

Honor and service. Álvaro Ferreira de Vera and the idea of nobility in the Portugal of the Habsburgs

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Abstract

The Early Modern Age was a period when the power of the nobility was at its height, and it also marked the beginning of the civilization of writing. The convergence of both these realities has left us with a wide-ranging literature about the peerage and the idea of nobility throughout southern Europe. In this article, an analysis is made of one of the most essential treatises about the nobility in Habsburg Portugal, *Origem da nobreza política*, written by Álvaro Ferreira de Vera and published in 1631. The treatises written about the peerage provide the perfect scenario for explaining the concept of nobility, its mechanisms of ennoblement, its hierarchies and its key values, such as honor and virtue. Ferreira de Vera's work represents a culminating moment in the formulation of the Portuguese discourse about the nobility, since it brings together the medieval tradition, the sources of Castilian law and the political and pedagogical needs of those who were admitted to the nobility under the dynasty of the Habsburgs. In short, this article analyses the discourse written about the nobility in Portugal in the first half of the 17th century, situating it within the general context of treatise writing about the nobility in the Iberian Peninsula, thanks to a text and an author that are both equally central to this genre.

Keyword

Nobility, nobility treatises, Alvaro Ferreira de Vera, honor, virtue.

Resumo

A Idade Moderna apresenta-se como um dos períodos áureos do poder da Nobreza, ao mesmo tempo que é também o momento inicial da civilização do impresso. Estas duas realidades convergem na produção de uma ampla literatura sobre nobres e sobre a ideia de nobreza em toda a Europa meridional. Neste estudo, considera-se que a tratadística nobiliárquica é o cenário ideal para explicar o conceito de nobreza, os seus mecanismos de nobilitação, as hierarquias internas do grupo e os valores nobiliárquicos essenciais de honra e de virtude. Analisa-se, por isso, um dos textos fundamentais da tratadística nobiliárquica portuguesa, produzido durante a dinastia Filipina - a Origem da nobreza política, uma obra de Álvaro Ferreira de Vera, publicada em 1631-, uma vez que recolbe a tradição medieval, as fontes do direito castelhano e as necessidades político-pedagógicas daqueles que, sob os Habsburgo, receberam distinções nobiliárquicas. Trata-se, assim, de um artigo que embora analise o discurso nobiliárquico em Portugal na primeira metade do século XVII, o enquadra no âmbito mais amplo da tratadística nobiliárquica da Península Ibérica.

Palavras-chave

Nobreza, tratadística nobiliaria, Alvaro Ferreira de Vera, honra, virtude.

I wish to express my gratitude to Manuel Amador González Fuertes, who, during some very special late nights in St. Petersburg, made several comments about style and content which improved this article's final version. I similarly wish to thank Nani, who also summoned up enough courage to read it.

¹ Post-doctoral scholarship holder of the Foundation for Science and Technology/Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education (FCT-MCTES), researching at CIDEHUS-University of Evora on the Project, *The Agents of Honor in Portugal and Castile 1640-1750: kings of arms and the Commissioners of the Orders and their respective social networks*. Ref SFRH/BDP/44883/2008.

“Las escrituras non son communes a todos los que las desean.”
 (“The writings are not common to all who wish for them.”)
 Luis Salazar Y Castro

“As far as the definition of true nobility is concerned, there is great doubt among philosophers and politicians as we will say further on in the seventh and tenth chapters: but in one way or another all will agree that its first principle was a virtue which calls for an honorable reward. Because the prize of honor is the one that copiously encourages virtue and thus incites the spirits to follow virtue and to undertake heroic deeds.” (VERA, 1631: f. 2r.)

1. Introduction

This work deals with the Early Modern Age (BOUZA, 1999: 239) and also with the nobility, insofar as the latter also generated a culture (CARRASCO, 2000: 11). This is why, for nearly three hundred years, we have witnessed a proliferation of texts that have aspects relating to nobility as their central subject. The action of “creating ideas” (BOUZA, 1999: 16) about what nobility is and what it represents, or explaining its representational forms was one of the essential activities of some authors, whom we will refer to henceforth as nobility experts. Their central subjects are the nobility, its memory and prestige. To create a memory of what nobility was and who the nobles were, defining their cultural, social and symbolic space, was the main task of a number of writers. They included men from the church, from the army, philosophers and genealogists. The message of these nobility experts focused on what, in everyday life, marked out the nobility and noblemen as singular people, stressing the power that the nobility enjoyed as a central point, in order to satisfy the wish to formulate an ideal explanation about social control and its mechanisms. This ideal explanation was, of course, based on the concepts of fame and prestige. Even if the books did not seek to impose an ideology, they provided a reference to a set of habits and values displayed by both the Portuguese nobility and all the nobility in Catholic Europe, and they undoubtedly had a remarkable social importance. The texts existed and their discourses became reality from the very moment of their publication or writing (CHARTIER, 1997:7), and they permanently maintained their connections with reality, establishing a remarkable order in the way in which they presented their subject.

A nobility treatise was a book that not only defined a social group but also spoke about a specific form of exercising power, providing a model of political and symbolic culture and making a decisive contribution towards establishing the boundaries of the concept of nobility, besides laying the foundations for a theory about dignity and social prestige in the *Ancien Régime*. Nobility treatises were thus the expression of a disquiet born from a broad debate about power; but they were also a tool that could be used to describe the mechanisms of integration and conflict determining the sovereigns’ policies for ennoblement and reward, presupposing a constant link with the past.

A new political reality was to be introduced to the Portuguese Crown in 1581. Its annexation by the Spanish Monarchy not only presumed a factual union, but for the first time also placed the respective nobilities under the crown of the same sovereign with all that this represented when the time came to generate a petition for graces and favors or for access to government posts, especially following the pledges made by Felipe II (Filipe I of Portugal) in Tomar². This article analyzes the concept of nobility existing in Portugal between 1580 and 1640 in light of an essential text, *Origem da nobreza política*, by Álvaro Ferreira de Vera, published for the first time in 1631 and which itself is a paradigmatic text for understanding the idea of nobility.

² For an extensive study of this particular aspect, see BOUZA 1987. Some of the details of his thesis can be found in a more updated form in his book *Filipe I* (2005).

2. The nobility treatise in Habsburg Portugal³

If the second half of the 16th century and the first half of the 17th century were marked, according to Professor Nuno Monteiro, by “keen competition among noble houses in their search for status, wealth and power” (MONTEIRO, 1997 v. IV: 364), we can infer that much of this competition encouraged the development of a literature about the nobility that justified or legitimized distinct situations of social ascent. The philosophy existing at that time, which placed nobility at the top of the list of social values during the Early Modern Age, had a place of central importance in nobility treatises. Hence, the nobility treatise writers became agents and promoters of a certain concept of nobility that was permeable to individuals’ personal strategies, whether they belonged to the court nobility or came from the lower provincial nobilities.

The nobility treatise, as a cultural artifact, developed a highly qualified discourse about the identity of a particular social group and highlighted the need existing at that time for a debate about the nature of power. Through this discourse, a set of basic ideas was created that singled out the nobility treatise from other forms of literary production, inasmuch as the matters it dealt with could only be applied to the nobility itself. This was true both in relation to the apparently static nature of some of its proposals and to the rhetoric it developed around the image of nobility and of the literature that this kind of treatise represented. Not to mention a whole range of peerage books, living archives and manuscripts so frequently found in modern Portugal.

In general, nobility treatises therefore presented an ordered structure in relation to their argument, which was fairly common to all kingdoms of Catholic Europe. In their formal structure, all aspects relating to the noble identity had their own explanation. Thus, the concern with defining nobility and the mechanisms for acquiring it, as well as heraldry itself, were all subjects that were intermingled with the definition of the hierarchy of nobles, with the conflict between arms and letters, and with a varied range of facts. All of this transformed the treatises into a closed set of works providing explanations about the idea of nobility. All that existed outside the treatise had nothing to do with nobility and therefore did not need any explanation.

From a formal point of view, we speak of a nobility treatise when we are faced with a text, well printed or handwritten, which dedicates a series of chapters to the definition of the term nobility, the factors of ennoblement, the hierarchy of nobles, the definition of “fidalguia/hidalguia,” heraldic representation, and finally several questions relating to the idea of family.

As António Caetano de Sousa wrote in his *História Genealógica da Caça Real Portuguesa* (SOUSA AC, 1951 (1734)), “the books of families which have been written in our time are not few in number” (AZEVEDO SOARES, 1916). In fact, in the Portugal that existed before the Habsburgs, the family seems to have been the central subject around which the discourse about the nobility was constructed such that the peerage book became identified with the prestige of those who were represented in the texts, “because of the category of the people of illustrious birth” (SOUSA AC, 1951 (1734)).

The family, as identified in the peerage book, derives in the Portuguese case from certain strictly genealogical texts such as the *Nobiliário del Conde D. Pedro*,⁴ and others that came after this, such as the famous *Livro Velho de Linbagens de Portugal* (MATTOSO, 1980)—according to Caetano de Sousa, it dates from 1343 (SOUSA AC, 1951 (1734) v. 1: 13)—which since the Middle Ages have come to represent a seminal point in the production of texts about the nobility. This fact resulted in the fact that the literature on the nobility in Portugal, despite being prolific enough in terms of quantity, became very uneven in terms of its quality. In this article, I shall deal with strictly doctrinal texts, leaving aside the real “jungle” of genealogies and peerage books that flood the Portuguese libraries (SOUSA AC, 1951 (1734): 2-5

³ In order not to be too prolix and to avoid a long list of titles and authors, I draw attention to a very interesting example of the production of Portuguese genealogical treatises and texts, which can be found in the works of SOUSA, 1735 v. 1: 20-232; see also the work of FRANCKNEAU 1734 and the *magnum opus* of AZEVEDO SOARES 1916.

⁴ Much has been said about this text and much more still remains to be said. In the present work, I used the edition commented by Juan Batista Lavanha, published in Rome in 1640, and subsequently extended by Lavanha himself, by Faria e Sousa, by the Marquis of Montebello and by Álvaro Ferreira de Vera. We owe the existence of this peerage book to, among others, Juan Bautista Lavanha, who, at the request of the 2nd Marquis of Castelo Rodrigo, prepared an edition and guaranteed its publication. In order to gain a clearer understanding of this peerage book, we can consult the introduction which José Figueiroa Valverde wrote, in the facsimile edition of the text, which was published in Santiago de Compostela in 1974.

(introduction)) and which have been, with distinct originality and confusing paternity, the subject of detailed studies and analyses by genealogists and historians. The treatises, those books “where some matters are studied” (COVARRUBIAS, 2006 (1611): 934.), will be the centre of our analysis, not forgetting, obviously, the importance and influence that the genealogical texts represented.⁵

A survey of the literature on the nobility, including both doctrinal texts like the nobility treatises and genealogy books, is offered by António Caetano de Sousa in his introduction to the *História Genealógica*. In his journey through the nobility literature, he did not find many genuinely doctrinal texts about the nobility. Although, in many of the writings about family histories, we find certain commentaries about the concept of nobility, their aim is no other than to stress the genealogical ties and matrimonial policies of Portugal’s distinguished families, together with summaries of their exploits. An example is provided by Gaspar Estaço and his *Tratado da Família dos Estaços* (ESTAÇO, 1625), which forms part of a text published in 1625 about Portugal’s ancestries.⁶

There were therefore not many authors of doctrinal texts during the period when the two crowns were joined together. Álvaro Ferreira de Vera was the only author of a genuinely doctrinal text about the nobility written in the traditional style, following the models already established by Mexía and his *Nobiliario Vero* (MEXÍA, 1492), Juan Benito Guardiola and his *Tratado de nobleza* (GUARDIOLA, 1591) or Bernabé Moreno de Vargas and his *Discursos de la nobleza de España* (MORENO DE VARGAS, 1622).

However, we can mention other texts that were close to the work of Ferreira de Vera, such as the one by António Coelho—King of Arms to the monarchs Felipe IV (Filipe III), Dom João IV and Dom Afonso VI—whose manuscript is known as a *Nobiliario* (peerage book), but which in reality is entitled *Livro em que se trata da Origen dos Reis e quanto Houve em Portugal e como sucederam* (COELHO, 2006 v. 3 (edited by NORTON, MA), in which he provides some notes on the concept of nobility, points out some notions of nobility theory and gathers together many previous opinions on this matter.⁷

We also find some thoughts on the idea of nobility in the writings offered by the choirmaster of Évora Cathedral, Manuel Severim de Faria in his *Noticias* (FARIA, 1644) of Portugal, published in 1655 several years after his death. Nevertheless, their central subject is not a doctrinal matter about nobility but is more concerned with confirming the identification of nobility with the idea of the family.⁸ There is also his *Fidalguia Portuguesa*⁹ which, according to Caetano de Sousa, “includes all the noble families of the kingdom” (SOUSA AC, 1951 (1734) v. 1: 60), although it was never published in printed form. In a similar vein, we can find the work of the jurist Miguel Leitão de Andrada, contained in his *Miscellanea* (ANDRADA, 1993 (1629)), published in 1629, also after his death.

A special mention should be made of Jerónimo Osório, not least because of his influence on Ferreira de Vera. He was the most influential of them all, at a European level. His text *Tratados da Nobreza civil e Cristã*,¹⁰ published in 1542 and written in Latin, was a landmark among the books about nobility written from a moral standpoint. Although it does not actually belong in the period of the kings Filipe, nor is it strictly and formally a treatise about political nobility at that time, it brings together a substantial part of the late humanistic thinking on fundamental aspects of the identity of nobility, such as virtue and honor.¹¹ We are dealing in this case with an author who went far beyond merely being an expert on nobility. Starting from principles, which are basically scholastic (EARLE, 2004: 1039-1049), he dealt in his

⁵ For a more detailed analysis of this literature, see MATTOSO 1976: 132-150, PAREDES 1995, COSTA VEIGA 1940: 172-174 and MATTOSO 1977: 17-66. More information can also be found in MACHADO DE FARIA 1977, MATTOSO 1983 and MATTOSO 1985: 73-92.

⁶ António Caetano de Sousa also mentions this man, saying that he was born in Évora and was a canon at the Collegiate Church of *Santa Maria de Oliveira de Guimarães*. He also classifies him as ‘learned in history and well versed in the ancestries’ (SOUSA, AC, 1951 (1734) v. 1: 38).

⁷ Caetano de Sousa also offers us some further notes about him, saying that he was a knight of the Order of Christ and a servant of the Royal House and that he composed a book about the House of Castro and another about the House of the Counts of Linhares (SOUSA, AC, 1951 (1734) v. 1: 33).

⁸ I deal with this text in my PhD thesis: GUILLÉN BERRENDERO 2008. There is also a reference to it in SOUSA, AC, 1951 (1734) v. 1: 59.

⁹ This text is a manuscript kept at the Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, cods. 1020 and 1021, which, it seems, has different authorships, although Tomás Caetano attributes its authorship to Manuel Severim de Faria.

¹⁰ The original text is written in Latin with the title *De nobilitate civil liber I... Eiusdem de Nobilitate Christiana liber tre* published in 1545. I mention it here because of the new translation into Portuguese published by António Pinto de Guimarães in 1996.

¹¹ About Jerónimo Osório’s works, see EARLE 2004: 1039-1049.

works with varied and transcendent themes, ranging from aspects related to Christianity to the monarch's authority, just to give an example.

However, despite the importance that nobility had for the development of Early Modern societies and the open debate that arose about its nature (as demonstrated by the existence of treatises of this type), historiography was not really aware of it until quite recently. All these nobility treatises, together with others that I shall look at later on, form a group that is not excessive in number, but which, at the same time, remains highly significant among the texts that have been little studied, from a historiographic point of view.

In the analysis of the nature of the Portuguese nobility, the pioneering work by António Manuel Hespanha has proved to be fundamental in that it has been repeatedly mentioned in the new methodologies that have made it possible for other research paths to be opened up (HESPANHA, 1993:29). These new avenues of research have been continued by other specialists, resulting in the production of a rich and prolific historiography on nobility, centered on the analysis of different matters relating to the nobility treatises.¹² This present article forms part of this tradition and aims at making a contribution to this historical renewal.

3. *Álvaro Ferreira de Vera*. Notes towards his biography

In 1981, António de Oliveira wrote that *Álvaro Ferreira de Vera* was “a man of his time” (OLIVEIRA, 1981: 273) and that his life was centered on trying to discover “*fidalgia* and wealth, in the search for upward mobility” (OLIVEIRA, 1981: 273). In this historian's opinion, this was one of the reasons that forced him to travel to Madrid in around 1637 to “have the honor to advise His Majesty” (OLIVEIRA, 1981:273). Notwithstanding these opinions, *Ferreira de Vera's* biography reveals to us an individual who was prepared to offer an “official” view on the concept of nobility within the parameters of the open debate that was taking place at that time throughout Catholic Europe about nobility and its values.

In spite of the scant biographical information available about *Álvaro Ferreira de Vera*, his family origins are clear. He was born in Lisbon of “illustrious” parents (as mentioned by Barbosa Machado in his *Biblioteca Lusitana*), and he studied at the Jesuit Colégio de Santo Antão (MACHADO, 1741, v. 1:102). In 1637, we find him in Madrid seeking to deliver a report about Brazil and the attacks of the Dutch on its coast (OLIVEIRA, 1981:273). This same report informs us of his probable stay in Pernambuco at an unspecified date.¹³ This stay in Madrid also allowed him to attempt to enter into court life and to learn more *in situ* about the Spanish public archives (MACHADO, 1741, v. 1: 102). In the *Enciclopedia Portuguesa Ilustrada* we find mention of his possible death in 1677, in Madrid.¹⁴ This “supporter of Filipe III”¹⁵ died in Madrid, years after the Restoration and was considered one of the loyal Portuguese followers of the *Rey Planeta*.

His most outstanding work was the one he produced as a genealogist, as is recognized by Franckaneau, who has this to say about him:

“*Olyssipone Lusitaniae nobili familia natus. Matrivi vixit servitiis Philipi IV. Regis addictus & praeter alia critica politicaeque opuscula.*”¹⁶

In his *Biblioteca Nova*, the Castilian polygraph, Nicolás Antonio, speaks of him as “*lusitanus, Olyssiponensis, edidit vernáculo gentis*” and attributes to him other works of a philological nature (NICOLAS ANTONIO, 1672, vol. 1: 58). His output was prolific and his great knowledge and erudition allowed him to write, among other books, *Ortographia, ou modo para escrever certo na lingua Portuguez* (VERA, 1631). He also

¹² As examples of the continuation of the research work initiated by Professor Hespanha, I draw attention to the new developments by MONTEIRO 2006: 43-61; MONTEIRO; CUNHA 2006: 97-128.

¹³ “Due to the experience that he had had in Pernambuco” (OLIVEIRA, 1981: 293).

¹⁴ *Enciclopedia Portuguesa Ilustrada*, v. 11: 116. This information about his death is confirmed in the entry on *Álvaro Ferreira de Vera* in the *Grande Enciclopédia portuguesa e brasileira* 1945, v. 34: 612.

¹⁵ The use of this term is to be found in the entry on *Álvaro Ferreira de Vera* in the *Grande Enciclopédia portuguesa e brasileira* 1945, v. 34: 612.

¹⁶ FRANCKANEAU, 1734: 19. Recently Antonio Mestre attributed the authorship of this work to the Spanish writer Juan Lucas Cortés. See MESTRE, 2003: 271.

provided some addenda to the *Nobiliario del Conde de Barcelos*,¹⁷ which were published in 1640, and he was the author of a text entitled *Información del Origen de los Vasconcellos* (VERA, 1646).

António Caetano de Sousa refers to him as “very proficient in Mathematics and an erudite man with a great knowledge of genealogy” (SOUSA AC, 1951 (1734), v. 1: 43). Salazar y Castro also mentions him in his *Advertencias históricas*, saying:

“Alvaro Ferreira de Vera, a Lusitanian nobleman, wrote some notes for the *Nobiliario del Conde D. Pedro de Portugal*, which were very useful for that volume; but as the writings are not common to all who wish for them, Alvaro Ferreira was prone to a number of errors, since he had not seen those texts originating from Castile.” (SALAZAR Y CASTRO, 1688: 332)

Other notes on his quality as an author of texts on the nobility are given to us by Manuel de Faria e Sousa in his *Fonte de Aganipe*.¹⁸ In the dedication, he says that Ferreira de Vera is a “researcher of venerable achievements” (SOUSA, 1646: f. 148v), and again, in the book, he calls him “our friend” and says that he “is a diligent writer on Portuguese Genealogical History which he has already published in a book about the nobility and other discourses with clarity and accuracy” (SOUSA, 1646: f. 152v). In the eclogue accompanying the above-mentioned text, there is fresh praise for Ferreira de Vera and yet more praise when António Soares de Alarcón, in his *Genealogía de la Casa de Trocifal* (ALARCON, 1656), calls him “a reporter on the families of Portugal” (ALARCON, 1656).

For all these reasons, Vera’s preparation, knowledge and later prestige situate this treatise of his at a particularly singular moment in the production of doctrine about the nobility in Early Modern Portugal and undoubtedly make it a crucial text for understanding the period from 1581 to 1640.

4. The *Origem da nobreza política*

The text on which this study is based, *Origem da nobreza Política, blasões de armas, appellidos, cargos & títulos nobres*, was published in Lisbon in 1631, the printer being Mathías Rodríguez.¹⁹ The printing license was awarded to C. Pereira, D. Miguel de Castro and Francisco Barreto, and dated 2 December 1631. In his report allowing the book to be printed, the Jesuit Jorge Cabral stated that the book “does not have anything I could find against our holy Faith or good customs” (VERA, 1631: licencias: s/f.). A license to print the book was also awarded by the choirmaster of Lisbon Cathedral João Bezerra Iacome on 4 September 1631. In another of the necessary printing licenses, Anrique Correa da Sylva wrote on 15 September of that same year that this book “is a good lesson for the curious and not dangerous to anybody” (VERA, 1631: licencias: s/f.). Later on, in 1791, there was a second edition, this time printed by João António de Silva.²⁰ Recently, in 2006, a new edition was published of the text as compiled under the responsibility of Filipe Folque de Mendonça, who transcribed the 1631 edition.

a. Sources

As happened with almost all of the reflections about the nobility published during the Early Modern Age, the main source for the treatise was Aristotle. We find him turned into a major authority in the form of quotes from his *Politics* and his *Ethics*, and he always answers to the misleading name of “the philosopher.” But it is also easy to find references to other classical authors: historians, nobility experts, and philosophers.

It is noticeable that there is only a scant presence of genealogists, despite the fact that their names are frequently mentioned; the same happens with Castilian treatise writers, who were near contemporaries

¹⁷ This is the edition of the text published in Roma in 1640 under the title of *Nobiliario de Don Pedro Conde de Barcelos/ordenado e ilustrado por Juan Bautista Lavanha; anotado y completado por el Marqués de Montebello, Alvaro Ferreira de Vera y Manuel de Faria y Sousa*.

¹⁸ SOUSA, 1646. Faria e Sousa dedicates his eclogue XII to Alvaro Ferreira de Vera. The full text of the dedication says: “the title of this Eclogue is Tagus; because one afternoon, on the banks of this river, two men spoke about genealogies: one insisted that the basis for the attribution of Nobility was birth: and the other attributed it solely to the worth of the actions themselves. Our friend Álvaro Ferreira is a diligent writer on Portuguese Genealogical History; and he has already published a book on the Nobility, and other discourses written with clarity and accuracy.” f. 152v.

¹⁹ The Spanish polygraph Nicolás Antonio also mentions this printer (v. 1: 56), indicating nothing more than his place of origin, “lusitanus, Olisiponensis” and offering only one note about the title of the book.

²⁰ I highlight the fact that it was “faithfully reprinted.”

of Vera's, such as Barnabé Moreno de Vargas. The following are the main texts and references quoted by our author:

i. Historians

The recourse to historians, besides being an attempt to contextualize his writings, offered Ferreira de Vera the possibility of establishing the connection between the nobility treatise and the historical tradition, especially, as in the case of the *Monarchia Lusitana* by Frei Bernardo de Brito (BRITO, 1597-1609 (reed. REGO; ANDRADE 1973-1988), when he uses it to construct a discourse on the origins of the nobleman's dignity. In a very similar tone the reference is made to Manuel de Faria e Sousa and his *Epítome de Historias Portuguesas* (SOUSA, 1628).

Another author who is frequently quoted is the Jesuit Juan de Mariana and his classic text *Historia General de España* (MARIANA, 1601), as well as his previous *Historia de rebus Hispaniae* (MARIANA, 1592). The very frequent recourse to Mariana on the part of the nobility writers was an attempt to raise morale by invoking history.

Three other Castilian classical humanist historians are quoted by Ferreira de Vera: Esteban de Garibay and his *Los XL libros del compendio historial de las Crónicas y universal historia de todos los reynos de España* (GARIBAY, 1571). The recourse to this Basque historian was centered on the explanation of the origins of the hierarchy of nobility; the same happened with the Aragonese historian Jerónimo Zurita and his *Anales de la Corona de Aragón* (ZURITA, 1610). The latter work, which was frequently referred to by other nobility writers, such as the Castilian author Guardiola, was used by Ferreira to impart solidity to his argument about the ancient and longstanding nature of noble titles and noble dignitaries. Finally, the Andalusian chronicler Ambrosio de Morales was also quoted to the same effect. His *Cinco libros postreros de la Crónica General de España* (MORALES, 1586) became a privileged tool for relating the noble categories of both crowns (Portuguese and Spanish), once again insisting on the idea of some cross-border nobilities or the permeability of their categories. Among the Portuguese authors, mention should be made of the historian, diplomat, and juriconsult, António de Sousa Macedo, and his *Flores de España y Excelencias de Portugal* (MACEDO, 1631). Ferreira de Vera must have known this youthful work, perhaps still as a manuscript, given that its printing date was so close to that of Vera's book.

ii. Nobility experts

Tiraqueau and his *De nobilitate* (TIRAQUEAU, 1545) is the first reference to an author who was recognizably a nobility expert and upon whose writings Vera's discourse was constructed. The reason why the French jurist is mentioned is to confirm that the origin of nobility was based on the inequality of men in keeping with the particular virtues of each of them.

Among Italian nobility writers, we notice Vera's use of Piccolomini in the chapter dedicated to "The origin of the political nobility and how the rank of *fidalgo* and esquire was introduced into the royal household," in order to define a concept, as genuinely Portuguese as that of the *Fidalgo de la Casa Real*. He is, however, not the only Italian who figures in the book, and the very famous Torquato Tasso and his *Diálogo de la nobleza* (TASSO, 1586) are also mentioned in this respect.

Mentions of the Castilian nobility writers are widespread. One of the most frequently mentioned names is Fernán Mexía and his *Nobiliario Vero*. Mexía was, unquestionably, one of the first and foremost treatise writers in the Iberian Peninsula, first chronologically and foremost in view of the importance of his writings and his great influence on the Portuguese treatise writers, as is shown in António Rodrigues' work.²¹

Nevertheless, two essential authors should be mentioned among the Castilian nobility treatise writers who were to have a powerful influence in the Portuguese world. The first, Juan de Arce Otálora (MARTÍN VILLODRES, 1997), a jurist and tax official at the Royal Chancery of Valladolid, was one of the most famous and influential Castilian nobility treatise writers. His *Summa nobilitatis hispanicae et regionum tributorum* (OTÁLORA 1559) had an immense influence upon all the treatises written in the Peninsula, as can be seen by the number of later re-editions. It was a decisive text in the formation of a discourse on the nobility in Castile. An apologist of the nobility inherited through blood lines and a defender of its privileges, Otálora's presence in Ferreira de Vera's book, which theoretically speaks of the nobility that was granted by royal concession, may be confusing, but, as we shall see later on, it does not turn out to be quite so contradictory.

²¹ António Dornelas repeats this idea in his introduction to the *Tratado Geral da Nobreza* by Alfonso Rodrigues.

Writing along the same lines, we come across Juan Benito Guardiola's writings. This Benedictine monk wrote a classic text about the Castilian nobility, which served as a real port of arrival and departure for the discourse on nobility that appeared both before and afterwards. His *Tratado de nobleza de España* was a milestone in Iberian treatise writing (GUILLÉN BERRENDERO 2007). Ferreira de Vera found in Guardiola the perfect subject for the legitimization of the nobility and all its signs. He used him to speak both of the first men who bore coats of arms²² and to discuss the semantic and historic origin of nobles and honors.²³

Together with the jurist and the Benedictine, there is also a place for another major author, Jerónimo de Osório. The references to his *De nobilitate civil libri duo* and *De nobilitate christiana, libri tres* clearly reflect the predominant role played by this work in the writing of Portuguese nobility treatises. Ferreira de Vera saw in him support for the Lusitanian tradition that reinforced the idea of a nobility based on virtue and the inheritance of virtues; a teleological argument that upheld the intrinsic value of the nobles and their ancestors, giving legitimacy to their inclusion in the honor system.

It was, however, to be the coming together of Tiraqueau and Osório that would make Ferreira de Vera's writings such a perfect combination, since from the first of these writers he drew the idea of the medieval legal tradition that legitimized an ennoblement beyond blood, while from Osório—often referred to as the Portuguese Cicero—he borrowed his moral considerations about nobility as being bound up with a certain way of doing things, including it within his general theory about the *areté*.

iii. Classical authors

There is widespread mention of classical authors. There is a predominance of quotes from historians such as Plutarch (*Life of Alexander*), Sallust (*The Jugurthine War*) or Virgil and his *Aeneid*. The circle is closed with Horace, Xenophon and Herodotus. As has already been pointed out, the abundance of references to Aristotle and the lack of references to Plato are important features, although, given the initial aim of the text, recourse to the former seems to have been the more obvious move. Cicero and his *Tusculan Disputations*, and Juvenal and his *Satires*, offer the possibility of interpreting the origins of nobility from a possibilistic viewpoint. Drawing on these classical writings for the notions of prestige and individual merit enabled Ferreira de Vera to outline a definition of the singular status of nobility.

The Roman world provided an ethical space for defining virtue and honor (CARRASCO MARTÍNEZ 2003: 71-92), and the acceptance of authors such as Aristotle and Seneca was useful for ending the explanation about nobility and describing it in the precise terms that would enable Ferreira de Vera to theoretically justify the noble status in the first half of the 17th century. This political Aristotle and his ethical dimension reinforced the singularity of the noble status and allowed the author to communicate a closed concept of nobility centered around the idea of personal merit and social prestige, as we will see further on.

iv. Others

Other authors are briefly mentioned, such as Fernando Alvia de Castro, Diego de Parra, Juan Crisóstomo, Boethius and his *De Consolatione*, the Bible, or the Spanish Bartolomé Cairasco de Figueroa and his *Templo Militante* (CAIRASCO FIGUEROA, 1613). The latter's writings link the work of the nobility expert Bernabé Moreno de Vargas to that of our author, thus establishing an idea of nobility that seems to be shared by the three of them. Finally, among the quoted authors, there are some emblematisers such as Alciato, João de Orosco and Francisco Soares Toscano and his singular *Parallos de príncipes y varones Ilustres* (TOSCANO, 1733 (1623)).

It is interesting to relate the quoted authors with the different chapters in which they appear. We can then understand how and when the recourse to such authority is used to reinforce an argument that our author attempts to convert into some irrefutable fact. The following chart provides us with an idea of the importance of the sources and the place they occupy in Vera's discourse.

²² See Chapter Four.

²³ As can be seen in Chapter Two, p. 25 (I quote from the 2005 edition).

Chapters	Mainly quoted authors
1. What can nobility be? And how great is its strength and esteem? (Que cousa seja nobreza. E quanta e a força e estimação della)	Tiraqueau, Cicero, Aristotle*, Jerónimo Osório Manuel de Faria e Sousa
On the origins of political nobility. And how the rank of <i>fidalgo</i> and esquire of the royal household was introduced (Da origem da nobreza política. E como se introduzio o foro de fidalgo & escudeiro na casa real)	Piccolomini, Juvenal, Mariana, Jerónimo Osório, Juan Benito Guardiola, Esteban de Garibay, Damião de Goes,
2. Origins of the noble marks of address, surnames and nicknames (Origem dos dãos, appellidos & alcunhas nobres)	Diogo de Paiva Andrada, António Caetano de Sousa, Manuel de Faria e Sousa
3. On the Origins of the Arms and the shield crests (Da Origem das Armas e insígnias nos Escudos)	Sallust, Seneca, Fernán Mexía, Juan Benito Guardiola, Jerónimo Zurita,
4. On the origins of the emblems on the Arms and the meaning of the crests and their colors (Da origem dos Timbres sobre as Armas e do que significam as insígnias e cores delas)	Virgil, Jerónimo Osório, Cassiodorus
5. On the origin and principle of Kings, Princes, Dukes, Marquises, Counts and other pre-eminent titles (Da origem & principio dos Reis, Principes, Duques, Marqueses, Condes & outros títulos preminentes)	Esteban de Garibay, Francisco Soares Toscano, Juan Benito Guardiola, Ambrosio de Morales,
6. Whether the humble man of common birth may become noble and the noble may become vile (Se o humilde & de nascimento comun pode ser nobre & o nobre pode vir a ser vil)	Aristotle**, Piccolomini, Tiraqueau, Ovid, Juvenal, Seneca, Jerónimo Osório, Sallust, Luis de Camões, Bartolomé Cairasco Figueroa,
7. On the many who degenerated from the nobility that they inherited (De muitos que degenerarão da nobreça que herdarão)	Suetonius, Padre Mariana, Plutarch, Sallust, Herodotus, Titus Livy
8. How from low and humble origins, many men were elevated due to their merits to great honors and dignities becoming captains with crests, Kings and Emperors (Como de baixos & humildes pães subirão muitos por seus merecimentos a grandes honras & dignidades sendo insignes capitães, Reis & Emperadores)	Padre Mariana, Pedro Mexia, Valerius Maximus, Sallust, Tiraqueau, Fernan Mexía
9. Where we close the argument proposed in chapter 7. with examples of the previous chapters (En que se dá fim ao argumento proposto no cap. 7. aos exemplos nos capítulos precedentes)	Jerónimo Osório, Tiraqueau, Manuel de Faria e Sousa, Boethius, Juan Crissostomo
10. Who ought to be admitted to the government of a republic, whether men of common birth if they are wise; or noblemen only because they are illustrious (Quaes devem ser admitidos no governo de huma republica, se os de nascimento comum, sendo sábios; ou os nobres soamente por serem illustres)	<i>Bible</i> , Seneca, Boethius
11. If it befits the nobleman 'to own property'. And whether the latter does or does not give nobility (Que convem ao nobre ter fazenda. E se esta dá nobreza ou não)	Titus Livy, Horace, Pedro Mexía, Aristotle** Ovid, Tiraqueau, Fernando Alvia de Castro
12. On the features that noblemen must have to justify their nobility (Das partes que devem ter os nobres para fundamento da nobreza)	Juvenal, Ovid, Jerónimo Osório, Seneca, Aristotle

13. On the reasons why some noble and ancient generations should come to an end; & why other modern generations should be ennobled. And on the inconstancies of honors and the little we should trust in them (Das razões que há para humas gerações nobres & antigas se acabarem; & outras modernas se enobrecerem. E da inconstância das honras & do pouco que devemos confiar nellas)	<i>Bible</i> , Tiraqueau, Juvenal, Jerónimo Osório, Ovid, Seneca
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(one * indicates the *Aristotle of the Ethics*/ two ** the *Aristotle of the Politics*)

b. Arguments and subjects

Continuing with the scheme presented by the author himself, we will start by indicating the basic subjects around which the treatise of nobility is organized in this prototypical text about honor: the definition of the concept of nobility, the mechanisms of access to honor, the hierarchy of the nobility and symbolic languages.

Already, in the dedication made to Luis Albuquerque de Mello, we can appreciate some of the work's basic elements. Besides the family connections that linked Álvaro Ferreira with Dom Luis de Albuquerque, since the latter was his nephew once removed, the fact is that the Albuquerques were from a "legitimate line of an illustrious family" (VERA, 1646: s/f.), but they also boasted within their family "famous victories" (VERA, 1646: s/f.): a mixture of individual virtues and lineage, the perfect combination between the idea of service and blood, between the individual and the collective which we find entrenched in the idea of nobility.

The debate between the idea of natural nobility and civil nobility is the first argument developed by Ferreira. Having resolved the question by stating that "true nobility is virtue" (VERA, 1646: s/f.), thus repeating the commonplace suggested by the earlier text by Moreno de Vargas, when he says that "although it is true that the real nobility is virtue" (MORENO DE VARGAS, 1622: f. 6r), it is necessary to broaden the ideological basis which grants access to nobility, for if Ferreira's argument was grounded only on those terms, that access would be very restricted. This is why, from the classical division of the nobilities ("the first is theological nobility. The second is natural primary nobility. The Third is natural secondary or moral nobility. The fourth is political and civil nobility") (MORENO DE VARGAS, 1622: f. 3r), he chose "political and civil nobility," this being "a quality granted by any prince" (VERA 1646: 23), or as was also defended by Moreno de Vargas, when referring to political nobility, "it is a quality granted by the Prince" (MORENO DE VARGAS, 1622: f. 6V). The insistence in 1631 that it is the sovereign's will that makes noblemen is not new in any way, especially if we bear in mind the symbolic additions that were made to such nobility, just as Manuel Severim de Faria indicated in speaking openly of "antiquity and splendor" as marks of nobility. The first was reflected in the families and the second in the honors and dignities that were acquired (FARIA, 1644: 81 and foll.). Thus, Álvaro Ferreira talked in his writings about the origin of political nobility within the parameters of tradition, especially when he placed on the family much of the burden for considering an individual a nobleman (natural nobility), which was, on the other hand, related to the extensive Portuguese tradition of peerage books and family histories.

When, in 1638, Juan Salgado de Araujo wrote his *Sumario de la familia Ilustrísima de los Vasconcelos* (SALGADO DE ARAUJO, 1638: Prólogo a la Ilustrísima Señora doña Ana de Vasconcelos...s/f), in informing Doña Ana de Vasconcelos, the Countess of Figueira about the publication of his book about the Galician nobility, he justified the choice of the Vasconcelos family because "it had noblemen who knew how to purge the campaigns of enemies and to recognize them" (SALGADO DE ARAUJO, 1638: Prólogo a la Ilustrísima Señora doña Ana de Vasconcelos...s/f). The author considered that "one of the main ways in which one can serve one's country is through the subject of one's noble lineages, with their history being told and extolled" (SALGADO DE ARAUJO, 1638: Prólogo a la Ilustrísima Señora doña Ana de Vasconcelos...s/f). Moreover, this type of writing fulfilled a pedagogical function about the role of the families ("the Vasconcellos family is full of such examples") (SALGADO DE ARAUJO 1638: Prólogo a la Ilustrísima Señora doña Ana de Vasconcelos...f. 4v). This hereditary nobility which was founded by "those who were notoriously good and known for it" (VERA, 2005 (1631): 21) was the one which deserved the graces and favors owed to them by the sovereign "due to their virtue and valor" (VERA, 2005 (1631): 22). In Ferreira's work, political nobility was jointly identified with the *foros* (immunities and prerogatives) granted by the Royal Household and the way they had arisen. The *foros* are

a central topic in the author's argument inasmuch as their origin allows him to indicate a path of social ascent linked to the idea of service to the monarch. The result is that "after having received arms for some honorable deed" (VERA, 2005 (1631): 27) they were incorporated into the Royal Household, together with the granting of a *moradía* (abode) or some help towards its maintenance.

Is the above significant enough to completely identify nobility with the idea of service? Ferreira de Vera does not propose this identification, but, on the contrary, he makes a possibilistic interpretation of the forms of ennoblement, thus guaranteeing the existence of one nobility with two origins, but not of two nobilities. So much so that in the chapters dedicated to the analysis of the names, surnames and other epithets related to the nobility, as well as to the origin of the coats of arms, the author classifies nobility according to both individual heroic deeds and the inheritance thereof, while the coats of arms are *ad hoc* prizes which, as time goes by, are converted into the marks of prestige of a lineage. This circumstance was again a common feature to be found in all the texts written about the idea of nobility.²⁴

This definition of nobility proposed by Ferreira de Vera is related to a particularly sensitive political moment in the kingdom of Portugal (VALLADARES, 1998: 33-65). Years before the publication of Ferreira de Vera's work, Cristóvão Ferreira y Sampayo wrote his *Vida i hechos del Príncipe perfecto Don Juan, Rey de Portugal, segundo de este nombre* (SAMPAIO, 1626: f. 11v-12; VALLADARES, 1998: 36). In this work, a certain criticism is detected regarding the new forms of ennoblement that diverted individuals from the path of virtue:

"for since then their rule has changed the old way which was maintained by their natural kings, and now all is governed almost by the distinction of the immunities or privileges that the noblemen enjoy [...] [for] were a man to do greater services at war and be most learned, without that privilege, he would be given a post or an enlistment reserved for fidalgos." (SAMPAIO, 1626: ff. 11v-12r)

This open criticism of the inherited nature of the *Foros* of the Royal Household also implies a clear aversion towards re-ennoblement, a process that had been taking place among the European noble families since the end of the 16th century, and which had also affected the Portuguese reality. The so-called *cierre estamental* (closed nature of the estate) gave rise to already established opinions, but these were ones that also legitimized and promoted the status. This is the central question behind the writings of Ferreira de Vera in Portugal and Moreno de Vargas in Castile, ten years earlier.

In this case, it is evident that this was a social category which enjoyed a good number of privileges and which was sustained both by the existence of an institutionalized taxonomy and by the pronouncements of jurists (MONTEIRO, 1998: 20; MONTEIRO, 1993: 43-62) who guaranteed its "purity." All this confirmed that the definition of nobility had been made according to the explanation of its privileges and the mechanisms of its actions. In this way, a legal definition of nobility could be arrived at, which, towards the end of the *Ancien Régime*, became broader and differed from the one formed in the 16th and 17th centuries (MONTEIRO, 1998: 20; MONTEIRO, 1993: 43-62). It is within this process that we have to situate Ferreira de Vera's writings. Showing an apparent distance from the normal commonplaces, he sought to establish a preponderance of the nobility of merit over the nobility of blood by creating a discourse that was kept clearly within these two boundaries and denied the possibility of the existence of a nobility outside these two categories. Everything that fell outside the boundaries of this explanation, just as in all nobility treatises, was not a matter of nobility and therefore its inclusion in the text made no sense.

Therefore when there is an attempt to identify nobility with public esteem, which undoubtedly makes this quality an essential requirement for the enjoyment of social prestige, we are dealing with a specific kind of understanding of the idea of prestige that accepts that "a man of humble birth can be noble" (VERA, 2005 (1631): 51). We also perceive an open criticism of "non-noble" behavior which was linked to a non-virtuous attitude. So that those who "spent their wealth and endangered their lives, and through valiant deeds in parts of Africa and India spilt their blood" (VERA, 2005 (1631): 52) had a virtuous conduct, worthy of recognition and public esteem. This explanation of noble actions as a way of achieving honors must not be interpreted as a negation of the theory of blood nobility; it means merely that a conjunctural explanation is being provided of the mechanisms necessary for the ennoblement of

²⁴ To mention just two significant examples, it can be seen that in the *Tratado de Nobleza* by Juan Benito Guardiola, published in 1591, the first chapter has the title "que es nobleza." Something similar can also be found in Bernabé Moreno de Vargas in his *Discursos de la nobleza de España*, published in 1622, where the first chapter has the title "que cosa es nobleza."

certain individuals. At no time is any question asked about the superiority of this inaptly named “services” nobility over blood nobility, for the ultimate aim of every nobleman is to be recognized for his blood, inasmuch as the category becomes a political one. Ferreira de Vera cannot deny the preponderant role of blood in his explanation of nobility, because blood/inheritance is indisputably part of his discourse about nobility, in keeping with the theoretical ideas that were current at that time, the hundreds of nobility inquiries that were taking place all around the Iberian peninsula, and because of the author’s own knowledge of genealogy which is reflected in some of his works, specifically in his comments on the *Nobiliario del conde Pedro*. In view of everything that has been said, we are faced with an ambiguous structure since we are dealing with a discourse in which the access of the middle ranks to the noble estate is permitted, but without this being allowed to detract from the political and symbolical importance of the noble condition itself.

Álvaro Ferreira de Vera himself, in a series of histories that he wrote about certain lineages (VERA 1630), was to consider these stories as *speculum nobilorum*, in order to produce a model of a nobleman that, in respecting the general concept of nobility, was in accordance with the given state of affairs at that time.

The first basic concept for our author was the idea of antiquity. The endurance of nobility over time not only stressed a temporal question, but it also set nobility in a specific time within a certain space and political reality. When Vera wrote about the Sousas, he first of all established time as one of the first indicators of nobility: “the antiquity of the SOVSA family is such that it not only exceeds that of many of the oldest families in Spain, but one can say in all truth that it is one of the first” (VERA, 1630: f. 139r).

Antiquity was understood as the biological continuation of a certain lineage and was related to the political category of blood. Yet, it was the succession of virtuous deeds that enhanced the fame and reputation of the lineage. It was a tool for legitimization constructed by genealogists and nobility experts who, like Ferreira de Vera, were converts to the cause; publicists whose job it was to transmit a certain idea of nobility for the greater glory, not only of a certain lineage, but also of the entire estate and its social and symbolic prestige. In this way, in the Sousa family, the figure of the Count of Miranda—Dom Diego López de Sousa—could claim to be the “the twenty-sixth successor of this House” (VERA, 1630: f. 139r) in the 1630s. This succession had the particularity of being in a direct line from the branch “which is its main one” (VERA, 1630: f. 139r), a circumstance that placed the lineage amongst the most conspicuous Portuguese nobilities.

The second important feature attributed to the Sousas’ nobility was their condition as servants of the sovereign. According to the omnipresent *Nobiliario del Conde don Pedro*, the history and life of the distinguished family members was presented as a succession of virtuous deeds, totally deserving of honorable recognition. These “lives of noblemen” became particularly significant if we consider the undoubted fact that the formal repetition of this kind of text helped to promote a model of presentation of the life of the nobility that stressed certain essential aspects in detriment to others.

Thus, the Sousa family’s deeds included a vast range of services rendered to the different sovereigns, which were determined by particular historical realities. The medieval origin of many lineages was linked to armed exploits, which would later evolve into other services.

Among many other examples, we can mention Henrique de Sousa, described by Ferreira de Vera as the “son of Vasco de Sovsa, his younger brother, who, on going to Africa, showed proof of his efforts” (VERA, 1630: f. 148). These efforts were of a military nature and were supported by the efforts of his own wife, the “daughter of Captain Melchior de Sousa Tavares, who was the first to reach the two famous rivers of Tigris and Euphrates with armed forces” (VERA 1630: f. 148). These services were related to the idea of individual valor, which pertained only to noblemen.

This idea of service that is outlined in Ferreira de Vera’s treatise provides a general response to an argument, greatly discussed in relation to the nobility, which is the apparent difference between service and blood. Without any doubt, service had its own particular space in noble identity. At least in the case of Iberian nobilities, it did not lead to the creation of a particular distinction between noblemen serving in government or in the army. In the peerage books, it was therefore very frequent to see it mentioned that the services of an individual or of his lineage involved both military exploits and bureaucratic services (MONTEIRO; CUNHA, 2006: 97-128).

In the Portugal of the kings Filipe, the concept of nobility was founded upon the cult of the memory and the idea of prestige. To such an extent that the use of memory as a strategy for communicating the idea of nobility transformed each of the ideas of antiquity, blood and service into a

political category. Based upon these three axes, a discourse was constructed, which was sometimes tautological and closed, and at other times quite open to external influences.²⁵

Antiquity served as an irrefutable argument for fixing memory beyond the contemporary moment. It offered information that had been objectified over time about the importance and value of the concept of nobility. It incorporated patterns of conduct upon which a discourse could be developed, and conferred a particular meaning to the dominant role of the nobility during the Early Modern Age in any kingdom of Catholic Europe. In this way, the social memory of the concept of nobility existed within a space dominated by the idea of prestige. Nobility was thus the result of a set of social practices taking place at a political level. It was symbolic and consisted of representations which the treatise writers ascribed to a question of continuation over time. The physical space afforded the narrative about nobility the support of verisimilitude, but above all it gave nobility a substantial practical component.

In this sense, blood ceased to be a biological artifact and became a political and symbolic fact upon which the theoreticians of nobility concentrated their analysis, endowing it with a certain singularity and seeing blood as a factor of social distinction based on both visual and written memories. Thus, the peerage books and heraldic texts became descriptions of the features of social prestige and were reinforced by the nobility treatises themselves. By ascribing this value to blood, the treatise writers reinforced the idea of distinction as an argument by attaching it both to the idea of the lineage's ancestral capacity and the overall circumstances under which the nobleman performed his services.

And with this, we reach the third of the political categories, service. This idea was used to stress even more the idea of distributive justice typical of the *Ancien Régime*, and to legitimize the position attained by certain lineages or families. Regardless of whatever social prestige one might wish to attribute to the nobility treatise, which perhaps derived from the lack of prestige enjoyed by the book itself (BOUZA, 1998: 130), its presence in everyday life was irrefutable, and in this sense, the idea that service formed part of its ethos was equally unquestionable. As determined by the *parcialidades* (partialities) of their time, nobility treatises considered service to be a founding element of an individual's noble status, and highlighted the importance of an argument centered upon service for complementing the one that the crown maintained in its relationship with its vassals. These aspects were in themselves the framework that sustained the concept of honor as an important nobility value, offering a varied demonstration of the nature of the doctrine of nobility treatises.

For 16th-century authors, the difficulties in defining the true nature of nobility were compounded by the intellectual limitations of their time, so that most of them resorted to the commonplaces of Western thought. The fundamental axis was the binomial of virtue-honor (*honra*), as reflected in the intellectual theme of the temple of virtue, which was also taken up by Ferreira de Vera:

“The Romans had the two temples to Virtue and Honor, founded in Rome by Marcellus, with such artifice that no one could enter the temple of honor without having first passed through the temple of virtue, in order to show that one must pass through the latter in order to attain human glory.” (VERA, 2005 (1631): 20)

This notion of action-reward, which had clear Aristotelian roots, formed the basis for all the theoretical writing about nobility and for the political idea of the estate, whether it was hereditary or acquired nobility. For Álvaro Ferreira, the idea that nobility derived from virtue converted its members into good people, identifying the idea of goodness, as a supreme benefit, with the idea of nobility, for his definition included moral considerations, supposedly based on Christian post-Tridentine ethics:

“Finally there are the noblemen who tend towards God, and the ones who serve and accompany kings, those who defend and sustain the republics in peace and in war, as the heads that they are of them. From this stems the reason why the law so venerates and honors them, determining that they shall be revered by all, granting them great privileges and immunities, because honor is a reverence which is paid as a testimony to the virtue that existed in such a lineage.” (VERA, 2005 (1631):20)

The general explanation of nobility as a concept and as a social category has now been made. It is a strictly qualitative criterion, to which we ought to add, in the words of the author, “Nobility has another quality, which is when, due to one's virtue and valor and through the King's grace and favor, one has

²⁵ This point is particularly significant if we bear in mind the mention of Castilian treatise writers who are quoted or literally transcribed wholesale to the works of some Portuguese authors writing on genealogy and the nobility in the 16th and 17th centuries.

obtained nobility and *fidalgua* for oneself and for one's descendants, this benefit has such power that it elevates and ennobles one's parents and ancestors" (VERA 2005, (1631): 20).

A concept of natural nobility was identified, which served to explain the concept of political nobility. Accordingly, the capacities peculiar to each human being became established as the justification of their individual qualities and as unquestionable marks of honor, or of their political nobility, which was the same "in such a way that noblemen were the ones who were notoriously good and known for this" (VERA, 1631: f. 3r).

The qualities of noblemen became established in spite of their categories. Thus, generally speaking, the classification and hierarchic composition of the Portuguese nobility shared the same values as the ones expressed in the binomial virtue-honor. This was not a random identification. The very structure of the societies of the *Ancien Régime* was based on the idea of service and reward to which we must add, in the case of the nobility, a set of strategies for the awarding of distinction, supported, when not created, by the crown itself with the clear purpose of controlling the hierarchy of noblemen.

Nobility and genealogical writing presupposed a degree of public esteem. Its forms of communication reinforced this idea, confirming, at difficult historical moments, an idea of nobility which would include the following elements "the reason for having been so esteemed and becoming so well-known in all nations, and recognized as worthy of honor & reverence, because these noblemen all commonly share many virtues and excellences as the natural fruit of the first reason" (VERA, 1631: f. 3v).

The noble values applied to the Portuguese nobility seemed to concur with traditional Castilian practices. Taking prestige as the main part of the coat of arms, the latter would be enriched by a series of marks and mottos which composed an exclusive image centered upon the nobleman's status, but also including the traditional idea that the Habsburgs supposed that there would be a complete break in the Portuguese honors system. Despite basing himself on the classical influences affecting the general thought upon the idea of nobility—Aristotle, St. Thomas, Bartolo de Sassoferrato, Tiraqueau—Álvaro Ferreira expressed the already classical idea of the noble virtues: "for ordinarily the noblemen and *fidalgos* are temperate, prudent & brave enough to undertake high and difficult tasks, setting a new example for their successors and going further than their ancestors" (VERA, 1631: f. 3v).

Since political nobility was sanctioned by civil law, it shared the same values as "natural" nobility, even more so because the language that was used had the ultimate aim of making them equal. Thus, in 1631, an author such as Ferreira de Vera who would differentiate between natural nobility and political nobility has to make us reflect upon the shift that had taken place in the way the estate itself was considered. Did this represent a change in direction or was it just a confusion about a fact that had not undergone any change?

The author himself defined political nobility as follows: "it is a quality granted by any Prince, to the one who deserves it; either because he descends from people who have earned it through services rendered to the republic, whether in arms or in letters; or because he has distinguished himself from the others in some memorable exercise" (VERA, 2005 (1631): 23). In what way did this definition differ from the one proposed by the Castilian *Partidas* or the *Ordenações Afonsinas*, which talked of a "certain dignity inherited or granted by the prince?" Another definition was provided by Piccolomini, an Italian treatise writer who had been well received in Castile and, since 1568, had described nobility as being "an ancient blood succession of an ancient family which had illustrious and famous people in both arms and letters" (PICCOLOMINI, 1568).

Perhaps we should place our emphasis less on whether or not there existed a debate about the nature of nobility and more on the different tiers of competence to be found in the crown's composition of this privileged estate, because, if it was the monarch who made noblemen, we could only attribute to the monarch the award of the status, but never its identity. It would seem obvious to think that, despite the linguistic games, nobility was not changeable as a concept. Our author dedicated the whole of the second chapter to this problem, dividing it in turn into two clearly different parts. We have already discussed the first one in some detail, but the second had the singularity of dealing with a Portuguese phenomenon, that of the *fidalgos* and their distinct *foros* or privileges.

Most of the Portuguese writers of nobility treatises explained, commented on and highlighted the hierarchic composition of their nobility, describing the mechanism of access to each of its levels.²⁶ This was common practice in all of the literature produced about the nobility in the Iberian Peninsula, but there was one particularity to be found in Portugal, arising from the specific distinction that was drawn

²⁶ See, for example, the texts written by LEITÃO DE ANDRADE 1629 (1867).

between nobility as a social category and nobility as a concept or, what ends up being the same thing, the nobility that was sanctioned by civil law and the nobility that was ratified by blood.

Álvaro Ferreira's text defined nobility through acquisition, essentially when he dealt with the question of the *foros de fidalgos de la Casa Real*, a genuinely intermediate category and the basis of *fidalgua*, and an essential place for understanding the mechanisms of ennoblement in Portugal throughout the Early Modern Age (MONTEIRO, 1998:24).

In the communication and circulation of ideas between Castile and Portugal, we find, in the works of Ferreira de Vera, a sonnet about the nobility written by the Portuguese poet Bartolomé Cairasco Figueroa, which is also referred to by Bernabé Moreno de Vargas in his *Discursos* of 1622:

“Nobility is a generous inheritance/whose beginning and source/was some heroic, memorable deed/privilege and successful advancement/granted by accident/although thereafter inherited by right/for nature made everyone equal/but luck, courage, strength/letters, virtue and true power/create this exemption and difference.” (VERA, 1631: f. 5v and MORENO DE VARGAS, 1622: s/f.)

Based upon this series of certainties about nobility, Álvaro Ferreira found the source of nobility in the action of the sovereign, who, through his will, converted an individual's virtuous action into political honor: “kings are the one who essentially grant nobilities & *fidalguias*” (VERA, 1631: f. 6r), which undoubtedly fitted in with the Lusitanian tradition, since “if the King wants someone to be a nobleman, *Fidalgo*, count, marquis, duke & grandee, it is enough that he should wish to do this with explicit words for them to be so, as we see in our times.” This was a defense of the Habsburgs' political actions from 1580 onwards and, by extension, of the new ennoblements.

Now, the most frequent way of establishing and communicating an individual's qualities and marks of nobility was the result of a perfect combination of inheritance and service. Thus we find in *Vida de Don Duarte de Meneses, tercer conde de Viana y sucesos notables de Portugal en aquel tiempo* (VASCONCELOS, 1627) a reference to some deeds performed during his own lifetime and during the life of his ancestors:

“His first son Dom Luis was the fourth count of Tarouca, like his ancestors, governing Tangiers left by him to his successor Dom Duarte, who is the one that is still alive and therefore I shall not speak now of his deeds, which are such that in a certain way they will ensure great hopes and effects due to his excessive modesty and his tender age, adroitness in the riding of horses, much curiosity and study of language and books: a very necessary and helpful means to prepare a gentleman to learn how to be one, and to manage this with advantage fulfilling his honor well, or being worthy of praise in whatever he achieves. And more so at some times than at others, obliging his king to grant new favors and increases greater than those that are owed to his house, in whose founder religion has found its defender, and the kings have found love and truthfulness with many splendid services rendered to the country, reputation and his perpetual glory.” (VASCONCELOS, 1627: s/f)

It is easy to see here the apparent ideological dissonance arising from the idea of the monarch as the guarantor and source of nobility, as well as the cult of lineage, which is clearly expressed in these testimonies.

Ferreira de Vera himself highlighted the power of lineage by saying that this was “not because lineage may be an efficient reason, as is the virtue awarded by the Prince, but because the Prince ennoble that generation in the head of the first one” (VERA, 1631: 6r). Ferreira de Vera further identified the material values deriving from the exercise of certain professions and services and linked them to a set of immaterial values which would, nevertheless, be an argument legitimizing the social position of the individuals and formed the basis of their petitions:

“Families of such splendid quality are living examples of valor and faithfulness, whom inferiors wish to emulate and copy, basing their actions upon them. They serve their kingdoms with splendor and honor, and defend the royal crown with strength, and their merits and services must be rewarded with honors and dignities that feed their spirits born for great enterprises, without letting [these honors] be extinguished with the death of their predecessors, so that, in continuing to be worthy, they may imitate their example, for the blood that warms their veins is

the same as that of the generous spirits that spur them towards emulating heroic deeds, it being certain that the fathers and grandfathers live on in the sons and grandsons.”²⁷

Honor was the subject around which Ferreira de Vera’s nobility theory gravitated. When he deposited in the sovereign the power to grant honors as a reward for certain services, he linked tradition with the present and united in one and the same person his ancestors’ deeds and his descendants’ deeds. This comparison allowed for the generation of spaces of communication for the nobility and their strategies of legitimizing actions, based on the support provided by the idea of time. Lineages and individuals extended their services over time, conferring the status of political truth upon the genealogical and historical data which were to be found spread between books and treatises. To such an extent that if “honor is a dignity acquired through virtue, so is virtue the essence of honor and comes into its distinction” (MACEDO, 1631: f.47), the merits of the past illuminated and illustrated the qualities of the present.

In the third chapter of his work, Ferreira de Vera offered an explanation of the “origin of noble surnames and nicknames” (VERA, 1631: f. 11r). Based on the idea of the symbolic reward of individual virtues, the origin of the surnames of noble families was linked with the idea of deeds of arms or services, which would, in the end, “differentiate them from the common people,” and contribute to the adding, to the term “noble,” of other epithets such as “sublime, distinguished, remarkable, pure, generous, and above all illustrious” (VERA, 1631: f.11v). Distinction, which the author dated back to the Roman world, served as the first qualitative proof of the distance between the titled and the non-titled.

This tradition was linked to a deed that we also find mentioned in the work of Manuel Severim de Faria in his *Notícias de Portugal*, published several years later. Nonetheless, he clearly recognized this to be an undoubtedly excellent idea with regard to the consideration of the noble family: “the families’ nobility being the most cherished thing in the political republics” (FARIA, 1644: 81); and he linked the nobility of the families of a kingdom to that of its crown, such that the attributes of the nobility—surnames, coats of arms and heraldic symbols—could be explained in the context of the theory relating to the nobility as marks that were not only conjunctural, but also formed part of the symbolic capital of a lineage. Ferreira de Vera himself followed this chapter with another one dedicated to the origin of coats of arms and crests, stating clearly in his preliminary words the true dimension and function “of arms & crests” when he said that “all good government of a republic consists in rewarding the virtuous” (VERA, 1631: f. 17v).

The heraldic language, so closely linked to nobility, was an essential part of its social prototype. In order to create the latter, it was necessary to make use of the knowledge provided by the peerage books, which clearly explained the reality of each of the individuals of a family or lineage.²⁸ The set of symbolic representations of the past which were placed on a heraldic coat of arms were the most evident manifestation of the continuation of a language that was understood by all. However, their explanation was not to be found only in the peerage books, because the treatises were the place where the real nature of heraldic devices were explained beyond their purely formal aspects. The political power of the coat of arms and the regulations for the use of crests had as their common purpose to underline the idea that a lineage continued over time, sometimes even situating it in time prior to the existence of the royal dynasty itself, or else beginning directly with it, as demonstrated by the appearance of the royal arms on some noble coats of arms (ALBERGARÍA, 1633).

Something similar occurred when the origins of the distinct noble hierarchies were narrated. Dukes, marquises and counts are afforded their own space of definition in Ferreira de Vera’s work. He himself deals with the subject of the policy of appointments followed by the kings Felipe and says that “When King Filipe the Prudent came to this kingdom there were no more than three dukes, namely the Duke of Bragança, the Duke of Barcelos, the title that is given to the first-born son of the Duke of Bragança, and the Duke of Aveiro which forms part of the Lancaster surname” (VERA, 1631: f. 29r).

The dukedoms were increased in number by Felipe II (Filipe I), who granted the title of Duke of Torres Novas to the first-born sons of the Dukes of Aveiro (VERA, 1631: f. 29r), and his son Felipe III (Filipe II) went on to grant the title of Duke of Caminha to Dom Miguel de Meneses, who was already Marquis of Vila Real (VERA, 1631: f. 29r). The main question lay in the impossibility of dissociating,

²⁷ The general tenor of the writings of the nobility theorists can best be appreciated in the petitionary language of some noblemen, where we find different categories of noble identity, as, for example, in the *Memorial de don Fernando de Noroña*, SNAHN, Osuna, c. 3363, d. 8, f. 22r.

²⁸ An essential tool for gaining a broader understanding of genealogy can be found in CRAIGIE 2006, 2 v. There is also an interesting reflection upon this subject in REGO 2007 and NORTON 2004, 3 v.

within the idea of nobility defended by Álvaro Ferreira de Vera, matters of personal merit, blood and time. The concept of nobility was thus the result of a meritocratic discourse that bound both nobles and the Habsburg dynasty itself to an ancestral tradition introduced by previous dynasties, from which it could be deduced that the noble family ended up being “an order of descent which, beginning in one person, is passed on from son to grandson” (FARIA, 1644: 81). This can be plainly seen in the already mentioned *Nobiliario del Conde don Pedro* and the successive updates produced by Lavanha, Ferreira de Vera and Faria e Sousa, where we can see how certain surnames were linked to a title.

Finally, Ferreira de Vera devoted one of the last chapters of his book to trying to explain the mechanisms of access to privilege. Basing himself, as he had done in the first chapter, on the authority of Tiraqueau, he stressed the idea of the head of a lineage and the link between this ‘foundational myth’ and the idea of virtue. The discourse is constructed around the antinomy of virtue-vice, taking its inspiration from Jerónimo Osório, who was adamant about the pair of virtue-nobility:

“Virtue does not consist only of the efficaciousness achieved through persistent labor, but also of the natural virtuousness that a family and its particular nature represent. This we call nobility, for nobility is precisely the virtuousness that is a distinguishing quality of a certain family” (OSÓRIO, 1996, (1542): 171)

4. Conclusions

The urban nobilities found in the nobility treatises the perfect medium for defining their political, ethical and cultural attitudes, for it offered them a complete system for the representation of their values. If we take the high nobility as an example, we see that a discourse was built around the question of social merit, service to the sovereign and blood, based on the recognition of honor. As a result of this, many of those honored with distinct graces and favors in Habsburg Portugal found in the treatises the culmination of their personal strategies for the attainment of prestige, singling themselves out and linking themselves to the great nobility of blood, represented in the ambiguity of natural nobility-political nobility, without forgetting that: “The nobility of this kingdom of Portugal is great and is a friend to Justice and reason” (*Diálogo llamado Philipino, congruencia XCIX* in BOUZA, 2000: 90).

In accordance with its basic principles, the noble identity is built upon two equally important foundations: at the level of theory and at the level of representations. The idea of nobility is founded upon the public image, the public space where its own ethical code is enacted. A space which must be understood as “the relations of the production and transmission of political, oral and written discourse” (CURTO, 1988: 143), and in this sense the labor of the nobility theorists was fundamental, for it afforded the debate on nobility a greater importance than the one it already possessed, establishing its precise limits. These limits on the other hand, were marked by the historical circumstances of the time and the different social strategies.

What should definitely be highlighted is the practical relationship between the exercise of a certain social function and the maintenance of a political dynamic. The fact that the key to ennoblement was the combination of *virtus* and *gratia* would then explain the relationship between the nobility and the crown. The sovereign became the guarantor of noble privilege: “dealing with the privileges and freedoms which, through letters from the kings, were given to them when they were ennobled” (GODINHO, 1997 [1516-1528]: f. IIr). This clearly established a Bartolian tradition centered upon the idea of nobility (*qualitas illata per principatum tenentem*) which, during the second half of the 16th century, was to be completed by the Castilian jurist, Juan Arce de Otálora’s maxim (*Nobilitas est virtus*). In both cases the aim was to define a space in which the action of the central power, the King, prevailed over other circumstances traditionally linked to biological nobility and its related conceptions. Now, the question was how to reconcile into one definition the conflict of powers within society. Once again the solution chosen was to comment on the situation through the repetition of commonplaces. Based on the Aristotelian system, which regarded inheritance as the main source of nobility, the nobility experts concocted an argument about the idea of nobility and goodness being transmitted by blood. This argument seemed to convince the opponents of biological nobility, since even they ended up recognizing that, with the granting of a noble title by the monarch, all of the beneficiary’s descendants would enjoy such a condition.

The same situation occurred when virtue was chosen as the origin of ennoblement, considering that the latter was a capacity which enabled the individual to enjoy certain qualities that could be claimed by his descendants, having recourse to the same system and form of communication. In this way, the idea

that nobility was the fruit of virtue was openly defended by all the experts, who based themselves on the accounts of the qualities that adorned nobility and were defined by authors such as Tiraqueau. The latter established a series of basic categories, such as wealth, virtue, knowledge, the prince, the fief, jurisdiction, the military, the clerical order, custom and homeland. We can sum up this list of words in the triptych Lineage-Function-Wealth. Consequently, it seems that the classical conflict between the traditional nobility, which was protected by its blood and therefore used it to defend its biological privileges, and the other nobility, closer to a “civil” concept of the factors of ennoblement, remained a fundamental part of the rhetoric of power, being subsumed in a debate between those who wished to gain access to the estate and sought to discover their legitimizing features and those who were already members and sketched out their own criteria for confirming their singularity.

It was within the context of this polemic that Álvaro Ferreira de Vera’s *Origem da nobreza política* belonged. As has already been explained, this author tried to include both categories in a general concept that would overcome possible disagreements, both theoretical and practical, about the subject-matter of the nobility treatises.

Later on, during the second half of the 17th century, we come across experts like João Pinto Ribeiro in his *Sobre os Títulos da Nobreza de Portugal e seus privilégios* (RIBEIRO, 1729 [1645]) and Sampaio de Vilas Boas in his *Nobiliarchia Portuguesa* (VILAS BOAS, 1676), who both produced an energetic defense of blood as a political category of noble identity.²⁹ Such opinions must be interpreted as an answer to the growing importance given to blood as a supreme value in the political sphere, under the scope of a philosophy that encouraged the development of this discourse. The constant allusions made to blood by Álvaro Ferreira de Vera not only direct our attention to that same universe, but they also tell us of the influence enjoyed by certain authors and highlight a particular sensitivity towards the legitimization of social ascent. The important thing is that, in these cases, the nobility theorists resorted to quoting authority as a strategy for justifying their own discourse.

The debate about the nature of nobility continued throughout the 16th century, and was of greatest importance in the 17th century. Only in the 18th century did we witness, at least in theory, an apparent victory of the theorists who defended the superiority of service over blood as a factor of ennoblement. At the same time, these social categories slowly entered into common law and became an essential aspect for the evolution of the idea of nobility.

The idea of nobility which is represented by the work of Álvaro Ferreira de Vera must be understood within the dual process of the creation of an ever greater aristocracy and the reaction to this phenomenon by the middle and lower sectors of the nobility. On the one hand, the need for a certain social mobility within the estate was justified, but, on the other hand, some values had become established that were peculiar to the nobility and were directly linked to the idea of blood. Just as had happened years before with the Castilian Moreno de Vargas, Álvaro Ferreira aimed his nobility treatise at the middle and lower echelons of the estate, those who seemed to be more in need of *speculum nobiliorum*, offering them a scenario in which they could interpret their own values and imitate those of the ancient nobility. As far as the question of political nobility-natural nobility was concerned, Vera identified the former with the crown’s particular plans and saw the latter as guaranteeing and defending the privileges enjoyed by noblemen. Hence, there was no criticism made of the old blood nobility, nor can one detect any traces of a dispute between arms and letters (GUILLÉN BERRENDERO, 2007). The strength of the argument lay in the radical defense of the values of nobility, as well as of an idea of nobility based on the twin notion of virtue-honor, itself the result of building an idea of service of a more holistic nature.

Lineages, coats of arms and official posts became the identifying marks of nobility, its quality further enhanced by its permanence over time. And what great social importance all these features represented during the Early Modern Age, a period that we can qualify as the age of nobility since the latter boasted a set of common characteristics that turned it into the very centre of power. Such

²⁹ An example of these opinions can be found in the following statement by Sampaio: “True nobility is the one that is inherited and which passes from father to son [...] and if some people of humble birth are to be found amongst those classified as nobles because of their valiant actions, the honorable posts they have held or due to some pre-eminence or rank that aggrandizes them, they are not the true nobility that derives from blood and is inherited from one’s ancestors, but instead they belong to the class of the civil and political nobility that is acquired through posts held in public affairs, and it will be these facts and the deeds most gloriously performed that allow them access to the first ranks of the nobility, so that truly it cannot be said of them that they are noble, but only that they are beginning to be so.” VILAS BOAS DE SAMPAIO 1676 (1725): 28-29.

characteristics included *nobilitas*, which was expressed in the sense of a certain faithfulness towards one's ancestors and the belief in the idea of a noble lineage that endured over time. There were also other values, such as *virtus*, demonstrated by the energy and skill with which nobles fulfilled certain social functions, and, finally, the so-called *certa habitatio*, that is to say the possession of a certain territory, affording jurisdiction over the land and its population. These elements represented the basis for the arguments defined in the nobility treatises in general and by Ferreira de Vera in particular.

The discourse about nobility was clearly developed along classical lines, in which honor was seen as the supreme value, extensible both to the families and their members. In its definition, the individual became combined with the collective, prestige with merit, and blood with service. The singling out of noblemen contributed substantially to the social polarization that derived from the binomial noble/non-noble, honored/non-honored.

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