

Family genealogical records: cleansing and social reception (Portugal - 16th to 18th century) *

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Abstract

This study looks at the importance of genealogical knowledge during the Early Modern Era in Portugal, and the way in which it influenced the various interests that marked everyday social life, not only in the field of the appraisals that were necessary for a person to hold a title in the courts, but also in regard to the ennoblement mechanisms and the economy of reward (*economia da mercê*). Thus, the activity of genealogists became incisive and prominent during a period in which it was deemed vital to prove purity of blood and nobility for appearance's sake, paying great attention to origin, birth and kinship. It therefore does not come as a surprise that such activity was to have quite an impact, nor that such widespread manipulation and abuse should arise from it.

Keywords

genealogical literature, genealogists, family records, nobility and "purity of blood", Inquisition

Resumo

O presente estudo reflecte sobre a importância do conhecimento genealógico, durante a Idade Moderna, em Portugal e o modo como influiu nos vários interesses que marcavam o quotidiano social, tanto no domínio das provanças e habilitações junto dos tribunais que inquiriam honra, como nos mecanismos nobilitantes e na economia da mercê. A actividade dos genealogistas tornou-se, desse modo, incisiva e marcante num período em que provar limpeza de sangue e nobreza eram vitais para um jogo de aparências cujas regras tinham em grande atenção as origens, o nascimento e a parentela. Desse modo, não é de estranhar, o impacto conseguido por esta actividade, bem como as manipulações e abusos a que deu lugar.

Palavras-chave

literatura genealógica, genealogistas, arquivos de família, nobreza e "limpeza de sangue", Inquisição

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Introduction

In a highly stratified society – which was the case with the Iberian Peninsula for several centuries – where the question of a person’s family origin was of immense importance. Thus, from an early stage, the need to preserve the splendor of the most important families was understood and a person’s origins were registered in a specific book so that they would not lose their social and political meaning. This was the case with the old *Nobiliário do Conde Dom Pedro* (the peerage book of Count Dom Pedro from Barcelos), which was written in the first half of the 14th century by a member of the Portuguese royal family and served as an Iberian model for many other books of lineage that were written later. Many of these were written because the need to (re)build genealogical records of families became widespread and increasingly important within Iberian society, especially from the 16th and 17th centuries onwards. But such interest also had deeply embedded sociological roots. This situation, on the other hand, could not be separated from the ennoblement processes that – in various European political units – provided a constant link between the established powers and the emerging patronage.

This all took place within a context where special concern was given, amongst other things, to enhancing one’s “purity of blood”, creating aspects of a general nature that would lend one’s family a rather specific seal. In this way, genealogical literature took on a relevant role in the conception of social paths and became a “tool” that was in daily use.

The possession, exchange and circulation of genealogical and lineage data, where influences were vital and favors were exchanged, became an obsession, resulting in situations of conflict and, at times, of complete rupture, which explains not only the sort of collective frenzy that invaded various social classes, but also its evident and persistent continuity until the mid-18th century. By this time, the enthusiasm for this kind of literature had given rise to such paroxysms that Dom António Caetano de Sousa (1674-1759) was led to acknowledge, in a rather annoyed tone, that it was a time in which everyone wrote about their families (Sousa, 1735: I, p. CII)

However, at the time, it was not only the importance of the origin and purity of one’s lineage that one sought to demonstrate. Alliances that tended to enhance the family image that was to be shown to the outside world were equally important. The aim was not only to achieve recognition and social esteem, but also to create an aristocratic *ethos*, even if the truth had to be slightly distorted in order to attain this, which is quite visible in the makeovers that many genealogies were subject to, with specific objectives and purposes leading to an undeniable *curiosi honorum*. Nevertheless, this recognition was sporadically called into question, causing some stigmatizing embarrassment, especially amidst the institutions that conferred honor.

Genealogical literature, ancestral records, antiquity, “purity of blood” and everyday life: expectations and (dis)illusions

The importance of genealogical literature within the scope of Iberian Modernity, even though its more obscure aspects were frequently called into question, is measured by the success that it obtained within both the sociological and the political sphere. Enrique Soria Mesa draws attention to its irrefutably cultural nature, further suggesting that, in a certain way, the Ancien Régime was indebted to it and, at the same time, considering genealogy to be “uno de los más destacados instrumentos del poder para adecuar teoría y realidad” (one of the most important tools for fitting theory to reality) (Soria, 2004: 22). From whatever angle it is viewed, genealogy undeniably played a leading role in social accreditation mechanisms, with its field of action and influence expanding according to people’s expectations and... needs. The areas in which genealogy exerted an influence were, in fact, manifold, varying from the merely symbolic to the more material ones. This explains the secret of its longevity. It is a sort of “passport” for people on the move, whether directed towards ensuring the primacy of lands or leading to even greater things. In general, it would meet all expectations, safeguarding appearances and allowing for reasonable flexibility between aspiration and reality. This explains why so many authors, some of whom remained impartial in their knowledge, maintained mythical and imaginary origins in their *nobiliários*, fuelled by great fantasy and insisting on a genealogical lineage whose formation would not be able to withstand a critical analysis or even the application of elementary good sense. But what importance could this have if, as traditional conceptions indicated, true nobility lay in one’s lineage

and the older this was the greater was one's nobility? Therefore a distant and even long forgotten ancestry of Gothic or Roman lineage was particularly valued. A fashionable expression that was frequently to be found in treatises written about the nobility of the Iberian space – “of a known manor house” – showed exactly this, enhancing a family's ancestry by referring to them as *fidalgos* / *hidalgos*. In this way, *genealogical records and antiquity of lineage* formed a binomial that was as much sought after as another that would later arise: *nobility and “purity of blood”*.

In fact, both were based on misleading suppositions, associating distinct realities. While, on the one hand, the existence of genealogical records, which could even be recent, was able to withstand the presumption of antiquity, on the other hand, being an old Christian did not imply nobility by birth and vice-versa. In other words, the fact that one was born into a noble family did not mean that one was necessarily “pure”. Of course, this all depended on the concept of “purity” defended by the institutions that assessed it. Under such illusions, many applicants for posts within the Inquisition were left feeling embittered, a sensation that would frequently persist for a long time. A paradigmatic case is provided by the Counts of Pombeiro, who ironically became victims of their own genealogical records – a mistake of an ancestor who had lived three hundred years before – and had to dispute, over three generations, their right to a modest habit of *familiar* agent of the Inquisition in a process that dragged on from 1693 to 1759, finally attaining it practically past the limit of decency. In other words, they achieved their position at a time when the royal charter that was to eradicate the distinction between new Christians and old Christians was being prepared (1773). So, it was not just a coincidence that there was a certain sheet of paper featuring the date of the beginning of the application process and annexed to this same document, in which the Marquis of Pombal ordered the inquisitor Rodrigo de Lencastre to pass by his house on the following day in order to deal with a very serious matter...¹

In fact, this association of words derived more from a stereotyped reality than from the actual perception and impression of the institutions. It came from a common understanding based on a sociological notion – the prototype of the old Christian nobleman / *hidalgo cristiano viejo*, who combined a mixture of ethnographic elements of nobility with the values of the Counter-Reformation, an *ethos* that embodied the essence of the cultural tradition of Hispanic Christianity (Contreras, 1992: 19). This stood in contrast to an inverse *ethos*, or, in other words, it was in opposition to a recent construction, namely the so-called “*identidad conversa*” (opposite identity – Hernández Franco, 2004: 515/41). It was between 1540 and 1550 that in Castile the “purity of lineage” was replaced, within the “*pleitos de hidalguía*” (attempts made by private individuals to prove their nobility), by information about “purity of blood” (Parello, 1999: 149). This proves that nobility and “purity of blood” were two distinct concepts, and even when they did coincide they did so accidentally. However, the dismantling of this line of reasoning was only observed in Portugal later on, and in a somewhat dubious manner, when ironically many people used the courts to falsely claim “purity of blood” and even forged official letters in order to inherit a title of nobility that was not in fact theirs. It should be stressed that registration and affiliation within the legal sphere of the royal house did not require the need to show evidence of old Christianity in any of the four grandparents. It was just vaguely implicit both in the contents of the legislation and in the current practices of that time. This statement is made, of course, bearing in mind the contents of the regulations governing the post of *Mordomo-Mor* (chamberlain to the royal court) in 1572, in which only the *quality* of the applicants, their parents and grandparents were mentioned. These same regulations ordered that investigatory proceedings should be undertaken either at the places where the applicants originated from or where they resided, but only in those cases that raised doubts as to the identity or quality of the participants². In 1581, the changes made to these regulations contained a minimal reference to “purity of blood” and ten years later, in 1591, another royal decree insisting on the need for proof only mentioned how investigations should be carried out, without in any way altering the contents³.

A similar legal procedure to that of the “*pleitos de hidalguía*” was adopted for the concession of the letter granting the right to a coat of arms. So, upon request of the interested parties, the process was prepared by the “*corregidores*” (judges for civil proceedings), who would listen to the witnesses confirming the social quality of the applicant, by declaring whether he “lived according to the rules of nobility”, leading a decent and comfortable life and ... very little more. All this took place without the formality of having to provide the so-called “positive evidence”, documentary or otherwise, which was provided in Castile, where offences were also numerous. Whether these

processes were really necessary is rather dubious, due to the ease with which approval was obtained, especially in the 18th century (S. Payo, 1969), and the poor reasoning that was frequently presented in order to justify both the noble quality of the new *armigerado* (person entitled to heraldic arms) and his ancestry. It was in this field that the genealogists intervened, directly or indirectly, placing their quill pens and knowledge of lineages at the service of the interested party and elaborating the family tree, in some cases forging it without any problem, by claiming the person to be the descendant of a certain family or lineage. This explains the verbosity of the genealogical lesson presented in so many letters of “coats of arms of nobility and *fidalguidade*”, especially during the baroque period. The search for this type of letter by a significant number of people aimed at diminishing or even overcoming obstacles that would hinder their full social integration. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that holders of such letters would hurry to have them registered in the municipal books of the places where they lived, of which there are many examples. These same letters also enabled their holders to benefit from certain tax exemptions. And there was yet another rather obvious advantage: by publicly confirming their holders’ personal and family qualities, they would generalize their blood issues. And even though the memory of certain abuses still lingered on in the minds of people, to the point of hindering other integration processes (the case of the *familiaturas* (the elite group of “*familiars*”) of the Inquisition, for example), the fact that there was legitimate and publicly expressed social recognition could mitigate the negative effects.

The 1685 *Junta*: notes on an (im)probable “uneasiness”

The need felt by some sectors to carry out a tighter social control, designed to safeguard principles strongly linked to the idea of *fidalgos*/old Christian, became quite evident in certain situations. Because of this, the disclosure of certain genealogical works, such as the *Nobiliário de Dom Tivisco Nasao Zarco y Colona*, was forbidden, as was the printing of others, such as the *Nobreza de Portugal* by Dr. Diogo de Melo Pereira, a manuscript dating back to 1604⁴. Similarly, criticism fell upon those who, by weakening the more exalted and conservative conception of the noble stratum opened up new social horizons. An example of this is the deliberately hostile reception given by the Theatine and prestigious academic scholar (he was a distinguished member of the *Real Academia da História*) Dom António Caetano de Sousa to the *Pedatura Lusitana*, written by the judge of the court of justice, Cristovão Alão de Moraes (1632-1693). Based on the work, he accused the author of not having had “*intensão muy recta (...) porque escreveo sem escolha, de pessoas desconhecidas, e que não devião entrar em Nobiliário e (...) sòmente para deslustrar humas e outras as meteo entre as Famílias illustres, e nobres*” (Sousa, 1735: LXXI). It could well have been precisely this that led to the creation, in 1685, of a board or *Junta* of Ministers of State, set up to handle issues pertaining both to the *Torre do Tombo* (the national archives) and to genealogy. It was not by sheer chance that this fact coincided chronologically with the *Puritan* period, understood by historiography as deriving from the commitment of the Brotherhood of the *Santíssimo Sacramento de Santa Engrácia*, founded in 1663 and establishing that only “old Christians without ever denoting otherwise” could belong to it. This event in itself did not have much significance, but within the context of other brotherhoods and within the context of the period it assumed greater relevance because its members included the houses of the nobility of the court. In relation to this period, importance has been attached to a report dating back to 1684, in which the French ambassador described the atmosphere in great detail, but historiography has paid very little or no attention at all to the existence of the aforesaid *Junta*. However, the constitution of this board was not just a matter of mere coincidence. At the very head of the table sat the Grand Inquisitor Archbishop Dom Veríssimo de Lencastre, himself an expert on issues pertaining to families, who “*honrou muito aos genealogicos mayores do seu tempo*”⁵ (Sousa, 1735: LXXXII) and, it is believed that he influenced the path followed by the Inquisition with regard to the examinations of “purity of blood”. At his side were the Marquis of Arronches, Henrique de Sousa Tavares, and the Viscount of Vila Nova de Cerveira, Dom João de Lima e Vasconcelos Brito Nogueira, both representatives of two of the houses that were closely related to the *Puritan* group, which had long resisted any alliances with “contaminated” families (Monteiro, 1998: 1345). The *Junta* also comprised the judge of the court of justice João de Roxas de Azevedo, *chanceler-mor* (head chancellor) of the Kingdom, member of the Mesa da Consciência’s court and of the Inquisition, Martim Monteiro Paim, also a member of the Holy Office, the one that was “*reteudo no mosteiro de Sta. Cruz e ahi processado, por hauer ditto algumas palavras*

indecorosas contra a santidade do Papa Innocencio X e os srs. Cardeas na occasião q se annullou o alvara q elrey Dom João 4º havia mandado passar a favor das confiscações dos xx.nn. prezos e condenados pela Inquisição”⁶ and his brother the Secretary of State Roque Monteiro Paim (1643-1706), *juiz da Inconfidência*, (*judge for cases of treason against the Crown*), as well as the author of *Perfídia Judaica*, a book of great anti-Semitic virulence. All of the above were fully acquainted with genealogy, a subject in which they were well versed, with the exception of perhaps Dr. João de Roxas. This *Junta* then decided that it would be extremely convenient to have “huma reduçãõ de livros genealogicos a hum só, a que se desse crédito para se guardar na dita torre”⁷. In other words, “hum livro (...) que tivesse fé, para que assim nas materias graves se tirassem as duvidas, e ficasse arrancada a sizania, que se tem semeado em livros de Familias”⁸ (Sousa, idem: XXX). It is not at all difficult to envisage the impact of such a measure, especially within the specific context of “purity of blood”. But how would this *Junta* determine that single *corpus*, which would be capable of applying laws to such a sensitive issue and, furthermore, would then take on the nature of a binding opinion? The consensus, at least amongst the members of the *Junta*, favored the adoption of the *Livro de Linhagens* of Damião de Góis, which would be continued through the works of Gaspar Álvares de Louzada, the Archbishop Dom Rodrigo da Cunha, Gaspar de Faria Severim and Ruy Correia Lucas. It is worth paying some attention to this proposal, which, although no more than an announced intention, received little support for its realization. The work of Damião de Góis gave continuity to the book of *Conde Dom Pedro*, and in the genealogical sphere it was referred to as a work of reference, later annotated by others in copies that still exist today⁹. However, a mystery still lived on.

The original work, kept in the national archives of the *Torre do Tombo*, was still there in 1622, but it then disappeared after the death of Diogo de Castilho Coutinho, its *guarda-mor* (chief warder) and the nephew of the Grand Inquisitor Dom Pedro de Castilho (†1613). Copies were made before its disappearance and one was authenticated by Diogo Coutinho, and handed by royal order to the Marquis of Castelo Rodrigo, which many years later came into the hands of Dom Manuel Caetano de Sousa (1658-1734). (Sousa, idem: XIX)¹⁰. It is mentioned in the genealogical section of many letters of coat of arms, both in the 17th and 18th centuries, which proves its acceptance amongst experts. The second “*oráculo*” (oracle), Gaspar Álvares de Louzada, who was for many years a registrar at the *Torre do Tombo* – in reality from 1612, but officially only from 1618 – left behind a memory of controversy. The scholars Braamcamp Freire (1904: 483) and Machado de Faria (1932/4: 366/393) acknowledge his ability to work, his talent and his effort and enthusiasm as a researcher of sources. On the other hand, the paleographer João Pedro Ribeiro (1758-1839), stricter and more critical, accuses him of forging documents, adulterating originals and having a tendency to disclose false information, all this due to the absolute lack of rigor in his work. (Ribeiro, 1828). Archbishop Dom Rodrigo da Cunha, a former governor of the Kingdom, very learned and respected by other writers, recognized his sound knowledge of genealogy. Whether it was his own or someone else’s, the truth is that he is known to have asked to borrow the *Nobiliário* of Fr. Tomé de Faria, and never returned it. The latter, who was Bishop of Targa and assistant to Archbishop Dom Miguel de Castro, inquisitor, member of the general council (*Conselho Geral*) of the Inquisition and Viceroy of Portugal from 1615 onwards, wrote about 40 families. As far as the other names chosen by the *Junta* are concerned, Gaspar de Faria Severim, a secular official of the Inquisition in 1624, had been the secretary of Mercês, and left a *Nobiliário de Familias do Reino de Portugal*, composed of various volumes.

It would not be in any way absurd to think that his inclusion might not be entirely unconnected with the ties of kinship and relationships maintained by the Severim family in Subserra, the place where the judge João de Roxas had a farmstead, which he had inherited from his aunt Bárbara de Vasconcelos¹¹. This relationship was referred to in one of the manuscripts left by Gaspar’s uncle, a *chantre* (precentor) of Évora, Manuel Severim de Faria. On the other hand, the Count of Vimieiro, Dom Sancho of Faro, who was the *vedor* (inspector) of the Queen Mariana d’Áustria, was Gaspar Severim’s grandson. Finally, the last writer chosen, Ruy Correia Lucas, of the *Conselho del Rei*, Lieutenant-General, *comendador* of the Order of Christ and member of the *Junta* of the Three States, officer of the Inquisition in 1645, left a three-volume *nobiliário*, which was also highly praised. The latter was the son of a judge of the Knights of the Military Orders and the brother of the inquisitor Cristóvão Salema Correia. This is, in fact, another characteristic that seems to stand out: the strong connection with the universe of the Inquisition and a clear antagonism

towards the Jewish or New Christian issue, in addition to the probable *Puritan* connotations that have already been referred to.

But was it really like this? At that time, the pressure exerted on the Inquisition in regard to the question of “purity of blood” was beginning to become quite dramatic. Both the radical sector and those that felt their honor threatened by the increasing rumors resulting from genealogy-related gossip also felt the need to create a defense to try and ward off the ghost of disgrace. Both sides caused shock waves to ripple through the institutions, as these were, of course, composed of people that were susceptible to the influence of networks and to relationships of interdependence. It is known that the gaining of positions was based on multiple strategies, since they were “obtained in order to attain advantages in a broad sense (symbolic, economic, political and others)” (Olival, Rego; 2006). Such strategies were defined in recruitment niches where relationships of solidarity and personal empathy had been built up. This was the case, for example, at the royal colleges of São Pedro and São Paulo, in Coimbra, where a reasonable number of positions on the Inquisition and the *Mesa da Consciência* were fought over. This complicated scenario of influences also exerted a contradictory force, frequently calling for action to prevent, or at least minimize, foreseeable damage. Such a situation could be said to have existed within the 1685 *Junta* and it helps to explain some of the choices made by it, because, beyond appearances, a different truth could in fact lie hidden. Therefore, as far as the members of this board are concerned, one should note that the inquisitor Veríssimo de Lencastre appears, here and there, mentioned amongst those members of the Inquisition whose qualifications were uncertain, although the weight of the institution’s seal of approval was to prove decisive. There was also, amongst others, the controversial issue of “purity of blood” involving the descendants of Fernão Coronel¹², and Duarte Brandão¹³, calling into question many noble houses, whose purity was promptly defended. Perhaps this was the reason why Dom António Caetano referred to him in a letter addressed to the Count of Vila Nova, as an “admiravel genealogico bem intencionado” (an admirable and well-intentioned genealogist), adding that “os seus livros mandou guardar no Secreto do Sto Oficio”¹⁴ (Dornellas, 1918: 54). One of the most controversial processes, mentioned quite precisely by an inquisitor, refers to a certificate issued by the “cardeal que deos tem, na qual se dizia ser o tronco desta familia limpo, e sem defeito, pois que se o tivesse, o cardeal pela vasta noticia que tinha das familias illustres do reino nao passaria tal certidao”¹⁵. But, occasionally, these decisions could go against the interests of the already approved members of the nobility, hindering the continuation of their qualifications. It was believed to be more prudent for the court not to “entrasse a averiguar tais fomas” (investigate such rumors), as the Inquisition’s image of trustworthiness, and with it the genealogical records of the Grand Inquisitor, could be placed under threat, as recalled by Francisco Carneiro de Figueiroa in the opinion that he produced in relation to a delicate application, in which a favorable certificate issued by the aforesaid inquisitor had been called into question. The latter’s attitude and the role of the *Junta* seem to converge entirely with that written by Dom Luís da Cunha (1662-1749) years later: “I remember – said the diplomat – that His Eminence the Cardinal of Lencastre, Grand Inquisitor and genealogist, disapproving, along with my father, who was also one, of this infamous malevolence, [considered the extraction of certain families of the kingdom to be pure], and that, having considered the best way of repairing it, it was decided that some family books should be drawn up in which similar falsities should be proved and the families purified and then archived in the Torre do Tombo, where my father was later the reformer (...) so that inquisitors could not deny letters, thus abolishing the despicable principle of ‘seu quicumque levis rumor’” (Cunha, 2001: 260/1).

As far as Dr. João de Roxas is concerned, the truth is that his partially Canarian ancestry was not exempt from controversy. A branch of the Roxas e Azevedo family, with further sub-branches in Brazil and the Spanish West Indies, had forged an undeniable reputation for itself as being composed of new Christians. The son of the judge, Pedro Roxas de Azevedo (1660-1745), a counselor of the Exchequer and the Ombudsman of the House of India, was one of those mentioned in the dishonorable list, which in 1710 caused such a social stir and gave rise to Process No. 16899 of the Inquisition of Lisbon. This case will be returned to later on.

The houses of Arronches and Vila Nova de Cerveira were also included in this list, representing a hypothetical stain on their ancestry. On the other hand, the anti-Jewish interest shown by the two Monteiro Paim seems rather excessive. On their paternal side, they were far from belonging to the first line of nobility, their ascent having been processed over two generations and

become consolidated when Roque Paim's daughter became, through wedlock, the first Countess of Alva. Furthermore, in order to hold an Inquisition title, judge João de Sande e Vasconcelos, who had been excluded due to an impurity of blood, indicated some descendants of his infamous great-grandfather, amongst whom he names António Monteiro Paim, "deputado desta inquisição q tambem he meu parente pela mesma linha"¹⁶. Just when it would seem that everything has already been said relating to the authors chosen by the *Junta* to give some credence to genealogies, a last and quite significant note needs to be added about Ruy Correia Lucas. In 1732, when two *moços-fidalgos* (important nobility degree among the courtiers of the royal house) of the Salema family, father and son, were preparing to hold a title of *Familiar* of the Inquisition, the suspicions raised about them were rather disconcerting. As far as can be seen, their fame of being a new Christian family was not only longstanding but regularly recalled whenever inquiries were carried out into its members. The inquisitor himself, Cristovão Salema Henriques, felt some disappointment when he was appointed treasurer of the Cathedral of Évora and his brother Ruy Correia Lucas did not face any obstacles in gaining the *habit of the Order of Christ (hábito de Cristo)* because he was acquainted with the commissioner of the appraisals, Fr. Silvestre Coutinho de Carvalho, and so his own appraisals were deemed clean. This procedure was not at all unusual, according to Fr. Manuel Rodríguez Corvo, as, whenever a family was preparing to accede to a title of *familiar* or other, it always endeavored to have a commissioner "de sua façõ e se podessem subornavam algumas testemunhas e ameaçavam outras e para effeito de sairem bem espiavam e mandavam espiar as testemunhas q se mandavam chamar para juramento e as q erao capazes de falar verdade, davam por suspeitas, dizendo serem suas inimigas capitaes, q além disso quieram servir na misericordia e camara expulsando pessoas beneméritas q não fossem da sua façõ e servindo com outras menos capazes mas mais a seu modo"¹⁷. The application of the aforesaid genealogist to hold a title (*familiar*) of the Inquisition met with no difficulties, because as his brother was inquisitor there was only the need for proof of kinship.

Contrary to what the immediate interpretation has revealed, the 1685 *Junta* held back slightly. They were not only concerned with the windows of opportunity resulting from the possible ease experienced in the acquisition of titles and the presentation of proof, but also with the possible damage that less conformist "genealogical records" could cause to a social group that, together with members of nobility, included an unpolluted old Christianity. This is how it was in the *Puritan* age ...

The Inquisition and the Genealogists: notes taken from a *dishonoring* role

The future would prove that the concerns of the *Junta* were in fact well grounded. After 1685, numerous cases arose that poured scorn on the intended merger between *fidalgia* and old Christianity which an inquisitorial sector wished to safeguard, inevitably leading to perfectly foreseeable damage.

In addition to the episode of the Counts of Pombeiro (continuing from 1693 to 1759), a paper that circulated amidst the Inquisition in 1710 listed many pre-eminent families on the "expurgatory list" of nobility. The contents of this list were, however, no surprise to anyone. All sorts of "stains" had become deeply embedded within the social sphere. But, this time, the secrets were not merely semi-hidden, semi-public and resulting from genealogical gossip; instead it was the inquisitorial institution itself that felt threatened in its image of austerity and credibility. And this aforesaid paper was not lenient with people whose purity of blood had been sanctioned by the Inquisition, affecting even those who served directly at court. The general lines of this case have already been outlined (Baião, 1973: t. 3, Chap. V), but no studies have focused on the impact that it caused within the context of the preparations normally made for holding a title and on the records of the institution itself. At the time, the latter endeavored to attenuate the inconvenience by asking experts and witnesses to testify, thus leading to the writing of the fragment of a *Tiqão* (genealogical book who intentionally mentioned impurities of the blood among the nobility), but no direct responsibility was attributed to anyone.

Whoever's responsibility it might have been, there appears to have been a sort of mutual retaliation between factions, which led to an increase in the climate of suspicion and tension existing within the court itself. Over the years, there was an underlying conflict between those who favored a policy of zero tolerance at the level of the assessment of purity and those who promoted

an atmosphere of openness that would be based on the social impression that a person might create. One of those directly involved, the inquisitor Manuel da Cunha Pinheiro (†1734), a genealogist like most of his close family, had very specific views upon this matter. This is what can be deduced from the expressive contents of a note left on the opening page of a *Tiçã* found amongst his belongings. Referring to this *black book*, he stated that he attached no importance to the dishonoring news contained therein, especially the one that said he had already been “*purified by the courts*”. He asked for the news to be transmitted with the aim of “*supporting it with evidence and documents when I feel I have the freedom to do so*”¹⁸. In the same note, the inquisitor requested that his heirs immediately burn the manuscript upon his death, but obviously his will was not satisfied. He did not even have the opportunity to correct it, contenting himself with preparing a volume of corrections to the work of Manuel de Carvalho e Ataíde (†1720), the other presumed author of the 1710 *dishonoring* paper, with whom he enjoyed ties of kinship. Curiously, during the process of inquiry, Manuel da Cunha Pinheiro was in fact cited as one of the possible culprits. The examinations carried out under the scope of this inquiry clearly underline one aspect: whatever the ostensible intention or reason might be, the *dishonoring* papers and the *nobiliários* of genealogical secrets were sometimes copied with the consent of their owners and, at other times, without their knowledge. They were then annotated and further information was added, so that the reputation of the owner could be tainted by the fact that he himself was included on the list of dishonoring names. This explains the apparent paradox of the author’s own name being included in the list – a situation that reflects the full extent of this deceitful and misleading game.

To conclude

In addition to the already-mentioned conclusions, another two or three notes should also be added.

By interfering in such a sensitive area as that of Genealogy, the Inquisition would eventually become entangled in all of its numerous contradictions. In spite of wanting to appear impartial, and setting aside all issues that were not assessed by the institution, it nonetheless ended up entangled in a web that would prove to be prejudicial. By accepting the *vox populi* as possible proof and as one of the assessment requirements, it paved the way for the official recognition of the “truth” as stated by others, which frequently did not coincide with the interests of that “truth” at all. By dangerously narrowing the gap between the one and the other, it left the court with less room for maneuver, thus having to assume a more defensive position and becoming a prisoner of its own rules. Note that, contrary to what happened in Castile, this institution ranked as the most rigorous in the sphere of purity/proof of honor in Portugal. A comparison of, for instance, the already-mentioned dishonoring paper of 1710 with the adversities faced by many families during the process of examination shows the blemishes and the blurred boundary that separated the two worlds. It also shows all the means that the inquisitors had to resort to, in order not to put at risk underlying or even concealed interests. Even though it belittled the so-called *Tições*, whose existence it condemned, demanding in fact that they be destroyed, the Inquisition was not able to escape the dishonorable influence. It didn’t even turn its back on information that it had already considered as “*todo cheyo de mentiras e de ignorancias*”¹⁹. Book 36 of the General Council of the Inquisition, which included the names of those excluded from the *familiatura* (most of whom did not even reach the phase of preparation for holding a title), affords us a view of the justifications as well as the identity of those that were later recovered, many of whom were successful in their claims.

Although the detailed analysis of these cases is beyond the scope of this text, it is deemed to be of interest for assessing the situations in which the influence of genealogists is quite perceptible. The latter varied quite considerably in their importance. Note that, between 1607 and 1753, the direct connections of some 111 genealogists with the Inquisition were made public, most of them also being members of the institution, except for 4 who were not accepted and another 4 who had an uncertain result in their preparations for holding a title. Most notable amongst this group were 5 general inquisitors, 4 inquisitors, 14 members, 3 of whom belonged to the general council, 9 qualifiers, 5 commissioners, 1 notary and 1 minister. Most of these people were admitted to the Inquisition between the 1640s and the 1690s and during the first decade of the 18th century. The long list of genealogical authors, around three hundred in number, included many others, all of whom at that time had not yet received recognition of their applications to hold a title. However,

they appear in some way or other to have been linked to the Inquisition through their ties of kinship with members and inquisitors or by simply dedicating specific works to the institution. There were certain occasions on which the significant efforts made by the Inquisition hierarchy to substantiate the genealogical issue of applicants were quite noticeable, resorting to the consultation of books and manuscripts and the evidence that was presented in the presence of genealogists. There were other moments when the mere mention of *nobiliários* was sufficient to arouse scorn. It was rather rare to find sound evidence of the effective predominance of this type of knowledge in deciding the final result of a process. When the authority of genealogical discourse was invoked, it was usually together with other evidence or other elements of appraisal without its ever being seen as having a binding effect on approval. In general, genealogical resources strengthened or, inversely, detracted from ideas that had already been deduced from the examination process itself. In other words, it enhanced certain trends and served the purpose of legitimizing partially announced positions. In 1692, in the course of the application presented by Dom Gastão José da Câmara Coutinho (1662-1736) for the *Order of Christ*, Mendo de Fóios Pereira, a member of the *Mesa da Consciência* (court for the military orders) requested that two genealogists should be heard and then poured scorn upon the situation. In doing so, he was undoubtedly following a strategy of silencing those who opposed the application and discrediting the evidence that interfered with the recognition of the candidate's "purity of blood"²⁰. Although this is merely one example, it highlights the dubious nature of the issue in relation to the applications made to hold a title and the evidence presented. The "flexibility" of this type of knowledge would adapt to circumstances, however adverse they might seem, simultaneously defending interests that were both contradictory and convergent in terms of their intention. This paradox was used by all those who employed genealogical records as a weapon of both defense and attack. A sort of survival instinct that would place "executioners" and "victims" at the same level. The profile of the authors of *Tições* seems to fit in with the description that claims that they belonged "mostly to the lowest but most arrogant of noble classes" (Abrantes, 1989:34). But were these the only ones to promote this black *nobiliário*? A genealogical record writer, himself of uncertain origin, added a curious note to the list that included the foreign bibliography in relation to Portugal. Thus, in referring to the "*Memorias para a Historia Genealogica das Cazas Illustres do Reyno de Portugal no anno de 1680*", he adds: "o mesmo Livro em Lingoa Franceza, porem augmentado com muitas, e particulares circunstancias"²¹. And then he is more explicit: "estes dous Manuscriptos que se conservao em Amsterdam na Familia de Nunes da Costa, Judeos Portuguezes, mostraõ e declaraõ os deffeitos das Cazas mais graves, e mais illustres do Reyno de Portugal, assim em materia de Nobreza, como de Sangue. Provaõ o principio, e origem desses deffeitos, e demostraõ com clareza as familias que sao izentas delles"²². He adds that he does not know whether this news is true or false and justifies himself by saying that he does not have much insight into genealogy, but insists that they are "muy particulares" (highly particular) (Oliveira, 1741: 379). In addition to this last aspect, it is also interesting to note who had possession of this work and how it was used. In fact, those that had possession of the work were the great grandchildren of the jurist and writer of new Christian origin Duarte Nunes de Leão (†1608), and they maintained an intricate network of commercial and political relations and intense diplomatic activity, to such an extent that their sumptuous house in Amsterdam bore a stone coat of arms of the Portuguese crown (Oliveira, 1741: 183). Hence, endowed with undoubted public visibility and using the same reasoning as the Puritans and even their methodology, they caused some damage to the image of the nobility and the Portuguese kingdom's estates and the honorability of its institutions. Dom Luís da Cunha's links with the Jewish emigrants in the Netherlands were well known. Making no direct reference to this case, he did, however, highlight in his *Instruções Políticas*, and in his correspondence, the repercussions that such news had on foreign public opinion, fostering the notion that Portugal was a country in which impurity and (titled) nobility were closely related. To conclude, this was a powerful reason for introducing the cleansing that was longed for by so many, not only of families' genealogical records but also of the very essence of the Kingdom and of the Monarchy. With the aim of repudiating any suspicions of the impurity of their blood, the Portuguese aristocrats exiled after 1640 encouraged genealogical learning with such fervor that "even their Castilian counterparts found it somewhat exaggerated" (Bouza Alvarez, 2000: 289). In fact, by doing so, they were endeavoring to preserve their families' genealogical records and the image of rigor and purity of their ancestry, so as to guarantee their rightful integration into local society and their place in the structures of the political core. Their claim to the rightfulness of their

social integration should be noted, because in Castile the rules of purity were far from being of the same kind.

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¹ ANTT, *Habilitações do Santo Ofício*, António, mç. 36, d. 903.

² Biblioteca da Ajuda, 5O-V-26, fl. 15.

³ Ibidem, fl. 31 and 34v.

⁴ This work can, nonetheless, still be found at the Biblioteca Nacional in Lisbon (Pombalina, 262).

⁵ (“... greatly respected among the most important genealogists of his time.”)

⁶ ANTT. *Inquisição de Coimbra*, Book 26, letters of the general council of the Inquisition (19 May 1668 to 26 June 1674), p. 434.

⁷ (“... the genealogical books reduced to just one, to which credit would be given in order for it to be kept in the aforesaid archive.”)

⁸ (“... one book (...) in which people would have faith, so that, in this way, doubts would be cleared up in relation to serious matters, rooting out the confusion that has spread in the books of families.”)

⁹ Three of these copies can be found at the Biblioteca Nacional, the Biblioteca da Ajuda and the Biblioteca Municipal do Porto.

¹⁰ See BN, cod. 977.

¹¹ This was the beginning of the house of the Lemos and Roxas family, the Marquises of Subserra.

¹² Biblioteca da Ajuda, 50-v-37, fl. 82/3. Fernão Coronel was Regidor of Segovia (Spain) despite his Jewish origins.

¹³ ANTT, *Habilitações Santo Ofício*, António, M.36, D.903. Duarte Brandão was a XVI century nobleman with Jewish roots but after his services in England (governor of Guernsey) became Knight of the Garter and adopted a new name: Sir Edward Brampton.

¹⁴ (“... his books have been ordered to be kept in the safekeeping of the Inquisition.”)

¹⁵ (“... cardinal who is with God, in which it was said that the main tree of this family was clean, and without any blemishes, for, if it had any, the cardinal, because of the vast store of information that he had about the illustrious families of the realm, would certainly not have issued such a certificate.”)

¹⁶ (“... a member of this Inquisition, who is also my relative through the same line.”) ANTT, *Habilitações Santo Ofício*, João, M.30, D.714.

¹⁷ (“... from their faction, and, if they could bribe some witnesses and threaten others, and, for the purposes of achieving success, they spied upon and had others spy upon the witnesses that were called to testify and those that were capable of telling the truth, they cast suspicion on them, saying that they were their sworn enemies, that furthermore they wished to serve at the charitable institutions like *Misericórdia* and the municipal council expelling honorable people who were not from their faction and making do with others who were less capable but more to their liking.”) ANTT, *Habilitações Santo Ofício*, Rui, M.55, D.1095.

¹⁸ Biblioteca Municipal do Porto, mss. 479 (*nobiliário* of genealogical secrets).

¹⁹ (“full of lies and ignorance”) ANTT, *Inquisição de Lisboa*, Process No. 16899 (a letter written by Luis Vieira da Silva).

²⁰ ANTT. *Habilitações Ordem de Cristo*, letra G, M.1, n.14.

²¹ (“... the same book written in French, albeit increased with many particular circumstances.”)

²² (“these two manuscripts that are preserved in Amsterdam amongst the Nunes da Costa family, Portuguese Jews, show the flaws of the more serious houses, and the most illustrious within the kingdom of Portugal, as well as in matters of nobility, such as blood. They prove the beginning and origin of these flaws and clearly show the families that are free of them.”)