

researchers “on the theme of shared historical memory” (p. 14). The articles presented in the volume, adopting different approaches, unpublished sources, and new interpretative forms, have reconstructed the historical context “in which to situate the experience of the internment camps of the communist regime in Albania, a political, but also economic, and social reconstruction, which also goes so far as to represent the historical phase of Albania’s exit from dictatorship and its gradual return to democracy and to the natural geopolitical context of belonging constituted by Western Europe” (p. 14).

The direction adopted by the authors is the example of the “extraordinary vitality of the research activities in which the path of reconstruction of a common historical memory between the two sides of the Adriatic, between Albania and Italy, is currently substantiated, with reference to the theme of totalitarianisms of the twentieth century and the archival sources with which to study them” (p. 20). This vitality, as Sabatini states, will necessarily have to translate “into an ever-growing commitment to the preservation and promotion of the values of freedom and respect for the rights of the person, against all ancient and new forms of oppression, persecution, segregation” (p. 20).

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**Luis Ribot**, *Carlos II. El final de la España de los Austrias (1665-1700)*, Madrid, Marcial Pons Historia, 2025, pp. 579.

This interesting and innovative volume by Luis Ribot, an internationally renowned Spanish historian who has been studying the politics and history of taxation in both Spain and the Kingdom of Naples for decades, is part of a historiographical trend that, on the one hand, seeks to reinterpret the figure of Charles II of Habsburg, attempting to free him from the long *leyenda negra* that characterised this monarch. On the other hand, it seeks to underscore the importance of the last of the Habsburgs in leading the monarchy towards the 18th century, attempting to free it from the *Tratados de Reparto* imposed by foreign powers, who had already attempted to divide the territories of the Spanish Crown during the reign of Charles II.

In the introduction, Ribot analyses the “historiographical contempt” that for a long time, until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, characterised the figure of Charles II, often seen as a weak king, with health problems, mental weakness, and an inability to make important decisions. In reality, this interpretation often corresponded to an excessive emphasis

on what has been called the Spanish decadence during the reign of the last Habsburg, a contrasting period, in which there was a constant search for balance both in domestic politics and within the international framework. While the liberal historian Antonio Cánovas del Castillo, despite pointing out the sovereign's shortcomings, also highlighted his merits and a series of values such as his intelligence and protection of his vassals, other eminent historians, such as Antonio Domínguez Ortiz, after having similarly criticised the sovereign, later underlined his merits.

Ribot, from the very first pages of his volume, embraces this more positive reading of the sovereign, seeking to break away from the historiographical criticisms often rooted in a long and now largely dated historiographical legacy dating back to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. As Ribot emphasises in the first chapter, the alleged problems of the sovereign's lack of decisiveness are likely attributable to his early childhood, and to the lack of an *ayo*, or educator, to help him develop decision-making skills and court etiquette, in an environment dominated by the regent, Mariana of Austria, and in which the sovereign was surrounded mostly by female figures. Mariana of Austria, by decision of Philip IV, was supported in her role as regent by a *Junta de Gobierno*, whose objective was to facilitate the governance of the monarchy and preserve it until the king came of age. This *Junta*, which operated independently of the councils, was not in itself a novelty of the regency, as the Spanish monarchy had authorised similar assemblies at other times, as in the case of the *Junta de Noche* in the final years of Philip II's reign. Prominent figures were appointed as members of the Council, such as the presidents of the Councils of Castile and Aragon; the Archbishop of Toledo and the General Inquisitor; and two of the principal nobles: the Count of Peñaranda and the Marquis of Aytona, *grande de España*. The *Junta's* work intertwined with that of Mariana of Austria's two favourites, Everardo Nithard and Fernando de Valenzuela, and in this regard, Luis Ribot provides a remarkably interesting interpretation of the political developments of the Spanish monarchy in those years. It is true that there were favourites, the so-called *privados*, but a *valido* was absent. Indeed, what defines the *valido* is its degree of power, that is, its decision-making capacity both in politics and in what is called patronage. Nithard did not possess these qualities, which were not particularly evident either in Valenzuela, which actually emerged only in the final years of what can be defined as his *valido*. As Ribot emphasizes in the second chapter, starting with the fall of Valenzuela, from 1677 to 1700 under the reign of Charles II the Monarchy underwent a period of major reformism with the *Consejo de Estado* consolidating its power and with Don Juan José de Austria playing a

leading role; the son of King Philip IV and María Calderón, and a strong opponent of the regent Mariana of Austria, Don Juan José also sought to reform the monarchy from an economic point of view, wanting to relieve it of the burden of the *juros* and therefore of the consolidated public debt. And, indeed, in 1680, a few months after his death, the reform of the *vellón* coinage was also implemented, with the aim to restore the currency stability and ensure its circulation within Castile, in order to create the conditions for an economic recovery and to restore production and consumption. At this time, a *Junta de Comercio* was also established, under the aegis of the prime minister Duke of Medinaceli, Tomás de la Cerda. And it is precisely with Medinaceli, and his successor, the Count of Oropesa, that Luis Ribot returns to the question of the *valimiento* and the "*ministerio personal*", comparing the two nobles to the Lerma-Olivares duo, showing how the latter two had much more power and also much more robust political support than the Medinaceli-Oropesa duo. The years starting from 1674 were marked by several wars, beginning with the War of Messina (1674-1678). Both the Marquis de los Vélez, Oropesa's cousin, and Francisco de Lira, ambassador to The Hague during the Dutch War, played a prominent role in the intervention of the Dutch fleet in support of the Spanish, and against the French support to the rebels in Messina. In 1685, De los Vélez also became governor of the *Consejo de Indias*, replacing the now elderly and ailing Medinaceli, and in 1687 he became its president, simultaneously holding the position of *Superintendente General de Hacienda*. Thanks to these factors de los Vélez effectively controlled the finances of the entire Monarchy. As Ribot underlines, we must also add the experience of de los Velez in 1675-1683, therefore partly during the War of Messina, as Viceroy of Naples, of which he had perfect knowledge from an economic and fiscal point of view.

In the third chapter, Ribot emphasizes the centrality of Mariana de Neoburgo, second wife of Carlos II, who in the 1690s played a significant role in influencing his decisions while, as the author points out, in the king's will (perhaps his greatest diplomatic success and in defending the interests of the Monarchy) a leading role was played by Cardenal de Portocarrero. As the author highlights, during that decade the international situation was extremely complex with repercussions also on the internal situation in Spain, especially starting from 1691, when, following the Monarchy's war defeats, Oropesa resigned from his role as Prime Minister, while the Marquis de los Vélez continued to hold his position as *Superintendente de Hacienda* until September 20, 1693, that is a month and a half before his death.

The Duke of Montalto played a leading role at that time, particularly in economic matters. He had to deal with the *Almirante*, who was pro-

tected by Queen Mariana de Neoburgo, during a period of dispersal of power, in which the absence of a *valido* was evident and in which the war situation placed the Spanish monarchy in a tough position, as demonstrated by both the fall of Barcelona to French troops on August 9, 1697, and the temporary capture of Cartagena de Indias, also by the French in 1697. In any case, the signing of the Peace of Ryswick proved decisive, ending the Nine Years' War and leading to the end of France's occupation of Catalonia. In 1698, the second *Tratado de Reparto* was signed which followed the first signed in 1668. On October 11, 1698, in The Hague, the treaty, signed between Louis XIV, England, and the United Provinces, granted the Iberian Peninsula (with the exception of Guipúzcoa), the Indies, and the Netherlands to the Prince of Bavaria; Naples, Sicily, and the garrisons of Tuscany to the Dauphin of France; and the Duchy of Milan to Archduke Charles. King Charles II's reaction was immediate, and on November 11, 1698, he drew up a second will in which he named a single universal heir to all his dominions, Prince José Fernando de Baviera. Or, in second succession, the designated heir was Emperor Leopold, and the line of succession of Catalina, daughter of Philip II and Duchess of Savoy. From October 29, 1700, three days before the death of Charles II, the regency of the Spanish Monarchy passed into the hands of *Cardenal Portocarrero*, who had been decisive in drafting the king's will and in defending the unity of the inheritance of the monarchy's territories, a goal strongly desired by the sovereign. His will, with the cardinal's decisive contribution, represents the highest point of his reign both from a diplomatic point of view and from the point of view of the interests of the Monarchy. In the fourth chapter, Luis Ribot focuses more on the political and economic reforms implemented during the reign of Charles II, which effectively laid the foundations for subsequent Bourbon governments, at a time when the Crown of Castile was immersed in a profound economic and financial crisis that was reflected in the Castilian *Hacienda*. For these reasons, too, during those years, a growing tension was evident between the *Consejo de Hacienda*, which aimed to increase its power and the government's executive capacity, and the *Consejo de Castilla*, which instead envisioned a less centralised and more dispersed (or polycentric) power between the cities and the authorities delegated by the monarch. The greatest innovation in the administration of the *Hacienda* was the establishment of the *Superintendencias*, created with the aim of more effectively managing certain branches of the administration. However, the reign of Charles II also saw the rise of the *Consejo de Estado*, the principal council of the polycentric and polysynodial monarchy, and the increased executive power of the Crown, an aspect, as underlined by the author, that is particularly interesting, because it

did not imply a particular institutional development of the Monarchy, but rather the intention to create a patronage network by rewarding the loyalty of the nobility and aristocracy with certain positions in the administration of the Crown, especially within the *Hacienda Real*. In any case, the new elements should not be underestimated, such as the absence, starting with the regent's decision of June 25, 1667, of the convocation of the *Cortes de Castilla*, replaced with the decision to require each of the cities with voting rights to renew their *millones* every six years. In 1669, this system was extended to the *alcabalas* as well, and, in general, the absence of the convocation of the *Cortes* also meant a freeze on taxes, which could not be increased, but only confirmed, a factor that underscores the difficult fiscal situation. In this complex economic framework, a key factor, as already mentioned, was the monetary reform of 1680, which aimed to eliminate abuses in the manipulation of the *vellón* coin. Until then, as Ribot points out, monetary inflation had been one of the main causes of the monarchy's crisis during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, a fact that contemporaries were also aware of, given that Quevedo himself declared the *vellón* coin to be the "*peste acuñada*" and considering that the premium of the *plata* over the *vellón* reached 275% in February 1680. The reform, which envisaged a significant devaluation of the *moneda de molino* (an alloy of copper and silver), was complemented by the 1686 reform, which reduced the amount of precious metal in silver coins. These were called *plata nueva* coins, to distinguish them from the heavier and more valuable *plata vieja* coins. These reforms were accompanied by the 1688 reform, which established a fixed budget of four million *escudos* per year (called *cuatro millones de la causa pública*), and which aimed to relieve the treasury of interest payments on *juros*, thus reducing the consolidated debt burdening the Monarchy. Alongside these tax relief measures, innovations were also introduced in the commercial field, considering that on January 29, 1679, at the behest of Don Juan José de Austria, a *Junta de Comercio* was created to deal with manufacturing production and trade with the American colonies, in a framework that began to be markedly mercantilist. In fact, as Ribot points out, in 1729 in the midst of the Bourbon period, King Philip V established the *Junta de Moneda*, which in December 1730 was not coincidentally aggregated to the *Junta de Comercio*, which from that moment came under the control of the *Consejo de Hacienda*. In this reformist framework, it is worth highlighting the reform of 1683, only partially implemented, which envisaged that the Crown itself, and no longer the *arrendatarios*, would administer the *rentas ordinarias* of the *Hacienda de Castilla* (*alcabalas, cientos, servicios ordinario y extraordinario, servicio de millones*). To make this possible, it was necessary to set up the *Junta de Encabezamiento*, headed by

Medinaceli, and to appoint twenty-one *Superintendentes*, one for each of the provinces into which the *Corona de Castilla* was divided. Furthermore, a sizeable portion of the chapter focuses on the Messina revolt, a topic to which Ribot has dedicated important monographs and publications. In this volume, it is noteworthy how the author highlights the presence in Messina of a powerful mercantile oligarchy, which opposed the powers of the traditional Palermo nobility, during a difficult period for the Spanish monarchy, forced to confront a complicated international geopolitical situation. In any case, the division into two factions, one loyal to the Monarchy and the other claiming the city's traditional privileges, plunged Messina into a crisis and then war. France intervened, precisely in support of the faction hostile to Madrid. However and despite the crisis, the Spanish Monarchy demonstrated its ability to reclaim the city, which took several years to recover from the war, and to ensure the loyalty of Sicily to Madrid.

In the final chapter, Ribot takes up some of the lines developed throughout the volume, underlining once again that we cannot identify the reign of Charles II with a Spanish decline, or at least not completely, since the Monarchy demonstrated that, despite everything, it could rely on the economic resources and also on the loyalty and power of certain networks capable of guaranteeing monarchical equilibrium. It is no coincidence that, as in the case of Lille, following the conquest of the city by the French, many citizens continued to be loyal to Madrid, something that also occurred in the Netherlands. If the Crown demonstrated such influence along its borders, including territories already conquered by hostile powers, we should not be surprised by the loyalty of the "Italian sphere", in which the various Kingdoms and State entities that belonged to the Monarchy, or that gravitated around it such as Genoa, demonstrated an extraordinary coordination skill during conflicts and emergencies, without the need, and the time it required, of transmitting information to Madrid, and then waiting for a response. In contrast, the Italian peninsula demonstrated a sort of "autonomy" in its governance, obviously because of the strict loyalty that the Kingdom of Naples, Sicily, Milan, and Genoa continued to feel towards the Spanish Crown. A reflection of this situation, and of the ability to preserve territories, was emphasised in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by the treatise writer Baltasar Gracián, who stated, with respect to the Spanish Monarchy, that "*es mucho más el conservar que el conquistar*". And in this quest for balance, both in foreign policy and in taxation, Ribot emphasises the importance of the arrival to power of a recent nobility, a process that was confirmed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when personalities such as Patiño, Campillo, Ensenada, Campomanes, Floridablanca, and Jovellanos reached the pinnacle of public administration.

In conclusion, Luis Ribot's volume represents an important and interesting development in the historiographical landscape regarding the forms of power and taxation of the Spanish monarchy during the early modern period, especially because it addresses a period, that of Charles II of Habsburg, whose historiography has often been characterised by preconceived views of the past, without a thorough analysis of primary and secondary sources, as the author does. In this sense, Ribot provides the right keys to understanding and interpreting Charles II's reign not only as a period of partial decline, but also as a moment in which the political and economic foundations for future reforms and Bourbon projects of the 18<sup>th</sup> century were laid.

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**Luca Tomassini, *Oltre. Il ruolo dell'uomo nella società dell'intelligenza artificiale*, Franco Angeli, 2024, pp. 192.**

In his new book *Oltre. Il ruolo dell'uomo nella società dell'intelligenza artificiale* (2024), Tomassini addresses the profound transformation humanity is undergoing in the age of Artificial Intelligence (AI). As a technologist and thinker, the author offers a cross-disciplinary reflection on the cultural, philosophical, and ethical implications of AI in contemporary society. His work, part of Franco Angeli's *La società* series, is not a technical treatise, but a thoughtful exploration of the evolving relationship between humans and intelligent technologies.

Tomassini offers a comprehensive journey through the complex and rapidly evolving world of AI. Structured into thematic chapters, it invites the reader to explore how AI is reshaping our lives, our institutions, and even our understanding of what it means to be human.

The book begins with a Preface and Introduction, setting the stage for the discussion to come, accompanied by a useful Glossary of Key Terms to help readers navigate the specialised language of this field.

The first chapter, *Il nuovo giorno*, marks the transition from historical developments to the transformative power of AI today. In the second, *Dalla storia al presente*, the author traces the origins and evolution of intelligent systems, while the third, *La rivoluzione silenziosa dell'AI*, delves into the ways Artificial Intelligence is already influencing key sectors – from healthcare and mobility to media, finance, education, and beyond. In *Oltre Turing* (chapter 4), Tomassini examines the future of intelligence. This section explores cutting-edge topics like quantum computing, the