

The Municipal Administration in Elvas During the Portuguese Restoration War (1640-1668)

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Abstract

The case study of Elvas – one of the main military border zones – is the subject of this essay, which studies the way in which municipal administrations reacted and adapted to the Portuguese Restoration War. It analyses the relationships between the local authorities, the army and the central government and the way in which Elvas Town Council dealt with the ever-growing defensive, logistic, economic, social, financial and administrative problems. Problems originated in an exceptionally difficult situation, which lasted for 28 years.

Keywords

Restoration, War, Army, Border, Municipality, Society

Resumo

O presente estudo aborda, através do caso de Elvas – uma das principais praças militares raianas – o modo como a administração municipal reagiu e se adaptou à Guerra da Restauração. Trata as relações dos dirigentes locais com o exército e o poder central e também o modo como enfrentaram os problemas acrescidos de natureza defensiva, logística, económica, social, financeira e administrativa, gerados por uma situação excepcionalmente difícil, que se arrastou ao longo de 28 anos.

Palavras chave

Restauração. Guerra Exército. Fronteira. Municipalismo. Sociedade.

1. Introduction

Municipal autonomy, originally conquered when Town Councils themselves became institutionalized, was preserved, in all its essential qualities, until the implementation of the administrative liberal reform. Such preservation was only possible due to the persistent resistance of both the citizens and the local authorities when faced with the centralizing efforts of the Modern State. Up to the time of the Marquis de Pombal's rule, this apparent independence was facilitated by the weak network of crown agents on the periphery; at the same time, however, it was further consolidated as a result of several factors: the gradual installation of the local nobility in the leading positions of municipal administration; the progressive development of the patrimony of municipal bureaucracies; and the vast and diversified prerogatives of the local authorities¹.

* This work was written when its author held a post-doctoral scholarship granted by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (October 2006 to August 2007). It was partially published in *O*

Such a combination of factors endowed Councils with a traditional and routine administrative model. It simultaneously converted them into stable structures, able to respond, without any outside interference, to the political changes introduced during the six decades of dynastic union with Spain, or at times of serious military conflict, such as the French Invasions.

The aim of this study is to analyze the action taken by the municipal council of Elvas during the Restoration period, a time that was marked by a deep and enduring political and military instability. The crisis spread throughout the kingdom, but had its greatest impact in the border zones, and mainly in the Alentejo, where Elvas stood out due to its defensive importance.

Special attention will be paid to the way in which local authorities adapted their management model to the everyday realities of a prolonged war, discovering how they related, within this context, to both military institutions and the central government.

2. Elvas Town Council: organizing structure and functioning model

Elvas had a similar administrative structure to that of the other main cities and towns in Portugal², consisting of a municipal senate composed of an appointed judge, three town councilors and a local representative in national affairs, also known as the town attorney. The appointed judge was a professional judge, appointed by means of a royal charter for a period of three years, which could be either prolonged or renewed. He performed both administrative and judicial duties, with the former being related to his position as Mayor. The town councilors and the municipality's national representative were appointed every year by order of a Royal Supreme Court, which superintended the peripheral administration³. These appointments were made according to lists drawn up at a local level, in the course of electoral acts occurring in the town every three years, under the rule of the *Corregidor*, a royal magistrate who superintended the district, which was a much wider jurisdictional area. In medieval times, the eligible candidates were chosen from amongst the "good men" (*homens bons*) of the municipalities and were elected by a vast assembly. However, this process became more and more elitist. In the first half of the 17th century, *the men of governance*, mostly the town councilors, were recruited entirely from a *list of eligible persons*, which contained only the richest and the oldest and most important members of the rural nobility. By that time, municipal seats were already transmitted to members of the same family, being handed down from generation to generation; this practice remained largely unchanged until the advent of liberalism⁴.

According to the legal requirements, the town councilors of Elvas met twice a week⁵. At these meetings, decisions of an administrative nature were taken and the municipal clerks and royal ombudsmen of the district and the municipality were admitted to office; craftsmen, doctors, surgeons and other responsible professionals took an oath; with the help of the 'almotacés'⁶ (inspectors of weights and measures), economic activity was controlled and steps were taken to guarantee the supply of essential consumer goods to the town; the councilors also decided on the construction of public works and inspected private building works; they organized or participated in popular festivities, both lay and religious; they supervised questions of hygiene and community

Pelourinho. Boletín de Relaciones Transfronterizas, No. 13 (2ª época). Año 2008, Badajoz: Diputación Provincial de Badajoz (33-44).

¹ On the relations between the central administration and the peripheral administrative authorities, during the period referred to in this study, see Hespánha, 1994.

² Except for Lisbon, which, since the Middle Ages and until the final implementation of liberalism, had always been a particular case in the Portuguese municipal organization. Cf. Monteiro, 103-105; Fernandes, 24-27.

³ On this Royal Court, see Subtil, 1996.

⁴ On the electoral processes in Portuguese municipalities during the *Ancien Régime*, see Silva, vol. I, 381-406; Fonseca, 111-123.

⁵ The *Ordenações Filipinas* (Book I, Title 66, §1) determined that the Council sessions would be on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Some municipal governments, either through tradition or for the convenience of the councilors, met on other weekdays. Elvas Town Council met on Tuesdays and Saturdays.

⁶ On these municipal workers, whose origin dated back to the time of the Muslim institutions, see Silva, vol. II, 567-592; Fonseca, 217-227.

health; and they also managed the financial activity of the council and ensured the preservation of municipal property.

But, the rebellion of the nobles on December 1, 1640⁷, disturbed this routine. Under the influence of the powerful Duke of Bragança, Elvas was one of the first towns in the kingdom to receive the news about the Acclamation⁸. Due to its proximity to Badajoz, it was chosen as the headquarters of the military government of the province of the Alentejo and its troops.

3. The municipal administration and the War

3. 1. The urgent defensive needs

While the recently formed government in Lisbon started to recruit military personnel and introduced projects for the fortification of the military zone considered likely to become the most heavily disputed border in the kingdom, the Town Council, without further ado, convened for December 4 the first of the many open meetings that were to take place over the next 28 years of conflict. Together with 77 members of the local population, considered to be representative of the three social estates, they took the first decisions for the defense of the town: an inventory was made of all the fighting equipment available in Elvas, including privately owned equipment; and a census was taken to discover those inhabitants who were fit and able to cooperate in defensive activities.

At that same meeting, four captains were elected to head the patrols which kept guard day and night, not only over the town's security, but also over that of other border zones⁹.

The urgent need to fortify the military zone and to begin the construction of a fortress next to Santa Luzia required yet another census of the local population. Together, they decided to impose the payment, 'voluntarily and under no coercion', of two 'reais' (the monetary currency at the time) on every pint of wine and every 16 ounces of meat or fish sold in the town, in order to support the costs of this construction¹⁰. And they gave the town councilors the power to convince some rich local merchants to advance the amount needed to get the works started, while sufficient money continued to be gathered for the whole enterprise¹¹.

In April of that same year, in what amounted to a pioneering action in comparison with other towns and villages¹², the Town Council, in cooperation with the military chiefs, had already organized the regiments of the town according to local needs and in keeping with the decision taken at the assembly of December 4, 1640¹³. These urban militias were composed of all fit and healthy men, exempted from privileges, and with ages ranging from 16 to 60 years. They were given regular military training and among them were both the auxiliary troops, who were in charge of the garrison of the military zone, and part of the regular army¹⁴.

In the chapters presented on behalf of the town to the *cortes* (parliament) of 1642, the town attorneys, invoking 'the lack of arms among the orderlies' asked for the supply of a thousand muskets and harquebuses. The arms given to the rich would be paid for by them; the ones given to the poor would be paid for by the Town Council, using the profits from the 'real de água' tax¹⁵.

⁷ On the context and meaning of the conspiracy of 1640, see Schaub, 2001; Costa and Cunha, 7-32; Valladares, 33-46.

⁸ On the significance of the priority given to Elvas and other places in the communication of the news about the Restoration, see Costa and Cunha, 84.

⁹ Municipal Historical Archive of Elvas (A.H.M.E)/Town Council of Elvas. (C.E) *Vereações (1640-1644)*, minutes of 4-12-1640, pp. 46-48.

¹⁰ *Ibid. Ibidem*, minutes of 1-4-1641, pp. 61-62v.

¹¹ *Ibid. Ibidem*, minutes of 23-4-1641, pp. 65-65v, of 4-1-1642, pp. 91v.-92 and of 4-1-1642, p. 91v. These merchants were mostly New Christians, quite numerous in the town at the time. On the role played by these men in the financial support of the Restoration War, see Valladares, 94-111.

¹² The reorganization of these regiments only took place from 1642 onwards. Barata and Teixeira, vol. 2, 172.

¹³ A.H.M.E./C.E., *Vereações (1640-1644)*. minutes of 27-4-1641, pp. 67v.-68 and of 23-6-1641, p. 73. On these dates, captains were elected to lead the already mentioned regiments.

¹⁴ On the restructuring of the defense of the kingdom of Portugal, including the recovery of the orderlies, carried out in the context of the urgent defensive needs of the Restoration, see Selvagem, 323-326 and 383-388; Barata and Teixeira, 9-33, 68-116 and 169-176.

¹⁵ Torre do Tombo (T.T.)/ *Cortes*. General and special chapters of 1642, p. 2.

3. 2. The administrative burden

Besides leading to more frequent, extraordinary and open meetings, the defensive questions implied many new tasks for the elected locals. Thus, there were more town councilors elected, namely the officers of the ten town regiments and the two country ones; wealthy and competent people responsible for launching, collecting and depositing the voluntary tax for the building of the fortresses; the quartermaster, the registrar and the bailiff; the cavalry officers; from 1664 onwards, also the collectors of the 'vintém' (an ancient coin), who collected money for the building of the military headquarters; when this construction started, its timekeeper and superintendent, as well as the treasurer of the vault where the money was kept; the supervisor of the transport of firewood by the town's inhabitants, which was needed to fuel the kilns used to make roof tiles, bricks and limestone for military constructions; the collector, treasurer and registrar of the military *décima* tax (or tithe), created in 1641 to help pay for the war expenses; and the steward responsible for food supplies in the military zone.

The Town Council also swore into office the bailiff responsible for the military zone's regiments. And, from 1646 onwards, whenever a province's military governor arrived for the first time in a military zone where the government had its headquarters, as was the case with Elvas, he was obliged to present himself and register at the Town Council the ranks and jurisdictions which had been attributed to him¹⁶.

The appointments of the people needed to perform the new tasks resulting from the war were not always easy ones to make. For those appointed, these tasks meant greater work and responsibility, with the consequent sacrifice of their own professional and personal life. Moreover, the payment of such work, which was not always guaranteed, was slow in coming and lower than might be expected. Therefore, whenever possible, many people avoided accepting the position, invoking the most varied reasons, such as exemption privileges, incompatibilities with other positions which they already held, old age or ill health. This lack of motivation created serious difficulties for the Town Council, as the lack of human resources prevented it from satisfying the demands of the highest ranking officers.

The appointment in which these difficulties were felt most acutely was that of the quartermaster. Those who held this position, introduced into Portugal after the Acclamation, had the difficult and thankless task of accommodating the troops in family houses, with due fairness and sensitivity. He would be appointed for three-month periods, which were frequently extended (Almada, 3-4).

In 1644, the quartermaster Tomás Mexia de Azevedo 'carried the poor' and placated the rich, taking 'great profit' out of this iniquitous behavior (Varela, 1-2). On the contrary, during the difficult years of 1658, 1659 and 1660, Manuel Figueiro held the same position with great competence, favoring a sense of 'quietude and conformity (...) among inhabitants'. Notwithstanding, in 1660, he renewed his request to be exempted from the job, a request which he had already made the previous year, claiming to be 'overburdened with work and time', besides complaining about the lack of payment. The Town Council rejected his request, invoking the 'doubts (...), worries' and the possible increase in problems and expenses if someone else were to be elected. And, in view of the lack of income which could be used to pay for his work, they decided to pay him 20,000 'reis' per year, taken from the voluntary tax collected for the building of the headquarters¹⁷.

3. 3. The new social and economic problems

The arrival of thousands of national and foreign outsiders, mostly soldiers whom the war had brought to the borderlands, helped to increase local economic activity, mainly commerce and craftsmanship. However, the rise in demand meant a general rise in prices and a decrease in the quality of products; it also favored the proliferation of monopolists¹⁸, smugglers¹⁹ and profiteers²⁰.

¹⁶ T.T. /War Council (C.G.). Decrees. 1646. Bundle 6, doc. 41, decree of 17-2-1646.

¹⁷ A.H.M.E./C.E., *Vereações (1660)*, minutes of 24-4-1660, pp. 12-13.

¹⁸ Producers or merchants who withheld food and other essential products, in order to sell them later on at a higher price, when there was a shortage or when demand rose due to greater influxes of troops into the town,

The latter were known in town as the peddlers, for there were numerous retail merchants to be found in Elvas 'more than in any other part because it is wealthy and thus they can collect as many supplies as they find and sell them for excessively high prices'²¹. This reality made the Town Council reinforce its control over economic activity, through the introduction of several measures: tighter fiscal supervision of the quality of products and their retail price; increase of penalties for offenders; and the approval, between 1646 and 1663, of new laws governing several issues: the calibration of scales, weights and measures; regulations for the functioning of inns and eating houses; the rules to be followed by outside sellers; control of the sale of firewood and its transport to the royal kilns; the public supply of meat and fish; protection of horse and sheep breeding; the ban on the undue appropriation of district lands; protection of the building of fortifications; regulation of the activity of millers and cereal transporters; the harvesting and preservation of olives; and the circulation of swine in the olive groves²².

The soldiers whose salary was always several months in arrears used several cunning strategies to survive. The most common one was theft. The farmers who lived near the fortress very often complained to the authorities about the theft of cattle, cereals, fruit and branches from the olive-trees. These were sold by the soldiers around town, at a much cheaper price than the official one. In order to reduce this scourge, the Town Council drew attention to this outrage every year and banned the population from buying firewood or olive oil from people who did not own or rent olive groves.

The demand for building materials for military constructions led to a rise in their respective prices. This caused the Town Council to ban the demolition of closed or abandoned houses, which were eagerly sought after by both military personnel and civilians, with the aim of selling their materials for building purposes²³.

The Portuguese army's suppliers were another huge problem for the local authorities. Based on the greater ease and lower cost of transport, which was quite dangerous in those times, these rich merchants acquired large quantities of wheat, rye, barley, meat and vegetables in Elvas in order to supply the military zones. As this practice affected the supply of the population and led to a rise in prices, the Town Council introduced new and more coercive measures to prevent such abuses, even though, in the long run, they proved to be less effective.

The town councilors were also obliged to follow royal decisions, reinforced by the orders of the military authorities, which led to hostility from the citizens. From the farmers they were forced to request barley and straw to feed the horses, and cereals, olive-oil, wine, wood, meat, vegetables and many other products to supply the troops. They also had to request carts and animals for the purposes of military transport. These latter obligations were also imposed on muleteers, resulting in an obvious loss in terms of trade. And, besides providing accommodation for the troops and guaranteeing the transport of firewood to the insatiable *kilns of His Majesty*, the local inhabitants were obliged to help in the building of defensive structures. The representatives who sat in the 1642 parliament requested of Dom João IV that, once the building of the fortress was concluded, 'the people who had worked there should be exempted from this fatigue, so as to take care of the crops (...) since, if they could provide for their own food, they could more easily

or due to the threat of a siege by the enemy. This kind of monopoly, which was very common in the Alentejo during war times, led the local authorities to carry out frequent inspections of barns and olive-oil presses.

¹⁹ Numerous in the borderlands, they illegally sold products to Spain, mainly cattle. Their activity intensified after the Restoration, due to the suspension of the trading agreement between the two belligerent countries.

²⁰ Intermediaries who bought large quantities of goods from neighboring producers, in order to sell them in markets and fairs. Their activity was forbidden in almost all districts by municipal laws, which, whenever possible, ordered that goods should be sold directly from the producer to the consumer, thus avoiding an increase in prices. In certain cases, the activity of the profiteers was allowed during the closing hours of those commercial spaces, when most of the buyers had already bought everything.

²¹ T. T. / *Cortes*. General and special chapters. 1641 and 1642. Elvas. Bundle 11, doc. 3. Special chapters of 1641, p. 3.

²² A.H.M.E./C.E., *Posturas (1520-1663)*, pp. 163-171v.

²³ *Ibid.*, *Vereações (1645)*, minutes of 20-5-1645, p. 26v. *Ibid.*, *Livro das Correições (1646-1681)*, Corregidor's visit, 20-2-1646, p. 3. These were annual inspections carried out by the Corregidor of the administrative activity of the Councils of his district.

support the war work²⁴. Such heavy demands gave rise to strong resistance on the part of the population, forcing the aldermen to increase the amounts of the fines and to impose prison sentences.

Cattle theft, perpetrated by Filipe IV's soldiers, during their frequent incursions into Portuguese borderlands, caused problems in the supply of meat and the consequent difficulties in finding a butcher willing to sell to the public. On these occasions, local authorities allowed domestic breeders of pigs, sheep and goats to sell their products at the municipal butcher's, on condition that they submitted the meat for the inspection of the municipal workers, who also fixed the respective price. When there were more difficulties, the main breeders in town were forced to supply cattle to the whole population, according to a previously arranged weekly schedule.

3. 4. The crisis in municipal finances

During these war times, the numerous skirmishes, combats and battles fought in the neighborhood of the military zone caused considerable economic loss among farmers and smallholders, as well as affecting the Town Council itself. During the most critical years, the profits of the municipality fell quite dramatically, as there were municipal rents which were not paid or that were charged at a lower price. Due to this, of the twelve years for which municipal accounting ledgers have been found, seven showed negative balances. However, the percentage must certainly have been higher, as we do not know the accounting balance for some of the most difficult war years²⁵, namely 1658 and 1659. At the beginning of January 1659, the Town Council, contrary to what had previously been the norm, did not receive any municipal rent, as there was no one interested, because the town had been under siege for more than 40 days²⁶. Naturally, the profits that were most affected were those originating from the fines levied on the olive and cork groves²⁷, from the rents and privileges of the council's agricultural properties and from the payment of licenses for the grazing of pigs, goats and sheep on council properties. In 1664, when the war was still at its height, these licenses brought a revenue of 4,500 'reis'²⁸. However, in 1666, in the war-torn period preceding the Peace Treaty of 1668, their value rose to 616,210 'reis'²⁹. Notwithstanding, the Council was still so 'poor and in need' that it had no money to pay the fees usually awarded to municipal workers and royal magistrates³⁰.

The Portuguese troops caused considerable losses both for the inhabitants and for the Council. In 1661, the aldermen exempted the market gardener Manuel Rodrigues, the tenant of Lameda, a council property, from the need to pay half of that year's rent, as he had lost all his crops, due to the fact that the army had camped on his land³¹.

War also indirectly led to a rise in the council's expenses; the Town Council paid for the festivities to mark the arrival of new military governors or of any other high ranking officer, or even for religious ceremonies, including processions organized in honor of the Portuguese victories, namely at the Battles of the Linhas de Elvas, Ameixial and Montes Claros. The first battle gave rise to an annual procession, which still continued to take place even after Portugal was at peace with Spain.

Dom Teodósio de Bragança, the first-born son of Dom João IV and Dona Luísa de Gusmão, arrived in Elvas on the November 4, 1651. Helped by some noblemen, he had fled from the royal palace on the night of November 1 to 2, as his father wouldn't agree to his visiting the most dangerous border of the kingdom. He returned to Lisbon on December 20 of that same year,

²⁴ T. T. / *Cortes*. General and special chapters. 1641 and 1642. Elvas. Bundle 11, doc. 3. Special chapters of 1642, p. 1 v.

²⁵ In the Municipal Historical Archive of Elvas, there only exist credit and debit books for 1651, 1652, 1657, 1658, 1660, 1661, 1662, 1663, 1664, 1665, 1666 and 1667.

²⁶ A.H.M.E./C.E., *Vereações (1659)*, minutes of 2-1-1659, pp. 44-44v. The siege imposed on the fortress by Dom Luís de Haro lasted for 54 days, from October 22 to January 14, 1659, the date of the Battle of the Linhas de Elvas.

²⁷ These fines were levied on those infringing municipal laws.

²⁸ A.H.M.E./C.E., *Receita e Despesa (1664)*.

²⁹ *Ibid. Receita e Despesa (1666)*.

³⁰ *Ibid. Vereações (1666)*, minutes of 8-5-1666, pp. 59v.-62v.

³¹ *Ibid. /C.E., Vereações (1661)*, minutes of 16-8-1661, pp. 16-16v.

at the behest of his father. The visit of the prince to the town, escorted by noblemen and servants, greatly enhanced the political and military importance of the town. It strengthened the determination and confidence of its inhabitants and favored the development of some economic activities³². But all the ceremonies held to mark his arrival and other festivities promoted in his honor meant a considerable expense for the Town Council. Therefore, the municipal governors asked Dom João IV for compensation of at least 220,000 ‘reis’ which ‘would be spent on things needed to mark (...) the arrival’, as was the custom ‘with royal visitors’³³.

3. 5. Military quartering

Due to the need to adopt urgent and exceptional measures, war periods have always represented an opportunity for the central administration to suspend or even to abolish social and local prerogatives that generally hindered the government’s action. This was the reason why, in Elvas, as in many other places situated along the path of military contingents, the long-existing privilege of exemption from the need to accommodate troops, including cavalry and vehicles, was frequently disrespected (Gama, 1963: 61).

The quartering of troops was one of the worst shames that could be imposed on a local population and represented a serious problem for local authorities, a difficulty that, as described above, was felt, first and foremost, in the appointment of the quartermaster. In 1641, most families lodged two, four or even six soldiers, with the consequent ‘risks to the family honor’, ‘thefts on the farm’ and even the possibility of ‘danger to life’, the latter due to the conflicts frequently arising between guests and owners.

And, although such duties normally fell upon the poorer population, they also affected the more privileged ones, as proved by the fact that, in that year, ‘the best houses in town’ were occupied by ‘captains and noble soldiers’³⁴.

In order to minimize the effects of such heavy obligations, which the continuation of the war had transformed into a real calamity, the Town Council decided to build military headquarters. In another open meeting, they established the ‘easiest way (...) for people’ to help pay for its construction: a tax of one ‘vintém’ on every 25 liters of wine, to be paid by those who came from outside the town to sell it. Matias de Albuquerque, newly endowed with the title of Count of Alegrete, and at that time the military governor of the Alentejo, supported the measure, as expected: he chose the best site for the construction of the headquarters and offered the plans for the buildings³⁵.

In spite of initial delays, part of the building was already completed by August 1652, as the Town Council had bought the doors and locks³⁶. But the construction was to go on for some more time, because in 1657, at a new open meeting, and for the same purpose, a tax was agreed upon of one more ‘real’ on every 16 ounces of meat and every pint of wine. It was decided that no one would be exempted from this payment, including the ‘lord generals’ and ‘their servants, as this was a contribution to the common good’³⁷. In 1660, there were already 101 houses built, where the infantry was lodged. In December of that same year, the Town Council asked the officer responsible for the supply of beds to the army for the money to buy 393 blankets, 305 straw mattresses, 306 pillows and 252 rugs to accommodate the troops in those public headquarters³⁸. The help provided by the British in the final stages of the conflict meant the arrival of English military contingents in Elvas, leading to an increase in the Council’s expenses, as well as in the

³² Dom Teodósio was born in 1634 and died young, in 1653. On his stay in Elvas, see Domingues, 135-162; and Ericcira, vol. 2, 359-362.

³³ A.H.M.E./C.E., *Receita e Despesa (1651)*, p. 54. The king accepted this request in a royal charter dating from 9-2-1652, addressed to the district’s ombudsman, the magistrate in charge of the supervision of the municipal accounts.

³⁴ T. T. / *Cortes*. Special and general chapters. 1641 and 1642. Elvas. Bundle 11, doc. 3. Special chapters of 1642, p. 1. See also Azevedo 101.

³⁵ A.H.M.E./C.E., *Vereações (1643-1644)*, minutes of 30-7-1644, pp. 78-80. Matias de Albuquerque had been rewarded with the title of Count of Alegrete after the Battle of Montijo, fought on May 26 of that same year.

³⁶ *Ibid.* *Vereações (1652)*, minutes of 27-8-1652, pp. 45-45v.

³⁷ *Ibid.* *Vereações (1657)*, minutes of 14-8-1657, pp. 32-34v.

³⁸ *Ibid.* *Livro das casas e camas dos quartéis. 1660*, pp. 2-3.

number of tasks to be performed and the number of problems to be dealt with. The council had to improvise new lodgings, as well as to control and repress the thefts and illicit economic activities perpetrated by those soldiers³⁹; and in 1666 it was forced to suspend the cleaning of the town, as the money originally allocated for this activity was needed to build new headquarters to accommodate a regiment of English troops⁴⁰.

3. 6. The increase in royal and municipal taxes

As was the case everywhere else in the kingdom, the local authorities had to deal with the complaints and resistance of the locals to the payment of the tithe as a contribution to military efforts. This tax had been created in 1641 with the sole aim of covering the extraordinary expenses caused by the Portuguese Restoration War. In 1652, and because of the ‘great clamor’ of the inhabitants who considered themselves ‘highly oppressed’ by the imposition and collection of such a tax, another open meeting was convened. Having discussed the subject, they found an ‘easier’ way to pay for it: the obligation to pay another ‘vintém’ on every 25 liters of wine and another ‘real’ on every pint of vinegar sold in town and outside⁴¹.

In those times, soldiers all over Europe were generally associated with the drinking of large quantities of wine. In fact, the consumption of wine was exceptionally high both in Elvas and in all the other military border zones. This drink served as a distraction, helping people to start a conversation, to make friends, to while away their free time and to diminish the anxiety caused by the imminence of attacks; and it helped not only the Portuguese, but mostly the foreigners to withstand not only the fact that they had been uprooted from their homes, but also the hunger and the cold that they were faced with. The production in the district of Elvas was insufficient for the soldiers’ needs, and so every year wine was imported from Borba, Vila Viçosa, Évora, Vidigueira and other places. The drunken soldiers created problems and caused damage in taverns and on the streets; they argued and fought amongst themselves, disturbed the inhabitants, damaged the houses where they were lodged and shot pets and defenseless people⁴². The bad examples were set by the highest ranking officers, who, though drunk, would nonetheless leave for the battlefield and thereby endanger the success of the campaigns (Freitas, 284-287).

But, in spite of all this, wine, and to a lesser extent other consumer goods such as meat and fish, represented an important source of profit for producers, merchants and also for the Town Council. Although the successive taxes levied on this drink raised its price, they did not diminish its consumption, thus giving rise to extraordinary profits, which helped to pay for the building of fortresses and headquarters. They also helped to relieve the inhabitants of the payment of the tithe and to finance several public works, such as the repair of fountains and stone pavements. And, when there was a shortage of cereals, they made it possible for money to be advanced to buy imported wheat.

3. 7. The relationship between the local authorities and the military command

The relationships between the civil and military institutions were rather complex at that time, for many reasons: the coexistence, in a small physical space, of institutions answerable to different central authorities; the overlapping and insufficient clarification of the respective powers and duties, which was quite a common feature at that time; the importance that had meanwhile been acquired by military chiefs operating within a war context; the need to take appropriate decisions for the peculiar situation being lived through in that region, decisions which had no connection with the local authorities and which did not fit in with local norms and customs.

The urgent needs of the recently restored Portuguese State in terms of military recruitment, defense and taxation led to the creation of more efficient forms of cooperation with the local

³⁹ *Ibid. Vereações (1665)*, minutes of 17-3-1665, p. 33; *id.*, *Vereações (1666)*, minutes of 30-9-1666, p. 68v.; *ibid. Vereações (1667)*, minutes of 5-4-1667, p. 16v. and 31-8-1667, pp. 29-29v.

⁴⁰ *Ibid. Vereações (1666)*, minutes of 30-9-1666, p. 68v.

⁴¹ *Ibid. Vereações (1652)*, minutes of 2-9-1652, pp. 46v.-48.

⁴² Coelho, 1940a. Letter to Governor Martim Afonso de Melo, of 9-2-1942, 7-8. Coelho, 1940b. Letters to Governor Martim Afonso de Melo of 16-12-1641, 5 and of 15-5-1649, 180.

administration. For this purpose, as a result of the decree of December 11, 1640⁴³, new military positions were created by the recently appointed War Council, in particular that of the military governor of the province⁴⁴,

But in Elvas, just like everywhere else in the kingdom, the local authorities were keen to preserve their traditional autonomy and did not readily accept the interference of these higher-ranking officers, whether directly or through the intermediary of subalterns, in matters that they considered to be their exclusive responsibility. Such matters included: the price of the meat to be consumed by both the civil and military populations; the means for the collection of the taxes to pay for the defense expenses; the supervision of the fish market; the control of the meat supplies to the army; the appointment of civilians to perform activities connected with military logistics.

The tensions between the political-administrative authorities and the military ones were already visible in 1642. The representatives to the parliament of that year asked the king to let 'the superior officers of the militia' rule over 'their own things', leaving to 'the Town Council the free political government of the Town', in order to avoid confusions and doubts regarding jurisdiction that might lead to 'scandal and hatred between soldiers and inhabitants'⁴⁵.

In 1644, the district's parliamentary representative vehemently protested against the destruction of tables, chairs and even bars, caused in the meeting house by soldiers who the commander had improperly lodged there, taking advantage of the fact that he had the key to the site⁴⁶.

The relationship between the Town Council and the military engineer João de Cosmader was particularly fraught. Their disagreements show the difference in priorities between the civil and military authorities, the clash of mentalities between Portuguese and foreigners, as well as the Flemish Jesuit's aloofness towards the interests and needs of the people of Elvas.

During the Corregidor's visit of 1646, the town councilors complained about the damage caused to the stone pavements by 'His Majesty's carts'. They tried to repair them on their own, but Cosmader forbade this. However, when he himself had them repaired, he did so in the sections that were least useful for the inhabitants, obliging them to undertake major detours⁴⁷. The district's parliamentary representative reinforced his fellow town councilors' criticisms, denouncing the actions of the colonel: he had the slaughterhouse pulled down, obliging the Town Council to transfer the slaughter of animals to the town centre, with evident prejudice to the inhabitants' health; he prevented the building of a clock tower, in spite of the fact that the works had already been adjudicated, alleging the uselessness of knowing the time during war periods; and he put off the repair of the arches of the Amoreira aqueduct, indispensable for the water supply to the military zone⁴⁸.

The complaints against the military engineer were made known to the king by the town's representatives to the parliament of 1645-46; these complaints lay at the origin of a royal order addressed to Cosmader, to commence the building of the headquarters without further delay, for which 2,000 'cruzados' (an ancient currency) had already been collected⁴⁹.

The interference of the highest ranking officers in Council matters extended to the use that was made of the district profits. At the above-mentioned open meeting of August 1657, designed to establish a new tax for further building work, both the nobility and the people imposed as the condition for its approval 'that in the application of that money there should be no interference of the lord generals'⁵⁰.

Such conflicts occurred in all places where there was a strong military presence. As they became the object of numerous representations of the people to the parliament, in 1654, Dom João

⁴³ Hespânia, 203 and 294.

⁴⁴ Costa and Cunha, 87.

⁴⁵ T. T. / *Cortes*. Special and general chapters. 1641 and 1642. Elvas. Bundle 11, doc. 3. Special chapters from 1642, p. 1v.

⁴⁶ A.H.M.E./C.E., *Vereações (1643-1644)*, minutes of 29-11-1644, pp. 100v.-101.

⁴⁷ *Ibid. Livro das Correições (1646-1681)*, Corregidor's visit of 20-2-1646, pp. 2-2v.

⁴⁸ *Ibid. Ibidem*, pp. 2v-3v.

⁴⁹ T.T./ C.G. Decrees. 1646. Bundle 6, doc. 110, decree of 3-4-1646.

⁵⁰ A.H.M.E./C.E., *Vereações (1657)*, minutes of 14-8-1657, p. 33.

IV banned the war ministers from interfering in matters of civil justice, and in the political government of the Town Councils⁵¹.

The royal order had little effect, however. In 1663, the divergences between the town councilors of Elvas and the 3rd Count of Sabugal, then governor of the military zone, reached such an extreme that the king himself summoned the town councilor Estêvão Pegado to explain what was going on, on behalf of all councilors⁵².

There was also frequent friction between the military chiefs and the royal magistrates of the town (the Appointed Judge, the Corregidor and the Ombudsman). The highest ranking officers complained about the condescending tone with which the peripheral ministers, used to a less severe practice of civil justice, administered military justice as the army's auditors.

In spite of these inevitable tensions, the situation of permanent danger that they all faced and the inevitability of their having to share a life together favored the development of a collaborative spirit, which prevailed in the relationships between the civil and military organizations.

The proximity of the military governor of the province made it possible for important decisions to be taken more rapidly for the benefit of the municipality. In 1647, at an open meeting of the Town Council, the representative of Martim Afonso de Melo committed himself to building three watchtowers on the dangerous road from Elvas to Estremoz, so as to make it safer for muleteers and other travelers⁵³. The following year, the same governor had a large cistern built inside the military zone, next to the wall, which guaranteed the water supply to both the population and the fortress for several months⁵⁴. And, in 1656, he promised the construction of another watchtower in the village of Santa Eulália⁵⁵.

The military engineers on duty in the Portuguese army, including the inflexible Cosmader, gave technical support for the repair of the drainage of Amoreira and for other public constructions.

When there was a shortage of cereals, the governors gave money to the Town Council to buy wheat for the population and made efforts to transfer cereals from the military stores of other zones where they were more abundant. In 1660, the Count of Atouguia, reminding the king of the 'shortages and miseries' suffered by the people of Elvas during the 1658-59 siege, proposed the suspension of the building of the military headquarters, so that this money could be used by the town officers to buy wheat to feed both soldiers and inhabitants⁵⁶.

The following year, the same governor asked the central government to provide financial help to the Town Council of Elvas, enabling it to store at least 200 'moios' of wheat (one *moio* is a unit of measure, equivalent to 40 bushels). He praised the 'great zeal' of the council in its attempts to amend the 'serious shortage of supplies' still felt in town. And he invoked the state of exhaustion of the people, caused by the 'past war works'⁵⁷.

On several occasions, when there was danger of an imminent siege, the Town Council could count on the support of the troops to store wood and cereals, to safeguard the livestock and to expel beggars and other foreigners who had no occupation or usefulness for the defense of the town.

The military authorities also cooperated with the Council in policing the town and the surrounding olive groves, taking preventive measures against plague, supervising the obedience of municipal laws and preventing abuses by the army's suppliers.

On the other hand, whenever the governors came officially to town, the town councilors welcomed them with great pomp and circumstance. They made every effort to accommodate the soldiers, officers and horses and to provide for their food. They associated themselves with the

⁵¹ T.T. / C.G. Decrees. 1654. Bundle 14, doc. 13, decree of 23-2-1654.

⁵² A.H.M.E. / C.E., *Vereações (1663)*, minutes of 9-8-1663, pp. 20-22. Dom João Mascarenhas, 3rd Count of Sabugal and War Counselor, had been in charge since March of that same year. Cf. Ericeira, Vol. 4. 103.

⁵³ A.H.M.E. / C.E., *Vereações (1647)*, minutes of 26-1-1647, pp. 14v.-16. Coelho, 1940b. Letters of 29-5-1647, 143. The plans for these watchtowers would be drawn up by Cosmader.

⁵⁴ *Ibid. Ibidem*. Letter of 21-5-1648, pp. 259-260. The plans for these cisterns were drawn up by the French military engineer Nicolau de Langres.

⁵⁵ A.H.M.E. / C.E., *Vereações (1656)*, minutes of 7-4-1656. The plan for this watchtower was also drawn up by Nicolau de Langres.

⁵⁶ Coelho, 1940a. Letter from 14-4-1660, 26-27.

⁵⁷ *Ibid. Ibidem*. Letter from 22-2-1661, 112-113.

military successes of the fighters, welcoming them cheerfully after the victories, celebrating with torches and religious ceremonies. They buried the heroes, killed in combat, with solemn funerals. The best known examples were the funerals of the soldier Roque Antunes and the artillery general André de Albuquerque. The former was caught by the Castilians in 1641 and murdered because he refused to applaud Filipe IV (Ericeira, vol. I, 237-239). The latter was shot and killed at the Battle of the Linhas de Elvas, after having contributed, through his action, to the military success of the Portuguese in this combat. He was buried in St. Francis's convent (Ericeira, vol. II, 220-223; Gama, 1965, 43).

As already mentioned, the Council adopted initiatives which allowed for the rapid reconstitution of the regiments and the beginning of the military constructions. And, with its own representations, it supported the persistent requests addressed by the governors to the monarchs, to reinforce the military garrisons of the border zones with new troops.

The town councilors of 1651 authorized those soldiers' wives who so wished to sell goods in the market, as long as they showed a safe guarantee, respected the municipal laws and paid a commission⁵⁸.

With this measure, they helped to ensure the economic survival of those poor fighters, who were systematically paid in arrears; they favored the integration of the families into the local community; and contributed to the decrease in the number of thefts, which usually occurred as a result of hunger.

Although disliking the interference of the military chiefs in matters of their own jurisdiction, local authorities would, whenever convenient, invoke the governors' decisions as a justification for their disobedience of royal orders when these were not favorable to them. This was what they did in 1664 when they invoked an order of the Marquis of Marialva as a pretext for excusing themselves from the need to account for His Majesty's 'reais' to the superintendent of the town and of the district⁵⁹.

The relationship between the military sector and the Council was further strengthened by the fact that 13 out of the 37 citizens who, between 1641 and 1668, held the most important seats as councilors had themselves been captains of the regiments. As the position of councilor was a lifetime post, some of these officers belonged to several Town Councils. And the accumulation of both jobs was not an easy task: in fact, the regiments of the border areas were always present at 'all signs of the enemy and at all entrances' into Castile; they kept guard of 'the trenches, rivers and watchtowers' and undertook 'patrols and watches'⁶⁰.

3. 8. The Town Council and the central government

The proximity between the king and his subjects, generated in the political circumstances of the Restoration and underlined by the need for human and financial resources caused by war, favored the communication of the Councils with the central government. Due to their strategic location, greater attention was given to the municipalities of the Alentejo border region.

Dom João IV also summoned meetings of the parliament with an unusual frequency in Portuguese history, in order to strengthen and legitimize his still fragile power and to convince the representatives of the three estates to cooperate in the war effort. Though important for the king, these assemblies represented, at the same time, an excellent opportunity for the people to lodge formal complaints.

The two district representatives to the parliament, acting in representation of the third estate, were elected at open Council meetings, from among the members of the nobility and the regional governors, and at least one of them was obliged to take an active role as a Town Councilor⁶¹. Only in this way could they represent the feelings of their communities, as well as the feelings of the municipal government (Cardim, 149-169; Costa, 1147-1181; Azevedo, 1914)⁶².

⁵⁸ A.H.M.E. / C.E., *Vereações (1651)*, minutes of 18-2-1651, pp. 22-22v. and 18-4-1651, pp. 33v.-34.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, *Vereações (1664)*, minutes of 1-5-1664, pp. 11-12.

⁶⁰ T.T. / C.G. Decrees. 1654. Bundle 14, doc. 9, decree of 23-2-1654.

⁶¹ As was the case with the representatives of Elvas, at least in 1641, 1642 and 1645.

⁶² T.T. / C.G. Decrees. 1646, Bundle 6; 1654. Bundle 14.

Besides presenting their community's complaints, a feature that was common to all districts, these representatives pointed out the damage that had been caused by the town's condition of a military border zone. The petitions presented in 1642 opened with a description of the serious economic situation of Elvas: previously 'one of the richest of the kingdom' was 'at present in a bad situation' They invoked as the cause of this situation the frequent enemy invasions, which prevented the sowing of the farmland, the maintenance of the vineyards and the breeding of cattle. They denounced the 'great felling' of trees in the olive groves of the neighborhood, with the aim of gaining a better visibility of the surrounding area and also in order to ensure a supply of 'wood for the fortifications'. They also complained about the destruction by Portuguese soldiers and their allies of the 'orchards close to the walls', which were the usual source of food for the inhabitants⁶³.

The monarch answered this anguished preamble with comforting words of concern and encouragement. And he promised to pay 'particular attention to 'pleasing them and favoring them' in whatever way possible'⁶⁴. As a matter of fact, the petitions from the people of Elvas in 1641 and 1642 were, in general, accepted, unless they opposed the laws of the kingdom or the superior interests of the State⁶⁵.

The representatives also highlighted in their petition the extremely dangerous situation under which people lived in the kingdom's inland regions⁶⁶. In 1641, they asked for the captains and the lieutenants of the town's regiments to be granted 'the privileges and freedom' of the royally appointed officers, as they served 'on the main border of this Kingdom'⁶⁷.

The representatives at the parliament of the following year reminded the king, in a more explicit way, of the fact that they had contributed with 'tithes, property taxes and other royal taxes, just like any people in Sertão'. Notwithstanding, the latter only rejoiced in the 'happy acclamation' of the monarch, without the alarms, scares and losses that are inherent in borderlands. With such an allegation, they asked for exemption from 'all taxes', as the inhabitants of Elvas had always served their king 'with arms in their hands, spending the little that was left on the lodging of the soldiers and having no farm from where they could take their food'. For all these reasons, they did not think it 'fair that, being different in work, they had taxes equal to the others' who only enjoyed 'profit and rest'⁶⁸.

And the emissaries to the meeting of the three estates in 1645-46 requested preference for the people of Elvas over 'outsiders' in the occupation of 'jobs and seats that would suit them', invoking, once again, the good service that they had rendered in the defense of the kingdom and the losses caused by war⁶⁹.

In these occasional representations to the central government, the Town Council tried to take advantage of the dangers and sacrifices to which the inhabitants were exposed. In 1660, they asked, unsuccessfully, for exemption from the increase in the tithe imposed on the whole kingdom, 'on the grounds of what they had already suffered with sieges and other violence'⁷⁰.

And, in 1662, they decided to send to the Royal Court, the town councilor, João do Quintal Lobo, to once more ask D. João IV for some tax relief, 'considering the severe situation' in which the town found itself and 'the misery of the people' who lacked 'all kind of trade and crops to withstand these and other duties'⁷¹. As this was considered a very important mission for the common good, and despite the sharp fall in the revenue from the two voluntary taxes (from which

⁶³ T. T. / *Cortes*. Specific and general chapters. 1641 and 1642. Elvas. Bundle 11, doc. 3. Special chapters of 1642, p. 1.

⁶⁴ *Ibid. Ibidem*. Answer to the petition of 1642, p. 8.

⁶⁵ *Ibid. Ibidem*. Answer to the petitions of 1641 and 1642, pp. 7-7 v. and pp. 8-9, respectively.

⁶⁶ The same thing happened to other places in a similar situation. Some even evoked the recent episodes of skirmishes with the Castilians. Cf. Cardim, 147-148.

⁶⁷ T. T. / *Cortes*. Specific and general chapters. 1641 and 1642. Elvas. Bundle 11, doc. 3. Special chapters of 1641, p. 3v.

⁶⁸ *Ibid. Ibidem*. pp. 1-1v.

⁶⁹ T.T. / C.G. Decrees. 1646, Bundle 6, doc. 114, decree of 3-4-1646.

⁷⁰ A.H.M.E. / C.E., *Vereações (1662)*, minutes of 4-4-1662, pp. 11-11v.

⁷¹ *Ibid. Ibidem*. minutes of 24-10-1662, pp. 23-24.

the cost of the councilor's trip and accommodation would be paid)⁷², the emissary was told to remain in Lisbon until all requests had been complied with.

4. Final remarks

The longlasting armed conflict, triggered by the rebellion of 1640, was a severe test of endurance for the border populations of the two belligerent kingdoms, particularly for those living in the Alentejo and Extremadura⁷³ military border zones, located in the regions worst affected by enemy incursions, where decisive battles were fought, leading to the end of the war and determining the political destiny of Portugal.

Together with Campo Maior and Olivença, Elvas represented the first line of defense of the Alentejo, and indeed of the kingdom itself. For the troops of Filipe IV, military domination of these zones meant easy access to Lisbon, the centre of the newly restored power.

Because of its geo-strategic position, Elvas was chosen as the headquarters for the military governors of the province. Coupled with the permanent climate of war experienced in the region for 28 years, such a choice considerably disturbed the everyday life of the town and required the local government to make a considerable effort to adapt to the new reality.

Without losing sight of its normal activity, the Town Council was confronted with the need to perform new duties and to solve urgent and sometimes unexpected problems. For the inhabitants and the neighborhood, who had already fallen prey to the devastation caused by the Portuguese and Castilian armies, this meant even greater financial and material burdens, besides leading to a serious deterioration in morale. In this context, the town councilors used their common sense and personal and social influence to quell any latent rebellions among the population exhausted both by the war and by the sacrifices they had had to make, and not always convinced of the advantages of the separatist coup performed by the middle nobility of Portugal.

In fact, the preservation of the Iberian union was defended in a more or less explicit fashion by members of the high nobility and the high clergy, whose involvement with the conspirators seeking to overthrow Dom João IV or with the war against Portugal is well known (Valladares, 286-311; 351-352; Costa and Cunha, 105-128; Wagner, 83 and ff.), but it was also defended by other sectors of the Portuguese population, as shown on several occasions, during the occupation of Évora by Dom João of Austria. After the town's liberation, the military governor of the Alentejo, Dom Sancho Manuel, the Count of Vila Flor, sent an extensive letter to Dom Afonso VI, in which he claimed that in the province's capital, just as 'in any of the Alentejo's regions, there are many men, either secular or ecclesiastical who insist on showing bad will when at the service of Your Majesty and in the protection of the Crown'⁷⁴.

Aires Varela, a canon from Elvas, who lived through the first years of the war, used to say that his town 'was full of traitors' (Varela, 1-2), many of whom have been denounced and killed (Varela, 2-8)⁷⁵.

The controversial nature of many decisions led the different Town Councils to convene with more frequency the representatives of the three social estates. Such meetings, which almost always turned into municipal assemblies due to the high number of participants⁷⁶, allowed the councilors to share responsibilities by involving the whole community in the war effort, and to reinforce their capacity to protest to parliament, the central government and the military chiefs.

At the beginning of 1659, because of the effects of the siege laid by Dom Luís de Haro, the town became almost ungovernable. The epidemics which had spread among the besieged townfolk extended to the town councilors, royal magistrates and even to the Council's registrar. On January 1, as there were crucial questions which could not be postponed, the town councilors of previous

⁷² *Ibid. Ibidem.* minutes of 16-12-1662, pp. 26v.-27v.

⁷³ On the impact of the Restoration War on Spanish Extremadura, see Cortés Cortés, 1990; Soto, 2001; Barreto Hernández and López Monroy, 268-283; González Rodríguez, 268-283; Valladares, 227; 241.

⁷⁴ Cf. Coelho, 1940a. Letter of 26-6-1663, 294.

⁷⁵ Cf. also Coelho, 1940b. Letter of 10-12-1648, 336.

⁷⁶ Although highly variable, the number of participants was always well into double figures.

years had to be summoned in order to be able to compose the Council. With no magistrate available, it was a soldier, Colonel Diogo Reimão de Sequeira, who was sworn into office⁷⁷.

But, for this short period, the Town Council in Elvas had always succeeded, even under difficult circumstances, in going about its everyday business as an institution against the background of the war, becoming a factor of stability and security for the town's citizens. And in spite of the jurisdictional conflicts with the military authorities, it was also an important ally of the army, not only due to the support that it provided in terms of military logistics, but also through the direct involvement of many of its members in the defense of the military zone and on the battlefields.

The role of the Portuguese Town Councils during the Restoration War, including the ones along the Alentejo border, is still relatively unknown. However, taking Elvas as an example, its systematic study might help us to achieve a more rigorous characterization of the Portuguese separatist movement and might highlight the reasons for its success.

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⁷⁷ Cf. A.H.M.E./C.E., *Vereações (1659)*, minutes of 1-1-1659, pp. 43-44. The situation lasted until the new Town Council came to power, on May 28 of that year.

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