

Medieval Portuguese Royal Chronicles. Topics in a Discourse of Identity and Power

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Abstract

It is only in the 15th century that the Portuguese royal chronicles assume their own unequivocal form. The following text analyses them as a discourse of the identity and power of the Crown. Three topics are selected by their importance and salience. These topics are the *territory* object of observation, the *central subject* of the narrative and the question of the *authors* of the historiographical accounts, or rather the position in which the chroniclers place themselves and the perspective they adopt for their description of events.

Key words

Portugal, historiography, medieval chronicles

Resumo

É apenas no século XV que a cronística régia portuguesa ganha a sua forma inequívoca. No texto seguinte analisam-se as respectivas crónicas como um discurso de identidade e de poder da Coroa. Assim, são seleccionados três tópicos pela sua importância e pelo relevo que lhes é dado. São eles o território objecto de observação, o sujeito central da narrativa e a questão dos autores dos relatos historiográficos, ou seja a posição em que os cronistas se colocam e a perspectiva que adoptam na descrição que fazem dos acontecimentos.

Palavras-chave

Portugal, historiografia, cronística medieval

The medieval royal chronicle genre constitutes an accurate type of historiography in narrative form, promoted by the Crown and in which the central protagonist is the monarchy (usually the king himself, its supreme exponent). The discourse therefore centers on the deeds of the monarch and on the history of the royal institution that the king and his respective dynasty embody. Generally speaking, the focus is that of a political history both in terms of the chronicle's predominant themes (the king's actions, war, peace, justice and so on) and in terms of its objectives. It emphasizes the "goodness" of the monarch and serves as

an apology for the actions of the sovereign and the Crown. As such, the royal chronicle is also an *instrument of power*, affirming the authority of the monarchy and contributing to the legitimization of that same authority.

In Portugal, the royal chronicles as such first started and gained importance from the early 15th century onwards, being closely linked to the new Avis dynasty, which began with João I (1385-1433).¹ It is true, however, that there are some previous historiographic examples that can be said to foreshadow the emergence of the genre.² The most famous example that can be cited as an antecedent is the *Crónica Geral de Espanha de 1344*, not so much because it was penned by a royal bastard, Pedro Afonso, Count of Barcelos and son of King Dinis (1297-1325),³ but because of the way it clearly demarcates the Portuguese kingdom from its neighbor, Castile, and the enhanced value it attaches to the Portuguese monarchy, which is treated autonomously within the context of the Iberian Peninsula.⁴ Nevertheless, the conceptions of a feudal nobility are often superimposed here on what we may call the monarchic ideology.

It is, therefore, only in the 15th century (following the so-called *Crónica de Portugal de 1419*)⁵ that the Portuguese royal chronicles assume their own unequivocal form. In our analysis of them as a discourse of the identity and power of the Crown, only three topics have been selected which, by their importance and salience, enhance this characteristic. These topics are the *territory*, which is an object of observation, the central *subject* of the narrative and, finally, the question of the *authors* of the historiographic accounts, or rather the position in which the chroniclers place themselves and the perspective they adopt for their descriptions of events.

As to the first topic - the territory that is the object of observation in the royal chronicles - this is unquestionably *the kingdom of Portugal* just as it appears in the *Crónica de Portugal de 1419*. Here, the kingdom is the constant that encompasses the various reigns from the first days of the Portuguese monarchy and its first king, Afonso Henriques (1139-1185), up to Afonso IV (1325-1357), the seventh monarch of the same dynasty. From this perspective, Portugal is subjected to a narrative treatment that is totally independent of the Iberian context, something that was contrary to what had happened until then, as can be seen, for example, in the *Crónica Geral de Espanha de 1344*. The question of the authorship of the *Crónica de 1419* remains open, but, in the wake of the critical edition by Adelino de Almeida Calado, it is no longer really acceptable to attribute it to Fernão Lopes,⁶ as Artur Magalhães Basto⁷ and Lindley Cintra⁸ wish it to be. While remaining an anonymous text, in

¹ For an overview and summary of medieval Portuguese historiography, see Luís Krus, "Historiografia", in *Dicionário da Literatura Medieval Galega e Portuguesa*, organized and coordinated by Giulia Lanciani and Giuseppe Tavani, Lisbon, Caminho, 1993, pp. 312-315, A. H. de Oliveira Marques, "Historiografia na Idade Média", in *Dicionário de História de Portugal*, edited by Joel Serrão, vol. VI, Lisbon, Iniciativas Editoriais, s.d., pp. 418-420 and Joaquim Veríssimo Serrão, *A Historiografia Portuguesa. Doutrina e Crítica*, vol. I, Lisbon, Verbo, 1974. For a literary studies perspective, see Isabel de Barros Dias, *Metamorfoses de Babel. A Historiografia Ibérica (Sécs. XIII-XIV): Construções e Estratégias Textuais*, Lisbon, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian and Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, 2003.

² On the subject of the medieval chronicle in Portugal, see Luís Krus, "Crónica", in *Dicionário da Literatura Medieval Galega e Portuguesa*, pp. 173-175 and, for a literary studies viewpoint, Albano António Cabral Figueiredo, *A Crónica Medieval Portuguesa. Géneze e Evolução de um Género (Sécs. XIV-XV). A Dimensão Estética e a Expressividade Literária*, unpublished PhD dissertation, Coimbra, Faculdade de Letras, 2005.

³ *Crónica Geral de Espanha de 1344*, Luís Filipe Lindley Cintra (ed.), 4 vols., Lisbon, Academia Portuguesa da História and Imprensa Nacional – Casa da Moeda, 1951-1990.

⁴ See Diego Catalán Menendez Pidal, *De Alfonso X al Conde de Barcelos. Cuatro Estudios sobre el nacimiento de la historiografía romance en Castilla y Portugal*, Madrid, Gredos, 1962.

⁵ *Crónica de Portugal de 1419*, Adelino de Almeida Calado (ed.), Aveiro, Universidade, 1998.

⁶ Idem, *ibidem*, pp. XXV-XXVII

⁷ A. Magalhães Basto, *Estudos. Cronistas e Crónicas Antigas. Fernão Lopes e a "Crónica de 1419"*, Coimbra, Universidade, 1960.

⁸ Luís Filipe Lindley Cintra, "Introdução" to the *Crónica Geral de Espanha de 1344*, vol. I, pp. CDV and CDVII-CDIX.

all likelihood the author compiled and rewrote diverse earlier texts which formed the basis for the work. This strong probability points to the active recording and preservation by the Crown, at an earlier date, of accounts of a historiographic nature. However, irrespective of knowing who the author was or of pointing to signs that there had been a royal concern with producing historiographic records and accounts, what must be stressed is that the *Crónica de 1419* is not a chronicle of Christianity, nor a chronicle of Spain but rather a chronicle of *Portugal*. For the first time, the kingdom is the field of observation, as also happens in the later chronicles of Pedro I, Fernando I and João I, all of which were incontestably written by the pen of Fernão Lopes in the 1430s and 1440s.⁹ The superimposition of the history of the monarchy onto the history of the kingdom, which is extremely noticeable in these chronicles, renders monarchy and territory as one, presenting them as elements which merge into one single reality. Such assimilation promotes an image of the supreme authority of the king *over his kingdom* and, simultaneously, constitutes a *physical, material and territorial* element in the identity of the monarchic institution.

The second topic to be considered in the present analysis concerns the *central subject* of the royal chronicles - the monarch himself. As the kingdom is the central object of observation, it ends up being assimilated into the monarchic institution and into the very person of the king himself. From this perspective, *the history of the kingdom is the history of the deeds of the king*, and this is a fundamental element in the identification of the kingdom of Portugal with the person and actions of its monarch and, by extension, of the Portuguese Crown. Thus, the guiding thread of the narrative is inevitably that of the history of the monarchy and the deeds of the monarchs. All importance is given to political history, as much by the themes dealt with (law, justice, relationships with other kingdoms, war and peace, protection of subjects) as by the general objectives (the justification and exaltation of the sovereign's acts). This affirmation of the king's authority and his supreme political and military power, recorded for prosperity in the chronicles, is divulged to the "target audience" of these chronicles - the court nobility and high royal functionaries, those who read the chronicle accounts, and especially those who hear them being read.

These aspects are expressed in their most concentrated form in that masterpiece of the chronicle genre and of medieval literature, the *Crónica de D. João I* by Fernão Lopes, in which a discourse is developed to give historical legitimacy to the Avis dynasty. In fact, João I, the founder of the second Portuguese dynasty, was an intruder from the outset, if not a usurper. It is worth briefly recalling the circumstances of the dynastic crisis unleashed with the death of Fernando I (1367-1383). After celebrating the peace that brought an end to the third war between Portugal and Castile, which had taken place in this reign, Fernando I proposed that Juan I, the Castilian monarch and a widower since 1382, should marry his daughter, Beatriz (born in 1372). The marriage was agreed in the Treaty of Salvaterra de Magos (2 April, 1383). The Treaty was later approved by the Castilian *Cortes* held in Valladolid in August 1383 and by the Portuguese *Cortes*, which met in Santarém in September of the same year. When Fernando died in October 1383, what had been set forth in the Treaty of Salvaterra should have ensued. In short, Portugal and Castile would remain separate kingdoms; but were Fernando I to die without leaving a legitimate son, as indeed happened, Juan I of Castile and his wife, Beatriz, would become the king and queen of Portugal, with their sons succeeding to the Portuguese Crown. Should there be no sons from this marriage nor any other legitimate daughters of Fernando I, the Portuguese Crown would be inherited by the King of Castile and his respective descendants. The widow of the Portuguese monarch, Leonor Teles, would become regent of Portugal until a son of Juan I of Castile and Beatriz reached the age of 14. This was what was laid down in the Treaty of Salvaterra, but the reality turned out to be very different. Opposition by various social

⁹ Fernão Lopes, *Crónica do Senhor Rei Dom Pedro oitavo rei destes regnos*, Damião Peres (ed.), Porto, Civilização, 1965; Fernão Lopes, *Crónica de D. Fernando*, Giuliano Macchi (ed.), Lisbon, Imprensa Nacional – Casa da Moeda, 1975; Fernão Lopes, *Crónica del Rei Dom Joham I de Boa Memoria e dos Reis de Portugal o Decimo*, Parte I, Lisbon, Imprensa Nacional – Casa da Moeda, 1977; Parte II, William J. Entwistle (ed.), Lisbon, Imprensa Nacional – Casa da Moeda, 1977.

sectors to Leonor Teles' regency and the Castilian military intervention in Portugal led João (illegitimate son of Pedro I and Master of the Military Order of Avis) first to the government and then to the throne of Portugal, thereby giving rise to the new dynasty.

The *Crónica de D. João I* is the chronicle of *this king* and his reign, written by the chronicler, Fernão Lopes, who was granted this mission by João I's successor, his son and heir, Duarte (1433-1438).¹⁰ And it is here that we come directly to the third topic for analysis, which concerns the *authors* of the chronicles and the position they held in relation to the task entrusted to them. Fernão Lopes' close links to the royal family and his performance in the important post he held as Crown Archivist, at least from 1418 onwards, clearly reveal his profile as a high functionary in the king's service. His status was raised even higher in 1434 when he was nominated official Chronicler of the Realm with the express duty of writing the chronicles of the kings of Portugal, a task for which he would receive annually the sum of 14 thousand *reais*. This clearly shows the extent to which royalty understood the importance of chronicles, directly investing in them financially and, above all, politically. Their aim was to construct a certain vision, or version, of the history of the kingdom emanating from the *centre* of power that was the Crown. In addition, as in the case of Fernão Lopes and the *Crónica de D. João I*, the chronicler sought to contribute to the legitimization of the Avis dynasty by defending its founder. As mentioned above, such legitimization could not be based on the Right of Succession, and even less on the Treaty of Salvaterra. Hence, the space and the importance that Fernão Lopes attributes to popular action and above all to the urban population, as well as to the intervention of João das Regras, the great defender of João I at the *Cortes* of Coimbra in 1385, where he was proclaimed king. Let us say that these were "atypical arguments" for the period, which Fernão Lopes used with recognized mastery to justify and defend João I's accession to the throne. His brilliant historiographic construction, the use of narrative and documentary sources, the testimony of people who had been present at some of the events of 1383-1385, and his repeated declarations of love and affection for the "truth" should, however, be understood from Fernão Lopes' perspective, which was to defend the legitimacy of the Avis dynasty. Fernão Lopes' construction of discourse, the narrative sequence, the liveliness of the style, the conception of history, the rationality of the argumentation and the care taken to find grounds for his version of events, all become more original and credible when considered in relation to the objectives he sought to reach and his own very strong convictions.

Consequently, the chronicles thus produced are *documents*, insofar as they *record* and try to *prove* those facts considered worthy of being remembered and which have the monarch as the protagonist, or even hero; but the chronicles are also *monuments*, insofar as they commemorate these royal deeds and seek to establish an enduring memory that exalts them.¹¹ Thus, the royal chronicles of the 15th century and, in particular, the *Crónica de D. João I* may be incorporated within a wider "program" which included the building of tombs, the founding of royal chapels, and the construction of royal palaces (such as Sintra) and the Monastery of Santa Maria da Batalha,¹² which evoked the victory over the Castilian armies at the Battle of Aljubarrota (14 August, 1385).

These *chronicle monuments* continued to be constructed throughout the 15th century and into the early 16th century, primarily by Gomes Eanes de Zurara (Fernão Lopes'

¹⁰ On Fernão Lopes, his life and beliefs, see Teresa Amado, *Fernão Lopes, Contador de História*, Lisbon, Estampa, 1991, by the same author "Fernão Lopes", in *Dicionário de Literatura Medieval Galega e Portuguesa*, pp. 271-273, Maria Ângela Beirante, *As Estruturas Sociais em Fernão Lopes*, Lisbon, Livros Horizonte, 1983, João Gouveia Monteiro, *Fernão Lopes. Texto e Contexto*, Coimbra, Minerva, 1988 and Luís de Sousa Rebelo, *A Concepção do Poder em Fernão Lopes*, Lisbon, Livros Horizonte, 1983.

¹¹ About this subject, see the article "Documento/Monumento", by Jacques Le Goff, in *Enciclopédia Einaudi*, 1. *Menória - História*, Lisbon, Imprensa Nacional - Casa da Moeda, 1984, pp. 95-106.

¹² Very well known approaches to this subject are Armindo de Sousa, "A Morte de D. João I (Um tema de propaganda dinástica)", *Studium Generale*, Porto, Centro de Estudos Humanísticos, 1984, pp. 417-487, as well as Luís Adão da Fonseca, "Íclita Geração. Altos Infantes (Lusíadas. IV. 50). Algumas considerações sobre a importância das circunstâncias históricas na formação de um tema literário", *IV Reunião Internacional de Camonistas. Actas*, Ponta Delgada, 1984, pp. 295-302.

successor in 1454), Duarte Galvão (c. 1445-1517) and Rui de Pina (appointed Chronicler of the Realm in 1497). They did not hesitate to attribute a transcendent mission to the Portuguese Crown, which is expressed through the revival and relaunching of a crusading ideal in which the Portuguese monarchs become the staunchest and most faithful players. This is the main “line” that can be found in Zurara’s *Crónica da Tomada de Ceuta*,¹³ in many detailed episodes in Duarte Galvão’s *Crónica de El-Rei D. Afonso Henriques*¹⁴ and in the works of Rui de Pina, especially in his additions to the *Crónica de Portugal de 1419* (entitled *Crónicas dos Sete Primeiros Reis de Portugal*),¹⁵ which primarily concern the royal version of the account of the Battle of Rio Salado (1340), in which Afonso IV becomes the main protagonist leading the victory against the Moors (in contrast to a previous account which attributed this role to Álvaro Gonçalves Pereira, Prior of the Military Order of the Hospital).¹⁶

Lying behind the monarchy’s interest in the chronicle genre was the aim of appropriating the past and of “constructing” this same past so that an absolute identity could be established between the history of the kingdom and the history of the monarchy. The success and the enduring quality of some of the central themes to be found in the vision of history presented by the royal chronicles demonstrate how this discourse of identity also served as a major factor in the legitimization and affirmation of the power of the Crown. By testifying to this success, the royal chronicles became not only the political memory of the monarchy, but also the main basis for the historical memory of the nation, extending far beyond the medieval age.

¹³ Gomes Eanes de Zurara, *Crónica da Tomada de Ceuta*, Francisco Maria Esteves Pereira (ed.), Lisbon, Academia das Ciências, 1915.

¹⁴ Duarte Galvão, *Crónica de El-Rei D. Afonso Henriques*, s.l., Imprensa da Universidade de Coimbra e Imprensa Nacional – Casa da Moeda, 1986.

¹⁵ *Crónicas dos Sete Primeiros Reis de Portugal*, Carlos da Silva Tarouca (ed.), 3 vols., Lisbon, Academia Portuguesa da História, 1952-1954.

¹⁶ This refers to the account introduced in the *Livro de Linhagens do Conde D. Pedro*, José Mattoso (ed.), Lisbon, Academia das Ciências, 1980, 21G15, pp. 239-257. In relation to this account, see António José Saraiva, “O Autor da Narrativa da Batalha do Salado e a Refundição do Livro do Conde D. Pedro”, *Boletim de Filologia*, XXI, 1971, pp. 1-16, Luís Krus, *A Concepção Nobiliárquica do Espaço Ibérico. Geografia dos Livros de Linhagens Medievais Portugueses (1280-1380)*, Lisbon, JNICT – Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1995 and Bernardo Vasconcelos e Sousa, “O Sangue, a Cruz e a Coroa. A Memória do Salado em Portugal”, *Penélope*, 2, 1989, pp. 27-48.

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