supporting piously and mercifully religious men and promoting religious places through donations and benefactions.⁹⁹

However, undoubtedly, the most characteristic wording expressing the idea of the divine origin of royal power in Ferdinand III’s preambles, which is both stable and recognizable as a formula, is: ‘because the kingdom belongs to the Lord, and He Himself is the owner of peoples (and of kings)’:

Since the kingdom belongs to the Lord, and He is the ruler of the nations, it is expedient for the peoples’, and especially for the kings’ salvation/health, to serve only Him, to obtain His favour, for He is the one who grants salvation/health to both kings and nations.¹⁰⁰

As we have seen, the figure of Chancellor Juan de Soria played a pivotal role in preserving Latin and some essential elements of traditional themes and formulas established in the chancery practice since the times of Alphonse VII. After 1230, a noticeable decline in the use of preambles in royal charts starts, coinciding with the prevalence of notification formulas (typically starting *notum* / *manifestum sit*...). After Juan de Soria’s disappearance in 1246, the boundless rise of Castilian romance in chancery work further marginalized the use of Latin and its associated formulas. Alphonse X’s reign really marks the critical shift toward a vernacular chancery (in his reign, only diplomas directed to the Pope or other external recipients will be written in Latin).¹⁰¹ Also the use of preambles in royal charters is reduced to a minimum in the period of Alphonse X’s chancery.¹⁰²

Nevertheless, a significant portion of the traditional ideological framework inherited from earlier chancery practices endures. Notably, the theme of royalty (encompassing the nature of royal power and the virtues and rights typically associated to the king) remains central not only in the Wise King’s official documentation (the word ‘king’ is, statistically speaking, the most frequent noun used in the whole of Alphonse X’s diplomas, excluding prepositions, conjunctions and articles),¹⁰³ but also throughout the extensive and rich body of written works sponsored by the King.

In the prologues or preambles of Alphonse X, the theme of the divine origin of royal power is consistently present, following a well-established tradition. Alphonse’s

⁹⁹ Quoniam dignum est, ut per Quem reges regnant in Eo regnare uideantur, religiosos uiros pie et misericorditer confouendo, religiosa loca donationibus et beneficiis extollendo: 1218, January 13. Ferdinand III’s grant of salt to Cluny: González González, *Reinado y diplomas de Fernando III*, t. II, p. 25 (doc. no. 17).

¹⁰⁰ Since the kingdom belongs to the Lord, and He is the ruler of the nations, it is expedient for the peoples’, and especially for the kings’ salvation/health, to serve only Him, to obtain His favour, for He is the one who grants salvation/health to both kings and nations: 1220, January 27. Ferdinand III’s grant to the monastery of San Andrés de Arroyo: González González, *Reinado y diplomas de Fernando III*, pp. 128–29 (doc. no. 105) (with variants, also in docs. nos 139, 173, 193, 548, and 850).

¹⁰¹ Rubio García, ‘Del latín al castellano en la cancillería de Alfonso el Sabio’; Procter, ‘The Castilian Chancery During the Reign of Alfonso X, 1252–84’; Sanz Fuentes, ‘Aportación al estudio de la cancillería de Alfonso X’; López Gutiérrez, *La cancillería de Alfonso X a través de las fuentes legales y la realidad documental*.

¹⁰² González Jiménez, M. *Diplomatario andaluz de Alfonso X*, p. clxxviii.

¹⁰³ Herrero, Sánchez, González De Fauve, Zabía, *Textos y concordancias de documentos castellanos de Alfonso X*.

‘romanism’ and the overall ideological orientation of his works tend to elevate the king’s role as a vicar of God.¹⁰⁴ Some preambles are often intertwined with considerations of a personal and familiar meaning, such as the king’s gratitude toward God for the position he holds in society, and also elaborating on the king’s inherent obligations to support the Church as a logical consequence:

Understanding that all goods come from God, especially to kings and the powerful, for the goods of kings are in God’s hands, and also, recognizing the great mercy that God has always shown to me and to my lineage from which I come, especially to me before and after I was enthroned, and trusting that He will continue to do so, therefore, I am obliged to honour His places and houses of prayer where He is worshipped day and night, and especially those that He has exalted, namely the bishoprics’ cathedral churches.¹⁰⁵

In particular, in this reign there is a very characteristic formula that could be thought to fathom some of Alphonse’s own insights on royalty: it is highlighted the fact that ‘king’ is one of God’s names, and thus Alphonse can relish the idea of sharing a common name with the Almighty:

Since our Lord Jesus Christ is king over all kings, and kings reign through Him and from Him they have their name, and He desired and commanded to protect the rights of kings, especially when the Jews tried to tempt Him by asking whether they should pay tribute and taxes, so that if He had answered that they should not, they could have accused Him of undermining the rights of kings. But understanding their malicious thoughts, He replied: ‘Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s’ [Mark 12. 17]. Therefore, since we kings bear our name after this Lord and King, and we derive our power to administer justice on earth from Him, and all honours and goods come from Him, and He chose to protect our rights, even though He is Lord over all and can do as He pleases in everything, out of the love He shows us in safeguarding our rights, it is both most reasonable and just that we love Him, acknowledge Him, and honour His honour and rights, and especially the tithe, which He specifically set aside and retained for Himself, to demonstrate that He is Lord of all and that all blessings come through Him.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ On the King as God’s vicar: Our Lord God Jesus Christ first ordered His court in heaven [...] and ordered the earthly court in the same manner and in the same way that His was ordered in heaven, and He placed the king in His place, as the head and beginning of all the people, just as He placed Himself as the head and beginning of the angels and archangels (Fuero Real, 1.2.2); [the king] does not derive his power from men, but from God, whose place he stands on, in all temporal things (Fuero Real, 4.21.5); Vicars of God are the kings, each in their realm, placed over the people to maintain justice and truth (*Partidas*, 2.1.5).

¹⁰⁵ Entendiendo que todos los bienes vienen de Dios e mayormiente a los reyes e a los poderosos, ca los bienes de los reyes en mano de Dios son, et entendiendo la grant mercet que Dios siempre fizo a mio linage donde yo vengo, e sennaladamiente a mi ante que regnase e despues que regne, e fio por El que me fara daqui adelante, por que so tenuto de ondrar los sos logares e las sus casas de la oracion o a El façen servitio de noche e de dia, e mayormiente a aquellas que El hizo ondrar, que son las iglesias cathedrales de los obispados: 1255, November 2. Alphonse X exempts the Church of Córdoba from some tax: González Jiménez, *Diplomatario*, p. 179 (doc. no. 163).

¹⁰⁶ Por quanto nuestro sennor Ihesu Christo es rey sobre todos los reyes, e los reyes por El regnan e del an el nonbre, e El quiso e mando guardar los derechos de los reyes, et sennaladamiente quandol quisieron temptar los iudios e le demandaron si darien su tributo e su pecho, porque si El respondiesse que non gelo devien dar, quel pudiessen reprehender que tollien los derechos de los reyes, e El, entendiendo los sus malos pensamientos, respondió e dixo: ‘Dad a Cesar los derechos que son de Cesar’ [Mark 12. 17]. E pues que los reyes deste Sennor e deste Rey avemos el nonbre, e del tomamos el poder de fazer iustiçia en la tierra, e todas las onrras e todos los bienes del naçen e del vienen, e El quiso guardar los nuestros derechos, sin que El es sennor sobre todo e puede fazer como El quisiere en todo, por el amor que El nos muestra en guardar los nuestros derechos, grant razon es e grant derecho que nos Le amemos e quel tomemos e quel guardemos la Su onrra e los Sus derechos, e mayormiente el diezmo que El sennaladamiente guardo e retovo para si, para mostrar que El [es] sennor de todo e del e por El vienen todos

In this long and most noticeable preamble, the quote of Mark 12. 17 serves to highlight the parallelism between Christ's alleged safeguard of Caesar's rights, and those of other kings and monarchs, as Alphonse X himself. God Himself, one of Whose names earthly kings bear, wanted to preserve the kings' rights; this very rights come from Him: this is the crux of the argumentation, and also some other of Alphonse X's preambles highlight the notion that it was God who put the realms in the king's hands:

It greatly benefits kings, who are entrusted with guarding and defending the lands and kingdoms that God has placed under their power [...].¹⁰⁷

From Sancho IV to the Trastámaras

Alphonse X's reign marked a significant shift in the practices of the Castilian chancery, primarily due to the definitive adoption of the vernacular language, which became almost exclusive in official use. Some of the ideas and conceptions about royalty underlying in Alphonse X's works and documents will continue to resonate in the preambles of later reigns. From Sancho IV to Alphonse XI, and later on during the Trastámara period, preambles would be mainly confined to the documentary type of the *privilegio rodado*. Indeed, there exists a deliberate coordination and a profound sense of underlying continuity between the diplomatic formulas — particularly the preambles — coined in the Castilian chancery during Sancho IV's reign and his immediate successors, and those that will continue to be employed (primarily in the most solemn diplomas, the royal privileges) throughout the Trastámara period. Many of the themes, fundamental concepts, and specific linguistic features will circulate freely across the reigns that span from Sancho IV to the Catholic Monarchs. This imparts a notable sense of continuity to the deployment of monarchical ideology in royal charters throughout the period considered, as will henceforth become apparent.

During Sancho IV's reign, the concept of the divine vicariate of the king held a significant prominence. As he undertook the definitive reorganization of the chancery,¹⁰⁸ consolidating preambles in Castilian that would endure for subsequent periods, traces of this idea naturally surfaced within them. Consequently, this concept continued to evolve consistently throughout later reigns, extending into the Trastámara era.

In an important diploma from 1285, where Sancho IV requests to be buried in the Cathedral of Toledo, the following words are attributed to him:

seeking to take an example from our Lord Jesus Christ, whose vicar we are in our kingdoms [...].¹⁰⁹

There is, therefore, a meaningful alignment of Sancho IV's formulas with the ideological background and expressive forms established in his father's works and chancery. Here

los bienes: 1255, November 3. Alphonse X instructs to pay the tithes to every council in the Corduban diocese: González Jiménez, *Diplomatario*, p. 181 (doc. no. 164) (also in the doc. no. 166).

¹⁰⁷ Mucho conviene a los reyes, que han de guardar et de defender las tierras et los regnos que Dios les metio en poder [...]: 1258, November 29. Alphonse X draws the limits between Cuéllar and Coca: Herrero *et alii*, *Textos y concordancias de documentos castellanos de Alfonso X*.

¹⁰⁸ Sánchez Belda, 'La cancellería castellana durante el reinado de Sancho IV (1284–1295)'.

¹⁰⁹ queriendo tomar exemplo en Nuestro sennor Jesu Christo, Cuyo vicario nos somos en los nuestros regnos [...]: Escudero De La Peña, 'Privilegio rodado e historiado del rey D. Sancho IV', p. 98.

not only the idea of the king as God's vicar is expressed, but also that of Christ as a role model and example for earthly kings.

In the chancery of Sancho IV, a preamble formula justifying the king's generosity toward the Church appears in 1285. According to this preamble, this generosity is founded on the king's gratitude for the personal and familial benefits received from God. This notion, while summarizing an earlier tradition, also represents a new beginning for expressing this idea in subsequent reigns, where the formula will continue to be employed:

Considering the many goods and great mercies that our Lord God has bestowed upon us — so numerous and immense that we could neither count nor express them — and having a strong desire to serve Him in all things to the best of our abilities and knowledge, as we are obliged to do for several reasons: firstly, because those from whom we come were born, lived, and died in the service of God; and also, because of the remarkable mercies that He has consistently shown us in all our endeavours, more out of His compassion than due to our merits.¹¹⁰

In a privilege granted by Sancho IV to the monastery of Sahagún, the idea that God directly bestows graces upon kings is articulated. And earthly kings, acting on God's behalf, are in turn entrusted with distributing these graces among their subjects and natural inhabitants of their realms. This intriguing stylistic feature will become part of the chancery's heritage, occasionally employed in subsequent reigns, such as that of Ferdinand IV:

Because of our strong desire to improve our territories in our time with respect to the way we first found them, and because those from our domain cannot receive any more freedom and mercies aside from what they receive from us, it is fitting that we grant it to them, because God, our Lord, grants favours to kings and princes, and they, in turn, must share them with their own subjects as is needed.¹¹¹

It is tempting and interesting to consider the possibility of relating the appearance of these ideas in preambles to the personality and circumstances of the successive monarchs during these later periods (though with necessary limitations and caution). For instance,

¹¹⁰ Catando los muchos bienes et las muchas mercedes que Nuestro Sennor Dios nos fizo, que son tantas et tan grandes que las non podriamos contar nin dezir, et aviendo muy grand voluntad de Lo servir en todas las cosas que pudiesemos et sopiesemos, asi como somos tenuto de lo fazer por muchas razones: lo uno, por que aquellos onde nos venimos nacieron et visquieron et murieron en servicio de Dios; et lo al, por las muy sennaladas merçedes que nos El siempre mostro et fizo en todos los nuestros fechos, mas por Su piedat que por nuestros merecimientos: 1285, January 18. Sancho IV's grant to his kingdoms' churches: Gaibrois, *Historia del reinado de Sancho IV de Castilla*, vol. III, p. xxx (doc. no. 47). A variant, referring to the Virgin Mary, that starts: Considering the many blessings and great favours that Holy Mary has always done and continues to do for us, and having a strong desire to serve her in all things that we can and know and at the end adds: not for any other service that we may render, in some ordinances on ecclesiastic matters, 1288, July 29: Gaibrois, *Historia del reinado de Sancho IV de Castilla*, vol. III, pp. cxxv–cxxvi (doc. no. 208).

¹¹¹ Por grand sabor que avemos de meiorar en el nuestro tiempo los nuestros lugares segunt la manera en que los fallamos primero, et porque los de nuestro sennorio non pueden aver franqueza nin graçia fueras tanta quanta les viene de nos, conviene que ge la demos nos, ca las gracias da las el Nuestro Sennor Dios a los reyes et a los principes, et ellos an las de compartir por los suyos segunt que es menester: 1289, July 30. Sancho IV's grant to the monastery of Sahagún: Gaibrois, *Historia del reinado de Sancho IV de Castilla*, vol. III, doc. no. 259. The same preamble, in Ferdinand IV's chancery: 1312, March 17. Ferdinand IV gives back the castle of Fregenal to the council of Seville: Benavides, *Memorias de D. Fernando IV de Castilla*. Madrid, 1860, doc. no. 570.

in a privilege issued by King Peter I, the reference to divinity as the source of royal power is linked to the natural tendency of parents to care for and provide for their children:

thus, parents, regardless of their social status or condition, love and should love, raise, and support their children according to their respective means and abilities. But among all people, kings should do this even more, because God endowed them with greater power to raise, honor and care for their offspring.¹¹²

Additionally, it is worth noting the effort at self-justification and legitimacy that underlies the explicit demonstrations of Henry II.¹¹³ His propaganda sought to present him as a monarch specially chosen by God, leading to a full identification — where Henry's enemies were considered enemies of God, and the people he governed were similarly connected to divine providence:

In the name of God [...], who out of His mercy desired to exalt us in the destruction of His enemies and chose us as judge of His people [...].¹¹⁴

Also characteristic is the pronounced emphasis observed during the Trastámara period regarding justice.¹¹⁵ During this time, justice is portrayed as a mission specifically entrusted to the kings by God, in accordance with a tradition that traces back consistently to the Old Testament. For instance, in the preambles of the ordinances of justice issued during the Cortes by Henry II in 1371 and by John I in 1379, this theme is unmistakably evident:

Because, according to both natural law and the Holy Scripture, justice is the noblest and highest virtue in the world [...], and because the protection, maintenance, and execution of justice were specifically entrusted by God to kings in this world [...].¹¹⁶

In a specific preamble formulation, which will be transmitted with minor variations from the charters of John I to those of Henry III of Castile, and passing through those of John II, it is once again emphasized that kings are entrusted with their realms by God and occupy in the earthly order, by analogy and representation, a position akin to that of Divinity in the heavens:

¹¹² e por ende los padres e las madres de qualquier ley o condicion que sean, aman e deven amar e criar e mantener sus hijos, segunt el poderio que cada uno ha. Pues entre todas las gentes lo deven mas fazer los reyes, porque les dio Dios mayor poder para criar e onrar e mantener sus hijos; 1361, January. Peter I's grant of Gibralfé to his son Ferdinand: Díaz Martín, *Colección documental de Pedro I de Castilla 1350–1369*, doc. no. 1134.

¹¹³ Rábade Obradó, 'Simbología y propaganda política en los formularios cancillerescos de Enrique II de Castilla'.

¹¹⁴ En el nombre de Dios [...], el Qual por la Su piedad nos quiso ensalçar en destroymiento de los Sus enemigos e nos escogio por juez del Su pueblo [...]: 1374, July 14. Henry II's confirmation of privileges to the villages of Vitoria: González Mínguez, *Fuentes documentales del País Vasco. Documentos de Pedro I y Enrique II en el Archivo Municipal de Vitoria*, doc. no. 24.

¹¹⁵ Martín Prieto, 'Los preámbulos como instrumento de comunicación y propaganda de la realeza Trastámara en Castilla'.

¹¹⁶ Porque, segunt se falla así por el derecho natural como por la santa Escripura, la justiciã es la mas noble e alta virtud del mundo [...], e porque especialmente la guarda e el mantenimiento e la escuçion della fue encomendada por Dios a los reyes en este mundo [...]: 1371, September 4. Ordinance on Justice in the Cortes of Toro; and 1379, August 8. Ordinance on Justice in the Cortes of Burgos: *Cortes de los antiguos reinos de León y de Castilla*, vol. II, pp. 188–89 y 283.

(And) therefore, all kings should remember that (eternal) kingdom where they must go and give (an account and) reason for the realms entrusted to them in this world by God, for Whom they reign and Whose place they hold [...].¹¹⁷

By virtue of this common notion of the divine vicariate of kings, the preamble of a privilege granted by John I, setting the Christian era in the Castilian chancery, will assert formally that the King of Castile recognizes no superior over himself other than Christ and His Church:

for we recognize no authority on earth, except in the spiritual realm the holy mother Church and the lordship of Jesus Christ.¹¹⁸

Reiterating the biblical citation from Proverbs 8. 15–16, which states that the kings of this world are entrusted by God with the responsibility to reign and administer justice, another preamble by John I will ground in this obligation the royal will to serve God through certain acts of governance:

for the service of God, by Whom kings rule and administer justice [...], having a great desire to establish and order in the government that He entrusted to us some things that are His service [...].¹¹⁹

While some of these considerations could be related to John I's personal piety, they harmonize seamlessly with the established ideological tradition of the earlier chancery, and thus they will persistently resurface in the preambles of subsequent reigns. The concepts of divine vicariate and the divinely ordained election of kings, along with all their far-reaching implications, will recur time and again in the preambles accompanying significant privileges under the Trastámara dynasty. These themes, enriched with interesting developments, endure until the conventional conclusion of the Middle Ages.

In some privileges granted by John II, this notion of the divine foundation of royal power will be consistently reiterated: kings, chosen for their role by the Divine Providence, occupy God's place over earthly kingdoms and realms:

Because every king or prince who reigns or holds dominion does so by God's choice [...].¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ (E) por ende, todos los reyes se deven menbrar de aquel regno (perdurable) adonde an de ir a dar (cuenta e) razon de los regnos que Dios en este mundo les encomendo, por Quien regnan e Cuyo lugar tienen [...]: 1379, August. John I's grant to Pedro Fernández de Velasco: Suárez Fernández, L., *Historia del reinado de Juan I de Castilla. II. Registro documental (1371–1383)*. Madrid, 1982, doc. no. 72; 1401, March 15. Henry III confirms Juan de Ponte's mavorazgo: Cañas Gálvez, *Colección diplomática de Santo Domingo el Real de Toledo. Documentos reales I. 1249–1473*, doc. no. 57; 1448, August 31. John II confirms some revenue to the monastery of Santo Domingo el Real of Toledo: Cañas Gálvez, *Colección diplomática de Santo Domingo el Real de Toledo*. Documentos reales I. 1249–1473, doc. no. 210.

¹¹⁸ por quanto non conosco superior alguno en la tierra salvo en lo espiritual la santa madre Iglesia e el senorio de Ihesu Christo: 1383, September. Cortes decree setting the Christian era in the chancery: Suárez Fernández, *Historia del reinado de Juan I de Castilla*. II. Registro documental (1371–1383), doc. no. 368.

¹¹⁹ a serviço de Dios, por el Qual los reyes regnan e ordenan la justia [...], aviendo grand voluntad de fazer e ordenar en el regimiento que El nos encomendo algunas cosas que son Su serviço [...]: 1387, December 16. Ordinances in Cortes of Briviesca: Díez Martínez, Bejarano Rubio, Molina Molina, *Colección de documentos para la historia del reino de Murcia. XI. Documentos de Juan I*, doc. no. 228.

¹²⁰ Por quanto todo rey o principe que regna o tiene senorio a esta manera por Dios, que lo quiso escoger [...]: 1412, April 15. John II's Ordinances on Jews and Moors: Vilaplana Gisbert, *Colección de documentos para la historia del reino de Murcia. XV. Documentos de la minoría de Juan II. La regencia de Don Fernando de Antequera*, doc. no. 183.

Because it is very fitting and beneficial for kings and princes, who occupy God's place on earth, to exercise mercy [...].¹²¹

In some of Henry IV's charters, interesting considerations derived from the king's divinely-ordained function, are to be found. The king is expected to persevere in the divine service, assist the Church, remember the judgement to fulfil the royal responsibilities without error, and preserve the administration and governance of his kingdoms. This set of moral duties the king is required to fulfil will be explicitly stated in some important preambles to various charters of this reign:

The Catholic Kings and great princes, who, as heads and lords and guides of their peoples, should love, fear, honour, serve, and follow with all their heart, soul, and strength the most high and noble and sovereign, our Lord God, whose place they hold on earth [...].¹²²

the faith in Our Lord Jesus Christ [...], through which kings reign and the powerful administer justice [Prov. 8. 15–16], [...] for this they should risk their lives, shed their blood, and strive to serve the holy Catholic Church; for kings and princes have this chiefly entrusted and they will be held accountable on the day of judgment [...].¹²³

Because kings and princes who govern realms and lands must protect and preserve, for themselves and for the royal crown of their kingdoms, the lands and lordships entrusted to them by God [...].¹²⁴

In the legal ordinances promulgated by the Catholic Monarchs during the Cortes of 1476 and 1480, which were of great importance for shaping and consolidating their government at the outset of their reign, some of these traditional principles are reiterated and expanded on the basis of some fundamentally stable patterns, rooted in the longstanding ideological framework that for so long had supported the work of the chancery, underscoring the monarchs' commitment to their divine-ordained role. Notably, the ordinances reflect on the heightened responsibilities borne by princes and the powerful, as they are recipient of God's grace and entrusted with significant authority (as expressed in the Gospel passage from Luke 12. 48). Above all, the idea stands out that the primary function of kings, for which they have been placed at the helm of their realms by God, is the administration of justice — a faculty endowed with extraordinary and significant prominence: once again,

¹²¹ Porque cosa muy propia e conuiniente es a los reyes e príncipes, que tienen lugar de Dios en la tierra, usar de clemencia [...]: 1450, May 24. John II's pardon to the council of Murcia: Abellán Pérez, *Colección de documentos para la historia del reino de Murcia. XVI. Documentos de Juan II*, doc. no. 280.

¹²² los reyes e grandes príncipes católicos, los quales, así como cabeça e señores e guiadores de sus pueblos, deven amar e temer e honrar e servir e seguir con todo su corazón e con toda su anima e con todas las otras sus fuerças al muy alto e noble e soberano, nuestro señor Dios, Cuyo lugar tienen en la tierra [...]: 1456, July 15. Henry IV confirms some revenue to Santo Domingo el Real de Toledo: Cañas Gálvez, *Colección diplomática de Santo Domingo el Real de Toledo. Documentos reales I. 1249–1473*, doc. no. 245 (also, in doc. no. 249).

¹²³ la fe de Nuestro Señor Jesu Christo [...], por la qual los reyes reynan e los poderosos escriven justicia, [...] por esta debe poner su vida e su sangre e su anima e pugnár por ella e por servir a la santa Iglesia católica, de la qual el día del juyzio sera demandada cuenta a los reyes e a los príncipes, así como aquellos a quien principalmente la tyene encomendada [...]: 1457, May 21. Henry IV's grant to Estepona: Abellán Pérez, *Fuentes Históricas Jerezanas. Documentos de Enrique IV de Castilla (1454–1474)*, doc. no. 54.

¹²⁴ Por quanto los reyes e príncipes que tienen regnos e tierras en administración e regimiento deven guardar e conservar para sy e para la corona real de sus regnos las tierras e señoríos que por Dios le son encomendados [...]: 1458, April 4. Henry IV's promise never to part Lorca from the royal crown: Molina Grande, *Colección de documentos para la Historia del reino de Murcia. XVIII. Documentos de Enrique IV*, doc. no. III in the appendix, p. 583.

the king, first and foremost, is depicted as a judge. In the gratitude expressed by the kings to God for achieving peace with neighbouring kingdoms and, consequently, consolidating their power, one can perhaps perceive an echo of the sense of wonder we saw in the preambles of Sancho IV upon receiving kingship from God:

And for this reason, He Himself said that to whom much is given, much will be required [Luke 12. 48]. And just as He made kings His vicars on earth and granted them great power in temporal matters, it is certain that those to whom greater power was given owe greater service and are more obligated to Him. And He wants this obligation to be fulfilled in the administration of justice, for it is for this purpose that they were granted power, and it is through its execution that they reign [1 Kings 10. 9]. Recognizing that God has primarily entrusted to us this administration and execution of justice in these realms [...].¹²⁵

recognizing the mercy and immense benefit that our Lord God has bestowed upon us [...] by securing peace with our neighbouring kings, who with all their might attempted to occupy what God, through wondrous ways and doing us justice, granted us, [...] and among all, especially to those of us who hold His representation on earth, He gave a singular command directed to us through the **wise's mouth**: 'Love justice, you who judge the land' [Wis. 1. 1].¹²⁶

Although familiar, it remains impressive to witness the remarkable coherence and fidelity to a fundamental notion that underpins the ideal of Christian royalty across all the preambles we have encountered. Despite stylistic variations influenced by language and the specific characteristics of each era and drafter, aligning these testimonies in a chain or succession enables us to appreciate the inherent strength and stability of this essential ideological element. Furthermore, it underscores the productivity and scholarly interest in using preambles as a source for studying the evolution and continuity of royalty's ideology.

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¹²⁵ E por esto dezia El mismo que aquel a quien mas da, mas le sera demandado [Luke 12. 48]. E como El hizo sus vicarios a los reyes en la tierra, e les dio gran poder en lo temporal, cierto es que mayor servicio avera de aquestos, e mas Le son obligados aquellos a quien mayor poder dio. E esta tal obligacion quiere que le sea pagada en la administracion de la justicia, pues para esta les presto el poder, e para la execucion della les hizo reyes, e por ella reynan [1 Kgs. 10. 9]. [...] *Conosciendo que principalmente esta administracion e execucion de la justicia nos es encomendada por Dios en estos reynos* [...]: 1476, April 7. Ordinance in Cortes of Madrigal: *Cortes de los antiguos reinos de León y de Castilla*, t. IV, pp. 1–2.

¹²⁶ reconociendo la merced e grandisimo beneficio que Dios nuestro sennor nos ha fecho en [...] ganado la paz de los reyes nuestros comarcanos, que con todas sus fuerças tentaron de ocupar lo que Dios por maravillosas vias, esecutando su justicia, nos dio, [...] e como entre todos, principalmente a los que tenemos sus vezes en la tierra, dio mandamiento singular a nos dirigido por boca del sabio, diziendo: amad la justicia los que juzgays la tierra [Wis. 1. 1]: 1480. Ordinance in Cortes of Toledo: *Cortes de los antiguos reinos de León y de Castilla*, t. IV, pp. 109–10.

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