

# Between Honour and Excellence

## Nobiliary Genealogy and Common Opinion in Early Modern Spain

*Abstract:* This article inquires after the causes of the unprecedented growth and scope of genealogical expertise in the many realms that comprised the Spanish Monarchy in the seventeenth century. Lengthy proofs of nobility were a prerequisite for admission to orders of chivalry, courtly institutions, colleges, and universities. The nature and means of transmission of genealogical knowledge are analysed in order to grasp its socio-political significance. Indeed, besides their critical importance for the nobility, genealogies were relevant for society at large and were tied to the recurring debates on the essence of nobility that were taking place in Europe from the thirteenth century.

*Keywords:* nobility, genealogy, early modern Spain

## Introduction

Nobility, genealogy, and public opinion contribute to a better grasp of the nature and contours of power in early modern times. Authors, performers, and all those involved in writing genealogical accounts understood genealogy and genealogical narratives as a specific sub-genre of historical writing on which to base privileges, liberties, and public and ceremonial honours. In the case of the Spanish Monarchy, this translated into both a sense of individual duty and the existence of a bureaucratic apparatus and *modus operandi* in which a certain manner of perceiving and conceiving power interacted with ongoing intellectual debates on the respective worth of ancient precedents (the *antiquus*) and present concerns (the *modernus*). A culture riveted by lineage and bloodlines justified and legitimized the existence of a type of literature that built on a sense of virtue, paradoxically not unlike that championed by Sallust's Marius, the quintessential *novus homus*, when he famously claimed that his nobility sprang from his virtuous deeds.<sup>1</sup> The onus placed on genealogy and genealogical knowledge as a key element of honour reflected such an ethical, virtue-driven mind-set:

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1 See Sallust, *Bellum Jugurthinum* 85, 29–30: “These are my portraits, this is my nobility, not left like theirs as an inheritance but which I personally have obtained thorough countless toils and dangers.”

“I am convinced nobody questions Genealogy is pleasing to men of letters, useful to those who devote themselves to History and necessary to those who wish to advance themselves in Political Studies. Genealogy, which is of itself intriguing, should afford pleasure to any human intellect.”<sup>2</sup>

As a socially responsive discipline, genealogy mirrored social needs. Genealogical texts submitted to any office of the Crown’s administrative apparatus partook of a notion of truth that was both discursive and factual and which required public knowledge and social prestige to go hand in hand. In his address to the marquess of Astorga, the presbyter Rodrigo Álvarez de Osorio extolled the ancestral feats narrated in the genealogical account that followed:

“[...] as if I had been an eye witness to it, for almost one hundred and forty years have elapsed since his time and mine – a time in which six heirs, who will be duly mentioned in order of succession later on, have succeeded at the head of Your Lordship’s house and some feats fully worthy of remembrance have taken place. Since the lords of your house are more drawn to exploits for others to write about than to writing about those of others, some deeds have been silenced either on account of the chroniclers’ oversight or out of malice given that Your Lordship’s house has always had mighty rivals. Yet, in the same way there is no soot that can hide gold completely, seldom does the envy of the wicked manage to bury virtuous acts. Their clear Fame remains imprinted in the minds of mortals. It rolls forward, one century after the other, so that the memory of the good not be vilified nor sunk in deep letters thus ensuring that the successors live by the example of their predecessors.”<sup>3</sup>

A first conclusion regarding the genealogical genre may be advanced. It was a type of manuscript or printed output that enshrined an understanding of nobility based on personal virtue, territorial holdings, family values, and lineage. As a sort of pedagogy of the past or moral *vademecum* for present times, as well as a weapon for political struggle, genealogical trees or charts afforded to the blood aristocracy an essential locus for self-representation in which each new scion meant new opportunities for memory’s red thread to branch out. The

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2 Antonio Chiusole, *La genealogia delle Case piu importante di tutto il Mondo. Principaddo da Adamo nostro primo padre e continuando fino al tempo presente*, Venice 1743, fol. 1: “Che la Genealogia sia dilettevole a qualunque Letterato, e utile a quelli, che professano la Storia, e necessaria a quelli, che negli Studi Politici avanzar vogliono, non credo, che alcuno lo metta in dubbio. Perocchè essendo la materia Genealogica per se stessa curiosa, si renderà dilettevole a ciascun Intelletto umano.”

3 Breve compendio sobre el origen y genealogia de los Osorios, compilada por Rodrigo Álvarez Osorio, presbítero, dirigido al muy magnífico Sr. D. Alvar Pérez Osorio, marqués de Astorga, conde de Trastámara, de Villalobos y de Santa Marta, señor de las villas, undated (seventeenth century), fol. 2v–3r: “[...] como de lo que por mi ojos vi: porque entre su edad y la mía han pasado casi ciento e quarenta años, en los quales han sucedido en esa casa de V.S., seis herederos, de los quales se hará mención adelante en su lugar por orden como sucedieren, e ansi mismo de algunas azañas que hicieron, bien dignas de memoria: las quales como siempre los señores de la Casa sois más inclinados a hacer cosas que otros escriban, que no escribir las que otros hacen. Algunas han quedado encomendadas al silencio, y esto por inadvertencia de los Coronistas o quizá por malicia, como siempre esta casa ha tenido recios competidores. Pero ansi como el oro ningún ollin lo puede cubrir, ansi los actos virtuosos pocas veces los puede sepultar o oscurecer la embidia de los malos, y siempre queda la clara fama impremida en las mentes de los mortales y las trae rodando de siglo en siglo, porque la memoria de los buenos no quede desnigrada ni somergida en ondas letras y los que suceden vivan a exemplo de los pasados.”

genealogical texts and charts submitted to the various *ancien-régime* institutions on which honour was codified in the early modern period complied with administrative requirements; their social agency stemmed from a socially accepted discourse on honour and its epistemological foundations. Genealogies were skilfully composed narratives designed to create an image, an analogue of all that a family had been and had achieved over time. Genealogies, whether drafted for administrative or historical purposes, constituted a uniquely ‘legitimate’ and performative language: a liturgy of honour as outlined in the preliminary words with which Juan Flórez de Ocariz defined nobility, genealogy and heraldry in his *Libro primero de las genealogías del Nvevo Reyno de Granada* (Madrid, 1674). Flórez, whose concern was to identify the genealogies of the conquerors of the viceroyalty of New Granada, defined nobility and its constitutive elements as part of a larger heraldic-genealogical system.<sup>4</sup> Early modern fame, memory, and genealogical output helped organize an image capable of encapsulating the personal and political history of individuals and of the kingdom at large. Genealogies and treatises on nobility were part and parcel of a shared discourse at the core of European life.

Three main points will be discussed regarding the role of genealogy and genealogical knowhow. First, a clear definition of what genealogy is and its relation to nobility and infamy is required. On this cue, a brief sketch will be presented of the motives and reasons behind the existence of a broad-ranging genealogical literature, and the role of genealogists as ‘agents’ and codifiers of honour will be introduced. Lastly, the commitment to truth and objectivity of all genealogical literature and its social agency will be discussed.

## Genealogy and genealogical knowhow

Early modern genealogy was a discipline with a clearly defined social function that served to bolster social prestige, its polar opposite being the power to cast into disrepute. It provided a targeted means to define the essential traits of the nobleman or noblewoman. To be sure, those of honourable lineage were eager to enter the “Temple of Honour” (*Templo de la Honra*). Unlike similar document-based typologies aimed at casting social and civic discredit or infamy, genealogy delivered the discourse on honour.<sup>5</sup>

Vested with the power of the written word, genealogical records confirmed what Baptista Mantuano summarized as the solace the virtuous (and virtue itself) ought to find in having been born to illustrious parents (“como que era un gran alivio para la virtud haber nacido de progenitores ilustres”). This was understood to be so to the extent that those endowed with genealogies automatically became members of the “Republic of the honourable” (*República de los honrados*). In a sense, genealogy was a sort of victory over time. The pervasive genealogical culture went beyond providing more or less convincing arguments; it was a distinctly European and cosmopolitan discursive system designed to defeat, with the aid of printing

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4 Juan Flórez de Ocariz, *Libro primero de las genealogías del Nvevo Reyno de Granada*, Madrid 1674, fol. 1r–31r.

5 See Ignacio Atienza Hernández, *La construcción de lo real. Genealogía, casa, linaje y ciudad: una determinada relación de parentesco*, in: James Casey/Juan Hernández Franco (eds.), *Familia, parentesco y linaje*, Murcia 1997, 41–63; Enrique Soria Mesa, *Genealogía y poder: invención de la memoria y ascenso social*, in: *Estudios: Revista de Historia Moderna* 3 (2004), 21–56; Enrique Soria Mesa, *La nobleza en la España moderna. Cambio y continuidad*, Madrid 2007, 300–317. See also the seminal analysis by Jaime Contreras Contreras, *Linajes y cambio social: la manipulación de la memoria*, in: *Historia Social* 21 (1995), 105–124.

formes or quills, Mercury – the divine trickster’s rout was of course intended to uphold an individual’s or a family’s privileged juridical status within urban societies.

The social and political climate of early modern Spain incited the creation of ancestral memories tailored to favour the interests of a given family or of the Spanish monarchy (*Monarquía*) itself, which the noble class held to be its foremost collective endeavour. In other words, from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, genealogy increasingly became a social imperative in an explicitly formal sense. It should also be noted that, other than a means of constructing an idealized past, genealogies constantly strove to spur on the heroic ethos of those serving their sovereign at different periods in history. Genealogy embraced all, human and divine or anywhere in between: Dionysius, Apollo, Hercules, or any stalwart royal servant who had given rise to an illustrious bloodline. The social value of service was emphasized whilst vindicating the centrality of an anthropology resting on honour and duty:

“As can be ascertained in manuscript books on the matter, there are far from few who pass on lengthy deceptions on the origin of their arms and surnames. Others have followed suit and these [lies] have been printed because both the former and the latter have forgotten the general and certain principles which are found in true accounts.”<sup>6</sup>

The Castilian institutional status quo demanded that individuals and families be subjected to public scrutiny on account of the quality and “purity” of their blood (*limpieza de sangre*) before being admitted to orders of chivalry, university colleges, chapters, and other privileged positions and offices.

## Genealogy and nobility

The circulation of the idea of nobility during the seventeenth century was in general similar to that in the sixteenth century. However, the increasing weight of printed and handwritten textual production and the increase in the number of ennoblement processes that took place in the Castilian Military Orders marked a turning point. So did the proliferation of texts and certificates of coats of arms, and the statutes and proofs of *limpieza de sangre* (blood purity, that is not having Jewish, Moorish, and in some instances, heretic or *conversos* – converts from Judaism – ancestors).

This generated the development of an ‘aristocratizing’ noble discourse, centred on the division between clean and unclean blood. This manifested itself in a set of questions that appeared in all the interrogations of the nobility processes, which became a capital issue in the construction of noble identity. In this way, the central issues to be considered noble were: legitimacy of the pretender, justification of the genealogy, purity of blood, and noble ways of life. The proofs of blood purity acquired great importance. Not only because they represented a form of protection against heresy in the search for religious orthodoxy in the

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6 Bernabé Moreno de Vargas, *Discursos de la nobleza de España*, Madrid 1636 (1st edn. 1622), fol. 3r: “No son pocos los que refieren largas patrañas del origen de sus armas y principio de sus apellidos, como lo vemos en los libros manuscritos desta materia, à quienes han seguido algunos Autores, que han impresso olvidándose unos y otros de los principios generales y ciertos, que en las historias verdaderas se hallan”.

Spanish Monarchy after the Protestant Reformation, but also because the *limpieza de sangre* constituted a conceptual absolute in the ideological and intellectual framework of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spain. The genealogy of the files, like all genealogy, claims – without intending to – a special circumstance for the nobility: having the social recognition of possessing *limpieza de sangre*. For this reason, and from 1580, questions related to the purity of blood acquired eloquence in the proofs of nobility in all corporations and social institutions of the Monarchy. The memory of clean blood or bad blood was a basic catalyst in the construction of genealogies.

Twofold evidence was required to prove one's status as a gentleman (*hidalgo*) or higher-ranking nobleman. Firstly, it was mandatory to seek the corroboration of oral witnesses; secondly, the presentation of a personal and family genealogy was required in most cases. All of which led to the institutionalization of genealogy not as mere knowledge but as a generalized administrative prerequisite.

Proofs of nobility, genealogical histories, genealogical trees in the form of manuscript accounts, and printed armorials allied to the ample literature on noble behaviour, contributed to shape and fix an aristocratic-biological mythos that lent credence to various royal mercies, grants, styles, and honours such as the famed knighthood of Santiago. This realization should be taken as the starting point for the study of how genealogical knowledge was constructed in early modern Spain. Three areas merit attention: first, proofs of nobility for those seeking admission to orders of chivalry, second, genealogical literature to legitimize noble status, and third, theoretical texts on genealogy.

The proofs of nobility required to enter Spanish orders of chivalry included genealogies whose materialization was entrusted to experts – the so-called *linajudos* –, historians, royal chroniclers, kings of arms, and, as a last resort, agents enrolled by the petitioners. The proofs outlined a brief description of the petitioner, his parents and paternal and maternal grandparents. Little else was consigned other than the claimant's payroll services and the origin of all the family members. But what then were the main sources tapped for the genealogical expertise that such proofs required? Tradition, public opinion, and the continuous appeal to the public knowledge of the past and of the law. A point in case, Don Íñigo de Guevara, Count of Oñate, submitted in 1621 his genealogy in order to be admitted into the Order of Calatrava. The standard procedure, which constituted the hallowed gateway into knighthood, had been in place in Spain since the reign of Philip II. The aspirant was expected to present his genealogy. It fell upon various witnesses to verify it later. Genealogical matters were thus turned into a major social phenomenon which was sure to set limits on the (authorized) account of any given family's history.

As far as proofs of nobility were concerned, only the parents and all four grandparents were investigated.<sup>7</sup> In proofs submitted by those seeking to have their status as *hidalgos* recognized by the royal high courts of justice (*chancillerías*), tracing patrilineal ascendants as far back as possible was a must.<sup>8</sup> Petitioners were required to identify the eldest male relative and

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7 Genealogía de Íñigo Vélez de Guevara, conde de Oñate, natural de Madrid, presentada para su ingreso en la Orden de Calatrava, 1621, Real Academia de la Historia (RAH), 9/323, fol. 23r.

8 Manuel Fernández de Ayala Aulestia, *Práctica y formulario de la Chancillería de Valladolid*, Valladolid 1667, fol. 16v–17r: “[...] quien fue el Petrucio (que es el trofeo y ascendiente último de quien ay memoria y descende el pretendiente”.

the *caput familiae* acknowledged by all its members. In order to deal with cases of families estranged or uprooted from their ancestral communities, genealogical narratives could and indeed were expected to supplement “common opinion” (*común opinión*).

Prior to the eighteenth century, the lion’s share of genealogical output in the Spanish Monarchy was tied to the agenda and needs of one lineage or the other. Even the genealogies put together by expert *linajudos*, chroniclers, and all sorts of opportunists were related to procedures and processes intended to rubberstamp noble status or legitimize social ascent. As shown by Antonio Terrasa Lozano, Luis Salazar de Castro’s *Historia genealógica de la Casa de Silva*, commissioned by the 5th Duke of Pastrana, is a prime example.<sup>9</sup> Davide Bigalli explained that the primary objective was to scrutinize a given family and assign the correct lineage to an individual.<sup>10</sup> By default genealogies constituted a description of the noble applicant’s self, of the updated series of charges undertaken and offices held, including all levels of royal service – court, army, and bureaucracy – as well as those positions on which livelihoods depended. The adjective “immemorial” was used as a construct whenever documenting an individual’s filiation proved most difficult. Indeed, genealogies embodied both social memory and oblivion. Yet, beginning in the sixteenth century, the Royal Council of the Orders of Chivalry traced the paternal and maternal great-grandparents of petitioners to double-check a genealogy’s trustworthiness. The administrative practice of genealogy presented itself as a one-sided dialogue with the past that had to be locally ratified. In a society where public opinion and reputation mattered greatly, this administrative practice contributed to the development of a type of heraldic-genealogical literature focusing on the history of lineages. It was not only a means to search for a remote past to legitimize virtues or to conceal “stains” (*manchas*) but an expedient to rest one’s case on the legitimization afforded by reason or the powers that be. The fact that both titled and untitled noblemen had to follow the same procedure to join the orders of chivalry underscores the administrative potency of genealogy. All petitioners were required to state the following:

“[...] on condition that the supplicant meets the required conditions for this dignity regarding ancient and noble blood, hereditary status up to the present, and services rendered by himself and his forebears, patronage, and commensurate revenue as decorum and respectability demand.”<sup>11</sup>

Martínez Calderón in his *Epítome* on the Guzmán family situated the origin of nobility in “valiant men on account of their virtues, riches, knowledge, industry, eloquence, war exploits or great deeds in the service of the Republic, exalted dignities or other distinctions.”<sup>12</sup> The idea, owed to the late medieval jurist Bartolo da Sassoferrato, ran deeply in early modern

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9 Antonio Terrasa Lozano, *La Casa de Silva y los duques de Pastrana*, Madrid 2012, 45–66.

10 Davide Bigalli, *La familia costruita: la ricerca della legittimazione nella casa d’Aviz*, in: Cesare Mozzarelli (ed.), “Familia” del príncipe e famiglia aristocrática, Roma 1988, 213–223.

11 Fernández de Ayala Aulestia, *Práctica y formulario*, fol. 16r: “[...] atento a concurrir en el suplicante las calidades necesarias para esta Dignidad; así en antigüedad i nobleça de sangre como de estado hereditario de tantos años a este, servicios de sus antepassados i proprio; patronazgos i renta suficiente para su lustre i decencia”.

12 Juan Alfonso Martínez Calderón, *Epítome de las historias de la gran Casa de Guzmán*, Spain 1640, Manuscript, Biblioteca Nacional de España, Mss/2256-Mss/2258, fol. 43v: “[...] los hombres valerosos por sus virtudes,

theories of nobility. It entailed the cultivation of forests of genealogical trees to assert authoritatively that the blood aristocracy's ties with the land and the monarchy itself were even stronger than with the ruling dynasty. Genealogies safeguarded for the nobility a self-understanding derived from the old notions of *nobilitas christiana* and *nobilitas regni*. The imprecise boundaries between merit and blood that underpinned the idea of the virtuous hero at the heart of a true nobleman's self-definition as generous and honourable came to bear on genealogies. All genealogies reinforced as a core argument the idea of nobility as "a natural faculty inherited from our parents through the act of procreation, engendering children with a virtuous disposition".<sup>13</sup> Genealogy sanctioned a social and cultural behaviour that preserved the highest echelons of society for certain individuals.

Rodrigo Méndez de Silva was one of the most celebrated genealogists of his age.<sup>14</sup> A faithful servant of the Portuguese bankers that thrived in Madrid during the reign of Philip IV (r. 1621–65), Méndez de Silva produced a great number of briefs (*memoriales*) and penned portraits of aristocrats, insisting on their being "of old and accredited stock" (*antiguo y calificado*) – two key features that appear to have become even more decisive in the seventeenth century. These two essential qualities needed to reinforce the memory and identity of a lineage were to be found not only in all the *memoriales* but also often surfaced in the oral testimonies of witnesses recorded in proofs of nobility. Méndez de Silva dedicated to Pedro de Barrientos Lomelin, vicar general and cantor of the Metropolitan Cathedral of Mexico, his *Origen, armas y varones ilustres del antiguo y calificado linaje de Barrientos*. As was customary, the author highlighted the ancientness of the lineage, indicating that "Barrientos is one of the ancient and generous lineages to be found in the kingdom of León having achieved much glory for Spain".<sup>15</sup> Time and again, anyone wishing to state his social station within the power networks existing in the different kingdoms and realms of the Spanish Monarchy or at the Madrid court had to reckon with genealogy as a codified system.

With the self-image projected by the so-called high nobility as its model, genealogical literature amounted to an inbred assessment of the significance of being noble. Following what may be described as the nobility's inner logic, the discourses woven around lineage histories drew attention to marriages, property, services rendered, and the symbolic capital of each lineage. In turbulent times, such as the 1640s, this discursive logic was intertwined with recurrent allegories of military strife. During Philip IV's reign, when the war effort took centre stage, appeals to valour were prevalent. Indeed, side-lining the traditional debate between the man of letters and the man of arms, it was said that "military nobility is acquired with the most exertion, danger, and glory and is therefore the most revered".<sup>16</sup>

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riquezas, ciencia e industria, elocuencia o por hazañas hechas en la guerra o en la administración de la república, o por sus grandes dignidades o por otras excelencias".

13 Discursos genealógicos de la nobilísima familia de Ruiz de Vergara, Madrid 1661, fol. 7r–v: "[...] una facultad natural, heredada de nuestros padres por medio de la generación, que producen los hijos inclinados a la virtud".

14 On his activity as a genealogist, see José Antonio Guillén Berrendero, Valores nobiliarios, libros y linajes. Rodrigo Mendez de Silva, un nobilista portugués en la corte de Felipe IV, in: *Mediterranea-ricerche storiche* IX (2014), 35–60.

15 Rodrigo Méndez de Silva, *Origen, armas y varones ilustres de antiguo y calificado linaje de los Barrientos*, Madrid 1653, fol. 1r.

16 Discursos genealógicos de la nobilísima familia, fol. 7v: "La nobleza militar se adquiere con más trabajo, más peligro y más gloria, y así es más estimada".

## Words, memory, and excellence

In *Memorial de la casa y servicios de don Ioseph de Saavedra*, published in 1647, José Pellicer de Tovar, after calling attention to the matrimonial alliances of the house of Saavedra since its inception, discussed the role of time with the purpose of connecting the innate virtues of the Saavedra with those of the marquess who happened to be requesting a privilege (*merced*) from Philip IV. Yet two central aspects need to be addressed. First, chroniclers like Pellicer de Tovar identified the passing of time as an intellectual legitimization. The classical world and its historians, the Bible, and the Gospels provided the stock of *loci communes* to reinforce the age-old arguments invoked to legitimize a family's dominance. Second, genealogies could be assembled on the basis of archival evidence. Intellectual and documentary legitimization cross-fertilized in genealogical discourses not unlike the way in which the construction and circulation of lineage histories and treatises on nobility overlapped:

“Authors referred so far in the course of this treatise praise the marquess and the honourable memory of his worthiness and that of his ancestors as do others which shall appear later: Vasco Díaz de Fregenal, who wrote *En el portante de Casas Nobles* a hundred years ago on the titles and styles of temporal dignities and on the old entailments of Spain; or Bernabé Moreno de Vargas, who in his twenty-third discourse on the nobility of Spain discusses accredited families in lineage and revenues [...]; and Father Pedro-Santa, who includes [the Saavedra] in his *Teresa Gentilitia* amongst Europe's most illustrious coats of arms and ensigns.”<sup>17</sup>

In the *memorial* Pellicer de Tovar wrote for Fernando Arias de Saavedra, Lord of La Isla de Fuerteventura, Alegranza and Lobos, the Saavedra surname reappeared. It was written “so that knowledgeable of both [his services and distinctions] Your Majesty should grant him the same honours and bounties that the Catholic Kings [Isabella and Ferdinand] bestowed upon his parents Diego García de Herrera and Doña Inés de Peraça”, count and countess of La Gomera.<sup>18</sup> On the authority of Jerónimo de Aponte, Pellicer stated:

[...] he is descended and issued from the most ancient and noble family of Saavedra, known in the histories and chronicles of Spain as one of the first –with none of the others lacking a Saavedra ancestor to boast about. Amongst his forebears since the beginning of the Reconquista, one could draw a long list of high-ranking, banner-wielding noblemen of ancient stock, first in the kingdom of Galicia where they had their

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17 José Pellicer de Tovar, *Memorial de la casa y servicios de don Ioseph de Saavedra*, Madrid 1647, fol. 123v: “Estas alabanzas de la Persona del Marques, y las Memorias Honrosas que de su Calidad i Ascendencia hazen los Autores referidos en el Discurso deste Tratado, y otros que se han visto despues, como son Vasco Díaz de Fregenal, que escribía Cien Años Ha, *En el portante de Casas Nobles*, que trata de todos los títulos de dignidades Temporales, i Mayorazgos Antiguos de España; calificados en Linages y Rentas: Bernave Moreno de Vargas en el Discurso Veintitrés de la nobleza de España [...] y el Padre Pedro-Santa, que las pone en su *Teresa Gentilitia* entre los más Ilustres Escudos, i divisas de Europa”.

18 *Ibid.*, fol. 1r: “[...] para que enterado de ambas cosas [servicios y calidades] se sirua V.M. de hacerle la misma honra i merced que los Señores Reyes Católicos hicieron a Diego García de Herrera i a doña Inés de Peraça, (progenitores suyos)”.



ancestral home, and then in León and Castile, until they descended upon Andalusia to conquer it. Yet suffice to say that in this house there have been and there are four titled nobles: the Count of Castellar, Lord of El Viso and *alfaqueque mayor* of Castile, who heads the lineage; the Marquess of Rivas; the Marquess of Lanzarote who was once an agnate Saavedra; and the Marshal of Castile whose office is now assimilated to the marquesses of Malagón whose title of marshal comes from the Saavedra.<sup>19</sup>

Genealogical writings, treatises on nobility, family histories, and the minutes of the kings of arms were interconnected to an extent modern scholars tend to overlook. These conformed in Spain a broad-based genre closely linked to the perpetuation of Habsburg legislation on the matter. The heroic feats of the Saavedra consigned in genealogical texts help connect this noble house to the monarchy's goals: "[...] these praises [...] which give the most credit to the marquess and to his house, also bind him to continue his services to Your Majesty and those rendered by his elders to these crowns".<sup>20</sup> Dating back to the early 1600s, an idea of nobility tightly bound up with the pairing of blood and service transformed – as was underlined by José Antonio Maravall – the aristocracy into a power elite. It became an essential argument to set apart the genealogy of honour from that of infamy, itself reflected in another, parallel type of procedures and trials that were also dependent upon the same range of literature.

The narration of family glories was used to reinforce petitions. Yet the swift adaptation in the seventeenth century of such traditional narratives to fit the changing reformulations of honourability proves remarkable. In this sense, court offices and positions were now accorded pride of place within the aristocratic service ethos and were asserted as part of the mythical union between the Crown and the nobility. The presence of the nobility in history texts, royal chronicles, and similar cultural artefacts was as recurrent as it was useful for both the nobility itself and the Crown. The latter held fast onto its traditional role of arbiter and broker of honours for, it should be remembered, all genealogical work was understood to be placed, at least to some extent, under royal aegis.

For genealogists, the royal court constituted the chosen stage on which the Crown and the nobility vied for honour according to sanctioned models of honourability. The three actors – Crown, court, and aristocrats – starred in compelling narratives recounting virtuous exploits and other displays of noble liberality. Within a given genealogy, new individual accomplishments were seen as reassuring, as fresh proof of the perennial bond uniting the high born to the ruling dynasty. By way of example, services rendered in European battlefields under the *Cardenal Infante* – Philip IV's brother – were presented by one petitioner as a token of

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19 Ibid., fol. 1v–2r: “[...] descende i trae su dependencia i origen de la Antiquísima i Nobilísima familia de Saavedra, conocida en las historias i Crónicas de España, por vna de las primeras, sin que haya ninguna que no haga honrosa memoria de algún progenitor suyo. Y aunque pudiera hacer vna muy larga lista de Ricos-Omes de Pendón i caldera, antecesores suyos, desde el principio de la restauración de España, que florecieron, primero en el Reyno de Galicia, donde tuvieron su Solar, i luego en el de León i Castilla, hasta que passaron a la Conquista de Andalucía, se contentará que en esta casa ha havido i hay Quatro títulos que son el de Conde de Castellar, Señor del Viso i Alfaqueque mayor de Castilla, que es cabeça i pariente mayor de este linage; el marqués del Ribas, el marqués de Lançarote, que fue Saavedra de Varón, i el Mariscal de Castilla, cuyo officio anda incorporado a la Casa de los Marqueses de Malagón que por Saavedras son Mariscales.”

20 Ibid., fol. 123v–124r: “[...] estas alabanças [...] que más que acreditan la casa i persona del Marques, le empeñan a continuar los servicios de sus Mayores, hechos a estas Coronas y los Suyos a V.M.”

personal nobility and of the special bond between each and every nobleman and his natural lord. Relating this individual's life experience, interpreted as an archetype of noble behaviour, to contemporary discourses on nobility helps put together a more accurate idea of what it meant to be noble during the reign of Philip IV.<sup>21</sup>

Genealogy and the broad and heterogeneous field of genealogical and nobility studies encompassed commonly shared beliefs, oral traditions, and intellectual practices in which banalities, clever document-based research, and unbelievable filiations and narratives mingled. All of which was aimed at addressing in the public arena family reputations and their elaborate articulation. In so doing, doubts regarding a family's good name could be dispelled; political deceptions regarding one lineage or the other could be bolstered; and a given individual's merits could be underscored in view of obtaining royal favour or mercy.

Genealogy, conceived as a *curriculum honorum*, was aimed at least in part to the common good, and its very existence and circulation may be seen as evidence of the extent to which the "Republic of the honourable" required its own tools and networks. In this utilitarian sense, its grip reached to councils, courts, tribunals, the royal household, the diplomatic corps, municipal councils, universities, and chapters. Genealogies functioned like doctored microscopes allowing the scientist to behave like an alchemist in search of the maximum purity in an individual's ancestry. Intellectual girth mattered little, for the existence of this type of literature depended primarily on its social agency. It served to transfer and reproduce certain ideals regarding the worthiness and privileged status of the nobility. Stereotyped narratives shorn of thorough reflection were inseparable from the political and social imaginary built around lineages.

Interestingly, within the expanding early modern communicative space, two main types of works were selected for publication: normative texts descended from late medieval treatises on nobility by authors such as Juan Benito Guardiola in the sixteenth century and Bernabé Moreno de Vargas in the early seventeenth century; writings in the form of catalogues, regests, or compendia of the kingdom's worthies in line with a tradition harking back to Hernando Pérez del Pulgar. The latter type was represented in the seventeenth century by the magnum opus of Alonso López de Haro, the *Nobiliario genealógico de los reyes y títulos de España*, published in Madrid in 1622. Later contributions of the second kind were authored by the jurist José Berni y Catalá (*Creación, antigüedad y privilegios de los títulos de Castilla*, published in 1769) or by Francisco Piferrer (*Nobiliario de los reinos y señoríos de España*, published from 1857 to 1860 with the revision of the king of arms Antonio Rújula).

They developed another sort of courtly, noble literature that, although not dwelling specifically on genealogy, provided a framework for noble self-understanding. Salazar y Mendoza's *Origen de las dignidades seculares de Castilla y León* (1618), Alonso Carrillo's *Origen de la dignidad de Grande de Castilla* (1657), and the recurrent 'histories' of the chivalric orders help grasp the investment in the 'genealogy of the honourable' as a social discourse throughout the Spanish Monarchy's many realms. The images, representations, or factual and quantifiable data comprised in genealogical trees, family accounts, or simple briefs show that genealogies became the foremost means to channel an existing social demand for written records publicizing the heroism of the subjects of the Habsburg monarchy.

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21 Archivo Histórico Nacional (AHN), OM, Caballeros, Santiago, exp. 7351.

Who were the authors, creators, and promoters behind such textual plethora? As stated before, the heterogeneous ranks included – alongside a significant number of historiasters and adaptable dabblers – kings of arms, genealogists, informants working for the Council of the Holy Office and the Council of the Orders of Chivalry, priests, and accredited specialists on the past such as the royal chroniclers. Yet some measure of substantial erudition was attached to the practice of genealogy, especially from the eighteenth century onwards. Luis Salazar y Castro, the “prince of genealogists”, stands out in this respect. Responsible for the *Biblioteca Genealógica de don Luis Salazar y Castro*,<sup>22</sup> he composed in 1702 a discourse on the role of professional genealogists, which he listed in alphabetical order and appraised in terms of their reliability as honour’s officials and agents. The many authors Salazar classified constituted a constellation of genealogists and authors of family histories who, although steeped in the importance of genealogy, were unevenly skilled in textual criticism. Not long after, in 1724, Gerhard Ernst Franck von Franckenau published under his name an impressive compilation of dubious authorship entitled *Biblioteca Hispánica histórico-genealógico-heráldica*.<sup>23</sup> This work offers an interesting excursus into the Spanish manuscript and printed production on genealogy and family history. A display of erudition summoning a seemingly surpassed world, it may be said to have ushered the classical quarrel between the ancient and the modern into the rarefied domain of noble affairs. This remarkable catalogue covers the vast range of work produced by genealogists, *linajudos*, clerks of the courts of justice, kings of arms, noblemen, clergymen, bachelors, scribes, and a long series of professionals writing over a period of three centuries on family origins. It confirms that in Castile as well as in the other realms of the Spanish Monarchy genealogy was at the heart of social discourse and representation. Beginning with Aquiles Estaço (or Estacio), a native of Vidigueira in Portugal, compilers – Franckenau comprised – did not fail to include the production of Neapolitan, Portuguese, Flemish, or German genealogists.

## Genealogy’s faithfulness and social agency

The Spanish Monarchy was a socio-political space shaped by public opinion.<sup>24</sup> Noblemen and people from various places and origins were bound together by serving the same sovereign from whom they received favours, honours, and distinctions that placed them at the apex of social reputation and established truth, undoing the ominous effects of silence or oblivion. The nobility always appealed to the advantages of both the *vox populi* and the *vox intellectiva*. What John Locke defined in his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) as the “law of opinion” may be applied to the nobility as a power elite. On top of purportedly objective administrative courts adjudicating honour and infamy throughout the Spanish Monarchy’s bureaucratic apparatus, the court of public opinion scrutinized the good name, prestige, and family ties of the nobility and all others enjoying social visibility. According to Locke

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22 Enrique Soria Mesa, *La biblioteca genealógica de Don Luis de Salazar y Castro*, Córdoba 1997, continues to be useful.

23 The eighteenth-century scholar Mayans believed Juan Lucas Cortés and not Franckenau to be the real author. See Vicente Peset, *Gregori Mayans i la cultura de la Il·lustració*, Barcelona 1996, 119, 155–156.

24 See Michele Olivari, *Avisos, pasquines y rumores. Los comienzos de la opinión pública en la España del siglo XVII*, Madrid 2014.

and in order to avoid the insufferable punishment of becoming social outcasts, all (political) beings had to conform to what the *vox populi* approved as authentic. In times when a volatile public opinion held sway, according credit to genealogical discourses without due reflection was commonplace. Genealogical memory cast its seductive spell on a society interested in antiquity, blood, and the genealogical roots of the monarchy itself.

What may be defined as the quintessential principle of 'genealogical truth' in early modern times rested on profoundly utilitarian and consequentialist arguments in line with what Harry Frankfurt would identify centuries later.<sup>25</sup> Genealogy's timeless veracity was 'necessary' inasmuch as it conjured up eternity, defined by Antonio Fajardo de Acevedo as "a space without beginning or end, which is always in a state of being and permanence, neither losing anything from the past nor acquiring anything in the future and whose greatest quality is to be in God himself".<sup>26</sup> In this sense, genealogies were largely utilitarian constructs to be interpreted as either true or false – an apparently entrenched dichotomy at the time which was seldom subjected to verification given that genealogical documents complied with the 'public voice and fame' but did not necessarily aspire to 'public and manifest' evidence.

In 1688, Luis Salazar y Castro published his *Advertencias históricas sobre las obras de algunos doctos escritores modernos donde con las chronicas y con las escritura solicitada sv mejor inteligencia*. The noted genealogist hoped to regularize the way in which scores of authors wrote about nobility and families. In the course of the seventeenth century and especially in the 1680s and 1690s, new professional standards came to the fore. In this light, the *Discurso histórico político sobre el origen y prehemienias del oficio de heraldos, reyes de armas, faciales y caduceadores*, published in 1693 by José Alfonso de Guerra y Villegas, one of Charles II's kings of arms, can be seen as part of an ongoing effort to raise the bar for a still undervalued occupation. Similar developments were taking place in France, in England, or in Portugal, where Father José da Cruz reformed the genealogical genre. The pursuit of genealogy and the dedication to nobility studies were increasingly seen as a skill-intensive employment that provided critical knowledge on the *res honorarium* and was therefore vital to the political order. One need only mention the two volumes, published in Paris in 1672, of the *Histoire généalogique et chronologique de la Maison Royale de France & des pairs, grands officiers de la Couronne & de la Maison du Roy & des anciens barons du royaume; avec les Qualitez, l'origine, le progrès & les armes de leurs familles: ensemble le statut & le catalogue des chevaliers, commandeurs & officiers de l'Ordre du Saint Esprit* by Pierre de Guibours, better known as Père Anselme.

Salazar y Castro was surely not the first to call attention to the flawed arguments and shortcomings of several genealogists. In 1611, Pedro Mantuano, secretary to the Duke of Frías, published in Madrid *Advertencias a la Historia de Juan de Mariana*, a work in which earlier genealogists were taken to task for inaccuracies regarding Castilian noble families. In-depth criticism was also levelled at formerly influential authors known to have worked under the protection of knights, noblemen, or the like and to have partaken of the bureaucratic

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25 Harry G. Frankfurt, *Sobre la verdad*, Madrid 2007, 23.

26 Antonio Faxardo y Azevedo, *Resymen historial de las Edades del Mvndo. Genealogía real y origen de todas las religiones eclesiásticas y militares*, Madrid 1671, fol. 1r-v: "[...] vn espacio que carece de principio y fin y siempre está en vn ser y en vna permane[n]cia sin perder nada en lo pasado ni adquirir en lo por venir y su mayor excelencia es estar en el mismo Dios".

dimension genealogy once had. Among the forerunners of a critical approach ranked the Santa Martas brothers, Álvaro Ferreira de Vera,<sup>27</sup> Andrés de Morales, Andrés Gutiérrez de los Ríos, and Joseph Torner, as well as the better known Jerónimo Gudiel and Pedro Salazar de Mendoza. Gudiel may be rightly called a pioneer who stressed the importance of drawing up genealogical trees correctly in his renowned *Compendio de algunas historias de España donde se tratan muchas antigüedades y especialmente de la antigua familia de los Girones y de otros muchos linajes*, published in Alcalá de Henares in 1577. The initial pages of this book read as an endorsement of the value of reliable genealogies based on true facts. Salazar de Mendoza followed suit in *Crónica de la excellentísima casa de los Ponce de León* (Madrid, 1611) and in his fundamental *Origen de las dignidades seglares de Castilla y León* (Madrid, 1657).

## Conclusion

Starting in the sixteenth century, the close relationship established across Europe between genealogy as a literary genre and the *memorial* or memorandum of services should draw attention to the paramount value of the former. For the honourable, a genealogical tree was an essential component of the *curriculum*, of the social *cursus*. As a matter of fact, Salazar y Castro and Franckenau refer to a very long list of genealogical texts derived from *memoriales*. In other words, early modern genealogy was not at all limited to listing grandees in the manner of Alonso López de Haro's *Nobiliario genealógico de los Reyes y títulos de España* (Madrid, 1621). What had started as an administrative prerequisite aimed at determining true filiations developed into a genre defined by a penchant for the ancient. Penned to counter the frailty of human memory, valour was constantly exalted. An attempt was made to resolve the deep-seated conflict in the noble ethos between individual and collective aspirations by extending the values of the nobility to the honourable as a whole. This operation involved a sort of reification or, to use Jean Braudillard's term, a "total screen" (*écran total*).

In its double dimension of practical object and artefact for the veneration of the past, genealogical knowledge materialized as a discursive production, a political reality, and a pedagogy of symbols encompassing a wide array of typologies created to write about families and family ties. Antiquity and its foundational accounts and metaphors, the real or imaginary past of the various bloodlines and present pursuits and agendas became inextricably mingled. In shaping the concept of noble behaviour laid down in genealogical texts, present concerns, although rhetorically embellished as contingencies, were far from being treated as mere anecdotes. A genealogy was a portrait unfettered by the demands of pictorial likeness; a dependable artefact condensing the honourability of an individual and his lineage.<sup>28</sup> The corpus of works by Luis Salazar y Castro, Jakob Wilhelm Imhoff, Francesco Sansovino, José Pellicer de Tovar, or Alonso López de Haro made sense of a social reality marked by the

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27 On this eighteenth-century Portuguese expert on nobility, responsible for the well-known *Origem da nobreza civil*, see José Antonio Guillén Berrendero, Honour and service. Álvaro Ferreira de Vera and the idea of nobility in Habsburg Portugal, in: *E-Journal of Portuguese History* 7/1 (2009), 2–21.

28 On portraying or "painting" the nobility's honour, see Adolfo Carrasco Martínez, Apariencia y ser del honor en la España del siglo XVII. En torno al retrato del duque de Pastrana, in: Paolo Broglio/Maria Pia Paoli, *Stringere la pace. Teorie e pratiche della conciliazione nell'Europa moderna (secoli XV–XVIII)*, Rome 2011, 93–118.

extensive use of genealogy in proofs of nobility. The proliferation and success of genealogical texts was a foregone conclusion in a world shaped by both honour and public opinion.

Polemics on the accountability of genealogies developed in two distinct spheres: on the one hand, restricted scholarly milieus presided by erudition; on the other hand, society at large with the Crown and the aristocracy as the most directly concerned. As regards the latter, what mattered the most was establishing a socially accepted truth, a lasting red thread to trace back noble honour. On top of a matter of opinion and public knowledge, genealogies became throughout Europe an indispensable part of the prevalent social discourse on nobility and honour – or, better, nobility qua honour.