

# Political letters of the Dynasty of Avis: the *ars dictaminis* of the common good (15<sup>th</sup> century)

*Cartas políticas da Dinastia de Avis: a arte de ditar o bem comum (século XV)*

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## RESUMO

Este artigo pretende analisar algumas cartas escritas no século XV por personagens-chave da Dinastia de Avis. A epistolografia é uma área de estudos que vem crescendo nos últimos tempos e, apesar de ser herdeira das propostas do século XIX, cada vez mais entende ser necessário incorporar perspectivas culturalistas a suas abordagens. A cultura política é um conceito importante que possibilita ir além da retórica, tal como era tradicionalmente entendida a epistolografia, para permitir ao historiador compreender uma trama discursiva complexa, que embora pareça seguir fórmulas, não deixa de atender às circunstâncias e aos casuísmos da política, mas, sobretudo propõe e evoca valores políticos, como o do bem comum.

Palavras-chave: Dinastia de Avis; bem comum; epistolografia.

## ABSTRACT

This article intends to analyze certain letters written in the fifteenth century by key members of the Portuguese Dynasty of Avis. Even though epistolography, as a field of studies, has been always connected to its nineteenth century heritage, recently there has been an attempt to incorporate new perspectives, such as the culturalist point of view. Political culture is thus an important concept to go beyond rhetoric, as epistolography has traditionally been seen, and to allow historians to comprehend complex discourse. In this sense, the discourse maintains the necessary formulas without ignoring political circumstances and also while highlighting political values, such as the common good.

Keywords: Dynasty of Avis (Portugal); common good; epistolography.

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## THE LETTERS

The *corpus* which constitutes this paper consists of 21 letters written in the first half of the fifteenth century, from the end of the reign of D. João I, first monarch of the Dynasty of Avis, and throughout the reign of his son, D. Duarte. More precisely, they date from between 1425 and 1438.

Most of these letters are clearly addressed to D. Duarte, and the writers are people close to his familial entourage who, from the time when he divided the rule of the kingdom with his father, had assumed the role of counselors in the Portuguese court. The political importance which the children of the *Mestre* of Avis and Philippa of Lancaster achieved in the life of the kingdom of Portugal is widely known, something which is proven through firm factual evidence, but also based on the construction of a memory – started at the time of D. Duarte – dedicated to extoling this ancestry, and which entered into History as the *Ínclita Geração* (Illustrious Generation).<sup>2</sup> As is well known, this epithet was coined in *Os Lusíadas* by Luís de Camões, in whose verses dedicated to the ‘noble *Infantes*’ it was evident that the bastardy of D. João I still weighed on the virtues of the dynasty, though the children were capable and legitimate and governed with their father and after him. Protagonism was thereby transferred to his descendants.

It is these descendants of D. João who wrote the letters mentioned here. These include: D. Duarte, author of five letters; afterwards come his brothers: *Infante* (a prince who was not an heir) D. Pedro, Duke of Coimbra, author of four letters; *Infante* D. João, who wrote one of the letters; *Infante* D. Henrique, Duke of Viseu, also the author of one letter; *Infanta* D. Isabel, Duchess of Burgundy, writer of one letter; the half-brother, D. Afonso, Earl of Barcelos, who wrote one letter; also as emissaries of one letter each are the nephews, D. Fernando, Earl of Arraiolos, and D. Afonso, Earl of Ourém, followed by D. Antão Martins de Chaves, Bishop of Porto, Bartolomeu Gomes, and a letter whose authorship cannot be established, but which appears to be a cleric. Finally, there are two letters from *Doutor* Diogo Afonso.

The set of letters is part of a broader *corpus*, well known to medievalists, called the *Livro dos Conselhos de El-Rei D. Duarte* (The Book of Counsel of King Duarte), or more simply *Livro da Cartuxa* (the Book of Cartuxa). It constitutes *Manuscrito da Livraria* no. 1928, located in Torre do Tombo, Lisbon, and according to the scholars of diplomacy and codicology, “is the oldest copy that is known of a book written in the reign of D. Duarte, possibly by the hand

of the king himself” (Dias, 1982, p. XIII). However, there are various copies, among them one from the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth associated with the Convent of Cartuxa, in Évora, in the National Library in Lisbon.<sup>3</sup> Although the title suggests that it is a book in which the advice given and received by the monarch was recorded, it is much more than this, since the subjects vary enormously, as well as the form they are registered. Of a total of 97 titles or chapters, 21 correspond to the category of advice letters, while the rest are concerned with a myriad of themes, really covering whatever could be of interest to a monarch at the end of the Middle Ages. In fact, Oliveira Marques even stated that “our vision of the epoch could almost be remade, using as an exclusive source, the Book of Cartuxa” (Marques, 1982, p. VII). Found in the book is everything from ordinances and rules related to governing the kingdom to liturgical questions, also including architectural, astronomical and astrological, historical, literary, agricultural, and above all medical knowledge. What calls attention in the latter is the number of remedies prescribed, 19, each giving title to a chapter. At a time of plague, such as the reign of D. Duarte, it was necessary to know the best proportions for *pós de texugo* (badger powder). There were other less serious concerns, but which disturbed daily life, such as tooth and stomach ache, and other curiosities, such as falling nipples! In relation to the work as a whole, it is important to highlight that in it D. Duarte noted what to him seemed worth recording, what he wanted to keep at hand. The Portuguese historian Luís Miguel Duarte, author of the most recent biography of the monarch, compares the document to a type of notebook, “in white, from which the king never separated. And since he trusted little in his memory and a lot in the written word, whenever a thought occurred to him that he wanted to go back to, whenever he was written a letter with significant contents ... whenever he came across a curiosity, D. Duarte noted it in his book” (Duarte, 2007, p. 286). The entries began in 1423, when he was still an *infante*, and ended in 1438, the year of his death, as the monarch.

Based on what has just been stated, it should be noted that the king wrote and received many more letters than the 21 he insisted on transcribing in his notebook. However, these are the ones he considered most important. If we give credit to Rui de Pina who, a few decades later, wrote a chronicle about the king, the latter wrote everything he liked “in a book, which he always carried with him, about familiar and special things” (Pina, 1914, p. 88).

The style of letters varies and the aesthetic result is better or worse depending on the skill of the writer. However, in relation to what interests us, a certain uniformity/familiarity should be highlighted among them in relation to the logic of discussion and how it is presented. If we base ourselves on the little that is known about the intellectual education of these people, it is possible to suggest that they had a very wide-ranging education which allowed some classics and the principal theological references to be read. They knew some Latin, although they certainly preferred to read and write in Portuguese.<sup>4</sup> An important clue for the issue we are concerned with can be found in the list of the “books which D. Duarte possessed,” which is part of the Book of Cartuxa (Livro dos Conselhos, 1982, pp. 206-208). Here, we are informed that the monarch, amongst various titles, owned the Epistles of Seneca, as well as the translations which D. Pedro, his brother, had made of Cicero.

In relation to the characterization of the letters, although we do not want to run the risk of sliding into formalism, we understand that they widely comply with what requires a correspondence to be classified as epistolary. In most of them, and above all in those which interest us most, there can be perceived “a pedagogical proposal of teaching the path to wisdom according to a purpose given to indoctrination” (Braren, 1999, pp. 39-44). Overcoming the Deissmann phase in epistolography, in which the difference between letters and epistles is insisted on, or between nature and art, according to Scarpat, we are now left with the general distinction between public and private letters (Scarpat, 1972, p. 499). The letters selected by D. Duarte, in his notebook, fit perfectly into what Braren says when analyzing the epistles of Seneca:

If we consider Artemius’ old definition... that a letter is part of a dialogue together with the references of Cicero in which the author appears to be talking with the absent friend, *conloquia absentium* (Cic. *Fil.* 2, 7, 4), we have a good starting point, since it can be seen that it is very common for the *I* to be addressed as *you*, as in a conversation the speaker addresses the listener. Furthermore, it seems to give the sensation that the friend is momentarily present, *praesentia absentium* (Cic. *Att.* 9, 10, 1; *Att.* 12, 53; *Fam.* 15, 19, 1), another topic frequent in epistolography. (Braren, 1999, p. 42)

The tone of the letters recorded by the monarch is the same: the promotion of virtue and reason as foundations to ensure the discernment of the common good. Senders assume the role of counselor who works with

friendship and a keen sense of duty, giving the receiver what he best has to offer, which is also related to Ciceronian logic (*polliceri aliquid*, in other words to offer something). The close connection between the sender and receiver appears in the narratives of D. Duarte's letters, but with the clear protagonism of the 'I' who emits the discourse and who points out how to understand and learn. Wisdom has a script which is traced by the sender, in the first person, by someone who had proficiency (*proficiens*) in the subject and whose stoic behavior allows reason to overcome emotion (Braren, 1999, pp. 42-43).

Also in relation to the discourse, common rhetorical *topoi* can be seen which transform the writers into actual members of a textual political community. We are, thus, not dealing with an *ars dictamens* whose identity is based on the strict correction of the protocols used, although the preservation of certain formalities can be perceived, principally in relation to social etiquette and the recognition of hierarchical superiority. The essential aspect was centered on the preparation of arguments with the clear aim of persuading the audience (see Camargo, 1991; Richardson, 2011), and more concretely identifying something close to the Italian *stilus rethoricus*, which spread from the thirteenth century onwards. According to Ronald Witt,

decidedly conceived as oration, the letter in *stilus rethoricus* was marked by frequent interjections and interrogations whose objective was to impact on the senses. The masters of this style showed a tendency to rhymed prose, a strong reminiscence of the Psalms, with recurrent echoes of biblical citations... Nevertheless, from the middle of the [thirteenth] century the *dictatores* of this style began to introduce references and citation of old pagan authors to reinforce their arguments and appeals, while the biblical presence decline. (Witt, 2005, pp. 76-77)

Although studies about the art of dictating point to some changes between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, the fact is that preferences in Portugal appear to have focused on the manners of writing just mentioned, which probably were better known and authorized by tradition.

Another important clue about the subject is also provided by the notebook, which allows the conclusion that the king was careful about the correct manner of writing his letters. In a chapter entitled "Dictated in Latin and the language of the king for other princes and lords" (Livro dos Conselhos, 1982, pp. 181-200), in which D. Duarte records the protocols for addressing, opening, and closing letters sent to 63 different types of receivers. The list is headed

by the pope, followed by emperors, kings, queens, dukes, duchesses, earls, baronesses, archbishops, bishops, abbots, ecclesiastic and civil collegiate powers, such as synods, the college of cardinals, and governments of cities. The formulas are written in Latin and in the vernacular 'language', depending on the case, while the rules of political hierarchy and etiquette are carefully observed. However, historians should not waste some of the preciosities which discretely appear between the formulas and which clarify how these protocols put each person in their place. For example, we can recover the closing for the Emir of Granada: "May God send you those things that he considers most apt for his service" (Livro dos Conselhos, 1982, p. 185).

Furthermore, and in the sense of highlighting the care that the monarch dedicated to the quality of writing, we can find in the notebook his concern in relation to translations, the number of which was expanding at that time. We can note that his own brother, D. Pedro, was the translator of classical works, principally of Cicero. The king's instructions about the care that should be taken not to add or subtract content from the original and to use precise words, which preserved the meaning of the Latin, but all of which were from Portuguese vocabulary "written as close to the ground and the general custom of our speaking as can be done," obviously avoiding those words "seen as dishonest" (Livro dos Conselhos, 1982, p. 151). Finally, an aspect more closely connected to the letters:

which preserve when being written the order, and equally should be kept in any other thing so must be clearly written so that it can be understood well and beautifully as much as possible. And briefly when necessary, and for this use many paragraphs, and point clearly to what you have to write. (Livro dos Conselhos, 1982, pp. 151-152)

It was thus necessary to write beautifully and clearly. For some historians, perhaps the monarch and his writing skills were not up to the level of his own rules. Although he was recognized as having some virtues, such as the capacity to invent words, which he managed to translate from Latin into Portuguese, such as "fugitive, evident, sensitive, abstinence, infinite, circumspection, and intellectual," in his writing things did not flow so well, judging by the "synthetic Latinisms – verbs at the end of phrases, the use and abuse of infinitive clauses, the greater use of subordinate conjunctions – meant that at times the king put himself into adventures in writing for which he was not, nor could

be, prepared” (Duarte, 2007, p. 291). For example, in Oscar Lopes and António José Saraiva’s assessment of the literary quality of the Loyal Counselor, the monarch writes “convoluted phrases in which the reader loses sight, in the outline of the incidents, of the construction which links the beginning to the end” (apud Duarte, 2007, p. 291). However, in relation to the letters of his authorship, although some scholars believe that the narrative at the time was only supported by coordinative conjunctions which did not demand great abilities of syntax (Duarte, 2007, p. 290), an elegance in writing and prose with rhythm must be acknowledged.

Furthermore, the same can be said in relation to the letters written by the *infantes*. Perhaps the strategy of *Infante* D. João calls more attention, who transforms his letter into an apologetic discourse in accordance with the dictates of scholasticism, in which he presents arguments for and against the expedition to Tangiers, using agile writing and based on the logic of reason. Equally, the style of *Infante* D. Pedro shows a dominion of the language, a curious spirit in relation to the things of the world, and very firm ideas in relation to the common good and politics; without a doubt, these are aspects which give a tone of authority to his text.<sup>5</sup>

The quality of the letters from the Earl of Barcelos and his sons, the Earls of Arraiolos and Ourém, is also similar to the previous ones, as well as one written by the Bishop of Porto and another by *doutor* Diogo Afonso Mangancha. In fact, in the last letter, which is a response to a request from the king that he give an opinion about in which cases it is legitimate to resort to astrology, *doutor* Diogo Afonso complains that in Porto de Mós, where he happens to be, there were more “stones than books,” for which reason he is obliged to issue his opinion based on memory alone (Livro dos Conselhos, 1982, p. 204).

## THE POLITICAL NETWORK

In D. Duarte’s notebook there appear important political characters from the kingdom. These names form a clear political network, whose interest can converge or conflict, but which, nevertheless, compose the interlocutors and counselors of the monarch.

Returning to the names cited above, there appear the brothers of the monarch, *Infante* D. Pedro, Duke of Coimbra, *Infante* D. João, *Infante* D. Henrique,

Duke of Viseu, *Infanta* D. Isabel, Duchess of Burgundy, D. Afonso, Earl of Barcelos, who was only a half-brother, and his sons, D. Fernando, Earl of Arraiolos, and D. Afonso, Earl of Ourém, D. Antão Martins de Chaves, Bishop of Porto, Bartolomeu Gomes, *Provedor da Fazenda* of Lisbon, and *doutor* Diogo Afonso Manganha, a man of laws and of the king's council.

In relation to the legitimate brothers and their relationship with the king, the history is well known. What is remembered is only the great political protagonism that they all achieved, during the reign of the father, D. João I, but also during the brief rule of D. Duarte, which ran from the minority of D. Afonso V to the beginning of his reign.

However, D. Afonso, Earl of Barcelos, who was born out of an amorous relationship between D. João I and Inês Pires, before his marriage with Philippa of Lancaster, equally had a leading role in the court of D. Duarte. Actually his importance goes back to the reign of his father, João I, since bastardy had not been an obstacle to Afonso marrying Beatriz Pereira de Alvim, daughter of the Constable Nuno Álvares Pereira, from which sprung the future dynasty of Bragança. He held important positions and functions in João's court, such as the provisioning of the fleet for the conquest of Ceuta. The children of the union with Beatriz, D. Fernando, Earl of Arraiolos, and D. Afonso, Earl of Ourém, would also be people of great political important at court. The latter, for example, who chosen by D. Duarte to head the Portuguese delegation to the Council of Basel.

His sister, D. Isabel, Duchess of Burgundy, had married Philip III, the Good, from whose union was born Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy. From Dijon, Isabel kept her brother informed about the political movements related to the Hundred Years' War, in which she participated actively.

D. Antão Martins de Chaves, bishop of Porto, was an ecclesiastic with a long career, including time in the Sees of Évora and Lisbon, where he was respectively dean and canon. His ascension to the seat of Porto dates from 1424. In 1434, D. Duarte sent a large delegation to defend Pope Eugene IV, in the Council of Basel/Ferrara/Florence, from what he considered to be the abuses of conciliar power, in other words, the power of the cardinals in regard to the papacy. The kingdom of Portugal closed ranks around this pope, and the bishop of Porto was one of most important in this regard, to the point of being chosen to head the mission, sent to Constantinople to hold conversations with John Palaeologus, with the aim of merging the two churches. D. Antão had great success in his mission and ended up remaining in Rome, where his merits



were recognized by being raised to the cardinalate, be awarded the title of St. Chrysogonus. However, D. Antão did not stop working on behalf of the Portuguese monarchy, and more specifically in favor of D. Duarte, for whom he achieved a Brief through which the kings of Portugal began to anoint and crown themselves in the manner of the French and English monarchs, and another Brief which allowed the knights of the orders of Christ and Avis to marry without the need to ask for dispensation. Even after the death of D. Duarte in 1438 D. Antão remained in Rome, where he died in 1447. He is buried in St. John Lateran, which certainly shows his political importance in the pontifical curia (Amado, 1873, pp. 81-83).

Finally, in the category of letter writers there appears *doutor* Diogo Afonso Manganha, whose epithet is related to the typical attire of the men of law. He was also part of the group sent by D. Duarte to participate in the Council of Basel, together with another important lettered person, Vasco Fernandes de Lucena. In the geopolitical 'itinerancies' of this council, Diogo Afonso ended up passing through Burgundy, where "he gave a lesson about Laws, Decrees, and the Liberal Arts. The most important doctors of the Church intervened in the controversy: they did not think that there was anyone this educated in Portugal" (Coelho, 2011, p. 50).

Many historians have identified the above people as belonging to the king's council, something which the monarch also did, when he referred to some of them as "of my council." The letters revealed that D. Duarte, in addition to asking for oral counsel, liked the counselors to put their arguments into writing afterwards (Duarte, 2007, p. 246), since, according to him, "words are taken by the wind, while writing remains," which once again shows his knowledge of ancient thought, and more concretely of Cicero. Perhaps the counselors did not send the monarch letters about all the subjects debated in council, but they did this at least in relation to the themes considered important.

D. Duarte, in accordance with the political tradition of Christian monarchies, understood that the king did not govern alone; he was the head of the kingdom, which meant that he needed other members to administer the political body. Thus, the council which assisted monarchs in ruling had to represent the best part (*optima pars*) of society, in order to implement the corporate model. It was common for the monarch's counsellors, depending on the biological longevity of each one, to be names of reference in various kingdoms, above all between the end of the reign of D. João I, the entire reign of D. Duarte, and the beginning of that of D. Afonso V. Therefore, they were men with great

lineages who were always with the monarchy, and when they died they were replaced by the successors to their houses. D. Duarte decided that it would be best to count on an earl and a bishop in the court to benefit from their counsel whenever it was needed, and in order not to overload these people with long stays in court, they were replaced every three months (Duarte, 2007, p. 247). Although the monarch did not say it, perhaps this was a way of avoiding the entrenching and strengthening those ‘validated’ in this way, which would feed a sense of injustice among those who remained further from the king.

According to the letters, the counselors *par excellence* were the brothers of the king; it is they who signed most of the correspondence. In addition to them, but also within the family, were the nephews. This biological protagonism in epistolary terms, which is not restricted to the Book of Cartuxa,<sup>6</sup> led some historians to accentuate the centralizing nature of the Dynasty of Avis, which was already evident in the reign of João, since the massive presence of *infantes* in the court strengthened the monarch against the interests of the nobility, always attentive to advance on the *res publica*. It should also be highlighted that school history, especially between the end of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, insisted on highlighting the virtues of the Avis nuclear family, and giving a new meaning to the Illustrious Generation – coined by Camões – presented us with a family-monarchy, in which the monarch constituted a single body with the illustrious blood of his relatives against all and everyone. As in other Christian kingdoms the greatest bastions of the nobility were headed by the uncles and aunts of the monarch, and it was exactly they, the principal political forces of the kingdom, who turned against the king, in Portugal this was resolved by the way the brothers rallied around the same cause: the monarchy. Although this theme deserves a deeper analysis, for what is proposed here, it is enough to highlight that obviously this is a problem of history-nation, also because the dispute between the *infantes* is well known, who in the role of dukes and earls, competed with the monarchy in various scenarios. In other words, the brothers of the monarchs in Portugal were neither better nor worse than the *infantes* and princes of Castile, Aragon, France, England...

However, this does not mean that the concept of network is of no use in this case. Obviously, it should be quickly noted that internal disputes cut across the network, which did not reduce its effectiveness from the social and political point of view, although circumstantially we can show that there were winners and losers as a result of the clashes. Nor were the vanquished always expelled

from the network, but suffered a repositioning in the group, according to the compositions which sealed the end of the disputes. Thus, the epistolary network of the monarch reveals internal dissensions, which reflect the interests of these interlocutors in the political scenario of the kingdom.

Beyond the kingdom the network expanded a lot, and it is D. Duarte himself who clarifies for us his heavyweight interlocutors. Based on the already mentioned “Dictated in Latin and the language of the king for other princes and lords” (Livro dos Conselhos, 1982, p. 181), which, to tell the truth, does not signify that those who appear on this list effectively received or sent letters to/from the king of Portugal. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that D. Duarte considered them interlocutors. The list is very long, involving six dozen important people, which allows us discover the shape of the political scenario in Portugal. Addressing himself to the pope, the monarch observes the treatment which exalts the sanctity and pontifical beatitudes in Christ, whose power extends to the universal church, and the humility which sovereigns, despite being kings by the grace of God, had to acknowledge before the bishop of Rome. To the monarchs with whom he has kinship, such as those of England,<sup>7</sup> Castile, and Aragon, he invokes the biological ties, loves, and the true friendship which they profess. Although they were not related, the kings of Navarre and Poland receive fraternal treatment and friendship, as well as the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. The vast list also includes the important English nobility, such as the Dukes of Gloucester and Brittany, and the Earls of Warwick and Huntington, with the latter being his cousin; almost all the nobility of Castile, such as Mendoza, Luna, Guzmán, Pimentel, Ponce de León, Manuel; in relation to France, only the Duke of Burgundy appears; the Doge of Venice, Francesco Foscari, and the Duke of Milan, in reference to Italy; and the Duke of Austria. Among the ecclesiastic authorities, the most important were the archbishops of Santiago de Compostela and Lisbon, the prior of Guadalupe Monastery, the abbot of Florence, the grand-master of the Knights Hospitaller Order of Rhodes. The monarch also had among his recipients the illustrious men of various European cities, such as Bruges, Seville, Bayonne, Florence, Genoa, and Burgundy. D. Duarte also wanted to prepare his own protocols for “the queens and other ladies,” to whom is addressed a fraternal and respectful treatment, depending on the case, and as in the relationship with men, where biological ties are revealed. Most important are: his sisters, the Queen of Castile, the Duchess of Burgundy, and the Baroness of Arundell; the cousins, the Queen of Aragon, and the *infantas* Catarina and Leonor;

afterwards Queen Branca of Navarre, to whom he declares love and friendship, and D. Tymbor of Cabrera.

Returning to the letters used for this paper, it is important to bear in mind once again that it is a selection made by D. Duarte. After all the monarch received and wrote many others which can be read, for example, in the *Monumenta Henricina*. It should not go unperceived that the *corpus* which he gathers in his notebook can be interpreted in relation to the reasons for their choice. Two important themes stand out in this correspondence: the war against the Moors (crusade), which involved two scenarios, Granada and North Africa; and the enthronement of the monarch associated with good governance. There are also other topics, such as the news that his sister, the Duchess of Burgundy, sent him from Arras, in 1435, in which she details the meeting between the English and French to try to reach an agreement about the disputes they were facing, and the difficulties that her husband, the Duke of Burgundy, had to remain on the side of the English, since these did not provide the promised aid, and the King of France was tempting him with rewards, which would perhaps 'oblige' him to change side (Livro dos Conselhos, 1982, pp. 97-99). Afterwards there are other letters related to questions of health, laws, and the economy, but these do not configure for us a group.

In relation to the 'War against the Moors,' it should be briefly clarified that this was the great question of the reign of D. Duarte. During the rule of his father, the conquest of Ceuta (1415) marked the beginning of the Portuguese expansion outside of Europe, intimately associated with the idea of the crusade. Continuing with the war against Islam in Africa itself was a political dream which did not falter after the capture of Ceuta, although the reality suggested prudence, sine the royal coffers were ruined, the maintenance of that African territory was very difficult and the people could not stand more demands. But the pressure for the enterprise was strong and came from the brothers, the *infantes* D. Henrique and D. Fernando, who understood it would be possible to conquer Tangiers. Nevertheless, the alternative was to join forces with the King of Castile and wage 'war on the Moor' of Granada, equally under the command of D. Henrique. There are eight letters dedicated to the theme, in which the *infantes* D. João, D. Pedro, D. Henrique, his half-brother, D. Afonso, his nephews, D. Fernando and D. Afonso, and D. Duarte himself wove long reflections about whether or not this war was convenient. Probably, the letters are from the time of D. João, when the crown prince was already associated with the throne. The arguments were based on a rhetoric which, although

it resorts to political circumstances and notwithstanding the possible losses and gains, is fundamentally related to the common good. Nevertheless, the care taken to request that letters about the subject be sent to him perhaps demonstrates, as Luís Miguel Duarte asserts, that the king “did not want Tangiers to be attacked at that time and in that way; he opposed the idea as he could and when he could” (Duarte, 2007, p. 305), but it also shows the prudence that was required in subjects of the state. However, for this work, it is important to clarify that D. Duarte also asked the opinion of the Holy See, whose opinions are known and configure important part of the judicial philosophy of the pontifical curia (*Monumenta Henricina*, 1960, pp. 285-343), but which the monarch did not record in his notebook.

In relation to the other theme, the enthroning of D. Duarte and the good government of kings was registered in seven letters, whose authors are the king himself, *infante* D. Pedro, and his half-brother, D. Afonso. As expected, the core of the argument falls exclusively on the common good.

## THE COMMON GOOD

Analyzing these two sets of letters – those related to war and those related to government – as a single *corpus*, it is possible to identify some principal *topoi* in relation to the common good. Service to God appears in first place and in absolutely all the letters; this is followed, in terms of recurrence, by what is related to justice, above all in relation to distributive justice, which equally affects the hypothetical scenario of war; the defense of the kingdom, both against the infidel and against the neighboring kingdom; the care for each one to fulfill their function; the protection of things of the church and religion; the care not to encumber the people.

The detail of the letters in these subjects and the clear manner in which the subjects of government affect the common good show that in the Lower Middle Ages in Portugal the theme was widely written about, and also in a conceptual manner, as in the other European Christian courts (Dunbabin, 1988, p. 477). At the same time, what stands out is what the letter writers thought about the ‘art of governing’ and knew that this art consisted of leading government to the end that was destined for them (Nemo, 1998, p. 951). A truth that is outside of man, which is transcendental, established by divinity since the beginning of time. The common good which was thus achieved in

history has as its destiny the salvation of subjects-Christians, through reason and the knowledge of a system of necessary causes inscribed in divine law (Senellart, 2006, p. 146).

The actual words of our political actors, who dictated the common good at the time of D. Duarte, allow us follow the arguments and understand some aspects which reinforce the corporate political model, not as utopia, but as political action.

The concern with good government is evident, since the bad king, in other words those who do not do justice, or who do not know how, is a tyrant or useless (Nemo, 1998, p. 948; Turchetti, 2001, p. 205). At the same time, if the political head does not exercise his role, the kingdom will acephalous, and thus the body will wilt and technically not exist. The common good, that which gives existence to society, as its blood and destiny, must pass through the monarch and his political actions. Acknowledging the service of good subjects and compensating them, as well as depriving the bad of favors, is doing justice. This action, as can be read below, legitimates the actual existence of the head:

The first correct thing is that our lord god demanded from the three estates in this world was that which he wished to be served by men of the word, tillers of the soil, and defenders, giving each their dutiful task. In order to be serve well, the task given to us is that we keep our people from evil and punish the bad, so that through this peace our people are kept from foreign evil. (Livro dos Conselhos, 1982, p. 46)

May it be given freely and for the work, according to their revenue: not taking from some to give to others, nor giving so much one day, that the whole year they cannot give, nor so much to one, or to a few, so that others receive no mercies: giving principally to those in whom he will recognize the merits of services or goodness, not forgetting those who, for the love of God, or according to God, require this, and in your giving or denial do so freely. (Livro dos Conselhos, 1982, p. 74)

Firmness in political action requires wisdom – reason –, in order not to cross the tenuous and dangerous frontier which leads to tyranny. The will of the monarch and the services he asks should, through temperance, guarantee than subjects never feel that he is asking too much, which will certainly affect their condition (Canning, 2013, p. 141). Thus, it is counseled:

Temper the affections, so that for them you do not want or do anything against Reason and law, nor make your will in things so rigid that it seems to ask too much from somebody, not fulfilling what goodly and correctly seems to you to be required, but strongly prevents your good state, and resting from your good heart, instead doing and demanding everything with reasonable diligence and good judgment.

As a result, the relationship that is established between service and benefit is important for the common good, that the beneficent and the beneficiaries need to adequately correspond to the virtue attributed to these political roles. In corporate logic, knowing how to behave in accordance with the role attributed by nature is a virtue that comes in the blood; those coming from nobility are born knowing what to do and how to do it. Certainly they were the most apt to occupy the higher places in court and in government. But there is still the possibility of a commoner rendering such an extraordinary service – or, in other words, noble – to the common good, that it deserves to receive a similar reward. The problem is when the extraordinary is converted into the ordinary, and that the monarch, through excess of generosity, makes benefits banal and has no resources to manage to exercise his generosity:

the remedy for these evils is the Lord King and you, and all of us who live under his rule, do not become the patron of any but those who fulfill their duties and whom you can easily govern. And those you take for squires, let them be *fidalgos* and of good lineage; and of the others, do not give them any rank except for some extreme service which they perform, and so each one will be content to serve to whom they belong. (Livro dos Conselhos, 1982, p. 20)

Corporate logic of the common good is based on Christian morality, such as political theology. The clerical order is thus an unavoidable social pillar, whose specialty guarantees the good order of society (Canning, 2013, p. 46). Although everything and everyone is at the service of God, there are spaces and groups whose characteristics have much more demanding characteristics in this sense. Here, the monarch, as the political head of the community of Christians in his kingdom, also has responsibilities, and like the different tasks of governance, they had to think first of the common good and guarantee the effectiveness of the Church through the religious benefits distributed.

It seems to me, my lord, that by the authority of the power which god gave you, you have the power to govern the many hospices/hostels and chapels that you ought to give to these people who minister the service of God, because I understand ... that in your land it is usual to give it to those who destroy it ... that later it can be amended according to what was Corrected before. (Livro dos Conselhos, 1982, p. 30)

The manner that seems to me that it should be to have bishops in the land to rule the people in spirituality is this. First, the lords King and *infantes* strongly propose not to promote or to give consent to the promotion to any episcopal dignity anyone due to lineage nor temporal service, nor petitions, nor singular affections. (Livro dos Conselhos, 1982, p. 40)

The fame of the monarch was transmitted to the kingdom: for the good and the bad. However, the path to reach good fame could not be tortuous. The king who scandalized his people with reproachable acts, even with the intention of obtaining political and military victories for the kingdom, does not work for the common good. The ends in this case do not justify the means.

The one who wants to do good having always the aim of that joy above all goodness, must not start doing things that scandalize people, and thus in this work you cannot do harm, first to cause harm and after to reach glory is not a very holy way. (Livro dos Conselhos, 1982, p. 67)

I will ask you for mercy, for your service, that when the officials from small places seek you out, one at a time, that you show them good will, so that they will have to tell each in their own place, and with some things that you resolve in the courts, pleasing god that they will be happy with this and with the good word they will be very content, and your fame will begin, which will always increase, pleasing god with all the good things that will follow. (Livro dos Conselhos, 1982, p. 81)

In the final extract that has been selected, the dimension of justice is insisted on, the corner stone of politics, of power, the only reason to be a monarchy. Here, the authority of tradition, incorporated by the two men who gave origin to the kingdom of Portugal:

And, lord, let me remind you that Earl Henrique, your grandfather eight times, as he lay sick in Astorga, his city, from the pain of which he died, called his son Afonso Henriques, your grandfather seven times, the first King of Portugal, and



among the things he especially commanded him was that he would be companion of the *fidalgos*, and grant them all their rights, and always honor the counsel they give him, so that all would have their rights, the great and the small, and that neither by entreaty nor greed would his justice perish, and that if one day he failed to do so he would move one away from himself one handbreadth, and on another he would move an arms' length away from himself and his heart, and instead he would always have justice and love in his heart, and would be loved by god and the people, and that he never consent in any way that his men were haughty or caught up in evil, which if he did not stop it he would lose his good name. (Livro dos Conselhos, 1982, pp. 84-85)

To close, we would like to emphasize that for historians it is a small documental *corpus*, but it is one of great value, since it allows the decoding of the argumentative strategies of a political network with an important projection in the kingdom, in relation to two subjects which are directly linked to the common good, and which, as we note again, were carefully transcribed by the monarch in his notebook. Of the citations selected in this article what strongly emerges is the interconnection between the good of each person and the common good, even constituting a single good, but also pointing out that the common good is superior to the individual one. It is, thus, a way of presenting things in accordance with scholastic tastes. Certainly, it can be highlighted that at the beginning of the fifteenth century in Portugal, Aristotelian thought which reintroduced into Western political thought “the principle of human community, such as the ‘perfect group,’ whose objective is not to simply live, but to live virtue” (Kempshall, 1999, p. 6) continued being a meaningful reference mark. The center point of argument which is drawn on in the political letters can be reduced to the fundamental idea that union with divinity can only be reached through the incorporation of each one in the common good, starting with the monarch himself. Nevertheless, it appears fundamental to us to emphasize that in the arguments presented the Augustinian and Aristotelian traditions are mixed, both with clear intentions of defining the common good as a moral deposit of good and the virtuous life, and with the purpose of promoting peace and utility (*communis utilitas*).

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## NOTES

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<sup>2</sup> The epithet was created by Luís de Camões in his work *Os Lusíadas* (Canto IV, stanza 50):

*Mas, pera defensão dos Lusitanos,  
Deixou, quem o levou, quem governasse  
E aumentasse a terra mais que dantes:  
Ínclita geração, altos Infantes.*

(In English this reads: For the defense of the Lusitanians/ He who removed him, left those who would govern/ And increase the land more than ever/ Illustrious generation, Noble *infantes*.)

<sup>3</sup> In relation to the different copies and versions of the manuscript, see: MUNIZ, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> In relation to this, see the inspired interpretation of Luís Miguel Duarte (2007, Chapter 14).

<sup>5</sup> In relation to the concept of the common good in the work of D. Pedro, see: GOMES, 2010. (I would like to thank this author for kindly providing me with the text).

<sup>6</sup> See *Monumenta Henricina*.

<sup>7</sup> It is interesting that for D. Duarte, Henry VI is “King of England, and of France, and Lord of Ireland,” showing the position of Portugal at the beginning of the Hundred Years War (See: Livro dos Conselhos, 1982, p. 182).

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