

The Military Orders of Santiago, Avis and Christ under the governance of the Portuguese Crown (1418-1578)

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Due to the association between the monarchy and the Military Orders, the theme under discussion in this paper constitutes a central area of study with recognized importance¹. In fact, to talk about the meaning of the attribution of the mastership of the orders of Santiago, Avis and Christ to members of the Portuguese royal family (something that continuously happens after the beginning of the 15th century) implies considering significantly different nuances which, by themselves, and in conjunction with their constituent elements, are essential to clarifying a complex question.

For them to be fully understood, we cannot avoid distinguishing the periods when the princes or the king's other relatives were in charge of the government of the orders from those when it was the monarch himself who patronized them. This last observation is responsible for the extreme complexity of the theme, because, in both situations, the understanding of the dignity of the "mastership", as it was inherited from previous times, was either different or identical, according to the political characteristics of each epoch. Furthermore, the chronology that delimits this evolution - from 1418 until 1551 - indistinctly alternates princes, kings and other members of the royal family, until it is stabilized in the Crown of Portugal from the mid sixteenth century onwards².

It is now the right moment to acquaint the reader with the features of a dignity that, backed up by the Portuguese monarchs since its foundation, would become appealing to the Crown, in a process dominant throughout the Iberian Peninsula, but that in Portugal had a very early start at the dawn of the Dynasty of Avis (1385-1580).

¹ P. P. Costa; M. C. Pimenta; I. M. Silva, "Prerrogativas mestrais e monarquia: as ordens militares portuguesas na Baixa Idade Média", *La Península Ibérica entre el Mediterráneo y el Atlántico*. Siglos XIII-XV, 2006, 589-595; I. M. Silva, "A Ordem de Cristo (1417-1521)", *Militarium Ordinum Analecta*, 6, 2002; M. C. Pimenta, "As Ordens de Avis e de Santiago na Baixa Idade Média: O Governo de D. Jorge", *Militarium Ordinum Analecta*, 5, 2001.

² Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo (thereafter AN/TT), *Gaveta* 4, m. 1, doc. 18 and *Gaveta* 5, m. 3, doc. 4, published *As Gavetas da Torre do Tombo*, Lisbon, II, 1962, 60-68 and 391-399. See also *Gaveta* 5, m. 3, doc. 1, published *As Gavetas da Torre do Tombo*, II, 382-391.

The course of action that precedes the historical date of the hanging over of the mastership of Santiago to Prince João, in 1418, goes side by side with the history of the Orders and for our purpose can be summarized in the answer to the following question: since the most remote times, and independently of the Orders' religious orientation, what did it really mean to be Master of a Military Order?

Without understanding the range of his functions, it would never be possible to detect continuities or ruptures in a period when "[Y]los maestros se hicieran reyes y los reyes maestros...", as Elena Postigo³ wisely expressed it in a classic article.

The dignity of Master was theoretically guided by the dispositions of the norm approved by the Holy See, starting with the definition written by Pope Alexander III in the foundation bull of Santiago in 1175⁴ (as well as in the first *formae vivendi* of the Order of Calatrava, in the case of Avis), where the meaning of military leadership and *exemplum* were attributed to it⁵.

Although the general lines of action of a master's behavior are known, its practical meaning points out, in the framework of the documents already studied, to a certain weakness which remains until the XIIIth century. In Portugal this situation is more obvious in the Order of Santiago than in that of Avis. This is an extremely interesting aspect which may find its best explanation in the different level of affiliation that each one of them had in relation to the Castilian mother convents: Santiago is a province from Uclés and Avis is affiliated to Calatrava.

Later, and probably in the framework of the constitution of the *mesas mestrais*, we can detect a stronger stability in the masterships, very often accompanied by movements of internal controversy, as a result of the greater concentration of powers in the hands of the Master. Similar to the situation observed in other Iberian military orders⁶, in Portugal this phenomenon coincides with important political changes within Afonso III's realm (1248-1279). During this period, Portugal attained the end of the Reconquest⁷ through the conquest of the Algarve, where the monarch was accompanied by some well-known personalities: the master of Avis, the prior of the Hospitallers, the chief commander of Santiago, among many other noblemen. In this context it was inevitable that a nearing from the king's side to the universe of the Military Orders is observed, especially because these institutions were also going through a process of internal reinforcement of the Masters dignity. Being part of the realm, as so many others, they should be dependent on the grace and mercy of the monarch.

The authors who dedicated themselves to the study of this period⁸, do indeed confirm this tendency stressing that "the first signs of tension" between the order

³ E. P. Castellanos, "« [Y]los maestros se hicieran reyes y los reyes maestros». Algunas consideraciones sobre las Órdenes de Caballería de tercera generación (1520-1660)", *Militarium Ordinum Analecta*, 2, 1998, 291-318.

⁴ I.L.Barbosa, "A Ordem de Santiago em Portugal nos finais da Idade Média (normativa e prática)", *Militarium Ordinum Analecta*, 2, 1998, 201-207.

⁵ C.A. Martínez, *Las órdenes militares hispánicas en la Edad Media (siglos XII-XV)*. Madrid and Arganda del Rey, 2007, 192-194.

⁶ C.A. Martínez, *Las órdenes militares hispánicas en la Edad Media*, 205-208.

⁷ To a better understanding of the Reconquest, see the king's biography by L. Ventura, *D. Afonso III*, Rio de Mouro, 2006.

⁸ Especially L. Ventura, *D. Afonso III*.

and the king date back to the reign of D. Afonso III, a well-known process⁹ in the case of Avis and Santiago.

The first step had been taken towards a situation that, in general terms, would undoubtedly proceed in the direction of the reinforcement of the king's involvement in these Orders.

As expected, the political complexity of the 14th century would display new situations in the way the Orders were ruled, this being an inevitable consequence of the alteration that were gradually felt by the royal power. We only have to think of the characteristics of the reigns of D. Dinis, D. Afonso IV and D. Pedro I, and of the specific Portuguese political scenarios displayed at the end of this century.

In general, the accomplishments which are the basis of the gradual establishment of the State in those days, have an immediate reflection in the way the monarch closed the gap between the royal government and the Orders. Thus, some of the most emblematic events should be brought to mind:

The tensions between the Portuguese province of Santiago and the Spanish mother house and D. Dinis's role in obtaining the bull from the Pope granting the autonomy of the order in Portugal¹⁰.

- The establishment of the Order of Christ by initiative of D. Dinis, appointing for first master¹¹ a man who until then had occupied the mastership of Avis and in whom the king had the utmost confidence.
- An instability in the core of these communities, where the concept of loyalty is already misunderstood, as we can clearly see during the period of the Reign of D. Fernando as well as in the following years; and the behaviour of masters Fernando Afonso de Albuquerque, Lopo Dias de Sou-

⁹ Between 1258 and 1260 there are several documents where the Master of Avis starts a quarrel with the Portuguese crown about the possession of the territories around Avis, Juromenha, Estremoz and Borba (e.g. AN/TT, *Chancelaria de D. Afonso III*, liv. 3, fl. 27). I. M. Silva; M.C. Pimenta, "As Ordens de Avis e de Cristo na Baixa Idade Média e a Monarquia Portuguesa: Percursos de Complementaridade", *Estudos de Homenagem a Joaquim Silva Cunha*, Porto, (1999), 805-824. It is also well known the "case study" of the double donation of Albufeira to the same order by Alfonso X of Castile and Afonso III of Portugal (M.C. Cunha; M.C. Pimenta, "Algumas considerações sobre as relações entre os monarcas castelhanos e a Ordem de Avis no século XIII", *Boletim do Arquivo Distrital do Porto*, 2, (1985), 45-57) and, lastly, the Order of Santiago is then ruled by its former "comendador", at that epoch, Master of Santiago in Castile, a complex situation to the king of Portugal (see M.L. Fernández, "La persona de Pelay Pérez Correa, maestre de la Orden de Santiago", *As Ordens Militares e as Ordens de Cavalaria na Construção do Mundo Ocidental*, Lisbon, 2005, 191-225).

¹⁰ The first sign is given by the bull of 1288 (*Pastoralis officii*) through which the Pope authorized the order to have its own master, instead of depending of Castile. But the question will only be solved in the middle of the 15th century. Nevertheless, the Master Pero Escacho organized the first Portuguese *Estabelecimentos* in 1327, without the supervision of Uclés. I.L. Barbosa, "A Ordem de Santiago em Portugal nos finais da Idade Média (normativa e prática)", 116. About this fundamental texto see also C. Ayala Martinez, "La escisión de los santiaguistas portugueses: algunas notas sobre los establecimientos de 1327", *Historia, instituciones, documentos*, 24, (1997), 53-70.

¹¹ Bull *Desiderantis ab intimis*. Published *Monumenta Henricina*, ed. Comissão Executiva das Comemorações do V Centenário da Morte do Infante D. Henrique, I, Coimbra, 1961, 119-121, thereafter M.H.

sa, and Fernão Rodrigues (respectively in the Orders of Santiago, Christ and Avis) who, in the transition from the thirteen hundreds to the fourteen hundreds, particularly during the conjuncture of crises of 1383-85, end up by placing themselves on the side of the new dynasty¹².

After the ascension to the throne of king D. João I, another chapter begins in the history of the Orders. Its first events are the most well-known:

- In 1417, when the master of the Order of Christ, Lopo Dias de Sousa died, the monarch interrupts the preparation for the next election. His fifth son, Prince Henrique, will be nominated to occupy this dignity in 1420¹³.
- In 1418, after the death of Mem Rodrigues de Vasconcelos, prince João, another son of the king, is appointed governor of the Order of Santiago¹⁴;
- In 1434, when D. Fernando Rodrigues de Sequeira dies, the Pope attributes the administration of the mastership of Avis to Prince Fernando¹⁵.

These three circumstances suggest the following remarks:

In the first place, these three moments cannot only be seen as interesting phenomena from the point of view of the leadership of the orders, but also in relatively to the alterations they implied. That is to say, from the angle of the internal organization of the orders, the collective starts acting under the guidance of a governor, minimizing or simply annulling the jurisdictional figure resulting from the elections of the masters and clearly outlined in the norm, thus respected until then.

In the second place, the chronology associated with those events, still reminds us of the conjuncture of the Roman Church, which was then leaving the Council of Basel (1431)¹⁶. This fact contributed to a new phase at the level of Christendom as a whole, with inevitable consequences for the relationship between the Military Orders, the Holy See and the Portuguese Monarchy. It manifested itself in the most obvious way in the Order of Avis, when during the reign of D. Duarte, the master of Calatrava requested from the Pope a declaration of his entitlement to visit the Order of Avis. However, this request had not a favorable sequence¹⁷.

And lastly, in the third place, there is still another dimension, probably less known, that we consider worth stressing: this tendency, which starts being practiced in Portugal between 1418-1434, will raise problems for the researcher at a do-

¹² P.P. Costa, Paula, "A Ordem Militar do Hospital em Portugal: Dos finais da Idade Média à Modernidade", *Militarium Ordinum Analecta*, 3/4, 1999-2000, 196-202; M.C. Pimenta, "A Ordem de Avis durante o mestrado de D. Fernão Rodrigues Sequeira", *Militarium Ordinum Analecta*, 1, 1997, 127-242; I.M. Silva, "A Ordem de Cristo durante o Mestrado de D. Lopo Dias de Sousa (1373?-1417)", *Militarium Ordinum Analecta*, 1, 1997, 5-126; M.C. Fernandes, *A Ordem Militar de Santiago em Portugal no século XIV*, Porto, 2002, 70-71.

¹³ 25th May 1420. Published *M.H.*, II, 366-367.

¹⁴ 8th October 1418. Published *M.H.*, II, 303-305.

¹⁵ 9th September 1434, AN/TT, *Ordem de Avis*, nº 29. Published *M.H.*, V, 70-72.

¹⁶ E.B. Nunes, "Nótulas de história do século XV português", *Do Tempo e da História*, 1, 1965, 47-54.

¹⁷ The Pope received a plea from the master of Calatrava in July 1436. Published *M.H.*, V, 249-250.

cumental level – undoubtedly changing the knowledge we already have of those periods, because the official documents kept today in the archives, which correspond to each one of the orders, should be studied in confrontation with the private documents of the houses of each prince involved. Needless to say, this situation is by no means easy and the situation becomes still more complicated when we have to deal with the king's chancellery, difficult to research due to its extension¹⁸.

Among the three princes who first occupied the military Orders of Santiago, Christ and Avis, two of them would die at the beginning of the 1440's: Infante D. João in 1442 and Infante D. Fernando in 1443, in the course of a politically disturbed phase of the government of the realm, as a consequence of the untimely death of the king of Portugal, D. Duarte (1438), followed by the troubled regency of his uncle, D. Pedro.

After his father's death, Santiago is handed to D. Diogo¹⁹, son of the previous governor D. João, but this prince died in 1443, which resulted in a simultaneous vacancy of the Masterships. In the following year, and with only two months' difference (March-May) D. Pedro, named after his father, the Regent, received the mastership of Avis²⁰, and D. Fernando, brother of D. Afonso V, received that of Santiago²¹. This allows us to say that, the political orientation behind these nominations was the same as the one that motivated king D. João I's first choice of the princes. In reality, during these middle years of the XVth century, though the Portuguese king was under age, and had no children to take on the leadership of the orders, there were enough Royal kinsfolk to ensure the continuity of their political loyalty to the central power of the state.

In those days, this loyalty was associated firstly with important political support, integrated into what is conventionally called the cycle of Alfarrobeira, where the Regent D. Pedro would meet his death. But, at a second level, it was also related to the continuity that should be attributed to the expansionist process that Portugal was developing at the time. These two reasons clearly explain why the choice of masters of the orders becomes more and more complex, this complexity reaching its highest level in the epoch of D. Afonso V.

This king goes much further in that regard, trying to ask for himself and for the first time, the government of a Military Order: Christ. This happens after the death of Prince Henry the Navigator, in 1460, and it is by a papal document²² that the King receives the Mastership. We know that he will keep it only until July of that same year but the symbolism of the request is obvious: as we are dealing with the Order of Christ, we cannot avoid considering its intervention in the ultramarine expansion, an aspect that the monarch called definitively upon himself.

Shortly after D. Pedro died, the vacancy of the mastership of Avis in 1466, and that of Santiago and Christ in 1470, as a consequence of the death of Fernando,

¹⁸ Especially the documents written during the realms of D. Afonso V, D. João II and D. Manuel, not yet available in book edition.

¹⁹ D. Diogo was elected in 1443 (AN/TT, *Leitura Nova, Místicos*, 1, fl. 19v).

²⁰ Bull of 29th March 1444 (Published *M.H.*, VIII, 153-155).

²¹ Bull of 23rd May 1444 (Published *M.H.*, VIII, 165-168).

²² Apostolic Letter by Pope Pius II, *Dum tua*, of the 25th January 1461. Published *M.H.*, XIV, 125-129.

Duque of Viseu, provided new opportunities for the monarch, so that he could reach an agreement with the Holy See in relation to the succession of each of those governorships. In 1468, the heir to the throne takes up the Order of Avis²³; Santiago is destined for prince João²⁴, an underage son of the Duque of Viseu and the order of Christ is handed over to young D. Diogo²⁵, also son of the Duque of Viseu. This scenario will go through several alterations: prince João dies in 1472, and Santiago is given to the Crown Prince. Thus, In the near future, the king of Portugal was also master of the Orders of Avis and Santiago, a situation that occurs for the first time, both in the history of the orders and in the Portuguese Monarchy.

Notwithstanding this vertiginous enumeration of the twists and turns which occurred, the government of the Military Orders during the Reign of D. Afonso V shows us that the King's policies were organized around two distinct poles united by the three institutions under study: Christ is at the service of the expansionist orientation of the Crown, and Avis and Santiago are much more turned to the king's interests in relation to the political struggles within the Iberian Peninsula. In effect, both approaches define the kingdom of the so called African King and characterize the interests of the Portuguese Crown, in the late 15th Century.

If the expansionist interests of Portugal are better known²⁶, we cannot forget the other approach mentioned: the consequences of the death of Henrique IV of Castile, a situation very favorable in terms of bringing Portuguese political interests closer to Castile²⁷. In this context, king D. Afonso V claims the rights of succession of D. Joana, his niece, mobilizing diplomatic and military efforts, which would lead to the battle of Toro²⁸.

This diversity of actions patronized by the Military Orders attracted an ever growing movement of the most privileged interests in the society of the realm, which saw in these institutions the answer to their longings. The Crown was not indifferent to this situation and used the contribution of each one of them in favor of its own interests, a tendency that would prevail in the policies of the forthcoming times. In turn, the Holy See is sure about the Portuguese predisposition to proceed with the expansion of the faith, a conviction that contributes to the favorable response to the king's requests to keep the nominations of the governors in his own hands.

The last years of the 15th century do not display anything new in the configuration of the Orders, it being well known that the Order of Christ still belongs to the Duke of Viseu. Similarly, in the 1490s, the Pope is asked to grant Avis and Santiago first to the heir of the throne, D. Afonso, and after the accidental death of this prin-

²³ Bull *Cessant nuper* of September 1468 (AN/TT, *Ordem de Avis*, nº30).

²⁴ This young Prince will shortly die, presumably in 1472.

²⁵ Bull *Dum regalis* of 1st February 1471, (Published M.H., XV, 7-9).

²⁶ See, among other titles, L. A. da Fonseca, *O Tratado de Tordesilhas e a Diplomacia Luso-Castelhana no Século XV*. Lisbon, 1991 and D. João II, Rio de Mouro, 2005, 92-134.

²⁷ L. Suárez Fernández, "Relaciones Hispano - Portuguesas en torno a 1488", *Bartolomeu Dias e a sua época*, 1989), I, 65-79; L. Suárez Fernández, *Los Reyes Católicos. La conquista del trono*, Madrid, 1989.

²⁸ C. Oliveira Serrano, "Una Etapa de Guerras Civiles", *Historia de España de la Edad Media*, Barcelona, 2002, 775-793; and S. Gomes, *D. Afonso V*, Rio de Mouro, 2006, 198-216; L. A. Fonseca, *D. João II*, 35-50.

ce, to D. Jorge, an illegitimate son of the king D. João II, whom the Monarch wanted to see as his successor. When, the "Perfect Prince", nominates D. Manuel, Duke of Viseu and his brother-in-law, to inherit the throne he makes all possible efforts to make him renounce the position as Governor for the benefit of D. Jorge²⁹. And it is possible to understand the importance of this attitude: the king has a clear perception that institutions like the Military Orders should be under his guardianship, and the first monarch who dared to put this idea into effect was D. João II.

After his death, D. Manuel I, acclaimed king on 27th October 1495³⁰, will go on thinking in the same way. This is clearly seen in his will when he points out that the Masterships should remain in the hands of the kings, their sons and brothers. And in relation to the Order of Christ he was still more demanding as F. Olival reminds us: "It will never leave the control of the Crown, or the king, for this would be most harmful, and most inconvenient, both for the Kingdom and for the King"³¹. The long life of D. Jorge is going to moderate this desideratum. This being the reason why only in 1550 D. João III succeeds in definitively reverting this situation when in the following year he receives the annexation of the Masterships to the Crown. All this happened 29 years after the death of D. Manuel.

What can we say in view of what has been discussed so far?

There is in the whole process of the choice of the different governors of Santiago, Avis and Christ from 1418 until 1550 a unique connection that is manifested by the fact that all of them are associated with the royal power by blood relationship ties. And if it is true that this tendency had been outlined long before (since the time of king D. Dinis), the truth is that king D. João I took a decisive step in this process by placing his sons at the head of the Orders in the first half of the 15th century.

Then, other similar choices followed, whose leading persons, in spite of not being the king's sons, equally acted side by side with the monarchy. In this evolution, it must be once again stressed that, D. Afonso V in 1461, tried to make himself governor of the Order of Christ. In spite of this not having been done in practice, it opened the way to what would become the definite scenario in the future.

Following different trails, the three Orders would end up in the hands of the Portuguese Monarch, but what is still more interesting is that the only Order administered by several members of king Manuel's family in the 15th and 16th centuries (Christ), would be the one that, as a consequence of the royal succession, would directly become part of the Monarch's tutelage and would remain there forever. In our view, this circumstance finds an explanation still in the controversial Reign of D. Afonso V, when this king, visibly divided between the maintenance of the Atlantic expansionist options inherited from his father and grandfather, and the attraction of meddling in Peninsular politics, keeps the Order of Christ at the guardianship of the Dukes of Viseu, and asks the Pope for the other orders for his

²⁹ M.C. Pimenta, "As Ordens de Avis e de Santiago...", 79-85.

³⁰ D. de Góis, *Chronica do Serenissimo Senhor Rei D. Manoel*, Coimbra, 1790, 1st part, chapter II, 3-4.

³¹ F. Olival, "Structural Changes within the 16th-century at Portuguese Military Orders", *e-Journal of Portuguese History*, Volume 2, number 2, Winter 2004 [available at http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Portuguese_Brazilian_Studies/ejph/; accessed 15th December 2011].

heir, the future D. João II.

Observing the alterations undergone in all this process by the exercise of the dignity of mastership, when in the hands of the members of the Portuguese royal house, is, for sure, a challenge we cannot avoid. However, it is important not to forget that in the neighboring lands, in the same period, this question was not worth mentioning and the Masters - independently of their level of loyalty to the Monarchs (not always high) - went on performing their functions. It has even been written that the history of the Military Orders during the 15th century in Castile was in many respects the chronicle of permanent conflict (with the Crown)³².

What seems a viable approach to this challenge is to try to understand whether the image which had inspired the Pope's definition of this dignity at the end of the 12th century still had anything in common with the late medieval image. "Military leadership and exemplum", the words used in 1175 for the definition of the Masters role, were never excluded from the kings' purposes when they requested the Masterships for the princes or some other member of his family; on the contrary. And this is still more relevant if the governor was to be the monarch himself, who due to the fact that he was king should, above all, exhibit such qualities.

This is what happened in the cases of D. João III and D. Sebastião after the incorporation of the masterships into the Crown by the bull of Julius II of 1551³³. In spite of all the difficulties that the "Ancien Régime" had to face when the time came for it to rule these institutions, in the narrow perspective of the definition of the Master's role under discussion here, it seems that there is no doubt that the Orders fully answered to the kings' command in the case of D. João III but, even more so, in the case of D. Sebastião due to the peculiar circumstances of its reign³⁴. During this period (1568-1578), the military function of these Orders and their loyalty to the monarch and to the Holy See are stated by several bulls which impose service in North Africa for those who wanted to become members of the Orders, and by the "Regimentos" written in 1572³⁵.

In practice the Orders showed their value in the field of Alcacer Quibir in 1578. In the so-called "battle of the three kings", Dom Sebastião, king and perpetual Governor of Christ, Avis and Santiago, did not depreciate the inheritance of the Mastership dignity in respect to military performance and exemplum. In spite of the defeat, these were values that the monarchs of the "Ancien Régime" had insisted on reserving very close to themselves, just in case they should be needed.

³² E. Cabrera, "El acceso a la dignidad de maestre y las divisiones internas de las Órdenes Militares durante el siglo XV", *Las Ordenes Militares en la Península Iberica*, I, 2000, 305.

³³ See note 2.

³⁴ A recent biography of the king is available by M. A. L. Cruz, *D. Sebastião*, Lisbon, Rio de Mouro, 2006.

³⁵ A very interesting approach on this subject was written by F. Olival, "Cristo, Ordem de", (with Luís Filipe Oliveira), *Dicionário Histórico das Ordens e instituições afins em Portugal*, ed. José Eduardo Franco, José Augusto Mourão and Ana Cristina da Costa Gomes, Lisbon, 2010, 564-574. [available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/10174/2569>; accessed 15th December 2011].