

The Preparation of Embassies and the Protocols Followed by Royal Portuguese Ambassadors in the Late Middle Ages¹

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Abstract

Diplomatic correspondence and the information transmitted through letters of instruction, which gave diplomats the necessary support for the performance of their duties, have become a highly important subject in the study of medieval diplomacy. In documents of this type, we can find some quite remarkable and valuable information about what could or could not be said in diplomatic contexts, outlining the rituals, attitudes, and procedures that a diplomat was required to adopt in the course of his international mission. Together with the letters of instruction, diplomats also carried with them letters of credence (commonly known as credentials). These were the documents that the various monarchs gave to their legitimate representatives, and which were designed to be presented at the courts visited by each diplomatic mission. These letters were essential for guaranteeing the correct conduct of negotiations, since, besides presenting the diplomats and expressing the wish that they be afforded credence in their role, these documents also explained the purpose of their missions. Thus, letters of instruction and credence are fundamental tools that enable historians to complete the picture of external relations through the description that they provide of other aspects of communication and symbolic representation, which sometimes tend to go unnoticed in different types of documents. In order to better understand certain fundamental aspects of this analysis, we complemented the information obtained from the aforementioned documentation with data from other documentary sources that indicate some of the protocols that were used in dealings with princes and kings of other realms, as well as the specific characteristics that some of the royal counsellors should have.

Keywords

Letter of instruction; letter of credence; diplomacy; ambassador; protocol; Middle Ages

Resumo

A correspondência e troca de informações, através das cartas de instrução que davam o suporte necessário à atuação de um diplomata, constitui um tema da maior

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relevância para o estudo da diplomacia medieval. Neste tipo de documentos encontram-se informações bastante singulares sobre o que podia ou não ser proferido nesses contextos: os rituais, as atitudes e os procedimentos que um agente diplomático deveria assumir na sua missão internacional. A par das cartas de instrução, os diplomatas também se faziam acompanhar por cartas de crença (também designadas por credenciais), documentos entregues pelos diversos monarcas aos seus representantes legítimos, a fim de serem apresentadas no destino de cada missão diplomática. Estas cartas eram imprescindíveis à boa execução das negociações, pois, além de apresentarem os diplomatas e manifestarem a vontade de que se lhes fizesse crença, também expunham os propósitos das próprias missões. Deste modo, as cartas de instrução e de crença são instrumentos fundamentais para que o historiador possa complementar o quadro das relações externas, atendendo a outras vertentes mais do foro da comunicação e da representação simbólica e que por vezes passam despercebidas noutras tipologias documentais. Com o propósito de melhor compreender os aspetos fundamentais envolvidos nesta análise, completámos os dados da documentação já referida com os de outras fontes documentais que indicam alguns formulários específicos a usar em atos endereçados aos governantes de outros reinos, bem como as características que alguns dos conselheiros régios deveriam ter.

Palavras-chave

Carta de instrução; carta de crença; diplomacia; embaixador; protocolo; Idade Média

1. Introduction

Despite the increasing interest currently being displayed in medieval royal diplomacy in Portugal⁵ and Castile,⁶ Portuguese historians continue to pay scant attention to the letters of instruction and credence that were given by kings to their representatives in other kingdoms in the late Middle Ages. With the greater historiographical focus in the 1990s on individuals specially linked to government circles and on the symbolic dimension of power, diplomacy has come to be seen less as a branch of political history and more as a separate area with its own distinctive cultural background, based on a complex game of representations and rituals (Branco; Farelo, 2011: 231-59).

The main goal of this paper is, in fact, to examine the logistics involved in the preparation of diplomatic missions and the protocols that were used by royal representatives of the Portuguese king in a foreign Court towards the end of the Middle Ages. Taking into consideration the data presented in a recent study on Portuguese ambassadors to the Iberian kingdoms in the fifteenth century (Marinho, 2017), as well as the information provided by some letters of credence and instruction, we will focus our attention on examples of the procedures (both before and after this period) related to diplomatic missions.

Diplomatic correspondence and the information transmitted through letters of instruction, which gave diplomats the necessary support for the performance of their duties, have become a highly important subject in the study of medieval diplomacy. In documents of this type, we can find some quite remarkable and valuable information about what could or could not be said in diplomatic contexts, outlining the rituals, attitudes, and procedures that a diplomat was required to adopt in the course of his international mission. Together with the letters of instruction, diplomats also carried with them letters of credence (commonly known as credentials). These were the documents that the various monarchs gave to their legitimate representatives, and which were designed to be presented at the courts visited by each diplomatic mission. These letters were essential for guaranteeing the correct conduct of negotiations, since, besides presenting the diplomats and expressing the wish that they be afforded credence in their role and welcomed by the visited king, these documents also explained the purpose of their missions. Thus, letters of

⁵ In recent years, some PhD theses have been presented on this topic, allowing us to form a clearer idea of Portuguese royal diplomacy in the late Middle Ages. Cf. Faria, 2012; Santos, 2015; Lima, 2016; Marinho, 2017.

⁶ The most relevant studies in this area are: Beceiro Pita, 1997: 1735-1744; Beceiro Pita, 2009: 193-228; Salicrú I Liuch, 2007: 77-106; Cañas Gálvez, 2010: 691-722; Villarroel González, 2018: 117-146.

instruction and credence are fundamental tools that enable historians to complete the picture of external relations, through the description that they provide of aspects of communication and symbolic representation, which sometimes tend to go unnoticed in other types of documents. Thus, letters of instruction and credence are fundamental tools that enable historians to complete the picture of external relations, through the description that they provide of other aspects of communication and symbolic representation, which sometimes tend to go unnoticed in other types of documents (La Clavière, 1892: 602-32; Tovar, 1932: 206-31; Péquignot, 2008: 17-43; Péquignot, 2017: 126-46).

2. The Documentary Sources

The main documentary sources used in this study consist of a number of deeds copied (along with many other documents of different types and diverse contents) into a manuscript (*Códice 177*), forming part of a huge and rich collection of volumes known as the *Manizola* Collection and housed in the Public Library of Évora, in Portugal.⁷ Although it is not possible to determine when, why, or indeed who, was responsible for copying so many documents, this volume is a *codex diplomaticus* (Cárcel Ortí [ed.], 1997: n. 75, p. 36), which means that it may have been written by someone who was directly linked either to the contents of the documents copied or to the institutions to which they referred. Certain particular documents in this collection caught our attention, as they are copies of letters of instruction and credence from the 1450s and 1460s. As previously stated, such documents were not only of paramount importance for the process of communication and the symbolic representation of the Portuguese Crown, but they also now enable us to reflect on the ceremonial role played by the representatives of the Portuguese kingdom. The guidelines that they contain and the code of behavior that they prescribe may indeed have been among the particular features that caught the attention of the person responsible for the copies contained in *Códice 177*. In the 1450s and 1460s, following a long period of regency (1438-1449), Portuguese diplomacy was entering a new phase and embarking on a new relationship with the Castilian kingdom, which extended into the decade of Toro (the 1470s). But there may have been other reasons behind the compilation of these copied documents: the prestigious status of the diplomats, the time period of the missions, or even

⁷ The *Manizola* Collection is the result of the efforts made in the nineteenth century by José Bernardo Gama Lobo, the second *Visconde da Esperança*, to gather together a number of important historical documents. The collection is kept at the Public Library of Évora, in accordance with this aristocrat's last will and testament. About the incorporation of this collection into the library of Évora, as well as the Archives of the Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa, see Lopes, 2014.

the purpose of the missions themselves may also have served as powerful motivations for making the copies. Finally, we cannot exclude the possible role played by someone connected to the monastery of São Vicente de Fora, as the volume begins with a copy of the Chronicle of the Martyrs, translated from Latin into Portuguese, which, at that time, was kept at that monastery,⁸ and also includes other documents related with the institution, such as the life story of a clergyman from the Order of Saint Augustine,⁹ and a letter from the Jesuits in Goa.¹⁰

We do not know the circumstances under which these documents were copied into the manuscript kept in the *Manizola* Collection, or why they appear immediately after the already-mentioned documents without any apparent connection between them. Nevertheless, as far as the history of Portuguese diplomacy is concerned, the importance of such a large number of copies of letters of instruction and credence should be underscored, because, as is well known, there are few medieval documents of this type to be found in Portuguese archives.

In fact, there are several reasons for the scarcity of this type of document: firstly, they were not written at a specific administrative office (for example, the Chancery), but rather in the royal private chamber, being the direct result of an order issued by the king; secondly, both the credentials and the letters of instruction were given directly to the ambassadors, who might (or might not) have kept them in their own personal archives, which have generally not been preserved over time; finally, there was no need to preserve these documents as they were rendered redundant once the goal of the mission had been accomplished.

Besides these letters of instruction and credence, we were able to gather together some letters of accountability, or reports, sent by the ambassadors to the king, who was interested in obtaining information about the progress or outcome of the missions as quickly as possible. So, each ambassador would have written the king one or more letters of accountability, depending on the length of negotiations, informing him about the steps that had already been taken and responding to the new instructions or requests received in the meantime. Some other documents, such as general letters missive (Cárcel Ortí [ed.], 1997, n. 404, p. 99) relating to the preparation of the diplomatic missions or to the

⁸ The manuscript starts with the title “*Cronica Velha dos Martires que foi tirade do latim em lingoagem dos livros de latim que estão em São Vicente de Fora da cidade de Lixboa.*” Cf. Biblioteca Pública de Évora, *Fundo da Manizola*, cód. 177, fl. 3.

⁹ Biblioteca Pública de Évora, *Fundo da Manizola*, cód. 177, fl. 13.

¹⁰ Biblioteca Pública de Évora, *Fundo da Manizola*, cód. 177, fl. 16.

missions themselves, were also sent and received either by the representatives or by the king, outlining the progress of the mission and the agreements that had been reached.

3. Letters of Credence and Instruction and the Skills of the King's Representatives

As has been said, the letters of credence and instruction constitute the main documentary basis of this study. We are aware that this type of document only reflects the written instructions addressed by the king to the ambassadors. Nevertheless, many other instructions may have been transmitted orally whenever the king provided specific verbal orders or issued general guidelines relating to these. Usually, these letters contained various elements relating to the context in which the mission was to be undertaken. Besides presenting the mission's objectives, they outlined the procedures that a diplomat should follow at a foreign court, as well as in the general international context, and gave some advice about how to achieve the king's goals as quickly and efficiently as possible.

In order to begin negotiations, a letter of credence was mandatory because "in addition to introducing the diplomat and manifesting the desire for him to be recognized by the other party as such, they also explained the mission's purposes."¹¹ So, the diplomatic agent was presented at the foreign court through a letter of credence, which may (or may not) have been attached to the letter of instruction addressed to him by the king. Without such a document, he did not have the important guarantee of being accepted by the visited king, since it was this that would publicly express such acceptance. In the drafting of these letters, the Portuguese monarch used a standard formula to request the visited king to receive the holder of the credential as faithful and true, saying that the diplomat would be speaking on the Portuguese sovereign's behalf.

On their return to Portugal, the diplomatic representatives would transmit to the king the message(s) from the visited monarchs, as expected. From a certain point of view, the diplomats seem sometimes to have performed a bilateral role, as they were responsible for the coordination of missions both inside and outside the country. In fact, it was possible for certain individuals to be chosen by several parties. For example, on October 20, 1451, the emperor gave a letter of credence to João Fernandes da Silveira (who had been sent to his court as a representative of the Portuguese monarch), charging him with the task of negotiating with King Afonso V on his own behalf.¹² During that same mission,

¹¹ Adapted from Marinho, 2017, vol. 1: 258.

¹² Biblioteca Pública de Évora, *Fundo da Manizola*, cód. 177, fls. 30v-33.

the already mentioned J.F. Silveira, received another letter of credence from Queen Leonor to be presented to the Portuguese king (“*Senhor, vosa irmãa vos emvia tambem a dizer por mim por vertude da cremça que vos della trouxe que a desabafeis daqueles portugueses que laa sam em os mamdardes todos vix*”).¹³

The agents involved in the missions were of great importance in both social and political terms. To illustrate their relevance, some remarks are made here about the social background and careers of four such diplomats, because these factors can help to explain their commitment to representing the king in certain diplomatic affairs.

Lopo de Almeida undertook important missions between 1433 and 1486 (Marinho, 2017, vol. 2: 104). He was a nobleman of the royal house, an erudite scholar, and the first Count of Abrantes (1476). He was the son of Diogo Fernandes de Almeida, the personal educator/tutor (*aió*) of the Princes Duarte, Pedro, and Henrique, the king’s sons (Freitas, 1996: 78 and 175). In 1442, he married a daughter of Pedro Gonçalves de Malafaia, who was also a royal officer and an ambassador (Marinho, 2015, p. 83-96). Lopo de Almeida held numerous royal offices, most notably as Overseer of the Treasury (*vedor da Fazenda*, documented between 1433 and 1438), a member of the royal council (from 1443 onwards), and the Chief Overseer of the Treasury (*vedor-mor da Fazenda* from 1445 to 1475). Furthermore, King Afonso V entrusted him with eight diplomatic missions to the Holy See (1451-1452, 1463, and 1471-1472); Siena (1451-1452); the Holy Roman Empire (1452); Morocco (1458); Castile (1463); and, finally, France (1463) (Marinho, 2017, vol. 2: 112-113). His social and political profile was decisive in determining the king’s choice, together with the experience that he had gradually been gaining, and his own personal wealth, which he used to sponsor his activity.

Álvaro Lopes [de Chaves] undertook diplomatic missions between 1462 and 1508 (Marinho, 2017, vol. 2: 35). He was also a nobleman of the royal house, and a knight of the Military Order of St. James. There are documents that present him as the royal secretary (1462-1495) and a general notary of the kingdom (1481), offices that provided him with a profound knowledge and understanding of the political scene. He participated in a diplomatic mission to Castile, between September and December 1468, which had been prepared with information provided by Cide de Sousa, another royal representative.¹⁴ Since he was the royal secretary, he was probably unable to be absent from the court for long periods.

¹³ Biblioteca Pública de Évora, *Fundo da Manizola*, cód. 177, fls. 33-33v.

¹⁴ Biblioteca Pública de Évora, *Fundo da Manizola*, cód. 177, fls. 36v-37v. Marinho, 2017, vol. 2: 36.

Cide de Sousa undertook important diplomatic activity between the 1430s and 1460s (Marinho, 2017, vol. 2: 47). He was also a nobleman of the royal house and the cousin of Rui de Sousa, one of the representatives charged with concluding the important treaty of Tordesillas (1494) signed between Portugal and Castile (Moreno, 1994: 12-4; Marinho, 2017, vol. 2: 245). He was a servant (*criado*) of the House of Queen Leonor, both in Portugal and Castile ([1433]-1445). He held a similar position at the Court of Aragon (1445-[1452]). Later, he was captain of the ships of Afonso V of Portugal (1453-1454), Overseer of the Treasury (*vedor*), and counsellor of Queen Joana of Castile (1456-[1468]). Between 1445 and 1454, he travelled to Naples, Guinea, and Ceuta as a representative of the Portuguese king. Back in Portugal (after the death of the Castilian Prince Alfonso¹⁵), he participated in two missions to Castile in the second quarter of 1468 and helped to prepare another one, led by Álvaro Lopes de Chaves (Marinho, 2017, vol. 2: 51), as already mentioned. This man's experience justified his being chosen to undertake various missions that were quite diverse in terms of their objectives and destinations.

Another very significant example is presented by the case of João Fernandes da Silveira, whose activity spread over 40 years (1443-1483) (Marinho, 2017, vol. 2: 75). A Doctor of Law (1443) and the first Baron of Alvito (1475), he was the son of Doctor Fernão Afonso da Silveira, the principal chancellor and ambassador of King João I of Portugal (Homem, 1990: 298-9). He was a clergyman of minor orders (*clerigo de ordens menores*) of the Lisbon diocese until he married, firstly Violante Pereira (1448), and secondly Mécia de Sousa Lobo, the granddaughter of Lopo Dias de Sousa, the Governor of the Military Order of Christ (1373-1417). This man was a member of a very prestigious social network. As a royal servant, he held various offices, including the positions of vice-chancellor (1443-1444), chancellor of the *Casa do Cível* (1445-1463), royal counsellor (since 1451), and privy scribe to the king (*escrivão da Puridade* [1481-1484]). Furthermore, he represented King Afonso V on many diplomatic missions: Castile (1453, 1454, 1455, 1463, and 1474); Aragon (1450 and 1463); Holy See (1449, 1451, 1452, and 1463); and Siena (1451 and 1452) (Caetano, 2011; Marinho, 2017, vol. 2: 79-81).

João de Porras also played a quite distinct role in the sphere of Iberian diplomacy.¹⁶ He is documented as a nobleman and the royal counsellor of the Castilian king. Consequently, he was a representative of Enrique IV and other unidentified Castilian

¹⁵ Prince Alfonso of Castile died on June 5, 1468.

¹⁶ Biblioteca Pública de Évora, *Fundo da Manizola*, cód. 177, fls. 59v-61. Pina, 1790-1793 [c. 1490], cap. 180: 545.

noblemen in an embassy sent to Portugal from Castile in the second half of 1468.¹⁷ But, during the conflict in which Afonso V opposed the Catholic Monarchs, he represented the Portuguese kingdom in approximately 1476, having succeeded in obtaining the obedience of the city of Zamora to the Portuguese king. In that same year, he was appointed Overseer of the Treasury (*vedor*) of the House of Afonso V,¹⁸ which is clear evidence of the king's confidence in him, even though, in the past, he had represented Castilian interests.

The social profile of these royal representatives made them almost natural members of the delegations sent abroad. They all enjoyed long careers, and it seems that, once they had undertaken these missions, they could hardly fail to be chosen for others that would take place later. Their academic training in law, and their continuous participation in negotiations with a particular kingdom to which they had been sent, made these men exceptional figures in the diplomatic field.

In the collection of laws enacted by King Afonso V during the 1440s (the so-called *Ordenações Afonsinas*), there is a chapter in which some considerations are made regarding the special features that royal counsellors should have (*Dos conselheiros do rei*).¹⁹ It is, indeed, a very suggestive text about the requirements and the criteria used in the selection of these royal officers. In its preamble, this legal text evokes antiquity in order to emphasize some of its arguments. Prestigious figures, such as King Solomon, and ancient intellectuals, such as Seneca and Aristotle, are used to demonstrate the great virtues that royal counsellors should have. For example, the philosopher Seneca had demonstrated the crucial importance of the knowledge acquired by counsellors, as well as their commitment to previous agreements and their availability to receive advice (“*como os homens ham de seer percebidos nas cousas que ham de fazer, acordando-se e avisando-se sobre ellas antes que as façam*”).²⁰ Inspired by these intellectuals, the author of the legal text enumerated certain skills and features that counsellors were expected to have:²¹ they should have a good understanding of the topics under discussion (“*Boo entendimento*”),²² knowledge, and common sense (“*De boo sisó*”).²³ They should also be wise (“*Homens que saibam das coisas*”), well-informed (“*Ser*

¹⁷ Biblioteca Pública de Évora, *Fundo da Manizola*, cód. 177, fls. 59v-61; fl. 66.

¹⁸ Pina, 1790-1793 [c. 1490], cap. 180: 545.

¹⁹ *Ordenações Afonsinas*, vol. 1, tít. 59: 340-345.

²⁰ *Ordenações Afonsinas*, vol. 1, tít. 59: 340.

²¹ *Ordenações Afonsinas*, liv. 1, tít. 59: 340-5.

²² *Ordenações Afonsinas*, liv. 1, tít. 59: 341.

²³ *Ordenações Afonsinas*, liv. 1, tít. 59:341.

bem entendidos”), shrewd or astute (“*Captar as coisas*”) and, last but not least, they should be a friend of the king (“*Ser amigo do rei*”).²⁴

Accordingly, some other documents and chronicles from the period that we are examining also highlight certain characteristics that royal officers were expected to have, such as prudence, discretion, patience, guile, loyalty, a good memory, and speaking skills. In addition to all these virtues, the ambassadors should, in particular, be able to avoid any *lapsus linguae*, convince listeners, and use vocabulary that was appropriate for the situation. Although such characteristics were not exclusive to this type of representative, they certainly had a special significance for them (Marinho, 2017, vol. 1: 244-257).

These attitudes were only part of the diplomat’s expected overall conduct, besides knowing how to interact, dress, speak, and behave at a foreign court (Marinho, 2017, vol. 1: 244). The ambassadors were also expected to master all questions relating to the existing protocol. There are some quite illustrative examples to be found in our sources. For example, Rui de Pina, a Portuguese chronicler, wrote that Alfonso Enriques from Castile (while visiting the regent Pedro of Portugal) had failed in his mission because he had no common sense and was not sufficiently discreet or prudent (“*Não havia porém n’elle aquele tento, descrição e prudencia, que a pessoa de tal cargo pertencia*”).²⁵ In contrast to this, the English King Henry IV, when talking about the mission undertaken by Pedro Faleiro and Fernando de Castro, both of whom were Portuguese, classified their attitude as exemplary because they expounded the different questions clearly, correctly, and graciously.²⁶

As has been said, the way in which the diplomatic agents expressed their messages was crucial. In fact, the words that were used in international communication were of paramount importance, hence the care that was taken over the writing of the letters sent by the kings. This was why specific formats and standard models existed for the writing of documents. In Portugal, some of these documents were systematized by King Duarte (*Livro da Cartuxa*)²⁷ and others by King Afonso V, the latter models being duly set out in the *Livro Vermelho*.²⁸ This set of forms adapted the formula for writing the address and the greetings expressed in the letters to the status of the recipient, as well as the final greetings, depending on whether they were addressed to the Pope, or to Christian or Muslim kings.

²⁴ Alfonso X, 2004, parte II, tít. 9, §2.

²⁵ Pina, 1790-1793 [c. 1490], cap. 53: 289.

²⁶ Santarém, 1865:197.

²⁷ Duarte, D., 1982.

²⁸ *Livro Vermelho do Senhor Rey D. Affonso V* (1793). In José Correia da Serra (ed.), *Collecção de livros ineditos de historia portugueza dos reinados de D. Joaõ I, D. Duarte, D. Affonso V, e D. Joaõ II*, vol. 3. Lisbon: Academia Real das Sciencias: 393-541. This book had this title (*Red Book*) due to the color of its original cover; it was copied in the sixteenth century during the reign of King João III, because the original had been damaged by water.

For example, the address in letters missive sent to the king of Castile should be like this: “*Muyto alto, eixcelemt e poderoso Principe, primo Irmaõ e amigo. Nos Dom Affonso &c. vos enviamos muyto saudar como aquella que muyto amamos.*” As far as the final greetings were concerned, the formula should be like this: “*Muyto alto, muyto eixcelente e poderoso Principe, Primo Irmaaõ e Amiguo. Noso Senhor aja sempre vossa pessoa e Real estado em sua santa guarda.*” On the outside of the letter, the so-called “*Sobre'escrito*” (envelope), the following words should be written: “*Ao muyto alto, muyto eixcelemt e poderoso Principe Dom Anrique per graça de Deos Rey de Castella e de Liam &c. nosso muyto amado Primo Irmaaõ e Amiguo.*”²⁹ In the case of Muslim kings (“*Dytado para todos os Rex Mouros*”), the correct formula was as follows: “*Muito nobre, e muito homrado antre os Mouros N. Rey de tal Reinno. Nos Dom Affonso &c. vos fazemos saber...*” There were no final greetings made in the letters addressed to these kings. The address written on the outside of the missive (“*Sobre'escrito*”) should be as follows: “*Ao muito nobre, e muito homrado antre os Mouros Rey de tal Reinno.*”³⁰

The language of communication, both written and spoken, was one of the key elements in the diplomatic process. In the fifteenth century, ambassadors probably expressed themselves in Romance languages whenever possible. Sometimes, especially outside the Iberian Peninsula, Latin was mandatory. For example, in the preparation of his marriage to Leonor of Portugal, Emperor Frederick III used Latin when he wrote a letter to Afonso V of Portugal, establishing the credentials of his representatives.³¹ Furthermore, in diplomatic missions, Latin could make communication easier, and this was another reason why the participation of clergymen was so important: besides belonging to a “super-structure,” such as the Church, they were also fluent in this language. Interpreters (Péquignot, 2009: 217-221) are to be found documented in these sources, particularly in the East, where Arabic languages were in common use. One cannot exclude the possibility that there were some letters that used encrypted writing (using regular Latin characters or different signs) or even included encoded messages, especially when they dealt with top secret matters.³² Preventive measures of this nature could be reinforced by using encoded names when referring to representatives. In this way, the identity of the representative remained unknown. There are several examples for the time period that we are considering. *Vitória* was one of these: he remained unidentified, and we do not know if he was related to the Portuguese King Afonso

²⁹ *Livro Vermelho do Senhor Rey D. Affonso V...*, vol. 3: 402.

³⁰ *Livro Vermelho do Senhor Rey D. Affonso V...*, vol. 3: 406.

³¹ ANTT, *Leitura Nova - Livro dos Extras*, fl. 239v.

³² Although there is no evidence of such letters in Portuguese archives, it is possible that they existed. About this strategy used in letters missive, see Serrano Larráyo, 1998: 171-82.

V or to Juan Pacheco, the Governor of the Military Order of Santiago, since, during the third quarter of 1468, he served as a courier³³ between them both.³⁴

It seems that the documents copied in *Códice 177* correspond to a set of guidelines or an appropriate code of behavior for any ambassador. According to what they outline, during the negotiation process, royal representatives were called upon to be careful with regard to certain people and to remain attentive to the news circulating at the visited court. Of course, in such contexts, listening was as important as speaking. In the diplomatic domain, all possible precautions and safeguards needed to be taken. So, we can clearly understand why the king introduced certain clauses, using expressions such as “you will say no more” (“*lbe não direis mais*”).³⁵ The king was objective in the instructions that he gave. Guided by the same prudent attitude, the king advised his officers not to believe in other news that might be sent from the Portuguese kingdom, in order to avoid scandals created by people who were not close to the king's service (“*não deveis dar fee a outras cousas que de caa se lbe emviem a dizer por pessoas que não desejem muito noso servyço e tem vomtade de dar maneira a bolicios e escandalos como ho hão acostumado*”).³⁶

As loyalty to the king was mandatory, his diplomatic agents should always be aware of who they were negotiating with, in order to guarantee the full realization of their mission. The requirements for success were bilateral, but the king's choices were naturally decisive for the achievement of the mission's objectives. Indeed, the king had to choose people who would not cause damage or create any misunderstanding (“*não ponha em ello taes pessoas que não comsyntam dano nem emgano seu*”).³⁷ Above all, the king had to pay special attention to those whom he had selected as his representatives, as well as to the things that were stated between them (“*Pelo que caa symto e conheço, me parece que Sua Senhoria deve muito olbar com quem trata e que do que com elle se asemtar tome tal seguridade qual cumpra*”).³⁸ The documents emphasize the need to choose a trustworthy and efficient person (“*pesoa sua muito fiavel que com grande efícação lbe fale sobre... e lbe certifique que...*”).³⁹

The ambassadors improved their skills (natural/innate, or acquired through their experience in previous missions) by receiving specific training, by attending European

³³ On the subject of medieval diplomatic couriers, see Moreno, 1972: 5-8; López Gómez, 2015 1-26.

³⁴ Biblioteca Pública de Évora, *Fundo da Manizola*, cód. 177, fls. 57-59 and fl. 61v.

³⁵ Biblioteca Pública de Évora, *Fundo da Manizola*, cód. 177, fl. 24v. Published by Marinho, 2017, vol. 2, doc. 1: 215-22.

³⁶ Biblioteca Pública de Évora, *Fundo da Manizola*, cód. 177, fl. 60.

³⁷ Biblioteca Pública de Évora, *Fundo da Manizola*, cód. 177, fl. 61.

³⁸ Biblioteca Pública de Évora, *Fundo da Manizola*, cód. 177, fl. 61.

³⁹ Biblioteca Pública de Évora, *Fundo da Manizola*, cód. 177, fl. 59. Published by Marinho, 2017, vol. 2, doc. 6, pp. 230-3.

universities, or even by holding positions in the royal administration. This is generally why they were people of a high social status as well as being members of important institutions, such as the Royal Council, Royal Chamber, High Courts, Royal Treasury, and Royal Chancery, as previously stated. Consequently, they were perfectly aware of the way in which the different questions should be presented or discussed with the visited king or his representatives. On July 4, 1433, the fourth Count of Ourém drew attention to the importance of choosing representatives from among people of a high social standing. At the time of the Iberian final *Reconquista*—the Granada War—the Count of Ourém proposed sending an embassy to Castile composed of three prestigious noblemen whose social profile would improve the mission’s goals. He stressed three requirements that were considered to be essential: the first was to be well-known everywhere (“*por ser mais notificado a todo o mundo*”);⁴⁰ the second was to avoid the denial or rejection of what was considered to be a just cause (“*porque sabendo o dicto Rey de Castella e seu conselho esta cousa (...) averiam empacho de negar cousa tam Justa*”);⁴¹ and the third was to achieve the objectives as quickly as possible (“*porque geralmente as grandes pessoas, se bem entenydas são, arecadão mais asynha as grandes cousas que as outras pessoas somenos*”).⁴² This last statement highlights a curious set of factors that were based on the social condition of the diplomatic agent. It was not enough to be a prestigious person. Being well understood was a necessary and complementary condition. By successfully combining these two characteristics, diplomats would achieve their objectives much more quickly. The Count of Ourém concluded his argument by recommending to the king that he pay especially close attention to the choice of his representatives, who should be well-informed and easily understood (“*as grandes pessoas se bem entenydas são, arecadão mais asynha as grandes cousas que as outras pessoas (...) que pois taes pessoas emviaes que grande tençon tendes naquilo a que os mandaes*”).⁴³

As has been said, when the ambassadors left the Portuguese Court, they took with them at least one letter of instruction containing specific guidelines about the matters that were to be addressed and the manner in which these should be dealt with at the foreign Court (Marinho, 2017, vol. 1: 257). Thus, it is not surprising that these documents started with an instruction, such as “what you, F., will say on our behalf” (“*o que vos, F., da nosa parte direis a*”),⁴⁴ or “these are the things that you must request” (“*Cousas que vos mandamos que ajais*

⁴⁰ Duarte, D., 1982: 71.

⁴¹ Duarte, D., 1982: 71.

⁴² Duarte, D., 1982: 71.

⁴³ Duarte, D., 1982: 71.

⁴⁴ There are some examples of detailed references in the *Manizola* documents. See Biblioteca Pública de Évora, *Fundo da Manizola*, cód. 177, fls. 33v, 36v, 57.

de requerer”)⁴⁵. Nevertheless, while such instructions were mandatory (being very exact and specific about the topic that should be negotiated), there were also other directions that were less precise, such as allowing the diplomatic agent to inform the other party about an issue only after being asked to do so. On the other hand, we must be aware that many subjects and attitudes would have been extremely hard to predict beforehand. Some ambassadors had a *carte blanche*, which let them decide what was the most appropriate manner or moment for talking about the *negotium*.

Besides these general statements, the letters of instruction could also include other specific directions about the best way of conveying messages to the visited court. Generally, the king advised the ambassador to be careful and to talk as best he could (“*dizei o milhor que puderdes*”)⁴⁶ about the matter under discussion. However, on certain occasions, the monarch would give specific instructions as to how his representative should act. This was the case, for example, in 1451, when Lopo de Almeida and João Fernandes da Silveira visited the Emperor, and the king specified exactly what his representatives should say and how they should address him (“*Esta hee a maneira como tereis em requerer ao emperador*”).⁴⁷

The actual contents of the letters of instruction varied according to each instance—in certain cases, we realize that some of these documents were written at a time that was very close to the final completion of negotiations, since they dealt only with the topics that would be included in the desired final agreement. On other occasions, the letters gave orders for the representative to undertake several missions, which were usually related to one another. Profiting from the journey of João Fernandes da Silveira to Rome, the Portuguese king ordered him to give his greetings to the Florentines and Sienees, notifying them about the journey to Turkey as well as asking them to open the ports to the Portuguese fleet. This ambassador was instructed to act in a similar fashion in Venice, where he was to insist on the topic, but only after returning from the Holy See, armed with the Pope's response.⁴⁸ This meant that one journey could be used for multiple diplomatic purposes. These joint efforts were certainly conditioned by both time and money.

⁴⁵ Biblioteca Pública de Évora, *Fundo da Manizola*, cód. 177, fl. 29v.

⁴⁶ Biblioteca Pública de Évora, *Fundo da Manizola*, cód. 177, fl. 30v.

⁴⁷ Biblioteca Pública de Évora, *Fundo da Manizola*, cód. 177, fl. 30v.

⁴⁸ Letter of instruction dated April 20, 1456. Marinho, 2017, vol. 2, doc. 1: 215-222.

4. Procedures and Rituals

The success of the missions also depended on the observation of the protocols, rituals, and ceremonies required on these occasions. As was to be expected, diplomatic agents normally adopted the noble codes and procedures of the visited court. In Portuguese archives, there is no evidence of any specific written formalization of protocols relating to the period that we are concerned with here. Nevertheless, according to the *Livro Vermelho*, there were some rules and precedencies established by the Portuguese royal council for visits to the Portuguese Court by foreign ambassadors (“*Detriminação do Conselho d’EIRey acerca da maneira que se aja de ter com os Embaixadores dos Rex e Príncipes estranjeiros, que a sua Corte vierem*”).⁴⁹

These precedencies were taken into account not only in the Royal Chapel, but also at all other ceremonies of the Court (“*e esa mesma maneira se tenha em quaesquer outros lugares d’asentamentos asy em Cortes como em todolos outros*”).⁵⁰ As this chapel represented the stage upon which the most important action took place, the positions (“*asentamento*”) occupied by the different people attending the ceremonies enable us to understand how the hierarchy was established. In fact, the positions occupied at the ceremonies of the Portuguese court were determined in accordance with the political importance of the person (emperor, king, or prince) who had sent the ambassador. For instance, a clergyman representing a foreign king would have a seat on the benches of the priests, ahead of the archbishops and bishops of the Portuguese dioceses. Otherwise, if he were the ambassador of a prince, he would have a seat on the same bench as the priests, but only ahead of those who enjoyed an equal ecclesiastical status. Another document highlights the importance of precedence in the case of ambassadors and even the monarchs themselves when visiting the Portuguese court: in January 1471, the Royal Council, assembled at Santarém, established the hierarchy of visitors, naming them in their order of importance as the Emperor, the King of France, the King of Castile, the King of England, the King of Hungary, the King of Aragon, etc. At this time in Portuguese history, people’s sitting positions were also considered to be important in other political spheres, such as at the royal “parliament” (*Cortes*), where a sequence was established for the seating of the representatives of the municipalities as well.⁵¹ All these regulations naturally reflected the way in which power was interpreted and exercised.

⁴⁹ *Livro Vermelho do Senhor Rey D. Affonso V ...*, vol. 3: 420-421.

⁵⁰ *Livro Vermelho do Senhor Rey D. Affonso V ...*, vol. 3: 421.

⁵¹ For more information about the Portuguese “parliament,” see Sousa, 1990 and Sousa, 2014.

The information given by the various documents copied into *Códice 177* of the *Manizola* Collection also enables us to reconstruct certain aspects of the procedures and rituals of a diplomatic mission in the 1450s and 1460s, following the initial phase of preparation and instruction (*fase de instrução*). In fact, on arriving at the court to which they had been sent, ambassadors would present their credentials, immediately following the official greetings.⁵² But it was possible that the visited monarch already knew beforehand that these representatives of other kingdoms were expected to arrive because he had previously received a letter of credence brought by a messenger, as is indicated by the following sentence: “whose arrival, from what we had seen in their credentials, would very soon take place” (“*cuja chegada polo que vimos per suas creanças seraa muy em breve*”).⁵³

Having presented their credentials, ambassadors would then seek to schedule an official meeting as soon as possible. This meeting could take the form of a private audience with the visited king or with a council or assembly, at which they would make a public speech in order to explain the goals of the mission. This happened, for instance, on April 20, 1456 in the context of a mission to Rome, when King Afonso V of Portugal decided that if the Pope refused to listen to the ambassador, then the latter should make a public speech in front of the cardinals and other witnesses, who would then be expected to transmit the message to the pontiff (Marinho, 2017, vol. 2, doc. 1: 215-222).

For reasons of courtesy, which ambassadors should always demonstrate, but also for reasons of secrecy and personal security (to protect the diplomats themselves), these representatives could only leave the emperor’s or the king’s court after receiving his permission to do so.⁵⁴

Once the diplomatic mission had been accomplished, or sometimes at specific moments during the negotiations, the diplomat was required to inform the king of the progress that had been achieved, generally by sending him a report. In fact, such feedback was decisive for ensuring the success of the mission and for obtaining rapid justice (“*breve justiça*”),⁵⁵ that is to say for achieving the desired goals more easily. It also allowed the Portuguese king to know what guarantees the foreign authorities were prepared to both provide and accept, thus evoking the fundamental principle of reciprocity in the field of diplomacy (Marinho, 2017, vol. 1: 75).

⁵² Thus, for example, in 1451, if the Count of Ourém did not greet the emperor, the remaining diplomats were expected to do so and then they would hand their credentials to the emperor. Biblioteca Pública de Évora, *Fundo da Manizola*, cód. 177, fl. 30v.

⁵³ Biblioteca Pública de Évora, *Fundo da Manizola*, cód. 177, fl. 57v.

⁵⁴ Santarém, 1865, p. CXLIX: 69, 136, 142.

⁵⁵ Biblioteca Pública de Évora, *Fundo da Manizola*, cód. 177, fl. 122v-123v.

When negotiations lasted a long time, the king was also to be informed of the reasons for the delay, since lengthy negotiations might damage the final agreement. Nevertheless, all information about both friends and enemies was to be sent to the king by the diplomatic staff, as well as by others. For example, on September 11, 1465, Afonso V of Portugal advised his representatives not to receive any “unacceptable responses;” if this happened, a previous memorandum (“*ementa de apontamentos*”) that they had brought with them should be used to support the bilateral agreement to be sent to the king aiming at obtaining his approval.⁵⁶ This shows how the king’s negotiators were aware of the need for complementarity in terms of actions in order to better achieve the desired goals.

Once the negotiations were completed, the diplomatic agents were finally able to return to their country, traveling either together or separately.⁵⁷

5. Final Remarks

Despite the fact that the documentary evidence provided by letters of credence and instruction referred only to a specific decade in the fifteenth century, we were able to gather together information—from the complementary sources that we have already referred to—about certain ceremonies and rituals relating to the Portuguese royal diplomatic missions of the middle of that century.

Initially, representatives were sent on the king’s behalf, having been selected on the basis of their social profile and the personal relationships that they enjoyed with some members of the royal court. The experience that they had gained as a result of their participation in previous missions was also decisive for their being chosen as representatives. Together with the rationalization of resources necessarily implied by the long journeys required by external relations, such circumstances explain why the same individual might sometimes be chosen as the representative of both parties involved in the *negotium*.

In fact, there was no professional or permanent diplomatic corps in Portugal until the end of the Middle Ages. For this reason, as far as the fifteenth century is concerned, the use of the term “embassy” is very limited. Although the expression was already to be found in use in 1456, in a document referring to a mission sent to the Holy See,⁵⁸ none of the other missions were given any specific diplomatic label.

⁵⁶ Biblioteca Pública de Évora, *Fundo da Manizola*, cód. 177, fl. 33v-36v.

⁵⁷ Biblioteca Pública de Évora, *Fundo da Manizola*, cód. 177, fl. 30v-33.

⁵⁸ Biblioteca Pública de Évora, *Fundo da Manizola*, cód. 177, fl. 24-29v.

However, at the same time, it was already possible to identify in Portugal clear signs that fundamental changes were being introduced into the organization of diplomacy in accordance with the experiences gained by the king's representatives on foreign soil. It was precisely during this period that the intense relations that Portugal enjoyed with the most diverse foreign kingdoms led to the development of specific knowledge that further transformed relations with the external entities. In the so-called *Livro Vermelho*, the Royal Council of Afonso V of Portugal set out rules of institutional conduct (establishing, for example, the different positions to be occupied during ceremonies held at the Court), which went far beyond the general norms of aristocratic behavior. In the absence of specific rules for ambassadors, the king's representatives reproduced, at the most diverse European Courts, many of the ceremonies and common aristocratic gestures that had been inherited from ancient times. Thus, through the experience that it had gained in external relations, the Portuguese Crown implemented what was clearly a diplomatic practice (Branco & Farelo, 2011: 258-259) in the modern sense of the term. A "diplomatic corps" that began to take shape at this time and would later materialize in the sixteenth century through the presence of permanent ambassadors (*embaixadores resyidentes*)⁵⁹ in foreign courts.

⁵⁹ Biblioteca Pública de Évora, *Fundo da Manizola*, cód. 177, fl. 122v-123v.

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