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FAMILY ARCHIVES AND
HISTORICAL RESEARCH

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**WHEN THE FAMILY ARCHIVE MADE ALL THE
DIFFERENCE: THE CASE OF THE NOGUEIRA
ARCHIVE IN LISBON (1281-1433)**

ABSTRACT: Drawing from a set of documents concerning the Nogueira family, kept in the private archive of the Casa dos Viscondes de Vila Nova de Cerveira / Marqueses de Ponte de Lima (dating from between 1280 and 1433), this essay highlights the importance of the documentation found in this type of archive to research about family members and their social promotion in a local, regional and even national sphere.

Keywords: private archive; medieval Lisbon; royal bureaucracy; Nogueiras; episcopate

RESUMO: Através da análise sumária de um núcleo documental referente à família dos Nogueiras, conservado no Arquivo da Casa dos Viscondes de Vila Nova de Cerveira e dos Marqueses de Ponte de Lima e datado cronologicamente entre 1280 e 1433, este texto pretende refletir sobre o impacto da documentação contida neste tipo de arquivo sobre o conhecimento biográfico dos seus membros e sobre os processos de promoção social, num espaço que pode ser de âmbito local, regional ou mesmo nacional.

Palavras-chave: arquivo particular; Lisboa medieval; burocracia régia; Nogueiras; Episcopado

The Nogueira family (as it is known today) was one of the most preeminent non-noble family groups in fourteenth-century Lisbon. Until the late 1990s, the Nogueiras were known mostly because of their two-pronged social promotion. On one hand, they became members of the monarchy's bureaucracy (as Armando Luís de Carvalho Homem and Rita Costa Gomes have shown); on the other, some of its members entered the ecclesiastical hierarchy of Lisbon

and indeed of the realm¹. Both routes were paramount to the ennoblement of the Nogueiras in the fifteenth century, as the family became more deeply involved in Lisbon's most important institutions, namely by holding the royal office in the city (*alcaide*) until the 1430s and, some decades later (in the 1460s), one of its members attaining the position of archbishop of Lisbon².

In 2006 a private collection of documents with information about the Nogueira family group came to my knowledge. It was kept at the Torre to Tombo, where it remained until 2011. Following permission from one of the owners, Mr. Luís de Vasconcelos e Sousa, I perused in detail all the documents dating to 1433 (the *ad quem* chronological limits of my doctoral thesis, then underway)³. Surprisingly enough, the research resulted in 179 documents being identified, as well as several inventories that allowed me to determine which documents had vanished before our time⁴.

This mass of documents mostly concerns the Nogueiras, a family whose origins lay with a royal officer and his brother, one of King Denis's physicians (r. 1279-1325), respectively Lourenço Peres I and Master Pedro⁵. The documentation has survived mostly due to the fact that the family controlled several entails (*morgadios*), which were created in the fourteenth century⁶. Some of these documents are unique, showing the family group's connection to lesser known matters, such as the cultural and educational aspects related to the loan receipts of books recently studied by Gonçalo Silva⁷. Some documents can be found in the family archive relating to the Brito family, since Violante Nogueira, the daughter of Afonso Eanes Nogueira, *alcaide* of Lisbon in the early fifteenth century (and the first person to use the surname

¹ HOMEM, 1990a: 627-628; GOMES, 1995: 135; FARELO, 2003, vol. 2: 149-153, 313-317 and 465.

² GOMES, 1995: 135; SILVA, 2012: 84-125; SILVA: 166-168.

³ FARELO, 2009.

⁴ Namely Torre do Tombo, *Arquivo dos Viscondes de Vila Nova de Cerveira e Marqueses de Ponte de Lima* (henceforth VNC), box 1, nr 7 (1542). See <http://www.inventarq.fcsh.unl.pt/index.php/catalogo-do-cartorio-da-casa-2/>.

⁵ FARELO, 2007: 147-148; FARELO, 2008: 486; FARELO, 2012a: 186-187. For their family tree, see FARELO, 2007: 155, and above all SILVA, 2012: 179-180 and SILVA, 2016: 202.

⁶ About these, see FARELO, 2012a: 185-203; SILVA, 2016: 165-166; SILVA, 2017b: 348-350.

⁷ SILVA, 2017a: 367-382.

Nogueira), married João Afonso de Brito, a Lisbon oligarch and the father of Mem de Brito. The latter eventually became responsible for administering the Nogueira entails⁸ in the mid fifteenth century. These entails later came to integrate the *Casa do Viscondado* (viscounty) of Vila Nova de Cerveira⁹. In addition, the collection contains rare medieval documents (donations) relating to the inception in 1476 of the house of the viscounts of Vila Nova de Cerveira, by King Afonso V (r. 1438-1481) on behalf of Leonel de Lima (the son of the mayor of Ponte de Lima, Fernão Eanes of Lima), whom Humberto Baquero Moreno has studied in depth¹⁰.

In the years following, these documents have been widely explored, given my research (in the meanwhile completed), the work carried out by Gonçalo Silva on the later family generations, and the doctoral project currently being developed by Filipa Lopes¹¹.

This is a good opportunity to reflect upon the importance of these documents, on how they differ or not from the documentation preserved in other types of archives; on how they can alter our understanding of this particular family group; and on their importance to the knowledge of medieval Portugal's social history.

The characteristics of the documentation

The chronology of these 179 documents echoes the characteristic of Lisbon archives belonging to medieval ecclesiastical institutions of having only a small amount of documentation predating the late thirteenth century, but

⁸ FARELO, 2012a, 192; ROSA, 2012c: 571-596; SILVA, 2016: 165-166; SILVA, 2017b: 346-365.

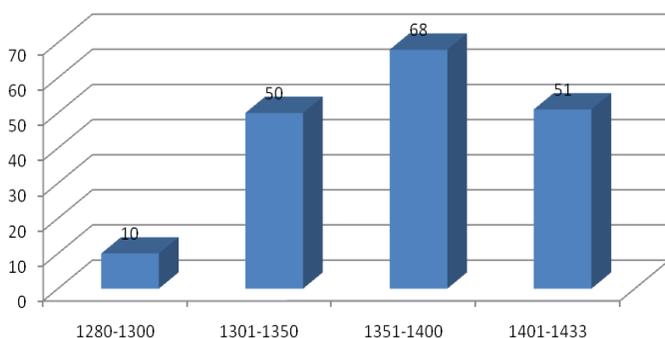
⁹ On the custodial history and morphology of the archives of the viscounts of Vila Nova de Cerveira, where the documents relating to the Nogueiras are included, see ROSA, 2009: 40-42.

¹⁰ MORENO, 1981: 259-274.

¹¹ SILVA, 2012; SILVA, 2016: 161-202; SILVA, 2017a: 367-382; 2017b: 341-373; SILVA, 2018: 531-541. Filipa Lopes's project is entitled *História(s) de uma Casa e de um arquivo: os Viscondes de Vila Nova de Cerveira, da ascensão à consolidação institucional (séculos XIV-XVII)*, a PhD with an international joint supervision between the NOVA Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas and the École nationale des chartes.

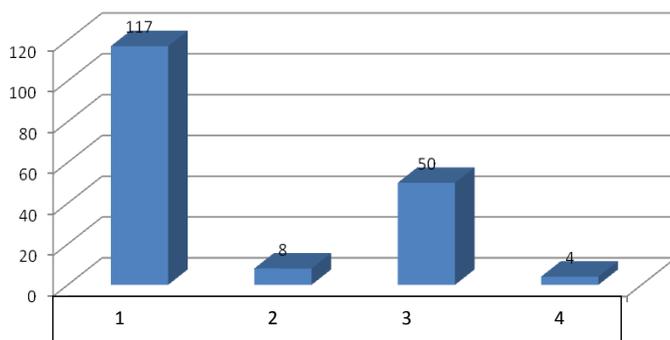
nonetheless witnessing a “documentary explosion” in the two centuries following.

Graph 1: Chronological distribution of the documents in the archive of the Casa dos Viscondes de Vila Nova de Cerveira (1280-1433)



In the same way (in accordance with the vast majority of Portuguese archives with medieval holdings), written sources relating to the acquisition and management of heritage are predominant. This documentary landscape largely took its structure from the family entails¹².

Graph 2: Documentary typologies in the archive of the Casa dos Viscondes de Vila Nova de Cerveira (1280-1433)



1 – Acquisition/asset management; 2 – Ecclesiastical benefices; 3 – Legal business (notarial and royal documentation); 4 – Pontifical matters

¹² Another view on the medieval archival material concerning the Nogueiras is provided in FARELO, 2012a: 192-197.

Regarding the documents' typology, the most common are registers of purchases and sales (numbering 30), leases for a lifetime (*emprazamentos*) (42), some donations and auctions (*arrematações*), which is a type of deed very often found in archives with medieval documentation. Undoubtedly, there was a utilitarian logic behind conservation, with the documents proving ownership of given assets being kept. But this documentary mass also contains less usual typologies, namely three charters of asset-sharing. Although frequent in modern private archives, they are thought to be rare for the medieval period. One inventory of the family archive indicates the existence of seven other similar documents¹³. Such disappearance obviously is not innocuous and should probably be attributed to moments of conflict during which its destruction would have been welcomed by one or both parties.

Equally important is the number of legal business deeds issued by the royal notaries and by the royal chancellery, namely proxies (documents of acquisition and patrimonial management) and copies (*traslados*) of previous documents. Adding to this, the six wills that have survived to this day provide an insight into the last wishes and the sociability networks of several members of the family group, even if the number of documents up to the sixteenth century held in the archives was originally higher¹⁴. In fact, the wills of two of the most important elements of the family, Master Pedro, the physicist to King Denis, and Master João das Leis, a bureaucrat at the service of King Afonso IV (r. 1325-1357), are now lost¹⁵. This speaks volumes about the intentionality behind the choice of keeping or discarding documents. Finally, since several family members were clergymen and the Nogueiras eventually became the patrons of the parochial church of Saint Lawrence in Lisbon from the mid fourteenth century onwards, a few documents concerning the parish have survived. However, almost nothing remains of the documentation produced

¹³ VNC, box 1, nr 7, fl. 10 (1394?), fl. 95-95v (1393), fl. 102-102v (fifteenth century), fl. 115v-116 (1337), fl. 118 (1327), fl. 119-119v (1388), fl. 121v (1437).

¹⁴ A list of both existing and lost wills can be found in FARELO, 2012a: 195, notes 39-40.

¹⁵ The archive had one original and a copy in Latin of Master Pedro's will and the original of Master John's. VNC, box 1, nr 7, fl. 40v, 175v-176, 189. The testament of Master Pedro and its translation were recovered from a modern transcription and published in FARELO, 2009: 26-35. On the biography of Master João das Leis: HOMEM, 1990a: 267-269; FARELO, 2007: 151; FARELO, 2012a: 189-190, 195, note 41.

within the institution itself¹⁶. In other words, the parish church and the entails (held mostly within that same *colegiada*) were considered to be distinct institutions by the family, something mirrored by the differentiated management of the documentation.

In view of this, what is the ecclesiastical dimension of the family archive?

Firstly, it evidences the management of ecclesiastical benefits, such as the presentation of clergy to the church of Saint Lawrence and their confirmation by the Ordinary. These documents were in fact in the possession of the holders of the patronage rights, the family archives still holding at least one dating from the fourteenth century¹⁷. Secondly, the concession of grants (*préstamos*), an original feature of the financial organization of this church that was introduced in the second third of the fourteenth century. Drawing from the church revenues, it was designed to reinforce the income of students attending higher studies in Portugal or abroad. Thirdly, the scarcity of papal documents must be acknowledged. This comes in line with the rest of Portuguese family archives with medieval holdings, but here it is restricted to a single case, that of the succession in the administration of Master Pedro's entail during the pontificate of Clement VI¹⁸. Also worth highlighting is a wedding dispensation, dating from 1393, a very rare finding among the existing documentation of this period kept in Portugal (the charters preserved in the Archivio Segreto Vaticano from the second half of the fifteenth century onwards being the obvious exception)¹⁹.

The main characteristics of these deeds already having been identified, let us now assess their impact on research on the family group.

¹⁶ On the relations between the family and the Church, see SILVA, 2012; SILVA, 2017b: 347-365.

¹⁷ VNC, box 5, nr 29; FARELO, 2009: 18

¹⁸ VNC, box 1, nr 15; FARELO, 2009: 14, 18-20; FARELO, 2012a: 190; SILVA, 2017a: 369-371.

¹⁹ VNC, box 1, nr 26 (1393). It concerns the dispensation for Gonçalo Viegas de Ataíde and Beatriz Nunes de Góis, in fourth-degree blood relatives, who had already married and copulated.

Allowing a better knowledge of the family group

All these documents provide additional data on the organization and promotion of the family group. In fact, the family archive makes all the difference in this sense since it becomes possible to deepen the study of the family group, to determine the origins of the patrimony, and the patrimony's links with the collegiate of Saint Lawrence. For instance, Lourenço Peres I and Master Pedro's parents have been identified as the links of Master João das Leis firstly to an important family in Lisbon and secondly to another group tied to royal bureaucracy. Moreover, it connected the Vivas and the Fafes to the Nogueiras, thus explaining why Rui Fafes and Miguel Vivas were the target of invectives from the royal *privado* Estêvão da Guarda²⁰. One must not forget that the two men not only shared with Master João das Leis the favor of King Afonso IV but also heraldic elements such as the ribbon²¹. The ribbon was used both by Miguel Vivas and the descendants of Lourenço Peres I, one of them Master João precisely²².

This being said, the availability of a family archive allows for much more than in-depth genealogical investigation. Although each case is a case, and every researcher is different, I believe there are at least two major areas in which this type of archive proves important for historical research.

The importance of family archives for medieval history

As one would expect, the first of these areas is family or family group history – the latter understood (maybe in too simple and unscientific a way) as the various families that are linked together by blood or marriage. Although

²⁰ LAPA, 1988: 86-87, 92-93; HOMEM, 1990a: 380; OLIVEIRA, 1994: 274; MARTINS, 1999: 26; MARTINS, 2007: 27; FARELO, 2007: 161-162, notes 60 and 72; FARELO, 2008: 533, 734; OLIVEIRA, 2009: 495-500; FARELO, 2012: 200.

²¹ BARROCA, 2000: 2/1, 1677-1682; BARROCA, 2003: vol. 2/2, 1162-1165; LIMA, 2006: 208-211; HENRIQUES; MENDES, 2007: 406-412; FARELO, 2007: 162, note 72; FARELO, 2008: 533; SEIXAS; GALVÃO-TELLES, 2008: 53-95.

²² FARELO, 2007: 162, note 72; FARELO, 2008: 533; FARELO, 2012a: 200; FARELO, 2012b: 363, 368-369.

knowledge always depends upon the volume and quality of the documents, as well as the research questions being asked, the use of deeds preserved in family archives allows for greater insights into family genealogy. In the case of the Nogueiras, thanks to the documents they can be linked to individuals otherwise “scattered” in references from royal and notarial documentation.

In addition, the preservation of family archive documents is full of significance. The deeds exist for a reason concerning the family in one way or another. This is different from a royal chancellery standpoint, in which the aggregation of documents is justified by their handling in the royal chancellery, by whomever produced the documents, and by their importance (current and future) as attributed by the Crown. In a family archive, all documents count. It therefore becomes essential for the historian to ascertain what they mean (or meant) to their holders.

These documents normally meant to provide details about how family members were inserted in institutions. Even if in the Nogueira archive there are virtually no documents about “public service” from its members, the fact that they acted in a “private” capacity does not preclude them from being identified by their public functions, for example: “bishop of”; “vassal of”; or “judge of”. In these, as with many other private archives, the use of such “familiar” documents clarifies the foundational and management contexts of chapels and entails founded by the families. By drawing up a list of the names of the administrators of these institutions, as taken from the deeds – once the form of succession determined in the founding instruments is established and known – one can figure out the sequence of individual birth dates and deepen the knowledge of the family structure.

A less perceptible area of inquiry (owing to the one just mentioned) is the contribution of these deeds beyond the family history as a more general history. This can be that of a city, a region, or even the history of a country itself. The Nogueira archive exemplifies the latter, since the family members interacted and participated in the governing structures of the Portuguese crown and church. Two examples help to illustrate this.

The titles held by Master João das Leis in the deeds of purchase and lease where he intervened help to grasp the fluctuations in his service to the Portuguese crown. During the reign of Afonso IV, the documents describe Master

João as “royal counsellor”, “ambassador”, “royal vassal”, “resident in Lisbon” and a “neighbour (*vizinho*) in Lisbon”²³. These titles are clear, since they detail João’s links to his hometown but mostly his proximity to the king. The change of monarch affected João’s “public” projection. During King Pedro I’s reign (r. 1357-1367) the documents in the family archive name him only as a resident and *vizinho* of Lisbon²⁴. Away from the court, from that moment onwards he becomes known for establishing himself in Lisbon. This “crossing of the desert” was to be expected: a document in the Vatican Archives proves the arrest of Master João at the beginning of Pedro’s reign, a sign that the king’s revenge for the murder of Inês de Castro was not limited to the executors but reached some of the officers closest to the former king, Afonso IV²⁵. Fortunately enough, João would return to the spotlight with King Fernando I (r. 1367-1383), as revealed from the functions held: royal counsellor, royal vassal and royal courtier holding a wage from the king (*aquantiado*)²⁶.

The second example shows how this documentation can better our knowledge of the Portuguese episcopate in the second quarter of the fourteenth century. During that time there were three bishops within the family: Miguel Vivas was elected bishop of Viseu (1329-1336)²⁷, Afonso Dinis was the prelate of Guarda (1346-1347) and of Évora (1347-1352)²⁸, while João Afonso succeeded the latter in Évora (1352-1356)²⁹. The biographies of these clergymen were already quite well known before the research into the family archive, but the new information provided insights. In the case of Miguel Vivas, his genealogy became clearer – we now know that he was a grand-son of Domingos Pais, son of Domingos Domingues and brother of João Vivas and Vicente Vivas) – as the family link to the Nogueiras (he was the cousin of Master João

²³ FARELO, 2014: 128-129.

²⁴ FARELO, 2007: 164, note 104; FARELO, 2014: 129-132.

²⁵ FARELO, 2007: 164, note 103.

²⁶ FARELO, 2014: 132-136.

²⁷ HOMEM, 1990a: 369-370; HOMEM, 1990b: 57-62; FARELO, 2007: 162, notes 65-70; FARELO, 2014: 124-125, FARELO, 2016: 209-217.

²⁸ COSTA, 1957: 370-417, 510-607; MATOS, 1998: 450-452; FARELO, 1999: 222-223; FARELO, 2003: vol. 2, 149-153; MEIRINHOS, 2007a: 47-64; MEIRINHOS, 2007b: 251-256; FARELO, 2007: 150-151; FARELO, 2009: 13-14; SILVA, 2012a: 95; FARELO, 2014: 128.

²⁹ FARELO, 2007: 152, 165-166, notes 114 and 118; FARELO, 2008: 414; FARELO, 2014: 128.

and the first patron of the church of Saint Lawrence)³⁰. As to the better-known Afonso Dinis, the only new piece of information is significant: there is proof that Afonso was a half-brother of Master João, meaning there was another family member in the private circle of Afonso IV. The case of João Afonso is the more astonishing, the documents helping identify him as the brother-in-law of Master João and as the same “João Afonso” who was already known to be a royal clerk and ambassador, doctor and a professor of Law, and the prior of the church of Saint Mary in Guimarães³¹.

In summary, these examples show the added information of a biographical nature available for each individual, mainly in terms of their familiar ties. Most importantly, all three cases attest the importance of family solidarity as one of the criteria for episcopal recruitment, especially at a time when the episcopal appointments in Western Christianity were to great extent in the hands of the Avignon popes³².

Some may argue against the generalizations I have made about a family archive that is unique from a Portuguese archival standpoint. Its uniqueness comes from the number of medieval deeds it holds, from the rare documentary typologies it contains, and from the importance of the family group at hand.

Like many other examples, the unity of the collection provided by the family links between individuals make these documents relevant for social and prosopographical approaches, enabling working hypotheses about the processes and means of affirmation both inside and outside the group. Indeed, such archives supply a view of the individuals under study that is much more “familiar” than the one provided by the royal and ecclesiastical documentation generally used by medievalists. It is well known that the latter implies a mediation that refracts and often subordinates our knowledge of the actions of these men to their public dimension.

³⁰ FARELO, 2008: 531-533.

³¹ FARELO, 2007: 152, 165-166, notes 114 and 118; FARELO, 2008: 414; FARELO, 2014: 128.

³² FARELO, 2014: 127.

The Nogueira case illustrates how a family archive can contribute to the understanding of the promotion processes of given power groups in local, regional, and even central political societies. In a case like this, the information is useful for the bigger history of the crown and the kingdom. In this sense, preserving an archive like this represents not only the good intent of owners but also a necessity for all those who, more or less professionally, are committed to advancing knowledge of our common history.

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