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ON THE WAY TO THE EMPIRE: THE PORTUGUESE DIPLOMACY OF THE LATE MIDDLE AGES

De camino al Imperio: la diplomacia portuguesa al final de la Edad Media

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ABSTRACT: At the end of the Middle Ages, the kings of Portugal broadened their network of diplomatic contacts while several navigators, on their behalf, were exploring the Atlantic. In this work, based on empirical research on 15th-century embassies and ambassadors, the outlines of the Portuguese diplomacy of that time are presented, giving an account of who the interlocutors were, characterising the ways in which connections were established, addressing the importance of writing and the typology of the documents involved in the contacts, socially characterising the representatives of the monarchs and looking at the relevance of the ceremonies and rituals in these connections. It is intended, therefore, to point out what the external relations of the kings of Portugal of this period had in common with the diplomacy of the medieval West in general and to identify the specificities of the Portuguese case.

Keywords: Portugal; Middle Ages; diplomacy; embassies; ambassadors; maritime expansion.

RESUMEN: A finales de la Edad Media, los reyes de Portugal ampliaron su red de contactos diplomáticos al mismo tiempo que varios navegantes, en su nombre, exploraban el Atlántico. En este trabajo, basado en investigaciones empíricas sobre embajadas y embajadores del siglo xv, se presentan las líneas generales de la diplomacia portuguesa de la época, dando cuenta de quiénes eran los interlocutores, caracterizando las formas de establecer conexiones, abordando la importancia de la escritura y la tipología de los documentos involucrados en los contactos, caracterizando socialmente a los representantes de los monarcas y observando la relevancia de las ceremonias y rituales en estas conexiones. Se pretende, por tanto, señalar

qué tenían en común las relaciones exteriores de los reyes de Portugal de este período con la diplomacia del occidente medieval en general e identificar las especificidades del caso portugués.

Palabras clave: Portugal; Edad Media; diplomacia; embajadas; embajadores; expansión marítima.

SUMARIO: 0 Introduction. 1 The framework of relations. 2 Institutions and laws: how diplomacy was managed. 3 Writing as a support for external Connections. 4 When the kings met. 5 The men who showed up for kings. 6 The rituals that ordered the world. 5 Works cited.

0 INTRODUCTION

A small country in the confines of the Iberian Peninsula, geographically semiperipheral, without great demographic expression and almost always relatively poor when compared to the main European states, Portugal is a country whose name is inscribed in most universal history manuals: in the 15th and 16th centuries, a series of navigations carried out on behalf of their sovereigns contributed decisively to what has been conventionally designated as the first global age. The maritime expeditions of the Portuguese, their impact on world knowledge and on the connection between the different continents, as well as the scientific developments from which they resulted and gave rise to, are all themes that have been valued by historiography for many years. Less well known, however, is an important aspect that cannot be dissociated from the expansion: the political relations developed by the kings of Portugal with rulers of foreign political entities.

This work aims to present an overview of the Portuguese diplomacy of the 15th century, highlighting how it converged with the generality of the medieval West and how it distinguished itself. It is based on an extensive empirical investigation that sought to exhaustively identify the documents, events and agents involved in these contacts¹. From that information, the list of states with which the kings of Portugal had relationships is drawn up and it is analysed how those political affairs were developed in practice, trying to understand aspects such as the influence on these contacts of the dynastic transition at the end of the 14th century and of the military and maritime expansion, which began in 1415.

This text also seeks to frame the Portuguese case in what has been, in the recent decades, the renewal of the diplomatic history of the Middle Ages, due to studies in which, as authors such as Catherine Fletcher and Isabella Lazzarini have already pointed out, the analysis framework has become more complex, insofar as the examination of *high-level negotiations* between kings, emperors and popes shifted to an attempt to understand social and cultural phenomena that involved, in formal and informal contacts, a greater

¹ The main result of that investigation is a doctoral thesis: Faria, *A diplomacia*. Other theses produced in recent years have contributed to a deeper knowledge of Portuguese medieval diplomacy: Faria, *The Politics*; Lima, *A diplomacia*; Marinho, *Os embaixadores*; Santos, *A sociologia*.

plurality of actors in a wider geographical framework². The synthesis that Jean-Marie Moeglin and Stéphane Péquignot published in 2017 on the diplomacy of the West between the 9th and 15th centuries is the greatest testimony and state of the art of these developments, which have contributed to the reinterpretation of several ancient problems and to the recognition of the existence of a *complex diplomatic Middle Ages*³.

1 THE FRAMEWORK OF RELATIONS

The Portuguese 15th century was still strongly marked by the dynastic transition that took place at the end of the previous century. When, in 1383, King Fernando (r. 1367-1383) died, he left his daughter Beatriz, married to King Juan I of Castile, as legitimate heir. The succession was not accepted by important sectors of the Portuguese political society, which provoked a crisis that culminated in the accession to the throne of João de Avis (r. 1385-1433), illegitimate son of King Pedro (r. 1357-1367). Thus began the second dynasty of the kings of Portugal —known as the Avis dynasty—, under the sign of illegitimacy and of the war with Castile⁴.

The development of this conflict implied the alignment of each of the parties with one of the opposing blocs in the Hundred Years' War. While the kingdom of Castile was an ally of France, the new king of Portugal approached England, benefiting from British military aid and formalising an alliance through the Treaty of Windsor, of 1386. The following year, João I married Philippa, daughter of the Duke of Lancaster and granddaughter of Edward III of England. As a consequence of this marriage, the descendants of this couple, among them all the kings of Portugal of the 15th century, were relatives of the English, Scottish, Danish and even Castilian monarchs.

The enlargement of the diplomatic framework is one of the essential characteristics of the foreign relations of the kings of Portugal from the late Middle Ages, and it persisted under the successors of João I. The lists of formulae of address, greeting and farewell that should be used in the correspondence addressed to foreign sovereigns are testimony to this⁵. During the reign of King Duarte (r. 1433-1438), among the potential interlocutors of the Portuguese monarch appear: the Emperor, the Kings of England, Castile, Aragon, Navarre, Scotland, Poland and Granada, and also the Dukes of Burgundy, Brittany, Austria, Milan and Venice —who were joined by various holders of positions in the curia, mercantile communities and urban authorities⁶. With King Afonso V (r. 1438-1481), the monarchs of France, Hungary, Naples, Denmark and Cyprus had already been added to the list, as well as, among others, the Dukes of Modena, Savoy and Genoa and the Marquis of Ferrara⁷. Naturally, these references, by themselves, do not testify to concrete

² Fletcher, *Diplomacy*, 7; Lazzarini, *Communication*, 2.

³ Moeglin and Péquignot, *Diplomatie*.

⁴ Bartlett, *Blood*, 169-75.

⁵ The production of this type of document was common in the chancelleries of the late Middle Ages, as it is pointed out in Senatore, «*Uno mundo de carta*», 375-8.

⁶ Duarte, *Livro dos conselhos*, 181-200.

⁷ Serra, *Livro vermelho*, 402-19.

contacts nor do they clarify their regularity and intensity, but allow an approximation to the range of powers that, at least, were on the political horizon of the kings of Portugal.

Different is the meaning of the data on the matrimonial alliances and on the embassies which were promoted by the same monarchs, insofar as they account for interactions that were not simply projected or conceived as possibilities, but that actually took place.

From the early decades of the 13th century to the late 14th century, the weddings of the Portuguese royal family have been all negotiated within the Iberian Peninsula. The scenario changed with the new dynasty, during which marriages that connected the family of Avis to the royal houses of England, Burgundy, Empire and Cyprus —besides, of course, Castile and Aragon— were promoted⁸. These alliances were simultaneously a cause and a consequence of the widening of the Portuguese monarch's contact framework, as the integration of members of the Portuguese royal family into some of the main foreign courts provided new connections. The most prominent case is that of Isabel de Portugal, who while Duchess of Burgundy played a determining role in the marriages of Leonor de Portugal with Emperor Frederick III and of João de Coimbra with Charlotte of Cyprus.

With regard to embassies, what is known about this aspect between the end of the 14th century and the end of the 15th century corroborates the tendency of expanding the number of powers with which the kings of Portugal were related —from nine between 1385 and 1433, they increased to 20 between 1433 and 1495—, but it also demonstrates that, essentially, the core of the spaces with which contacts were strong was relatively restricted: Castile and the Papacy stood out clearly, being the destination of 53,1% of the embassies. Even so, the connections to trans-Pyrenean spaces such as France, the Empire and the Italian states became stronger. The great novelty of this enlargement, however, is the establishment of political contacts with African entities, especially during the reign of King João II (r. 1481-1495), who sent six embassies to Fez, Eguafó, Mali and Congo (two), as part of a commitment to exploring the West African coast and establishing alliances with local leaders, with a view to creating Portuguese outposts, promoting commerce and spreading the Christian faith. In the previous decades, in Africa, there had been only sporadic contacts with the kingdom of Fez and the sultan of Cairo⁹. In the following century, the development of the Portuguese maritime empire would also include contacts of the same type in diverse areas of Asia¹⁰. This diplomatic dimension of the Portuguese expansion, so often subordinated in relation to the importance of navigations, is one of the foundations of an idea recently presented by Luís Filipe Thomaz: the Portuguese expansion can be characterised as «of Greek or Carthaginian type» —that is, with a discontinuous profile, which implied interaction with populations and political

⁸ Rodrigues, Silva and Faria, *Casamentos*.

⁹ An exhaustive catalogue of embassies sent by the kings of Portugal between 1433 and 1495 and an analysis of their data is available in Faria, *A diplomacia*, 209-460.

¹⁰ Serge Gruzinski addressed the importance of the diplomatic contacts of the Portuguese crown in China during the 16th century in Gruzinski, *L'Aigle*.

entities from different parts of the globe—, in contrast to the Spanish one, which would be of a «Roman type» and, therefore, much more territorial¹¹.

2 INSTITUTIONS AND LAWS: HOW DIPLOMACY WAS MANAGED

The level of formality and institutional solidity of the Portuguese diplomacy of the Middle Ages, if we use as indicators to assess it the existence of legislation and of administration offices dedicated to this area of governance, was more incipient than that of other areas in the West. In the 15th century, this scenario was not reversed, but there were some significant innovations.

As far as the structure of the kingdom's governance is concerned, it is not yet during this period that positions directly related to the *foreign affairs* appeared. While in England, for instance, at the end of the 14th century there was already an official exclusively dedicated to archiving documents relating to the conflict with France¹², in the Portuguese case it is not possible to detect, among the dozens of offices related to the management of the king's household and of the kingdom, a single one whose exclusive or main function was any task related to contacts with the outside world¹³. The conduction of foreign policy and the selection of its protagonists were prerogatives of the king, who did not act alone. Sporadically, the Parliament served to discuss and deliberate on matters of foreign policy, as happened in 1442, in Évora, where the three states pronounced themselves on the response to a number of embassies from Castile¹⁴. It was in the Royal Council, however, that these topics were most often dealt with, with plenty of examples of meetings in which it was decided what to answer to the embassies of other monarchs, established conditions on the conclusion of agreements or discussed possible matrimonial alliances. The choice of the ambassadors could also be the subject of discussion at these meetings¹⁵.

The profile of the royal representatives abroad is another indication of the importance of the Royal Council for the diplomacy. At least 40 of the 93 individuals selected for foreign missions between 1433 and 1495 served on that body¹⁶, which could suggest two things: on the one hand, this would happen because monarchs would choose as their advisors a group of men whom they most trusted personally and politically, and it would be natural that this trust would result in their being chosen for representative missions abroad; on the other hand, as Council meetings were moments when the preparation and composition of the embassies were regularly discussed, it would not be surprising if the debate and choices often ended up focusing on the personalities present.

¹¹ Thomaz, *A expansão*, 16-8.

¹² Moeglin and Péquignot, *Diplomatic*, 143.

¹³ Gomes, *The Making*; Homem, *O desembargo*.

¹⁴ Sousa, *As cortes*, 362-3.

¹⁵ Chaves, *Livro*, 214; Duarte, *Livro*, 69-73.

¹⁶ Faria, *A diplomacia*, 498.

Unlike in the neighbouring kingdom of Castile —where in the *Siete Partidas* of Alfonso X, from the 13th century, there was already a law about the ambassadors¹⁷— and in several other spaces¹⁸, diplomacy was almost on the margins of the legislative production of the medieval Portuguese monarchy. The few examples of norms dedicated to the matters of foreign relations appear precisely in the 15th century, but they are isolated and do not fit into a comprehensive effort to systematise procedures on the functioning of these activities.

In the *Ordenações Afonsinas*, a compilation of laws completed in 1448, there is a title on the figures who could not be cited for judicial purposes when at court, which included «whoever comes to court with an embassy from outside the kingdom», except in special circumstances. In addition, it was determined that any member of an embassy, from the moment he was in Portugal, should «be safe from any harm», thus formalising the principle of diplomatic immunity, which had ancient roots and was already observed in Portugal¹⁹.

There are a few more cases of rules that relate to the contacts with other powers. In King Afonso V's *Livro Vermelho* (*Red Book*), there are two examples of policies produced in meetings between the king and his advisors that concern two aspects of the diplomatic practice: at an unspecified date, it was drawn up a regiment on where foreign ambassadors should sit in the royal chapel²⁰; in 1473, the king decided on the supplies that would be paid to his representatives and to the members of the committees that were sent with them to other domains²¹. In some royal documentation preserved in municipal funds or archives, it is possible to find examples of rules established by the sovereigns regarding specific cases of diplomatic missions, such as those that King João II informed the municipality of Évora, on 12 October 1486, about the reception of the ambassadors from Venice who were travelling around the kingdom²². Even if they emanate from royal authority, the absence of a minimum constitutive, general and definitive character of these determinations does not allow them, presumably, to be considered laws.

The lack of further legislation on diplomacy can perhaps be explained by the *ad hoc* nature of the diplomatic missions, the absence of what would later come to be known as international law, the non-existence of offices devoted exclusively to foreign policy, and the fact that the conduction of contacts with other powers was a royal prerogative, with the king himself functioning as a *living law*, on the basis of practices and customs that were refined over time²³. Thus, the essential of the norms that somehow regulated the international relations of the kings of Portugal were contained in the treaties signed with other monarchs. These include: the Treaty of Windsor, which in 1386 defined the terms of an alliance between the sovereigns of Portugal and England and was successively renewed during the fifteenth century; the Treaty of Medina del Campo, which in 1431

¹⁷ *Las Siete Partidas*, Part II, tit. IX, law XXI.

¹⁸ See the well-studied case of Dubrovnik in Fejic, «Les relations».

¹⁹ Nunes and Costa, *Ordenações*, 13-5.

²⁰ Serra, *Livro*, 420-1.

²¹ *Ibidem*, 467-9.

²² ADE, *Fundo da Câmara*, livro 72, 42-43.

²³ Caetano, *História*, 463-4.

established peace with Castile, after decades of conflict and instability following the 1383-1385 succession crisis; the Treaty of Alcáçovas-Toledo, which in 1479 resumed and deepened the agreement of 1431, after a new war between Portugal and Castile; and the Treaty of Tordesillas, which in 1494 determined which parts of the world Portugal and Castile had the right to explore and conquer²⁴.

In what concerns to the other norms, there are not many testimonies to confirm or disprove the real applicability of royal decrees, which, even so, does not diminish the importance of those texts, since their mere existence has a meaning. The facts that, as far as is known, they have no antecedents and that they were elaborated in roughly the same chronology may be indications that the evolution of diplomacy engendered the necessity to start producing abstract norms, even if in an incipient way, to regulate some aspects of the relations with the outside world. Those norms could have the purposes of stabilising old practices, responding to new challenges of the functioning of foreign policy, standardising procedures and dispensing, in some cases, of the discretion and direct action of the king or his closest officials.

3 WRITING AS A SUPPORT FOR EXTERNAL CONNECTIONS

From the middle centuries of the Middle Ages onwards, there was a great quantitative and qualitative growth in the importance of writing for the governance of political entities, as shown, for example, by the enormous increase in the consumption of sealing wax in English chancery during the 13th century²⁵. Throughout the West, diplomatic relations did not escape this *document revolution*, which was associated with the development of bureaucratic apparatus and the complexity of the structures for administering territories. From the end of the 12th century, written friendship agreements between princes became regular. This was followed by the emergence of new types of texts, some of them without legal value but with an evident practical and pragmatic nature. In the 13th and 14th centuries, states were already living in what Isabella Lazzarini, from the cases of the Italian Peninsula, characterised as an *age of multiplied communication*, in which there is an amplification of the connections between various powers of the West through writing and an explosion of the production of sources related to those contacts²⁶.

The Portuguese reality was quite different from the Italian one, but it is still possible to identify a set of documents of various typologies that embodied the diplomatic relations²⁷. Among those with legal value, the treaties, marriage contracts, powers of attorney and laissez-passers stand out —there are also indirect references to letters of credence, but it has not been possible to identify a single one. In addition to these texts, the correspondence sent and received by the monarchs, members of the royal family and individuals

²⁴ Faria, *A diplomacia*, 112-29; Fonseca, *O essencial*.

²⁵ Clanchy, *From memory*, 62.

²⁶ Azzolini and Lazzarini, «Introduction», 1-7; Lazzarini, «La communication»; Moeglin and Péquignot, *Diplomatie*, 126-32.

²⁷ Vigil Montes, «La importancia»; Vigil Montes, «Diplomacia y diplomática».

who worked as ambassadors, as well as the letters of instruction to those who exercised functions abroad, played a fundamental role in international contacts. In terms of typology, general structure and objectives, especially regarding the documents with legal value, nothing of substance distinguished those produced in Portugal from those produced in other courts of the West²⁸. The most innovative aspect of this period is the emergence of new ways of preserving these diplomas, while what most distinguishes the Portuguese reality from that of other spaces is the list of languages in which the texts were written.

The scriptures that constituted the memory of the Portuguese monarchy were deposited in a tower of the Lisbon castle, which became known as the *Torre do Tombo*, perhaps since the reign of King Dinis (r. 1279-1325)²⁹. It is difficult to reconstruct the organisation of the documentation in this space in times before the earthquake of 1755, but the description instruments of the 16th and 17th centuries do not point to a special individualisation of the samples related to the international contacts. There is evidence, however, that in the 15th century it would not have been easy for the king to gain access to documents he needed to consult. This type of difficulty can be seen in a letter that King Afonso V sent to the Évora town council in 1451, requesting that the copy of the peace treaty with Castile, which was part of the municipal registry, be temporarily transferred to him³⁰. It was one of the most significant documents signed by a king of Portugal in the previous decades, but even so, whether due to the way it was filed at the *Torre do Tombo*, or to any other circumstance related to the royal itinerancy, the monarch had easier access to it through a copy that was in the possession of a city council. A few years later, in 1459, the «great expense» that was made «seeking some things» in the old tomes of the royal archive and the «great prolixity of scriptures» found there were targets of complaints from the people in Parliament sessions³¹.

One of the strategies that the men and institutions of the Middle Ages found to mitigate the problems of document management was the creation of cartularies. In the 15th century, the official amanuensis of the kings of Portugal prepared at least two volumes in which were compiled documents related to diplomacy, which were intended to facilitate their reading and research in the royal archives. The oldest was produced during the reign of King João I and was dedicated to relations with England. It originally included 16 documents, including the Treaty of Windsor (1386). Later, the blank folios were used to add the ratification of that agreement by King Duarte and King Henry VI of England, which, as Néstor Vigil Montes has already pointed out, reveals the nature of a *living book* that was attributed to the volume³². In the final decades of the century, Fernão de Pina was responsible for drawing up *Livro das Pazes* (*Peace Book*)³³. Dedicated to the relations with Castile, it contains 14 documents, divided into two parts: the first part includes texts relating to border disputes; the second one includes the treaties of Alcanizes (1297),

²⁸ These documents are analysed in Faria, *A diplomacia*, 111-58.

²⁹ Ribeiro, «Como seria», 1401.

³⁰ ADE, *Fundo da Câmara*, livro 72 (Livro II de Originais), 199-199v.

³¹ Marques, *Chancelarias*, 3.

³² Vigil Montes, «*Tractados*».

³³ ANTT, *Leitura Nova*, book 61 (*Livro das Pazes*). On the circumstances of the elaboration of this codex and its characteristics, there follows, once more, a study by Vigil Montes, «*Livro*».

Medina del Campo (1431) and Alcáçovas (1479). At a time when there were still no administration «departments» specifically dedicated to external relations, these cartularies bear witness to the importance of diplomacy within an increasingly complex government structure and its relative individualisation vis-à-vis other matters.

The languages used by the kings of Portugal in their relations with foreign countries are diverse and different from those used in the West in general. Castilian was the predominant language in the 15th century Peninsular contacts, and it was in this language that the kings of Portugal received correspondence from Aragon, Castile and Navarre. In the opposite direction followed communications written in Portuguese³⁴. The fact that Portuguese and Castilian were often used simultaneously in the same negotiation —with each side expressing itself in its own language —constitutes a singularity in the medieval West³⁵. This scenario can be explained by cultural and political reasons. On the one hand, the Iberian languages were so close that one of them would be easily understood by a native of the other³⁶. On the other hand, the use of the native language was a way of not acknowledging superiority to the other party and of making clear the existence of different entities and identities³⁷. This kind of political significance attributed to the choice of the language of the documents is solidly demonstrated, both in relation to other spaces³⁸ and to the early days of the Portuguese monarchy³⁹.

The contacts with the trans-Pyrenean spaces were mostly in Latin, but there were some exceptions. In the connections to Burgundy, at least in the lifetime of Isabel of Portugal, Portuguese also came into the equation, for the obvious reason that it was the Duchess's native tongue⁴⁰. With Brittany, there is a curious scenario of letters sent by King Afonso V in three different languages —Latin, Portuguese and Castilian⁴¹. The choice of the classic language is explained by the universality of its knowledge in the West. It is more difficult to understand why a king of Portugal would write in Portuguese to a Breton duke. Given the political connotation that could be attributed to the

³⁴ For example, Dinis, *Monumenta*, VI, 279-80, VII, 166-7, X, 250-1.

³⁵ Vigil Montes, «La importancia», 162. This phenomenon is also well observable in the case of the languages used in the international relations of the city Barcelona, Péguignot, «Les langues». The situation was different in other multilingual spaces, such as Flanders. In this case, although contacts with the authorities could be made in Latin, French and Dutch, the chancellery tended to adapt to the interlocutors' mother tongue, Prevenier and De Hemptine, «La Flandre».

³⁶ This provided, at least, semi-communication experiences, such as those described by Einar Haugen for the Scandinavian case, in which «languages that are closely related and mutually comprehensible serve as media of a partial understanding», Haugen, «Semi-Communication».

³⁷ The idea that different languages corresponded to different political entities is coeval with these events, as demonstrated by Philippe de Commynes' writings on the Iberian Peninsula, Péguignot, «Les Espagnes».

³⁸ For example, the kings of England stopped writing in French to the sovereigns of France during the Hundred Years' War, Autrand, «L'écrit», 311.

³⁹ Maria João Branco has already pointed out that the first Portuguese royal texts in vernacular, in the 13th century, were all politically important documents and drafted in contexts of crisis by men who mastered Latin and continued to write mostly in that language, it being evident that it was a political motivation that justified the writing of the diplomas in one language or the other, Branco, «Revisiting».

⁴⁰ For example, Paviot, *Portugal et Bourgogne*, 459-60.

⁴¹ Serrão, *Relações*, 150-4, 158-9.

language of international contact documents, it is likely that King Duarte's successor wanted to make clear the position of pre-eminence of a king over a duke. When he wrote to Francis II in Castilian, at a time when he was claiming the throne of Castile and calling himself the monarch of that kingdom, King Afonso V would have tried to show that he fully embodied the new title. In specific circumstances, Arabic texts were also produced as part of the diplomatic relations of the Avis monarchs⁴². In those cases, the use of this language results from the role played by the Muslim elites of the kingdom of Portugal in the contacts with the Islamic powers⁴³.

4 WHEN THE KINGS MET

Between the foundation of the kingdom of Portugal and the mid-14th century, conferences involving the Portuguese monarchs and other sovereigns, almost always from the neighbouring kingdoms of León and Castile, were very frequent. The slowdown in this practice has parallels on a Western scale⁴⁴ and, in the Portuguese case, can be explained by very clear political factors: the definition of the kingdom's borders in 1297; the decreasing of the level of friendship in Luso-Castile relations in the 14th century, which resulted in four military conflicts and fewer matrimonial alliances; and, complementarily, the processes of curialisation of the nobility and the development of the central administrative apparatus. During the reign of King Afonso V, the scenario changed.

After four reigns and more than 80 years in which there had only been a few encounters, Afonso V resumed the habit of the kings of Portugal meeting their counterparts from other powers. Between 1456 and 1477, that happened on seven occasions. If we extend the analysis to the interviews involving a sitting monarch and a leading member of a royal family from another kingdom, such as a prince or queen consort, these numbers increase: there are 11 *vistas* (*views*) between 1453 and 1488. The strengthening of relations with Castile, after decades marked by the wars and the mistrust that always follows them, and the unstable political situation that marked the life of that Crown for a large part of the 15th century are the factors that most directly contributed to this change.

It all started in 1453, when King Afonso V met in Monsaraz with Enrique, the Castilian prince who would succeed Juan II the following year⁴⁵. In that kingdom, the internal conflict between sectors of the aristocracy encouraged the search for allies abroad. The future King Enrique IV, who was living a fruitless marriage with Queen Blanche I of Navarre, looked at Portugal as a possible important support and saw a marriage with the Infanta Joana, sister of Afonso V, as an opportunity. It was within this framework that Afonso and Enrique got to know each other personally and laid the foundations for the meetings that would follow in the future. Always against a backdrop of conflicts between the Castilian nobility and monarchy, on the one hand, and the relationship between

⁴² Cenival, *Les sources*, I, 25-30.

⁴³ Barros, «A minoria».

⁴⁴ Schwedler, *Herrscher treffen*.

⁴⁵ Dinis, *Monumenta*, XI, 253.

Portugal and Castile, reinforced by Enrique's marriage to Joana, on the other, there were five more meetings with these protagonists⁴⁶.

The death of King Enrique IV in 1474 was followed by Afonso V's dispute for the Castilian throne, which would come to be at the genesis of an event that provided more royal *vistas*: the journey of Afonso to France. It was an unprecedented journey, since, apart from the campaigns in Morocco, no king of Portugal had ever left the Iberian Peninsula before. Besides, it would be necessary to wait for the second half of the 19th century and for the European tour of King Pedro V (r. 1853-1861) for another Portuguese monarch to visit again the trans-Pyrenean courts. In 1476 and 1477, in France, King Afonso V met twice with King Louis XI, from whom he was unable to obtain military support for the war with Castile, and with Charles *le Téméraire*, the Duke of Burgundy who was his cousin⁴⁷.

In 1479, it was also a meeting that launched the peace negotiations with Castile. Queen Isabel and the Duchess Beatriz, cousin and sister-in-law of Afonso V, met in the border village of Alcántara. On his behalf, she began to negotiate the terms of an agreement that would put an end to the conflict and normalise the relations between the two kingdoms⁴⁸.

During the reign of King João II, there was a return to the pre-Afonso V reality and no further meetings with other peninsular monarchs. The *Perfect Prince* would come to meet in person with a member of another royal family, but in a very different context. In 1488, King João II received in Setúbal the African prince Bemoim, from the kingdom of Jalofos, with whom there already existed contacts in the context of the exploration of the West African coast by the Portuguese. Over the course of a few weeks, the two discussed the military support that the king of Portugal could provide Bemoim in the context of the war that he was facing in his territories, safeguarding the African's conversion to Christianity as one of the essential conditions for the agreement to come to fruition⁴⁹.

11 meetings in the 35 years between 1453 and 1488, which corresponds to an average of one meeting every three years and two months, is equivalent to a kind of return to the times of King Dinis, who met with other monarchs at roughly the same rate between 1287 and 1314. The reigns of King Afonso V and King João II saw the innovations of one sovereign travelling outside the Iberian Peninsula to meet others and of his successor receiving a prince from another continent. Even so, in general, the purposes of the royal encounters did not differ significantly from those that motivated them in the 12th to 15th centuries: it was, above all, the issues of peace and war what was generally at issue. And, in the long run, the resumption of this practice during the reign of King Afonso V can be seen as exceptional. The costs of these meetings, the difficulty of organising them, the security risks they could entail, the complexity of the diplomatic affairs, the sedentary nature of the royal itinerancy, the development of the central government apparatus and Portugal's eccentric geographical position in relation to most of the powers with which

⁴⁶ Faria, *A diplomacia*, 178-87.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, 188-94.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, 194-6.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, 196-9.

it had relations are all reasons that help us to understand that the late Middle Ages were no longer exactly the time for royal meetings.

5 THE MEN WHO SHOWED UP FOR KINGS

As Françoise Autrand and Philippe Contamine have written from the French case, diplomatic negotiations progressively ceased to be a matter for princes and became primarily a matter for their representatives⁵⁰. In the 15th century, this type of task was not yet performed by professionals who dedicated a career exclusively to these matters, but the choice of the men who led the embassies, even though it was made *ad hoc* and involving personalities with very diverse profiles, was not discretionary: there were royal servants who were sent abroad on several occasions, and it is even possible to identify common characteristics that motivated their choice for those tasks⁵¹.

The composition of diplomatic missions could be very diverse. In Portugal, between 1433 and 1495, about two-thirds of the embassies had only one ambassador, while about a quarter of them included two⁵². Missions with three or more ambassadors were much rarer (around 10% of the total) and were reserved for more complex or solemn occasions, as was the case, for instance, with the Portuguese representation at the Council of Basel or the marriage of Leonor of Portugal to the Emperor Frederick III —it was also on these occasions that the simultaneous presence, on the same mission, of noble, clerical and literate ambassadors was recorded, which some authors have already pointed out as a kind of ideal composition of the medieval embassies⁵³.

If we adopt precisely this tripartition between nobles, clerics and literates to look at the set of 93 men who represented the kings of Portugal in this period —and this division, despite being a simplification of the reality that tends to devalue the permeability between the different categories, is based on the perceptions of that time on the organisation of the medieval society⁵⁴—, it can be witnessed that during the 15th century the nobility continued to be the main field for recruiting ambassadors, while the weight of clerics sharply fell and that of the literates increased considerably.

The noble group includes 46 of the 93 ambassadors identified, that is, 49,5% of the total. During this period, these individuals were always in the majority among the diplomats, but their weight has tended to decrease: in the reign of King Duarte, 77,8% of the embassies had nobles, while in that of King João II that number had already fallen to 54,5%. On average, each of these men took part in 1.5 missions, which had 13 destinations, with a notable predominance in the contacts with the African powers, France, England and Castile. The profile of these individuals was very heterogeneous —it ranged

⁵⁰ Autrand and Contamine, «Naissance», 108-11.

⁵¹ An up-to-date overview of the choice of ambassadors of the Iberian kingdoms in the Middle Ages is available in Nieto Soria, «Conclusiones», 343-7.

⁵² For a deeper approach to this subject, cf. Faria, «Os embaixadores».

⁵³ Beceiro Pita, «Embajadas», 196.

⁵⁴ Godinho, *Estrutura*, 75-109, 191-3.

from members of the royal family with noble titles to squires and court knights of a more modest status—, but almost all of them had close connexions to the court and the monarchs, and many of them were experienced in the administration of the royal household and the kingdom and had proven themselves in warfare. As Anne-Brigitte Spitzbarth has pointed out with regard to the appointment of noblemen to the embassies of the Dukes of Burgundy, their choice almost always seems to suggest a greater appreciation of the *savoir être* than of the *savoir faire*⁵⁵.

About a quarter of the ambassadors belonged to the ecclesiastical state. As with the nobles, their weight decreased, this time more markedly: during the reign of King Duarte, 44,4% of the diplomats were religious; in that of King João II, only 12,1% were. Each one took part, on average, in 1.3 missions, which had five destinations, with a strong focus on the Italian Peninsula. Also in this case, it is worth noting the diversity of profiles falling into this group: there were secular and regular clerics, in particular bishops and members of religious orders who served as royal confessors at the court. Simultaneously men of God and men of the king, the ecclesiastics often synthesized the attributes that were most recognized in the nobles and the literate, to whom they allied a moral authority and a spiritual charisma that only they could hold⁵⁶.

The group of the literates was the fastest growing in the 15th-century diplomacy⁵⁷, despite being, at first sight, the least numerous: 20 literates who acted as ambassadors between 1433 and 1495 (21,5% of the total) were identified, a lower number than that of the nobles and clerics. On average, each of these men participated in 2,8 missions. Between the reigns of King Duarte and King João II, the weight of the embassies that had individuals with this profile increased from 44,4% to 48,5% —in the other two groups, it should be remembered, the tendency was reversed. Among these 20 men, 15 had higher education and held offices in the central administration of the kingdom. It was not possible to identify the specialisation of all, but the studies in Laws are clearly the majority as opposed to Canons. Regarding the universities, there were men who studied in Bologna, Florence, Lisbon, Paris and Siena. The positions they held in the bureaucratic structure of the Crown were very diverse and covered both the *Desembargo* (the set of officials and services responsible for the preparation of documents for the administration of the kingdom) and the higher courts of the *Casa do Cível* and *Casa da Suplicação*. In general, these were men who were outstanding for their culture and legal knowledge, who spoke foreign languages and who, in many cases, travelled to distant lands at a young age, as well as belonging to social and administrative milieus very close to the monarchs⁵⁸.

Although one cannot speak of professional ambassadors looking at the Portuguese reality of the 15th century, there is evidence of the specialisation of a small core of individuals in foreign policy matters. The most relevant is the number of embassies in which

⁵⁵ Spitzbarth, «Le choix».

⁵⁶ Lazzarini, *Communication*, 132.

⁵⁷ A trend common to several spaces, Beceiro Pita, «La tendencia», 451; Cañas Gálvez, «La diplomacia», 713-4; Lazzarini, *Communication*, 125-32; Spitzbarth, «Le choix».

⁵⁸ A more in-depth overview of the role of literates in the Portuguese diplomacy of the late Middle Ages is available in Faria, «A participação».

each of the men chosen to be ambassadors participated. Practically two thirds of those identified were part of a single mission, which points to the sporadic nature of this type of service in the biography of each of them. Even so, there was a minority of about 14% of nominees for three or more missions, in relation to which it seems to be legitimate to note that the experience gained on previous occasions was recognized and valued —the most relevant case is that of João Fernandes da Silveira, a literate from the kingdom's administration who would become the first Portuguese baron and took part in at least 17 embassies. Among these individuals to whom the kings resorted most often there also seems to be some tendency towards geographical specialisation: Silveira, for example, went to Castile at least nine times, while Pedro de Sousa's three missions took place in France and Brittany.

From the analysis of the biographies of the group of 93 individuals who represented the kings of Portugal between 1433 and 1495, it appears that the criteria that would have weighed most heavily in their nomination were the proximity to the court, the social status and inherent financial capacity, the intellectual and literary skills, and the diplomatic, travel and foreign travel experience.

6 THE RITUALS THAT ORDERED THE WORLD

In the late Middle Ages, the practice of diplomacy was developed within the framework of a set of rituals, ceremonies and codes of behaviour that conferred some order on the diversity of the courts of the West. It was many years ago that authors such as Marc Bloch and Norbert Elias highlighted and interpreted gestures and events that were repeated in medieval monarchies, which were not all the same but tended towards a synchronisation, and which attributed predictability to social interactions and could be imbued with important meanings⁵⁹. The «ceremonialisation of international relations», according to José Manuel Nieto Soria, was one of the relevant points in the evolution of diplomacy in this period, marked by an attitude of ostentation that was aimed at the prestige of the sovereigns and that influenced the development of negotiations⁶⁰. The interactions involving the kings of Portugal and their representatives did not escape this scenario.

There are several testimonies of the importance given, in the 15th century, to ceremonial aspects related to diplomacy. One of the most evident is the way in which the precedence between the representatives of different powers was seen. Both in the documentation produced by the royal administration⁶¹ and in the ceremonies held in the King's Chapel⁶², foreign monarchs and their ambassadors were ordained according

⁵⁹ Bloch, *Les rois*; Elias, *The civilizing*; Elias, *The court*. New perspectives on the role of rituals in medieval monarchies are in evidence in works such as Althof, *Die macht*; Gauvard, «Le rituale»; Moeglin, «Performative turn».

⁶⁰ Nieto Soria, *Ceremonias*, 133-5.

⁶¹ Duarte, *Livro*, 181-200; Serra, *Livro*, 402-9.

⁶² Serra, *Livro*, 421.

to the order of precedence established among the various sovereigns of Christendom, who always had the Pope and the Emperor at their head. Sources such as the diary of the journey of the Count of Ourém to the Council of Basel —where there is a report of a conflict between English and Castilian ambassadors over the precedence⁶³—, the correspondence received by King Afonso V from a servant of him in Rome —reporting an incident with an Aragonese delegation about who would have the privilege of holding the Pope's robe at a wedding⁶⁴— and a letter sent by the same monarch to the ambassador João Fernandes da Silveira during a stay in Italy —with instructions on how to manage the precedence in the curia⁶⁵— confirm that the Portuguese sovereigns of the late Middle Ages and their delegates, as was the case in Christendom in general, placed great value on the question of the precedence of one over the other, which they would not fail to see as a mirror of a hierarchy of power and prestige.

Given the importance attached in the West to the ceremonial aspects of diplomacy, it is not surprising that the development of embassies followed a common, albeit flexible, ritual scheme, which was followed at the court of Avis and at almost all the courts visited by the Portuguese ambassadors. Stéphane Péquignot summed it up: on the first occasion, after the solemn reception or the announcement of the entourage's arrival, an audience would be held in which the ambassadors would present greetings, hand over credentials and gifts, and, sometimes, give an account of the objectives of the mission with which they had been entrusted; over the following days, weeks or even months, a series of hearings and meetings, usually more private, were held for negotiation purposes; at the end, a final farewell interview, which used to be less exuberant, was held⁶⁶. The implementation of this sequence of interactions could vary according to the protagonists involved, the circumstances and the particular objectives of each embassy.

As an example of this malleability, it should be noted how, in practice, the start of political interactions between princes and ambassadors could take place in very diverse circumstances, from some examples of the Portuguese court⁶⁷. In 1494, the representatives of the *Catholic Kings* who wanted to discuss the succession to the Portuguese throne with King João II had no difficulty: on the day they arrived in Setúbal, they presented themselves at the palace and asked that the monarch be informed of their arrival; perhaps because the matter in question was of special interest to João II, they were immediately received⁶⁸. The same fate would not have befallen the envoys of the same sovereigns to the King of Portugal in 1485, if an anecdotal episode were true. It had reached the ears of the king that the ambassadors had said that «Lisbon was nothing and that it was very small compared to other cities in Castile». In retaliation, the two noblemen were lodged in the Santos area, at a considerable distance from the royal palace, and the count in charge of bringing them to the monarch's presence was instructed to fetch them only

⁶³ Sousa, *Provas*, vol. V, pt. II, 284-5.

⁶⁴ BL, Ms. Add. 20952, 74v-75.

⁶⁵ BPE, *Manizola*, cód. 177, 44v-45.

⁶⁶ Péquignot, «Les diplomaties», 550-1.

⁶⁷ See examples from France, England, Denmark and Byzantium in Moeglin and Péquignot (eds.), *Diplomatie*, 449-51.

⁶⁸ Torre and Suárez Fernández, *Documentos*, II, 412-3.

after midday and not to take the shortest route. The result: the delegation arrived at the palace «already too late» and was not received. The incident would have been repeated for seven or eight days, until it drew protests from the diplomats. When he was informed, the king is said to have replied with an ironic question: «Will they still say that Lisbon is small?»⁶⁹. It is admissible that this did not happen like that, but we can admit that the royal goodwill towards foreign ambassadors was not always the same.

The audiences held in the context of embassies and meetings will have been, at least formally, the moments when information was exchanged, negotiations established and agreements discussed, but contacts between diplomatic agents in the late Middle Ages were far from restricted to these occasions. The conviviality between the protagonists of *international relations* also included a notable set of other interactions at court, abroad and in religious spaces. It is in the testimonies on some of these events that two of the particularities of the 15th-century Portuguese diplomacy can be distinguished: the organisation of great ceremonies that had a clear propagandistic nature associated with the affirmation before Christianity of a dynasty that had an origin that was not legitimate; the use of exoticism associated with the expeditions of discovery and the exploration of Africa and the Atlantic as a distinctive element of the Portuguese court.

The ceremonies that preceded the departure of the Infanta Leonor to Rome, where she married the Emperor Frederick III, were the subject of a detailed report by one of the German ambassadors who followed them in Portugal, Nicolau Lanckman of Valkenstein. According to this author, right after the first formalisation of the marriage, there was a great celebration that began with a supper which was followed by a whole night of feasting: there was music, dancing and «various games»; and there were dramatic performances involving the king himself, his brother, «nobles dressed as Germans», officers of arms with allegories to all the powers of Christendom, Moorish and Africans, and even a dragon-shaped machine⁷⁰. As was customary at that time, there were also held jousts during those days, in which what most impressed the German ambassador was: the serpent-, elephant- and dragon-shaped devices, which were used, for instance, to challenge King Afonso V to a fight; the magnificent robes of the king, others of those present and the horses, in these cases imitating a stag, a unicorn, an ox, a lion, a capricorn and a bear; the appearance of the square where the stage was installed, «longer and wider than Vienna's»; the «African boys», a symbol of exoticism, who «threw oranges at the people»; and the golden cup, the golden tube and the ring with a precious stone with which the winners were awarded⁷¹. The fascination that emanates from this report is in itself a testimony to the effectiveness of the propagandistic nature of these events.

In 1490, in Évora, a new marriage once again gave rise to impressive ceremonies. At issue was the connection between Prince Afonso, heir to the Portuguese throne, and Infanta Isabel, daughter of the *Catholic Kings*, the greatest symbol of the reconciliation between the two kingdoms after the war in which they had fought between 1475 and 1479. According to the testimonies of the period, what was most striking on this occasion was a set of banquets, large meals which, as Nicolas Offenstadt has already pointed out, in

⁶⁹ BA, 51-VII-31, 175-175v.

⁷⁰ Nascimento, *Leonor*, 33-5.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, 41-7.

the Middle Ages were often related to demonstrations of reconciliation, functioning as real signs of peace and as representations of the normality of public order⁷². These ceremonies were described in detail by Garcia de Resende, a chronicler and member of the court of King João II who will have witnessed them. Firstly, the fact that they took place in a «wooden room» that had been built especially for the purpose and was decorated with «very large brocade dorsils» is highlighted. Among the aspects that most impressed the author were: the abundance of servers «richly dressed»; the «infinite and diverse delicacies and luxuries»; the parade that preceded each of the dishes brought to the royal table; the «blare of the trumpets, rattling drums, shawms, sackbuts and all the ministers»; the way various foods were presented, such as «two large roasted oxen, whole, with the horns and golden hands and feet», transported standing on a cart with wheels so low that «they looked as if they were alive and walking». Besides, everything was «in very great abundance and perfection», in a conviviality that lasted «almost the whole night» and included the representation of an episode played by a king of Guinea and «three amazing giants» and that involved more than 200 people⁷³. A few days later another banquet was held in the same place. Garcia de Resende guarantees that it included «many more inventions, abundance and courtesy» and was «much better served than the first one». In parallel, there took place a series of jousts in which the competition, the decoration and the quality of the prizes were once again in evidence, but what was most prominent was the magnificent lighting «with lights and fires burning», which made the night «clear and lighted, so that they could always compete as if it were daytime»⁷⁴. In either type of show or in the other, what was at stake was almost always the same: the ability to cause an impact through the activation of sensations, particularly visual and auditory, on a very large number of people, many of them foreigners and potential spreaders of messages about the greatness of the King of Portugal.

Another practice of international relations of the Middle Ages that had very old background and contributed to the stabilization of diplomatic language and the reinforcement of *amicitia* ties among the rulers was the exchange of gifts. The data for the Portuguese case is not very abundant, but witness the monarch's efforts to impress the interlocutors. In the 1440s, for example, a lion and a lioness, as well as horses, weapons and wood were offered to the Duke of Burgundy⁷⁵. Later, an ambassador from Venice received African slaves⁷⁶. It is evident that exoticism associated with maritime expansion was a theme of the propaganda with which the kings of Portugal intended to reinforce their image abroad.

⁷² Offenstadt, *Faire la paix*, 213-7.

⁷³ Resende, *Crónica*, 173-5.

⁷⁴ Pina, *Crónicas*, 978-80; Resende, *Crónica*, 177-87.

⁷⁵ Paviot, *Portugal et Bourgone*, 313-4, 319, 356-7, 372-3.

⁷⁶ Pina, *Crónicas*, 937.

7 CONCLUSION: SPECIFICITIES OF THE PORTUGUESE MEDIEVAL DIPLOMACY

In the conclusions of a colloquium on medieval diplomacy, Jean-Marie Moeglin advanced the idea that at that time there was a *common diplomatic culture*, which manifested itself in aspects such as the preponderance of kinship in the establishment and development of bonds of friendship between the princes, the existence of standard documents that supported interactions whose validity was *universally* accepted, the global recognition of principles such as diplomatic immunity, and a grammar of ceremonies, rituals and gestures that gave order to these relations and whose general features were shared⁷⁷. Although its location on the western edge of the Iberian Peninsula and the fact that it only had a land border with Castile were circumstances that made the Kingdom of Portugal semi-peripheral on a Western scale, the foreign relations of its monarchs fitted perfectly into this ecosystem of Christian diplomacy. Which did not mean, definitely, that they had no specificities.

Among the particularities of the contacts of the kings of Portugal with foreign countries is the resumption, in the middle of the 15th century, of the practice of holding meetings with other sovereigns—which had already slowed down and fallen into disuse in other areas in the previous centuries—and the bilingualism present in the links with the other Iberian kingdoms, in which in the same negotiation each party could speak its own language. But there are two other factors of a more structural nature that contribute more decisively to the singularity of the Portuguese diplomacy of this time. On the one hand, the fact that a new dynasty of illegitimate origin was founded at the end of the 14th century was an incentive for the Avis monarchs to seek legitimacy by projecting their achievements abroad, which is inseparable from the propagandistic nature associated, for example, with the lavish delegation sent by King Duarte to the Council of Basel and the exuberance of the celebrations of some royal weddings. On the other hand, the military and maritime expansion that began in 1415 with the conquest of Ceuta both opened new diplomatic horizons—as witnessed, for instance, by the embassies sent by King João II to the kingdoms of Eguafó, Mali and Congo, with a view to establishing bonds of political friendship, commercial relations and the spread of the Christian faith—and had an impact on the development of the relations of the kings of Portugal within Christendom—the more exotic elements present in the celebrations of the marriages of Infanta Leonor to Frederick III and of Prince Afonso to Isabel of Castile are evidence of this. Diplomacy was, in essence, an instrument at the service of a dynasty whose legitimacy was under threat, and which found in the maritime expansion a way of distinguishing itself and affirming itself in the wider framework of the West.

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⁷⁷ Moeglin, «Conclusions».

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