

### 3

## *Hic sita Sigea est: satis hoc*

### Luisa Sigea and the Role of D. Maria, Infanta of Portugal, in Female Scholarship

*Sofia Frade*

*Hic sita SIGEA est: satis hoc: qui cetera nescit, rusticus est,  
artes nec collit ille bonas.*<sup>1</sup>

André de Resende

Luisa Sigea [FIG. 3.1] is a very peculiar and particular case of feminine scholarship for both Portugal and Spain. Not only were women scholars a rare feature in the Iberian Peninsula in the sixteenth century, but women who actually wrote texts in Latin or about classical matters, rather than reading and discussing them, were exceptional. Her education and her role at the Portuguese court of the Portuguese *Infanta* (princess) D. Maria (i.e. Maria of Portugal, Duchess of Viseu) were fundamental to enabling her unique position in the Iberian literary context.<sup>2</sup>

The education of women in Portugal and Spain in the sixteenth century was never public; women were educated, if at all, in private.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 'Here lies Sigea. These words suffice. Anyone who does not know the rest is a bumpkin and does not concern himself with culture'.

<sup>2</sup> The most recent monograph on Sigea is Thiemann (2006), although it is heavily dependent upon important earlier contributions including Allut (1862), Ribeiro (1880), Vasconcellos (1902), and Ramalho (1969–1970).

<sup>3</sup> See de Leão (1610) 151: 'E se em todas artes e disciplinas se não acham grande número de mulheres scientificas (. . .) é por a honestidade e a vergonha que as enfrea e as encolhe,



**Fig. 3.1** Etching of Luisa Sigea, reproduced from Serrano y Sanz (1905) *Apuntes para una biblioteca de escritoras españolas desde el año 1401 al 1833*. Madrid, Vol. 2, 395. Reproduced courtesy of King’s College Library.

During most of the Renaissance, aristocratic women in Portugal were not expected to leave their houses except to attend Church or religious festivities.<sup>4</sup> The women in the royal family and higher aristocracy usually

principalmente em Portugal onde as molheres se não mostram em público.’ [‘And if in all arts and subjects one cannot find a great number of women scholars, it is because honesty and shyness stops them, especially in Portugal where women do not show themselves in public.’]

<sup>4</sup> de Leão (1610) 138: ‘... muito é para celebrar o grande recolhimento e honestidade das donzelas, e o encerramento em que se crião, que se nam é para ir às igrejas (onde ainda vão poucas vezes as nobres por o antigo costume do reino) a nenhũa parte outra vão: e ainda a essas igrejas assi levão os mantos derrubados sobre os olhos, que de ninguem podem ser vistas que rostos que têm.’ [‘... the seclusion and honesty of young women is cause for celebration, and the closed quarters in which they grow up so that, unless they are going to Church (where noble women go rarely, as is the custom of the kingdom), they go nowhere, and even at Church they go with veils covering their eyes so that nobody can see them and what kind of face they have.’]

had private sessions arranged with one tutor (or several) in order to learn, at any rate, Latin. Perhaps the greatest example of this is that of Isabella I of Spain, known as '*la Católica*', whose own education had been supervised by her mother (also named Isabella), the grand-daughter of John I of Portugal; a pious and studious young woman, Isabella I set about learning Latin and is said to have achieved fluency in just one year. She became an ardent advocate of education for girls as well as boys, founded a palace school at the Castilian court, and made sure that her own daughters learned Latin.<sup>5</sup>

Even so, such education rarely led to any significant literary production, except for some Latin correspondence. Most of the Latin literature produced in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by women was closely linked to monastic life.<sup>6</sup> In monasteries women could afford a certain degree of independence and had the means to educate themselves.<sup>7</sup> The literature they produced in this context is normally of religious content, Latin being the official religious language in Catholic countries. Otherwise, most of the literary production in the Iberian Peninsula, whether the work of men or of women, was written in the vernacular. Writing in Latin was a mark of special status and prestige in intellectual and spiritual terms, marking these women off from the everyday, practical concerns of working people.

A major exception to this rule was the case of Sigea. As stated already, two factors make her a unique case: her upbringing by her father, Diogo Sigeo, and her integration in the court of the Infanta D. Maria. Born around 1520 in Tarracón, Spain,<sup>8</sup> Luisa Sigea was the youngest of four children (two boys and two girls) born to Francisca Velasco, a Spanish noblewoman, and Diogo Sigeo. Diogo was a Frenchman who moved to

<sup>5</sup> For an accessible account of Isabella's life and education, see Rubin (1991).

<sup>6</sup> Some of the women of the Iberian peninsula who wrote Latin in religious contexts are discussed in Stevenson (2005) 216–23. The scale and importance of women's scholarly and spiritual lives in connection with the monasteries in Portuguese society, an importance which extended beyond the Renaissance into the sixteenth century, has only recently begun to attract the attention it deserves. See Bellini (2005).

<sup>7</sup> Miguel-Prendes (1999) 457: 'Active learning and writing, beyond the few precepts and rules on how to live endorsed by Vives, were considered unwomanly; they were tolerated only when women renounced what identified them as women, marriage and childbearing, and gave themselves to the asexual or celibate life of monastic retreat.'

<sup>8</sup> The exact date is disputed, though she must have been born before 1522, when her father fled from Spain to Portugal.

Spain as a boy and was educated there at Alcalá University, learning Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. He was forced to move to Portugal in 1522 on account of his connections with the failed attempt at revolution in Castile, the 'Revolt of the Comuneros' led by Juan de Padilla. Once in Portugal, Diogo became tutor to the children in the royal house of the Duke of Bragança.<sup>9</sup> Having achieved a stable position in the court, he summoned his family to join him in Portugal in around 1536.

From this moment, when Luisa moved to Portugal, she was educated by her father, along with her sister Ângela and their brothers Diogo and António.<sup>10</sup> This education makes the Sigea girls a very special case, since women were excluded from Universities in Portugal and Spain, as in all of Europe. In Iberia, the very few women with a strong classical education were normally connected with religious centres and monasteries. Therefore, the secular education of both Luisa and her sister make them unique and proved invaluable to both of them. Their father probably saw this education as the only way to ensure that his daughters could make a decent living (which they could never achieve solely through marriage, being from a relatively poor family with a questionable reputation since they had fled Spain under a cloud).<sup>11</sup> In fact, the social status the sisters achieved later in life can be directly related to their unique education (they probably not only had learning opportunities, but these opportunities were equal to their brothers. They therefore obtained an education normally reserved for boys and never accessible to women).<sup>12</sup>

Ângela was well known for her musical skills, certainly invaluable for a woman making her way in a Renaissance court. Luisa was particularly famous for knowing Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Chaldean, and Arabic as well as some modern languages; the Latin and Greek she learned with her father, and we have references to her asking for an Arabic teacher. She

<sup>9</sup> Vasaeus (1552) ch. 9, describes Diogo Sigeu as one of the greatest humanists in Portugal, and as holding an important position in regard to the royal family. He was certainly himself an excellent Latinist, since he published a Latin grammar in 1560, 'le fruit de son enseignement à la Court' ('the fruit of his teaching at the court') according to Matos (1952) 112.

<sup>10</sup> See Letter 11 in Sauvage and Bourdon (1970), 101–2.

<sup>11</sup> Miguel-Prendes (1999) 449: 'A classical education was the only wealth he could bequeath his children, and he passed it on not only to his two sons, but to his two daughters as well.'

<sup>12</sup> Rada (1994) 341.

was also fluent in Portuguese, Castilian, French, and Italian. She was not shy of such knowledge, having written a letter to the Pope in no fewer than the five ancient languages cited earlier.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to her very unusual education, Luisa also had a unique chance of making a career as a scholar thanks to the existence of an intellectual circle around the Infanta Maria, where we find the names of most Portuguese women writers of the time.<sup>14</sup> Maria was born in 1521, to the King, Manuel I of Portugal, and his third wife, the Arch-Duchess Eleanor of Austria. Maria's father died only six months after her birth. Her mother remarried and left the kingdom for France three years later; she was forced to leave her daughter behind. Therefore, from the age of four, the Infanta was left with only her eldest brother, the new King João (John) III. She was the heiress to a large part of her father's fortune and, later, her mother's. This enormous combined fortune was one of the main reasons why she was not allowed to leave the country, despite her mother's attempts to take her.<sup>15</sup> It was also, later, one of the main reasons why (despite being one of the most eligible princesses in the European Royal Houses and having been considered as a potential bride by almost

<sup>13</sup> Letter 3 Sauvage and Bourdon (1970) 83. Vasaeus (1552) ch. 9: 'Ut omnes alia Latinis litteris tinctas silentio praeteream, dabit Hispania Aloisiam Sigeam Toletanam, sed in aula Lusitana per multos iam annos educatam: quinque linguarum adeo peritam, ut non immerito Paulus tertius, Pontifex Maximus, litteras illius ad se scriptas Latine, Graece, Hebraice, Syriace, atque Arabice laudatibus sit prosecutus, admiratus tam multiplicem ingenii fructum, et donum tam multiplicis linguarum scientiae, in viris quoque rarum, nedum in foeminis: sic enim sonant verba Diplomatis. Debetur haec laus optimo patri et viro doctissimo Didaco Sigaeo. Nec in ea solum hanc operam possuit, sed alteram quoque filiam Angelam, Graece, Latineque, pro aetate et sexu non mediocriter eruditam, tam exacta Musices scientia curavit perdocendam, ut vel cum praestantissimis hujus artis professoribus contendere posse putem.'

'Even disregarding all other things written in Latin, Hispania will produce Luisa Sigea, from Toledo, but educated for many years in Portugal: she was so skillful in five languages that not without merit, the pope Paul III read her letters in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Syriac and Arab, praising the fruit of her multiple ingenuity, and the gift of the knowledge of multiple languages, already so rare in men and even more so in women: as says the document. This praise is due to her excellent and very learned father, Diogo Sigeo. He did not only work with her, but also with her other daughter Ângela, educated in Latin and Greek, well above her age and gender, and so flawless in the arts of Music that I believe she could rival the best teachers of this art.'

<sup>14</sup> See the important autobiographical study by Vasconcellos (1902).

<sup>15</sup> I draw biographical information about the Infanta Maria from Vasconcellos (1902), who reassessed the early sources including Pacheco (1675). See also Serrão (1954).

all of them, including the English king Henry VIII) she never married.<sup>16</sup> Known as ‘the eternal bride’, from 1537 onwards the Infanta Maria established a court for herself and lived as a great Renaissance princess. Here the Infanta surrounded herself with all sorts of humanists, writers, and artists. As a court headed by a woman, it was particularly appealing to women scholars and gave them a chance to be paid for their services. Sigea taught Latin to the Infanta and was paid 16,000 *reis* per year, an amount superior to that received by other chambermaids. At court Luisa had access to the royal library and could dedicate herself to her literary pursuits.<sup>17</sup>

The Infanta Maria was always present at royal functions and played an important role in the royal family. For example, she was the only sibling of the King to go with the royal couple and heir on their important visit to Coimbra in 1550, when the King bestowed the royal palace of this city on the University.<sup>18</sup> After the death of her brother, in 1558, she intensified her role as patron of the arts and made full use of iconography linking her with the House of Avis.<sup>19</sup> These facts challenge the impression given by the biographers of the Infanta, especially Friar Miguel Pacheco’s 1675 *Life*,<sup>20</sup> which represented her house as a chaste, modest, almost convent-like court. This idea has been challenged since the publication of Carolina Michaëlis de Vasconcellos’ work *Infanta D. Maria de Portugal (1521–1577) e as suas Damas*, in 1902. Most recently, it has been accepted that the Infanta played a fundamental role in the politics of the country as well as in promoting various kinds of art.<sup>21</sup>

Both Ângela and Sigea were to become part of this important cultural milieu. Sigea’s most famous works were produced during the years she spent at the court of the Queen of Portugal and later at the house of the Infanta. Her most relevant literary works are *Syntra*, a Latin poem dedicated to the Infanta, published in France by her father in 1566, and *Duarum Virginum Colloquium de vita aulica et privata* (*Dialogue between*

<sup>16</sup> She was actually married to the future Filipe II of Spain, but the marriage was annulled within twenty-four hours of being celebrated, when Filipe’s father, Charles V, learned that Mary Tudor had become a widow.

<sup>17</sup> Anastácio (2011) 569–72. <sup>18</sup> Pinto (1998) 31.

<sup>19</sup> Anastácio (2011) 569. For a full discussion of the Infanta’s support of the arts, see Pinto (1998).

<sup>20</sup> Pacheco (1675); this problematic text is discussed in detail in Peixoto (2010).

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Pinto (1998).

*two Virgins on Court Life and Private Life*), a bucolic dialogue filled with classical *topoi*, published in 1562, in France, by the intervention of the French ambassador in Portugal.<sup>22</sup> Along with these works, we have a substantial collection of letters, including those sent to the Pope Paul III.<sup>23</sup>

*Syntra* is an elegy with 54 elegiac couplets, dedicated to the Infanta on the occasion of her marriage to Philip I of Portugal (later Philip II of Spain). The poem evokes the forest of Syntra, near Lisbon. The poet encounters a nymph who has emerged from a lake to prophesy the marriage of Luisa's mistress to a noble man who will rule the world with his sceptre. The visionary nymph concludes with an instruction to Luisa:

‘Vade ergo, & timidae referas, quae diximus, ore  
Fatidico, ut laetos exigit illa dies.  
Nec sis sollicita, aut metuas praedicere fata:  
Succedent votis ordine cuncta tuis.’<sup>24</sup>

‘So go and with prophetic mouth report to that timid one  
What we have uttered, so that she may enjoy her happy days  
Nor should you be anxious, or fear to predict what is fated.  
Everything will happen, in order, according to your prayers.’

The poem is artful and elegant, involving some complicated play on direct speech within direct speech as Sigea/the authorial voice quotes the nymph quoting Jupiter as he delivers the prediction. The text is learned, displaying many allusions to canonical classical texts by famous authors including Ovid, Virgil, and even Homer.<sup>25</sup> Stevenson has suggested that it also echoes two famous ancient poems by women, Sappho's Greek hymn to Aphrodite (number 1 in all editions of Sappho), quoted in Dionysius of Halicarnassus' *On Literary Composition* 23, and Sulpicia's Latin *Satire*.<sup>26</sup> Despite the nymph's predictions, the marriage was not consummated in the end, but the text apparently benefitted Luisa's career at court, guaranteeing her a fairly good position.

<sup>22</sup> Nicot, the French ambassador in Portugal, was in fact a friend of Sigea's father, Diogo; see Matos (1952) 109.

<sup>23</sup> Sigea's Latin letters are collected in Corbalán (2007).

<sup>24</sup> The text is reproduced from Sigea (1566). The same text, with accompanying English translation and detailed discussion, is more easily accessible in Stevenson (2005) 214–15. There is a variant text in manuscript 338 in the Toledo Public Library.

<sup>25</sup> Tocco (1992) 113.

<sup>26</sup> Sappho's ode to Aphrodite had begun to circulate widely in Humanist circles after Robert Estienne's Greek edition of Dionysius, published in 1546 (on which see further the chapter by Fabre-Serris on p. 83). On Sulpicia see the comprehensive study of Skoje (2002).

*Duarum Virginum Colloquium de vita aulica et privata* is a dialogue text, very similar in form to the typical Renaissance dialogues by and in imitation of the style of Erasmus. It is a complicated, skilfully written, and fascinating work. Dedicated to the Infanta, it thanks her for allowing the author time to write it and for allowing her to use the library. This has allowed the authoress to improve her knowledge of literature (a knowledge which is displayed in dense and erudite allusion to classical and patristic authors). The three-day dialogue takes place, in a conventional *locus amoenus*, between two women, Blesilla and Flaminia. They debate whether it is better to live in court or in a private home, a favourite Humanist theme. A short excerpt from one of Blesilla's speeches will give a flavour of the text and its allusiveness.<sup>27</sup>

Faciam libenter quod iubes; non enim me paenitebit unquam exantlati laboris in hoc conflict, cum, teste Seneca, 'generosos animos labor nutriat.' Se denim hodie non licebit ulterius progredi; cadunt enim e montibus umbrae, ut ait Mantuanus Tytirus. . . Eamus igitur nunc, et Musicis demus aliquantisper operam dum crepusculum est, ad levandos illic animos ubi aquae susurrus et avicularum cantus vocibus nostris atque organis consonant.

I shall do your bidding with pleasure. It will never be a trial for me to pour out my efforts in this debate; for, as Seneca says, 'Labour nourishes noble souls.'<sup>28</sup> But at this hour, today is not the time to continue; the shadows are falling from the mountain, as the Mantuan's Tityrus says.<sup>29</sup> Let us depart, then, and give our attention to the musicians for a time while it is twilight, and ease our souls there where the murmur of the water and the songs of the birds will accompany our voices and our instruments.

The immediate reception of this text was positive and enthusiastic, but it soon lapsed into obscurity and remained almost entirely neglected until the second half of the twentieth century. Although it was published in Spain in 1903 by Manuel Serrano y Sanz, a critical edition and translation (in French) did not appear until 1970.<sup>30</sup>

The younger interlocutor, Flaminia, is a courtier and defends the life at court as the best option for a woman, while the older one, Blesilla, is a nun and defends a life of isolated quietude and reflection. This discussion is used as a context in which to contemplate other important political topics such as the nature of power, the ideal prince, and his relation with

<sup>27</sup> Text and translation reproduced from Churchill et al. (2002) 175–6 and 183.

<sup>28</sup> Seneca, *Epistle* 31.5. <sup>29</sup> Vergil, *Eclogue* 1.82–3. <sup>30</sup> Sauvage (1970).



his people, and is thus a perfect example of a conventional confluence of different humanistic traditions: dialogue form, serious socio-political topics, and a huge number of quotations (Latin, Greek, biblical, and patristic) to show the author's erudition and her capacity to work within the tradition in order to support two different positions.<sup>31</sup> There is nothing out of the ordinary in this text, except for the single fact that it was written by a woman in a time and place where this generic form of literary argumentation usually belonged exclusively to male authors.

Modern scholars have assessed Sigea's achievement in radically different ways. Miguel-Prendes criticizes the text for being basically a translation of other texts; for her, Sigea is a learned but derivative figure.<sup>32</sup> But Nascimento admires the manner in which the dialogue crystallizes the central issues in its discussion of what an ideal life should be.<sup>33</sup> Inés Rada has pointed out, rather, the elements of autobiography and self-representation, where the text highlights the education of Luisa Sigea and places her in the ranks of the great humanists.<sup>34</sup>

In the end, despite Blesilla's advice, Flaminia decides to stay at court.<sup>35</sup> George argues that the difference between the use of general, universalizing affirmations and more contextually specific ones (what the Roman orator

<sup>31</sup> Tocco (1992) 117.

<sup>32</sup> Miguel-Prendes (1999) 452–3, argues that the basis for the construction of this dialogue is the texts recommended in the Renaissance to educate women. She goes on to suggest (455–6): 'Luisa Sigea, as a woman and a woman in court, writes within linguistic and social structures that do not permit her to transcend her role. First of all, she confines herself to translation, one of the fields allowed to women writers, and she excels in it as an accomplished student. . . But she stops short when it comes to imitating or recreating the models that she so expertly translates, to speaking in her own voice.'

<sup>33</sup> Nascimento (1995) 290. <sup>34</sup> Rada (1994) 349.

<sup>35</sup> Ramalho (1969–1970) 407: 'Esta atitude crítica aberta ao procedimento dos príncipes, ao seu egoísmo, tirania e ingratidão não a conseguem disfarçar as citações bíblicas, patrísticas ou pagãs, sobretudo as duas primeiras, com que tenta escudar-se a incisiva Blesila, tão franca quanto imprudente. Com efeito, embora Flaminia seja criação da humanista, não menos que Blesila, e Flaminia exalte a realeza e a vida na corte, Blesila está mais de acordo com o que as cartas de Sigeia nos revelam, e representa certamente a sua verdadeira forma de pensar. Não surpreende por isso, que os príncipes não fossem generosos com Luísa Sigeia, quando esta abandonou o seu serviço.' 'this disapproving attitude towards the behaviour of the princes, their selfishness, tyranny and ingratitude are not disguised by the biblical, patristic and pagan quotes, mainly the first two, with which the cutting Blesila tries to guard herself, as honest as imprudent as she is. Indeed, even though Flaminia is a creation of the artista as much as Blesila, and Flaminia praises the royalty and the life at court, Blesila is more in tune with what Sigea's letters tell us, and certainly represents her way of thinking. It is, therefore, not a surprise that the princes were not generous with Luisa Sigea, once she left their service.'

Quintilian called questions *infinitae* and *finitae*, respectively) can be used to show that Luisa Sigea's own ideas are more aligned to those of Flaminia than Blesilla.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, some scholars have seen the conclusion of the dialogue as a direct expression of Sigea's own vexations at a time when she was apparently frustrated by her lack of success at court, and thinking about retiring from the Infanta's service to a private existence in a remote countryside village, there to marry an impoverished nobleman.<sup>37</sup> Certainly, Sigea wrote a revealing letter in Latin to her brother-in-law, Alfonso de Cuevas, complaining that after thirteen years' hard labour at the court, she had in the end not even been awarded her promised salary (see further on p. 58).<sup>38</sup>

Sigea's other letters cover a variety of themes and are critical to understanding her life; they are fundamental to painting a picture of her as a humanist writer. In her letters, which include a selection addressed to some of the most significant figures in European politics at the time, we can find a wide range of quotations from Homer and Aristotle, Pliny, Plato, Xenocrates, and Seneca. This epistolary corpus, along with her other writings, offers the potential to be a fundamental source of information on the classical texts available in Portugal at the time. The establishment of the sources of Renaissance authors, both writing in Latin or in the vernacular, is a very problematic question, and little work has been done in relation to writers working within Renaissance Portugal.<sup>39</sup> We have scant information about the library of the Infanta or indeed other Portuguese libraries at the time; we also need to be careful to distinguish between quotations which were taken from books of excerpts and those which were taken from the full original texts. A thorough investigation into literary resources available to Renaissance writers, and the identification of sources used in specific works, are both fundamental to any serious research on the culture of this era. Since at least some of the most prominent figures of the Portuguese Renaissance were in one way or another linked to D. Maria, the close analysis of Sigea's literary culture would not only tell us more about her own reading

<sup>36</sup> See George (2000).

<sup>37</sup> E.g. Stevenson (2005) 212–23.

<sup>38</sup> Allut (1862) 11–12.

<sup>39</sup> The seminal work on the idiosyncratic nature of the Portuguese Renaissance remains Cerejeira (1917); for more recent attempts to refresh the discussion, see e.g. Klucas (1981) and Klucas (1992).

habits and experience, but offer fundamental insights into the broader literary and intellectual culture and outputs of this period.

In September 1552 Luisa Sigea married Francisco de Cuevas, a nobleman from Burgos, Spain. They had only one child, a daughter named Juana de Cuevas Sigea. Shortly after her marriage, Luisa left the court to live in Burgos. By that time, the rest of her family seems to have been established in Torres Novas, Portugal, where Ângela was married to a local nobleman. In 1558, Luisa and her husband went to Valladolid to work for Maria of Habsburg, the daughter of Philip I of Spain—her husband as a secretary, she as a Latinist. But this position lasted for only a few months since Queen Maria died shortly afterwards.

Luisa spent the rest of her days trying to go back to court, but was never given a position at any court again. She died on 13 October 1560. The latter years and end of her life are not very well understood, but from her letters she seems to have experienced great difficulty in adapting to existence away from court, despite all her criticisms of the way of life there. She also seems to have resented that, despite her unique scholarly characteristics, she never seemed to go as far in life as other women of a more noble birth. Yet this response was to deny the realities of the relationship between birth-status and education at the time. It was the lack of opportunity caused by her insufficiently high birth—the doors that were always going to be closed to only a minor aristocrat and an immigrant—that motivated her father to ensure that she had a way to support herself by offering her such an exceptional education.

Sigea was by far the best and most renowned woman scholar of her age. In her later years she resented being insufficiently recognized and not being awarded the status and respect she felt she deserved, probably because after marriage she was kept away from opportunities appropriate to a scholar. Yet her role at court must have been highly valued by the Infanta since her daughter, Juana Sigea, was provisioned in D. Maria's will with an annuity of 12,000 *reis*.<sup>40</sup> There can be little doubt that the Infanta prized the scholarly output of the learned women with whom she liked to surround herself. Indeed, in Portugal, almost all the Latin texts produced during this period which are associated with women's names are also associated with Infanta Maria's household: Joanna Vaz and

<sup>40</sup> Pinto (1998) 174; Ramalho (1970) 407.

Pública Hortênsia de Castro being the main names along with Sigea. Vaz was a maid of honour in attendance upon Queen Catherine of Portugal; she is said to have played a key role in court events and to have written fluent Latin.<sup>41</sup> Pública Hortênsia de Castro's parents had named her very obviously after the famous daughter of the consul Quintus Hortensius Hortalus, who had delivered an effective oration to the Triumvirs in 42 BC, pleading for the repeal of a tax imposed on prosperous Roman women. This ancient Hortensia had studied Greek as well as Latin literature, especially the orators (see Appian, *Civil Wars* 4.32–4; Valerius Maximus, *Factorum et dictorum memorabilium libri* 8.3.3). The name selected for the Portuguese Pública Hortênsia suggests that she was destined from birth to an exceptional education including Greek and Latin.<sup>42</sup> She certainly engaged with great argumentative skill and polish in a public disputation on Aristotle at the age of just seventeen, eluding the attempts of her clever male interlocutors to trip her up.<sup>43</sup>

A few well-educated Portuguese princesses are documented later in the sixteenth century; Sigea's reputation may have been instrumental in leading their parents to encourage their studies.<sup>44</sup> Yet the only Latin texts by women which were actually *published* during the sixteenth century (and whose authorship is therefore beyond dispute) are those of Sigea.<sup>45</sup> Sigea was not alone as an educated woman, but as a celebrity intellectual and published Humanist, she was a major exception for her times. Although sixteenth-century Portugal and Spain were politically unified, and their royal houses much intermarried, the two cultures remained distinct, and the Portuguese were always assiduous in affirming their separate identity. Arriving as a foreigner (half-French, half-Spanish) from a non-Portuguese background, and as a member of only a relatively minor aristocratic family with possible revolutionary tendencies, she nevertheless succeeded in making a living for herself thanks to her exceptional education.

Yet it can scarcely be stressed enough that there is still much to be researched and discovered about Sigea and her context beyond her gender and social status. An important area of future study would be

<sup>41</sup> Vasconcellos (1902) 36–7.      <sup>42</sup> dos Anjos (1626) 402.

<sup>43</sup> Vasconcello (1593) n.p., quoted in Serrano y Sanz (1903) vol. 1, 247–8.

<sup>44</sup> See Stevenson (2005) 216; dos Anjos (1626) 243–5; della Chiesa (1620) 122.

<sup>45</sup> George (2002) 218.

the comprehensive examination of her sources and quotations in order to ascertain what kind of library was available to her. Are her quotations from the original texts or from the widely distributed books of quotations and anthologies so popular during the Renaissance? Are her quotations in Greek an indication that Homer and other ancient texts were already available in their original Greek versions in Portugal at the time? Maybe the study of this (until recently) almost neglected woman scholar could open an extraordinary door to the understanding of the Renaissance and Humanism in Portugal.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>46</sup> I would like to thank Dr Vanda Anastácio for guiding me through the waters of women writers in Portugal during the Renaissance and for stressing that the outputs of Luisa Sigea would have been impossible without the Infanta D. Maria of Portugal and her patronage towards women.