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FAMILY ARCHIVES AND
HISTORICAL RESEARCH

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**FAMILY ARCHIVES, THE ARCHIVAL PRACTICES
OF NOBLE FAMILIES, AND THE SOCIAL LOGIC
OF ARCHIVAL PRESERVATION (PORTUGAL,
FIFTEENTH TO NINETEENTH CENTURIES)**

ABSTRACT: This paper analyzes the social logic of archival preservation by studying the evolution of the main archival practices developed by noble families in Portugal between the fifteenth and the nineteenth centuries. This analysis is divided into two parts: in general terms, the first part focuses on the meanings and functions assigned to the archives by families, highlighting in particular the problems that must be taken into account so as to avoid fragmented and incomplete interpretations of the social role of archives and archival preservation; the second part examines some of the main archival practices carried out by noble groups, and attempts to clarify the organic relationship between the social evolution of families and the evolution of the archives themselves.

Keywords: nobility; ancien régime; family archives; Portugal

RESUMO: Neste texto pretende-se pensar a lógica social da conservação documental a partir dos arquivos de família, avaliando a evolução das principais práticas arquivísticas de grupos familiares da média nobreza não titulada em Portugal entre os séculos XV e XIX. A análise divide-se em duas partes. Na primeira focam-se, em termos gerais, os significados e funções atribuídos aos arquivos pelas famílias e sublinham-se, em particular, os problemas que devem ser tidos em conta quando se avaliam esses significados e funções de forma a evitar leituras fragmentadas e incompletas sobre o papel social dos arquivos e da conservação documental. Na segunda parte examinam-se algumas das principais práticas arquivísticas dos grupos nobres, procurando tornar clara a relação orgânica que se estabeleceu entre a evolução social das famílias e a evolução dos próprios arquivos.

Palavras-chave: nobreza; Antigo Regime; arquivos de família; Portugal

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In the wake of the archival turn that took place in the late twentieth century, recent research has focused on the study of family archives as objects of study², taking them as complex social, cultural, and political constructs rather than natural and predictable products of human activity³. By addressing such diverse topics as the social history of archives, the uses of archived records, or the study of inventory processes, these academic works highlight three central conclusions.

Firstly, they have underlined the advantages of Historical Archivistics, a discipline born of the alliance between History and Archival Science, for the contextual study of the production and conservation of social information. According to Maria de Lurdes Rosa, Historical Archivistics offers the possibility of reflecting on how and why social groups produced, archived, and used archived information, thus conferring social importance to their documentary and archival practices⁴. Secondly, this research has also drawn attention to the “authority”⁵ problems of family histories written primarily or exclusively from written records produced and preserved by other entities. By disregarding the families’ documentary production and conservation practices, as well as the organic relationships they established with their archives, those studies are inevitably limited and partial. Lastly, they showed that archives played a “sociogenetic” role in the formation and consolidation of family groups⁶. In this sense, archives were key elements for the operation, stability, and evolution of families in many different ways throughout the centuries, from the management of estates to the construction and celebration of shared identities and memories.

By bringing these premises to the history of ancien régime nobility and applying them to the study of family archives, this article intends to analyze

² Examples of this can be found in ROSA, 2012a, a collective work that presents studies from various European countries; and in the results of the ARCHIFAM international project, hosted by the École des Hautes Études Hispaniques et Ibériques: <https://www.casadevelazquez.org/pt/investigacao/programas-cientificos-ehehi/anciens-programmes/archifam/archifam/apresentacao-geral/>.

³ COOK, 2010.

⁴ ROSA, 2017: 550-551.

⁵ BLOUIN JR, 2004: 297.

⁶ MORSEL, 2010: 17.

the social logic of archival preservation, following the evolution of the main archival practices of noble family groups in Portugal between the fifteenth and the nineteenth centuries. It is anchored in a previous study, completed in 2016, about the Gama Lobo Salema archive and the creation, management and uses of noble family archives⁷.

The chosen chronological boundaries correspond to the period when most archives of the Portuguese nobility were active, that is, when they played out a central social role in the survival of the noble families. Although in some cases the accumulation of records and the consequent creation of archives began before the fifteenth century, the majority of the initial and most consistent documentary sets dates from that century. The bureaucratization process of the Portuguese Crown also intensified during this time, resulting in an increasingly frequent use of writing in day-to-day activities of the various institutions associated with it, which helps to explain the rise in the amount of contemporary documents that were produced and preserved⁸.

At the other chronological end, we find that most of the family archives in the second half of the nineteenth century no longer performed the functions that noble groups had previously attributed to them. The political and social transformations that led to the end of the *ancien régime* called for the adaptation of the nobility, which in turn resulted in a mutation of the archives' social role. Despite this, many archives retained value as historical archives and as "lieux de mémoire", justifying their survival into the twenty-first century⁹.

As to the object of analysis, we will focus on untitled middle-nobility families belonging to the new lineages that began a process of social ascension in the fifteenth century. These families were generally characterized by an upward social mobility within the noble hierarchies, mostly driven by service offered to the royal family or to titled nobles (military service, administrative or bureaucratic service in the kingdom and overseas, and mercantile service between the metropolis and the overseas territories); by the acquisition of land assets, at the local level, that were later linked to the family group by means

⁷ NÓVOA, 2016.

⁸ MAGALHÃES; SUBTIL, 1997; COELHO, 2015.

⁹ NORA, 1989.

of *morgadios* or chapels (entails)¹⁰; by the celebration of marriages that, as a rule, did not afford an immediate rise in the social hierarchy but provided an important addition to the family estate; and, lastly, by their reinforcement of local power through membership of the military orders, the acceptance of positions in municipal structures, and the patronage of religious buildings where the founders' coats of arms could be displayed¹¹.

As such, the following text is divided into two parts. In general terms, the first focuses on the meanings and functions assigned to archives by the families. I particularly intend to highlight the problems that must be considered when assessing these meanings and functions, so as to avoid fragmented and incomplete interpretations of the social role of archival preservation. The second part examines some of the main archival practices of noble groups throughout various phases of their social progress, and attempts to clarify the organic relationship that existed between them and the archives' own evolution.

It should be noted that the analysis presented below is not meant to be exhaustive and, therefore, does not deplete the possibilities of studying the meanings and functions attributed to archives by the noble families, nor does it encompass the comprehensive universe of noble families included in the broad chronology proposed. On the contrary, it explores only a part of this potential and universe, and seeks to exemplify the virtues of using an approach that is capable of promoting the study of these social groups' history in close association with the documents they produced, received, and chose to archive. This choice creates social meaning and, as such, reveals some of the groups' specific features that would be difficult to identify through the use of written records produced and preserved by institutions other than the families.

Noble family archives: meanings and functions

While today we see many family archives as part of a historical and cultural heritage, one that is both static and fossilized, during the *ancien régime*

¹⁰ About the *morgadios* and chapels, see below.

¹¹ CUNHA; MONTEIRO, 2010a; MAGALHÃES, 1997.

these documentary sets were “living organisms”, in constant mutation¹². The successive transformations that occurred along their conservation course implied not only physical changes but also mutations in the meanings that were attributed to them and to the different documents they contained¹³. In fact, these archives have accumulated layers of meanings over the centuries, superimposed on the original justifications for the production of the documents and their archival preservation. These layers of meanings could maintain or update the relevance of the archives and of the different records that constituted them, thus enhancing the continuity of their preservation. On the other hand, they could also reverse that relevance and render the records or the archives obsolete.

In the case of the ancien régime noble families, this accumulation of meanings, linked as it was to the evaluation of the relevance of archival preservation and to the archives’ physical transformations, could occur at different times. Generational shifts occasionally brought changes to the archives’ structure, especially in cases where one heir did not stand to gain any advantages over the others. With the distribution of patrimonial assets among the successors, some corresponding documents, previously kept in the family archives, were also dispersed among the new owners. Likewise, even when the bulk of the documentation was passed on to a single heir, generational shifts could also lead the new generation to question the conservation relevance of some documents. This would often coincide, as we shall later see, with the partial or full inventory and appraisal of the documentary set that had been bequeathed to the family’s new representative.

Marriages also involved the circulation of records between archives, since all written records relating to assets negotiated in the marriage contract were, like the assets themselves, exchanged between the spouses’ families. As a rule, most records accompanied the dowry of the wife’s family archive, and were integrated into the husband’s family archive. Documentary circulation at the time of marriages was particularly significant when the wife held representation duties for her family, in the absence of male heirs. In these cases, the

¹² BOURQUIN, 2010: 211.

¹³ MORSEL, 2008.

entire archive — or, at least, a considerable part of it — could be incorporated into a new repository, which explains why family archives are actually archives within archives. When groups of documents from other archives were incorporated into new repositories, an assessment of the relevance of archival preservation, similar to the one triggered by generational shifts, sometimes followed. The documents that a given family considered relevant enough to preserve could lose their status upon integration into the archives of other family groups.

Lastly, archives suffered physical mutations — perhaps less substantial but more frequent than others previously described — when assets were bought and sold. In addition to the records produced to prove the transaction, a number of other related records could also be integrated into the purchasers' archives, and consequently removed from the vendors' archival holdings. The latter, produced on dates prior to the transaction, provided information deemed relevant to buyers, such as how the sellers had come to possess the goods or whether they were rented by other individuals or institutions. Many of the earliest written records kept in family archives followed this process of incorporation. This meant, for example, that the purchase of a property concluded in the seventeenth century could lead to the integration in the archive of fourteenth-century documents. This idea is important to avoid dating the creation of archives exclusively according to the production date of the oldest contained document, since its incorporation might have occurred centuries later.

Underlying all these processes of transformation of ancien régime noble family archives are two central ideas for analyzing their functions as social instruments. The first of these, noted by Joseph Morsel, is that not all documents were produced with the intention of being preserved¹⁴; hence the notion that documentary destruction is an integral part of the archival conservation course and should not be attributed solely to accidental or unconscious factors. On the contrary, the destruction of documents also corresponded to rational choices and specific social reasons that are reflected in the archival practices of families.

¹⁴ MORSEL, 2008: 8.

The second central idea, formulated by Arnold Esch, highlights the problems of representativeness and distortion of historical transmission¹⁵. According to this author, the images constructed by historians about a given study object (a society, a period, a city, a social group) are necessarily conditioned and deformed by the representativeness of extant sources. Resulting from a combination of accidental factors and rational choices, the information that survived and that was transmitted does not necessarily represent the entirety of what was produced, but rather, according to Esch, a part of the whole that was more likely to be preserved. Therefore, it becomes necessary to reflect on what is missing, on absences, on what was produced but, for various reasons, was not preserved until today, and on the representativeness of whatever has reached us¹⁶.

When we consider the functions of family archives during the ancien régime, the large percentage of records related to land assets (i.e., purchase, rent, or lease deeds) — which in many cases outnumbers other types of records in the archives — suggests family archives were mainly used as instruments of patrimonial management. Entails such as *morgadios* and chapels contributed greatly to this. They acted as legal mechanisms which, in keeping with their founders' wishes, perpetually entailed certain patrimonial assets to the family and regulated their transmission, preventing them from leaving the possession of family members¹⁷.

While patrimonial management was one of the most important functions of archives, we should remember that this type of documentation, especially when linked to entails, had a higher probability of being preserved than others, using Arnold Esch's terminology. On one hand, land assets were the most important source of income and wealth for the families and, therefore, their management, supported by written records, should be impeccable. On the other, as we shall see, since entails were considered perpetually bound to the family, so too should the corresponding records enjoy perpetual preservation.

¹⁵ ESCH, 2002.

¹⁶ ROSA, 2013: 20-21.

¹⁷ ROSA, 1995; ROSA, 2012d.

Family archives were also important tools for claiming and defending rights and privileges, safeguarding evidence that could be put to use as needed. As the probative value of writing surpassed the authority of individual memory, to possess written records became essential to ensure the continuity of ownership and even the acquisition of new rights and privileges. It was records such as these that legally protected families from threats made by other family groups or institutions and could sustain court claims on rights and privileges. That is why we can still find an abundance of judicial proceedings in archives, dating mainly from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which clearly demonstrate how they were manipulated for protection or aggression, according to the families' social or political context¹⁸.

In addition to these functions, that dealt with matters that were transmitted through the centuries and over successive generations, archives also served other purposes which, given their ephemeral or temporary nature, left few documentary traces, such as documentation that, for different reasons, was less likely to be preserved and which is often known to us only through other documents. This is the case, for example, of what Patricia Guyard calls "day-to-day management", that is, administration activities of current affairs related to the family or the professional life of family members¹⁹. Once these mundane issues were resolved, the pertinence of the conservation of the records related to them would be appraised and the probability of their preservation would dwindle. Because of this, it is very difficult to accurately determine not only the percentage of documents in this category that were produced and temporarily archived, but also the reasons why some of them survived until today, against all odds.

On the whole, family archives functioned as repositories of family memory, connecting members of the family group over time and providing physical testimony of ancestral achievements, intended as examples for future generations. In this sense, like heraldry or family names, archives were an integral

¹⁸ Filippo De Vivo found the same archival manipulation in early modern Venice. During this period, archives were organized according to whether the Republic was at war or peace: DE VIVO, 2010.

¹⁹ GUYARD, 1999:524.

part of the symbolic capital of families and participated in the construction, sharing, and celebration of a common identity.

Archival practices of noble families

As we will see, the archival practices of family groups developed alongside the social evolution of families, progressively responding to whatever needs arose. Thus, between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries we find four general distinct phases for the social courses of the untitled and local middle-nobility families that we have described above, which are reflected in their corresponding archives: the first phase, between the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth centuries, is characterized by the construction of lineages; the second, that takes place during the sixteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries, is one of consolidation; the third, spanning the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, constitutes an attempt at further social development; and, finally, the fourth phase, one of complexification and later decline, extends between the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries²⁰.

In the first phase, from the fifteenth to the beginning of the sixteenth century, we find that the original generations served in the houses of titled nobility, the royal family, or the king himself as squires or knights and, in some cases, accepted early charges of other military or administrative functions. Simultaneously, they also invested their income in the acquisition of land assets and negotiated marriages with families of the same geographical provenance and similar social status. The firstborn sons were not yet neces-

²⁰ Before analyzing each of these phases, two remarks must be made. The first is that this general description, mostly based on the case studies examined through the Gama Lobo Salema archive, does not exhaust other possible social courses also reflected on family archives, such as failure to consolidate the families' social status or the extinction of the family groups due to the lack of heirs. Secondly, some authors use the concept of "house" (*casa*, *maison*) to define the social and institutional organization that was created during the phases mentioned above (see, for example, MONTEIRO, 1993 and 1998; OLIVEIRA, 1999; CUNHA, 2000; CUNHA; MONTEIRO, 2010b). However, I have chosen not to use this concept due to the recent questioning of its adequacy, the difficulties in defining it precisely, and the fact that not all families that went through a similar social process of ascension necessarily intended or were able to constitute "houses" (HADDAD, 2009 and 2014).

sarily benefited over their siblings, and every individual was responsible for maintaining and, if possible, increasing their family's social status and wealth. In this way, each family member's particular effort could be directed towards a shared family project which would be continued by following generations.

The first consistent documentary sets are formed during this phase, coinciding with the consolidation of the centralization and bureaucratization process of the Portuguese Crown and its associated institutions. This process entailed an increased appreciation of writing as an instrument of daily management and as a preferential, though not exclusive, source of authority. Consequently, the demands exerted on families by the Crown and other institutions to produce records capable of proving property ownership, rights, or privileges became more frequent.

However, in this initial period of archival constitution, families were not always able to produce written evidence. This was the case with Diogo Gonçalves Salema, squire and servant of the house of the *Infante* D. Fernando, during a visit to Alcácer do Sal by the *comendadores* (commanders) of the order of Santiago in 1480²¹. Eleven years earlier, in 1469, Diogo Gonçalves Salema had bought from the order the right of use of a number of properties in Alcácer do Sal that had been, at an uncertain date prior to the sale, perpetually rented to the family of the seller's husband²². At the time of the visit, the *comendadores* asked Diogo Salema to submit written proof not only of the purchase he had made in 1469 but also of the rental agreement between the order and the seller's predecessors. The *comendadores* justified the need to produce both records by claiming that renting proprieties in perpetuity went against the order's regiment and canonical law. As such, without the necessary evidence the agreement's perpetual status would be lost and become valid only for the duration of three individuals' lifespans; after that, the right of use

²¹ ANTT, Arquivo Gama Lobo Salema, cx. 9, pt. 58; ANTT, Arquivo Gama Lobo Salema, cx. 35, pt. 182; ANTT, Feitos Findos, Livros dos Feitos Findos, liv. 246, "Inventário geral dos papéis...", fls. 17, 75v and 102. From now on the Gama Lobo Salema archive will be referred to as "AGLS".

²² "Carta de venda" (1469): ANTT, AGLS cx. 35, pt. 182.

would return to the order, which could then renegotiate its terms with new owners, to the detriment of Diogo Gonçalves Salema and his successors²³.

Diogo Gonçalves Salema presented the 1469 deed of purchase but was unable to prove the rental agreement since he did not have the corresponding document in his possession. Accusing the *comendadores* of unjustly treating him, he recalls that the proprieties had been rented to the seller's family for "cento e duzentos anos que a memória dos homens não em contrário" (a hundred and two hundred years, undisputed by the memory of men). The *comendadores* were unmoved and replied that the memory of men could not replace written evidence, later revoking the right of use in perpetuity²⁴.

Examples such as this — in which the lack of written records or the failure to preserve them might hinder the use of certain assets or even jeopardize their ownership — made families aware of the importance of preserving documents. In addition to the pressures exerted by the Crown and other powerful institutions, this awareness was often reinforced by the professional experience of some family members. In fact, while in some cases family groups sought social ascension through military or commercial service, in others they focused on central or local administrative service, allowing them to come into contact with the experience of the institutions they served regarding written document management and preservation.

This exposure influenced the archival practices of family groups, particularly those related to the organization, control, and retrieval of information. Still in the fifteen-hundreds — particularly in the final years of the century — we see the first rudimentary attempts to organize documents accumulated until then and to facilitate the identification of information contained therein.

One of these efforts was to organize written records according to what Pierre Chastang has called "patrimonial genealogy", that is, according to the genealogical succession that explained the transmission of patrimonial assets between its several owners²⁵. Documents related to the same asset or property

²³ "Carta testemunhável de requerimento" (1480): ANTT, AGLS, cx. 35, pt. 182.

²⁴ *Idem*.

²⁵ CHASTANG, 2001: 424. The same practice was common, for example, in monastic institutions: OLIVEIRA, 2001: 223-225.

were thus assembled within a single installation unit (a bundle, for example), forming, in Kristen Neuschel's words, "topically-organized clusters" within the archives²⁶. In the Gama Lobo Salema archive we find some examples of these "clusters", such as the documentation pertaining to the *berdade do Gradil*, which was produced between 1433 and about 1485²⁷. On the back of the oldest document of this collection we find a note, probably written in the fifteenth century, which confirms collective documentary conservation practices by indicating that "estas escrituras todas são do Gradil" (these records all belong to Gradil)²⁸.

Notes on the back of documents represent another example of early rudimentary efforts made by families to control and retrieve the information available in archives. These notes could summarize the written record's general content or highlight specific aspects that were considered relevant by the note's producer²⁹.

Three notable examples were produced in the first decade of the sixteenth century by Gabriel Lopes de Bulhão, who began his career as a clerk for the orphans, Jews, and Moors of Lisbon and as a squire of the king's household, later becoming a knight and *provedor* (ombudsman) of Lisbon municipality³⁰. In the early sixteenth century, Gabriel Lopes took possession of some houses in Lisbon after exchanging them for others in the same city. With the deal he received three documents³¹. On the back of these records he then included notes which, in addition to describing the content of the document, as was common, provided supplementary, more specific information, such as: the reason why he received one of the records — "para resguardo de meu direito" (to safeguard my rights)³²; the name of the person to whom the documents

²⁶ NEUSCHEL, 2001: 208.

²⁷ ANTT, AGLS, cx. 35, pt. 184.

²⁸ "Carta de partilhas" (1433): ANTT, AGLS, cx. 35, pt. 184.

²⁹ This practice was also common in monastic and royal archives: OLIVEIRA, 2001: 223-224.

³⁰ ANTT, AGLS, cx. 32, pt. 170; ANTT, AGLS, cx. 34, pt. 180; ANTT, Chancelaria de D. Manuel I, liv. 33, fl. 40v.

³¹ "Carta de permuta" (1505): ANTT, AGLS, cx. 32, pt. 170; "Carta de confirmação de emprazamento" (1506): ANTT, AGLS, cx. 32, pt. 170; "Carta de confirmação de emprazamento" (1506): ANTT, AGLS, cx. 32, pt. 170.

³² "Carta de permuta" (1505): ANTT, AGLS, cx. 32, pt. 170.

were originally delivered; and the date when the documents were handed to him. Gabriel Lopes de Bulhão's experience as clerk and *provedor* was not circumstantial to the degree of detail in these notes which, in essence, relate the course and justification of the documents' preservation.

We find another example of notes on the back of documents, albeit with a different purpose, in an annotation produced by Cosme Rodrigues, knight and nobleman of the king's household, knight of the order of Christ, *provedor-mor* (main ombudsman) of the kingdom's *Casa dos Contos*³³, and *vedor* (supervisor) of the treasury of the Indies³⁴. In 1535 Cosme Rodrigues bought some houses in Lisbon and, in addition to the deed of purchase, he received four other documents that belonged to the "patrimonial genealogy" of the property³⁵. On the back of the oldest document of this set, dated 1464, Cosme Rodrigues wrote a note indicating that those four documents had been delivered to a certain Francisco Martins, followed by their description. At the end of the note he later added that the records had already been returned to him³⁶. Simple in form, this note represents an effort to control the exit and entry of documents from the archive, most likely influenced by Cosme Rodrigues's professional experience at the *Casa dos Contos* or the treasury of the Indies. Given the importance of document ownership, monitoring tasks such as these gradually became more relevant as archived records increased.

The last example of the oldest archival practices of noble groups can be found in a list of documents written in 1498 after the death of Vasco Queimado de Vilalobos, a nobleman of the household of the duke of Beja³⁷. Following a common procedure in cases where the heirs became orphans, the nobleman's death prompted an inventory of all his assets, including deeds³⁸.

³³ An institution that supervised the public income and expenditure of the kingdom.

³⁴ ANTT, AGLS, cx.11, pt. 83; ANTT, AGLS, cx. 11, pt. 84; ANTT, AGLS, cx. 36, pt. 185; ANTT, Feitos Findos, Livros dos Feitos Findos, liv. 246, 'Inventário geral dos papéis...', fls. 17v, 43v, 49v, 52v, 68v, 70, 70v, 71, 71v, 73, 73v, 74v, 75, 76v, 92v, 93, and 93v.

³⁵ "Carta de venda" (1535): ANTT, AGLS, cx. 36, pt.185.

³⁶ "Carta de venda" (1464): ANTT, AGLS, cx. 36, pt.185.

³⁷ ANTT, AGLS, cx. 12, pt. 88; ANTT, Chancelaria de D. Afonso V, liv. 33, fl. 97v.; ANTT, Chancelaria de D. Manuel I, liv. 29, fl. 91v.; ANTT, Chancelaria de D. João II, liv. 8, fl. 216; ANTT, Chancelaria de D. Manuel I, liv. 29, fl. 91v.

³⁸ Traslado (1716) do "Instrumento ao teor de um inventário..." (1498): ANTT, Casa de Santa Iria, cx. 15, doc. 20.

It is unusual to find lists of documents or even brief mentions to archives in these post-mortem inventories. In this case, a possibility exists that the list was made under the influence of Nuno Fernandes da Mina, Vasco Queimado's son-in-law, who would be aware of the importance of describing the archives due to his experience as *vedor* (supervisor) for the master of the order of Santiago, and *alcaide-mor* (captain-general) and *comendador* (commander) of the same order³⁹.

This account, which can be considered a proto-inventory, individually and collectively lists and summarily describes more than 43 records, with no indication of date or call number system. The sequence in which the documents are mentioned does not seem to suggest any sort of chronological, geographical, or typological order. This is in line with what Kristen Neuschel found in the study of archive inventories of the same period. Neuschel states that documents were catalogued in the same way as other movable assets, that is, as they were located and identified by the producers of the inventories and without any intentional abstract order. That is why retrieval of information during this period depended largely on familiarity with the documents and also on human memory⁴⁰.

The list of Vasco Queimado de Vilalobos' records allows us to note one last aspect. By confronting it with other documents, we are able to determine that out of the approximately 43 listed records, the whereabouts of only seven are known today, that is, close to 11% of the total⁴¹. In other words, from the fifteenth century to the present day the erosion rate of Vasco Queimado de Vilalobos' archive was around 89%, reminding us of the problems of representativeness and deformation postulated by Arnold Esch⁴².

Like this proto-inventory, many of the archival practices analyzed up until now were continued and improved over the following centuries, starting with the second phase of these families' social course, which spanned the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. At this stage, the investments of the first

³⁹ NÓVOA, 2016: 229.

⁴⁰ NEUSCHEL, 2001: 210.

⁴¹ NÓVOA, 2016: 223-248.

⁴² ESCH, 2002.

generations were rewarded with titles in the king's household, which were later transmitted to heirs. This period also saw the consolidation of military order affiliations, often accompanied by the acceptance of formal posts in these institutions. Finally, *morgadios* and chapels were consistently instituted, which entailed the patrimony hitherto accumulated and cemented the social and economic position of the families. Although not all entails benefited the oldest male heir, the prevailing tendency was to choose the firstborn son over any siblings, and to entrust him with the representation of the family.

By functioning as social, economic, and legal hubs for the families, entails played a similar twofold role for archives. On one hand, they created documentary sets, composed of written records related to the *morgadios* or chapels and, thus, organically linked to each other, within the archives; in fact, many archives were later reorganized according to the different *morgadios* and chapels administered by the families. On the other hand, entails bolstered the idea of perpetual conservation, given their intended perennial nature; the documentation related to them should also be preserved “até ao fim do mundo” (until the world ends).

This last expression is used in the testament that Maria Rebela wrote herself in 1596, where she instituted a chapel that should be perpetually administered by her second-born nephew and, thereafter, by all his second-born successors⁴³. As a condition for the entail's administration and under penalty of being denied the chapel's income, the testator determined that the administrators should always keep a copy of her will — “the primary legal source” of the entail⁴⁴ — and pass it on among them “until the world ends”.

In fact, it is precisely the existence and longevity of entails, which were only extinguished in 1863, that largely explains the cohesion of many surviving family archives. As we have seen, documents related to entails were the ones most likely to be preserved, even if other documents shared a similar probability of preservation, such as proofs of patronage or burial rights in religious institutions. Overall, this category of records secured in writing perpetual rights and privileges that could be transmitted from generation to gen-

⁴³ “Traslado (1828) de testamento e livro de codicilo (1599)”: ANTT, AGLS, cx. 16, pt. 133.

⁴⁴ ROSA, 1995:65.

eration, which justifies the higher probability of archival preservation. Family projects depended on these rights and privileges and, consequently, relied on the capacity to prove their ownership whenever necessary.

It is interesting to note that many of the references to “daily management” records are found in testaments — the documents commonly used for instituting entails and entirely different in terms of documentary conservation⁴⁵. The testament written in 1562 by Brás Salema, a nobleman of the king’s household, *língua* (translator) and *apostentador-mor*⁴⁶ of Hormuz, and merchant, is a good example of this⁴⁷. Along with his last wishes and the institution of a *morgadio*, Brás Salema mentions several pending matters that should be addressed by the testament’s executors using various written records⁴⁸. He explains that his successors could find information on payments due to a servant on a “papel de minhas lembranças” (record of my recollections); he later mentions a “escritura” (deed), held by a ship’s pilot, concerning eighteen barrels of wine that belonged to him and that were stored aboard the vessel; he then refers to “um assinado em forma” (a signed formal record) that he had given to his mother to certify a debt of his to her (recalling that he also owed money to his mother-in-law but had not provided her with a signed receipt); and finally states that he was granted a “provisão d’el Rei” (provision from the king) authorizing him to import bread from Brazil. Once the servant had received his belongings, the wine business completed, the money owed to the mother repaid, and the bread brought from Brazil, the probability of the documents’ preservation decreased considerably.

The same is valid in the third phase of the families’ social course, which extends from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century. New entails continued to be instituted and existing ones augmented with the annexation of new assets. The family groups already enjoyed a consolidated social position and wealth, reinforced by prestigious positions connected to the Crown and

⁴⁵ GUYARD, 1999:524.

⁴⁶ Officer in charge of providing for the king and the court while on travel.

⁴⁷ ANTT, AGLS, cx.10, pts. 69 and 70; ANTT, Feitos Findos, Livros dos Feitos Findos, liv. 246, “Inventário geral dos papéis...”, fls. 32v, 44, 48v, 52 75 and 75v.

⁴⁸ “Carta testemunhável com traslado (1563) de testamento (1562)”: ANTT, AGLS, cx. 10, pt. 69.

the military orders and all accompanying benefits, such as *comendas* (commendations). The family project would then concentrate on acquiring new privileges, among which a title of nobility — the most desired and hardest to achieve. For this purpose, the families, on one hand, sought to obtain advantageous marriages (preferably among the titled nobility, which was not always possible) and, on the other, persistently incurred in judicial disputes as an alternative way of accumulating prerogatives and rights.

The path of João Salema, nobleman of the king's household, clearly demonstrates the importance of archival preservation for the incorporation of new privileges⁴⁹. Since at least the late sixteenth century, his endeavors had focused on obtaining a *comenda*, which appears to have been requested of Filipe II for the first time in the 1580s. However, the king demanded three conditions for accepting the request: that João Salema rendered military service in Africa for at least a year; that he join the order of Christ; and that he not receive another *comenda*⁵⁰. Consequently, João Salema served at his own expense in Ceuta between 1591 and 1592, after which he received a service certificate of proof from the city's captain and governor⁵¹. Also in 1592, he requested and received royal permission to join the order of Christ by means of a royal charter⁵². Finally, in the same year, he was issued a certificate proving that he had not received any previous *comenda*⁵³.

With these three documents — the certificate by the captain and governor of Ceuta, the royal charter, and the certificate that he had not received a *comenda* — João Salema once again wrote to the king. In the letter, of which two drafts have survived, he mentions his services, duly proven by the three documents, as well as the services of his older brother, Diogo Salema, who had served the Crown in the *comenda* of Tangier and died in the battle of *Alcácer Quibir*. Finally in 1600, after almost 20 years of efforts, we learn that

⁴⁹ ANTT, AGLS, cx.10, pt. 71; ANTT, AGLS, cx. 16, pt. 129; ANTT, AGLS, cx. 41, pt. 200; ANTT, Feitos Findos, Livros dos Feitos Findos, liv. 246, “Inventário geral dos papéis...”, fls. 1v, 4v, 7v, 9v, 11, 11v, 12, 12v, 13, 13v, 14, 17, 34, 42, 60v, 75, 75v, 90, 101v, 103, and 104.

⁵⁰ “Minuta de petição” (s/d): ANTT, AGLS, cx. 10, pt. 71.

⁵¹ “Carta de certidão” (1592): ANTT, AGLS, cx. 10, pt. 71.

⁵² “Alvará régio” (1592) described in “Inventário geral dos papéis...” (ANTT, Feitos Findos, Livros dos Feitos Findos, liv. 246, fl. 75v).

⁵³ “Carta de certidão” (1592): ANTT, AGLS, cx. 10, pt. 71.

João Salema received the *comenda* of S. Gião de Lobão, in the bishopric of Viseu⁵⁴, supported by duly archived written records and the memory of his family's feats.

The descendants of João Salema represent another striking example of the efforts made by families to incorporate new privileges and of the central role of archives in this process, just before the nineteenth century. In 1790, Fernando Xavier de Miranda Henriques, second count of Sandomil, renounced his title and family representation in favor of his eldest son and successor, Luís Xavier de Miranda Henriques, third count of Sandomil. However, Luís de Miranda Henriques died two years later, raising a serious succession problem. Fernando Xavier, who died in 1794, only had two other male sons, both of whom were unable to succeed in the administration of the entails since one was an illegitimate son and the other a priest. Thus, following the death of the second count, an impressive court battle took place, involving all potential successors of the Miranda Henriques entails, including the Salema, who rushed to gather the necessary evidence for supporting their legal claims⁵⁵.

The Gama Lobo Salema archive reflects this episode not only because it holds several hefty books produced during the dispute⁵⁶ but also because it shows that the archive itself was manipulated and reorganized following the judicial conflict⁵⁷. A significant part of the written evidence presented in court, some of which dated back to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries — in other words, that had been produced 300 or 400 years previously — was provided by the archive. Given the volume of documents accumulated over that period, those responsible for presenting evidence in court were forced to search the information inside the archive and to organize it so that its retrieval was as effective as possible, considering the complexity of the litigation.

The Salema family's efforts were rewarded in the early nineteenth century when they were considered legitimate successors of some of the entails administered by the counts of Sandomil. As a consequence, their archive

⁵⁴ “Carta régia de mercê de comenda” (1600): ANTT, AGLS, cx. 10, pt. 71.

⁵⁵ NÓVOA, 2016: 37-39.

⁵⁶ ANTT, AGLS, cx. 20, pts. 142; cx. 21, pts. 143-144; cx. 22, pt. 145.

⁵⁷ NÓVOA, 2016: 71-73.

incorporated about 750 documents originally from the archive of the Miranda Henriques family⁵⁸. This incorporation exponentially increased the volume of the Salema archive and prompted a reorganization that took place in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, one of the moments in which the pertinence of archival preservation was evaluated.

Victory in court and the succession of some entails encouraged José Maria Salema Lobo de Saldanha e Sousa Cabral e Paiva, the then current representative of the family, to request the title of Count of Sandomil from the king⁵⁹. In the draft of the letter addressed to the monarch, José Maria Salema presents several arguments of justification, including services to the Crown of three of his ancestors in the sixteenth century. The letter also contained several documents attesting to these services and reinforcing the legitimacy and authority of the request. In the end, the king did not grant the request to Salema's representative but the use of documentation that had been produced about 300 years earlier clearly shows the importance of archival preservation and the constant renewal of the uses and meanings attributed to archives over time.

This brings us to the fourth and last phase of the families' social course, which took place between the end of the eighteenth century and the middle of the nineteenth century. This is the most complex period in terms of wealth management, given the accumulation of numerous entailed and free assets, whose income and obligations had to be administered and controlled. Despite this, the social status, prestige, and wealth accrued over five centuries did not withstand the political and social changes that marked the end of the Ancien Régime. Napoleon's invasions, the exile of the court in Brazil, the liberal revolutions, and the end of the absolute monarchy heralded profound transformations; the nobility's attempts to adapt and respond to them were ultimately unsuccessful.

The most critical threats arrived in 1860 when new legislation that regulated entails and required their registration (the so-called "lei do registo vincular") was introduced; three years later, this led to the extinction of the entail model. The definitive elimination of entails marked a turning point, since it

⁵⁸ NÓVOA, 2016: 37-39.

⁵⁹ "Minuta de carta" (s/d): ANTT, AGLS, cx. 13, pt. 113.

implied the transformation of all the patrimonial assets hitherto bound to the family, determining their equal distribution among all of the heirs⁶⁰. As such, the nobility was stripped of its main mechanism of aggregation, maintenance, and transmission of wealth, endangering their subsistence as a social group.

The archival practices of families mirrored all these transformations and the most notable examples can be found in inventories of archives. As we have seen, the practice of creating inventories dates to at least the fifteenth century, and progressively evolved with the increase and diversification of archived documents⁶¹. However, the most complex and complete inventories were produced in the nineteenth century by specialized professionals working within specific political and legal contexts⁶².

Three illustrative examples can be offered. The first concerns the inventory commissioned by the first count of Belmonte in 1807, immediately before his family left for exile in Brazil⁶³. The second is the inventory created by the expert paleographer Friar João Filipe da Cruz for the aforementioned judicial dispute that followed the extinction of the family of the counts of Sandomil. In 1815, the specialist completed the inventory of the archive that was held by the counts, describing approximately 1,735 documents. However, the total number of records in the archive would have been higher since the documents that João Filipe da Cruz considered “insignificantes” (insignificant) were not described, together with the “inteiramente inúteis” (entirely useless), which were destroyed⁶⁴. Lastly, the third inventory, created between 1854 and 1864, was produced during the reorganization of the Castro family archive to collect the necessary documentation to comply with the entail registration law and, consequently, to protect patrimonial assets that belonged to the family⁶⁵.

These inventories and the remaining practices associated with them represented the last archival efforts to maintain the social cohesion of families. With the extinction of entails and the equal distribution of assets, families and

⁶⁰ COELHO, 1980; ESTEVES, 2008.

⁶¹ ROSA; HEAD, 2015a.

⁶² ROSA; HEAD, 2015b: 19-21.

⁶³ SOUSA, 2015; SOUSA, 2017: 258-277.

⁶⁴ NÓVOA, 2015; NÓVOA, 2016: 56-64.

⁶⁵ MARQUES, 2015; MARQUES, 2013: 41-49.

archives lost the aggregating functions they had had throughout the Ancien Régime. Many documents were dispersed to different heirs. Some document collections survived more or less cohesively and continued to be preserved for their historical and sentimental value. Others fell into oblivion; some eventually disappeared, and a few were ultimately rediscovered and revalued.

In any case, it is worth noting that family archives, as we know them today, are the result of this long journey of preservation, both in terms of document type and quantity and mode of organization, and that it has considerably affected the perception we now have of this type of documentary heritage. The constant transformations that occurred between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries gradually introduced changes in the meanings and physical structure of archives. On the eve of the nineteenth century, profound political and social changes echoed in archives, which were extensively manipulated and reorganized as a response to the upheavals. The conservation premises of previous centuries were then recast into new ones, until archives finally lost the role they had played for so many centuries in the management and survival of family groups.

Conclusions

To summarize the ideas presented in this article we sustain, first of all, that there are multiple benefits in constructing a historiography centered on archives and in paying due attention to the historical course of archives and their producing entities. A social history of archives and archival practices of social groups can flourish at this intersection, and is made manifestly richer by building not on documents produced and preserved by third parties but on records created and received by the groups themselves, who later opted to transform them into archives. It is this choice that gives archives their socio-genetic character, providing social meaning to archival preservation and to the functions performed by archived documents. Therefore, historians never start off with the totality of what was produced, but rather with the result of an equation that combines intent and randomness, the rational choice to conserve or destroy, and the action of time, nature, and the neglect of human-

kind. Consequently, in order to write the history of social groups one must also contemplate the representativeness problems of sources, which directly distort the intelligibility of these groups' past, to greater or lesser degrees.

One way to mitigate these problems is to follow the different stages of these groups' social courses, asking how and why they produced and received documents, what uses and meanings they assigned to them, and in what contexts and how they were transformed into archives. In this fashion, we are able to understand, at least partially, why and how archives have survived to the present day, which, in epistemological terms, enhances the work of historians when, on the shoulders of giants, they transform archives into sources.