

Lineage, Marriage, and Social Mobility: the Teles de Meneses Family in the Iberian Courts (Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries)

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Abstract

This article discusses the social mobility strategies of the Teles de Meneses family throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, seeking to understand their influence on the family's social evolution and improved ranking at the court. Marriage policy and service in the Iberian courts are analyzed over three different generations and from two standpoints: first, the preservation of the family's pre-acquired status; second, the diversification of the services performed in the various settings where its influence could be exercised. This will highlight the reasons behind the social evolution of this family and the subsequent granting of titles to some of its members.

Keywords

Teles de Meneses; Social Mobility; Family; Nobility; Marriage

Resumo

O presente artigo pretende discutir as estratégias de promoção e mobilidade social da família Teles de Meneses durante os séculos quinze e dezasseis, com o propósito de compreender as implicações que daí advêm em termos de incremento social e posicionamento na corte. Para tal, analisar-se-á a política matrimonial e o serviço nas cúrias ibéricas conduzido por três distintas gerações, obedecendo a duas perspectivas: uma relacionada com a conservação do estatuto já adquirido e outra centrada na diversificação dos serviços prestados nas variadas esferas de poder, percebendo desta maneira as razões para o conseqüente incremento social e titulação de alguns membros.

Palavras-chave

Teles de Meneses; Mobilidade Social; Família; Nobreza; Matrimónio

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Introduction

This article's main goal is to discuss the social mobility strategies of the Teles de Meneses family at the end of the fifteenth century and during the first half of the sixteenth century, by examining both the practical execution of such strategies and the instruments employed to attain the social status they enjoyed at the time. The family under analysis is one of the branches of the Silva lineage,² who, as a result of the services they rendered at the court, were rewarded with the County of Unhão in 1636 (Freire, 1927: II, 73). The article will follow the trajectory of Fernão Teles de Meneses (c. 1432–1477), the fourth Lord of Unhão, and of his descendants up to the second half of the sixteenth century, encompassing a period corresponding to three generations.

I shall argue that two main variables lay at the root of the substantial degree of social mobility demonstrated by this family from the mid-sixteenth century onwards. The first variable relates to the progressive stabilization of a courtly and political hierarchy in the context of the Portuguese monarchy. In order to secure for themselves the best position possible, the members of this family resorted to a series of social and political practices, ranging from dedicated service at the Iberian royal courts to the pursuit of a deliberate marriage policy.

This first variable gave rise to another feature, the services provided by family members at the Portuguese and Castilian courts, which grew in visibility from the reign of Manuel I onwards. Court service will be approached from a dual, and not necessarily concomitant, perspective: on the one hand, royal service was simply the result of the Teles de Meneses' proximity to the royal family, which afforded them the obvious rewards within a favor-based economy. From another perspective, it is important to assess the limits of the political *fides* as it was practiced by this extended family, considering their taste for high-ranking employment in the Portuguese crown dating back to the Middle Ages. During the first half of the sixteenth century, the range of courts at which members of the family rendered service became increasingly diverse. This raises the question of how family members dealt with the issue of fealty and, in turn, of whether individual princes exploited their clienteles in order to increase their own power. In spite of such ambiguities, the investment made by the various family members across such spheres of power led to an inevitable increase in their social capital, exploited by the extended family by virtue of their kinship and the formal and informal relations they developed in both kingdoms. In turn,

² Habitually referred to as Teles de Meneses or Silva Teles, being part of the House of Unhão. See Attachment 1.

the enhanced social capital obtained among the Iberian princes and monarchs ensured that the family members involved in the process would gain in both power and influence, in the form of titles, rents and land, as well as high-ranking positions and offices in their respective courts.

On a more general note, and in accordance with the vast historiography produced about the role of royal and noble courts as a space for self-affirmation, patronage and client-patron relationships, the (not necessarily concurrent) viewpoints adopted in this article—that is, the stabilization of a constellation of political agents at court and the services rendered by individuals at two royal courts simultaneously—rely upon two basic premises. The first such premise concerns the *proximity* to the monarch, which might—or might not—be the consequence of high office. It thus differs from the second premise, which is *social status*. Historiography has indeed highlighted the important role played in decision-making by those servants who were physically closest to the prince (Starkey, 1973). The period under analysis was characterized by a certain ambiguity between features that were distinctive to the late Middle Ages and to the Early Modern court. Such ambiguity results in the fact that the two above-mentioned premises do not always coincide. Therefore, the condition of being close to the prince and/or the king did not always mean belonging to the high nobility. Theoretically, for the lower strata of the nobility, the possibility of social ascension depended on the efforts of the interested parties. Most importantly, it relied on the monarch's own favor and his acceptance of the presence of these parties. However, the ambivalence resulting from serving the monarch was subject to a number of factors. One such factor was the self-image of the king as a natural leader among the nobility, and the need for him to act accordingly (Elias, 1987: 65; Duindam, 1995: 49-56).

The period studied in this article, encompassing the second half of the fifteenth century and the first half of the sixteenth century, has been described as quite favorable to social mobility within the kingdom (Pereira, 2003). Much of this paradigm may be explained by three aspects. First, the bureaucratic needs of the royal household, leading to recruitment from among non-noble ranks—a policy that had clear social consequences in the short term (Gomes, 2003: 16-55). Second, the opportunities prompted by maritime expansion, which allowed the second children of nobles to occupy administrative and military positions in the African outposts and, later, in the *Estado da Índia* (Boone, 1986). Lastly, marriage used in its political role as a means of forging alliances, raising social status, and even collecting magnanimous endowments (Cunha and Monteiro, 2010: 51-53).

Aside from the diversification of the services provided, due to an increase in opportunities, it is important to understand whether the concessions made to descendants, along with the solidarity ties at stake, would have worked as the main catalyst for social ascension, or if the most relevant factor was instead the investment made in client-patron interdependency, with considerable implications for the monarchy's political arena.

With these considerations and objectives in view, an analysis will be carried out regarding the marriage policy and the princely service of the Teles de Meneses at the Iberian courts across three generations, clarifying the family's behavior in the light of both the corresponding political context and the pursuit of titles of nobility, leading to an ever rising social status.

Political context

Before initiating this discussion, it is necessary to consider the centuries-old tradition of paying service to the crown, not only on the part of the Teles de Meneses family, but also on the part of other families who were similarly related to the Silva lineage. Indeed, the most remote ancestors of the Silvas, with branches existing in both Castile and Portugal, had been close to the Portuguese court's sphere of influence since at least the middle of the thirteenth century (Ventura, 2009: 216). During the rule of the Avis dynasty (from 1385 onwards), the various branches in the lineage usually provided royal service either to the royal household or to the newly established houses of the royal *infantes*, specifically to the dukedoms of Viseu-Beja and Coimbra. For instance, the support offered to *Infante* Pedro by Aires Gomes da Silva, the Lord of Vagos and head magistrate at the *Casa do Cível* (a high court of law), did not result in his being cast out from the royal sphere of influence, since Afonso V pardoned all defectors soon after the Battle of Alfarrobeira (1449), in which Pedro was defeated (Moreno, 1979: I, 659). After obtaining the royal pardon (1453), Aires and his sons were able to return to the court, having briefly regained some significant offices in the royal administration: one of the sons, Fernão Teles de Meneses, was allowed to inherit a substantial share of the jurisdictions his father had enjoyed (Freire, 1927: II, 51; Moreno, 1979: II, 1048).

Fernão possessed no title and enjoyed only a middle ranking within the hierarchy of nobles, but his close relationship with the court and the offices he occupied granted him some degree of influence at Afonso's court. This was enough for him and his descendants to earn rewards from the *fides* and the services carried out, in the form of highly coveted

courtly offices and even jurisdiction rights in the Portuguese Atlantic, a fertile ground yet to be explored (Riley, 1998: 152). Likewise, Fernão participated in various campaigns in North Africa, serving the king and *Infante* Fernando at al-Qsar as-Seghir (Alcácer-Ceguer, 1458), Tangiers (1463) and Asilah (1471) (Moreno, 1979: II, 1047-53). Historiography has highlighted the close affinity between Queen Isabel and Dona Beatriz de Meneses, the mother of Fernão Teles and her sometime chambermaid and maid of honor (Freire, 1927, II, 51-3). Several authors have approached the role of interpersonal relations and of the concept of fealty in supporting the way of life at the Early Modern court (Mousnier, 1982; Dedieu and Moutoukias, 1998). Perhaps this informal relationship between the two women was one of the reasons why Fernão was so swiftly readmitted to the royal court to enjoy significant benefits, among which were the positions of head steward to Queen Leonor, João II's consort, and chamberlain to Princess Joana (known as the *Excelente Senhora*).

As will soon become clear, these dynamics designed to safeguard power were a distinctive, underlying feature of the marriage policy implemented by the “founder” of this branch of the lineage, Fernão Teles de Meneses; they are also traceable in the continuous targeting of different spheres of power, as well as in the increasing diversity of the services performed.

Marriage policy

Table 1: Lineage and male line in the Teles de Meneses family (c. 1450-c. 1550)³

Generation	Average number of children per male heir	Average number of male heirs per male heir	Average number of legitimate children per male heir
1 st	6	4	6
2 nd	5	3.5	4.5
3 rd	3.7	2.9	3.1

Sources: GÓIS, 2014: 337-9; MORAIS, 1997: II, 445-55; GAYO, 1992: IX, 391-407; FREIRE, 1927: II, 73-105; FARIA, 1956: 127-9.

It is legitimate to say that, to a certain extent, the marriage policy implemented by the Teles de Meneses branch ever since its creation provided the conditions necessary for every second child to bear progeny. The lesser number of offspring in subsequent generations was prompted by variables such as a rise in male mortality rates (chiefly deriving from military duties carried out in North Africa) or their admission into the

³ Numbers include only the male line of the family, including illegitimate children.

military orders, which imposed vows of chastity and restrictions on marriage. To a certain extent, the latter variable can help us to understand the considerable fall in the number of legitimate offspring during the second and third generations of the family.

The substantial mortality rate of male heirs at the time, coupled with a tendency to give younger females away to a religious life, generally accounted for the concentration of wealth in the hands of only a few heirs, or even just one. This behavior was common to most families in the upper echelons of the nobility. However, in the lowest strata, to encourage the marriage of every descendant—even the female offspring—might prove to be the shrewdest strategy, since the meagerness of the family's assets would not compensate for their concentration in the hands of just one or a few individuals (Boone, 1986).

In the case of the Teles de Meneses family, their behavior regarding the marriage market reveals the adoption of two different strategies. On the one hand, the marriage options for the female offspring called for extreme care. Even in the third generation, marriage to members of the titled nobility did exist (see Tables 4 and 5), which contradicts the tendency for the second sons to embark on a religious career. On the other hand, ever since the first generation it had been common for male heirs of this family to be admitted to both the mendicant and the military orders (such was the case, for example, with Aires Teles of the first generation, and Jerónimo Teles of the third). The choice to integrate these men into such institutions is, apparently, indicative of a profile similar to that of the upper aristocracy, thus enabling the concentration of assets in the hands of the lowest possible number of children. The compulsory assignment of these resources, as imposed by their entailment (the *morgadio*) at the time of Maria de Vilhena in 1483, was ratified in 1504 by Rui Teles de Meneses, which also contributed to the adoption of the latter arrangement.⁴ Nonetheless, based on the information available, such actions may be considered ambivalent. In part, they reflected the ambitions of a family who, in spite of their proximity to the royal court and unlike some of their distant relatives, did not belong to the kingdom's highest nobility.

⁴ DGARQ/TT, LN, liv.18, fl. 290.

Table 2: Marriage policy applied to the direct offspring of Fernão Teles de Meneses (c. 1432-1477) and Maria de Vilhena – first generation.

Descendant	Consort	Social status	Social Mobility
André Teles	n/a	n/a	n/a
Rui Teles de Meneses	Guiomar de Noronha	Non-titled nobility	Identical
João de Vilhena	n/a	n/a	n/a
Aires Teles	n/a	n/a	n/a
Joana de Vilhena	João de Meneses	Titled nobility	Higher
Filipa de Vilhena	Nuno Martins de Silveira	Non-titled nobility	Identical

Sources: GOIS, 2014: 337; FREIRE, 1927: II, 76; GAYO, 1992: IX, 391; MORAIS, 1997: II, 445; FARIA, 1956: 127-8.

As shown in Table 2, all the offspring of Fernão Teles de Meneses married members of influential families at court (except for André Teles, João de Vilhena and Aires Teles, all of whom never married). The heir Rui Teles de Meneses (c. 1460-1528), the fourth Lord of Unhão, married Guiomar de Noronha, the daughter of Pêro de Noronha, João II's head steward and the Commander-in-Chief (*comendador-mor*) of the Order of St. James in Portugal (*Ordem de Santiago*). A similar alliance was to be noted in the marriages of Joana and Filipa de Vilhena, respectively, to Nuno Martins de Silveira, Queen Catarina's head steward, and João de Meneses, known as the *Conde-Prior* due to his accumulation of offices and titles. The strategy of attempting to maintain the family's offspring within the sphere of the court is quite clear. Let us now consider the situation of the following generation.

Table 3: Marriage policy applied to the direct offspring of Rui Teles de Meneses (c. 1460-1528) and Guiomar de Noronha – second generation.

Descendant	Consort	Social status	Social Mobility
Fernão Teles	n/a	n/a	n/a
Aires Teles	Inês de Noronha	Non-titled nobility	Identical
Manuel Teles de Meneses	Margarida de Vilhena	Non-titled nobility	Identical
Brás Teles	Catarina de Brito	Non-titled nobility	Identical
André Teles da Silva	Branca Coutinho	Non-titled nobility	Identical
Beatriz de Vilhena	Francisco de Portugal	Titled nobility	Higher
Teresa de Noronha	Luís Portocarrero	Titled nobility	Higher
Maria de Noronha	Francisco da Silva	Non-titled nobility	Identical

Sources: GOIS, 2014: 338; FREIRE, 1927: II, 80; GAYO, 1992: IX, 391; MORAIS, 1997: II, 445-6; FARIA, 1956: 128.

An analysis of Table 3 shows that such a trend continued to exist: the practice of marrying male heirs to the offspring of court officers was maintained, provided that those officers occupied either central administrative positions (such as Inês de Noronha's father, Álvaro de Castro, who was governor of the *Casa do Cível*) or positions in overseas territories (such as Rui Dias de Sousa, the governor of al-Qsar as-Seghir and the father of Branca Coutinho). On the other hand, great emphasis was placed on the matrimonial alliances of female descendants, since a number of marriages took place to men of higher social standing (for example, Francisco de Portugal, the first Count of Vimioso), or alternatively to nobles whose families were close to the court and/or were prominent figures within it (for example, to Francisco da Silva, a distant relative of the extended family). Regarding these matrimonial options, particular attention should be paid to the surrounding political context. As will be demonstrated later on, a key aspect for understanding the high rate of social mobility of the second children (in this case, the daughters of Rui Teles de Meneses) was the diversification of services provided by both men and women to the Iberian royal courts.

Table 4: Marriage policy applied to the direct offspring of Manuel Teles de Meneses (d. 1573) and Margarida de Vilhena – third generation⁵

Descendant	Consort	Social status	Social Mobility
Fernão Teles de Meneses	Maria de Castro	Non-titled nobility	Identical
Jerónimo Teles	n/a	n/a	n/a
Maria de Vilhena	Fernando de Noronha	Non-titled nobility	Identical
Joana de Vilhena	Afonso de Noronha	Titled nobility	Higher

Sources: GÓIS, 2014: 338; GAYO, 1992: IX, 391-2; FREIRE, 1927: II, 83-4; MORAIS, 1997: II, 446; FARIA, 1956: 128.

The marital unions recorded among the progeny of Manuel Teles de Meneses (d. 1573), the fifth Lord of Unhão, highlight the marriage policy practiced by their direct ancestors. Once again, the firstborn son (and potential heir) married the daughter of a court official (here, Jerónimo de Noronha), who served as lady-in-waiting to Queen Catarina, while the female children were married to similar or even higher-ranking gentlemen. Such was the case with Joana de Vilhena, who married Afonso de Noronha, the fifth Count of Odemira.

⁵ The decision was made to consider only the legitimate children for the purposes of this article: the number of illegitimate children is unclear, with Gayo reporting two male children, Morais one, and the *Livro de Linhagens do século XVI* none whatsoever.

It is, however, important to point out that such patterns were not exclusive to the progeny of the heir to the jurisdictions, lands and entailed property of the lordship of Unhão. There is evidence that this policy applied more widely within the family branch, as it was followed by all the descendants, despite slight variations depending on the available marriage options and the opportunities resulting from the services being rendered at court or overseas. The lineage of the following descendants emphasizes this idea: considering the offspring of André Teles da Silva (or Teles de Meneses, depending on the author), we can see a marriage policy that was simultaneously conservative—as far as social status was concerned—and expansive.

Table 5: Marriage policy applied to the direct offspring of André Teles da Silva (d. 1562) and Branca Coutinho – third generation

Descendant	Consort	Social status	Social Mobility
Rui Teles da Silva Coutinho	Leonor de Manrique	Non-titled nobility	Identical
Paulo da Silva	n/a	n/a	n/a
Brás Teles	n/a	n/a	n/a
Aires Teles de Meneses	Brites de Aragão	Non-titled nobility	Identical
Bernardim Teles	n/a	n/a	n/a
Manuel Teles Coutinho	n/a	n/a	n/a
Lourenço Teles Meneses da Silva	Joana de Moncada	Titled nobility	Higher
Guiomar de Vilhena	Fradique de Toledo	Titled nobility	Higher
Maria Coutinho	Lopo de Alarcão	Non-titled nobility	Identical
Beatriz Coutinho	Vasco da Gama	Non-titled nobility	Identical

Sources: GÓIS, 2014: 339; MORAIS, 1997: II, 453; FREIRE, 1927: II, 80-1; GAYO, 1992: IX, 405-6; FARIA, 1956: 129.

The family's propensity for promoting marriages with Castilian families is noteworthy. By proceeding in this way, the family was attempting not only to conserve its social status, but if possible to enhance it. This increment in the matrimonial market should not, however, be seen merely as a consequence of the mobility of servants from the houses of the royal princes, such as the departure of Rui Teles de Meneses, fourth Lord of Unhão, to Castile, to serve in the entourage of Empress Isabel. The protection gained from becoming part of this entourage was considered to be a major advantage in the plethora of marriage arrangements. One should also bear in mind that Teresa de Noronha was later to marry Luis Portocarrero, the second Count of Palma. However, considering the marriage options available, the evidence indicates that this was an alternative solution. Indeed, Rui Teles de Meneses had attempted to arrange the marriage of this daughter of his to Alfonso

Téllez, the heir to the Marquisate of Villena. The direct assistance of Emperor Charles V suggests that the crown was, at least, interested in ensuring that Teresa de Noronha married a man who would be worthy of the Empress's lady-in-waiting status. In this case, the political purpose of the marriage arrangement was to promote the family's relations with its Castilian counterpart, considered at the time to be among the great noble houses of Castile and Aragon (the so-called *Grandees*). When the arrangement failed, Rui Teles had to seek an alternative.⁶

The ties established abroad arose from the opportunity and interest in marrying offspring (especially second children) to members of a socially or hierarchically well-positioned family. While there was a tendency to maintain homogamy in political marriages in the case of male descendants, the marriage policy for women was one of hypergamy. This explains why Guiomar Vilhena, the daughter of André Teles da Silva, married Fradique Toledo, the high steward of the household of Prince Carlos and the son of the third Count of Alva de Liste. There were also, naturally, some exceptions to this tendency. The marriage of Lourenço Teles Meneses da Silva, the son of André Teles da Silva, to Joana de Moncada (or Mendonça) may be understood as one such case in which the acquisition of titles through marriage was directly related to the occupation of high office, with all of its subsequent rewards.

The court and the granting of offices and titles

Table 6: Number of offices and titles granted to the Teles de Meneses family, per generation (c. 1450-c. 1590)⁷

Generation	CORH	RAO	OVO	EMB	CMO	EO	T
1 st	3	1	1	0	1	1	0
2 nd	4	2	2	1	3	1	0
3 rd	7	7	8	1	8	1	1

Caption: CORH = Chief offices in the royal household (including the princes' households); RAO = Royal administration offices; OVO = Overseas offices; EMB = Embassies; CMO = Commanderships of the military orders; EO = Ecclesiastic offices; T = Titles.

In general terms, the growing number of offices that were granted (Table 6) can be explained by the previously mentioned factors: the increased bureaucracy associated with the royal administrative structures, and the additional opportunities opened up by the

⁶ AGS, *Est.*, Leg. 2-1, fl. 174; Leg. 2-2, fl. 397.

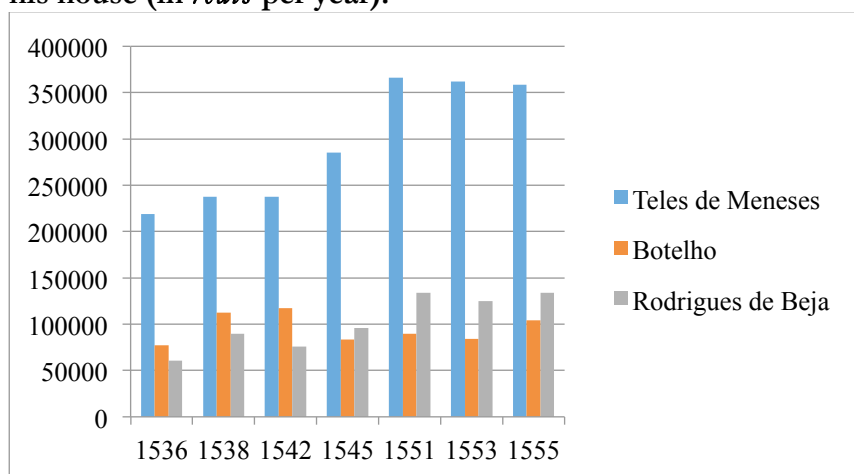
⁷ Only the offices and titles bestowed upon the male line are contemplated here.

overseas expansion. The second and third generations of the family, in particular, benefited from the need to empower the households of Manuel I's children, elevating the family members to the higher echelons within the hierarchy. This allowed them to build upon their pre-existing influence by populating these various structures with their descendants and relatives. Furthermore, the family took full advantage of the overseas offices granted to them, since by the third generation they had obtained a high number of posts in the administrative structures of North Africa and the *Estado da Índia*, serving as captains, captains-general and even as governors/viceroy. Services were also rewarded through the granting of commandships of the military orders. Indeed, the granting of positions in the military orders of Avis, Christ and St. James is clearly notable from the third generation onwards (Olival, 1988: II, 463-4), which were slightly higher in number than the positions granted within the Order of Malta and other foreign military institutions, such as the Order of Alcántara in Castile, which provided Lourenço Teles da Silva with a commandship.

Both the male and the female progeny of Rui Teles de Meneses tend to fit into this pattern of diversification. Rui, the head of the family, must have been extremely influential within the court, as he succeeded in placing all of his four subsequent children within the court's institutional sphere or in households related to it, thus promoting the preservation of his lineage within such circles of power. This was particularly clear in the house of *Infante Luís*, where Rui Teles guaranteed his sons positions: Brás Teles "inherited" the offices of provost (*guarda-mor*) and high chamberlain (*camareiro-mor*); André Teles was appointed the high steward (*mordomo-mor*); and António Teles was granted the office of head chaplain (*capelão-mor*).⁸ It should be noted that, in institutional terms and when taken together, the spaces which these men oversaw—the chamber, the hall and the chapel—represented an astonishing platform of influence and power, providing significant access to this prince as master of the household, and conditioning his capacity to allocate patronage. This confirms the tendency of this family to firmly establish itself in the above-mentioned social structure, with the offspring being appointed to key domestic sectors.

⁸ DGARQ/TT, CDM, *Doações...*, liv.36, fl. 66v; DGARQ/TT, CDJ, *Próprios*, liv.47, fl. 120; DGARQ/TT, CDJ, *Próprios*, liv.51, fl. 77v. The remuneration considered refers to subsidies of various types, paid every two or three months, either in kind or in cash.

Chart 1: Total amounts paid by *Infante* Luís to the three foremost family groups of his house (in *reais* per year).



Sources: DGARQ/TT, CR, NA, livs. 177-186.

The payments in question (see Chart 1) might not relate exclusively to services carried out at court. On many occasions, gifts made directly by the prince, or under his influence, came in the form of administrative, fiscal, and military offices. As far as this family is concerned, sizeable grants include those made by *Infante* Luís to André Teles da Silva and Brás Teles, appointed respectively as governors (*alcaldes-mor*) of Covilhã, and Seia and Moura. The inclination to regard offices such as these as a family legacy is equally clear, at least from the second quarter of the sixteenth century onward. João Gomes da Silva, the son of Brás Teles, “inherited” the position of governor of Seia from his father, keeping the office in the family until the period of the restoration of Portuguese independence, in 1640. Brás de Teles’ firstborn son, Rui Teles de Meneses (named after his grandfather), would be granted the office—held by his father before him—of governor of Moura. André Teles’ firstborn son, Rui Teles de Meneses Coutinho (named after his cousin and grandfather) would also be appointed governor, just like his father, a position which in turn was passed on to his offspring (Gayo, 1992: 394, 406; Sousa, 1947: 335).

The inclusion of Rui Teles de Meneses’ progeny in the entourage escorting Princess Isabel to Castile, upon her marriage to Carlos V, may have benefited from the affinity between Isabel and Guiomar de Noronha. Indeed, Rui Teles de Meneses’ wife had been summoned to the palace very early on in her life (1504), in order to take part in the princess’s upbringing.⁹ Not only did this turn into a huge advantage for Guiomar, it also especially benefitted her female descendants, who were shown priority among the women eligible for inclusion in Isabel’s entourage. Despite the attempts to remove Portuguese

⁹ DGARQ/TT, CC, Parte I, mc. 4, n° 60.

officials from the empress's household through the appointment of prominent Castilian nobles to the highest positions there (Labrador Arroyo, 2005), Isabel's grandson, Rui Gomes da Silva, was able to establish himself at court, thanks to his proximity to Prince Felipe (later, Felipe II), thus improving his social standing in a remarkable way, having been shown favoritism and granted various titles (Boyden, 1995). To a certain extent, such an influence would even benefit Rui's brothers. For example, Fernando Teles da Silva served Filipe II in Milan, became governor of Asti, and married Juana de Moncada, the Marchioness of Favara (Álvarez-Ossorio Alvariño, 2001: 87). In addition to the services provided at the households of the various princes, the family never ceased to render services directly to the king. These services were rewarded through fixed regular payments and miscellaneous graces and favors, with family members enjoying the rank of *fidalgos da Casa Real*—noblemen of the royal household.

One should also highlight the overseas interest of some family members, whether participating in colonial settlements or benefiting from colonial trade. Such was the case with Brás Teles de Meneses, who in 1524 was authorized to keep 3,200 *arrobas* (approximately 106 lb) of sugar from Madeira and to sell it abroad, exempt from the payment of duties (the *dízima*) to the crown. That such transactions had already taken place beforehand is known from the fact that Brás Teles de Meneses authorized his representative, Manuel Carvalho, to ship a similar amount of this product to Venice, where it would be sold.¹⁰ Though we cannot be certain about the exact profits from this business, there is evidence of a subsequent attempt to expand it to Brazil, since, in 1541, Brás Teles de Meneses was granted some land in the captaincy of Espírito Santo, by the captain-major at the time, Vasco Fernandes Coutinho.¹¹ From a broader perspective, the grant may relate to the royal approval (by Afonso V, in 1474) of the purchase of the island of Flores (in the Azores), together with its lordship rights, from João de Teive by Brás' grandfather, Fernão Teles de Meneses. Fernão was given ownership of the domain of Sete Cidades (also in the Azores) as well as any territories discovered by him, excluding those around the Guinea region (Meneses, 2005: III, 243-260). Although granted at different periods, both jurisdictional rights reflect the involvement of some family members in colonial endeavors, thus enhancing the social status of the Teles de Meneses family, while meeting the crown's need for maritime exploration and the settlement of newly conquered territories.

¹⁰ DGARQ/TT, CC, Parte I, mç. 31, n° 46; Parte II, mç. 118, n° 116.

¹¹ DGARQ/TT, CDJ, *Doações...*, liv. 47, fl. 1.

That mutual support was exercised between members of the family regardless of their proximity in terms of kinship is noticeable from the assignments they carried out on behalf of their lords. During Catarina of Austria's regency, there is evidence of favors requested by André Teles de Meneses for his son, during the latter's employment as an ambassador in Castile and Rome, and until his death in 1562. As a reward for those services, the regent Catarina promised to grant Aires Teles, André's son, the command of a fortress in India.¹² The choice of André Teles as an ambassador to Castile was far from being an innocent one: in the 1530s, he had already been sent as an envoy of *Infante* Luís to the Castilian court, to discuss the latter's private business.¹³ It may, therefore, be concluded that the prior experience of André Teles, taken together with the social capital that he was gradually able to acquire, justify his mandate for the crown, André keeping his role as a facilitator of communications between the two courts.

Another broad implication of this analysis is that Rui Gomes da Silva, Prince of Eboli and Duke of Pastrana, also used his position to influence the granting of commanderies to his kinsmen in Portugal.¹⁴ Assuming that arrangements of this type were widespread, it can be inferred that interpersonal relationships, in addition to a thoughtful marriage policy, facilitated the establishment of a platform for family power, whose profits were shared among the various family members. An intricate web of informal contacts also fed such a platform, working on both sides of the border, where family members used their privileges of greater access to the prince in order to promote this system.

Conclusions

As historians have stated, the diversification of the services provided to the crown was a crucial factor in guaranteeing the sustainability and even the expansion of aristocratic lineages in the process of upward social mobility, particularly when considering that such mobility was very common during the period under analysis (Cunha, 2009). In the particular case of the Teles de Meneses family, this diversification was not achieved merely through the several individual actions performed by its members over a considerable period of time—namely holding prominent offices at the royal household and the princes'

¹² DGARQ/TT, CC, Parte I, mç. 104, fl. 87. Letter of André Teles de Meneses to Queen Catarina [Toledo, 1561-03-12].

¹³ AGS, *Est.*, Leg. 369, fl. 123.

¹⁴ DGARQ/TT, CC, Parte I, mç. 108, n° 57. Letter from Rui Gomes da Silva to Queen Catarina, requesting the commandery of Ulme for his nephew, João de Saldanha [Madrid, 1567-5-25].

households and important positions in both the central and the colonial administrations; serving in diplomatic missions; and holding military posts. The family also invested in the close relationships arising from its service to other sovereigns. Additionally, advantages were obtained from the political support that the various members of the extended family permitted each other. As an example, consider the actions of Rui Gomes da Silva, who, in recommending grants for his *fidalgo* cousins in the royal household, overlooked the political strife between the partisans of Catarina and those supporting the regency of Henrique, during the minority of King Sebastião.

If we consider the earning of titles as another possible goal within the lineage, only the “Castilian” branch of the family was successful (as Rui Gomes da Silva, Fernando Teles, or Lourenço Teles da Silva proved). Due to a number of different factors, the family members who served in Portuguese courts experienced a slower development in their upward mobility process. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, they never accomplished the same level of gains as those achieved by their distant relatives, who actively took part in the maritime expansion and in courtly service (Cunha, 2009).

Ironically, to a certain extent, the regular services provided by members of the family at the household of *Infante* Luís were to hinder the social progress of several individuals, since this prince was not himself successful in promoting his own particular standing. Neither did the attachment of those individuals to the crown do much for their status. Although this is still unproven, it seems likely that competition for the king’s patronage was much fiercer at the royal court than it was in the princes’ households. The latter had fewer resources to offer when compared to the crown.

Apart from the patterns demonstrated so far, there are also other conclusions to be drawn. A political interpretation may be made, based, for instance, on the family’s behavior during the dynastic crisis of 1580. Some historians have found it difficult to explain the reasons why Fernão Teles de Meneses, the governor of Portuguese India, was so eager to proclaim his allegiance to Filipe II (sworn in as the new king in 1581) before leaving Goa. His hesitation had been due to the close relationship between himself, his father (Brás Teles de Meneses) and *Infante* Luís, in addition to his being, quite plausibly, sympathetic to the cause of the latter’s illegitimate son, António, the Prior of Crato. Essentially, the family’s behavior and the mutual support network connecting its members—even the most remote ones—may help to explain their preference for serving with the Castilian king. Some authors have already highlighted the probable conversations between Rui Teles de Meneses, the second governor of Moura (and the brother of Fernão Teles de Meneses),

and Cristóvão de Moura, concerning their eventual support for Filipe II's claim to the Portuguese throne (*Colectión*, 1845: VI, 294). For some, such clues have been enough to place the family as supporters of Filipe II's cause (Sampaio, 1921: 15-6). Yet, considering the diversity of offices performed at the various Iberian royal courts, it is very much to be expected that family alliances prevailed over the bonds of allegiance and fidelity to the prince being served. In spite of the many rewards accumulated over time from the Portuguese crown, the princes' households (particularly those of Isabel and Luís), and the offices held at the central and overseas administrations, in the end it was the will of the family which carried most weight when the time came to make a decision. This implied shifting their allegiance and services to Filipe II, since he would probably be in a better place to reward the family members for their support. Likewise, patriarchal power would be reinforced in terms of both decision-making within the family and the planning of their descendants' future, considering the interests of the lineage (Frigo, 1985).

The existence of a coherent family strategy for the period studied here is open to discussion. Nevertheless, the arguments previously stressed regarding marriage policy and the political solidarity among its members leads one to think that, at least in the time of Rui Teles de Meneses, the fifth Lord of Unhão, and his descendants, family interests were taken into serious consideration. In fact, the strategy mentioned here does not differ considerably from that of other case studies from the same period, such as the Meneses or the Cunhas (Cunha, 2009). It was based on the premise of maximizing what the matrimonial market could offer, especially to daughters and some second sons, a strategy attributed to families that did not belong to the highest nobility (Boone, 1986: 867). Alternative ways of guaranteeing social mobility to descendants other than the first-born came in the form of courtly service. Hence, arranged marriages, accompanied by services rendered through offices at court and overseas, were part of a typical path of social ascension. From that viewpoint, the behavior of the Teles de Meneses family before 1580 was decisive for its future success in the noble hierarchy, always taking advantage of the current political context and profiting from it.

Abbreviations:

AGS: Archivo General de Simancas

CC: Corpo Cronológico

CDJ: Chancelaria de D. João III

CDM: Chancelaria de D. Manuel I

CR: Casa Real

DGARQ/TT: Direcção Geral dos Arquivos/Torre do Tombo

Est: Estado

Fl: Folio

Leg: Legajo

LN: Leitura Nova

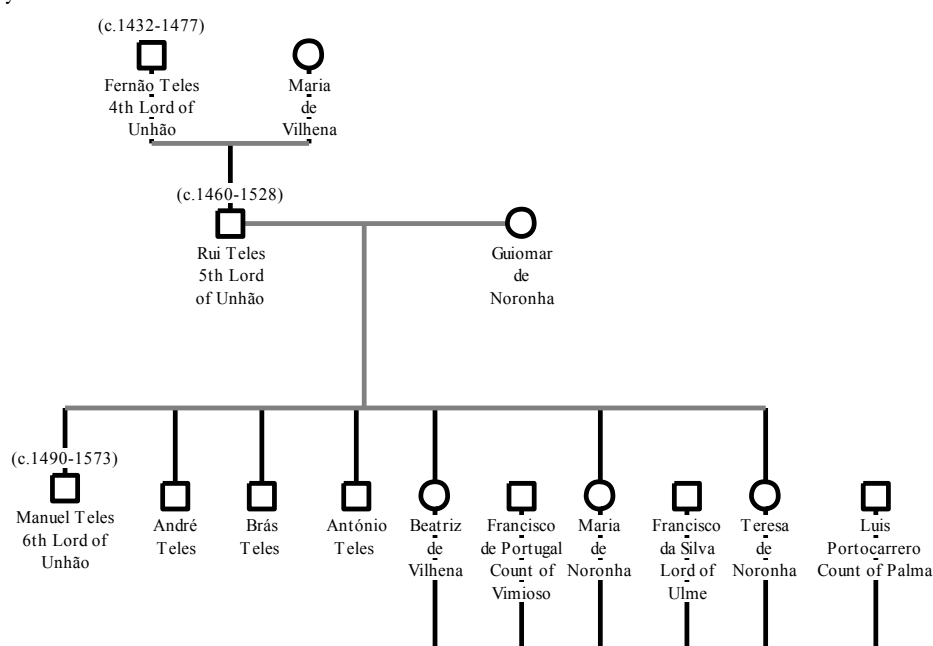
Mç: Maço

Nº: Número

NA: Núcleo Antigo

Attachments:

Attachment 1: Simplified genealogy of the first two generations of the Teles de Meneses family



Sources: GÓIS, 2014: 338; GAYO, 1992: IX: 391; MORAIS, 1997: II, 445-6. The heads of household are identified by the title Lord of Unhão.

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