

The Royal Chancellery at the end of the Portuguese Middle Ages: diplomacy and political society (1970 – 2005)

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Abstract

The aim of this text is to review the research undertaken in Portugal on the question of the medieval royal chancellery and diplomacy and their relationship with the study of royal bureaucracy. In this sense, we characterize the lines of development that are to be noted in the research undertaken into political societies and royal power based on the records of the royal chancellery in the last thirty years. Initially, we focus our attention on the relationship established between the royal chancellery and diplomacy and later we highlight the main themes and problems studied under the scope of the social history of institutions. Finally, we refer to the use of prosopography as a method applied to the study of medieval Portuguese elites.

Keywords

royal chancellery and diplomacy; royal power; political elites; historiography; Portugal; Middle Ages

Resumo

O objectivo deste texto é o de proceder a um balanço da investigação desenvolvida em Portugal sobre Chancelaria e Diplomática régias medievais na sua relação com o estudo da burocracia régia. Neste sentido, efectuamos a caracterização das linhas de desenvolvimento das pesquisas realizadas sobre sociedades políticas e poder régio a partir dos registos da chancelaria régia nos últimos trinta anos. Centramo-nos, inicialmente, na relação estabelecida entre Chancelaria e Diplomática régias e, posteriormente, realçamos os principais temas e problemas estudados no âmbito da história social das instituições. Por fim, referimo-nos à utilização da prosopografia como método aplicado ao estudo das elites políticas medievais portuguesas.

Palavras-chave

Chancelaria e Diplomática régias; Poder régio; Elites políticas; Historiografia; Portugal; Idade Média

1. A review of history making

This text seeks to provide a review of the studies on Portuguese royal chancelleries in their relationship with diplomacy from the perspective of a history of the State and the social profile of the

higher institutions of the royal bureaucracy, in particular in the last centuries of the Middle Ages. In section 1.1, we characterize the recent developments to be noted in the different approaches to the study of royal diplomacy and the royal chancellery. In section 1.2, we contextualize the return of the political history of the Middle Ages in Portugal, explaining the influence of external approaches on internal developments (Gomes 1989; Homem 1996; Freitas 2004b). In the following sections, we analyze the studies made of the political personnel in the late Middle Ages, under the auspices of the PhD and Master's Degree programs of the Faculty of Letters of the University of Porto (hereafter referred to as FLUP). In this context, we undertake a critical analysis of the monographic studies presented to FLUP about royal chancelleries, defining the main lines of research that have been followed. The overriding idea in all research is that of the existence of a large set of possible relations that can be established between royal chancellery and royal diplomacy, chancellery and royal officialdom, chancellery and prosopography, chancellery and political societies and chancellery and State structures. In this way, we seek to highlight the changes in perspective in the “new” historiography of the *political* and explain the current context regarding the development of studies about medieval royal chancelleries, underlining the current perspectives of analysis of the chancellery archives: the *diplomatic* perspective (the study of the diplomatic production of the decision-making bodies), the *institutional* perspective (seeking to establish the organigram of government) and the *socio-political* perspective (the prosopography of the decision-making bodies). As we shall demonstrate, these three aspects of analysis converge in the most recent view of the *political* in Portugal¹.

1.1 Diplomacy and Royal Chancelleries

Until the 1970s, scholars studying royal diplomacy maintained a preferential interest in determining the types of documents conserved in the archives of the royal chancellery, giving pride of place in their research to the critical analysis of the authenticity, genuineness or falsity of the deeds, complementing this with the inventory of collections and the critical edition of the documents originating from the chancelleries of the counts and the first kings of Portugal (Azevedo 1927; Costa 1975 and 1979). It is therefore not surprising that, until the 1970s, there was a close relationship, in terms of academic studies, between diplomacy (Ribeiro 1810-1836; Reuter 1938 and Azevedo 1940a and 1940b), paleography (Costa 1976), archivism (Azevedo 1927), medieval literature studies (Cintra 1963), and research about the Portuguese historical and linguistic space (Cintra 1958 and 1959) from the origins of the Portuguese nationality to the consolidation of the monarchy (Azevedo 1958 and Costa 1979), bearing in mind the chronological period that was preferentially studied, the 12th to the 13th centuries. The main results of the studies undertaken until that point are systematized in the historiographic syntheses published in recent years (Coelho 2000 and Homem 2005).

A new phase in the study of royal diplomacy, in its close links with medieval chancelleries, was marked by the appearance of a “new” generation of scholars (from the 1980s onwards), a stage that can be broken down into two distinct but related areas of research and study:

- the publication of collections of royal documents, including the publication of all the Portuguese medieval chancelleries, under the coordination and initial academic supervision of A. H. de Oliveira Marques (1933-2007) and later of João José Alves Dias, from the Centre of Historical Studies of the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences of the New University of Lisbon; and
- the systematic exploration of the records of the royal chancelleries in close conjunction with royal diplomacy, e.g. the identification of the different types of charters through the critical analysis of the deeds issued by the chancellery services, with a view to determining the spheres of intervention of the State's agents. This aspect is expressed in the consolidation of the alliance between royal diplomacy and the history of the State in the Middle Ages (Homem 1981 and 1984).

The study of the first of the areas mentioned began in 1984 as part of a long-term project centered on preparing the publication of the collections of royal documents housed in the National Archives of the Torre do Tombo. Emphasis was laid on the publication of the registers of the royal chancelleries, later extending to the minutes of the *Cortes* and the publication of regulations and

¹ The bibliography referred to here brings together those Portuguese and foreign studies and articles that we consider illustrative of the lines of research discussed in this article. The bibliography of each author is ordered in chronological fashion, from the most recent to the oldest study, respecting the norms of the Harvard system of reference. We apologize here for any omission that may exist in relation to other important works.

legislative compilations, e.g. the *Ordenações Manuelinas* (first published in 1512-1513). This project was also geared towards the editing, critical presentation and publication of indexes of the main collections of Portuguese medieval royal documents, from the reign of Afonso III (1248-1279) to that of Manuel I (1495-1521). In fact, this aspect of seeking to publish collections of medieval royal documents can be seen as an activity that is designed to complete the work begun by Rui de Azevedo (1940a and 1958) and continued by Avelino de Jesus da Costa (1975). It is a task that will prove enormously useful for the scholars of the Middle Ages, representing the recovery of an interest in this historical period at Portuguese universities, and, in some ways, expressing the growing dynamism of the research being undertaken into the Middle Ages in Portugal.

The second area of research also follows in the wake of the works produced in the preceding period, which we have already mentioned (Azevedo 1958 and Costa 1979, to be precise), and it is directed towards producing an in-depth analysis of the royal chancellery as the State archive. One of the central aims of this line of research is to gain greater knowledge about the activity of the men of power through the systematic examination of the chancellery records, as we have already stated.

The studies about royal chancelleries that have been undertaken in the meantime have made it possible to establish a typology of the deeds produced by the royal chancellery, particularly in the 14th and 15th centuries.

We now know today that there is no uniformity in the chancellery records of the medieval Peninsular kingdoms. Just as there were various medieval Spains, there are also essential differences to be found in what has remained by way of records of the administrative procedures undertaken by the kings of Aragon, Castile and Navarre and, in the same way, between these records and those of the kings of Portugal. Furthermore, even in the same kingdom there were periods in which the records were less organized, as opposed to other periods in which there was greater regularity in the procedures and routines of the chancellery, with the records being organized by years, and within these one also finds the parchment ledgers organized by months (Homem, Duarte and Mota 1991). In this way, an assessment of the processes followed in the recording and storage of Portuguese medieval royal documents allows us to put forward the suggestion that there were many different situations that can frequently be explained by a variety of factors, namely the vicissitudes of history, and the archival purposes of the State or of the curator of the Archive of the Torre do Tombo.

In this context, we consider it pertinent at this moment to undertake a synthesis of the main evolutionary characteristics of the records of the royal chancellery throughout the Middle Ages (Coelho and Homem 1995), seeking to explain the difficulties and the advantages awaiting all those studying the main repository of the political action of the Portuguese medieval princes. The evolution of the records of the Portuguese royal chancellery is currently divided into three distinct periods (Coelho and Homem 1995):

A first period corresponds to the beginning of the activity of the production of written records, a period that coincides with the administration of the Counts Dom Henrique and Dona Teresa (1095), Afonso Henriques (1139-1185), the first king of Portugal and Sancho I (1185-1217), his son. The royal documents of this period were studied and catalogued by Rui de Azevedo and Avelino de Jesus da Costa (1940a and 1975, respectively).

A second *foundational* period arises from the appearance of a first ledger at the chancellery containing documents relating to the final years of the reign of Afonso II (1217-1221). This was followed by a period of disorganization in the chancellery services, at least until the reign of Sancho II (1223-1248);

A third and final period corresponds to a *refoundational* cycle at the chancellery, beginning in the reign of Afonso III (1248-1279) and continuing until the reign of João II (1481-1495). This cycle marks a greater maturity in the archive services, as can be seen in the recording, storage and execution of a growing number of deeds. During this phase, the services of the royal chancellery were performed more smoothly and were not subject to phenomena that lay outside the normal practice of the chancellery as the hub of the kingdom's central administration. In our view, this fact remains inseparable from the process of consolidation of the State apparatus in the late Middle Ages.

Despite this fact, the chancellery records from this period were subject to the historical vicissitudes linked to a *reform process* that began in the mid-15th century, with the underlying idea being to select only the documents that were to be definitively conserved, in keeping with the instructions of the monarch Afonso V (1439-1481). The man who was placed in charge of selecting the documents that would have some archival value was Gomes Eanes de Zurara (1410-1474), a royal chronicler and

the keeper of the Archive of the Torre do Tombo. The process of reorganizing the oldest records of the royal chancellery was, at the time, justified by the fact that many records were damaged and illegible, giving rise to the appearance of new volumes that were given the name of *reformed records*. In keeping with the orders of the monarch and following criteria for the assessment, selection and expurgation of records that were valid at that time, Gomes E. de Zurara submitted the old ledgers of the royal chancellery to a process of triage that was considered to be an extremely violent one if we take into account the criteria that are normally followed in current archival practices.

The reform of the records of the royal chancellery undertaken in the 1450s, 1460s and 1470s undervalued the importance of many of the acts that had been entered in them, with only a summary being kept of the others, so that there were few *reformed records* kept of charters that actually conserved all of their diplomatic components. Consequently, most of the documents of the *reformed records* either do not contain the *escatocolo*² of the original deed or else omit part of it. In the *reformed records*, the summarized royal charters cannot be used in the study of royal officialdom. Despite everything, the reorganization of the transcription of the deeds into new books was carried out with different levels of intensity, with some of the *original records* having been conserved in a “complete” form. For the benefit of all those studying the 15th century, the process of assessing, selecting and eliminating *original records* was applied to records prior to 1438.

For the period after 1438, corresponding to the reigns of Afonso V (1439-1481) and João II (1481-1495), the records that have survived until the present day are the *original records*. In the *original records* there is a greater correspondence between the deeds that were produced and those that have been conserved, and the registration of the deeds follows criteria that allow us to make the respective classification by type and the identification in the *escatocolo* of those taking part in the act, as well as the date of its bureaucratic dispatch.

The studies undertaken at the Faculty of Letters of the University of Porto from 1970 to 2005, which we will discuss in section 1.2.1, examined the royal chancelleries of the 14th and 15th centuries, or, in other words, they worked with both *reformed records* and *original records*, sensibly overcoming the main problems posed by the heterogeneity of the records of the Portuguese royal chancelleries. The systematic examination of the records of the royal chancelleries led to the appearance of “new” themes and called for the perspectives of the different approaches to be updated. As far as royal diplomacy is concerned, there was a movement towards the study of the royal *charter*, as a quintessential legal document of the bureaucratic activity of the Prince and the respective group of officials cooperating in his business (Homem 1994), making it possible to analyze the different types of legislative acts: the study of the law as an expressive form of the exercise of royal power (Homem, 1999a and 2005; Nogueira: 2006). At the same time, equal importance was given to establishing the typological classification of the acts performed at the meetings of the three Estates, commonly known as the *Cortes* (Sousa 1990a), in order to understand the dynamism of the activity of the Prince’s governance with his main interlocutors represented at the general meetings of the common people.³

Consequently, the interest in improving knowledge of the genesis of the royal chancellery and in establishing the criteria for analyzing legal documents (original form, copies, analysis of contents, determination of diplomatic types) led to the study of the list of matters in which the Prince’s servants intervened, in an attempt to explain the various factors that could reveal the priorities of the royal administration.

Among the main perspectives of the research into the records of the royal chancellery undertaken in the last four decades, mention should be made of the following: the movement around the country of the royal retinue (Rodrigues 1978; Moreno 1976b and 1988) and the consequent itinerancy of royal officialdom (Henriques 2001); the characterization of the official royal letters and the spheres of bureaucratic intervention, complemented by the definition of the classification of the royal acts (Homem 1990a; Mota 1989 and Freitas 2001); the examination of the chancellery sources from the perspective of the official memory of the State (Homem, Duarte and Mota 1991); the critical analysis of the contents of the royal charters from the point of view of the study of the forms typically

² The *escatocolo* or final protocol is the documentary part of the royal charter which states the date and the topographical and chronological details, as well as showing the signs of its validation: underwriting, signatures or seals.

³ A historiographic review of the history of the Portuguese parliament can be found in Duarte 2003.

prescribed for their writing, their discursive content and their respective importance for the Prince; the study of the different forms of record keeping, distinguishing the complete deeds from the legal documents drawn up in an abbreviated form (*ementas*)⁴ (Freitas 2001); the systematic compilation of biographical details or prosopographic catalogues of the political personnel (Homem 1990a; Mota 1989; Freitas 1996 and 2001); the study of the secularization of the royal bureaucracy (Homem 1990a; Freitas 2006); the places and territories of power (Sabatier and Gomes 1998; Freitas 2006a); the relationship between the different sectors of bureaucracy and the rates at which documents were produced in the 14th and 15th centuries (Homem 1990; Mota 1989; Freitas 2001), amongst other themes and problems that we shall analyze in detail in the following sections.

At the same time, there has been an increase in the diplomatic analysis of the public acts performed at the offices of lay notaries (Sá-Nogueira 2008) – the *tabelionado* – and a similar increase in the number of studies made of ecclesiastical chancelleries, especially those to be found at Episcopal and monastic institutions (Gomes 2007; Cunha 2005; Morujão 2005), although these are not in fact analyzed in this review. In the same way, studies have been developed in the field of paleography, centered on the characterization of the evolution of writing (Santos 1994), the formal aspects of the documents and the conditions under which the manuscripts were stored and conserved (Santos 2001).⁵

1.2. Political Society/(ies), elite(s) and the medieval origins of the Modern State

The resurrection of the studies of Political History and consequently of the medieval political societies in Portugal has been linked in particular to the foreign influences deriving from the triumph of the *political* and the return of an interest in the medieval State in Europe, from the mid-20th century onwards, amongst French and Anglo-American politologists. A first phase was marked by the influence of the work written by Raymond Cazelles (1917-1985), *Société politique et la crise de la royauté sous Philippe de Valois*, published in 1958, together with the publication of the studies produced by Roland Mousnier (1907-1993), in the 1950s and 1960s, about the political realities of modern France in the 16th and 18th centuries (Mousnier 1964, 1979 and 1980), as well as the reference work compiled by Bernard Guenée, *L'Occident aux XIV^e et XV^e siècles. Les États*, dating from 1971. In the same year, René Fédou published a synthetic study that enjoyed widespread dissemination in Portugal: *L'État au Moyen Age*; a year later Philippe Contamine wrote the work *Guerre, État et Société à la fin du Moyen Age* (1972), in which he undertook an analysis of the relationship between the improvement of the State apparatus at the end of the Middle Ages and the changes in military organization and strategy. Shortly afterwards, the best-known work of the American medievalist Joseph Reese Strayer was published: *As Origens Medievais do Estado Moderno (On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State)*, (1969), in which he defined the founding elements of the model of the *modern* State in the Middle Ages. At the level of political ideas, and especially in relation to works dedicated to the analysis of the contemporary State, mention should be made of the influence of the work *Sociologie de l'État* by Bertrand Badie and Pierre Birnbaum, dating from 1979, in which the Marxist idea that the state and its bureaucracy are merely the expression of the ideas of the ruling class is refuted. Badie and Birnbaum consider that the State is a reality that is dated historically and situated geographically. In Western Europe, this concept is sufficiently revealing of the tendency to adopt a sociological approach to the State.

As far the paths of the *new* European medieval political history is concerned, Bernard Guenée moves away from the traditional emphasis on ideology in the historiographic approach, pointing out the general lines of evolution of this specific area of knowledge (Guenée 1976). For Guenée, the historiography of the *political* has gradually progressed and reached a safe place amongst the community of historians since the 1950s and 1960s, having as its main object of study the State and its servants (Guenée 1976 and 1995). Its success is measured by the ever greater volume of studies undertaken from different approaches; as he mentions, a *history of political geography* (the study of States

⁴ “*Ementa*” is a term that derives from the Latin and means “note,” “main idea,” “written record;” or, in other words, it directs our attention to a summarized text or one that has been reduced to its essential points. In the Middle Ages, it was customary to transcribe the official documents with similar protocols in a summarized form (Marques, 1985: 362-363).

⁵ For more information about this subject, besides the essay that has been mentioned, see Coelho *et al.* 2001a.

and administrative divisions) was followed by the *history of political societies* (the study of the groups of men who held power, the tensions and the political activity of the leaders), culminating in the *history of political mentalities* (the analysis of social and political groups, the definition of pressure groups and the formation of public opinion). Bernard Guenée firstly (1976), and then later Philippe Contamine (1998), encouraged the spread amongst medievalists of the use of the concept of *political societies* in the plural, in which they include not only the study of the structures and the functioning of the institutions of the medieval State, but also the study of the political agents and the social power groups. In B. Guenée's work, we can detect a call for attention to be paid to the "new" political history, whose academic orientation and research problems have moved away from political events *tout court*, as well as from the so-called traditional history of a political, biographical and factual nature, which was the subject of intense and prolonged criticism from the *Annales School* in the period between the two world wars. In only two generations of medievalists, and after overcoming the accusations systematically leveled against it by Marxist, structuralist and *Annalist* historians in the 1930s and 1940s, as we have mentioned, the *new* political history triumphed and became humanized! Political history became geared towards the study of men, being interested in knowing more about the history of the life of all those who took part in the building of the State, reached top positions in the administrative bodies, were rewarded with favors in return for the services that they rendered to the kings, participated in military actions or in the collection of taxes, guaranteed the dispensation of justice and helped to keep the peace, and who did their best for the common good. In this undertaking, the politologists had to depend on the help of a peculiar method of study – the prosopographic method (Millet 1985b; Autrand 1986). This method allows for the construction of collective biographies, the study of groups that are defined politically and socially (Millet 1988).

These are the men who are of interest to the modern-day historian of the *political*. These are the men who achieved the status of belonging to the elite: a minority that governed in the face of a majority of the people that were ruled by them. It cannot be forgotten that the original semantic sense of the word "elite" was founded on the idea of the *exercise of power*. The theory of elites developed in political sociology and historical sociology tells us that the concept of "elite" originally occurred in the singular, in opposition to the Marxist doctrines that defended the idea of mass movements; consequently, the plural and heterogeneous use of "elites" met with considerable resistance and took some time to become established amongst the community of historians (Leferme-Falguières and Van Renterghem 2001). Despite all the difficulties encountered, the 1980s marked the beginning, throughout Western Europe, of a period dedicated to the study of the most diverse elites: aristocratic, municipal, ecclesiastic, artistic, literary, amongst others.⁶ Nowadays, the notion of elite has a plural use. Consequently, the concept of "elite" has ceased to be used exclusively to describe those who exercise power. In Portugal, the use of this term has gradually emerged amongst the community of medievalists, making it possible to provide a first review of the research dedicated to the theme in the 1980s and 1990s, under the title: *Elites e redes clientelares na Idade Média: Problemas Metodológicos* (Barata 2001), following the review presented in 1996 by Jean-Philippe Genet and Günther Lottes entitled *L'État moderne et les élites. Apports et limites de la méthode prosopographique*. In this way, a new purpose was built for the "new" political history, which was able to readjust the prism through which its main subject matter was approached – the State and the political body that it represented.⁷ We have gradually been moving towards the history of political ideas, the representations, the ceremonies, the myths and ideas of power, the propaganda and the legitimization. In other words, political history has been gradually moving towards the history of *political cultures and mentalities*. In the 1980s, the international recognition of this new way of looking at the *political* was expressed in an innovative work and project: *Les Lieux de mémoire*, by Pierre Nora (1984-1993), which provides a clear reflection on the French nation. 1984 saw the launch of the international program of research led by Jean Philippe Genet and Wim Blockmans, dealing with the problematics of the *Prosopographie et Genèse de l'État moderne* and setting in motion a wide-ranging plan of research into the medieval origins of the *Modern State* from the 13th to the 17th century.⁸ Very recently, as we have said, there has been an

⁶ In the final bibliography, references are made to those studies undertaken in Portugal between 1970 and 2005, which we consider come closest to this perspective of analysis.

⁷ On the developments of the "modern State" in Portuguese historiography, see Homem 1999c: 63-76.

⁸ The lines of development of the European project can be seen in *Prosopographie et genèse de l'Etat Moderne* (1986). Ed. Françoise Autrand, Paris: ENSJF.

increase in the studies on the political cultures of social groups connected with the State, and some works that are representative of this trend have come to light: *La genèse de l'État moderne: Culture et société politique en Angleterre* (2006) and *Du contrat d'alliance au contrat politique. Cultures et sociétés politiques dans la péninsule ibérique à la fin du Moyen Âge* (2007).

In Portugal, the history of the central and local powers and their officials was initially dealt with in the 3rd quarter of the 19th century/first half of the 20th century, by Abel Andrade (1866-1958) and Henrique da Gama Barros (1833-1925), both of whom had a positivist background and were prone to see the subject from a legal viewpoint, respectively studying the royal power in the 12th to the 14th centuries (Andrade 1892) and the history of the public administration in the 12th to the 15th centuries (Barros 1885-1923). Later, in the first half of the 20th century, attention is drawn to the work of Manoel Paulo Mêrea (1888-1977), who examined medieval political institutions. In the same way, Torquato de Sousa Soares (1903-1988) distinguished himself with the study of municipal institutions (Soares 1931 and 1935), in which he was followed by Marcello Caetano (1906-1980), a historian with a legal background (Caetano 1951 and 1953) and Maria Teresa Campos Rodrigues (1968). Since the early 1980s, the study of local government has gradually been replaced by research into municipal powers, urban societies and elites (Coelho 1995b), with the most notable achievement in this field being the model of the medieval city systematized by António Henrique de Oliveira Marques (1982 and 1988), further complemented by the approaches developed by Iria Gonçalves (1985) and by Maria Helena da Cruz Coelho and Joaquim Romero Magalhães (1986), all of whom were followed by a younger generation of historians⁹. At the same time, the royal itineraries (Moreno 1976b and 1988), crises of the State (Moreno 1976a), social and political tensions (Moreno 1985) and the history of Portuguese municipalities (1986) were afforded special attention by Humberto Baquero Moreno. Approaching the question from a similar viewpoint, mention should be made of the study by Luís Adão da Fonseca of the political importance of the figure of the Constable Dom Pedro (1982), as well as the work by José Marques on the relationship between the ecclesiastic power and the royal power (1988).¹⁰

From the 1970s onwards, the directions taken by research also led to the study of the History of Law, the State and political institutions (Hespanha 1972 and 1978 in particular),¹¹ the history of government and royal offices (Homem 1974) and, a little later on, the history of the Portuguese medieval parliament (Sousa 1983 and 1989). More recently, there has been a study of the representations and rituals of power (Sousa 1999; Gomes 1999) and the development of a social history of war (Monteiro 1998 and 2003; Duarte 2003 and Barroca 2003).

What has just been said is justified by the chronological proximity and respective dissemination in Portugal of the thematic guidelines governing research abroad. In effect, the modern currents of the European historiography of the *political*, particularly that which was being produced in France and in Anglo-American academies, only began to affect Portuguese medievalists in an incisive and striking fashion from the 1970s onwards.

In this context, one can understand the introduction of the discipline of *Institutional and Political History (5th-15th Centuries)*, in the academic year of 1978/79, into the curricula of the History courses at the Faculty of Letters of the University of Porto (FLUP), the Faculty of Letters of the University of Lisbon (FLUL), the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences of the New University of Lisbon (FCSH-UNL) and the Faculty of Letters of the University of Coimbra (FLUC), as well as the opening, at the Master's degree level, of the seminars in *State and Institutions in the Late Middle Ages* at FLUP, in 1986/87, under the responsibility of Armando Luís de Carvalho Homem and of the seminar in *Representative Institutions*, in 1988/89, under the responsibility of Armindo de Sousa, at the same University, contributing to the promotion and increased interest in the studies of political history *tout court* and drawing attention to the relationships that were to be established between powers, in the plural. At these seminars, new lines of research were followed in areas such as medieval institutions (central and local), social conflicts, political elites and representative powers, the elites of the royal

⁹ Among the many works that have dealt with the study of municipal powers and urban political elites, attention is drawn in particular to Beirante 1980; Gomes 1987; Silva 1987; Conde 1988; Vilar, 1988, Andrade 1990, Costa 1993 and others referred to in the final bibliography of this review. On this subject, see the historiographic review in Coelho 1998: 49-62.

¹⁰ In which he was followed by Ventura 1997 and Vilar 1999, in particular.

¹¹ Although Hespanha is a "modernist," the perspectives put forward in the studies mentioned were highly influential in renewing the history of politics in the Middle Ages.

bureaucracy and prosopography, especially in the Late Middle Ages. This return to the study of the *political* as a privileged area of historical knowledge was indissociably linked to the dissemination in Portugal of the movement for the rehabilitation of medieval political history that was taking place in France (Guenée 1971; Contamine 1972; Autrand 1981; Millet 1982; Krynen 1981; Genet 1990).

To end this section, stress should be laid on the central importance of the semantic evolution displayed in transferring the use of concepts from the singular to the plural, in particular the transformation of “political society” into “political societies,” “power” into “powers” and, finally, “elite” into “elites.” A corresponding semantic evolution also seems to us to have taken place in relation to the expression “political history,” now referred to in modern parlance as the history of the *political*, directing attention not only to the return of the *political* into the history of the Middle Ages, but also to other viewpoints and lines of research that include within themselves a *new political*, which we shall discuss in the following sections.

1.2.1 Themes and problems

The study of the royal power with a view to improving our knowledge of the departments of the central administration, the identification of the holders of public office and the areas of government intervention based on the diplomatic analysis of the deeds drawn up at the royal chancelleries of the 14th and 15th centuries, together represent the central theme of all the research that we shall be analyzing in the next few paragraphs.

In the early 1970s, the central administration began to be seen as an object of specific study in a work entitled: *Aspectos da administração portuguesa no reinado de D. Pedro I* (1974), by Armando Luís de Carvalho Homem. In this pioneering work, the author stresses the functional aspects of the government of Pedro I (1357-1367), with his source of information being the records of the royal chancellery, which he used to determine the structure, functioning and evolution of the decision-making bodies during that period. His work provides a systematic analysis of the records of the royal chancellery, seeking to identify the royal services (the different sectors of the central administration), as well as to identify the royal officials and determine their respective roles as political agents. The choice of the reign of Dom Pedro I was a deliberate one. All that remains to describe the administrative activity of the servants of this monarch is just one ledger of the *reformed records*. In fact, this was one of the smallest chancelleries, in the context of the Portuguese royal chancelleries as a whole, a situation that made it possible to undertake a preliminary exploratory research project, further complemented by the analysis of the two sets of regulations published by the king Pedro I in 1361 about the functioning of the “*Desembargo*” (High Court) that heard the petitions that arrived at the court, at a time when we still had access to legislative compilations. On the subject of the disciplinary activity relating to the functioning of the central bureaucracy, enshrined in these regulations, the same author republished the above-mentioned work under the title – *Subsídios para o estudo da Administração Central no reinado de D. Pedro I* (1978) – in which he successively presents “*the existing positions and their holders, in order to next examine both the way in which the Administration functioned and its evolution throughout the king’s reign*” (Homem 1978: 8). Or, in other words, the author combined the study of the activity of the royal bureaucrats with the study of the regulations promulgated by the king in the early years of his reign, assessing the impact that such legislation had on bureaucratic activity.

Subsequently, in his PhD thesis, the author went deeper into the already mentioned problematics, having performed a systematic survey of the records of the royal documentation relating to the period from 1320 to 1433, although he did, however, update the perspectives for approaching this subject. The authors referred to in this work were, in particular, Bernard Guenée, Jean Glenisson, Françoise Autrand, and Philippe Contamine in regard to the various dimensions of the history of the State and its agents; and there is also a mention of the work by Robert-Henri Bautier in relation to the study of the Royal chancelleries (Homem 1990: 11-17). The work was based on the systematic study of the acts recorded in ledgers that were, in the main, subjected to a selective reorganization in the mid-16th century, the records of the *Zurara reform*, which we have already talked about. The historical period that is examined includes the final years of the reign of Dinis, 1320-1325, and the reigns of Afonso IV (1325-1357), Pedro I (1357-1367), Fernando I (1367-1383) and João I (1385-1433). In it are identified the categories and posts of the officials signing the entries in the ledgers and their respective *cursus honorum* in the bureaucracy, as well as the forms of recruitment of the royal officials. The work also studies the secularization of the administrative structures, detecting the phases of the

institutionalization of the offices and the regularization of the administrative *praxis*, together with a questioning of the existence of the genealogical transmission of offices (patrimonialization). At the end, this work results in the compilation of 240 micro-biographies of the notaries who underwrote the charters issued by the chancellery (Homem 1990).

Based on the proficient lines of research developed in the already mentioned work,¹² but reflecting on the most recent European guidelines for research into the *political* in the Middle Ages, especially those emanating from the French school, Eugénia Pereira da Mota embarked upon the compilation of a pioneering prosopographic catalogue about the notaries who underwrote the royal charters between 1481 and 1483, analyzing the respective political and administrative activity from the end of the reign of Afonso V (1439-1481) to the early years of the reign of João II (1481-1495) and attempting to detect signs of change in the bureaucratic structures and the organization of the State in the late Middle Ages. Once again, the question is raised about the chancellery sources, since this was a time for which there was an abundance of *original records*. A time when the number of documents produced was almost the same as the number of records conserved, confronting the historian of political institutions with the problem of managing the “excessive” volume of documentation available. In fact, quantity does not always equal quality as the quantity of documents dispatched and recorded in the ledgers was close to the effective total number, but this reflects a new reality: that of the specialization of the administrative services, which led to a typological uniformity. Robert-Henri Bautier had drawn attention to this fact: the increase in the volume of acts recorded at the medieval royal chancelleries was accompanied by a reduction in the number of different types of deeds issued (Bautier 1964). At the turn of the 14th to the 15th century, the royal chancellery specialized in the treatment of questions of graces and favors, in particular charters *endowing property and rights, privileges in general, appointments to royal offices and pardons*, as a result of the distribution of the administrative activity amongst departments or services that specialized in the resolution of financial questions (the *Casa dos Contos* of Lisbon, institutionalized during the reign of João I) and the consolidation of the sphere of activity of the higher courts: the *Casa do Cível*, which was established permanently in Lisbon from the second quarter of the 15th century onwards and the *Casa da Suplicação*, which accompanied the king on his travels from region to region, having its own body of officials (Albuquerque 1982). Each of these departments of the royal bureaucracy was responsible for undertaking specialized activity. Between the end of the 14th and the beginning of the 15th century, these sectors of the bureaucracy had their own ledgers for recording the royal acts and their respective deeds. In turn, the chancellery specialized in the registration of a certain type of records, with many of them having since been silenced through reforms and/or adjustments. Consequently, Eugénia Mota (1989) compiled a voluminous documentary corpus of over one and a half thousand documents per year, but this was fairly unrepresentative of the activity of the sectors of the royal finances and the dispensation of royal justice. Despite everything, the author managed to explain the impact of the change of king on the alteration of the human resources who worked in the higher echelons of the royal bureaucracy. With this work, Eugénia Mota proved the advantages of undertaking biographical macro-research (prosopography) and fostered the acceptance of prosopography as a method of analysis applied to the study of social and political groups. The work was completed at a time when improvements were being made to the method of prosopography as used by the French school (Millet 1988). It led to a greater dissemination of the prosopographic method in Portugal and its consequent application in the study of different elites: municipal, aristocratic, courtly, ecclesiastic, literary or artistic¹³.

Despite this “sudden” adherence to the method, the term “prosopography” remained throughout the 1980s a word of limited use in Portugal and was not so readily accepted in all the sectors of the community of medievalists. This fact is not particularly surprising, since, for example, for more than two decades my computer has insisted on not recognizing the expression, repeatedly alerting me to a spelling and semantic error... Anyway, it may be said that prosopography as a historiographic method applied to the study of elites proved to be fruitful initially amongst the community of medievalist politologists, and shortly afterwards amongst all those who devoted their attention to the analysis of social, political, religious or cultural groups.

¹² On the reappearance of political history in Portugal in the 1970s and 1980s, see, for all cases, Gomes 1989: 25-32.

¹³ Some reflections may be found on the possibilities offered by the use of the prosopographic method in Nogueira 1994; Oliveira 1994; Gomes 1995; Rodrigues 1996 and Pizarro 1999.

In a later work, Judite Gonçalves de Freitas (1996) undertook a similar study about the officialdom in the reign of Duarte, the king of Portugal between 1433 and 1438. The author worked with both *original records* and *reformed records* from the chancellery, having undertaken a reflection on the times when the written deeds were produced, recorded and conserved. As a further complement to this, she presented a pioneering approach to the royal scribes and made a study of the activity of the notaries underwriting these deeds, anticipating the question of the venality of the royal officials (embodied in the use of the *resignatio in favorem*). The works of Françoise Autrand, Hélène Millet, Jean-Philippe Genet, Neithard Bulst and Wolfgang Reinhard represented her main methodological bases, besides the studies that have already been highlighted. In her PhD thesis, the author analyzed the subsequent chronological period, the regency of the Infante Dom Pedro (1439-1449) and the first few years of the government of Afonso V (1449-1460), based on the compilation of two prosopographic catalogues: one relating to the officials who composed the entries (92 biographies) and another relating to the officials who recorded them in writing (315 biographies). For this purpose, she surveyed more than twenty thousand *original records* of the chancellery of Afonso V. The use of the prosopographic method allowed her to establish the socio-political profile of the officials working for the royal bureaucracy. Thus, she analyzed their social origins, levels of cultural education, types of career in the bureaucracy, professional performance and their age at the time of their access to positions of royal office, as well as the role of relations of patronage and nepotism in the obtaining of offices, having identified the models for the patrimonial transmission of the offices. At the same time, she carried out a critical analysis of the sources examined and defined the organigram of royal governance in the mid-fifteenth century (Freitas 2001).

Later, Vasco Vaz undertook an *ex professo* study of the scribes of João I (1385-1433) based on the production of a catalogue of micro-biographies that “*seeks to provide an overview of the group to which those whose biographies are written here belong, stressing what they have in common*” (Vaz 1995, vol. II: 1). Following the theoretical and methodological premises of preceding works, the author subdivides his approach to the chancellery into two main sections: “The Institution” and “The Men.” In the first section, he analyzes the bureaucratic circuit of the chancellery, investigating the difference between the legislated law and the law that was actually practiced. In the second section, he turns his attention to royal bureaucracies, stressing the increase that took place in the technical specialization of writing, the levels of activity of weekly and monthly production, the degree of specialization and the circuits that were frequented, with the aim of defining the social and political profile of the royal scribe.

For the study of the royal bureaucracy in the 1460s and 1470s during the reign of Afonso V (1439-1481), nine research works were undertaken, using the same methodological bases as the works analyzed previously.

The research undertaken by Ana Paula Almeida (1996) and Armando Borlido (1996) mark the beginning of a phase of production of monographs about a very brief period, one or two years in the operations of the High Court of Afonso V, corresponding to the same number of ledgers at the royal chancellery. This is why, for the purposes of compiling the prosopographic computer file, these studies considered the data obtained in the works mentioned earlier, completing them with the gathering of information in the published sources: the *Monumenta Henricina* (1960-1974), the *Chartularium Universitatis Portucalensis* (1966-1985), the chronicles of Fernão Lopes, Gomes Eanes de Zurara and Rui de Pina and other published medieval sources. These studies make an important contribution to the analysis of the codicological characteristics of the records of the royal chancellery, seeking to discover signs of organization of the chancellery in terms of both the form and the checking of the records, the appearance of signs of validation, the time(s) when the records were taken and the due payment of charges to the royal chancellery (Henriques, 2001). Similar efforts were made with regard to the study of the volume of documentary production (Monteiro 1997) and the distribution by type of the acts undertaken, classified according to the matters that were dealt with in them, based on the typological patterns of royal documents presented in earlier works (Homem 1985 and 1990; Mota 1989; Freitas 1996 and 2001). The main question raised by these studies is that of the impossibility of reconstituting the staff of servants of the royal bureaucracy and the *cursus honorum* of the individuals responsible for producing the deeds recorded in the ledgers of the royal chancellery, in view of the fact that they only relate to short periods. With the aim of overcoming this limitation, the studies turned their attention to describing and characterizing the chancellery as an archive, making both an internal and an external criticism of the main collection of documents relating to the period of governance of Afonso V (Henriques 2001). Consequently, the works that deal with short periods

undertake a detailed examination of the *original records* of the royal chancellery, analyzing the production and organization of manuscripts, the composition of the records in notebooks and ledgers and the routine procedures adopted by the services of the chancellery (Monteiro 1997; Durão 2002). Similarly, attempts have been made to investigate the possible relationships existing between the places where the deeds were drawn up and the establishment of the *places of power*, as a way of studying the settlement and implantation of the services of the royal bureaucracy and the central archives of the chancellery as an organ of government. A sub-group of the works studying the central offices of the royal administration, besides the subjects already referred to, is also dedicated to the study of the itinerancy of the different sectors of the bureaucracy, resulting in the drawing up of illustrative tables and graphs (Carvalho 2001; Capas 2001; Durão 2002). Others worked on defining the rhythms and working habits of the notaries and scribes (Ferreira 2001; Brito 2001). Almost all of them stress the participation of the royal bureaucrats in the council, in diplomatic missions and in war.

Thanks to this wide-ranging group of works, we can safely say today that the study of the political staff and the organizational structure of the services of royal governance has been satisfactorily made for the period from 1279 to 1483.

One of the most important pieces of research undertaken by the group of researchers mentioned was the preparation of biographical notes resorting to the definition of a prosopographic source accompanied by the respective computerized experimentation. It is this experiment that we shall now examine.

1.2.2 History, Prosopography and Information Technology

One of the distinctive aspects of the “new” history of the *political* lies in the use of modern research methods and working techniques. The use of prosopography as a method of historical research in Portugal dates back to the 1980s, as we have said, coinciding with a period of intense publication and dissemination of French and Anglo-American studies upon the subject.

The aim of prosopography is to collect a set of data originating from different sources about a pre-defined group of people (a micro-population) and organize it in a structured manner. This allows for factor analysis, i.e. the identification of correlations between the established variables, defining what the original variables have in common.

In the early 1970s, the English historian Lawrence Stone (1919-1999) relaunched discussions about the use of the prosopographic method, pointing out that the aim of prosopography is to collect multi-biographical data (collective biographies). This distinguishes it from biography which has as its aim to collect all the information available about one particular individual (Avezou 2001). For Stone, the purpose of prosopography is to produce a multi-biography (Stone 1971), which is to be created from a matrix that brings together the full set of correlations that are accepted as being essential for the analysis of the social group under study. In the prosopographic matrix, it is possible to identify sub-groups of variables that are closely correlated with one another (within each group) and have little association with other variables of other sub-groups. Stone drew attention to the usefulness of prosopographic analysis in the study of History and admitted the possibility of applying the techniques of prosopography to the study of common people, thus relieving it of its “elitist” dimension. In fact, in the 1980s, the application to the Social Sciences of developments in information technology made it possible for French and Anglo-Saxon historians to recognize in prosopography a privileged instrument for combining qualitative analysis and quantitative analysis (Millet 1985; Bulst 1989). In the 1990s, the prosopographic method underwent a genuine rebirth, becoming very popular amongst the communities of medievalists in western Europe.

Most of the studies about royal officialdom that were mentioned in the previous section made use of the prosopographic method, thus increasing Portuguese familiarity with the prosopographic style proposed by the French school (Millet 1985; Genet 1986; Autrand 1986; Genet and Lottes 1996).

The starting point for identifying the holders of royal posts and offices was the chancellery. The exhaustive survey of the chancellery records made it possible to identify the State servants whose names were written in the final protocol of the royal charters. The area(s) of government in which the agents of the royal power intervened were characterized through the recognition of the office shown in the charter (*escrivão da puridade* (private secretary), *chanceler-mor* (head chancellor), *desembargador* (high court judge), *corregedor da Corte* (magistrate at the king’s court), *ouvidores da Corte* (justices of the peace), *procuradores* (attorneys), *sobrejuizes* (superintendents) or others). A similar purpose was served by the

diplomatic classification of all the deeds drawn up with the aim of establishing the areas of bureaucratic specialization of the notaries who underwrote them (Exchequer, Justice, Grace and Favor, General Administration). At the very least, the information gathered together at the chancellery, after being fed into the database, makes it possible for us to know the length of time that the agents of the royal bureaucracy remained in office, their *cursus honorum* in the palace administration, their level of cultural education (bachelor's degree, licentiate or doctorate), their degree of bureaucratic specialization, their participation in the council and other dimensions of their political activity.¹⁴

The prosopographic method was originally applied to the study of the notaries underwriting documents (Homem 1991) and shortly afterwards to the chancellery scribes (Freitas 1996; Vaz 1995). The studies made of royal scribes follow a research methodology that is similar to the one developed for analyzing the bureaucratic activity of the higher placed agents of power. However, the volume of data available varies from individual to individual, and it is much more difficult to compile information about the dimensions of the active "political" life in the case of scribes as opposed to the officials who drew up the wording of the documents. This is one of the main limitations of prosopography, as has been underlined by several authors since the 1970s (Burke 1974).

As H el ene Millet states, "*Se lancer dans une  tude prosopographique, c'est effectuer une suite de travaux dont l'ordre lui-m eme n'est pas indiff erent. Il convient en premier lieu de collecter les informations sur les personnes, sans rien retrancher ni s electionner*"¹⁵ (1985: 115). In this context, the studies made about the officials of the medieval royal chancelleries that we have referred to in previous sections examined all the information available in the original sources and in the published sources for the two groups of officials studied (notaries and scribes). The former sources include the so-called archive sources, in particular the records of the royal chancellery and the separate original sources. The latter include all the published medieval sources, namely genealogical sources, chronicle sources and documents originating from different areas of production. Consequently, scholars studying the royal officials have completed the information that they gathered from the main source – the royal chancellery – with the consultation of all the published medieval sources. The preparation of the prosopographic surveys took into account the whole of the information available for the two groups of higher placed agents in the royal bureaucracy (notaries and scribes). This is why underlying each of the items of the questionnaire are the quality and quantity of biographical information surveyed in all the sources examined for the group(s) of officials under analysis. In this way, it was possible to point out the similarities and differences in the political participation and the careers of the two socio-political groups.

The program of research into royal chancelleries developed by Portuguese scholars has established the following categories of data as the items to be included in the prosopographic catalogues of the upper elite of the bureaucracy (the notaries): years of service, social status and geographical position, family status, personal ties, social status, economic level, educational and cultural level, university career, military career, diplomatic career, career in the bureaucracy, activity as a notary, participation in the royal council, public life and private life (Mota 1989, vol. II: 15-17; Freitas 2001, vol. II: 373-374).¹⁶ In the case of the items established in the prosopographic catalogues of the scribes, the categories that were selected were those for which it was possible to gather together a significant set of information, namely years of service, career limits, social condition, economic condition, bureaucratic career (intensity of intervention, type of charters written and offices held) and personal ties (Vaz, 1995, vol. II: 3; Freitas 1996: 219).¹⁷

Both the compilation and the systematic organization of individual data in prosopographic catalogues correspond to what Jean-Philippe Genet calls a *metasource* (Genet 1986: 13). The *metasource* provides an organized distribution of the main questions that can be asked about all of the members of each of the groups under study. Consequently, the two main vectors of the prosopographic

¹⁴ A historiographic review about the relationship between prosopography and the history of the State can be found in Homem 1996: 29-37.

¹⁵ Carrying out a prosopographic study means performing a series of tasks, for which the order in which they are undertaken is of paramount importance. First of all, one must collect information about the people, without subtracting or selecting anything.

¹⁶ All of the studies on royal chancelleries that we referred to in section 1.2.1. applied the prosopographic method of inquiry proposed by these authors.

databases built by the scholars of the power elites of the late Middle Ages are the men and the documents (sources).

From what has been said, it can be seen that we distinguish the works that are accompanied by biographical information in which the narration of events and the succession of informative details is, to some extent, arbitrary from those works in which the information that has been gathered together follows a rigid organizational scheme, structured in the form of a prosopographic matrix. Nevertheless, we consider the possibility of there being a biographically informative text in which prosopography may be identified as an underlying “intellectual attitude,” namely in the way that the narrative details are selected and laid out, based on an identical set of questions, or, on more specific occasions, on particular concerns with quantification (Homem and Freitas 2001: 174-177).

The Master’s degree dissertations and PhD theses presented at the Faculty of Letters of the University of Porto about the agents of the royal bureaucracy (notaries and scribes) have brought together the data relating to more than a thousand such agents in the form of biographically informative texts and prosopographic catalogues. In this way, we can state that the paths of the royal bureaucracy and its agents have now been drawn from the end of the reign of Dinis (1320-1325) to the beginning of the reign of João II (1481-1483).

Conclusion

At the end of this text, it is important to stress the main approaches, knowing that these illustrate the main stages in the evolution of political history in Portugal over the last thirty years.

We began by stressing the alliance established by the “new” history of the *political* between the sources and the men. In this regard, the royal chancellery is seen as a documentary memory of the activity of the agents of the royal bureaucracy.

Next, we described the international framework of the studies about political societies in Portugal, bearing in mind the decisive influence of the historiography produced by French and Anglo-American scholars in enriching the problematics and in renewing the different perspectives for approaching classical themes from the historiography of the *political*.

Finally, we referred to the advantages of introducing prosopography into the study of the royal power and the upper elites of the bureaucracy in the 14th and 15th centuries, highlighting the increased possibilities for the treatment, exploration and correlation of data offered by the construction of prosopographic databases in considering the different aspects of the activity of the groups studied (notaries and scribes). This series of alliances gave rise to a renewal of the studies of political history in Portugal from the 1970s onwards, leading to the firm implantation of this field of study in the following decades. Currently the history of the *political* dominates important sectors in the production of Portuguese medieval historiography. For all of these reasons, we can look forward with confidence to moving, as Bernard Guenée has predicted, from “political societies” to “political cultures and mentalities.”

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