

Biographical dictionaries of members of parliaments in Southern Europe: History studied through its participants

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SUMMARY

In recent years editions of biographical dictionaries have been launched in Spain in the long Continental European and Anglophone tradition of such works, but so far only for individual regions. They form the indispensable basis for the collective biographies (prosopography) of members of parliament and other political elites.

In 1971, the journal *Daedalus* (vol. 100) published an article by L. Stone on prosopography. The author offered an assessment of collective biography, or prosopography as it was called by historians in the past. Prosopography can be defined as a method of work and research in which we give a privileged position to a series of common characteristics in a group of historical actors. The serialized analysis of their lives and public interventions enables us to obtain patterns of behaviour, or generalizations, while at the same time preserving individual influence. Besides, if we juxtapose or correlate this with other information, we construct elements of veracity and verification by which, through comparison, we approach a historical language with greater levels of accuracy and probability for historical truth. Where our aim is the analysis of the roots of political or social action, prosopography is a method that can offer new results. In our case, we set ourselves to analyse the elites that managed public power, elites influenced by the individual and collective past.

This planned study can be preceded, as a prior step, by the preparation of biographical dictionaries which are the empirical base for prosopographical study.¹

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¹ A general view of the importance of biography in the contemporary era can be found in E. Engelberg and H. Schleier, 'The Contribution made by Historical Biographies of the 19th and 20th Centuries towards deepening Historical Biography', Comité International des Sciences Historiques,

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This interest in biography is not something new, although the changes undergone by historiography in the last two decades have given new impetus to this historical genre,² which has resulted in the publication of a large number of biographies and even in the creation of an International Autobiography and Biography Association.³ However, this flowering of political biography has not lacked its critics, who consider that it is not possible to present personages as models of a social group, and that consequently, biography can never transcend the particular case.⁴

This tradition of preparing biographical dictionaries began in the United Kingdom in the eighteenth century. The publication between 1747 and 1766 of the first work with such characteristics⁵ started a flourishing line of work in that country which has not been interrupted up to the present. Facing the ups and downs in the production of individual biographies, the genre of biographical dictionaries has not declined at any time, and their publication continues, while it is true that their characteristics have varied over time. The construction of the new liberal states in Western Europe over the course of the nineteenth century led the emergent bourgeoisie to elaborate cultural instruments with the aim of legitimizing the new model of society and spreading the principles of liberalism. It is in this framework that we should understand the proliferation of national histories and biographical dictionaries. The latter, unlike individual biographies, were to find continuity throughout the contemporary period. The countries that undertook this work gave it continuity by extending the original editions and preparing new dictionaries. In any case, the editions of national biographical dictionaries were to continue until the present day.

If we consider their origin, we see two different models in the preparation of these works. In the countries of Continental Europe, the initiative proceeds from the governments, which want to make known the life of the personages of merit in their countries. The dictionaries that have been prepared in Sweden,⁶

17 Congreso Internacional de Ciencias Históricas. II. Sección Cronológica. Metodología. La biografía histórica (Madrid, 1992), pp. 1,105–8.

² Reflections on this revival from the Spanish perspective can be found in *Historia Contemporánea* 13–14 (1996) pp. 17–349; from the Italian perspective, in E. Mana, 'La biografia politica: alcune osservazioni sulla produzione italiana recente', *Ricerche di Storia Politica* 10 (1995); pp. 101–16, and from the French perspective in C. Heinritz and A. Rammstedt, 'L'approche biographique en France', *Cahiers internationaux de Sociologie* 91 (1991), pp. 331–70.

³ On the International Autobiography and Biography Association (IABA), see *Biography* 22–4 (1999), p. 475.

⁴ For this debate, see the articles by P. O'Brien, 'Is Political Biography a Good Thing?'; P. Croft, 'Political Biography: A Defence (1)'; J. Derry, 'Political Biography: A Defence (2)', and N. Hamilton, 'In Defence of the Practice of Biography', all published in *Contemporary British History* 10, no. 4, (1996), pp. 60–86.

⁵ *The Biographia britannica: or, The lives of the most eminent persons who have flourished in Great Britain and Ireland, from the earliest ages down to the present times*, published in London in 7 volumes.

⁶ In Sweden, the first biographical dictionary was the *Biographiskt lexicon öfver namnkunnige svenska män* (Upsala, 1835–57), published in 23 volumes, an undertaking subsequently continued in the *Svenskt biografiskt lexikon* (Örebro, 1857–1907), published in 10 volumes; at present, there is the *Svenskt biografiskt lexikon* (Stockholm, 1918–97), of which 29 volumes have so far been published, volume 29 reaching the letter 'R'.

Holland,⁷ Austria,⁸ Germany,⁹ Belgium,¹⁰ France,¹¹ Denmark,¹² Norway,¹³ Luxemburg,¹⁴ Italy,¹⁵ and Spain¹⁶ follow this model. Facing this list of national biographies obeying a public impetus from governments, academies of sciences and so on, in the Anglophone world there was a primacy of projects financed by private individuals. The best-known is the British *Dictionary of National Biography* (London, 1885–1901), published in 22 volumes.¹⁷ This work was started on

⁷ The year 1852 saw the start of publication of the *Biografisch Woordenboek der Nederlanden* (Haarlem, 1852–78), in 24 volumes. This work has found continuity in the *Nieuw Nederlandsch Biografisch Woordenboek* (Leiden, 1911–37), and at present in the *Biografisch Woordenboek van Nederland* (Gravenhage, 1979–2001), published in 5 volumes.

⁸ In Austria, *Der grosse österreichische Hausschatz: biographisches Lexicon des Kaiserthums Oesterreich* (Vienna, 1856–1891) was published in 60 volumes. It finds continuity in the *Neue Österreichische Biographie ab 1815: Grosse Österreicher* (Vienna, 1923–87), published in 22 volumes, and subsequently in the *Österreichisches Biographisches Lexikon 1815–1950* (Graz, 1957–2001), published in 11 volumes, although not yet completed. Volume 11 reaches the letter 'S'.

⁹ In Germany, the *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* (Berlin, 1875–1912) was published in 56 volumes, an undertaking which continues in the *Neue Deutsche Biographie* (Berlin, 1953–2003), published in 21 volumes, although not yet completed. Volume 21 reaches the letter 'R'. To this work must be added the *Biographisches Handbuch der SBZ/DDR 1945–1990* (Munich, 1996–7), published in two volumes and dedicated to biographies of personalities of the German Democratic Republic.

¹⁰ In Belgium, we find one of the most significant works for understanding the nationalist meaning of these dictionaries. In 1845, the Belgian Government decided to create the *Commission de la Biographie Nationale*, formed by members of the *Académie Royale des Sciences, des Lettres et des Beaux-Arts de Belgique*, to draw up a national biography that would contain all persons of merit. The result of this work was to be the publication of the *Biographie Nationale*, published in Brussels between 1866 and 1986 in 28 volumes, and between 1957 and 1986 in 16 supplements. The latest supplement carries the announcement that the *Académie Royale des Sciences, des Lettres et des Beaux-Arts de Belgique* has decided to start a *Nouvelle Biographie Nationale*.

¹¹ In France, this work was started later on. The *Dictionnaire de Biographie Française* (Paris, 1933–2004), published in 20 volumes, has still not been concluded; volume 20 reaches the letter 'L'.

¹² In Denmark, also in the twentieth century, the *Dansk biografisk Leksikon* (Copenhagen, 1933–44) was published in 27 volumes, and continued in the *Dansk biografisk Leksikon* (Copenhagen, 1979–84) with 16 volumes.

¹³ In Norway, some years previously, the *Norsk Biografisk Leksikon* (Oslo, 1921–83) was published in 19 volumes.

¹⁴ In Luxemburg, publication began even later of the *Biographie nationale du Pays de Luxembourg depuis ses origines jusqu'à nos jours* (Luxemburg, 1949–75), in 11 volumes.

¹⁵ Italy was one of the last European countries to start this undertaking. The year 1960 saw publication of the first volume of the *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, which is still incomplete today. Published in Rome in 62 volumes between 1960 and 2004, it has reached the letter 'H'.

¹⁶ In Spain, there has to date been no national biographical dictionary, although at present a project for its preparation exists, directed by the *Real Academia de la Historia* (RAH). In June 2000, the press published the news that an agreement had been signed between the Spanish government and the RAH for the preparation over eight years of the *Diccionario Biográfico Español*, at a cost of 4,800,000 €. The work, with 50,000 entries, will be published both on paper in 20 volumes, and in CD-Rom format, and it will be possible to consult it on the Internet (*El País* and *ABC*, 9 June 2000).

¹⁷ Appendices were subsequently published over the course of the twentieth century with the title *The Twentieth Century DNB*. Finally, an edition was published on CD-Rom, which facilitated consultation of a work that had become dispersed amongst the initial volumes, the appendices, volumes of corrections and additions and so on. Concerning its transfer to CD-Rom, see G. Abbattista, 'Dictionary of National Biography on CD-ROM', Oxford University Press, 1995', *Storia della Storiografia* 29

the initiative of the publisher George Smith, with the collaboration of Leslie Stephen as editor. This dictionary became the model for many subsequent works, and its entries served as a reference for other thematic dictionaries owing to the rigour of their elaboration. We can place the American biographical dictionary, very similar to the British dictionary, within this Anglophone tradition. However, the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography/Dictionnaire Biographique du Canada* (Toronto and Quebec, 1966–89), published in French and English in 14 volumes,¹⁸ is of greater interest to us because of the innovations that it introduces.

But these general biographical dictionaries are no more than a small part of what this type of study can offer. In the political sphere, there has been an important development of works dealing with ministers¹⁹ or with local and pro-

(1996), pp. 133–6. A new *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* was published in 60 volumes in 2004 and online in 2005.

¹⁸ This work was due to the patronage of James Nicholson (1861–1952), who left a legacy to the University of Toronto to finance the creation of a National biographical dictionary similar to that of the British. The novelty of this work resides in the fact that it adopts a chronological structure, rather than the alphabetical structure normally found in previous models. The editors decided to create a structure by chronological periods; (the periods employed are: Vol. I – 1000–1700, Vol. II – 1701–1740, Vol. III – 1741–1770, Vol. IV – 1771–1800, Vol. V – 1801–1820, Vol. VI – 1821–1835, Vol. VII 1836–1850, Vol. VIII – 1851–1860, Vol. IX – 1861–1870, Vol. X – 1871–1880, Vol. XI – 1881–1890, Vol. XII – 1891–1900, Vol. XIII – 1901–1910, Vol. XIV – 1911–1920), within which the biographies are ordered from A to Z. They considered that there were three reasons for working by periods rather than alphabetically. In this way, it is easier to contrast the biographies of contemporaneous persons, since they are drawn up at the same time, unlike in alphabetical dictionaries. In addition, it makes consultation easier for a person interested in one period. Finally, it facilitates revision, which can be done by periods rather than in the work as a whole. But the interest held by this work does not end in its novel structure: it was also one of the first national dictionaries to change its format to CD-Rom; R. Cook and R. Belanger (eds), *Dictionary of Canadian Biography/Dictionnaire Biographique du Canada (CD-ROM)* (University of Toronto Press and Université Laval, 2000). In this new format, the chronological and alphabetical arrangements lose their importance, since, with all of the volumes available on CD-Rom, both chronological and alphabetical searches can be made.

¹⁹ In the United States, we find the *Biographical Directory of the United States Executive Branch 1774–1977* (Westport, CT, 1977), published by R. Sobel, which contains the biographies of the ministers, vice-presidents and presidents of the Continental Congress of the United States. In France, we find the *Dictionnaire des ministres de 1789 à 1989* (Paris, 1990), which includes all of the ministers. In the United Kingdom, the *Biographical Dictionary of British Prime Ministers* (London, 1998), only deals with prime ministers. In Portugal, a biographical dictionary of ministers and parliamentary members of the First Republic has been published (A.H. Oliveira Marques, coord., *Parlamentares e Ministros da 1ª República (1910–1926)* (Lisbon: Assembleia da República, 2000), which can be considered an advance compared to broader works. In Italy, we find an index of senior state *Governi, alte cariche dello Stato, alti magistrati e prefetti del Regno d'Italia*. The third edition published in Rome in 1989 is more complete than the two previous editions (1973 and 1978), which could be considered as merely the basis for preparing a biographical dictionary. Finally, in Spain, after the classic work by García Madaria, *Estructura de la Administración Central (1808–1931)* ('Structure of the Central Administration [1808–1931]') (Madrid, 1982), a first approach to the study of the governments was published in *El Poder y sus hombres ¿Por quiénes hemos sido gobernados los españoles? (1705–1998)* ('Power and its men: Who have the Spanish been ruled by? [1705–1998]') (Madrid, 1998), which is not exactly a biographical dictionary, but its information is equivalent to what these usually contain. An index of Spanish ministers has recently been published, *Gobiernos y ministros españoles (1808–2000)* ('Spanish governments and ministers [1808–2000]') (Madrid, 2001), as a prelude to a future biographical dictionary that is being prepared (see

vincial authorities.²⁰ However, what is especially interesting to us are those dealing with parliamentary members. The two studies that are most complete, and closest to us, are *The History of Parliament*,²¹ from the United Kingdom, and the French study, *Dictionnaire des Parlementaires Français*.²² To the latter must be added a partial work dedicated to the revolution, the *Dictionnaire des Constituants (1789–1791)* (2 volumes, Paris, 1991). In Portugal, besides the already mentioned work dealing with ministers and parliamentary members of the First Republic, a project is underway at the Institute of Social Sciences of the University of Lisbon²³ to produce a *Dicionário biográfico Parlamentar (1834–1910; 1926–1974)*, the first volume of which, from A to C, has recently been published.²⁴

In Spain, there is no biographical dictionary of the Spanish parliamentary members, nor is any even projected. One recent publication is *Quién es quién: sus*

J.R. Urquijo Goitia, 'Diccionario biográfico de los ministros españoles del siglo XIX', *Historia contemporánea* 13–14 (1996), pp. 323–30.

²⁰ The following are some Spanish examples. In Bizkaia, the *Diccionario biográfico de los Diputados Generales, burócratas y patricios de Bizkaia (1800–1876)* ['Biographical dictionary of the deputies, bureaucrats and patricians of Bizkaia [1800–1876]'] (Bilbao, 1995), dealing with the political elite of the province; the works *Bilbao desde sus alcaldes: Diccionario biográfico de los alcaldes de Bilbao y gestión municipal en tiempos de revolución liberal e industrial (1836–1901)* ('Bilbao, starting with its mayors: Biographical dictionary of the mayors of Bilbao and municipal management in the time of the Liberal and Industrial Revolutions [1836–1901]') (Bilbao, 2002) and *Bilbao desde sus alcaldes: Diccionario biográfico de los alcaldes de Bilbao y gestión municipal en tiempos de revolución democráticas (1902–1937)* ('Bilbao, starting with its Mayors: Biographical dictionary of the mayors of Bilbao and municipal management in the time of the democratic revolutions [1902–1937]') (Bilbao, 2003); that dealing with the political elite of the province of Alava, *Diccionario biográfico de los diputados generales, consultores y secretarios de gobierno de Álava (1800–1876)* ('Biographical dictionary of the general deputies, advisers and government secretaries of Alava [1800–1876]') (Vitoria, 2004), and those dealing with the *foral* institutions of Navarre: *Diccionario biográfico de los diputados forales de Navarra (1840–1931)* ('Biographical Dictionary of the *foral* Deputies of Navarre [1840–1931]') (Pamplona, 1996) and *Diccionario biográfico de los diputados forales de Navarra (1931–1984) y de los secretarios de la Diputación (1834–1984)* ('Biographical Dictionary of the *foral* Deputies of Navarre [1931–1984] and of the Secretaries of the Deputation [1834–1984]') (Pamplona, 1998).

²¹ This work begins its study in the Middle Ages, but with respect to the modern era we would mention R.G. Thorne (ed.), *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1790–1820*, 5 vols (London, 1986). The biographies of the parliamentary members are contained in the third to fifth volumes. At present, it is possible to consult everything published previously on CD-Rom; see M.J. Daunt, 'Virtual representation: The *History of Parliament* on CD-ROM', *Past & Present* 167 (2000), pp. 238–61.

²² A. Robert and G. Cougny (eds), *Dictionnaire des parlementaires français, comprenant tous les membres des assemblées françaises et tous les ministres français, depuis le 1er mai 1789 jusqu'au 1er mai 1889, avec leurs noms, état civil, états de services, actes politiques, votes parlementaires, etc.*, 5 vols (Paris, 1889–91), continued in J. Jolly (ed.), *Dictionnaire des Parlementaires Français: Notices biographiques sur les ministres, députés et sénateurs français de 1889 à 1940*, 8 vols (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1960–77), and subsequently in F. Barbier, M.A. Bergounioux and M.C. Charle (eds), *Dictionnaire des Parlementaires Français: Notices biographiques sur les parlementaires français de 1940 à 1958*, 4 vols (Paris, 1988–2001).

²³ The team preparing it consists of Maria Filomena Mónica, Manuel Braga Cruz, Maria de Fátima Bonifácio, Nuno Monteiro and Rui Ramos.

²⁴ M. Filomena Mónica (dir.) *Diccionario biográfico parlamentar (1834–1910)*, vol. I (A–C) (Lisbon: Instituto de Ciências Sociais da Universidade de Lisboa – Assembleia da República, 2004).

señorías los diputados. Atlas de la democracia parlamentaria española ('Who's who: The Right Honourable Deputies. Atlas of Spanish Parliamentary democracy') (Madrid, 2002), which refers solely to the members of the Congress of Deputies since 1977. Because of its sources and methodology, it cannot be compared to the works we have mentioned previously. There are, however several works of a regional scope. The first was the *Diccionario biográfico de los parlamentarios de Vasconia (1808-1876)* ('Biographical dictionary of the parliamentary members of Vasconia [1808-1876]') (Vitoria, 1993), which will be continued with the *Diccionario biográfico de los parlamentarios de Vasconia (1876-1939)* ('Biographical dictionary of the parliamentary members of Vasconia [1876-1939]'), to be published in the next few years.²⁵ In Castile and Leon, a team directed by Pedro Carasa (University of Valladolid) published the work *Élites castellanas de la Restauración* ('Castilian Elites of the Restoration'),²⁶ and in Galicia a group, co-ordinated by X.R. Barreiro Fernández, has published the work *Parlamentarios de Galicia: biografías de diputados e senadores (1810-2001)* ('Parliamentary members of Galicia: Biographies of deputies and senators [1810-2001]') (Coruña, 2002). In Cantabria, a work has been published along the same lines,²⁷ which besides including the parliamentary members of the Spanish Cortes, also considers the parliamentary members of the autonomous communities and the representatives of non-elective assemblies such as the Consultative National Assembly of the Dictatorship of Primo de Rivera and the Cortes of the Francoist Dictatorship.

Recently, we have received news of the existence of a team directed by Professor Borja de Riquer, which has begun preparation of a *Diccionario biográfico de los parlamentarios catalanes del siglo XX* ('Biographical dictionary of the Catalan parliamentary members of the Twentieth century').

²⁵ There is project of collaboration between the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU) and the Basque Parliament to prepare this work, following the previous model.

²⁶ Published in Salamanca in 1997, in two volumes. The first of them was a biographical dictionary of the parliamentary members of Castile and Leon in the Restoration (1876-1923).

²⁷ A. Garrido (ed.), *Diccionario biográfico de los parlamentarios de Cantabria (1902-2002)* (Santander: Parlamento de Cantabria, 2003), which will be followed with a similar work dealing with the nineteenth century.