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Ceremonial Receptions in Early Modern Portugal: Comparative Perspectives for a Truly Iberian History

The purpose of this proposed project is to complete the last phase of research necessary to finish my book manuscript on “Cities and Sovereigns: Ceremonial Receptions of Iberia as Seen from Below, 1350-1550.” Most often, these ceremonies—which involved a reception of royalty by municipal delegates, an elaborate procession through the city streets, as well as a variety of festivities and celebrations—have been regarded by scholars as mere vehicles for royal “propaganda,” supposedly absorbed by a passive urban audience.

My study adopts a different perspective: that of the cities hosting the ceremonies. It does so in two principle ways. First, it employs a different source base. Instead of relying on the biased royally sponsored narrative chronicles and printed pamphlets, it employs municipally held archival sources (account books, receipts, legal testimonies, city-hall minutes). Second, the study holds to a different set of controlling assumptions. Instead of assuming a static monarch-centric model, it allows for the possibility of a dynamic city-sovereign relationship—one that could fluctuate with any variety of political and economic circumstances.

My central argument is that the cities were fully active participants in these ceremonies, and indeed controlled most of the decision-making and financing of them. I arrived at such conclusions by comparing how cities and sovereigns interacted across the Iberian Peninsula. In my dissertation, some of my statements had to be suggestive, since for Portugal I was only able to examine sources from the city of Évora. As I move to publish my book with the sort of definitive statements that will withstand the scrutiny of fellow experts, I will need to travel to the cities of Lisbon, Santarém, and Coimbra. Supplemental funds from the AFHRP would allow me to conduct the few days of the travel necessary to survey all the major cities of Portugal.