'Keeping your eyes and ears open': a diplomatic counsel for an Anglo-Aragonese alliance at the outbreak of the Hundred Years' War

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Abstract:

Late Medieval diplomacy intrinsically relied on informal diplomatic networks to remedy administrative and governmental deficiencies in the management of international affairs. In this article I examine the deeds of the Catalonian merchant Peter Sesers and his associates, who acted as informal diplomatic agents, and possibly spies, in England between 1333 and 1339, negotiating an Anglo-Aragonese alliance after the outbreak of the Hundred Years' War. Significantly, Sesers's activity in England is recorded in an unedited and overlooked counsel, presented to Edward III and his council between March and May 1338 and preserved at TNA. Acting as an international negotiator, in his counsel Sesers shows how, alongside their mercantile business on the south-east coast of England, he had gathered confidential information and rumours, exploited to build political arguments in favour of an Anglo-Aragonese alliance. In particular, Sesers focuses on the importance for the English of setting international alliances, especially on the Franco-Iberian borders. The latter would have allowed the English to surround the French kingdom and reconquer the Duchy of Aquitaine. Equally, Sesers addressed the importance for the English of exploiting the presence of Robert of Artois in England and his French connections in order to establish new continental alliances. Finally, in his last section of the counsel, Sesers sheds new light on how unofficial diplomatic missions were organized, highlighting aspects of fourteenth-century diplomatic and administrative practices which have been overlooked because of lack of surviving evidence. In conclusion, the article engages with established scholarly debates on the international dimension of the Hundred Years' War and the formation of diplomatic and administrative practices in the Late Medieval period.

Please Note: I have transcribed the counsel which could be added as Appedix to the article, if the Editors thought this may be suitable. The transcription consists of about 3,000 words. I have not attached the transcription yet, because of the length of the article.

'Keeping your eyes and ears open': a diplomatic counsel for an Anglo-Aragonese alliance at the outbreak of the Hundred Years' War

In my recent monograph on Anglo-papal relations during the first phase of the Hundred Years' War (1305-1360), I focused on informal and unofficial contacts alongside formal diplomatic missions, maintaining that Late Medieval diplomacy intrinsically relied on informal diplomatic networks to remedy administrative and governmental deficiencies in the management of international affairs. Here I mainly defined as "unofficial" missions those undertaken by envoys who went on diplomatic duties without receiving a formal credence or procuration as well as those diplomatic negotiations that were secret or undisclosed through established diplomatic channels.[1] This unofficial diplomacy built on an extensive web of contacts at different levels, from connections with rulers, their household and close advisers, to freelancers, lobbyists, merchants and spies, who facilitated diplomatic negotiations and information-gathering.[2] Significantly, the allegiance of informal networks of individuals was secured in different manners, for instance through payments in kinds and various sorts of favours. In this respect, the employment of informal contacts in fourteenth-century diplomacy clearly shows the extent to which administrative and diplomatic practices were still

[1] B. Bombi, *Anglo-papal Relations in the Early Fourteenth Century. A Study in Medieval Diplomacy* (Oxford, 2019), pp. 53-66.

[2] Bombi, *Anglo-papal Relations*, pp. 83-91; 100-101. See also J.R. Alban, C.T. Allmand, 'Spies and Spying in the Fourteenth Century', in *War, Literature and Politics in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. C.T. Allmand (Liverpool, 1976), pp. 74–9; A. Reitermeier, *Außenpolitik im Spätmittelalter. Die diplomatischen Beziehungen zwischen dem Reich und England, 1377-1422* (Paderborn, 1999), pp. 399-408; J.M. Moeglin, S. Péquignot, *Diplomatie et «relations internationales» au Moyen Age (IXe-XVe siècle)* (Paris, 2017), pp. 645–70; More recently, Cirier and Loss have pointed out how intelligence services first emerged in the Italian communes from the thirteenth century onwards and how, especially in Loss' opinion, they were associated with the formation of "popular" forms of government: A. Cirier, 'Diplomazia e retorica comunale: la comunicazione attraverso lo spionaggio politico nell'Italia medievale (secc. XII–XIII)', in *Comunicazione e propaganda nei secoli XII e XIII*, ed. R. Castano, F. Latella, T. Sorrenti (Rome, 2005), pp. 212–13; E. Loss, Officium Spiarum. *Spionaggio e gestione delle informazioni a Bologna (secoli XIII-XIV)* (Roma, 2020), pp. 35-70. For specific refrences to the Aragonese Crown and the use of its sujects, especially merchants, as diplomatic envoys see S. Péquignot, *Au nom du roi: Pratique diplomatique et pouvoir durant le règne de Jacques II s'Aragon (1291-1327)* (Madrid, 2009), p. 110, 118.

underdeveloped and had to supplement their deficiencies in the management of international relations through more unconventional means.

This was, as Stéphane Péquignot has recently pointed out, the case of merchants acting as secret agents of the Aragonese Crown during the reign of James II (1291-1327), who dispatched secret missions to the kingdom of Granada, southern Italy and at the court of Charles IV of France.[3] Equally, after the outbreak of the Hundred Years' War in 1337, merchants played a very important part in unofficial diplomacy that went hand in glove with the management of cross-Channel transportation, trade and cash flow needed to pay for war expenditures. A fine case-study of this set of activities is represented by the career of Aragonese merchant Peter Seseres and his associates, who acted as merchants and informal diplomatic envoys, and possibly spies, in England between 1333 and 1339, negotiating an Anglo-Aragonese alliance soon after the outbreak of the Hundred Years' War in 1337. Seseres' activity in England is recorded in an unedited and overlooked archival document preserved at The National Archives in London (C 47/32/23), which will be the focus of this essay.[4] The document, recorded in a short enrolment, contains Seseres' written counsel presented to Edward III, King of England, and his council, probably when, at some point between March and May 1338, the envoy was admitted to convey his advice. What makes this report almost unique for the early fourteenth-century history of diplomacy is that Sesers seized the initiative and elevated himself to the rank of international negotiator. There is in fact no evidence that Sesers had been officially appointed by either the king of England or the king of Aragon to draw up the negotiating plan before the conveyance of his counsel. Yet, as it emerges from the counsel, Sesers had gathered information on international affairs and the Anglo-French war through informal channels, probably exploiting the connections available to him through his mercantile business on the

[3] M.T. Ferrer i Mallol, *Organització i defensa d'un territori fronterer. La governació d'Oriola en el segle XIV* (Barcelona, 1990), pp. 285-296; Péquignot, *Au nom du roi*, pp. 109-110.
[4] TNA, C 47/32/23.

south-east coast of England that had allowed him to become acquainted with members of the king's inner circle and the papal legates dispatched to England in late 1337.

This essay shall therefore investigate Peter Sesers's activity and connections, moving onto the examination of the actual counsel and its contents. The latter in fact sheds new light not only on unofficial diplomatic and administrative practices in Late Medieval diplomatic activity, but, more significantly, on the complex set of international political alliances that contributed to the English military successes in the Hundred Years' War between 1337 and 1338.

1. Peter Sesers and his trades across the Channel.

The origins of Peter *de Seseres* remain quite obscure. His name *Seseres*, meaning "of eastern origin" in Anglo-Norman French, may suggest that he was possibly a Saracen or from the Holy Land.[5] This speculation nicely fits in with the fact that in the records Peter is said to be a subject of the Aragonese Crown, where Catalan and Aragonese merchants are known to have been engaged in international trade from the late thirteenth century onwards, when the sea-route between the Bay of Biscay and northern Europe, especially England and Flanders, was increasingly used to avoid the dangerous road journey through France, providing a link for trade between northern Africa and northern Europe.[6]

Sesers's activity as merchant and ship owner, trading cloth, wine and goods between the continent and England, is well recorded between 1336 and 1339. The first occurrence found in the English records for Peter de Sesers's business dates from 1336, when he appears as the owner of the ship *Seynt Lowys*. On 13 October 1336, while sailing off the coast of Sandwich

[5] See https://www.anglo-norman.net/entry/Seseres (accessed on 11 March 2022).
[6] T.H. Lloyd, *Alien Merchants in England in the High Middle Ages* (New York, 1982), pp. 159-165; O.R. Constable, *Trade and Traders in Muslim Spain 900-1500* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 243-247. See also D. Valérian, 'Ifrîqiyan muslim merchants in the Mediterranean at the end of the middle ages', *Mediterranean Historical Review* 14 (1999), pp. 47-66.

in Kent, the *Seynt Lowys*, whose master was the Spaniard Bernard Bador, was attacked and had its merchandise stolen by the English ship *La Godbiete*.[7] Soon after these events, Peter denounced the robbery in a petition to parliament, where he asked for the investigation and arrest by the town mayor of *La Godbiete*'s master, Elias Condy, and his associates from Sandwich in Kent.[8] Despite this misfortune, Peter's business and trading across the Channel was still based in Sandwich in January 1337, when Sesers alongside James *Skamilica*, and two Lombard merchants, Ubertinus Manchesole of Piacenza and Conrad de Walescario of Asti, asked Edward III whether they might cross to Brabant with their money, hides and merchandise on board of one or two Spanish and Zeeland ships.[9] From this request we learn that Peter and his associates had come to Sandwich to sell various goods, including honey and ox-hides, and were now planning to travel back to Brabant to trade what had remained unsold (namely 75 tuns of honey and 3,000 ox-hides). The merchants promised to pay customs due to the king for the profit made abroad and provide the duke of Brabant's certification of their profits.[10] Equally, few months later, in April 1337 Peter was allowed to export six silver barrels of wine to Middelburgh in Brabant, paying customs in London.[11]

Despite the outbreak of the Hundred Years' War that made trading across the Channel a risky business, between 1337 and 1338 Peter's business was still based between Sandwich and London. Yet, in October 1337 Peter once more tried to recover what he had lost in the robbery off the Sandwich coast in 1336. He appealed to the king, who ordered that William Clynton, earl of Huntingdon and constable of Dover, enforce the claim for compensation

[7] CCR, 1337-39, pp. 283-284. On the importance of the Kentish coast in the Channel trade during the first phase of the Hundred Years' War see A. Ayton, C. Lambert, 'A maritime community in war and peace: Kentish ports, ships and mariners, 1320-1400', *Archaeologia Cantiana* 134 (2014), pp. 67-80.
[8] TNA, SC 8/74/3672.
[9] On the business partnership between Lombard and Catalan in the south Mediterranean and England during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries see T.H. Lloyd, *Alien Merchants in England in the High Middle Ages* (New York, 1982), pp. 159, 168-173; Constable, *Trade and Traders*, pp. 249-250.
[10] CCR, 1333-37, pp. 643-644; CCR, 1337-39, p. 39. On the importance of Italian merchants from Piacenza and Asti and their activity see Y. Renouard, *Les hommes d'affaires italiens du Moyen Age* (Paris, 1949), pp. 65-69.
[11] CCR, 1337-39, p. 39

against Condy and his associates in Sandwich. On 9 January 1338 Peter attended in person the court of chancery in the Carmelite church in London as attorney of the *Seynt Lowys*'s crew, delivering a written deed as evidence.[12] Meanwhile, together with another Spanish merchant, Benedict Ferrandes, Peter appears as the owner of a ship named *La Carrak*, which was attacked by London merchants and had her merchandize stolen while transporting 87 cloths. On 20 January 1338, while in London, Peter and Benedict therefore requested that the king and his council order the return of their goods, since they were allowed to trade to and from London by general royal order as merchants from friendly countries, namely the Duchy of Aquitaine, Spain, Portugal and Lombardy.[13]

On 11 March 1338 Peter Sesers appears in the records as a member of the entourage of the cardinal of S. Prassede, Petro Gomez de Barroso. The latter, together with Bertrand of Montfavès, cardinal of S. Maria in Aquiro, had been dispatched by Pope Benedict XII to England on 29 November 1337 as papal legate to find a mediation between England and France.[14] Originally from the Iberian Peninsula like Peter Sesers, Cardinal Pedro Gomez came from Toledo in Castile. He had been bishop of Cartagena, former councillor of King Alfonso XI of Castile, and had served as papal legate in Castile in 1336.[15] His choice as legate to mediate in the Anglo-French conflict probably reflected the pope's trust in his diplomatic skills and arguably complemented the personal profile of the other legate, Bertrand of Montfavès, who was a Frenchmen from Quercy, like Benedict XII's predecessor, John XXII.[16] For the

[12] CCR, 1337-39, p. 214; 284. Sesers action here were not unusual and, as Lloyds pointed out, a similar appeal to the court of chancery was launched by Aragonese and Majorcan merchants in 1323-1325: Lloyd, *Alien merchants*, p. 163.
[13] CCR, 1337-39, p. 236.
[14] Daumet, 376; *Foedera, conventiones, litterae et cuiuscunque generis acta publica inter reges Anglie et alios quosvis*, ed. T. Rymer, R. Sanderson (London, 1816–1830), II/2, p. 1006; CCR, 1337-39, p. 391.
[15] H. Hofmann, *Kardinalat und kuriale Politik in der ersten Hälfte des 14. Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig, 1935), p. 73; D. Emeis, 'Peter IV., Johann I. und Martin von Aragon und ihre Kardinäle', *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kulturgeschichte Spaniens*, 17 (1961), p. 107; P. Linehan, 'Castile, Navarre and Portugal', in *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, ed. M. Jones, VI (Cambridge, 2000), p. 630.
[16] B. Bombi, "Benedict XII and the Outbreak of the Hundred Years' War", in *Benedict XII (1334-1342). The Guardian of Orthodoxy*, ed. I. Bueno (Amsterdam, 2018), pp. 204-210.

crossing in March 1338 the cardinal legate's party comprised at least nineteen people.[17] Interestingly, some of those people were connected to Peter Gomez de Barroso and were from the Iberian Peninsula, such as the papal squire Martin Didatus de Frias, who held a prebend in Burgos (Castile), and his relative Peter Luppi de Frias; James of Castile and Peter Sesers.[18] Others were from southern France, for instance Peter Meruli, a Benedictine monk from the priory of St Denis at Menda in Lozère, and chamberlain of the French cardinal of S. Quattro Coronati, Guillelmus de Curte;[19] Peter Johannis and Peter Johannis Trigintilibrarum, possibly connected to the cathedral in Avignon;[20] John Audini, clerk of Béziers;[21] and Peter Garsie and Durand de Garsia, monk of the Cluniac Order, probably from Aquitaine.[22] Notably, the party also included William Montagu, earl of Salisbury and admiral of the English western fleet since 1337, who was an experienced diplomat and had been dispatched for important negotiations to the papal curia and France during Edward II and Edward III's reigns.[23]

The presence of Peter Sesers in the cardinal of S. Prassede's entourage and his connections with the king and his council in 1338 were remarkably timely. The two papal legates had in fact arrived in England on 29 November 1337 and had begun negotiating with Edward III, trying to delay his campaign to the continent until the summoning of parliament in February 1338.[24] While in England the two cardinals tried to sway the king's council to support an Anglo-French truce. Their diplomatic activity however clashed with Edward III's ongoing

[17] CCR, 1337-39, p. 391. The cardinal's entourage included: Martin Didatus, papal squire; Peter Johannis and Peter Johannis Tringintalibrarum, Peter Lupi de Fries, William of Montagu, James Silvestro, James Castelli, James de Botrou, Giles de Vascers, Bernard de Pontils, Peter Garsie, John de Ama, Durand de Garsia, monk of the Cluniac order, Peter Meruli, Bertrand the clerk, John Audini, Reimund Armandeti, Augerius Mosengue, and Conrad de Urmo.
[18] Daumet, 7772 and 897.
[19] Daumet, 4278, 5523, 7789.
[20] A canon of Avignon cathedral appears with the surname *Trigintalibrarum*: Daumet, 511.
[21] Daumet, 1230.
[22] Daumet, 512.
[23] M. Ormrod, 'Montagu, William', in ODNB: https://www-oxforddnb-com.chain.kent.ac.uk/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-19001#odnb-9780198614128-e-19001 (accessed on 8 March 2022).
[24] Daumet, 289; *Foedera*, II/2, p. 1007; E. Déprez, *Les préliminaires de la guerre de cent ans. La papauté, la France et l'Angleterre (1328-1342)* (Paris, 1902), pp. 180-181.

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secret preparations for war, his successful engagements with the English subjects in Guyenne, and the establishment of international alliances with Robert, King of Sicily and Naples, Genoa and Castile.[25] On 14 February 1338 parliament approved Edward III's new set of demands to be put forward to Philip VI of France that should have delayed the king's crossing to the continent until late June. At this point, Benedict XII ordered the cardinals to cross to France and continue negotiations with Philip VI. On 11 March 1338 Pedro Gomez and his entourage, including Peter Sesers, were therefore granted a safe-conduct to cross to the continent, while on 7 April 1338 the cardinals received papal instructions on their mission to France.[26] Despite the French attacks against Portsmouth and Jersey on 24 and 26 March 1338, on 21 April Philip VI's envoys also arrived at the papal curia for further negotiations.[27] Finally, on 1 May 1338 the papal legates returned to England, in a last attempt to avoid Edward III's summer campaign to France.[28] However, their journey was hindered because of the risks involved in crossing the Channel and, on 28 May 1338, Edward III had to grant 24 sacks of wool for their ransom in Brabant.[29]

Thanks to his trading business and ability to keep his eyes and ears wide open, in March 1338 Peter Sesers therefore found himself in a perfect position to gather useful and confidential information and rumours on the international political milieu soon after the outbreak of the Hundred Years' War and throughout the convoluted preparations for Edward III's campaign to the continent. Meanwhile, transporting the cardinals across the Channel seems to have further facilitated Sesers's in gaining personal favours from the Crown. On 12 March 1338, the day

[25] *Foedera*, II/2, pp. 1010-1012; Déprez, *Les préliminaires*, pp. 181-182; Bombi, "Benedict XII", pp. 210-211. On Anglo-Castilian relations see P.E. Russell, *The English intervention in Spain and Portugal in the time of Edward III and Richard II* (Oxford, 1955), pp. 1-11. On the international policy of the kingdom of Castile see R. Averkorn, 'Kastilien als europäische Großmacht im Spätmittelalter. Grundprobleme der auswärtigen Beziehungen der kastilichen Könige vom 13. bis zum 15. Jahrhundert', in *Auswärtige Politik und internationale Beziehungen im Mittelalter (13. bis 16. Jahrhundert)*, ed. D. Berg, M. Kintzinger, P. Monnet (Bochum, 2002), pp. 326-329; 343-346.
[26] CPR, 1338-40, p. 126. See also Daumet, 427, 443; Bombi, "Benedict XII", p. 212.
[27] Daumet, 433, and Bombi, "Benedict XII", p. 212.
[28] *Foedera*, II/2, p. 1033.
[29] *Foedera*, II/2, p. 1038.

after receiving the safe-conduct to cross to the continent alongside the cardinal's entourage, Peter Sesers, his fellow merchant Benedict Ferrandes and their associates from Aragon, Majorca, Spain and Lombardy were in fact granted custom exemption to transport 87 cloths from Southampton to Aragon on the ship *La Carrak*, on the grounds of the English king's affection for the 'king of Spain'.[30]

However, the ultimate failure of papal mediation in May 1338 and Edward III's crossing to the continent on 16 July proved very challenging for Sesers's business. At some point before 5 August 1338 Peter Sesers petitioned parliament and obtained the king's general protection for himself and his merchandize. Nevertheless, royal protection did not prevent Peter from having a cargo of wares and goods stolen by local Southampton merchants, probably between 5 October, when the French raided the town, and 22 November 1338, when the king ordered the restitution of the stolen goods to Peter and his associates from Aragon and Catalonia, Nicholas Fylet and William Pierehugh.[31] The last piece of evidence that we find in the English records for Peter Seseres' activity is a writ close dated 10 February 1339. This ordered Nicholas de la Bech, constable of the Tower of London, to free Peter and his Catalonian associate William Pierehugh, who had been imprisoned on false accusations of 'suspicious activities' moved against them by some earls and magnates before the king's council.[32] The writ close does not explain the nature of the suspicion moved against Peter and William, but circumstantial evidence that will be investigated below suggests that they had probably been suspected of being foreign spies.[33]

[30] CCR, 1337-39, p. 326.
[31] TNA, SC 8/156/7793; CPR, 1338-40, p. 183.
[32] CCR, 1339-41, p. 11-12. See also below n. 85.
[33] On the Latin and Anglo-Norman terminology employed to address the activities of information gathering and spying see Moeglin –Péquignot, *Diplomatie*, pp. 645–70. See also J.R. Alban, C.T. Allmand, 'Spies and Spying in the Fourteenth Century', in *War, Literature and Politics in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. C.T. Allmand (Liverpool, 1976), pp. 74–9; Cirier, 'Diplomazia e retorica', pp. 212–13.

2. Peter Sesers and the international dimension of the Hundred Years' War in 1338.

As mentioned above, Peter Sesers's activity and his involvement in unofficial diplomacy as negotiator and information gatherer is evidenced in the overlooked diplomatic account, preserved at TNA in the diplomatic miscellanea series (C 47/32/23). The enrolment, consisting of three membranes sewn together and authored by Sesers himself, records the counsel that Sesers probably conveyed before the king and his council. The counsel makes the case for an Anglo-Aragonese alliance and rests on information seemingly gathered by Peter through his contacts in England, France, and the Iberian Peninsula.

Internal evidence suggests that Peter's counsel was written between March and May 1338. This dating is based on five pieces of information. First, the account mentions that William Clinton, earl of Huntingdon, may have been dispatched to campaign in Gascony. This suggests that the report was written at the time of Clinton's appointment as commander to Gascony between March and June 1338, but before Clinton assumed the regency for the Black Prince, after Edward III went on campaign to the continent in July 1338.[34] Secondly, in the counsel Sesers mentions as the second negotiator involved in the mission the knight Bérenguer de Saint-Jean, who was in fact paid wages for his service by the constabulary of Bordeaux on the king's order along with his armed men on 18 May 1338 - the latter should be considered as *terminus ante quem* for the compilation of Sesers's counsel.[35] Accordingly, the counsel maintains that Robert of Artois was also planning to cross to the continent, as he eventually did in the summer of 1338, following Edward III in his first continental campaign.[36] Furthermore,

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[34] M. Ormrod, 'William Clinton', in ODNB: https://www-oxforddnb-com.chain.kent.ac.uk/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-53080?rskey=472AET&result=1 (accessed on 8 March 2022).

[35] Berenger de Saint-Jean can be identified with Bérenguer de Saint-Jean, who received payment of for a total 204 l. 2 s. 10 d. ob. in wages with his men: **https://www.gasconrolls.org/edition/calendars/C61_50/document.html#it050_12_05f_120** by the constable of Bordeaux on the king's order on 18 May 1338: https://www.gasconrolls.org/indexes/entity-015007.html (accessed on 27 September 2022).

[36] As Diller pointed, the Amiens recension of Froissart' chronicle and its claim that Robert of Artois was fighting in Gascony in 1337 have to be dismissed as inaccurate: G.T. Diller, 'Robert d'Artois et l'historicité des Chroniques de Froissart', *Moyen Age*, 86/2 (1980), pp. 217-218. In his opinion, as Froissart pointed out, Robert followed

Peter's report refers to the fact that Philip VI of Valois was concerned with a possible involvement of the Empire in the Anglo-French conflict and even on Anglo-imperial invasion of France, without referring to Edward III as imperial vicar. The report was therefore probably written between late March 1338, when the Anglo-Imperial French invasion was threatened, and before November 1338, when Edward III accepted the imperial vicarage.[37] Last but not least, at the end of his account, Sesers shows to have had some insight into papal plans to organize a new crusade, information which must have gathered during the journey undertaken across the Channel with the papal legates' entourage in March 1338.[38]

The dating of Peter Sesers's report between March and May 1338 is most significant when considering his activity and connections in those months. As mentioned above, since January 1338 through his business Peter established relations with inner London mercantile circles and the royal administration, petitioning parliament, the king and his council on a few occasions and attending the court of chancery. Equally, he was probably acquainted with William Clinton, who was constable of Dover and entrusted with the execution of the lawsuit in which Sesers was involved in Sandwich.[39] Indeed, in his counsel, Peter Sesers claims some familiarity with William Clinton and has warm words for him, remarking on his chivalric values, loyalty and many virtues, and the esteem in which Clinton was held among the community of Aragonese and Castillian merchants.[40] Equally, Peter was acquainted with the papal legates Bertrand of Montfavès and Pedro Gomez de Barroso, who, at their arrival in England on 29 November 1337, had been escorted from Dover to London by the same William

Edward III in his continental campaign between July 1338 and February 1340. Conversely, Favier placed Robert of Artois' journey to the continent in February 1339, when he secretly landed in the Low Countries: J. Favier, *La Guerre de Cent Ans* (Paris, 1980), pp. 42-47. See also D.L. Sample, 'Philip's Mortal Enemy: Robert of Artois and the Beginning of the Hundred Years War', in *The Hundred Years War. Different Vistas*, ed. L.J.A. Villalon - D.J. Kagay (Leiden, 2008), pp. 261-284.

[37] M. Ormrod, *Edward III* (New Haven, 2013), pp. 200-206.

[38] See below n. 83.

[39] See above, n. 12.

[40] TNA, C 47/32/23, m. 1r: "la persone de mons de Huntyndon, en le quel repose grant sen, chivallier diligente et summe de / loialte et plusors autres vertus. Per les queles et per ceo auxi que plusors marchanntz des roialmes de Castell et Darragonn et de celles parties / ount denuncie seu bon revenu".

Clinton. Interestingly, in January 1338, while waiting in London for the deliberations of the Westminster parliament, summoned on 3 February 1338, the cardinals pursued their diplomatic activity and their own personal affairs, shifting goods and wine to the continent. In particular, on 4 and 10 January 1338 Edward III granted royal protection to the cardinals' messengers and servants, shipping wine and letters between England, Gascony and the papal curia.[41] It is therefore tempting to speculate that this sort of business allowed Peter Sesers and his associates to network with the cardinals' entourage, given that their business, based mostly in London and Sandwich, specialised in trading goods and probably providing occasional transportation to individuals across the Channel.

Significantly, during the first half of 1338, in preparation for his first continental campaign in the Hundred Years' War, Edward III focused on the international dimension of the conflict, extending his diplomatic efforts beyond France and the Low Countries. In this context, the kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula had a special role to play because of their contribution to international trade across the Channel as well as their feudal connections with the south of France.[42] As Déprez pointed out, while in January 1338 the cardinals were waiting for the summoning of parliament in England, Edward III moved secretly and decisively to strengthen his alliances with Genoa, Castile and Naples. While concluding his alliances in Flanders, on 28 August 1337 Edward III announced the dispatch of an embassy to Aragon to secure Peter IV's support.[43] According to the sixteenth-century antiquarian Gerónimo Zurita, at Christmas 1337 the Dominican envoys from England, Guillelmo de Orgolio and Bertran de Perraleuada, arrived at the Aragonese court in Valencia and conveyed to King Peter IV the advantages of an Anglo-Aragonese alliance, but the king's advisers steered the young king away from this

[41] *Foedera*, II/2, p. 1008, 1012; Déprez, *Les préliminaires*, pp. 181-182; Bombi, "Benedict XII", pp. 210-211.
[42] On this issue see J.N. Hillgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms, 1250-1516*, I (Oxford, 1976), pp. 39-44; T.N. Besson, 'The Problem of Feudal Monarchy: Aragon, Catalonia, and France', *Speculum*, 53 (1978), pp. 460-478.
[43] *Foedera*, II/2, p. 993.

idea, suggesting instead that he should ally with France.[44] Equally, between 1337 and the early months of 1338 Edward III entertained diplomatic relations with Castile. Between May and June 1337 Edward III in fact issued protection to merchants trading with Brabant, Castile and Aragon.[45] On 4 January 1338, at the request of the king of Castile, Edward III endorsed the complaint of some Castilian merchants, who had been robbed in English waters outside Southampton, while on 8 January the king granted protection to the Castilian merchants trading between England and the Low Countries.[46] Most importantly, two writs close, dated 7 and 8 January 1338 and addressed to Queen Maria and King Alfonso XI of Castile, show that Edward III had dispatched his envoys to negotiate an alliance with Castile and that this alliance had been delayed because of the king of Castile's war in Portugal.[47] Meanwhile, on 8 January 1338 Edward III commended the dispatch of his envoy Arnald de *Duro Forti* to Robert, king of Naples, who was at this point an important diplomatic player and facilitated in February 1338 the diplomatic communications between Benedict XII and Peter IV, king of Aragon.[48]

Between March and May 1338, in very convoluted and fast changing political circumstances, Peter Sesers was therefore in a very good position not only to gather information and rumours that could be sold to the English and Aragonese Crowns, but above all to try and advance himself from merchant to international negotiator, providing advice to Edward III and his council. Yet, most importantly, beyond the speculations on the international political milieu, Sesers's counsel does not shy away from its true agenda, namely facilitating the businesses of

[44] G. Zurita, *Annales de la corona de Aragon*, II (Zaragoza, 1610), fol. 132rab. Zureta wrongly dates the arrival of the envoys in 1338. On the attempts at establishing an Anglo-Aragonese alliance in the 1320s see Lloyd, *Alien merchants*, p. 162. See also C.A. Willemsen, 'Jakob II. von Mallorka und Peter IV. von Aragon (1336-1349)', in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kulturgeschichte Spaniens*, ed. J. Vincke, VIII (Münster, 1940), p. 93. For a general introduction to Peter IV's reign see Hillgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms*, pp. 347-371.
[45] *Foedera*, II/2, p.961; 971-972; 977; 993. See also Lloyd, *Alien merchants*, pp. 159-162.
[46] *Foedera*, II/2, p. 1008, 1010.
[47] *Foedera*, II/2, p. 1010. See Linehan, 'Castile, Navarre', p. 365; Averkorn, 'Kastilien als europäische Großmacht', pp. 328-329; A. Masiá de Ros, *Relación Castellano-Aragonesa desde Jaime II a Pedro el Ceremonioso*, I (Barcelona, 1994), p. 229.
[48] *Foedera*, II/2, p. 1011; Daumet, 408.

Aragonese and Castillian merchants across the Channel after the outbreak the Anglo-French conflict.

3. The counsel: political speculation and self-promotion.

The three membranes of the enrolment, recording Seser's counsel, roughly correspond to three distinct sections in the account: a first one making the case for an Anglo-Aragonese alliance;[49] a second one containing the documents that the English Crown should have dispatched as part of the diplomatic mission, the negotiator's opinions and conclusions;[50] and finally, a third section recording practical arrangements regarding the diplomatic envoys that should have been dispatched on the diplomatic mission and their faculties. The latter section and membrane, as stated in a feint note added to the document, could have been detached or torn apart from the document, as happened for documents recording confidential and sensitive information.[51] This structure of Sesers's counsel actually follows the formulaic pattern of Aragonese secret diplomatic reports, which, as Péquignot pointed out, were generally presented in the form of an inquiry.[52] Nevertheless, throughout the document Peter Sesers distinctively maintains two main lines of argument, which are often intertwined. First, he supports the case for an alliance between Aragon and the English-Flemish coalition against France, established in August 1337, to successfully advance English military gains and conquest of the Duchy of Aquitaine and territories on the French-Iberian border. Secondly, he shows the economic advantages that the success in the war against France, achieved through an Anglo-Aragonese alliance, would have brought to both the English and Aragonese Crowns, their subjects and, above all, to merchants and their businesses.

[49] TNA, C 47/32/23, m. 1r.
[50] TNA, C 47/32/23, m. 2r.
[51] TNA, C 47/32/23, m. 2r-3r. On documents recording sensitive information see Péquignot, *Au service du roi*, pp. 105-106.
[52] Moeglin –Péquignot, *Diplomatie*, pp. 664-666.

At the beginning of his counsel Peter Sesers clearly positions himself as negotiator and political adviser. He introduces himself to Edward III and his council as a diplomatic counsellor able to demonstrate how the proposed Anglo-Aragonese alliance would have benefitted both parties in the military and economic respects. Initially, Sesers sets out to secure the attention and interest of his audience by disclosing that Peter IV of Aragon had recently undertaken diplomatic negotiations with Philip VI of Valois (*par treyter et determiner*).[53] The latter concerned three specific issues: first, the grant of the county of Toulouse in southern France to the Aragonese Crown; second, the reciprocal right of reprisal (*marke*), from which both Aragonese and French merchants should have been protected; third, the return to the Aragonese Crown of the county of Comminges, which Philip VI had unlawfully taken from James, count of Urgell and brother of Peter IV of Aragon.[54] With regard to this last issue, Sesers maintained that Peter IV had unsuccessfully complained with Philip VI that he had been badly damaged and claimed to have good inside knowledge on this matter, which he would have shared with Edward III and his council in person (*plus plenement dire de buche*).[55] Yet, while Sesers was clearly trying to draw the attention of his au dience with compelling rumours on the ongoing Franco-Aragonese negotiations, he was equally well-informed. The county of Toulouse had in

[53] While Péquignot pointed out that only few original letters of envoys survive for the reign of Peter IV of Aragon (1336-1387), he has drawn attention to the mission of the Catalan knight, Ramon de Melany to the French court between March 1329 and July 1332, when the King of Aragon, Alphonso IV, sought French support for the organization of a crusade against the Muslims in Granada: S. Péquignot, 'Diplomatie et itinérance curiale. Cinq ambassades des rois d'Aragon en France (premier tiers du XIV^{e} siècle)', in *L'itinérance de la cour en France et en Europe*, ed. B. Bove, A. Salamagne C. zum Kolk (Villeoneuve d'Ascq, 2021), pp. 131 n. 13, 137-147. On Franco-Aragonese relations between Peter IV of Aragon and John II of France in 1350-1351 see J. Mutgé i Vives, 'La inseguretat en el Mediterrani Occidental: acord entre el rei catalanoaragonès Peres le Cerimoniós i el francès Joan II de Valois per a la solució de les marques existents entre ambdós reignes (1351)', in *La Corona catalanoaragonesa i el seu entorn Mediterrrani a la baixa edat mitjana*, ed. M.T. Ferrer I Mallol, J. Mutgé I Vives, M. Sánchez Martínez (Barcellona, 2005), pp. 185-204.

[54] James I of Urgell had acquired it from Philip VI through his marriage with Cecilia of Comminges, daughter of the Count of Comminges, Bernard VIII. This marriage had been negotiated in 1336 thanks to the mediation of Jean of Comminges, who was a son of Bernard VIII, count of Comminges, and brother of Cecilia: Emeis, 'Peter IV.', pp. 111. See also C. Higounet, 'Comté et Maison de Comminges entre France et Aragon au Moyen Age', *Bulletin hispanique*, 49 (1947), pp. 325-326; R. Lützelschwab, *Flectat cardinales ad velle suum? Clemens VI. und sein Kardinalskolleg. Ein Beitrag zur kurialen Politik in der Mitte des 14. Jahrhunderts* (Oldenburg, 2007), pp. 473-475.

[55] Higounet, 'Comté et Maison', p. 325-326, pointed out that a mediation in this matter was possibly pursued by the Cardinal Jean de Comminges. See also Emeis, 'Peter IV.', p. 111 n. 252.

fact come under the control of the French Crown in 1283, after Alphonse of Poitiers, brother of Louis IX, king of France, died without heirs, having acquired the county in 1249 from his deceased wife Joanna, who had herself inherited it from her mother Sancha of Aragon.[56] Likewise, the recovery of the county of Comminges had already been at the core of failed Franco-Aragonese diplomatic negotiations between 1312 and 1325.[57] Concluding the introductory part of his counsel, Sesers therefore suggested that Edward III could have exploited the disagreement between the French and Aragonese kings on the possession of the county of Comminges to his advantage, as he could have done for the disagreement between Philip VI and the King of Majorca, concluding that there were a number of counts and barons in the kingdoms of Aragon, Majorca and Castile whom the French had dispossessed and may have been keen to help the English against Philip VI.

Securing the trust of his audience through the display of insider political knowledge, Sesers hence sets himself up as a diplomatic envoy, who should be dispatched to Peter IV of Aragon to negotiate the Anglo-Aragonese alliance and its provisions on behalf of Edward III and his council.[58] Sesers introduces this section of his counsel, making clear that he is seizing the initiative in the diplomatic negotiations (*finelement mest anys solom mon petite seu que bon serroit*), as he does in other instances throughout the counsel.[59] First, Sesers suggests that Peter IV of Aragon should accept five covenants made by the English, namely: that the king of Aragon received the counties of Toulouse and Comminges; that he campaigned (*a guerreier et*

[56] D. Abulafia, *A Mediterranean emporium. The Catalan kingdom of Majorca* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 38-39. See also M. Gavrilovitch, *Étude sur le traité de Paris de 1259* (Paris, 1899), pp. 71-73.
[57] C. Higounet, 'Comminges et Aragon au début du XIVe siècle. Les passages de la haute chaine luchonnaise', *Revue de Comminges, Pyrénées centrales*, 68 (1955), pp. 159-164; Higounet, 'Comté et Maison', p. 312; Péquignot, 'Diplomatie et itinérance', pp. 132-134.
[58] TNA, C 47/32/23, m. 1r: "Sur les queles choses mest avys que bon serroit que mem seignur le roi mandast ses messages au roi Darragonn qui aussi / poer de meer et de terrim toutes les demandas que le roi Darragonn farra. Et finelement mest avys solom mon petite seu que bon serroit que au / dit roi Darragonn feussent largement, et terez et confermez les dittes demandes per V condicions".
[59] See for instance, Sesers's remark after setting the five provisions for the king of Aragon just below at TNA, C 47/32/23, m. 1r: "Et si a le roi Darragonn se vidroit assentir en lavandite manere mest anys per diverses et infinitez resons que serroit a mout grant profit et honur de nostre dit seignur le roi".

chivacher) in those territories when both kings were ready and before the harvest season; that he allowed the king of England to retain rights in those counties as the king of France had done; that no peace or truce should be agreed without the mutual consent of the king of England and the king of Aragon; and, finally, that the king of Aragon defended the king of England against the fleets that will come to support the king of France. Sesers further maintained that, once conquered, the administration of the counties of Toulouse and Comminges should be given to another count previously chosen, if the king of Aragon were to be absent during a war against Philip VI. Finally, the king of Aragon should have been allowed to retain and dispose of the conquered territories up to 50 square leagues (about 2,500 km^2), as he wished, subject to three conditions: that the counts and barons of these territories defended them as they did for the French crown; that the conquered towns, cities, castles and other places should pay two years of due rent starting one year after the conquest and could redeem them in five years; and that the king of Aragon left to the English the acquisition of the town of Montpellier. The latter had in fact been part of the kingdom of Majorca and disputed with the French Crown since 1258, when the Treaty of Corbeil between Louis IX, king of France, and James I, king of Aragon, had failed to address its status.[60]

What Sesers was arguably suggesting was that Edward III's offer to Peter IV matched Philip VI's covenants in terms of territorial acquisitions for the Aragonese Crown in the counties of Toulouse and Comminges and reciprocal military aid, but for one important issue, namely the military support of the Aragonese vassals in the region against the French. The latter request was indeed crucial given that the political and military importance the counties

[60] Abulafia, *A Mediterranean emporium*, pp. 37-41; T.N. Bisson, *Medieval Crown of Aragon: a short history* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 104-107. A diplomatic mission addressing the status of Montpellier was dispatched from Aragon to France in 1295: S. Péquignot, 'Diplomatie et itinérance curiale. Cinq ambassades des rois d'Aragon en France (premier tiers du XIV^{e} siècle)', in *L'itinérance de la cour en France et en Europe*, ed. B. Bove, A. Salamagne C. zum Kolk (Villeoneuve d'Ascq, 2021), pp. 129-132. On the importance of Majorca as a trading centre in the first half of the fourteenth century and its competition with Aragon see Y. Renouard, 'Les principaux aspects économiques et sociaux de l'histoire des pays de la couronne d'Aragon aux XII^{e}, XIII^{e}, et XIV^{e} siècles', in *Études d'histoire médiévale*, II (Paris, 1968), pp. 1095-1101; P. Wolff, *Commerces et marchands de Toulouse (vers 1350 - vers 1450)* (Paris, 1954), pp. 34-41; 138-147.

of Toulouse and Comminges had in the Anglo-French conflict, as Sesers himself argued later in his counsel. Furthering this line of argument, Sesers therefore adds a list of six concessions that the king of England would have granted to the king of Aragon, pending his continuous support and assistance against the French.[61] The latter included: the acquittal of people and properties of the French Crown for up to 5000 florins of Florence; the subjugation of French people and properties up to 5000 florins of Florence payable in three or four years; the subjugations of foreign people in France for up to 5000 florins of Florence; the payment of the census and other duties of the people of three foreign towns in France;[62] the grant and protection to freely bring money outside France; and the proclamation of five jurisdictions (*banys*) in the French kingdom. These further concessions arguably made the English propositions quite attractive for the Aragonese Crown, especially regarding the size of territorial gains and taxable income.

At the end of the first section of his counsel Sesers further sets these covenants in the big international political picture, expressing once more his own assessments. While maintaining the need to dispatch diplomatic envoys to Castile in order to resolve promptly the ongoing war there, with a convoluted and rhetorical turn of phrase, Sesers dares to manifest openly his own support for the dispatch of Robert of Artois and the Earl of Huntingdon to fight in Gascony, since, along with the king of Aragon, they would have represented a challenge for Philip VI as much as the one faced in the Empire - where Edward III had gathered an anti-French coalition in the summer of 1337.[63] Sesers also requested safe-conducts and protection

[61] TNA, C 47/32/23, m. 1r: "en eide et confort de nostre dit seignur le roi et de ses busoignes / et en grevance et disseynsement du dit mons Philip".
[62] The requests concerning taxation and custom rights are particularly striking, since in 1338-1339 the consuls of Montpellier addressed a supplication to the king of Majorca, asking for exemption from the commercial taxes levied by royal officials: Abulafia, *A Mediterranean emporium*, Appendix II, pp. 253-263.
[63] TNA, C 47/32/23, m. 1r: "mest anys qe entre mon dit seignur Darragonn et ses amys et les ditz seignurs purroient dispondre et ordiner cieles, si nobles genres qe / per la foy que ieo doy a Dieu, ieo qoi en certeym mes que ieo lesase dire que le dit mons Philip et ses gentz averont bien pars tant affaire [vers] / celes pries come ils averont affaire en les parcies vers Alemagne. Et de ceo clerement demonstrer ieo me forcerey al fyn de ceste di". Envoys had been dispatched from England to Castile in early 1338: see above, n. 47. On how the alliance with Castile intertwined with the English control over Gascony see Lloyd, *Alien merchants*, pp. 159-162.

for the messengers and the merchants from England and Flanders involved in this mission, once more indulging in rhetorical flourishes to express how these arrangements will equally favour the trade of English wool and Flemish cloth and be financially advantageous for the English Crown.[64] Meanwhile, probably, owing to his past experiences, wary of attacks against the ships and their merchandise during the journey off the English coasts, Sesers asked that any dispute between the messengers and English merchants or subjects would be arbitrated before the king.

Sesers's requests of protection for the negotiators are followed by the arrangement for the dispatch of letters of credence for the envoys and Sesers's conclusions of the counsel, which are all recorded in the second section of the counsel on the second membrane of the enrolment. Here we first find records of letters of credence for the envoys sent by the English Crown to the king of Aragon and the king of Castile and safe-conducts for the Aragonese and Castillian merchants that would have been dispatched along with the messengers. Interestingly, while the letter of credence addressed to Peter IV of Aragon was to be issued unsealed, possibly to preserve the confidentiality of the mission, and refers to the envoys' faculties of negotiation in general terms, the letter of credence for the king of Castile refers to the need to make peace and agreement among the two kingdoms.[65]

Those letters of credence are followed by Sesers's concluding remarks to his counsel. The latter hang on four main points. First, Sesers suggests that the alliance between England and Aragon as well as a solution to the war in Castile would have favoured the organization of

[64] TNA, C 47/32/23, m. 1r: "Item les dicti messages purroient trecter ove les merchanntz des ditz roialmes qils veignent en les parcies Dengleterre et de Flandres ens conduyt iles costumes nostre seignur le roy acresseront et le leynes Dengleterre et les draps de Flanndres averont mellours ventes [meillour] issues et le people avera meillour marche des biens et marchanndises que les diti marchanntz estranges aporteront qils navie [mey]menant. Et ceo serra a grant profit et avantage del nostre seignur le roi et des siens". Constable, *Trade and Traders*, pp. 250-252, points out how the Hundred Years' War damaged international trade, especially affecting the export of Iberian and English wool to Flemish markets. Diplomacy was used to secure some stability, as happened in 1345, when Edward III protected the arrival of foreign ships in the port of Swin, near Bruges, and promised protection to the Castilian merchants as part of the Anglo-Castilian alliance in 1351. On the role of the Spanish merchants in trading between England, Flanders and the Iberian Peninsula see Lloyd, *Alien merchants*, pp. 165-166.

[65] On secrecy and information gathering in the Aragonese context see Péquignot, *Au nom du roi*, pp. 100-106.

a great military expedition, well into the kingdom of France. The latter would also have taken advantage of the concrete threat of an Anglo-imperial invasion of France, - which was seen as likely by March 1338 -, and would have given to the English the same good outcome that had occurred in Autumn 1325 at the end of Wars of St Sardos, when Edward, then Prince, went to France.[66] Secondly, Sesers maintains that it was likely that Peter IV of Aragon would have quickly recovered the counties of Toulouse and Comminges without facing any opposition from the population of Navarre, as some English envoys dispatched to Navarre after the coronation of Philippe de Evreux as king of Navarre in March 1328 had also confirmed.[67] Arguably, Sesers built here on the information provided by reliable insiders at court and was well-informed on the broader international political implications of his plan, especially when mentioning the involvement of the Navarrese Crown and the embassy of Master Reymond Durant that had in fact been dispatched to Navarre on 28 March 1328.[68] Yet, as a neighbour of the count of Comminges, the king of Navarre was involved in the politics of the county, especially during the reign of Philippe de Evreux, who was a cousin of Philip VI of Valois and promised his daughter Maria in marriage to Peter IV of Aragon in 1336, exchanging some castles on the border between the two kingdoms as a guarantee for the marriage agreement.[69]

Equally, returning in the conclusions of the counsel to a point made earlier, Sesers once more argued for the dispatch of Robert, count of Artois, and the Earl of Huntingdon to Gascony.

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[66] TNA, C 47/32/23, m. 2r: "chivacher mout avant en le roialme de France et defaire ses volentes en cas que mons Philip / eit tant affaire en les parcies vers Alemaigne come il avoit nadgieires qant nostre dit seignur le roi et ses amys chivache/rent sur France". On the Wars of St Sardos see S. Phillips, *Edward II* (New Haven, 2011), pp. 468-481; Ormrod, *Edward III*, pp. 34-37.

[67] TNA C 47/32/23, m. 2r: "Et seront obeysanntz a sa volente et ia le mayns les gentz du roialme de Navarre ne luis serront de / rienz contre, qar ils ount iurez le dit roi Darragonn come roi de Navarre apres cesty qerest. Et il y ad gentz creables / en la court nostre seignur le roi qi furent en Navarre deux en qois iours apres ceo qi le dit roi fust iure". See also Bisson, *Medieval Crown of Aragon*, p. 107.

[68] *Foedera*, II/2, p. 737. Reymond Durant could be possibly identified with Ramon Durand, a lawyer and lieutenant of the seneschal of Gascony between 1318 and 1324, constable of the castle of Colomiers: https://www.gasconrolls.org/indexes/entity-006006.html (accessed on 27 September 2022).

[69] B. Leroy, ' Les débuts de la dynastie d'Evreux en Navarre: des expériences mutuelles de noureiles situations', *España Medieval*, 17 (1994), p. 25; B. Leroy, 'Les hommes du pouvoir en Navarre au XIV siècle. Gouvernement et société dans le royaume de Navarre de 1328 à 1425', *Moyen Age*, 95 (1989), pp. 476-477. See also Higounet, 'Comminges et Aragon', pp. 162-164.

Alluding to the disagreement between Philip VI and his cousin Robert over the inheritance of the county of Artois, Sesers emphasised that Philip VI had great obligations towards Robert of Artois, who enjoyed strong support in France and Gascony.[70] Here Robert could count on the friendship of the count of Foix and could have shifted his supporters' allegiance to the English. Sesers's mention of the count of Foix, Gaston II (1315-1343), and his relation to the counts of Artois is once more significant and shows Sesers's clear understanding of the complex set of political allegiances in the Duchy. Gaston II's mother, Jeanne of Artois, was in fact Robert's sister and had been actively involved in Foix's decision of siding with the French against the English in Aquitaine since her marriage to Gaston I of Foix in 1301, bringing a strong influence on her son Gaston II's decisions. In this respect, it was plausible that Robert of Artois could be considered a means to shift the position of the counts of Foix towards the English. However, realistically it may have been difficult, since Jeanne had been a notorious French supporter at the time of the Marsan war in Gascony in 1323 and during the Wars of St Sardos.[71] Furthermore, in Sesers's opinion, Robert of Artois enjoyed the backing of the kings of Castile, Aragon, Majorca, and Portugal and the duke of Brittany. Yet again, Sesers's speculations on the connections of Robert of Artois were here broadly plausible: John III, duke of Brittany, had in fact been the only one to vote against the banishment of Robert of Artois from France in 1332, and was himself distantly related to the crowns of Castile and Portugal through his wife, Isabelle of Castile.[72] Finally, while Sesers considered Robert of Artois as pivotal to the English plans of summoning a great anti-French alliance in the Iberian Peninsula, he praised once more the Earl of Huntingdon, who was held in great esteem among the Castilian and Aragonese

[70] Favier, *La Guerre*, pp. 46-47; Ormrod, *Edward III*, p. 189, 225. On Robert's French supporters and Philip VI' action to circumvent them see Sample, 'Philip's Mortal Enemy', pp. 270-273.
[71] M. Vale, *The Angevin Legacy and the Hundred Years War, 1250-1340* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 90-91, 230-231.
[72] J.P. Leguay, 'Jean III le Bon, Herzog der Bretagne (1312-1341)', in *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, V (1980-1998), p. 333.

merchants, now demanding his return to France.[73] In conclusion, Sesers maintained that, if such a great anti-French coalition, held together by the proposed Anglo-Aragonese alliance, had embarked on a military expedition (*chyvacer*) in France, the English Crown would have reconquered all the Duchy of Aquitaine, while the Aragonese Crown would have secured the counties of Toulouse and Comminges.[74] Obviously, what Sesers was thinking of here was a joint attack against the French, moved by the Anglo-Flemish and Anglo-German alliances onto the northern borders of France and the Channel and by the Aragonese Crown onto the Iberian-French borders.

In order to fulfil this plan, in the third and final section of his counsel Sesers therefore moves to the practical arrangements of the proposed diplomatic mission, focusing on the envoys and their faculties. Significantly, Sesers put himself forward as chief negotiator along with the *chivaler* Bérenguer de Saint-Jean. Both Bérenguer and Peter Sesers should have received written letters of credence for their mission listing their faculties.[75] Indeed, further detailing the practical arrangements needed to fulfil the mission (*ces sont les choses que les dittes messages ount busoigne*), Sesers requests a "dual appointment" (*double commission*) for the envoys, who would have had the faculty of negotiating before both the kings of England and Aragon.[76] The latter was a crucial and quite perceptive request on Sesers's part, since, as I

[73] TNA C 47/32/23, m. 2r: "Mest anys que les dit mons Robert purroit grant lieu tenir as busoignes nostre dit, seignur le roi. A leu droit de la persone de mons de Huntyndon, en le quel repose grant sen, chivallier diligente et summe de loialte et plusors autres vertus. Per les queles et per ceo auxi que plusors marchanntz des roialmes de Castell et Darragonn et de celles parties ount denuncie seu bon revenu. Par mye la grant bonnte et loialte que ils ount trove en lui en plusors choses qils ount ewe affaire per devers lius, le dit seignur purroit plusors bones oepres faire".

[74] TNA C 47/32/23, m. 2r: "si le roi Darragonn dune part et les ditz seignurs dautre part feussent apparaillez per chyvacher tantost se retourneroit / toute le Douchee entierement a nostre seignur le roi et les dittes comitees de Tolouse et de Comenge au roi Darragonn. Ensi serroit qils / purroient chyvacher par mye tant le roialme de Frannce a lour volente totesortz, ma en teute est que nostre seignur le roi et ses alies / feussent toutz prestes de chyvacher sur Frannce come ils ount este nyadgaires".

[75] See above n. 35.

[76] TNA C 47/32/23, m. 2r: "il serra forme et les ponitz de la comission". On diplomatic envoys and their letter of credence see G.P. Cuttino, *English Diplomatic Administration, 1259–1339* (Oxford, 1940), pp. 110–11; P. Chaplais, 'English Diplomatic Documents to the End of Edward III's Reign', in *The Study of Medieval Records. Essays in honour of K. Major*, ed. D.A. Bullogh, R.L. Storey (Oxford, 1971), pp. 29–30; Bombi, *Anglo-papal relations*, pp. 57-58.

have argued elsewhere, dual appointments were meant to reduce possible frictions among the parties during diplomatic negotiations, although they occasionally created confusion and conflicts of interest.[77] Equally, Sesers asks that the diplomatic envoys were to be escorted by armed men under the command of Bartholomew *de Bochon* and that the envoys were to be allowed to find their own passage and ships, paying them directly over two, three or four years up to the price of 50,000 marks sterling. Furthermore, pending the permission of the king of Aragon, Sesers demands that the diplomatic envoys could employ six trusted armed men (*honorables homes*), who would have received a pension of 20 or 30 pounds sterling. The latter were to answer to the English king and would have played an important role in the mission.[78] At this point, Sesers significantly tries to further his own interests and those of his fellow merchants, creating a special status for one hundred merchants, who had to swear allegiance to the English Crown and receive an indenture, as evidence of their status, while the messengers would have received the faculty of freeing those merchants from duties owed on merchandise exported outside England. Furthermore, Sesers asks that the messengers be given the faculty to arbitrate in the case of robberies undertaken by English merchants against merchants of Aragon and Majorca, securing that the former should be prosecuted by the Crown and the latter should pay their due duties to the Crown.

Finally, on a smaller strip of parchment stitched to the bottom of the enrolment, using a different thread and pattern from the one employed to attach membrane 1 and 2, Sesers lists the faculties of the negotiators regarding the confirmation and sureties of the territories that

[77] Bombi, *Anglo-papal relations*, p. 117. See also J. Sayers, 'Centre and localities: aspects of papal administration in England in the later thirteenth century', in *Authority and Power. Studies on Medieval Law and Government Presented to W. Ullmann*, ed. P. Linehan, B. Tierney (Cambridge, 1980), p. 126. See also M. Kintzinger, 'Voyages et messageries. Diplomatie in Frankreich zwischen Familiarität und Funktion', in *Aus der Frühzeit europäischer Diplomatie. Zum geistlichen und weltlichen Gesandtschaftswesen vom 12. bis zum 15. Jahrhundert*, ed. C. Zey, C. Märtl (Zürich, 2008), p. 219; W. Untergehrer, *Die päpstlichen* nuntii *und* legati *im Reich (1447–1484). Zu Personal und Organisation des kurialen Gesandtenwesens* (PhD, Munich, 2012), pp. 264–73.

[78] On unofficial diplomatic envoys travelling under disguised identity see Moeglin –Péquignot, *Diplomatie*, pp. 658-660.

the king of Aragon would have conquered.[79] As proposed in the earlier part of the counsel, the envoys were to be given faculties to agree with the king of Aragon on the size of the conquered territories (up to 50 square leagues) as well as their shape (triangular, square or circular) and boundaries, while the administration of those territories was to be given, in agreement with the king of Aragon and Majorca, to the lords that contributed to the military conquest. Equally, if it were not possible to divide the conquered territories in portions of 50 square leagues, Sesers suggests that the king of Aragon could have negotiated their division in smaller portions of 20 leagues. Finally, Sesers maintains that the king of Aragon would have in fact welcomed the English offer of enfranchising the conquered territories to the king of Aragon in return for a monetary loan. Once more Sesers here seems to outbid intentionally the French offers made to the Aragonese Crown, while playing on the English need for cash to fund the Anglo-French war.[80]

Sesers concludes his counsel, rhetorically reflecting on the great cost needed to acquire a great advantage and on the necessity of securing great allies in order to conquer big territories and defeat the enemy. Here, disguising it as an afterthought, Sesers provides confidential information about papal plans for a crusade. Admitting that the organization of a crusade risked jeopardizing the proposed Anglo-Aragonese alliance, Sesers reassures Edward III that the pope could not launch a crusade without the consent of four kings, namely the kings of England and France, who were at war with each other, and the kings of Aragon and Castile.[81] Convinced that there was no appetite among Christians for a crusade at that moment, Sesers therefore recommends that Edward III write to the pope, asking him to halt his crusading plans, and conscientiously support the party which was in the right, namely the Anglo-Flemish

[79] TNA C 47/32/23, m. 3r: "confermer et garantir au roi Darragonn le pais que lui serra grante per conquesta".
[80] TNA C 47/32/23, m. 3r: "Si nostre seignur le roi vorroit enfranchir au roi Darragonn les ditz comitees ou lui vodroit prester ascune quantitte de moneye, ie soi bien que les busoignes enproudroient mout meillor espleiter".
[81] M. Carr, 'Benedict XII and the Crusades', in *Pope Benedict XII*, p. 227. See also N. Housley, *The Avignon Papacy and the Crusades, 1305–1378* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 30-31; 82-84.

alliance, against the one that was in the wrong, namely the French. Edward III should have further confirmed that he would have been willing to take the cross in the future. Once more, here Sesers seems to have built on rumours that he had probably gathered thanks to his acquaintance with the papal legates Pedro Gomez and Bertrand of Montfavés and their entourage in March 1338.[82] Yet, Sesers's information was overall correct. As Housely pointed out, after 1336 Aragon and Castile lost interest in the crusade to the Holy Land and the *Reconquista*, which were draining their kingdoms' finances, while in March 1338 Edward III dreaded the threat of Pope Benedict XII's crusading plans, after Philip VI had been allowed to use the two years' tenth, collected for the cancelled crusade in the Holy Land, to fund the defence of the kingdom of France against Emperor Lewis of Bavaria and his Anglo-Flemish supporters.[83]

4. Conclusions: a successful negotiation?

Arguably, the activity of Peter Sesers is significant in different respects. On the one hand, his career shows how a merchant of possible Saracen origins, whose business consisted in trading goods between England, the Low Countries and the Iberian Peninsula, enduring the relentless danger of robbery and piracy in English and French waters, could profit from the uncertainties and risks that arose after the outbreak of the Hundred Years' War in 1337. In those exceptional circumstances, Sesers and his associates were able to take advantage of their expertise and connections in England, France and the Iberian Peninsula, diversifying their activities from trading to unofficial diplomatic negotiations and representation. Merchants were in fact, at least theoretically, protected by rights of safe passage. They could exploit special protection in different countries and were placed in an ideal position for unofficial

[82] See above n. 14.
[83] Housley, *The Avignon Papacy*, pp. 176-177; 183.

diplomatic roles.[84] Unlike official diplomatic envoys and embassies, their activities could be easily disguised, covering the gathering of sensitive information, rumours, and espionage. This was however a risky business, as Sesers's arrest and imprisonment in the Tower of London in 1339 on the grounds of suspected espionage clearly shows.[85]

Significantly, the examination of Peter Sesers's career and counsel displays a degree of sophistication and wit in his understanding of the international political and diplomatic milieu. If anything, the counsel witnesses to Sesers's detailed investigation of both sides of the argument. At the beginning of his counsel, Sesers astutely set the proposed Anglo-Aragonese alliance against the plans for a Franco-Aragonese alliance, positioning Edward III and his council in competition with the French enemy. Sesers then moves on to the advantages of an Anglo-Aragonese alliance, demonstrating how it was convenient for Edward III to ally with Peter IV of Aragon on the basis of territorial and regional considerations concerning the politics of the Iberian Peninsula, where, as Hillgarth pointed out, the king of Aragon was pursuing the plan of creating a "Mediterranean Empire".[86] Indeed, Sesers's counsel heavily draws on the idea that Edward III would have gained not only the support of the Aragonese Crown in the war against France, but also that of his feudal allegiances. In return, Peter IV could have exploited the outbreak of the Anglo-French conflict to gain control over strategic territories adjacent to his kingdom, namely the counties of Toulouse and Comminges in southern France, where the English covenants offered to the king of Aragon generously outbid the French ones. Arguably, Sesers demonstrated competence in grasping the complex set of allegiances on the

[84] On the immunity of diplomatic envoys and merchants see E. Nys, *Les origines du droit international* (Bruxelles, 1894), pp. 338-341, 379-387; K. Plöger, 'Die Entführung des Fieschi zu Avignon (1340): Zur Entwicklung der diplomatischen Immunität in der Frühphase des Hundertjährigen Krieges', *Francia* 30/1 (2003), pp. 73-105; R. Kolb, 'The protection of the individual in the times of war and peace', in *The Oxford Handbook of International Law*, ed. B. Fassbender, A. Peters (Oxford, 2012), pp. 317-322; D. J. Bederman, 'The Sea', in *The Oxford Handbook of International Law*, pp. 359-365; J. Benham, *International Law in Europe, 700-1200* (Manchester, 2022), p. 156, 241.
[85] See above n. 32.
[86] Hillgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms*, pp. 271-276; 347-348; 353. This argument is supported by Abulafia, *A Mediterranean emporium*, pp. 37-38.

Iberian-French border, sensitively aware that the Aragonese Crown had lost control of the counties of Toulouse and Comminges due to inheritance rules.[87] In this respect, a sticking point in the negotiations could have been control over Roussillon and Montpellier, which, in Abulafia's opinion, represented a very desirable acquisition for Peter IV because of their importance as centres for trade and financial transactions, while Sesers suggested that it should be left to the English after the conquest.[88]

Significantly, Sesers built on his good and in-depth knowledge of English policy in the Iberian Peninsula between January and February 1338, when Edward III had undertaken secret negotiations for an Anglo-Castilian alliance, while dispatching his envoys to Aragon, where in December 1337 the diplomatic mission of England's Dominican envoys, Guillelmo de Orgolio and Bertran de Perraleuada, had failed to set up an Anglo-Aragonese alliance, as mentioned above.[89] We can read in this optic the emphasis in Sesers's counsel on the importance of pursuing negotiations with the kingdom of Castile, implicitly hinting at the Castilian need for Aragonese support, as was the case given the war between Castile and Portugal, whose peace negotiations, between July and December 1338, were entrusted to Bernard d'Alby, bishop of Rodez, upon request of Peter IV of Aragon.[90] Finally, Sesers included in his assessment of the geo-political situation in the Iberian Peninsula the case of the kingdom of Navarre. In this respect, the English alliance with the Aragonese Crown could have exploited Peter IV's marriage to Maria of Navarre in July 1337 and consolidated the English stand in the region vis-à-vis Philip VI of Valois, who was related to the Navarrese bloodline through his cousin the King of Navarre, Philippe of Evreux.[91]

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[87] Renouard, 'Les principaux aspects', pp. 1095-1101.
[88] In 1343 Peter IV managed to annexe to Aragon Montpellier as part of the kingdom of Majorca: Abulafia, *A Mediterranean emporium*, pp. 38-39;180-186. See also Hillgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms*, pp. 359-363.
[89] See above n. 44.
[90] Hofmann, *Kardinalat*, p. 73; Emeis, 'Peter IV.', pp. 108-109. See above, n. 25, 43, 47.
[91] Hillgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms*, pp. 339-340; 357; Linehan, 'Castile, Navarre', pp. 631-632; Masiá de Ros, *Relación Castellano*, pp. 236-239. See also above n. 69.

Equally, Sesers demonstrated insider knowledge of the established territorial allegiances in the kingdom of France and the Duchy of Aquitaine and how they intertwined with the politics of the territories on the French-Iberian border. The latter is evidenced in the careful assessment of how the Aragonese military engagement in France could have gained a great advantage for the Anglo-Flemish alliance against the French both in the Duchy and in the kingdom of France. In doing so, Sesers focused on the pivotal role that Robert of Artois could have played to secure a pro-English consensus in the Duchy thanks to Artois's connections with the count of Foix as well as in Castile, Portugal and Brittany, where Robert enjoyed the support of John III. Arguably, the involvement of Robert of Artois in Sesers's plan may have represented a bit of a gamble on his part, since Philip VI had used Edward III's protection of Robert of Artois as an excuse to confiscate the Duchy of Aquitaine in May 1337, an action that prompted the outbreak of the Hundred Years War, as Froissart notably argued.[92] Indeed, even Benedict XII was concerned for the English protection of Robert of Artois, which was considered risky and dangerous, as the pope wrote to his legate Bertrand of Montfavés on 24 July 1338.[93] Yet, it seems very likely that Sesers's speculations on Robert's possible role in English military operations in Gascony may have built on rumours and information gathered not only through contacts at the English court, but also thanks to acquaintance with the entourage of the papal legates in March 1338. Likewise, Sesers's personal acquaintance with William Clinton, earl of Huntingdon, further prompted his advice to Edward III of dispatching the latter to Gascony, especially given that the Earl enjoyed popularity among the Aragonese and Castilian merchant community which made him a good candidate to liaise and fight along with the Aragonese allies.

[92] See, among others, Déprez, *Les préliminaires*, pp. 164-166. On Froissart and his account see Diller, 'Robert d'Artois', pp. 217-231; Sample, 'Philip's Mortal Enemy', pp. 272-284.
[93] Déprez, *Les préliminaires*, pp. 200-201 and p. 200, n. 5; Diller, 'Robert d'Artois', pp. 224-225; Sample, 'Philip's Mortal Enemy', pp. 275-278.

Overall, Sesers proposed plan was quite straightforward: he was proposing to Edward III to expand his international alliances to the Iberian Peninsula, creating a big anti-French coalition and aggravating the international isolation endured by the French between March and July 1338. The only limitation to this plan was, by Sesers's own admission, Benedict XII's project for a new crusade in the Holy Land, which was coupled, in March 1338, with the pope's concession to Philip VI of employing the crusading tenth to defend his borders against the threat of an Imperial invasion.[94] Yet again, Sesers's assessment here was pretty sound and probably informed by his familiarity with the papal legates in England. Sesers in fact built on papal peace-making narratives, which were focused in 1337-1338 on the re-launch of the crusade after its cancellation in 1336, seen as a means to delay the beginning of the Anglo-French hostilities. However, Sesers correctly assessed the illusory nature of this papal project.[95]

Along with Sesers's original contribution to our understanding of the complex geo-political domestic, regional and international milieu at the outbreak of the Hundred Years' War, his counsel uniquely sheds new light on how unofficial diplomatic missions were managed on a practical level in the fourteenth century. In this respect, some remarkable administrative and diplomatic practices stand out. First, Sesers was not chosen as a diplomatic envoy, but set himself up as a negotiator together with Bérenguer de Saint-Jean, who had men-at-arms and was fighting in Gascony on behalf of the English Crown in March 1338.[96] Equally, the two messengers demanded a "dual appointment" (*double commission*) to negotiate between England and Aragon and were clearly planning to act as a team with duties and tasks determined by their individual background. Bérenguer along with another knight Bartholomew *de* Bochon, who was in charge of six armed men, was to be responsible for the protection of

[94] See above n. 83.
[95] Déprez, *Les préliminaires*, pp. 108–9; H. Jenkins, *Papal efforts for peace under Benedict XII, 1334-1342* (Philadelphia, 1933), pp. 41-53; Housley, *The Avignon Papacy*, 30–1, 82-123. See also Bombi, “Benedict XII", pp. 191-202; M. Carr, "Benedict XII and the Crusades", in *Benedict XII*, pp. 231-240.
[96] See above n. 35.

the party during its journeys by land and sea, potentially imperilled by warfare and privateers. Meanwhile, Sesers was to act as a negotiator, exploiting his merchant skills and networks as well as his connections in England, on the continent and in Aragon, and as a broker for transportation and practical arrangements. Counting on mercantile networks, Sesers could further guarantee a degree of secrecy for the operation, disguising it behind ordinary trading activities. Last but not least, in his counsel, Sesers carefully addressed the issue of sensitive and confidential information that should be conveyed only verbally or should be detached and disposed of, as is suggested by the last strip of parchment sewn at the end of the enrolment, recording more confidential details on the management of the mission.[97]

Despite its great risks and unofficial nature, the proposed diplomatic mission potentially held great advantages for those participating in it. On the one hand, the English Crown was to fully finance the mission, budgeting for transportation, the payment of informers and tips, the armed protection of the messengers, and other expenses. On the other hand, Sesers and his fellow merchants would have profited from the mission, gaining protections on trade in the conquered territories on the French-Iberian border and across the Channel. Although this secondary and more self-centred agenda of Sesers's mission is not openly disguised, it emerges in the request to Edward III to set up a special status for one hundred Aragonese and Majorcan merchants, who were to swear allegiance to the English Crown in return for favourable conditions on their exports and the promise of due process in the case of robberies in English waters. Significantly, this was probably the only part of Sesers's plan that was to some extent ever implemented. While between March and April 1338 exports of wool and goods abroad were banned to support the preparation for the English continental campaign, on 20 August

[97] Péquignot, *Au service du roi*, pp. 105-106.

1338 royal protection of merchants from Aragon, parts of Castile and Majorca trading in the Low Countries, Ireland, and other regions allied with the English Crown was confirmed.[98]

Unfortunately, the evidence does not allow us to suggest with certainty if Sesers' mission led to his arrest on suspicion of espionage in 1339 and whether his counsel was found or used as evidence on this occasion, though this sort of speculation is quite tempting. Although some suggestions in Sesers's counsel, such as the deployment of Robert of Artois in Gascony, may have been somehow politically controversial, at close examination the document does not seem to contain any "stolen" information, but simply gathers rumours and news that Sesers had gathered keeping his ears wide open alongside his business activities. If anything, the magnates and earls, who had Sesers imprisoned in 1339, resented him stepping forward as an international negotiator before Edward III and his council and it is quite understandable why Edward III eventually let him off.

[98] *Foedera*, II/2, p. 1022; 1025.