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# RECOVERED VOICES, NEWFOUND QUESTIONS

FAMILY ARCHIVES AND  
HISTORICAL RESEARCH

MARIA DE LURDES ROSA  
RITA SAMPAIO DA NÓVOA  
ALICE BORGES GAGO  
MARIA JOÃO DA CÂMARA  
(COORDS.)

J. A. DE SOTTOMAYOR-PIZARRO

*Academia das Ciências de Lisboa*

*Real Academia de la Historia de Madrid*

*Faculdade de Letras/UP*

*CEPESE*

*pirro.jo@gmail.com*

ORCID: 0000-0002-6016-6024

**“E MOSTRAROM DUAS ARCAS HUA VAÇIA E NA  
OUTRA ANDAVAM CARTAS”. MONASTIC FUNDS  
AS FAMILY ARCHIVES IN THE MIDDLE AGES**

**ABSTRACT:** For the Middle Ages, before the constitution of private archives of manor houses — which occurs, for the most important part, during the fifteenth century — researchers of family history have to resort, in addition to the royal funds, mainly to monastic funds. It was in these that the diplomas concerning the members of the founding or protective families of the different monasteries were kept. I intend, therefore, through the analysis of a few examples, to highlight the importance of some document types, such as wills or letters of partition, not only to collect information about the individuals concerned, but also to record the transmission of several assets throughout the generations.

**Keywords:** Middle Ages; monastic archives; document types; family assets transmission

**RESUMO:** Para a Idade Média, e antes da constituição dos arquivos privados das casas senhoriais, o que ocorre, para as mais importantes, no decurso do século XV, os investigadores da história familiar, para além dos fundos régios, têm que recorrer sobretudo aos fundos monásticos, pois era nestes que se recolhiam os diplomas que respeitavam aos membros das famílias fundadoras ou protectoras dos diferentes cenóbios. Pretende-se, assim, através de alguns exemplos, chamar a atenção para a importância de algumas tipologias documentais, como testamentos ou cartas de partilhas, não só para se recolher informação para os indivíduos em causa, mas também para poder historiar a transmissão de vários bens ao longo das gerações.

**Palavras-chave:** Idade Média; arquivos monásticos; tipologias documentais; transmissão de bens familiares

Ever since he had crossed the Douro in the barge of the Poor Clares from the Torrão convent, the knight had been complaining to Afonso Peres, his squire and servant, of a strong pain in his chest, strong to the point of stunting one of his arms: “It is this humidity that the river takes, my Lord, once we get to the monastery a good fire will make you feel better”. But the January chilling air, blowing stronger and stronger from the Freita, would only worsen the pain and the cough that had been afflicting him for the last few months, to the point that Rui Martins had asked various times to stop the horses in order to have some rest. Leaning against a gigantic oak, at the gates of Espadanedo, he asked for some water, which a good woman leading a few goats promptly offered him. But as the knight of the Casal gotten worse, another servant, Gomes, was sent for help at the monastery, already close by, bringing a stretcher mounted on two mules of the abbess, *Dona Aldonça Martins de Resende*, who in distress welcomed the retinue at the gate of Santa Maria de Tarouquela.

Later on, she would say that the knight Rui Martins of the Casal “arrived here diseased, and it was God’s will that he left this world”, by early 1312. At the delivery of the movable assets that took place on following March by the abbess, whom Rui Martins had designated as executor — which is understandable, since they had two daughters together, both legitimated by the king D. Dinis, by whom the knight is several times referred as vassal and witness in a couple of royal acts — in the presence of the two servants mentioned; and, in between the knight’s many other belongings, “duas arcas hũa vaçia e na outra andavam cartas” and some morabitanos<sup>1</sup> are referred.

Of these, unfortunately, I did not find the trail, but I believe that I read all his letters, ten of which are kept in the Tarouquela registry office, as between 1989 and 1992 I swept all the monastic funds at the Torre do Tombo, coming across this remarkable documentary piece, concerning the delivery of the deceased knight’s property to one brother of his, transcribed at the end.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix.

This is not the first time I have intervened at these archives meetings, especially the ones concerning family archives, thanks in large part to the generous condescension of my good friend and colleague, Dr Maria de Lurdes Rosa, to whom I am thankful for this new invitation. In June 2012, framed by the sumptuous palace of the Sousa-Botelho in Mateus, I had the opportunity to draw attention to the importance that the lists of *naturais* from churches and monasteries may have had for the elaboration and updating of the medieval nobiliary, and in July 2015, in a meeting in Ponte de Lima, I was able to emphasize the great importance of royal documentation, in particular the general inquiries, which allow to securely date the possession of certain patrimonial assets, appearing one or two hundred years later referenced in documentary pieces of the family assets.

At the end of my intervention in Ponte de Lima, I called attention upon the importance of the ecclesiastical documentation, especially the monastic, as a good working hypothesis for the reconstitution of family archives. At the time, however, I limited myself to value the concept of “duplicate” and to propose its use by all of those who intend to reconstitute private archives prior to the fifteenth century. But also the royal archives. Indeed, I then offered the example of the royal documentation, emphasizing the great difference in publishing a chancellery book, as it has been done with the monarchs posterior to D. Sancho II, and making its reconstitution by collection of all royal diplomas which are scattered by the different registry offices, either public or private, national or foreign, as it has been done for the *Condes Portucalenses* and for D. Afonso Henriques and D. Sancho I.

And so I finished: “In other words, the monastic funds preserve, amidst thousands of other diplomas, the documents that throughout the time have witnessed the relations of patronage, collaboration or conflict, between a given monastery and the members of a certain family. Acts of either purchase and sale, donations, pledges or pious legacies, sentences and judiciary processes or wills, all those pieces nowadays stored in those monastic funds surely had a copy — since they were issued in duplicate such as the royal diplomas — in family archives that did not live up to our days, simply vanished or were lost throughout centuries of patrimonial neglect, were destroyed in wars, fires, family partitions, or just because someone, even a distant descendant, like

the monarchs of the 1400s and 1500s, in relation to their predecessors, found them useless<sup>2</sup>.

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The case I used for the opening of this intervention is no doubt very rare, even exceptional — a documental core of a very reasonable dimension, witnessing several moments in the life of an individual of the average regional nobility, documented from the early last quarter of the thirteenth century until the end of the first decade of the following century, revealing a part of his patrimony and of his relations with his closest relatives, and which can then be crossed with data either from the royal chancellery or other monastic registry offices. In all, and for the aforementioned dates, the knight Rui Martins do Casal appears in 22 documents, half of which had been kept in the Tarouquela registry office.

But I was only able to find them under also exceptional circumstances, not to say impossible to achieve in our days, that is, during the preparation of my doctoral dissertation, which at that time could take ten years or even longer, its ambit being of national-wide analysis which, taking into account the current rules, one could hardly repeat. At the time, I went through all archives and libraries, national, district and municipal, as well as private funds, and only that systematic character made it possible to gather a rather interesting collection of data about individuals or families, totalling almost 40,000 pieces of information for a chronology of about one hundred years — from c.1250 to c.1350 (the inquiries of 1258 were not signed) — having used about a quarter of it for the foundation of that doctoral thesis.

How to deal, therefore, with this immense mass of monastic funds? Only by a big stroke of luck one could arrive in Arouca or Lorvão, for instance, and immediately come across an important document for one's investigation. Even

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<sup>2</sup> As is known, the successive reforms of the royal archives throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries led to the destruction of documentation then considered without practical effects, which makes most of the books of chancellery prior to D. Afonso V (r. 1438-1481) to be copies made in the fifteenth century; or that the *Leitura Nova* of the reign of D. Manuel I (r. 1495-1521) led to the elimination of the oldest documents there transcribed (ALBUQUERQUE, 1990).

nowadays, with a large part of the funds duly organized, the investigator is very far from being able to entirely rely on the summaries that are offered, elaborated in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries, and that do not identify in a safe way the intervenients of each diploma, except in very few cases.

Given the circumstances enunciated, I can only offer some methodological suggestions, divided between two issues: on the one hand, the documental typologies and, on the other hand, the nature of the institutions.

Let us start with the first. There are two types of documents that can be essential to understand not only an isolated individual but an entire family group: wills and partition letters. These exist in a much larger amount than one might think of. For the period I worked with, I registered about seven hundreds of wills and more than one hundred partition letters. Each and every one of them can be essential to understand how the patrimonies were constituted and dispersed, providing fundamental clues to follow the trajectory of the most important elements, such as honors or *quintās*, or to date with some accuracy the construction of a palace or a tower. So, when in the late Middle Ages most of the family archives begin to take shape, some of the above-mentioned elements can be determinant in explaining the existence of several groups of documents in the fifteenth or sixteenth centuries.

Nothing better than some concrete examples. Firstly, however, I would like to make it very clear that I do not intend to demonstrate the importance of wills, partition letters or any other kind of documentation, but to draw attention to some details that may open up clues and/or guidelines for further investigations leading to the virtual reconstitution of a particular individual or family archive.

1) In 1379, Martim Afonso Botelho, a king's vassal knight, his judge in Riba Côa and mayor of the Sabugal's castle made a will, kept in the registry office of Santa Maria de Aguiar, ordering to be entombed in the monastery of São Salvador da Torre, "no moimento que ali tinha feito e que deitassem Joana Rodrigues sua mulher no dela, a par do seu e que os filhos varões fossem enterrados no seu e as filhas no dela" (in the monument he had built there and that Joana Rodrigues, his wife, would be lain in hers, next to his, and that the sons would be entombed in his and the daughters

in hers)<sup>3</sup>. The rest of the will, which I must emphasize is extremely rich on information about Martim Afonso's patrimony, both movable assets and estate, is of utmost interest to us for the following reason: if such a strong connection between the knight and that Benedictine monastery in Minho existed, the possibility of finding in the fonds of its registry office diplomas concerning his private life is high, such as it happens with Rui Martins do Casal, as we shall later see.

2) One can say the same of the will of Sancha Pais de Paredes, widow of the knight Martins de Freitas, dated 1299, ordering to be entombed in the monastery of Freixo, near Amarante, leaving twenty pounds for his "work"<sup>4</sup>.

But wills can also be of use to understand the way patrimony, or at least a significant part of it, temporarily passed onto the possession of ecclesiastic institutions, and therefore, as far as their documental fonds is concerned, one could have, in the very least, the expectation of finding elements for the archival reconstitutions.

3) This is the case, at all levels remarkable, of Lopo Afonso de Melo's will (1325), lord of the honor of Melo, making his daughter Dona Teresa Afonso his universal heiress. The latter, by professing in Santa Clara de Coimbra, donated all her belongings to the monastery, the above-mentioned honor of Melo included, several diplomas concerning the management of that patrimony having been kept in the Poor Clares' registry office in Coimbra, patrimony which, by barter, would later return to the family's possession. Thus, when studying a given patrimony in the fifteenth or sixteenth centuries, one should keep in mind that earlier information can be found in documental fonds that, on a first glance, could be of no interest. From that piece, allow me to quote a short passage — I recall that its finding, at the time, paid up for the tiredness of that week's work, in the old and wistfully missed Torre do Tombo, at São Bento:

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<sup>3</sup> ANTT, "Mosteiro de Santa Maria de Aguiar da Beira", C. 25/E. 45, mç. 5, nr. 8.

<sup>4</sup> ANTT, "Mosteiro de São Pedro de Cête", C. 25, cx. 2, mç. 4, nr. 1,204.

Item, rogo Tareija Affonso mha filha que eu leyxo per mha herel e por mha testamenteyra e de sa madre e de sa avoo e daqueles onde ela vem, que faça come booa filha, e rogo-lhi per mha beençam e pola de Deus pera se comprir todo bem esto que eu mando, que se detenha de casamento quatro anos ca lhi nom minguara muitos boos casamentos cada que lhi comprirem, e meta a renda esto que amamos mim e ela pera se comprir soo melhor e per sacar ela despois mays eyzenta ela se o fezer comme booa filha, e de-lhi poreu Deus a sa beençam e a de sa madre e a de seus avoos e a minha ca seja certa *que diz o proverio ca filha es e padre seras e qual fezeres tal receberas* (Item, I beg my daughter Teresa Afonso, whom I nominate my heiress and my executor and of her mother's and grandmother's and of those who will come of her, to act as good daughter, and I beg of her by my blessing and of God's to well carry out all this I hereby command, to stop herself from marriage for four years since good marriage proposals won't lack her after that, and that she rents this that we both love in order to take the best of it until she becomes a full woman and able to take the best profit of it if she acts as a good daughter, and with the blessing of God and her mother's and grandparents' and mine that the proverb that says that *you are a daughter, a father [mother] you shall be, and what you do, you will win back* applies to her), my italics <sup>5</sup>.

4) Wills, by their very nature, contemplate many references to debts to be paid by the testamentary executors, which report to the patrimonial management of the testator and that can be of the greatest relevance. To that, I shall come back on account of the knight of the Casal. A note, however, about the surprises that these texts reserve for us. Gil Martins de Coreixas, a knight buried in the monastery of Cête, made his will in 1326, leaving a huge amount for the payment of debts, 1,200 old *morabitanos*, 500 of which for the souls of those whom “eu matey e mandey matar e fiz matar e conselhey a matar e ajudey a matar” (I killed and ordered to be killed and made be killed and advised to kill and helped to kill), remembering perhaps his participation in the wars of end of the reign of D. Dinis<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> SOTTOMAYOR-PIZARRO, 1999, vol. 1: 571-572.

<sup>6</sup> ANTT, “Mosteiro de São Pedro de Cête”, C. 25, cx. 2, mç. 5, nr. 1,199.

5) As for the partition letters, information is all the more important as it reveals the dispersion to which the family patrimonies were subject due to the hereditary partition system, dominant before the implementing of the *morgadio* system already in the 1400s. I here recall, for instance, the decisive importance that the partitions made by the offspring of D. Gil Martins de Riba de Vizela and of *Dona* Maria Anes da Maia had in my PhD thesis: a single document enabled me to reconstitute a vast patrimony, widely dispersed geographically, as well as two generations of members from that important courtly lineage<sup>7</sup>.

This point allows me to emphasize the importance of the monastic funds, the female ones in particular<sup>8</sup>, in order to understand the economic management of the family patrimony. When I elaborated my thesis, more than half of the information that I collected on patrimony was found in diplomas that concerned the ladies of each family who had embraced religion but that, contrary to what was thought, were not excluded from inheriting the family assets. Moreover, the partition letter that I mentioned above is in the registry office of Arouca, since there had professed three daughters of D. Gil Martins. This situation was repeated in all monasteries, enabling me to reconstitute not only patrimonies but sometimes entire generations of succession lines that otherwise would have escaped me, since they were not recorded in any other type of documental funds.

From that point of view, Arouca and Lorvão are a real mine for the families of the high and middle court nobility, at least until the end of the thirteenth century, giving then way to the more fashionable monasteries of the fourteenth century, such as the Poor Clares of Coimbra or the Dominicans of Santarém.

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<sup>7</sup> SOTTOMAYOR-PIZARRO, 1999, vol. 1: 547-552.

<sup>8</sup> The absence of a system of exclusion of the second sons, as was long thought, until the appearance of the *morgadio* regime, as [I had] the opportunity to demonstrate, was not directly involved in the increase of monastic communities from the end of the thirteenth century, due to lack of own assets. The prime factor for that increase was the limitation of marriages, leading to the growth of the monastic world of women, but not of the male world, where the number of members of the aristocracy (as was also the case in the military orders) was much smaller (SOTTOMAYOR-PIZARRO, 1999, vol. 2: 565-592).

In short, the secret for the archaeologist of the family archives lies in understanding which monastery counted on protection from the lineage that precedes the house to study and invest in the study of its most ancient fonds — as an example, one should refer the monastery of Almoester for Paiva Gosende or S. Simão da Junqueira for Cunha. Always keeping in mind, of course, the lists of the *naturais* from monasteries or churches, that already indicate connections between several families and each of the institutions in question.

Before moving on to the second point for comment, one last reference to our well-known Rui Martins do Casal, who ended up serving as a guiding thread for a series of questions that seem to me important to emphasize in the context of this meeting. By the beginning of the 1290s, this knight began to contract small debts, in the house a few tens of pounds, which later forced him to sell some assets, such as half of a tent in the Rua dos Estieiros, in Santarém. The turning of the century seems to have brought him some financial improvements, since he had the necessary liquidity, 340 pounds, to buy an important estate in Sanfins. The truth, however, is that the debts he left led D. Afonso IV to pawn that estate, at the time in the possession of one of his daughters and of abbess of Tarouquela, whom in order to pay for her father's debt bought it from the king. How do we know all this? Because all notes of debt, purchases and loans were kept in a monastic registry office.

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To conclude, a short note on the nature of institutions. I must emphasize that the following observations are derived from the chronology in which I usually work and know best, this is to say the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, and once again result from the experience of researching my thesis.

Imprimis, the Collegiate, in other words, the urban world. It took me months to look through all the fonds of the *colegiadas* of Coimbra, Santarém and Lisboa, just to mention the most representative, only to obtain very scarce information, concerning mainly knights of urban lineages still in a structuring phase. I confess, therefore, that those funds disappointed me, for I approached them with high expectations, more the fruit of personal

ignorance than out of information from others. But I believe that those same fonds, for later chronologies, can prove to be far more important than those of an old Benedictine rural monastery.

Secondly, the registry offices of the military orders. They were also disappointing, for the absence of a system of family partitions exclusive to the second sons, as I initially thought existed, revealed that those institutions — just like the male monasteries and convents — were structured on a much less aristocratic social fabric, as Luís Filipe Oliveira demonstrated later<sup>9</sup>. Once again, concerning those funds, it was the ladies who saved me, if I am allowed to express myself in this way. As a matter of fact, for the friar-knights, with the exception of the Hospitallers, I only obtained very scarce information; the registry office of the monastery of Santos, on the contrary, revealed itself as a real mine to reconstitute the patrimony of the families connected to the order of Santiago, beginning by the Correia lineage and its collaterals, through the daughters or widows of *santiaguista* knights who had professed there.

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There is not much else to say, nor so much substance for great conclusions, as I merely developed an idea aired out at an earlier meeting, but which could be of interest for either younger investigators or those who do not have the time to explore a documental fond in an exhaustive way.

Be that as it may, I hope you have come to understand that well-known and well-worked sources, such as wills, when viewed from another angle, can serve as guidelines for those trying to understand how the earliest family archives were formed.

I believe that, from this point of view, the knight Rui Martins do Casal, and even more the unfortunate outcome of another visit to Tarouquela, proved to be of the greatest utility.

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<sup>9</sup> OLIVEIRA, 2009.

## Appendix

14<sup>th</sup> March 1312, Tarouquela: The abbess of the monastery of Tarouquela, *Dona Aldonça Martins* [de Resende], before the notary public and the judge of Sanfins, makes delivery of the goods that the knight Rui Martins do Casal took with him when he died in the said monastery.

ANTT — “Mosteiro de Santa Maria de Tarouquela”, C. 25, cx. 2, mç. 13, n/nr.

Conhoscam quantos este estormento virem e leer ouvirem que en presença de mym Lopo Dominguiç publico tabaliom d’el Rey en terra de Bem Viver e de Sam Fiiz e das testemunhas que adeante som escritas e per ante Martim Viçente juiz de Sam Fiiz, Dona Aldonça Martiiz Abadesa do Moasteiro de Tarouquela frontou e disse – «juiz e tabaliom, Roy Martiiz do Casal chegou aqui doente e vontade foi de Deus que se saiu deste mundo, e dizem-my que ele que nos leixa por sa testamenteira, e eu nom consento no dicto testamento nem filho en mym offiço da testamentaria. E s’eu alga fiz pola sa alma fição polho aver do moasteiro de Tarouquela porque ende ele era muy natural e por muita ajuda que senpre fez ao dicto moasteiro e por algo que ha-de hy leixar a sa morte». Item a dicta abadessa dise e frontou e fez chamar per dante nos dicto juiz e tabaliom Afonso Perez he Gomez criados de Roy Martiiz que lhy mostrassem as cousas que hy leixavam das cousas que hy trouverom con’o dicto Roy Martiiz ca nom querya ende despois ficar en enpeço nem en demanda de lhy soer despois demandado mais que o que hy leixavam. E eles disserom – «Roy Martiiz nom tragia aqui se nom esta cama», a qual logo foy mostrada per dante nos huum almadrake e ha almuçada e duas colchas e uum cabeçal e quatro façeiroos e V lançoes e huum almafreixe. Item uum pesponto e hum cambais e huum manto e huum tabardo viado empenado e outro tabardo velho e huum pelote de viado e outro de bifa e ha capelina e dous mantees e dous par de çilhas e dous barriis e has luvas de solhas e huum Livro dos Dereitos e has redeas e duas peças de çendal ialle e ha espada. Item outros disserom e mostrarom duas arcas ha vaçia e na outra andavam cartas e andavam hy treçe maravedis e XX soldos e que forom ende os oito maravedis e treçe soldos de trigo que venderom en Val de Froles. Item disserom os dictos Afonso Perez he Gomez que nom tragia o dicto Roy Martiiz al, salvo

huum cavalo e duas mas com sas selas e com seus freios e livros de fintas e huum açor e quatro podengos. E este cavalo e mas e açor e podengos e livros leixavam logo os dictos Afonso Perez he Gomez a Garçia Martiiz do Casal e de mais disserom que ha açemola que hy tragia o dicto Roy Martiiz con'as outras cousas de suso dictas que as leixavam aa dicta Abadesa e de mais deu logo a dicta abadessa per dante nos ao dicto Afonso Perez X livras e XV soldos dos dictos maravedis que dele reçebera e de mais disserom os dictos Afonso Perez e Gomez que eles eram os que soiam a despender o de Roy Martiiz que o trariam en poder e que nom ficava al no dicto moasteiro salvando as cousas que per dante nos mostravam asy en como aqui son divisadas das quaes cousas a dicta donna Abadesa pidiu ende a my tabaliom de suso dicto huum estromento. Feito foy no dicto moasteiro XIII dias andados de Março da Era de Mil e Treçentos e Çinquenta anos. Testemunhas que forom presentes Domyngos Martiiz e Estevam Dominguiz e Lourenço Perez e Joham Rodriguiz clerigos e Giral Viçente e Martim Viçente e Martim Anes escudeiros e outros muitos. E eu Lopo Dominguiz tabaliom de suso dicto a estas cousas presente fuy e estes estromentos com mha mão propria escrevy e ende meu sinal pugi en testemunho da verdade que tal he [*notarial sign*].