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Towards a history of parliamentary culture in the early modern world: concept, geopolitical scope, and method

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ABSTRACT

This article proposes an innovative approach to early modern representative institutions, from the later fifteenth century to the early eighteenth. It argues that only a transnational, interdisciplinary, and comparative study of such bodies can reveal their shared culture and prominence in contemporary political discourse, public memory, and cultural production. Central to this new approach is the concept of 'parliamentary culture', which sees representative assemblies as collective constructs and embodiments of a political community, and encompasses the transnational tradition of customs, ideas, and cultural expressions associated with them. The article aims to: (1) sketch out the institutional, geopolitical, and historical scope of our enquiry; (2) define parliamentary culture as a collection of practices of legitimation, negotiation, and debate in political assembly that are central to the life of a community; and (3) demonstrate that the distinctive institutional cultures of representative assemblies were an essential component of the public life and political thought of early modern countries; and that there was a common culture of representative assembly shared and recognized throughout Europe which was variously transplanted to and adapted in the overseas territories of the Iberian, Anglo-British, and Dutch empires, often through interaction with Indigenous traditions of assembly. The underlying argument is that only by looking at early modern representative bodies in this way can we appreciate the vitality and significance of this type of political organization.

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This article offers an innovative approach to early modern representative institutions. It argues that only a transnational, interdisciplinary, and comparative study of such bodies can reveal their distinctive culture and prominence in contemporary political discourse,

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public memory, and cultural production. Central to this approach is the concept of what we call parliamentary culture, which sees representative assemblies as collective constructs and embodiments of a political community, and encompasses a transnational tradition of customs, ideas, and cultural expressions associated with them.

Representative assemblies – from the French Estates General to the Castilian, Aragonese, and Portuguese *Cortes*, from the Swedish *Riksdag* to the Swiss Federal Diet, from the Polish, and later Polish-Lithuanian, *Sejm* to the parliaments of England, Scotland, and Ireland – were common forms of political organization in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe.[1] They have been extensively studied. Modern scholars have traditionally approached them as formal structures rather than as cultural phenomena, and mostly within national silos. But as we have argued in a transnational survey of the field, a more expansive, comparative approach is necessary when addressing a period in which Europe's religious and dynastic histories and colonial expansion created unprecedented societal demands and tensions which were played out in and transformed representative assemblies throughout the continent and beyond it.[2]

Each national institution, it is true, has been well covered by venerable historiographies that trace modern, post-revolutionary, representative bodies to their *ancien régime* antecedents. This scholarship, however, is severely limited. Legal and constitutional in tradition and methodology, it deals with the powers of individual assemblies and their relationship with princes, and how conflicts between different elements of society – clergy, nobility, commons, town corporations – unfolded in them. But it seldom compares such bodies with each other, and when it does, it tends to emphasize differences and divergences in the long-term pathways of the various assemblies and the exceptional nature of each.

Meanwhile, neither the history of political thought nor cultural history has explored early modern representative assemblies in any depth at a transnational level. Historians have elucidated the cultural histories of specific assemblies: the studies of Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger and others on the politics of presence and decision-making in the Imperial Diet and elsewhere in Germany, stimulated by work on symbolic communication within early and high medieval assemblies, have provided important new insights and directions.[3] But so far these accounts have not been followed up with a systematic approach to such institutions across Europe on the model of burgeoning transnational and interdisciplinary studies of monarchy, court culture, or diplomacy. And historians of political thought continue to pay little attention to the institutional context of theoretical writing. The latter seems a puzzling omission given that the culture of representative institutions reflected and shaped changes in political thought (such as the ideas of sovereignty or representation) and in the nature of the political community, affected by religious change, dynastic union or fragmentation,

[1] M. A. R. Graves, *The Parliaments of Early Modern Europe: 1400–1700* (London, 2001); M. Hébert, *La voix du peuple: Une histoire des assemblées au Moyen Âge* (Paris, 2018). See, now, W. Blockmans, translated by M. Horn, *The Voice of the People? Political Participation before the Revolutions* (Abingdon, 2024), originally published as *Medezeggenschap: politieke participatie in Europa vóór 1800* (Amsterdam, 2020).

[2] P. Kewes, S. Gunn, D. Pietrzyk-Reeves, P. Seaward, T. Sowerby, and J. van der Meulen, 'Early Modern Parliamentary Studies: Overview and New Perspectives', *History Compass* 21, (2023), e12757. https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12757. See also M. Hébert, *Parlementer: Assemblées représentatives et échange politique en Europe occidentale à la fin du Moyen Âge* (Paris, 2018), pp. 10–12.

[3] B. Stollberg-Rilinger, *The Emperor's Old Clothes: Constitutional History and the Symbolic Language of the Holy Roman Empire* (New York, 2020); T. Neu, M. Sikora, and T. Weller (eds), *Zelebrieren und Verhandeln: zur Praxis ständischer Institutionen im frühneuzeitlichen Europa* (Munster, 2009).

and revolution.[4] An interdisciplinary and transnational approach to the history of representative assemblies, we believe, informed by the perspectives and methods of cultural and intellectual and literary history, and the histories of art and of visual and material culture can reveal a much deeper and more connected culture of political engagement and interaction than has been previously acknowledged. For only if we look at these bodies in a broader way – not just as formal structures of power, but also as cultural phenomena and both engines and subjects of political thinking – can we recognize a common set of ideas, assumptions, and traditions developing across Europe and beyond, and appreciate the vitality and significance of this type of political organization.

This article has three main aims. First, we sketch out what we mean by the 'parliamentary' institutions which we propose to investigate, recognizing both their ubiquity and their diversity and some of the difficulties of reducing this variety into a phenomenon capable of effective investigation. Secondly, we define parliamentary culture as a collection of practices of legitimation, negotiation, and debate in representative assembly that are central to the life of a community. Thirdly, we demonstrate that the distinctive institutional cultures of representative assemblies were an essential component of the public life and political thought of each country; and that, diverse as these bodies were in so many ways, there was a common parliamentary culture shared throughout Europe just as there was a shared culture of princely courts or diplomacy. Indeed, we suggest that as representative bodies were established in the overseas territories of a number of European countries, principally the Iberian Empires, England/Britain, and the Dutch Republic, European parliamentary traditions were variously adapted to different new settings and peoples, hybridizing in colonial contexts, and extending the phenomenon we call 'parliamentary culture' across much of the early modern world.

Representative assemblies as a transnational idea: definition, scope, and approach

The problem that has hindered serious transnational thinking about these basic national representative institutions is the issue of definition. It seems intuitively clear that such assemblies form a common group (and, as we shall see, contemporaries thought in such terms). What they had in common is that all of them arose out of a need for an arena where a ruler could come together with an important segment of his, or occasionally her, subjects. Crucially, such bodies became associated with the idea that they could, in some sense, represent a political community. In short, Europe's political assemblies typically consisted of gatherings of people (though usually people of property, and always men) who claimed in some way to represent some or all of the populace of a legally defined territory (such as an empire, kingdom, city–state, principality, or confederation of provinces), in a direct meeting with each other and usually with princely governments. From the Middle Ages to the later seventeenth century, such bodies developed

[4]Seminal studies on these topics which, however, omit to engage with parliamentary history include: Q. Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, 1978); J. H. Burns and M. Goldie (eds), *The Cambridge History of Political Thought 1450–1750* (Cambridge, 1991); B. Tierney, *Religion, Law, and the Growth of Constitutional Thought, 1150–1650* (Cambridge, 1982). Still more surprising is the lack of attention to representative institutions in V. Cox and J. Paul (eds), *A Cultural History of Democracy in the Renaissance* (London, 2021).

bureaucratic and symbolic practices both in order to facilitate their business and to convey the nature of the community itself and its multifarious relationships.

There was, moreover, a growing sense in the sixteenth century that the assembly lay at the heart of that political community's core identity, both its embodiment and its defender.[5] One might even identify this period, with a notable apogee in the 1570s and 1580s, as the 'parliamentary moment' at which representative assemblies began to assume an unusual prominence in the affairs of their communities – to the extent that they could come to threaten the secure hold of their rulers on power.[6] Kings famously amplified the status of some assemblies by using them to facilitate the religious and constitutional changes of the Reformation: the Swedish *Riksdag* and the English Parliament were used in this way, and other assemblies were seen as fora (if sometimes unsuccessful ones) for discussion of religious futures.[7] And when grave political crises arose, often related to religious division, foreign threat, or arguments over succession, the response was in many cases to convoke a representative assembly.

This helped to give such assemblies an enhanced meaning and importance in the national imagination. In Hungary in 1527, after the shattering defeat at Mohács at the hands of the Ottoman armies of Suleiman the Magnificent, King John Zápolya summoned the delegates of the city of Bártfa to the Transylvanian Diet (*országgyűlés*), saying it fell upon them to defend the realm against the dissolution of the nation and potential fall of the *lingua Hungarica*.[8] After the demise of the male line of the Jagiellonian dynasty in 1572, the *Sejm* of the Commonwealth of Poland-Lithuania took it upon themselves to develop a new constitutional framework which guaranteed both religious toleration and in-person election of the new monarch, the so-called *electio viritim*, in which all members of the nobility were entitled to take part.[9] In France in 1576, after years of religious warfare, Henry III summoned the Estates General to Blois to begin a process of pacification and reform whose long-term legacies belied its medium-term defeat in the bloody politics of the 1580s.[10] Portugal saw as many as four meetings of the *Cortes* in four years, 1579–83, during the succession crisis precipitated by the childless death of King Sebastian in 1578 and culminating in the takeover by Spain and creation of the Iberian Empire; in 1640, when Portugal regained independence, the assembly was again extensively deployed by the newly installed Braganza monarchy.[11] In England,

[5]P. Seaward, R. Frost, and J. Ohlmeyer, 'Parliamentary Assemblies as Political Communities', in P. Kewes, D. Pietrzyk-Reeves, and Paul Seaward (eds), *Parliamentary Culture of Poland-Lithuania and the Kingdoms of Britain and Ireland, c. 1490–1720*, forthcoming.

[6]See P. Kewes, *Contesting the Royal Succession in Reformation England, Pole to Shakespeare* (Oxford), forthcoming.

[7]See, for example, M. Hallenberg, 'An Elected Dynasty of Sweden? Blood, Charisma and Representative Monarchy', in L. Geevers and H. Gustafsson (eds), *Dynasties and State Formation in Early Modern Europe* (Amsterdam, 2023), pp. 109–33; D. MacCulloch, 'Parliament and the Reformation of Edward VI', *Parliamentary History* 34, (2015), 383–400; N. Jones, *Faith by Statute: Parliament and the Settlement of Religion, 1559* (London, 1982).

[8]B. Varga, 'Political Humanism and the Corporate Theory of State: Nation, Patria and Virtue in Hungarian Political Thought of the Sixteenth Century', in B. Trencsényi and M. Zászkaliczky (eds), *Whose Love of Which Country? Composite States, National Histories and Patriotic Discourses in Early Modern East Central Europe* (Leiden, 2010), pp. 283–313 (pp. 292–3).

[9]J. Dzięgielewski, *O tolerancję dla zdominowanych. Polityka wyznaniowa Rzeczypospolitej w latach panowania Władysława IV* (Warsaw, 1986); E. Opaliński, *Kultura polityczna szlachty polskiej w latach 1587–1652: System parlamentarny a społeczeństwo obywatelskie* (Warsaw, 1995); W. Kriegseisen, *Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Szlacheckiej (do 1763 roku)* (Warsaw, 1995); F. Roşu, *Elective Monarchy in Transylvania and Poland-Lithuania, 1569–1587* (Oxford, 2017).

[10]M. Greengrass, *Governing Passions: Peace and Reform in the French Kingdom, 1576–1585* (Oxford, 2007); M. Greengrass, 'A Day in the Life of the Third Estate: Blois, 26 December 1576', in A. Bakos (ed.), *Politics, Ideology and the Law in Early Modern Europe: Essays in Honour of J.H.M. Salmon* (Rochester, NY, 1994), pp. 73–90.

[11]P. Cardim, *Cortes e cultura política no Portugal do Antigo Regime* (Lisbon, 1998); P. Cardim, 'Portugal's Elites and the Status of the Kingdom of Portugal within the Spanish Monarchy', in J. Morrill and R. von Friedeburg (eds), *Monarchy*

after the collapse of the Cromwellian Protectorate in 1659, the ideal of summoning a 'free parliament' was embraced by royalists and republicans alike.[12]

Confessional identity could be a rock around which the assembly's sense of common purpose was built (as in England, where the effective exclusion of Catholics by oath from the 1560s onwards helped to create a powerful link between the Church of England and the English Parliament). But it could also be the reef upon which the ability of an assembly to serve as an expression of the community's identity foundered (as perhaps, in France, where successive Estates General were wrecked in part at least as a result of the religious divisions of its civil wars). And for French Protestants, representative institutions emerged in the 'parliamentary moment' of the later sixteenth century to become a crucial element in the way they organized and funded the military operations carried out in their name, a guarantee to the German mercenaries, recruited to their armies, that they would be paid. Huguenots would claim that they were an instrument in cementing the religious pacification in early seventeenth-century France but the French monarchy preferred to regard them as an instrument of confessional politics or, worse, a dangerous Huguenot state in waiting, a proto-republic.[13] The Commonwealth of Poland-Lithuania was, for a while at least, a remarkable exception. There, the legislative union was built on the vow of successive kings-elect to respect the various confessions' freedom of worship and refrain from religious persecution, and the *Sejm* reflected this sense that religious unity was not an essential feature of the existence of its multi-national state even if the assembly's membership was restricted to Catholics and Protestants.[14] General and provincial assemblies, in other words, both reflected and enacted the religious divisions of the communities they represented.

Yet once we move beyond this basic definition and sense of the centrality of the recourse to assemblies, we swiftly encounter problems. Our conception of what 'parliamentary culture' might relate to is overshadowed by the historiography of the formation of (national) states: we tend to conceive of this as a subject that applies essentially to bodies at *national* level – with the nations thought of in modern terms. The scholarly habit of getting stuck in national and disciplinary silos has not only impeded transnational comparison (as we exposed in our *History Compass* essay), it has also reinforced the temptation to concentrate on representative assemblies in the period from the late-eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth – as the cradle of modern nations with parliamentary democracies.[15] And yet, most early modern Europeans considered the

Transformed: Princes and their Elites in Early Modern Western Europe (Cambridge, 2017), pp. 212–43; J. Flores and P. Cardim, 'An Imperial Formation Joins a Composite Polity: The Portuguese Empire and the Information System of the Hispanic Monarchy (1580–1640)', *European Review of History* 30, (2023), pp. 600–23; P. Cardim, 'Elites, représentation et participation politique du "people": Les Cortes et le débat sur l'élection du roi dans la crise de succession portugaise de 1578–1581', in Y. Junot and J. J. Ruiz Ibánez (eds), *Quand le Peuple élit le Roi*, forthcoming. We are grateful to Professor Cardim for sending us his essay in advance of its publication.

[12]B. Worden, 'The Campaign for a Free Parliament, 1659–60', *Parliamentary History* 36, (2017), pp. 159–84.

[13]For a recent overview of the Huguenot political assemblies in their broader institutional context, see the contributions of H. Daussy, 'Les assemblées et le système politique huguenot (1562–1598)', and H. Daussy and M. Greengrass, 'La fin des institutions politico-militaires (1598–1629)', to P. Chareyre and H. Daussy (eds), *La France Huguenote: Histoire institutionnelle d'une minorité religieuse (XVIe-XVIIIe siècle)* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2024), pp. 229–52; 273–92.

[14]B. Kane, G. Glickman, A. Kalinowska, and P. Kewes, 'Unrepresentative Assemblies? Parliamentary Culture and Exclusion', in Kewes, Pietrzyk-Reeves, and Seaward (eds.), *Early Modern Parliamentary Cultures of Poland-Lithuania and the Kingdoms of Britain and Ireland*.

[15]Kewes et al., 'Early Modern Parliamentary Studies'.

assemblies of other countries as belonging to the same broad spectrum as their own. The most sophisticated sixteenth century commentator on comparative government in sixteenth-century Europe, Jean Bodin, discussed them in his *Les six livres de la République* of 1576 as roughly equivalent institutions.[16] The assumption was a common one. Take the dispatch by Sir John Hackett, Henry VIII's ambassador in the Low Countries, on Charles V's journey to Barcelona in 1533 'to kepe Courttes; which is as mowche to say as a maner of a Parlement, other a congregacion of the lordes and astattes of Spayn'.[17] Or the straightforward translation of 'Parliament' as '*Córtes*', of 'to call a Parliament' as '*hazer Córtes*', and of the 'Parliament house' as '*la Sála, de las Córtes*' in the Spanish-English dictionary of 1623.[18] Meanwhile, in the 1674 Portuguese *Cortes*, a member of the high nobility exasperated by the vociferous intervention of the Commons, admonished his unruly opponents by comparing them to their English counterparts: 'Your Excellencies, the Procurators, must understand that you are not the Parliament of England'.[19] By 1681, Thomas Rymer, a committed Whig in due course appointed Historiographer Royal by the post-Revolutionary regime, penned a comparative account of European parliaments, states, and diets meant to prove the power and superiority of the Westminster Parliament and concomitant decline of representative institutions elsewhere.[20]

It is true that the conception, operation, powers, and effectiveness of such bodies varied enormously across Europe, and it would be wrong to assume that there was a single idea throughout the continent of what a representative assembly should look like, least of all that all assemblies need to be measured against some standard view, often based on the examples that survived into the modern period. The foundation of these assemblies in a claim to representation is, of course, an essential element of their purpose, and has often been seen as critical to our understanding of them. It is what distinguishes representative assemblies from bodies that are purely conciliar, such as a meeting of a ruler's close advisers, whose qualifications are their knowledge and expertize, rather than their ability to convey the views of any group of people who are not present. But this distinction can itself be too strongly drawn. Many assemblies that were central in the understanding of political interaction and negotiation can scarcely be regarded as representative in any exact sense – the Venetian Great Council, for example, membership of which was limited to adult male patricians – but which nevertheless fulfilled a similar function to that of representative assemblies elsewhere; it, and the Venetian Senate, chosen from among the patricians and office-holders, were powerful examples throughout Europe of the purpose and character of political assembly and deliberation.

[16]For example, in *De la Souueraineté* (I, ix), *De toutes sortes de Republiques en general* (II, i), *Des corps et colleges, estats & communautez* (III, vii).
[17]E. F. Rogers (ed.), *The Letters of Sir John Hackett, 1526–1534* (Morgantown, 1971), p. 332.
[18]R. Perceval and J. Minsheu, *A Dictionary in Spanish and English* (London, 1623), p. 334.
[19]Juan Bautista Maserati (Spanish Resident in Lisbon) to the Council of State in Madrid, Lisbon, 7 May 1674, Archivo General de Simancas, Estado – Portugal, 2626, quoted in P. Cardim, 'Representative Institutions and Parliamentary Culture in the Portuguese and Spanish Empires', in P. Kewes, P. Seaward, and J. van der Meulen (eds), *Parliamentary Culture and Indigenous Traditions of Assembly, c. 1500–1700* (forthcoming).
[20]*A General Draught and Prospect of Government in Europe, And Civil Policy. Shewing The Antiquity, Power, Decay, of Parliaments* (London, 1681). For discussion, see P. Kewes and T. Kucharski, 'Representative Assemblies in the Political Imagination', in Kewes, Pietrzyk-Reeves, and Seaward (eds), *Early Modern Parliamentary Cultures of Poland-Lithuania and the Kingdoms of Britain and Ireland*.

The term 'parliamentary culture' may well seem to be perpetuating too specific a definition of our subject: to indicate that the English/British Parliament has a sort of paradigmatic status in its importance within a particular state and in its distinctive understanding of political representation. For this reason, the term has often been resisted in broader treatments of representation and consent in medieval and early modern Europe, and justifiably so, since it was not generally applied to general deliberative assemblies. A commoner term within Europe was the estates, designating the tripartite assemblies of clergy, nobility, and townspeople; sometimes with the addition of a separate estate for peasant communities. The *parlements* of *ancien régime* France were, indeed, not assemblies of estates but appellate courts of law. This state of affairs occasionally caused problems of translation to commentators at the time that were exacerbated by the judicial elite of the *Parlement de Paris* 'prid[ing] itself on being the "Senate" of France' in the late Middle Ages.[21] Contemporary authors were well aware of this issue, however, and they often tackled terminological complications head on. Louis Le Roy, acclaimed translator of Aristotle's *Politics* into French (1568), which he copiously annotated to update the ancient political treatise for modern times, explained the distinction between '*etats*' and '*parlement*' in France. Le Roy drew attention to the survival of the latter term in English to denote an assembly of estates: '*Ceci était anciennement appelé tenir parlement & encore a retenu le nom en Angleterre & Ecosse*'.[22]

Our aim, in fact, is to move as far as possible away from a restrictive conception that hampers our ability to think of the subject transnationally. We use the term 'parliamentary' because there is no concise alternative adjective in English. The early seventeenth-century translator of Bodin, Richard Knolles, freely used the word 'parliament' as equivalent to the various terms employed by his original.[23] Today the term 'parliamentarism' is ubiquitous in some national scholarly traditions relating to this period, for example in Polish historiography ('*parlamentaryzm*'), and it crops up in various ways elsewhere (for example, Michel Hébert's '*parlementer*').[24] We emphatically do not mean to suggest that the English (later British) Parliament is somehow exemplary, or typical, nor that there was a linear trajectory from the parliamentary traditions of the period before the revolutions of the later eighteenth century to the bodies that came after, often referred to as parliaments, nor its associated political theory (often referred to as parliamentarism), or to the democratic institutions of the present day (many of which are colloquially referred to as 'parliaments'). But while we prefer the more neutral term 'political assemblies' for all those bodies that contemporaries in and outside a given territory envisaged as representative of that territory's political community, we believe that 'parliamentary culture' is, if imperfect, still a useful term for the phenomenon we seek to identify and historicize, and that while the representative assemblies of Europe

[21] J. B. Collins, *The French Monarchical Commonwealth, 1350–1560* (Cambridge, 2022), p. 5.
[22] *Les Politiques d'Aristote*, translated by L. Le Roy (Paris, 1576), 256FG.
[23] *The Six Bookes of a Commonweale. Written by I. Bodin*, translated by R. Knolles (London, 1606).
[24] M. Hébert, *Parlementer: Assemblées représentatives et échanges politiques en Europe occidentale à la fin du moyen âge* (Paris, 2014); Hallenberg, 'An Elected Dynasty of Sweden?'; Cardim, 'Portugal's Elites'. See also A. Marongiu, Il parlamento in Italia nel medio evo e nell'età moderna: Contributo alla storia delle istituzioni parlamentari dell' Europa occidentale (Milan, 1962). See also two edited volumes centring on the Long Eighteenth Century: D. W. Hayton, J. Kelly, and J. Bergin (eds), *The Eighteenth-Century Composite State: Representative Institutions in Ireland and Europe, 1689–1800* (Basingstoke, 2010); I. M. Szijártó, W. Blockmans, and L. Kontler (eds), *Parliamentarism in Northern and East-Central Europe in the Long Eighteenth Century, Vol. I: Representative Institutions and Political Motivation* (London, 2023).

were enormously diverse, their commonalities were widely recognized at the time by political and intellectual elites, and they can be seen today as having many common features which demand comparative study.

But how widely should the net be drawn? The focus of studies of representative assemblies has been mainly on those institutions relevant to a teleological history of the formation of nineteenth- and twentieth-century nation states: bodies such as the Swedish *Riksdag* or the English/British Parliament, which survived, or were reinvented, after the Age of Revolutions. This, though, is to ignore those vibrant bodies at what turned out eventually to be sub-national levels, which are in many ways just as emblematic of parliamentary culture as are the larger ones: institutions such as, for example, the Estates of the Tyrol, an assembly representing peasants as well as townsfolk, nobles, and clergy, whose activities between 1300 and 1800, it has been argued, demonstrate 'the active concurrence of the subject in the construction of the modern state'.[25]

This example raises immediately the issue of scale, and the nature of the community. Political and representative assemblies existed at multiple levels. In a Europe largely encompassing composite polities, some assemblies were essentially congresses of delegates from a number of separate and largely autonomous jurisdictions. Some composite polities generated new assemblies that functioned above the level of pre-existing institutions. The Imperial Diet is the most obvious example; but there are others, such as the States General of the Burgundian-Habsburg Low Countries or the Polish-Lithuanian *Sejm*. In such cases, the status of the bodies at different levels could be in dispute.[26] In the Dutch Republic, for instance, there was continuous debate over whether and, if so, how sovereignty should be shared between the States General and the provincial assemblies, some of which functioned in much the same way. The Estates of Holland was particularly assertive at the general assembly, which often caused the other provinces to resist the interference from 'the Generality'. Even as the provincial deputies at the States General were in favour of provincial sovereignty, however, they still believed that the general assembly represented the sovereignty of their republic in the international sphere. The deputies of the States General tried to defend its sovereignty in the seventeenth century by insisting that their diplomats abroad be treated with the same reverence as those of the Republic of Venice. Meanwhile, diplomatic correspondence with the English Parliament in 1652 reveals that an ambassador sent across the Channel by the States General was referred to by his provincial affiliation, '*status Hollandiae Westfrisiaque membrum*'.[27]

[25]P. Blickle, S. Ellis, and E. Österberg, 'The Commons and the State: Representation, Influence, and the Legislative Process', in P. Blickle (ed.), *Resistance, Representation and Community* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 115–54 (p. 135); W. D. Godsey, *The Sinews of Habsburg Power: Lower Austria in a Fiscal-Military State, 1650–1820* (Oxford, 2018); K. Krüger, *Die Landständische Verfassung* (Munich, 2003); C. Hirschauer, *Les états d'Artois de leurs origines a l'occupation française 1340–1640* (Paris, 1923); J. B. Collins, *Classes, Estates & Order in Early-Modern Brittany* (Cambridge, 1994).

[26]On the Imperial Diet, see B. Stollberg-Rilinger, *Das Heilige Römische Reich Deutscher Nation: Vom Ende des Mittelalters bis 1806* (Munich, 2006); on the Burgundian-Habsburg Low Countries: W. Blockmans and W. Prevenier, *The Promised Lands: The Low Countries Under Burgundian Rule, 1369–1530*, translated by E. Fackelman and E. Peters (Philadelphia, 1999); cf. J. Oddens, A. Metlica, and G. Moorman (eds), *Contending Representations I: The Dutch Republic and the Lure of Monarchy* (Turnhout, 2023). On the Polish and Polish-Lithuanian *Sejm*: A. Sucheni-Grabowska, 'The Origin and Development of the Polish Parliamentary System toward the End of the Seventeenth Century', in S. Fiszman (ed.), *Constitution and Reform in Eighteenth-century Poland: The constitution of 3 May 1791* (Bloomington, 1997), pp. 13–50; and Kewes, Pietrzyk-Reeves, and Seaward (eds), *Early Modern Parliamentary Cultures of Poland-Lithuania and the Kingdoms of Britain and Ireland*.

[27]The Hague, National Archives, 1.01.02, Nos. 12549.14, 12576.57.

In other cases, rulers dealt individually with a number of representative assemblies operating on different geographical scopes. The Spanish Habsburg monarchy interacted with separate *Cortes* in Valencia, Aragon, Catalonia, Castile, and for a time also in Portugal. Great Britain had to await the defeat of the king and the conquest of Scotland and Ireland by the English Republic before a single Parliament claiming to represent all three political entities could, briefly, be instituted. In some places, processes of imitation after integration into a composite realm led to the development of new or better-defined institutions at lower geographical levels, such as the Lithuanian *sejmiki* (dietines) or the States of Tournai and the Tournésis.[28] All this was further complicated by the presence of institutions – assemblies of notables, conventions of cities and towns, national or provincial assemblies of the clergy – representing sectional interests across a whole polity. Sometimes these met at the same time as more all-encompassing bodies, as the Convocation of Canterbury regularly did with the English Parliament, or the Colloquy of Regensburg with the German Imperial Diet (*Reichstag*) of 1541; the Synod of Dort in 1618–19 not only ran in parallel with the Dutch States General but had been summoned by it.[29] These were assemblies that in some sense or other could be regarded as representative of a largely autonomous territory. But at the opposite extreme a definition of parliamentary culture might encompass so wide and deep a culture of representation and political association as to include town councils or village assemblies, and in doing so would risk losing sight of many of the special characteristics of bodies traditionally identified by historians as parliaments or assemblies of estates.

The existence of representative assemblies at multiple levels buttressed the cultures of political assembly – the parliamentary culture – in the polity as a whole. Contemporaries certainly saw political bodies that operated on different geographical scopes as in some sense complementary. As evidenced in such tracts as the *Freeholders Grand Inquest* (1648), English commentators commonly equated the meetings of county courts and their role in presenting local grievances to the role of Parliament at the national level.[30] This phenomenon was yet more pronounced in other polities. In the Kingdom of Poland, for example, the provincial assemblies called *sejmiki* (dietines) – which predated the institution of the central *Sejm* in the later fifteenth century – were at the heart of local political communities; every member of the (very largely defined) nobility had a right to participate in their local *sejmik* and deliberate on local concerns. Even members of Jewish communities were able to attend these assemblies.[31] It was from

[28]W. Kriegseisen, *Sejm Rzeczypospolitej szlacheckiej (do 1763): Geneza i kryzys władzy ustawodawczej* (Warsaw, 1995); F. Mariage, B. Desmaele and J.-Marie Cauchies (eds), *Les institutions publiques régionales et locales en Hainaut et Tournai-Tournaisis sous l'Ancien Régime* (Brussels, 2009).

[29]D. MacCulloch, 'Parliament and the Reformation of Edward VI', *Parliamentary History* 34, (2015), pp. 383–400; S. Hequet, *The 1541 Colloquy at Regensburg: In Pursuit of Church Unity* (Saarbrücken, 2009); A. van Goudriaan and F. A. van Lieburg (eds), *Revisiting the Synod of Dordt (1618–1619)* (Leiden, 2011).

[30]*The Freeholders Grand Inquest Touching our Soveraigne Lord the King and His Parliament* (n.p., n.d.); see C. C. Weston, 'The Authorship of the *Freeholders Grand Inquest*', *English Historical Review* 95, (1980), pp. 74–98.

[31]On the contested status of the so-called *Vaad*, alternatively labelled as the *Sejm* or Council of the Jews in the various territories of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and on attempts made by Polish-Lithuanian Jews to influence the proceedings of the *Sejm*, see A. Michałowska-Mycielska, *Sejm Żydów Litewskich (1623–1764)* (Warsaw, 2014). For the English translation: A. Michałowska-Mycielska, *The Council of Lithuanian Jews (1623–1764),* translated by A. Adamowicz (Warsaw, 2016). On Jewish influence in the political and administrative structure of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth: A. Michałowska-Mycielska, 'Żydzi w strukturze politycznej i administracyjnej Rzeczypospolitej (XVI-XVIII w.)', *Przegląd Humanistyczny* 58, (2014), pp. 107–26. On the functioning of (informal) Jewish envoys during general *Sejms* in the Commonwealth: A. Michałowska-Mycielska, 'Działalność wysłanników żydowskich podczas sejmów Rzeczypospolitej w XVI-XVIII w.', *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów* 2, (2021), pp. 437–54.

the *sejmiki* that delegates were sent to the *Sejm's* lower house, the Chamber of Envoys, bearing instructions as to what action they should take there. After the Union of Lublin and the introduction of the Henrician Articles in the later sixteenth century, the Polish-Lithuanian *sejmiki* had a say in taxation, military defence, and foreign policy. In fact, the king would occasionally consult the *sejmiki* directly, especially in matters of taxation.[32] Little wonder that contemporaries saw their provincial *sejmik* as the main platform for consultation, deliberation, and reaching consensus, yet still they accepted that the general *Sejm* had the final say in most matters.[33]

Any successful approach to the question of scale in the selection of assemblies for study must therefore be flexible. In essence, all bodies ranging from the smallest Dutch town council or *vroedschap* to the vast, multi-status groups and multi-confessional gatherings of the sixteenth-century German Empire can be considered as part of an overall culture that used representative assemblies as fundamental means of registering the political view of a community.[34] Our pragmatic focus here is on the larger bodies, at provincial or national or imperial scale: these tended to make grander claims, involved more people, were more visible internationally, were the subject of wider interest and analysis. As well as polity-wide assemblies, our framework encompasses the estates of a province or comparable unit, particularly in a composite and not very centralized formation such as, in their different ways, the Swiss Confederation, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, or the lands of the Austrian Habsburgs; and the ruling bodies of a city–state such as Venice, Genoa, or Geneva. The more local and subordinate assemblies at village, town, or even city level, are not directly included in our framework (save in that they were involved indirectly in the work of these larger bodies); and yet we are conscious of their importance in underpinning ideas about the cultures of discussing and resolving political questions through formally gathered assemblies.

If there is a wide formal variety among early modern representative institutions, individual assemblies could and did change radically over our period, depending on political circumstances. Some, such as the Scottish or English or Dutch, became centres and symbols of resistance to royal authority. Many had a brief efflorescence and moment in the limelight, when they were associated with a political crisis, for a while nurturing vigorous manuscript and print cultures, spreading the influence of their debates far and wide, and encouraging a recognition of these bodies as at the centre of a community's political exchange. Those discussions often encompassed profound reflection on law and politics expressed in a variety of genres, from sophisticated treatises to popular works of imaginative literature.

In some countries over our period national political assemblies were pushed to one side by determined rulers; in others they became more significant, even dominant. But

[32]R. Frost, *The Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania. Volume 1: The Making of the Polish-Lithuanian Union, 1385–1569* (Oxford, 2015), pp. 288–94.

[33][Anonymous senator], 'Deliberacje o królu, panach radzie i urzędnikach, sejmie i bezkrólewiu z r. 1569', in Bolesław Ulanowski (ed.), *Sześć broszur politycznych z XVI i początku XVII stulecia* (Kraków, 1921), pp. 177–9.

[34]Note that the early modern Holy Roman Empire also encompassed Austria, the Swiss Confederation, Lombardy, and the Kingdom of Bohemia, while the Diet only featured representatives of the German states. In that sense, it is slightly misleading to speak of the 'German Imperial Diet'. We thank Wim Blockmans for bringing this issue to our attention. Since there is no adequate translation for the German word *Reich*, however, we have nonetheless chosen to refer to this assembly as the German Imperial Diet to distinguish it from the regional German Diets (*Landtage*). See Stollberg-Rilinger, *The Emperor's Old Clothes*.

the culture of political engagement through assemblies continued to thrive as an idea and as a practice, even in those countries where it was most opposed, not only because other provincial bodies continued to operate, but also because people were well-informed about flourishing parliamentary traditions elsewhere. Viewed in broad and cultural terms, we suggest, parliamentary culture was deeply embedded in the political lives and collective imagination of early modern communities, and needs to be studied as such.

Parliamentary culture: event and communication

Drawing the boundaries of the subject more flexibly than is customary enables us to get beyond the legal and constitutional frameworks that have dominated the field, and to start to build a sense of an overall culture of representative assemblies in the early modern world. The disputes, protests, and negotiations that took place in diets, states, estates, parliaments, *Cortes* were of course about constitutions and the law and formal rights. But they were also, no less importantly, cultural phenomena: performative, ritualistic, rooted in pre-existing traditions and histories of protest and in elite, popular, and local ideas of justice. As such, they provided not only embodiments of abstract concepts such as 'good government' or 'representation', but also a collection of practices and procedures surrounding a critical and resonant event, involving both formal consultation, debate, and argument, and means of registering consent, but also communication at multiple levels: from people to sovereign, and sovereign to people, and within the various components of the assembly.

The ability of an assembly to perform these functions depends essentially on speaking and debate, on interaction and discussion on questions of policy. Representative assemblies were places to identify and to articulate as effectively as possible the central issues affecting a realm, and to offer compelling solutions. As argued by Jörg Feuchter and Johannes Helmrath, contemporaries saw these bodies as quintessential arenas of rhetoric and oratory.[35] Some orations by expert practitioners were seen as exemplary performances, such as a speech given by Jerzy Ossoliński, Grand Chancellor of the crown, before the Polish-Lithuanian *Sejm* in 1649. Ossoliński, speaking on behalf of John Casimir II, provides reasons for the unity of the *Sejm*, i.e. the King, the Senate and the Chamber of Envoys, which is necessary to secure the unity, well-being, and felicity of the Commonwealth, especially when faced with external threat. Rich in metaphors, allegories, and symbols, Ossoliński's address engages the emotions of those present in delineating a vision of the unified commonwealth and the practical necessities of statehood.[36] Such celebrated interventions were part of a broader culture of interchange and discussion among representatives. By delivering (and copying and circulating) speeches, assembly members developed and reinforced ideas underpinning contemporary perceptions of the political community.[37]

[35] J. Feuchter and J. Helmrath, 'Oratory and Representation: The Rhetorical Culture of Political Assemblies, 1300–1600', *Parliaments, Estates & Representation* 29, (2009), pp. 53–66.; Graves, *The Parliaments of Early Modern Europe*, p. 207.
[36] *Mowy Jerzego Ossolinskiego Kanclerza Wielkiego Koronnego* (Warsaw, 1784), pp. 60–7.
[37] J. Feuchter and J. Helmrath, 'Einführung: Parliamentische Kulturen von Mittelalter bis in die Moderne: Reden – Räume – Bilder', in J. Feuchter and J. Helmrath (eds), *Parlamentarische Kulturen vom Mittelalter bis in die Moderne Reden – Räume – Bilder* (Düsseldorf, 2013), pp. 9–31; T. Neu, 'Moralizing Metaphors: Veit Ludwig von Seckendorff on Parliamentary Order', *Parliaments, Estates & Representation* 29, (2009), pp. 85–101.

But communication also took the form of symbolic messages delivered through resonant ritual. The existing scholarship suggests that in terms of ceremony, there was much common ground across Europe, though more work is needed to flesh out these similarities and to determine how far ceremonies observed by representative assemblies differed from those in princely or royal venues. From Aragon to Lithuania, most European assemblies began with a lavish opening ceremony, and all used symbolic objects and developed ritualized procedures that contemporaries deemed vital to the legitimacy of each session. Beyond that, the assembly was (and is) a framework and a style of doing politics that focused around a public event. In the absence of formal written rules, rituals provide such a framework for action and deliberation. This phenomenon is perhaps most evident in the work of Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger and others on symbolic communication in the German Imperial Diet. Their studies have highlighted that the non-verbal communication in assembly meetings through actions and objects could be every bit as significant as spoken dialogue. Such practices may have been particularly important in polities that had no written constitution, such as the German Empire, as they helped to inscribe the political order and notions of legitimacy.[38]

Rituals enacted at parliamentary meetings created a version of the political community, in part through the carefully calibrated placement of individuals within processions and assemblies, and in part through the inclusion of certain groups in, or their exclusion from, particular ceremonies or rituals. Such rituals were often intimately connected to explicitly religious rites, emphasizing the close (though complicated) relationship between church and state in monarchical polities. In the Commonwealth of Poland-Lithuania, for example, every *Sejm* opened with a church service, which included a sermon. As these sermons were delivered by the court preacher, they were often politically pointed, and usually highly regalist in tone. There is little evidence of sermons fulfilling a similar function in kingless polities such as the Dutch Republic. Even so, all public prayers in the churches of the United Provinces were to include a formulaic blessing of the worldly authority of the States General (‘*wij bidden U voor de Staeten Generael*’). That formula was contested by the provincial Estates of Holland in 1663, which argued that blessings were to be addressed to the Estates of the province in whose territory the prayer was said, ‘just as public prayers in the French Church in this country are sometimes addressed *nominatim* to the King of France’.[39]

Such rituals were designed, among other things, to emphasize the corporate and unified nature of the political community and the assembly, in the midst of an event that ran enormous risks of generating conflict. Processes of deliberation and decision-making would often underline the importance of the assembly to the whole community, as they incorporated systems for delivering and considering petitions from individual members of the public, or from specific towns or regions or special interest groups. But the process of discussion and decision-making was also dangerous: it might easily fracture the fragile bonds which held the community together. Governments and other participants preferred to nurture, as far as they could, a culture of consensus, avoiding as far as possible the lasting impression of argument or division. The Dutch States

[38]B. Stollberg-Rilinger, ‘Zeremoniell, Ritual, Symbol: Neue Forschungen zur symbolischen Kommunikation in Spätmittelalter und Früher Neuzeit’, *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung* 27, (2000), pp. 389–405; and see the works cited above, n. 3.

[39]The Hague, NA 2.21.005.39, no. 164, fols 57v-58r.

General, for example, frequently published its resolutions, not only to inform subjects of the assembly's decisions, but also to explain why they had been taken. Similarly, when foreign envoys anonymously spread requests that had been presented to the States General, the assembly would publish its diplomatic responses or alternative 'official' versions to prevent public opinion from running wild.[40] In most cases, however, the techniques generated to attain consensus prevailed. These careful negotiations that blurred distinctions or found compromises in words or actions, utilizing petitions, exchanges of proposals, formal or informal meetings and conferences, shaped the codes of parliamentary culture as they were constantly practised.

These were carefully staged and well-prepared events. What can their *mise-en-scène* tell us about the cultures of parliamentary assembly? The few examples of spatial analysis of pre-modern and modern representative assemblies suggest the benefits of such an approach, which has already proved transformative in studies of royal courts.[41] Whether modern parliaments were designed in a square or hemicycle, for example, has been said to influence whether debate was constructive or confrontational.[42] Similarly, it has been suggested that meetings of the pre-modern Valencian *Cortes* held within a religious building had a more neutral tone than those that were not.[43] Comparative scrutiny of these questions is bound to reveal striking similarities or contrasts. Did meeting in a royal space lend the English Parliament a more 'political' feel, for example, as has been argued was the case for the Portuguese *Cortes*?[44] How far did the fact that the Scottish Parliament most often met in the tolbooth (town hall) of the town or city to which it was summoned lend proceedings a municipal character, and how did the move to a permanent home in 1639, with its new spatial connotations, influence the way in which the parliament operated?[45] Numerous documentary and visual accounts of these assemblies permit the analysis of spatial configurations within the house(s). At the sixteenth-century Imperial Diets, for instance, the Prince-Electors were concerned to maintain pride of place, while meetings of the seventeenth-century Dutch States General adhered to a strictly choreographed seating arrangement based on the historic status of the individual provinces.[46]

[40]G. de Bruin, 'Political Pamphleteering and Public Opinion in the Age of De Witt (1653–1672)', in F. Deen, M. Reinders, and D. Onnekink (eds), *Pamphlets and Politics in the Dutch Republic* (Leiden, 2011), pp. 63–95 (pp. 72–3).

[41]For example: M. Fantoni, G. Gorse, and M. R. Smuts (eds), *The Politics of Space: European Courts c.1500–1700* (Rome, 2009); R. Asch, 'The Princely Court and Political Space in Early Modern Europe', in B. Kumin (ed.), *Political Space in Pre-Industrial Europe* (Farnham, 2009), pp. 43–60.

[42]P. Manow, *In the King's Shadow: The Political Anatomy of Political Representation* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 8–41; P. Seaward, 'Architecture and Revolution at St Stephen's and Beyond', in T. Ayers, J. P. D. Cooper, E. H. Smith, and C. Shenton (eds), *St Stephen's Chapel and the Palace of Westminster* (Woodbridge, 2024), pp. 219–42. See also the contributions in S. Psarra, U. Staiger, and C. Sternberg (eds), *Parliament Buildings: The Architecture of Politics in Europe* (London, 2023), especially chapter 13 (R. Aerts and C. Hoetink, 'The Architecture of Political Representation: A Historical Review'), which calls for a systematic comparative and interdisciplinary study of parliamentary architecture (but which centres on the nineteenth century).

[43]A. Bermúdez, 'Ceremonial Spaces for Parliamentary Sessions in the Kingdom of Valencia (XII-XVII Centuries)', *Parliaments, Estates & Representation* 32, (2012), pp. 3–19.

[44]P. Cardim, *Cortes e Cultura Política no Portugal do Antigo Regime* (Lisbon, 1998), pp. 56–7.

[45]A. Mann, 'House Rules: Parliamentary Procedure', in K. M. Brown and A. R. McDonald (eds), *The History of the Scottish Parliament: Parliament in Context* (Edinburgh, 2010), pp. 122–56 (p. 132). For an exploration of the changing stature of the Scottish Parliament prior to its dissolution in 1707, see L. Stewart, 'The Scottish Constitution before 1707', in P. Cane and H. Kumarasingham (eds), *The Cambridge Constitutional History of the United Kingdom* (Cambridge, 2023), pp. 231–58.

[46]*Protokollarischer Bericht über die Verhandlungen der schmalkaldischen Verbündeten vor Reichstagsbeginn – Regensburg, [1541 April 2]*, available on: https://reichstagsakten.be (Deutsche Reichstagsakten, Der Reichstag zu Regensburg 1541,

Parliamentary culture: record, interpretation, memory

Early modern assemblies were events that people watched, heard and read about, sought to influence, and reimagined. Recording, reporting, and interpreting the events was critically important in creating and transmitting a parliamentary culture throughout and beyond Europe. The textual and visual data resulting from our assemblies has rarely been examined as evidence of a culture, rather than cherry-picked as evidence of specific political events. Yet by considering such cultural expressions side by side systematically for different countries we can recover distinct cultural aspects of individual assemblies and identify transnational connections between them. The prodigious expansion in our period of manuscript and print cultures gave assembly meetings – and the people involved in them – a lasting textual afterlife. There are plenty of indications that outsiders were also attending closely.

Although the deliberations of most representative assemblies were meant to be secret, this was rarely achieved in practice. Assemblies were leaky bodies, whose members often had reasons to disclose and circulate details of what had transpired and how they behaved themselves, and their meetings were held in conditions that invited public attention and scrutiny. Governments – and political factions – might find it convenient to disseminate the speeches of key figures in order to outline programmes and strategies. In some places (say England in the early seventeenth century), the development of vigorous print and parliamentary cultures went hand-in-hand. In the Republic of Venice, supposedly confidential parliamentary business was often quick to spread to the city's town squares and private dwellings.[47] Assembly meetings generated public or semi-public documents as individuals and interest groups outside the direct circle of delegates submitted written communications such as petitions or else through publication of printed appeals, sermons, and addresses.[48] Often widely disseminated, these and other texts such as polemical pamphlets, newsletters, or satiric prints shaped how the wider public perceived parliamentary affairs.

Assembly proceedings were normally archived in written texts, documents that became fuller and more elaborate during our period. The journals of the House of Commons and the Lords in England are a good example, although their contents and survival are patchy before about 1600.[49] The Imperial Diets, by contrast, were reported on in quasi-official records called 'protocols'; a process that began in the fifteenth century and expanded during the reign of Emperor Charles V (1519–56). There is probably a connection with the decentralized nature of the Empire: the colleges, respectively of Electors (*Kurfürstenrat*), Princes (*Reichsfürstenrat*), and Cities (*Reichsstädtekollegium*)

III,1 Protokolle und protokollarische Berichte, No. 63); Abraham de Wicquefort, *Verhael in forme van journael, van de reys ende 't vertoeven van* […] *Carel de II koning van Groot Britannien &c. welcke hy in Hollandt gedaen heeft* (The Hague, 1660), pp. 58, 70–1, 92–3, 103–4, 106–8.

[47] De Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice*, 47–8; cf. G. de Bruin, *Geheimhouding en verraad. De geheimhouding van staatszaken ten tijde van de Republiek (1600–1750)* (The Hague, 1991).

[48] See the contributions in *Parliaments, Estates & Representation* 38, *Early Modern Political Petitioning and Public Engagement in Scotland, Britain and Scandinavia, c.1550–1795* (2018); M. Knights, 'Participation and Representation before Democracy: Petitions and Addresses in Premodern Britain', in I. Shapiro et al. (eds), *Political Representation* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 35–58; P. Loft, 'Petitioning and Petitioners to the Westminster Parliament, 1660–1788', *Parliamentary History* 38, (2019), pp. 342–61.

[49] P. Seaward, 'The English Parliament in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: Sources and Digitisation', in G. Haug-Moritz and G. Vogeler (eds), *Digital Scholarly Edition and Pre-modern Parliamentarianism: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Early Modern Sources* (Göttingen, 2024), pp. 97–107.

– not to mention the division into Catholic and Protestant bodies after the Peace of Westphalia – met separately. This created a need for intelligence on those other bodies, hence the more expansive documentation.[50] On the other hand, there was a growing practice of participants taking their own notes, whether for the immediate political purposes of tracking events and debates, or out of a sense that it was important to record their work for posterity. There are the well-known parliamentary diaries in England. Similar to the Imperial protocols, some of these diaries were written for patrons in the House of Lords who wanted to know what was going on in the lower house. But there are also Jean Bodin's detailed 'diary' (*recueil*) of the 1576–77 meeting of the Estates General at Blois published simultaneously in French and Latin; the *Sejm* diaries (*diariusze sejmowe*) of the Kingdom of Poland and, later, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which by the 1690s began appearing in print; the personal notes of the Augsburg cathedral canon Clemens Sender (1475–1537) concerning the Imperial Diet; and many others.[51] Such practices can suggest the institutionalization of these bodies, the creation of a common institutional memory as well as a sense of the enormous significance of their meetings. Participants, including men of relatively humble origins, may have increasingly felt that their personal actions in these events mattered. In that sense, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were transformative in the *longue durée* of representative politics.

Reports – printed and manuscript documents and no doubt oral accounts – of the proceedings and outcomes of individual events were instrumental in the increasing prominence of representative assemblies in all manner of imaginative and historical writing: poetry, drama, satires, chronicles, and politic histories. These types of sources add a layered perspective on how outsiders (and insiders) described, imagined, or tried to shape the workings of representative assemblies. Playwrights such as Sir David Lyndsay (*c.* 1486–*c.* 1555), William Shakespeare (1564–1616), and Pierre Matthieu (1563–-1621) included parliamentary scenes in their dramas, suggestively depicting the procedures, powers, and roles, respectively, of the Scottish Parliament, the English Parliament, and the French Estates General.[52] Meanwhile, scores of vernacular and neo-Latin tragedies set in ancient Rome evoked transparent parallels between the Roman senate and contemporary representative assemblies. Some literary texts also furnished a striking gender dimension on parliamentary culture. This issue has been rarely if ever addressed because women, other than a few queens regnant such as Mary I or Mary Queen of Scots who presided over representative bodies or those able to view the proceedings from a public gallery, as in Poland-Lithuania or France, never sat in the assemblies. Contemporaries, though, did engage with the question of female representation through imaginative writing. Think of the satiric poems inspired by Aristophanes'

[50]H. Cohn, 'Protocols of the German Imperial Diet during the Reign of Emperor Charles V', in J. Feuchter and J. Helmrath (eds), *Parlamentarische Kulturen vom Mittelalter bis in die Moderne Reden – Räume – Bilder* (Düsseldorf, 2013), pp. 45–64.

[51]C. Kyle, *Theater of State: Parliament and Political Culture in Early Stuart England* (Redwood City, 2012), pp. 7–8; N. Millstone, *Manuscript Circulation and the Invention of Politics in Early Stuart England* (Cambridge, 2016); P. Kewes, 'Representative Assemblies in the Political Thought of Jean Bodin', in Haug-Moritz and Vogeler (eds), *Digital Scholarly Edition and Pre-modern Parliamentarianism*, pp. 43–70; M. Matwijów, *Zbiory materiałów życia publicznego jako typu książki rękopiśmiennej w czasach staropolskich (1660–1760)* (Warszawa, 2020), pp. 38–40, 95–6; 455–62; Stollberg-Rilinger, *The Emperor's Old Clothes*, pp. 114–5; F. De Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 53–4.

[52]See Lyndsay's *Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis* (1552; 1554), Shakespeare's *3 Henry VI* (*c.* 1591), and *Richard II* (*c.* 1595), and Matthieu's closet drama *La Guisiade* (1589).

Ἐκκλησιάζουσαι ('Assemblywomen', 391 BCE) and Erasmus's *Senatulus sive Gynajkosynedrion* (*Senate or assembly of women*, 1528), such as the anonymous *Senatulus to jest sjem niewieści* ('Senatulus or diet of women') of 1543, Marcin Bielski's *Sjem niewiesci* ('Diet of women') of 1566/67, and Jan Oleski's *Sejm panieński (białogłowski)* ('Diet of maidens') of 1617. Or consider the satiric pamphlets of the British Civil Wars such as *The petition of the weamen of Middlesex* (1641). Albeit in a comedic or satiric vein, these works place centre-stage women's role in political deliberation and decision-making; their target is often the ineffectiveness, stupidity, or corruption of male parliamentarians.

Assemblies perhaps had less visual impact than other expressions of power. The visual culture of royalty and diplomacy, with its ceremonial processions and entries, was grander and more prominent. But representative assemblies had their processions as well, some quite sumptuous. There are sixteenth- and seventeenth-century prints of such opening ceremonies of a number of different European bodies; and from the late sixteenth century images of assemblies in session, some involving monarchs, became available in print as well. Among them are those of the French Estates General at Blois in 1576–77; of Elizabeth I presiding over the English Parliament, published in 1608; and of the Imperial Diet at Regensburg in 1641.[53] These images were designed to convey the fullest expression of the embodied political community, rather than necessarily to provide an accurate topographical depiction of a meeting-in-progress; and yet they give the viewer the sense of a real, physical institutional process. Some later and more sophisticated productions – like the 1651 seal of the English Commonwealth – combine both functions in the most subtle form, with in this case the most accurate depiction to date of the House of Commons in session on the obverse, and a map of England and (its directly ruled colony) Ireland on the reverse.[54]

If assemblies were ever more vividly presented visually, they also became more sharply and clearly understood in terms of the histories and the constitutional identities of the communities to which they related. Historical modes of legitimizing political assemblies included not only a shared classical legacy but also a belief in the 'gothic' inheritance of ancient barbarian institutions which the Roman invaders had destroyed.[55] So too they involved growing recourse to medieval privileges and charters. The 'parliamentary moment' of the 1570s and 1580s appears to have been particularly significant in developing increased ideological associations between the assembly and the political community in several European countries – above all, Poland-Lithuania, France, United Provinces, and England, often though not always with a view to assuring the monopoly

[53]R. Le Mangnier (publisher), *Le Vray Pourtraict de L'Assemblée des Estats tenus en la ville de Bloys au moys de Decembre, l'an mil cinq cens soixante & seize*, 1577; illustration to R. Glover, *Nobilitas Politica vel Civilis (1608)*; J. Dümler (publisher), *Eygentlicher Abriß, welcher gestalt die Sessiones bey Publicirung deß Reichs Abschieds den 10 Octobr./30 Septeb. Anno. 1641*, etching. See also H.-A. Chatelain and N. Gueudeville, *Atlas Historique ou Nouvelle Introduction à l'Histoire, à la Chronologie & à la Geographie Ancienne & Moderne; Representée dans de Nouvelle Cartes, ou l'on remarque l'establissement des Etats & Empires du Monde, leur durée, leur chute, & leurs differens Gouvernemens*, 2 vols (Amsterdam, 1705, 1708), which included a series of imposing images of some of the main assemblies of Western Europe. Among them were those of England and Scotland, the Imperial Diet and the Cantons of Switzerland, as well as smaller illustrations of the complex landscape of governing councils and assemblies in France, the Dutch Republic, Spain and Venice, and of the Irish Parliament and the governing bodies of such corporations as the Dutch East India Company, the Teutonic Order, and the Knights of Malta.

[54]J. Cooper, 'Picturing Parliament: The Great Seal of the Commonwealth and the House of Commons', *The Antiquaries Journal* 101, (2021), pp. 369–89.

[55]M. Goldie, 'The Ancient Constitution and the Languages of Political Thought', *The Historical Journal* 62, (2019), pp. 3–34.

of a given confessional orientation and religious policy. In 1579, for example, the rebellious Protestant provinces of the Low Countries invoked their 'ancient' (fourteenth-century) constitutional charters to defend the 'trinity of liberty, privileges, and States as the cornerstone of the political order', which, they alleged, their Habsburg Catholic overlord had violated.[56] It is around the same time that came assertions of – and disputes about – the antiquity and pre-eminence of the privileges of the Parliament and the Commons in England.[57] Meanwhile, both Latin and vernacular historical writings in prose – Raphael Holinshed and others' *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (1577; 1587); Emmanuel van Meteren's *Historia Belgica nostri potissimum temporis* (1598), Jacques Auguste de Thou's *Historia sui temporis* (1604–08), Théodore-Agrippa d'Aubigné's *Histoire universelle* (1616, 1618), devoted ever more attention to what transpired in individual sessions; and by the mid-seventeenth century, Thomas May produced the earliest printed account of one such institution, *The History of the Parliament of England which Began November the Third, 1640* (1647).[58] The royal historian of Castile and the Indies, Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas (1549–1625), even found in the *Cortes* a patron for his work on the contemporary history of the Spanish monarchy from the perspective of the global deeds of the Castilian people.[59] The Pole Jan Zamojski's *De senatu romano libri duo* (1563) was the most sophisticated account of the Roman senate and its origin, development, and *modus operandi* to that date; Zamojski went on to a stellar career in politics, serving as an envoy and later as senator in the *Sejm* of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The Venetian printer and scholar Paulus Manutius's history of the Roman Senate (*Liber de Senatu*), published posthumously in 1581, reads like an implicit warning against the degradation of political assemblies through non-patrician influences, both in the form of meddling autocratic rulers and through the influx of members of the *populus*. While Manutius's projected comparative assessment of Sparta, Rome, and Venice as 'the three most flourishing republics of three ages' (*tres trium aetatum florentissimas republicas*) never materialized, he implicitly casts the corruption of the late Roman Senate as a cautionary example of what might befall his native Venice.[60]

No less steeped in classical learning, Jean Bodin's enduringly influential treatises on history and political philosophy, *Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem* (1566; rev. 1572) and *Les six livres de la République* (1576), also closely scrutinize the role of representative assemblies across a range of political systems. Bearing the unprepossessing title '*Des Corps et Colleges, Estats, & Communautez*', Book III, chapter 7 of the *République*

[56]G. Marnef, 'Resistance and the Celebration of Privileges in Sixteenth-Century Brabant', in J. Pollmann and A. Spicer (eds), *Public Opinion and Changing Identities in the Early Modern Netherlands* (Leiden, 2007), p. 137.

[57]P. Cavill, 'Polydore Vergil and the First English Parliament', in P. Cavill and A. Gajda (eds), *Writing the History of Parliament in Tudor and Early Stuart England* (Manchester, 2018), pp. 37–59; J. G. A. Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law: A Study of English Historical Thought in the Seventeenth Century: A Reissue with a Retrospect* (Cambridge, 1987); Kewes and Kucharski, 'Representative Assemblies in the Political Imagination', in Kewes, Pietrzyk-Reeves, and Seaward (eds), *Early Modern Parliamentary Cultures of Poland-Lithuania and the Kingdoms of Britain and Ireland*.

[58]May was commissioned to continue and redact the work for publication in Latin, *Historiae Parliamenti Angliae Breviarium*, 1650; an English translation appeared in the same year.

[59]These were A. de Herrera y Tordesillas, *La Historia general del Mundo*, 3 vols (Madrid, 1601–12); A. de Herrera y Tordesillas, *Historia general de los hechos de los castellanos en las Islas y Tierra Firme del mar Océano que llaman Indias Occidentales* (Madrid, 1601–15). Tordesillas had petitioned the *Cortes* to sponsor these works.

[60]P. Manutius, *Antiquitatum Romanorum Paulli. Mannuccii. Liber de Senatu* (Venice, 1581), p. 6. See P. Kewes, 'The Roman Senate in the Political Thought and Parliamentary Culture of Early Modern Europe', online essay and response to discussion at The Roman Senate in Early Modern Europe (May 2023) | Online Library of Liberty (libertyfund.org).

conceives of the state as made up of diverse kinds of communities, corporations, estates, and societies, among which representative bodies constitute a vital and enormously beneficial one. Bodin later revised his treatment of such institutions at least in part in light of his own experience of participating in the 1576–77 Estates General at Blois as a delegate of the Third Estate from Vermandois, as well as being an associate of François, Duke of Anjou during his ill-fated bid to obtain the government of the Low Countries in 1580–83. Amplifying the comparative scope of his investigation, Bodin effectively calls for more frequent meetings of the Estates General in France, and this call is most explicit in the expanded Latin version, the *Republica*, published in 1586.[61]

Bodin was not alone in being able to draw on first-hand knowledge of parliamentary culture. Throughout Europe, political philosophers, historians, imaginative writers, and polemicists often served in representative assemblies or else acted as diplomats, commanders, or counsellors in engagement with such assemblies. In the ocean of polemical literature published during the French Wars of Religion, the Dutch Revolt, the Thirty Years' War, and beyond, there were passionate controversies about the right of assemblies to oust unworthy rulers and elect others.[62] So too contemporaries disagreed about whether the religious settlement, whatever it might be, ought to be debated and ratified by assemblies, with or without a prince or king at their helm. In disputing these matters, comparisons and contrasts with ideas and procedures elsewhere were routinely made, and some of the pamphlets voicing these positions were addressed to or written by assembly members.[63]

Parliamentary culture: transnational exchange

Even as the French Estates General and other general assemblies ceased to be regularly summoned, works such as Bodin's *Les six livres* continued to be read throughout Europe, alongside translations, among them Bodin's own revised and expanded Latin edition of 1586, as well as later translations into German, English, and Spanish. In a similar vein, literary writings inspired by political assemblies, such as the 1594 *Satyre Ménippée* (translated into English in 1595), a scathing and witty response to the abortive Leaguer Estates General of 1593, ensured that the French assembly lived on in the public imagination.[64] Bodin and others, notably his near-contemporary Louis Le Roy in his profusely annotated translation of Aristotle's *Politics*, not only wrote of the Estates General, however; they also made frequent reference to foreign assemblies, drawing on examples from classical antiquity and scripture alongside those from medieval and more recent history. Pierre D'Avity's bestselling compilation *Les estats, empires et principautez du monde* (1613), which went through at least 56 French editions as well as being translated into Latin, German, English, and Dutch, and reprinted in augmented versions into the 1660s, provided thumbnail sketches of general assemblies in each country it surveyed.

[61]Kewes, 'Representative Assemblies in the Political Thought of Jean Bodin', 67–8.
[62]See the chapters by R.M. Kingdon, J. H. M. Salmon, and H.A. Lloyd, in J.H. Burns and M. Goldie (eds), *The Cambridge History of Political Thought, 1450–1750* (Cambridge, 1991); S. Mortimer, *Reformation, Resistance, and Reason of State (1517–1625)* (Oxford, 2021), pp. 160–168; M. van Gelderen, *The Political Thought of the Dutch Revolt* (Cambridge, 2002).
[63]See for example M. Stensland, 'Peace or no Peace? The Role of Pamphleteering in Public Debate in the Run-up to the Twelve-Year Truce', in Deen, Onnekink and Reinders, *Pamphlets and Politics in the Dutch Republic*, pp. 227–52.
[64]P.M. Smith, 'The English Translation of the *Satyre Ménippée*: Provenance and Purpose', *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 71, (2009), pp. 113–27.

Early modern scholars, political philosophers, polemicists, and popular writers were far more cosmopolitan in their outlook than we often give them credit for; and they responded to rising demand for information about other polities and representative institutions from educated readers at home and abroad.

But the two main routes of transmission of knowledge about what went on in the assemblies were the budding transnational news networks and the diplomatic channels that connected political centres across Europe.[65] Newsletters, printed *avvisi*, *courants*, gazettes, and newspapers frequently included reports about political assemblies.[66] The writers of newsletters at the Imperial court, for instance, moved with it to cover events at the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Imperial Diets, while the ceremonial attributes of Hungarian Diets featured prominently in newsletters in the early seventeenth; in both cases the reports reached far beyond domestic audiences.[67] This rapidly expanding news culture left its mark on the sessions of general assemblies, which welcomed relevant news from other polities. Extracts from the *London Gazette*, for example, were read in the Dutch States General in 1671.[68]

Diplomatic interactions did still more to spread knowledge of assembly cultures. In our period, the extent and intensity of diplomatic contact between European states increased significantly, albeit unevenly.[69] Venetian *relazioni*, reports produced at the end of an ambassador's mission and read before the Doge and Senate, frequently gave an overview of foreign assemblies and their rituals. Daniele Barbaro's *relazione* of England in 1551, for instance, briefly described how summonses to parliament were issued and elections run, as well as the assembly's opening and voting procedure.[70] By the end of the sixteenth century, ambassadors from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth composed similar end-of-mission reports which were either read before the *Sejm* or archived by it, or both, meaning that here, too, members of the diplomats' home assembly were well informed about how comparable institutions in other polities operated.[71] Diplomats gained knowledge of these assemblies through various means: sometimes they were able to observe proceedings or the ceremonial openings or were invited to address the assembly or else, lacking direct access, solicited information from those who sat in it. Above and beyond *relazioni*-style reports, diplomats included whatever information they could glean about meetings of representative bodies in their regular dispatches. In 1676, for instance, the English diplomatic agent in Gdańsk forwarded handwritten accounts and printed pamphlets describing the Coronation *Sejm* of John III Sobieski in Kraków alongside

[65]J. Raymond and N. Moxham (eds), *News Networks in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden, 2015); A. Pettegree, *The Invention of News: How the World Came to Know about Itself* (New Haven, 2014).
[66]See the contributions in: J. Peacey (ed.), *The Print Culture of Parliament, 1660–1800* (Edinburgh, 2008); H. Droste, *The Business of News* (Leiden, 2021).
[67]N. Schobesberger, 'Mapping the Fuggerzeitungen: The Geographical Issues of an Information Network', in Raymond and Moxham (eds), *News Networks in Early Modern Europe*, pp. 216–40 (p. 239); V. Dillon, 'From Vienna, Prague, or Poland? The Effects of Changing Reporting Patterns on the Ceremonial News of Transylvania, 1619–58', in Raymond and Moxham, *News Networks*, pp. 824–48 (p. 842).
[68]J. Peacey, '"My Friend the Gazetier": Diplomacy and News in Seventeenth-Century Europe', in Raymond and Moxham, *News Networks*, pp. 420–42 (p. 422).
[69]P. Dover and H. Scott, 'The Emergence of Diplomacy', in H. Scott (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern European History 1500–1750: Volume 2 Cultures and Power* (Oxford, 2015), pp. 663–96.
[70]E. Alberi (ed.), *La Relazioni degli Ambasciatori Veneti al Senato*, Serie IV (Florence, 1849–63), iv, pp. 236–7.
[71]For an early example see T. Bałuk-Ulewiczowa, '*Audiatur et Altera Pars*: The Polish Record of the Działyński Embassy of 1597', *British Catholic History* 33, (2017), 501–33.

his own despatches.[72] As well as disseminating parliamentary knowledge through the reports they sent home, the diplomats themselves were often members of their country's own assembly or went on to be so upon return from their mission. The English case demonstrates how extensive this phenomenon could be: of the thirteen men who served as English resident-ambassador to France in Elizabeth I's reign, all but one had sat in the English Parliament before their residency and all but two (one of whom died on embassy) were elected to the Commons afterwards. There is, therefore, considerable potential to analyze how diplomats used the knowledge they had obtained of other assemblies in debates in their own. Diplomats were also potential transmitters of information about their domestic parliamentary culture to courtiers, politicians, and scholars at their host courts. The resident ambassador in France, Valentine Dale, was Bodin's source for details about the English Parliament.[73]

There are well-documented cases where members of foreign communities acted in representative assemblies alongside native deputies. For example, from the 1630s onwards, the Swedish *Riksdag* was frequently attended by Scotsmen; in fact, it was quite common for meetings of the *Riksdag* to include Scottish deputies, both as members of the 'third estate' (*Borgarna*) – predominantly merchants who were granted access based on their citizenship (*burskap*) of a Swedish town – and as members of the nobility (*Adeln*) – who had often been ennobled as a reward for their military service to the Crown. It has even been suggested that some of the political stances taken by these Scots, such as opposition to the *Riksdag's* power to overturn the will of King Karl XI in 1680, reflected their ongoing concern about the abolition of the Stuart monarchy in England in 1649.[74] A future study of parliamentary culture and diplomacy will need to enquire how envoys from countries lacking representative institutions, for instance the Ottoman empire, reported on European assemblies.

The strength and spreading of parliamentary culture

In spite of this plentiful evidence of the dynamism of political assemblies, wide public interest in their activities, and the rapid spread of information about parliamentary culture, modern historiography associates the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries primarily with the 'autocratic turn' and a concomitant decline in the role of representative institutions, especially in Western Europe. In some countries, major assemblies did indeed fall into abeyance, or became marginal to political life. But in others, their stature remained intact, or even grew. In this regard the scholarship has narrowly concentrated on the prominent examples of England (later Britain), and, from the later eighteenth century, the United States of America.[75] There were, however, many other

[72]M. Sawicki, 'The Coronation Parliament of John III Sobieski in French-Language Reports sent to London', *Eastern European History Review* 3, (2021), pp. 137–45; TNA SP 88/14 fols 111r-116r.

[73]Jean Bodin, *Les six livres de la république* (Paris, 1576), C. Fremont, M.-Dominique Cousinet and H. Rochais (eds), 6 vols, (Paris, 1986), i, p. 201. See also: Mark Greengrass, 'The Experiential World of Jean Bodin', in Howell Lloyd (ed.), *The Reception of Bodin* (Leiden, 2013), pp. 67–96.

[74]Note that some of these – often the most influential ones – were second-generation Scotsmen born in Sweden: A. Grosjean and S. Murdoch, 'Scottish Involvement in the Swedish Riksdag of the Seventeenth Century: The Period from Parliamentarianism to Absolutism, *c.*1632–1700', *Parliaments, Estates & Representation* 34, (2014), 1–21.

[75]J. P. Greene, *The Constitutional Origins of the American Revolution* (New York, 2011); D. Hulsebosch, *Constituting Empire: New York and the Transformation of Constitutionalism in the Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill, 2005); M.S. Bilder, *The Transatlantic Constitution* (Cambridge, MA, 2004).

countries where representative assemblies persisted or gained in clout. In the Swiss Confederation and the Dutch Republic, assemblies vied for sovereignty with their princely or imperial rulers, and the Peace of Westphalia formally recognized the independence of both polities in 1648. Elsewhere, assemblies claimed a stronger voice in determining the royal succession and initiating legislation. Henry VIII's deployment of the English Parliament to ratify three distinct Acts of Succession, the last one also empowering the king to make further changes to the order of succession in his last will, fuelled fierce debate in the reign of Elizabeth I and paved the way for later statutory arrangements culminating in the Bill of Rights in 1689 and the Williamite Act of Settlement in 1701.[76] The role of parliament in authorizing religious settlements is also an expansion of its political role. The *Sejm* of the Kingdom of Poland and, after 1569, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, won legislative functions in the sixteenth century which effectively constrained royal power. It was only after the abuse of the *liberum veto* from the mid-1650s onward, a privilege which each member of the *Sejm* could invoke to terminate the session immediately, rendering void all legislation that has been passed, that the Sejm grew progressively dysfunctional.[77] Meanwhile, Sweden became the only European kingdom where all members of the free peasantry (*bondestånd*) were allowed to elect the delegates who represented them at the *Riksdag*, an institution that was itself an earlier sixteenth-century innovation following the break-up of the Kalmar Union and emergence of Sweden as an independent kingdom under the Vasas.[78]

And even as some representative assemblies declined or ceased to operate, culturally they survived and retained their vitality not just within public memories of individual countries but also within those of their close and distant neighbours. Take the French Estates General, called only infrequently from the late fifteenth century, which, after a final meeting in 1614, disappeared for more than 150 years. It too persisted in the national memory, periodically resurfacing in political discourse at moments of crisis. During the Fronde of 1649–51, Queen Regent Anne of Austria actually called an Estates General. This resulted in some local assemblies convening although the general meeting in Paris was ultimately cancelled. Summoning the Estates was considered again during the contested succession to Louis XIV in 1715.[79] Clearly, the idea to mobilize the Estates General remained an option that continued to be debated even if it did not happen for close to two centuries.[80] One of the first things that Louis XVI did to placate his increasingly restless subjects in 1789 was to convoke the Estates General. After that tactic proved ineffective and the revolutionaries seized power from the king, they, too, convoked assemblies. Meanwhile, as the National Assembly (7 June) and National Constituent Assembly (7 July) hinged on debates pitching tradition against innovation, the deputies looked back to the precedents of the historic Estates

[76]Kewes, *Contesting the Royal Succession*; Kewes, 'Parliament and the Principle of Elective Succession in Elizabethan England', in Cavill and Gajda (eds), *Writing*, pp. 106–32.
[77]R. Frost, *After the Deluge: Poland- Lithuania and the Second Northern War 1655–1660* (Cambridge, 1993), especially pp. 131–51.
[78]M. F. Metcalf (ed.), *The Riksdag: A History of the Swedish Parliament* (New York, 1987).
[79]J. Collins, 'Dynastic Instability, the Emergence of the French Monarchical Commonwealth and the Coming of the Rhetoric of "*L'état*", 1360s to 1650s', in R. von Friedeburg and J. Morrill (eds), *Monarchy Transformed: Princes and their Elites in Early Modern Western Europe* (Cambridge, 2017), pp. 87–126 (n. 112). See also J. Collins, *From Monarchical Commonwealth to Royal State, 1561–1651* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming). We are grateful to Professor Collins for sharing his work with us in advance of its publication.
[80]Wim Blockmans, *Medezeggenschap. Politieke participatie in Europa vóór 1800* (Amsterdam, 2020).

General. Two Parisian lawyers, anticipating these debates, undertook the monumental task of compiling a corpus of manuscripts (royal summonses, local registers of elections, *cahiers*, and so on) related to the Estates General. Published in 1789, their nine-volume reference work left no doubt that this was a venerable institution that had fallen into disuse over time.[81] By contrast, provincial assemblies survived and thrived. French historians living during the Third Republic (1870–1940) were too preoccupied with how poorly the Estates General had fared compared to the English Parliament to appreciate the vigour of local and regional assemblies in early modern France.[82] These assemblies belonged to the same cultural spectrum and may have served as a repository of 'parliamentary' traditions even as the Estates General disappeared.

France is not an isolated case. When the people of the Austrian Netherlands – those parts of the Low Countries that roughly correspond to present-day Belgium – rose up against Emperor Joseph II in 1789, the country had not seen a States General since 1634, yet the revolutionaries resurrected the institution almost immediately. Despite the demise of the south-Netherlandish States General, the country had preserved a living parliamentary tradition through the undiminished role of provincial assemblies in ratifying legislation, most notably the Estates of Flanders and Brabant. Besides, the (temporary) outcome of the so-called Brabant Revolution of 1789–90 was a constitutional union of the different south-Netherlandish provinces based on ideas of parliamentary sovereignty that harked back to those first developed during the Dutch Revolt (1568–1648), specifically the Act of Abjuration of 1581.[83] We encounter similar idealizations of parliamentary traditions in relation to the Castilian *Cortes* in the later eighteenth century, or in relation to the States General in the post-Napoleonic constitution of 1814.[84] Even in the less assertive consultative tradition of modern Russia, there were people who looked for models to the national past. The Russian writer Konstantin Aksakov (1817–1860), who coined the term '*Zemskii sobor*' (Assembly of the Land) in a letter to Tsar Alexander II (r. 1855–1881) in 1856, urged the Tsar to restore the early modern Russian assembly, though to no avail.[85] Meanwhile, many (proto-)nationalists of the later-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries held up the English/British parliamentary tradition, transplanted abroad and now asserting itself as a representative of the people of the United States of America. The Dutch statesman Joan Derk van der Capellen tot den Pol published a revolutionary tract in 1781, which, in a vein similar to Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* (1776) or Abbé Sieyès's later pamphlet *Qu'est-ce que le tiers-état?* (1789), directly addressed 'the people' of his country, citing the enfranchised 'thirteen

[81]T. Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary. The Deputies of the French National Assembly and the Emergency of a Revolutionary Culture (1789–1790)* (Princeton, 1996); C. Lalourcé and F.-Alexis Duval, *Recueil des pièces originales et authentiques, concernant la tenue des états généraux*, 9 vols (Paris, 1789). The authors owe this reference to Mark Greengrass.

[82]Collins, *The French Monarchical Commonwealth*, p. 267.

[83]G. Van den Bossche, *Enlightened Innovation and the Ancient Constitution: The Intellectual Justification of Revolution in Brabant (1787–1790)* (Brussels, 2001); R. Vermeir, 'Early Seventeenth-Century Representative Institutions and Law Making in the Habsburg Netherlands', in E. De Bom, R. Lesaffer and W. Thomas (eds), *Early Modern Sovereignties: Theory and Practice of a Burgeoning Concept in the Netherlands* (Leiden & Boston, 2021), pp. 288–306; B. Deseure, 'From Pragmatic Conservatism to Formal Continuity: Nineteenth-Century Views on the Old Regime Origins of the Belgian Constitution', *Journal of Constitutional History / Giornale di Storia Costituzionale* 32, (2016), pp. 257–77.

[84]F.-Xavier Guerra, 'The Spanish-American Tradition of Representation and its European Roots', *Journal of Latin-American Studies* 26, (1994), pp. 1–35 (pp. 2–3); J. Oddens, 'The Experience of State Formation. Chronicling and Petitioning on the Dutch Island of Ameland (c. 1780–1815)', *National Identities* 22, (2020), pp. 1–22.

[85]D. Ostrowski, 'The Assembly of the Land (*Zemskii sobor*) as a Representative Institution', in J. Kotilaine and M. Poe (eds), *Modernizing Muscovy: Reform and Social Change in Seventeenth-Century Russia* (London, 2004), pp. 103–49.

united states of America'.[86] In re-structuring and re-imagining their own political institutions, Europeans did not limit their gaze to the here and now; even when their own assembly had fallen into disuse, they were keenly aware of its history and vestiges in contemporary customs and traditions, and the cultural imprint it shared with representative bodies elsewhere.

With such reflections went a growing awareness of political cultures across the world. From the sixteenth century onward, European parliamentary culture variously spread to distant continents. In their pursuit of colonial expansion, imperial powers, notably Portugal, England/Britain, and the Dutch Republic, installed political assemblies across their new territories or else facilitated colonial representation in the metropolis. The Portuguese granted delegates from Goa and several Brazilian cities access to the *Cortes* in Lisbon, respectively called *Estado da India*, *Estado do Brasil*, and *Estado do Maranhão*; English settlers established forms of assembly in Bombay, Jamaica, and North America which were ratified by the metropolis; the Dutch did so in their North American colony of New Netherland, in Brazil, and in Formosa (Taiwan).[87] Of these colonial bodies, the Anglo-American assemblies are probably the most familiar to Anglophone scholars and historians of later periods. Yet even these have not been explored comparatively or from a cultural perspective, nor have they been considered as a form of trans-Atlantic exchange.[88]

Take Jamaica. Between 1677 and 1679 the committee to oversee British colonial affairs, the Lords of Trade and Plantations, sought to reform the Jamaican assembly. Established in 1664 in imitation of the Westminster Parliament, it was now to be remade in the image of the Parliament of England's earliest colony, the Lordship (later Kingdom) of Ireland. Building on John Locke's proposal of 1674, the Lords considered introducing a bill based on the so-called Poynings' Law (1494), according to which the Irish Parliament could enact only those laws approved in advance by king and council in England.[89] Though ultimately the plan was shelved, alternative ways of managing the colonies as integral parts of the crown were being floated on the model of Portuguese imperial practice. Writing in 1708, a year after the Anglo-Scottish union and creation of the Parliament of Great Britain, the English pamphleteer and historian John Oldmixon praised the summoning of three overseas chambers (Goa, Bahia, and Maranhão) to the Portuguese *Cortes*. Oldmixon went so far as to suggest that the crown should follow the

[86]J. Sterk, 'The Pamphlet that Woke a Nation: The Search for Readers', *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies* 39, (2019), pp. 1–24; J. Derk van der Capellen tot den Pol, *Aan het volk van Nederland: Het democratisch manifest van Joan Derk van der Capellen tot den Pol* [1781], ed. W.F. Wertheim and A. H. Wertheim-Gijse Weenink (Weesp, 1981), p. 100.

[87]P. Cardim, 'Political Status and Identity: Debating the Status of American Territories across the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Iberian World', *Rechtsgeschichte – Journal of the Max Planck Institute for European Legal History* 24, (2016), 101–16.

[88]For an overview of this process, see Kewes, Seaward, and van der Meulen (eds), *Parliamentary Culture and Indigenous Traditions of Assembly*.

[89]*The Calendar of State Papers, Colonial: North America and the West Indies 1574–1739*, VII (6 January 1674), X (30 April 1677; 10 May 1677; 16 November 1677; 2 April 1679; 4 April 1679; 28 May 1679; 2 June 1679; 20 August 1679). The quotation is taken from the session of 2 April 1677. The key studies are A. Graham, 'Jamaican Legislation and the Transatlantic Constitution, 1664–1839', *The Historical Journal* 61, (2018), pp. 327–55; and A. Graham, 'Legislatures, Legislation and Legislating in the British Atlantic, 1692–1800', *Parliamentary History* 37, (2018), pp. 369–88. See also C. Pestana, *The English Conquest of Jamaica: Oliver Cromwell's Bid for Empire* (Cambridge, MA, 2017). For a recent study of the inner workings of the early modern Irish Parliament, see: B. McGrath, *The Operations of the Irish House of Commons, 1613–48* (Dublin, 2023).

Portuguese example and adopt the same practice for its North American colonies so as to increase the internal cohesion of Britain's empire.[90]

If the links and communication between colonial assemblies and the metropolis have been scarcely studied, those between such European exports and Indigenous traditions of deliberation and political decision-making are uncharted territory. Consider the Potiguara of Brazil. The Potiguara were a native political community estimated to have numbered about 100,000 people when the Portuguese had arrived on their shores around 1500. After the Dutch West India Company (WIC) had conquered parts of Brazil from the Portuguese and organized a Diet (*Landdag*) in August of 1640 to aid relations between the Dutch command and the Portuguese white freemen, the Potiguara organized their own gathering in Tapesserica, Goiana in 1645. Not much is known about this meeting: did it draw on the Potiguara tradition, or was it simply an attempt to amass a collective counterweight to the colonizers based on what the Potiguara learnt of the Europeans' own cultures of deliberation? Earlier scholarship has emphasized the latter aspect, framing the Potiguara as tools of the Europeans.[91] Yet some historians have recently begun to reassess the Tapesserica assembly by addressing the influence of pre-colonial practices of organizing councils (*Conselhos de Chefes*).[92] This work is still in its infancy, however, and there is a general dearth of scholarship that incorporates the perspectives of Indigenous communities or that investigates how European traditions of assembly cross-pollinated in colonial contexts. Our ongoing conversation about transnational parliamentary culture in the early modern world would greatly benefit from such a multilateral approach and sustained methodological reflection on the challenges of reconstructing Indigenous forms of deliberation and collective decision-making.

Towards a history of parliamentary culture

We have argued that parliamentary culture is not a purely national phenomenon. Rather, it is among the 'ideas, products, processes and patterns that operate over, across, through, beyond, above, under, or in-between polities and societies', to take Akira Iriye and Pierre-Yves Saunier's sense of the range of transnational studies.[93] Demonstrating this in a systematic fashion will be more of a challenge. There are vast national historiographies covering the constitutional status and activities of representative assemblies, in some cases in extraordinary detail, each of them largely in their own language. This is not to mention the monumental source editions that have been produced over the past century-and-a-

[90] J. Oldmixon, *The British empire in America: containing the history of the discovery, settlement, progress and present state of all the British colonies on the continent and islands of America* … (London, 1708), xxxiv–xxxv. We owe this reference to Pedro Cardim.

[91] M. Meuwese, *Brothers in Arms, Partners in Trade. Dutch-Indigenous Alliances in the Atlantic World, 1595–1674* (Leiden, 2012), pp. 170–1. On the Diet or *Landdag*, see J. van den Tol, *Lobbying in Company: Economic Interests and Political Decision Making in the History of Dutch Brazil, 1621–1656* (Leiden, 2021), pp. 46–90.

[92] B. Miranda, 'The 1645 Potiguara Assembly in Tapesserica: Indigenous Alliances in the Dutch-Portuguese Wars in Brazil', in Kewes, Seaward, and van der Meulen (eds), *Parliamentary Culture and Indigenous Traditions of Assembly*. See also: M. van den Bel and M. Françozo (eds), *The Tapuia of Northeastern Brazil in Dutch Sources (1628–1648)* (Leiden, 2023).

[93] See for example the entries in A. Iriye and P. Yves Saunier (eds), *Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History: From the mid-19th Century to the Present Day* (London, 2009); P.-Yves Saunier, *Transnational History* (Basingstoke, 2013); F. Paisley and P. Scully (eds), *Writing Transnational History* (London, 2019). The quotation is from A. Iriye and P.-Yves Saunier, 'Introduction', in Iriye and Saunier, *Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History*, pp. xvii–xxii (p. xx).

half, which are increasingly digitized and made searchable.[94] There is no shortage of material, but trying to find patterns and commonalities is looking for the wood among a vast number of highly distinctive individual trees. Large-scale collaboration across disciplinary and national historiographical frontiers will be essential: we need to bring together scholars not only from different linguistic and national backgrounds but also from a range of fields: intellectual history, literary criticism, art history, historical anthropology, political science, legal-constitutional history, and almost certainly several others.

Only then can we start an informed conversation about early modern parliamentary culture, its evolution, expansion, and change. In completing this essay, we realize just how little we still know of this transnational phenomenon. At the same time, we are firmly convinced that there is immense collective expertise that could be harnessed to do justice to it: the two projects we are currently completing, a comparative study of parliamentary culture of Poland-Lithuania and kingdoms of Britain and Ireland, *c*. 1490–1720, and of the interaction between early modern parliamentary culture and Indigenous traditions of assembly, suggest as much.[95] The result should ultimately be to provide a new narrative that recognizes the existence, survival, and potency of this common culture – not solely in those countries where it so patently flourished, but also in countries where its existence has so often seemed either transitory or tenuous; and, illuminated by insights from other histories of early modern culture, describes and understands the continuities and commonalities of that culture across the period, across Europe, and beyond it. Eventually that will help us to realize that parliamentary culture is not just a development of something whose past belongs peculiarly to one country or another, but a body of ideas and practices that reflects the history of a continent, and perhaps more than a continent, as a whole.

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[94]There are several recent and ongoing projects to digitize the records of political assemblies, both 'national' and regional. For the Scottish Parliament, see https://www.rps.ac.uk/; the German Imperial Diets: https://reichstagsakten.de; Dutch States General: https://republic.huygens.knaw.nl/; English Parliament: https://www.british-history.ac.uk; Estates of Languedoc: http://etats-du-languedoc.univ-montp3.fr/index.php?menu=presentation. Other projects that are not solely aimed at digitizing the records of assemblies yet contain much useful material: https://beyond-2022.github.io/index.html, and https://chancery.tcd.ie/content/welcome-circle (both of which are devoted to Irish records, mostly for the medieval period). Our project website, https://parliamentaryculture.web.ox.ac.uk/, will be the first resource to provide brief essays and up-to-date bibliographies on all the representative assemblies extant from the late fifteenth century to the early eighteenth.

[95]The former, a co-authored monograph, comprises chapters on a range of themes written in collaboration by teams of scholars from different disciplines and national traditions; the latter, a mini-special issue of a journal, invites closer scrutiny of how colonial empires negotiated the culture of representation, decision-making, and consent in their overseas territories.

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