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The uses of luxury: some examples from the Portuguese courts from 1480 to 1580**

The article explores the relationship between precious possessions and power strategies of their owners in the context of the reinforcement of the Crown's power between c. 1480 and the end of the Avis-Beja dynasty in 1580. Six figures are analysed from a gender perspective: Kings João II, Manuel I, and João III; Beatriz, duchess of Avis, and Queens Leonor and Catarina de Áustria.

Their choice of precious possessions depended not only on personal circumstances but also varied according to their access to political authority. Whereas women accumulated objects in direct relation with their spirituality (with the exception of Queen Catarina), men favoured the possession of religious objects as a strategy in order to reinforce political power and authority.

Keywords: material culture; collections; political power; gender; devotion.

Os usos do luxo: alguns exemplos das Cortes portuguesas entre 1480 e 1580

O presente artigo explora a relação entre os bens materiais e as estratégias de poder dos seus possuidores no contexto do reforço dos poderes da Coroa entre cerca de 1480 e o fim da dinastia de Avis-Beja em 1580. Analisam-se, segundo uma perspectiva de género, seis figuras da casa real: os reis D. João II, D. Manuel I e D. João III; a duquesa de Beja, D. Beatriz, a rainha D. Leonor, sua filha, e ainda D. Catarina de Áustria. As suas escolhas em matéria de bens de luxo dependiam não apenas de circunstâncias pessoais, mas variavam também consoante o seu acesso à autoridade política. Enquanto as mulheres acumularam objectos em relação directa com a sua espiritualidade (com a excepção provável de D. Catarina), os homens favoreciam a posse de objectos religiosos como uma estratégia de reforço de autoridade e poder político.

Palavras-chave: cultura material; colecções; poder político; género; devoção.

The study of choices in consumption is often thought of as an a-historical category deprived of political aims or consequences, and not as “myriad conflicts over power that constitute the politics of consumption” (De Grazia and Furlough, 1996, p. 4). Objects communicate with the invisible or absent, be it God, the past, or the future. They testify to their owners’ good

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relationship with the gods, and claim their right to eternity, thereby asserting their position within the society they belong to. It is this relationship with the supernatural, or what transcends materiality, that invests objects with meaning¹. Seen in this light, the acquisition of luxurious objects and gift giving cannot be seen as the exclusive result of personal taste, but also as political and social investments within given historical contexts.

This article is a first approach to the study of the ways in which conspicuous consumption fashioned gendered identities and claims to political status in the context of Portuguese courts during a period that extends from the last twenty years of the fifteenth century, until the end of the Avis-Beja dynasty in 1580. I shall draw examples from several of the most significant characters in the royal households: King João II, Beatriz, duchess of Beja, her two children Leonor and King Manuel I, João III and Catarina de Áustria. In the context of the transition from the Middle Ages to the Early Modern Period, these individuals also represent a political trajectory that starts with a king threatened by rivals who aspired to the throne (João II); proceeds to the analysis of the women that represented the rival faction, his mother-in-law Beatriz and wife Leonor; and moves to the last three characters, who represent kingship in a monarchy that no longer had internal competitors. Manuel I ruled as a monarch whose authority was largely unquestioned at the internal level, but needed to construct his international image as a magnificent monarch. He can also be seen to represent the victory of the Beja branch of the royal family, as he was also son of Beatriz and brother to Leonor. João III reigned between 1521 and 1557, when royal finances were far from enjoying the same good health as during his predecessor's reign; Catarina arrived in Portugal in 1525 as his queen consort and was to obtain a significant political influence both during her husband's life and after his death (from 1557-1562).

These persons acquired objects within different contexts and pursued different goals regarding the self-fashioning of their identity as consumers of products. The importance of the category "luxury" cannot be ignored here; we are considering a society with a particular regime of consumption, based on aristocratic values where religious symbolism played an essential part.

ROYAL COURTS, LUXURY GOODS, GIFT GIVING, AND PRIVATE COLLECTING IN THE POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS CONTEXTS

As elsewhere in Europe, the distinctions between court and households were somewhat blurred in Portugal, because the royal court was in practice

¹ K. Pomian has defined these objects as semiophors, a concept that has been adopted in this article (see K. Pomian 1999, pp. 191-229).

a set of interconnected households (in Portuguese, *casas*). The king's house and servants comprised one unit, whereas the queen formed another, and princes were given their own when they came of age. The same can be said about closer relatives: even aristocratic nuns held court in convents, and bishops might keep an entourage of courtiers similar to that of the king, complete with resident musicians. The distinction between a royal court and other aristocratic courts thus lies mainly in scale, and not in composition, revenues, or activities such as music or theatre. Borders between courts could also be vague, as the same courtiers could have overlapping functions in the same household, or participate in different households. The problem is further complicated by the fact that courtiers, although belonging to different households, could belong to the same family. Most households, however, dissolved as soon as their holder died, and were absorbed into the surviving ones². A ceaseless composition and re-composition of the courts' personnel occurred whenever a member of the royal family died, or even in the case of a princess marrying into another European court. The problem is further complicated when we consider the king's brothers and sisters. Although they could share the same palace (*paço*) at given moments in time, they could also live in their own residences. It is thus difficult to use the word "court" in order to mean this complex world of multiple units that might dissolve or separate from the royal court itself³.

As we know, in early modern societies each one had to live up to his or her social standing; for members of the royal family, and even bishops or titled nobles, this often meant showing off material wealth in accordance with their status. Even so, it was agreed that wealth should honour God and be put to His service through generous donations to ecclesiastic institutions or to the poor. It was shameful on the part of the wealthy to be too attached to earthly goods, and they should distribute them generously amongst their entourage and the poor. These values explain most of the choices of our royal *personae* concerning the nature of the objects they chose to own or to give away as gifts.

Let us start with the first of our case studies, King John II (1455-1481-1495). He was to face the turbulence of two plots against him, the first in 1483, led by the duke of Braganza, and the second in 1484, by the duke of Viseu. Both were the heads of the most important households after the royal one: the duke of Braganza had married Isabel, the sister of the king's wife Leonor, and Diogo, the duke of Viseu, was her eldest brother. In short,

² Rita Costa Gomes (2003, p. 57) argues that queens' households were dispersed at their death. This was also the case, however, with the households of other members of the royal family.

³ Mafalda Soares da Cunha (2003) has termed it "a plural system of courts".

João II's enemies were all members of his wife's family, herself his first cousin. The king inherited a financial situation near bankruptcy when his father Afonso V died, as well as an unconsolidated peace with Castile. Afonso had involved himself in a war with Isabel of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon over the rights to the throne of Juana (1462-1530), the *Beltraneja*, daughter of King Henry IV of Castile (1425-1454-1474) and his wife Joana, Afonso's sister. Juana was the most direct heir to the throne of Castile but Isabel's partisans spread the idea that she was illegitimate and thus could not be their queen. Afonso V contended his rights to the throne as both uncle and husband of Juana, whom he married in 1475. As a result of this conflict, Prince João (later João II) ordered the melting of most of the silver in possession of ecclesiastic institutions during a period of regency while his father invaded Castile (Resende, 1973, p. 10). The battle of Toro put an end to Afonso V's claims, the king retreating to Portugal with his wife Juana (Fernández Álvarez, 2003, pp. 196-230 and Suárez, 2005, pp. 127-150). A precarious peace was signed in September 1479 in the treaty of *Alcáçovas-Toledo*, because the contenders could not seal it by marriage in the short term. Afonso, son of Prince João of Portugal, was four at the time, and Fernando and Isabel's daughters were also too young. As a consequence, peace arrangements required that the latter be taken as hostages at the *terçarias de Moura*, until they were old enough for betrothal to each other.

The exotic products available until João II's death did not include the Asian ones; they were restricted to gold, ivory, and slaves from East Africa. He is the only one of our six characters who did not live to see the "marvellous possessions" Vasco da Gama's voyage brought back to Portugal. In fact, whereas Manuel I would own, some twenty years later, rhinoceroses, elephants, and panthers, King João II exhibited a camel in the yard of his *paço* in the city of Évora (Munzer, 1951, p. 66). The posthumous inventories of the objects existing in the various sections of his household suggest modest belongings when compared to the sophistication of his successors. A Polish traveller commented on the fact that the king and his only son and heir ate from common plates and vessels, "as if they were princes in a lesser court"⁴. We can never be sure how representative the sources available are of his mobile property, but nothing relevant strikes the eye, except for the usual silver tableware, a silver hourglass, and a modest array of textiles (except for table napkins, which summed nearly six hundred)⁵.

⁴ "Viaje de Nicolas de Popielovo por España y Portugal", in *Viajes de Extranjeros por España y Portugal en los Siglos XV, XVI, y XVII. Coleccion de Javier Liske*, traducidos del original y anotados por F. R., Madrid, 1878, p. 133.

⁵ Freire (1903-1916), documents n. 52, 186, 187, 376, 384 and 425.

The unique moment of conspicuous consumption during his reign was the wedding of his son Afonso with Isabel, the eldest daughter of Fernando and Isabel of Castile. For the occasion, according to his chroniclers Rui de Pina and Garcia de Resende, João II imported tapestries, woollen textiles and silver bullion from Germany, Flanders, England, and Ireland; Italy and Castile supplied silk cloths and damask; harnesses were commissioned from Castilian artisans (Almeida (ed.), 1977, 966-973 and Resende, 1973, pp. 158-159). The wedding did not improve the financial situation of the Crown, but did bring an end to the hostilities between Castile and Portugal. In fact, the king had to assemble courts in Évora in January 1490 in order to obtain the sum of 100 thousand *cruzados* from the representatives of the third estate (Resende, 1973, pp. 144-145). Besides this crucial moment in his life, when he married his only son to his former enemy's daughter, no other moment of conspicuous consumption is known during his reign.

His mother in law, Beatriz, duchess of Beja, died in 1506 after 36 years of widowhood. Her husband, Fernando, duke of Viseu (heir to the fortune of Henry the Navigator, deceased in 1460), died in 1470, leaving her as the head of the household, with teenaged daughters Leonor and Isabel to marry (although promised to the prince heir and to the future duke of Braganza), and five young male children on whose behalf she would exert considerable power (Lopes, 2003, p. 54). Three of these died in childhood, but Diogo, duke of Viseu, would be one of the opponents of João II, and Manuel would be king. Her husband had merged his wife's land inheritance with his estates and she became the administrator of the duchies of Beja and Viseu after his death. Her assets included Madeira and its sugar, and the government of the Order of Christ during her sons' minority⁶. She had considerable political authority, as she represented the king of Portugal in the initial negotiations with her niece Isabel the Catholic, held at Alcantara in the aftermath of the battle of Toro (Siculo, 1533, pp.168-170; de la Torre and Suárez Fernández, 1958-1963, vol. 1, pp. 215-241)⁷. In the agreement that followed, she was charged with the responsibility of caring for the heirs of both parties, who were to grow up together as hostages in the town of Moura. Only in 1484 was her remaining son Manuel I (Diogo, duke of Viseu had been killed by her brother in law King João II) to be named as the grand master of the order. As with many widows of her time, independence meant the possibility

⁶ The pope delegated the government of the order to Beatriz on 19 June 1475. Her son Diogo was the Grand Master for a brief period, and only in 1484 was Manuel to inherit its command when King João II killed Diogo, who had been conspiring against him (see Almeida, ed., 1977, pp. 926-933, and Resende, 1973, pp. 78-86).

⁷ Isabel the Catholic was the daughter of Beatriz's sister, who had married King Juan II of Castile.

of investing in a religious institution. *Nossa Senhora da Conceição de Beja* was a Poor Clare convent, affiliated with the observant branch of the Franciscans, founded while her husband was still alive. She devoted herself to the convent during her widowhood, and bequeathed most of her earthly possessions to it upon her death⁸. The convent was to house the family chapel and inherit her apothecaries filled with Asian spices. When she died in 1506 oriental textiles had already invaded liturgical apparatus such as altar frontals, vestments, canopies, etc.⁹ Nevertheless, some of her possessions were still related with the early years of the Portuguese empire, as they originated in West Africa: two civet cats, lavishly ornamented by gold and precious stone collars, two parrots, and several slaves, many of them white. Her situation reflects a gender-specific option: she held a court of her own, but in the immediate vicinity of the convent she had founded at Beja. Piety and devotion were essential in the building of identities for widowed women, who lived their post-marital lives in prayer and seclusion. Nevertheless, monastic austerity was not incompatible with a wide number of servitors (physician, confessor, and apothecary, slaves, maids of honour, etc), and a whole range of objects that testified to their owner's faith and magnificence (Freire, 1914, pp. 64-110).

Beatriz's eldest daughter, Leonor, married King João II in 1471 and upon his death in 1495 began a long widowhood of thirty years, in which she performed the same religious devotion, founding a convent of her own, the *Madre de Deus de Xabregas*. It belonged to the Poor Clare branch of Sainte Colette of Corbie, and was also a member of the same branch of observant Franciscan convents as her mother's *Conceição de Beja*. The nuns were to inherit the objects included in her personal oratory and chapel. She was buried as a tertiary Franciscan, in a flat grave in the floor that leads to the entrance of the convent's church. Both her convent and her mother's required from their inmates absolute poverty, but that was not the case of the churches of their convents, filled with precious commodities. Whilst both convents had to acquire papal permission in order to have rents of their own to avoid financial instability caused by the uncertainties of alms collecting, the list of liturgical apparatus and relics is impressive in both cases (Belém, 1753, p. 483, and 1755, pp. 27-33). It seems that this contrast was not seen as a contradiction, as long as riches contributed to the glory of God, at least in the eyes of the founders. Leonor inherited at least 17 white slaves from

⁸ Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal (BNP), cód. 11 352. On the creation of the convent, see Belém (1753, pp. 475-505).

⁹ On the subject of demand for religious art and proliferation of religious institutions during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, see Goldthwaite, 1993, pp. 69-148. On widowed women and religious patronage, see King (1998, pp. 29-39).

her mother, and acquired others through other means. Between 1518 and 1519, she is said to have taken 70 of them to her lands in the *vila das Caldas* where she had founded a hospital in the 1480s. Some were put to work inside the hospital's premises, where they performed menial tasks such as sweeping and carrying water (Sousa, 2002, p. 172; Sá and Paiva, 2004, pp. 132-151). Whereas in a plantation economy such as colonial Brazil slaves would be trivial presences, in metropolitan Portugal they were luxurious commodities, often presented as trophies of conversion to Christianity. Most of them received baptism, and slave children were sometimes entrusted to convents for induction.

Leonor was obsessed with relics: her inventory lists body parts and *memorabilia* from over 30 different saints. The ensemble can be considered a collection in its own right, as its inner logic obeyed a concern to represent moments in sacred history, from the Old and New Testament, with special emphasis on Christ's passion. Mendicant saints, but not exclusively, were also present either with items of their bodily remains or with contact relics. For instance, the collection included hairs of the Virgin Mary, pieces of Christ's dress, a bowl from which St. Anthony of Padua-Lisbon used to drink, and every sort of fragment that might have witnessed events of sacred history¹⁰.

Her most prized relic was a thorn from the crown of Christ that she was to keep in a reliquary made in the German fashion. By 1523, two years before her death, a certificate issued by the apostolic notary certified that the thorn had bled during Holy Friday¹¹. The relics of *Santa Auta* came second only to this one. A high moment in her life was their arrival to Lisbon, a present from her cousin, the emperor Maximilian. King Manuel I ordered the transportation of the relics from the river Tagus to his sister's convent of the Madre de Deus in a solemn procession, thus transforming it into a major event in the life of the city of Lisbon (Góis, 1949 [1566], pp. 68-69; Lowe, 2000, pp. 225-248).

As we know, relics were generally deposited in churches, not all of them religious. Some were military, as was the case of certain spoils from important battles¹². In that context, liturgical objects taken from the enemy during war were especially meaningful. But in Leonor's case, many of her relics were for personal use: she kept them in her private chambers, and used to

¹⁰ BNP, cód. 11352.

¹¹ BNP, ms. 255, n.º 14, "Instrumento do milagre do espinho da coroa de nosso senhor que a rainha nossa senhora tem", 10 de Dezembro de 1523.

¹² The Cistercian monastery of Alcobaça owned amongst its relics at least two objects taken from the enemy in battle. See inventory drawn in 1519 [Instituto dos Arquivos Nacionais/Torre do Tombo (hereby IAN/TT), *Corpo Cronológico*, I-24-65].

carry a small bag containing some of them around her neck. Only after her death were her personal relics passed on to the convent she founded.

When King Manuel I ascended the throne, even before Vasco da Gama's voyage, royal finances were greatly improved. Not only was he a rich man — as the heir to his brother Diogo who had been killed in the conspiracy against João II — but also recent scholarship has revealed an increase in the revenues of the kingdom's customs through the proper management of regular taxation and the profits of Crown lands. Nevertheless, the profits of the Asian trade gave the Crown an unprecedented financial freedom¹³. As the owner of Madeira — one of the lands inherited from Henry the Navigator and that formed part of the Order of Christ — he merged profits from the sugar production with the Crown revenues. Royal income could even afford forgoing some traditional revenue sources. Manuel I expelled the Jewish communities from the kingdom, creating the need to compensate seigniorial authorities from loss of Jewish taxes. He also restored the House of Braganza with its former assets, which had been confiscated and incorporated into Crown property in 1483, following the execution of Duke Fernando (Freire, 1904, pp. 81-157).

Several issues strike the eye in the king's relationship with material possessions: the first is the importance of earlier customs still enjoyed in the Portuguese court. The presence of tents testifies to the importance of the displacements of a court that, even if not as nomadic as during the Middle Ages, was often on the move, especially in order to escape from epidemics. Each tent could serve identical functions as the different rooms in a royal palace: reception room, bedchamber, wardrobe and chapel (Marques, 1940, pp. 565-605). The court had a taste for Moorish things, probably booty from Moroccan conquests. The inventory of the king's wardrobe, recorded in 1522, has a separate section to deal with weaponry, shirts, and all sorts of Moorish objects that might fit well in military parades, or simply be used in simulated fights between Moors and Christians, which were very popular on festive occasions (Freire, 1904, pp. 381-417). These garments were used as costumes in court games in order to differentiate between teams. The Muslim influence at the royal court can be attested in other issues besides the presence of war booty from North Africa. Women and children were not to sit in chairs, but on cushions. Once they were on the *estrado*, a wooden platform that raised the king and his close relatives in court ceremonies, they were to sit aside on cushions, whilst the king and his male guests of honour sat on chairs. Also, Muslim dancers and musicians seem to have been present in court festivities. João II summoned them to participate in the

¹³ On the improvement in the Crown's revenues, see Humble (2003, pp. 213-214), and Pereira (2003, pp. 525-544).

festivities of his son's wedding; equally, the court used to dance to their music during supper with Manuel I (Resende, 1973, p. 161; Góis, 1949 [1566], p. 224). Muslim influence was also visible in the strict segregation of living quarters of men and women; foreigners were struck by the fact that not only were spaces strictly separated, but also men could not even pass by the threshold of women's apartments (Bertini, 2000, p. 56).

The second feature I wish to call attention to is Manuel I's taste for the Oriental exotic. He paraded Lisbon with several elephants — there were as many as five of them at one time — and a leopard mounted on a Persian horse (Góis, 1949 [1566], pp. 224-225). The days when the king had to take firm action against rival factions were over. No other seigniorial power could boast the same visibility or claim the same authority. At the same time, Manuel I invested in the celebration of Empire: he purchased tapestries in Flanders in order to commemorate Vasco da Gama's voyage to Calicut; certified copies of them were sent to Henry VIII and to emperor Maximilian (Jordan, 1985, p. 47). He also commissioned the Belém monstrosity to be made from the first gold that Vasco da Gama exacted from Quíloa, on the East African Coast.

Even without the immediate danger of dethroning that had hung over his predecessor's reign, we sense that the king needed to reaffirm his superiority by constant gift giving. He developed an activity of consistent patronage of ecclesiastic institutions, from the parishes that were being created overseas to hospitals and convents. He started by furnishing the churches that belonged to the Order of Christ with adequate liturgical equipment while he was still its grand master in 1492, three years before he became king¹⁴. When he inherited the throne in 1495, he continued to secure his position with lavish displays of generosity. He distributed sugar from Madeira — an essential commodity for the production of medicines and fruit preserves — to monasteries, convents, churches, hospitals, confraternities, and private persons, including members of his family¹⁵. He furnished churches across the empire, from the Azores to India, giving them altarpieces, liturgical vestments, silver chalices, and other pieces of liturgical apparatus¹⁶.

¹⁴ Churches belonging to the order were endowed in the context of a general chapter held at Tomar (IAN/TT, gaveta 7, maço 18, doc. 1).

¹⁵ See the list of the institutions that received sugar in I. G. Sá and J. P. Paiva (eds.) (2004, vol. III, pp. 197-211).

¹⁶ Some examples of these many donations are: IAN/TT, *Corpo Cronológico*, I-16-37 (donation to the monastery of *Penha Longa*, 1514.10.14); I-15-83 (donation to the *Conceição*, 1514.07.06); I-15-70 and I-15-86 (donations to churches in the island of *Faial* — Azores); I-15-17 (donation to a church in *Mazagão*, 1514.08.08); I-15-119 (donation to the *Misericórdia* of Aveiro, 1514.08.26), and I-17-91 (donation to a church in *Calecute*, India, 1515.03.07).

He also sent the pope an embassy that included numerous gifts, including a huge quantity of Oriental spices, some pieces in silver, and Hanno (or Anone), the famous elephant (one of the five that he had owned in Lisbon) that delighted Leo X (Bedini, 1997). Other embassies are less well known to historians, such as the one he sent to the king of the Congo in 1512 or, the gift that was intended for Prester John in Ethiopia in 1515¹⁷. These included not only personal gifts to rulers, but also the complete set of liturgical objects needed to celebrate mass, as well as devotional and doctrinal books, such as manuals of confession, primers, hagiographic literature, and martirologues. Such gifts were based on the belief that both the Congolese and Ethiopians would be able to make use of those objects and read those books. These displays of generosity stressed the spread of Christian faith, as the majority of the gifts had the purpose of providing the receivers with liturgical apparatus, from vestments to liturgical and devotional books. The king was not only trying to convince the pope of the glories of overseas expansion and its service to the expansion of faith, but also to convert African allies to the material advantages of Christian culture. Africans, especially in the Congolese case, were to use western assets in order to obtain prestige amongst other Africans: during the eighteenth century European dress still constituted a status symbol (Thornton, 1998, p. 231).

Investment in gifts that testified to the greater glory of God was not a mere sign of devotion and generosity. Important changes in the relationship between the Crown and the Church were taking place with Manuel I, and were to continue with João III. We can identify an increase in the Crown's control over religious structures, due to three processes that developed mostly during the period under analysis. These can be summarized as follows: the appropriation of the revenues of the military orders, the patronage of the church in new territories, and the nomination of bishops by the king. Although the military orders were autonomous institutions, they came increasingly under the tutelage of the Portuguese Crown. They became a means of reward for royal service, as the king could distribute their lands as *comendas* to his subjects (Olival, 2004). The second process consisted of obtaining from the papacy the patronage over ecclesiastical institutions in the Portuguese empire, whereby the king was to finance church structures but gained control over them (Sá, 2007). On the other hand, the king was to designate bishops, which the Holy See confirmed in the post, thus controlling the top hierarchy of secular ecclesiastics in the kingdom¹⁸.

¹⁷ IAN/TT, CC-1-17-75. On this gift see also Aida Fernanda Dias (1995).

¹⁸ According to José Pedro Paiva (2006, p.42), there was not a single Portuguese bishop appointed by the pope without being designated by the king after Manuel I.

Through the control of overseas trade, the “merchant king” supplied himself and his relatives with every possible commodity available in the warehouses of the *Casas da Mina*, *Guiné* and *Índia*. His mother Beatriz, his sister Leonor, his cousin *Joana a Beltraneja*, his wives and children, and many others, were directly supplied with luxurious commodities brought by ship. Gift giving was of course not a novelty to Portuguese kings, but never was this activity so frequent as with Manuel I, as he enjoyed the best financial situation of the Crown in Portuguese Early Modern history (Godinho, 1978).

João III would continue his policies of gift giving, especially concerning sugar and liturgical equipment, but his gifts are less visible in the sources. His more modest action as a donor can be partly explained by the fact that he did not enjoy such an affluent financial situation as did his father, Manuel I. At the same time, royal expenditures were constantly increasing. João III endowed his sister Isabel, who married Charles V in 1525; he settled with the latter the dispute over the ownership of the Molluccas with a large sum of money; he also had five living brothers to support. Later in 1543 he was to marry off his daughter Maria, who became the first of Phillip II’s four wives, and whose dowry meant a new drainage of wealth to Spain¹⁹. By the time it came to pay for the wedding festivities of Juana of Austria to his son and heir, João, in 1552, he was himself recognizing the difficulties of his financial situation²⁰. No particular interest in luxurious commodities can be found in João III, who seems to have preferred to invest in architecture.

His wife Catarina, in turn, spent heavily on luxurious commodities from the time she arrived to the Portuguese court in 1525 and in the fifty years that followed. She surrounded herself with every possible luxury available, from jewellery to portraits, *exotica* from the East, etc... Annemarie Jordan, to whom we owe the study of her collections, has considered her as one of the first collectors of non-European objects (Jordan, 2000, p. 281). Another of such collectors would be her aunt Margaret of Austria (1480-1530), sister to her father Philip the Fair. Family connections dictated the content of the collections. Margaret raised five of her brother’s children with Juana the Mad in Belgium, including the future emperor, and later she was regent in the Low Countries on his behalf. Her collection was based on *exotica*, not Asian but Mesoamerican. She symbolically incorporated the newly founded Americas as a Habsburg domain in a collection of objects

¹⁹ Marriage contract published in *Gavetas (As) da Torre do Tombo*, vol. v (Lisboa, 1960), pp. 538-557; A. Caetano de Sousa (1958), “Quaderno das cousas de ouro, e prata, e joyas, que levou a princesa D. Maria a Castella, em desconto do seu dote...”, in *Provas da História Genealógica da Casa Real Portuguesa* (Lisboa, 1958), vol. III, part I, pp. 211-245.

²⁰ IAN/TT, *Manuscritos de S. Vicente*, livro 2, fls. 158-162.

brought by Cortès to Europe after the conquest of Mexico and offered to her by the emperor (MacDonald, 2002).

The personality and personal circumstances of Catarina seem to have exerted an influence on her collecting habits. She was born after her father's death, and not taken away from her mother, as her brothers and sisters had been. She grew up in Tordesilhas, and biographers have emphasized her relatively deprived childhood with her confined and insane mother (for example, in order to prevent kidnapping, Juana kept her in a windowless bedroom) (Fernández Alvarez, 2000, pp. 166, 184-185).

I should remind the reader that D. Catarina outlived all of her nine children. Maria was her only child who died away from her, in Spain, when she gave birth to Don Carlos (Buescu, 2005, pp. 161-173). Catarina was also regent during the minority of her grandson Sebastião, between 1557 (the year King John III died), and 1562, and had direct access to commodities from the Empire. It was precisely during this period that she became particularly active in search of *exotica* for her collection. It is difficult to assert the reasons for Catherine's need to collect, but I would risk that her motives were rather more personal than political. No doubt the rare and precious things symbolized the dominance of vast areas and peoples, but the creation of distance between her subjects and royalty was no longer a priority. On the other hand, her belongings were mostly profane. Some of them, such as bezoar stones, were believed to have magical properties against poison or the plague²¹. She seems to have been fascinated, like her relatives in Vienna, by rare objects that very few people in Europe could possess (Jordan, 1994, pp. 9-81). Her concern with relics, although still present, is not comparable to Leonor's collection (her will mentions some of them, but does not identify all the saints that they belonged to²²). Although she retreated to the convent Leonor had founded in the last years of her life (the Madre de Deus), her devotion was less connected to the Mendicant Orders and more to the emerging Jesuits, for whom she had a chapel built posthumously²³.

Her collection seems to have enjoyed no social life, although many of the receipts of purchase have survived and the queen monitored her collection through periodic inventories²⁴. We have no idea if she showed her treasure

²¹ *Lettere di Filippo Sassetti*, Reggio, 1844, pp. 142-143.

²² *Gavetas (As) da Torre do Tombo*, vol. vi, Lisboa (1960-), pp. 9-81.

²³ See the queen's testament, dated 1574, *Gavetas (As) da Torre do Tombo*, vol. vi, (Lisboa, 1960-), pp. 30-31.

²⁴ The receipts of purchase can be consulted in IANTT, *Corpo Cronológico*. As to the inventories, also in the same archive: casa forte, n. 64, inventário de móveis, vestuário, tapeçarias e utensílios vários; *Núcleo Antigo*, n. 790, receita das jóias, peças de ouro e prata da rainha D. Catarina; *Núcleo Antigo*, n. 791; *Núcleo Antigo*, n. 792, receita do móvel e

to people beyond her close attendants. She never exhibited it publicly and the collection seems to have been confined to chests, to disappear mysteriously soon after her death. Her will makes no mention of it, and the objects are known mainly through textual evidence. The vulnerability of her collection is no surprise. Before the production of showcases protected by glass, the option was to have collections stored in chests, and shown only to selected guests on special occasions.

CONCLUSIONS

In spite of different political and economic configurations that provoked changes in the structure and complexity in the court's material life in the course of the period considered here, it must be stressed that the desire to appropriate the enemies' features was always present. We can find traces of Muslim culture, as well as the desire to become closer to the Spanish court through repeated marriages between the two royal families. Later, it was the acquisition of *exotica* from distant lands that dictated new fashions in material culture. Things and people, appropriated as slaves or guests, symbolized the prosperity of the kingdom and the eagerness of the monarchy to compete in an international arena.

Reasons for investing in lavish gifts of liturgical apparatus served other political purposes. As the main donor to ecclesiastic institutions, the king established a relationship where he would be the main protector of the Roman Church, both in Portugal and in its overseas territories. This relationship implied great benefits to the Crown, as it enjoyed revenues from church land — the case of the *comendas* in military orders — and also signified the right to appoint ecclesiastic posts. Most of these donations took place before the end of the council of Trent, when matters concerning the separation of spheres between Crown and Church were still open, and the Crown was clearly, especially during Manuel I's reign, trying to superimpose its will over the church hierarchy.

The patterns of women's consumption, even ruling women and such powerful widows as those cases we have considered, can be regarded as different from the three kings we have analysed. In the first place, a whole range of objects of a military type, such as weapons or armour, were excluded to women. Women could not call attention to themselves in the

jóias da rainha D. Catarina, 1539-1543; *Núcleo Antigo*, n. 754 (1545); *Núcleo Antigo*, n. 932, rol de várias despesas de compra de trastes; *Núcleo Antigo*, n. 793, livro da receita de todas peças de ouro... 1545; *Núcleo Antigo*, n. 794, livro da câmara da rainha nossa senhora da receita de pedraria... 1550.

same way men did, and emphasis had to be put on their virtue, sacrifice, and religious devotion. But clearly, our first two examples, Beatriz and Leonor, concern two late medieval women, connected to mendicant observant devotion, and devoted to the principles of voluntary poverty. In that context, attention was driven mainly to cult objects, where the focus would be on the glorification of God. Catarina of Austria innovated as a consumer of profane objects. While not giving up liturgical apparatus or relics, she also invested in exotic objects few people at the time, even in royal courts, could obtain. Nevertheless, she shared with Beatriz and Leonor a period of widowhood that gave her a visibility that she never enjoyed as queen consort, in spite of the importance she has been said to have assumed during her husband's life.

As a final remark, one might ask the question about the transition from the Middle Ages to the Early Modern period. There is no doubt that material culture continued to mirror values that can be considered medieval: the taste for exotic animals used as symbols of power, the acquisition of relics and liturgical apparatus that were incorporated in church or princely treasures, the strong presence of gift exchange in political and religious negotiations. Nevertheless, contexts were slowly changing. Instead of struggling against other rival families, such as John II, Manuel I used wealth to place the Crown above the high nobility. On the other hand, his superiority came from privileged access to the goods of the kingdom's mercantile empire. By 1580 there was no longer the need to impress internal enemies competing with monarchic power, but the most dangerous threats to the Portuguese Crown still came from within the royal family. This time, however, these relatives happened to be ruling Spain, and Philip II succeeded to a vacant Portuguese throne in 1580.

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