Between spiritual and material culture: male and female objects at the Portuguese court, 1480–1580

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My main purpose in this chapter is to examine the increasing importance of the possession of luxury objects at the Portuguese court during the century that saw the beginning of the early modern period. We owe to Richard Goldthwaite an excellent survey on the changes in demand for luxury consumption in Renaissance Italy.† Goldthwaite, however, presents the Italian case as unique and fails to recognize that an explosion of consumer demand for luxury goods was also taking place in other areas of Europe during the same period. In Portugal, the first maritime empire that traded directly with Asia, the appeal of orientalia seems to mark the consumer habits of the royal and princely courts to an extent that has little parallel in Europe before the end of the sixteenth century.‡ Goldthwaite also fails to consider the ways in which patterns of consumption varied according to gender. This distinction becomes essential, in particular, when we consider the consumption of devotional objects such as relics, which Patrick Geary considered as sources of supernatural power that could be supplanted by new and more effective forms of authority.§ Indeed, this might suggest that state-building and the reinforcement of royal authority made relics less significant to Portuguese kings whilst, as I shall try to argue, they remained crucial possessions for women especially if they did not exert political authority.

Portugal did not boast the variety of rival courts to be found in the Italian peninsula in this period, as the latter was fragmented into many different political units. Nor was there the same dispersal of wealth in the hands of several patrician families, as was the case in Italian cities such as Florence. Instead, wealth was concentrated in the hands of royalty and the higher nobility. The patterns of consumption analysed here will therefore be those of various members of the Portuguese royal family, albeit from different branches. I shall compare female modes of consumption and transmission of luxury goods with male ones, aided by some biographical detail.
An aspect that is particularly striking in the Portuguese case is the apparent contradiction between the persistence among the wealthy of ideals of frugality which discouraged conspicuous consumption and associated it with guilt, and the increased demand for luxury objects through which the Portuguese crown expressed its new prosperity. Indeed, the increased appeal of material possessions occurred in a context in which the attitudes to wealth and the life choices of the rich were still inspired by ideals of sobriety and voluntary poverty. The rise in luxury consumption also took place at a time when the Crown was reorganizing charity along new lines, stressing the importance of the 14 works of mercy, uniting small hospitals into bigger ones, and supervising the way in which the bequests of donors were used. It is not accidental in this context that many of the new luxury goods were for religious purposes and thus associated with religious institutions – above all, convents – and sacred spaces. The importance of a lavish liturgical and devotional apparatus seems in fact to support the idea that in this phase the search for comfort held a spiritual rather than a material meaning. Nevertheless, by the end of the sixteenth century, as we shall see, other forms of consumption began to rival the purchase of devotional and liturgical objects, albeit without achieving the same status as the latter.

The consumption of exotic objects and substances originating in Portuguese maritime trade started with commerce on the East African coast, but was to experience a boom after the discovery of the maritime route to India in 1498. This was largely a form of commerce controlled by the Crown: not only was the king the most important merchant of all, but he could dispose of many commodities that were stored in the warehouses of the Casa da Guiné e da Mina or the Casa da India, on behalf of himself and his relatives. Vasco da Gama’s voyage to India was followed by a period of prosperity, which ensured the Portuguese Crown a hegemony that was responsible in large part for the advent of the sovereign state. The reign of D. Manuel coincided with this period (1495–1521), but economic wellbeing declined from the reign of his successor, D. João III (1521–57), onwards. I have chosen to end the period discussed in this chapter in 1580, the year in which Portugal became one of the many possessions of Philip II of Spain’s composite domain. By then, Portugal’s economic prosperity was over; there was no longer a Portuguese royal court and the consumption of imported Asian artefacts was no longer an exclusively Portuguese phenomenon.

Empire, religion and the state in sixteenth-century Portugal

From the religious point of view, Portugal presents features not much different from those that characterize the rest of Catholic Europe in the sixteenth century. The medieval legacy was responsible for the spread of the mendicant orders and their reformed branches, a wide range of confraternities, a view of charity as path to eternal salvation, the diffusion of the belief in Purgatory,
the proliferation of commemorative and votive masses, and the creation of nunneries that attracted women from noble families.

The reign of D. Manuel is held to be a crucial moment in the history of Portugal for several reasons. Several reforms converged into what might be called the creation of the state. Lisbon became the economic centre of the kingdom, as the main arrival point for overseas merchandise. Although not yet a juridical and administrative capital, Manuel I transformed Lisbon. Squares were built, new streets opened upon a radial axis and laws were passed in order to homogenize the buildings and their construction materials. A new royal palace was built, the Paço da Ribeira, whose ground floor was occupied by the Casa da India, where the riches from the Orient were to be stored. Numerous public buildings were constructed, not only in Lisbon but also throughout the whole kingdom, and the king would subsequently give his name to the manueline style, as it came to be designated during the nineteenth century. At a rather early date by comparison with other European monarchies, architecture and urban renewal were therefore used, in Portugal, to express the king’s magnificence and power.

D. Manuel also undertook a series of initiatives that together served to enhance the power of the state. He overhauled the system of weights and measures, reformed the coinage and ordered a new compilation of laws that were printed and distributed to the municipal councils. He also tried to consolidate the presence of royal judges in some of these, albeit with difficulty.

Moreover, the Crown, more than private initiative, patronized and funded most of the books that were printed after the introduction of the press in the 1480s. Two members of the royal family account for this evolution: king D. Manuel I and his sister D. Leonor (1458–1525), widow of his predecessor D. João II. Both were the patrons of several of the first printed books in Portugal but while D. Leonor sponsored books strictly concerned with spirituality, the king also promoted the publication of juridical books. Nevertheless, some of the titles of the books they owned were the same.

Both the works they sponsored and the books they possessed contain passages that discuss the issue of the right use of wealth, making reference to a spiritual climate where poverty was a pre-condition for salvation, according to the ethos of the mendicant orders. The underlying principle was very simple: material possessions were seen as obstacles to eternal salvation, and the only solution was either to distribute wealth to the poor, or contribute to the glory of God by furnishing the places where his presence was most felt; that is, sacred spaces. St John Chrysostom (CE 347–407) was a key reference: according to his teaching earthly treasures should be placed in Heaven.

Both D. Manuel and his sister innovated in terms of charitable foundations. The Queen founded the first Misericórdia of Lisbon, in 1498, while she was acting as regent for her brother the king during his absence, then the latter dedicated himself to the diffusion of these institutions in his domains. Inspired by the Italian confraternities of misericordia, the Portuguese Misericórdias were
to perform all the 14 works of mercy. As a result of this royal protection, these confraternities were founded on a homogenous basis throughout all the Portuguese territories. At the same time, D. Manuel continued the work of reorganizing charitable institutions initiated by his predecessors. This programme contained different strands: the inventorying of the properties of chantries, confraternities and hospitals to be carried out by royal officers; the creation of large hospitals uniting smaller units and the awarding of juridical privileges and economic resources to these institutions. I have argued elsewhere that this reorganization of charity can be viewed as one of the elements of state-building in Portugal.\textsuperscript{12}

As we shall see, however, the transfer of wealth to the poor was overshadowed by investment in sacred objects.\textsuperscript{13} D. Leonor invested in an impressive collection of relics, liturgical vestments and jewellery – the latter designed to decorate sacred images of the Virgin and Child – which she either kept with her or donated to the nunneries she founded, the convent of the Madre de Deus. D. Manuel bestowed this same kind of objects to a range of churches, convents and cathedral sees. This striking wave of donations accounts for a gift economy which provided the patron with a source of immediate legitimacy and increased its overall power and authority while allowing the recipient to establish relations of reciprocity which, over time, became increasingly marked by the negotiation of prerogatives by both parties.

It is significant that so much religious gift-giving on the part of the royal family took place during D. Manuel’s reign. The reign of his predecessor had been disturbed by conspiracy and treason, in a context in which competition was still rife between the royal family and other powerful family groups. The generous gifts by D. Manuel I seem to have helped consolidate his position, by defining him as the most important donor. Although his successor, D. João III, continued in this vein, nothing indicates that it was as important to his image as it had been to his father’s; instead, the king’s authority seems by then to have been sufficiently reinforced and no longer so dependent upon gift-giving.

Women’s possessions

In this section I shall discuss the possessions of three women, and in particular the large assemblages of sacred luxury items that characterize their property, as revealed by the post-mortem inventories of their goods. I shall start with D. Beatriz (c. 1429–1506), granddaughter of king D. João I, wife to Fernando Duke of Beja (1433–70), brother of king D. Afonso V, and heir to Henry the Navigator’s immense fortune as his adoptive son. The couple founded a Poor Clare nunnery, the convent of Nossa Senhora da Conceição in Beja, which Beatriz was to patronize during her long widowhood. She built the chapel inside the convent’s church where she, her husband and children would be buried, conveniently endowed with land and liturgical equipment.\textsuperscript{14} The
execution of her will, from which we have the proceedings, demonstrates that other objects not included in the contract that founded the chapel were also donated to this convent. It also shows that she donated, although not in the same quantity, liturgical objects to other local convents in Beja, such as the Franciscan monastery of Santo António. On the whole, her donations included the entire panoply of liturgical apparatus, from textiles to silver and books; they also demonstrate an exclusively local investment, since nothing was bequeathed to either institutions or persons living outside Beja. Interestingly, this document also tells us about her secular property and the employees in her service at the time of her death. There was a pharmacy, complete with every possible spice and substance acquired through maritime trade with Asia; some women, including a female slave, were attached to its service, and it employed also a physician and an apothecary. The pharmacy was bequeathed in its entirety to the convent of Nossa Senhora da Conceição, staff included. The duchess also had a taste for exotic that testifies to the fashion typical of the earlier years of Portuguese expansion, when the African coast was being explored. Not only did she have the latest novelties from Asia, including textiles, tableware and spices, but she kept to the tradition of possessing some African commodities such as two civet cats, some round chairs from Guinea and a parrot. She also owned numerous domestic slaves, which at the time were supplied by either Morocco or the East African coast.\(^5\)

Her daughter D. Leonor (1458–1525), widow to the king D. João II (1455–95) and sister to his successor D. Manuel I, seems to have inherited most of her mother’s devotion for mendicant piety. Her fortune came second only to that of her royal brother; it included vast dominions as well as lavish rents granted by the king and paid by several customhouses of the realm.\(^6\) Contemporary chroniclers point to her influence in political affairs, due perhaps to a privileged relationship with her brother.\(^7\) In private, she was a pious and sickly woman, her piety being framed by what is generally termed as *devotio moderna*.\(^8\) At least two of the paintings that depict her show her wearing a tertiary garment (that is, the garment of a lay associate of the monastic organization).\(^9\)

Both her acquisitions and patronage testify to the central role that devotion played in her life. She was the founder and main patron of the Mosteiro da Madre de Deus de Xabregas, at the time located just outside Lisbon, by the river Tagus, a convent for a branch of Poor Clares inspired by the Franciscan reformer Saint Colette of Corbie (1381–1447). The nuns of this convent were recruited mainly from D. Leonor’s entourage, and belonged to the highest nobility of the city. The Queen invested in this convent from its foundation and was a frequent visitor although her residence at Paço de Santo Eloi was not in the immediate vicinity of the Madre de Deus.

In her palace, D. Leonor seems to have moved between three religious structures that were under her protection: her private oratory, her chapel and the church of the male convent of St John the Evangelist. These three spaces seem to have been arranged according to a hierarchy of proximity to
the queen, and although not all were used exclusively by her, they formed part of her private religious sphere. The importance of the private oratory though, located next to her bedchamber, seems to have been crucial, because the Queen is said to have spent most of her last decades in bed, as a result of chronic ailments. Both occupied the upper floor of her palace, the Paço de St. Eloi, and communicated with the church of the contiguous male convent of the Loios (St John the Evangelist) through a passageway. D. Leonor was the first queen to organize a private worship on a regular basis. During her lifetime, not only parts of her domestic space had been turned into sacred space but the religious space of the convent had been appropriated and became an extension of her domesticity, given that a corridor connected her palace to its church.

Nevertheless, the queen donated most of her possessions to the convent she had founded, the Madre de Deus. She made an impressive list of gifts to this convent, both during her lifetime and in her testament. In particular, the nunnery inherited the whole contents of both her chapel and her private oratory. Twelve years after her death in 1525, an inventory of all the objects given to the convent was drawn up, which listed all the donations made by D. Leonor and other givers. The Queen is by far the most important donor, in quantity and quality of objects. According to the hierarchical order in which they appear in the source itself, these goods consisted first of all of an impressive collection of relics. These included objects from Christ’s passion and hairs belonging to the Virgin Mary; bones and personal possessions from 37 different saints; and relics of Old Testament prophets, such as Daniel and Abraham, were also present. The fragment from the spine of Christ was displayed in a reliquary made of gold with six precious stones (see Pl. 18). Among the male saints special mention should be made of St Anthony of Padua and other Franciscans.

The all-encompassing nature of this collection of relics should be noted: the impressive array of objects relating to the early martyrs, the Passion of Christ, the life of the Virgin Mary, and the founders of the mendicant orders suggests an attempt to evoke the most important moments in the history of Christendom. We know that D. Leonor spared no effort to acquire such relics, and some of them attest to her ability to involve her more powerful relatives. The relics of Santa Auta, for instance, were a donation from her cousin the Emperor Maximilian. As it appears from the correspondence between the two cousins, she was to wait anxiously for the arrival of the relics, and the procession carrying them from the boat to the convent would be one of the most important religious events that took place in Lisbon in those years (see Pl. 19).

Silver came second to relics in the inventory: candles, incense spreaders, crucifixes, chalices, etc. Their importance was due both to their presence on the altar and to their role in the Eucharist. Also, silver had a currency that other inventoried objects could not have; that is, in case of need, silver objects were the ones that could be easily sold or melted down. Finally, a vast collection of
liturgical vestments and altar frontals was listed. Textiles from India (damask, etc.) were abundant, together with velvets and other luxury cloths from Northern Europe. The origins of these objects testify to a common pattern: in Portugal during this period textiles for the liturgical apparatus could still be imported either from Flanders or Italy, but became gradually submerged by Asian imports, equally sophisticated but less expensive.

We know that poverty was one of the main concerns of Franciscan monastic life, and the rule inside the Madre de Deus emphasized both contemplative life and the renunciation of the world: it recommended that the nuns should live according to the Gospel, own nothing, be chaste and obedient. Little is known about the material life of nuns and the interiors of the residential sections of the convent; nevertheless, there are doubts that these precepts were respected if we consider that, upon her death, the lavish furnishings of D. Leonor's private religious structures were passed onto the Madre de Deus. The elderly D. Leonor, in accordance with the principles followed in her devout life, chose to be buried in the ground, in the entrance to the cloister, dressed in a black penitential garment of the Franciscan Third Order (her epitaph reads: 'Here is Queen D. Leonor wife to king D. João II, who is the founder of this convent'). This contrasts, however, with the splendid material possessions, later inherited by the nuns, that adorned her private oratory and her own chapel. It can be doubted that she would have been aware of the contradiction between the splendid material possessions she enjoyed in her lifetime and her devout life. She lived like a tertiary, and most of her possessions were related to her devotional motivations, and she may have thought that her wealth was entirely devoted to God.

We can form an idea of the importance attached to her private devotion by considering the objects contained in her personal oratory: these were a collection of religious objects, including 15 altar frontals, 15 silk curtains and 29 corredicas (movable curtains, used to draw over altarpieces), 8 complete liturgical vestments, 231 books (of which many are of devotional nature) and 37 altarpieces. It is mentioned in D. Leonor's last will that the relics were kept in her paço (palace), some being carried on her body and others kept in a chest at the head of her bed. It was also emphasized that the nuns should never disperse any objects she was bequeathing to the convent. The concern with the preservation of her memory was present all along in her will. The location of her burial site, in a very visible spot in spite of its plainness, the concern that her heritage should not be dispersed but entrusted to an institution that would care for it, and the fact that several objects bore her personal device (the shrimping net) testify to a careful staging of her future presence among the living.

From her domestic and private sphere, her possessions were therefore transferred to the convent after her death, adding to other gifts the Queen and other donors had already offered to the treasure of its church. The tradition of making gifts to this convent was not exclusive to Leonor (though
she clearly had an especially close relationship with it): her own brother Manuel gave it two precious altar frontals with liturgical vestments to match. The wife to the next king, João III, D. Catarina de Austria, offered it the same type of gifts as Leonor. She had indeed chosen the same paço and its contiguous convent as her living headquarters during the last years of her life. Other than these three royal benefactors, the inventory lists about 30 gifts from other donors, the majority being women, and most of them nuns in the convent.29 Nor was D. Leonor the only member of the royal family to found a convent and bequeath her personal devotional possessions to it. In particular, D. Leonor was clearly influenced by the precedent of her mother, D. Beatriz, the Duchess of Beja.29

Catarina (1507–78), daughter of Philip the Fair and Juana the Mad, arrived in Lisbon to wed king D. João III in 1525, the year D. Leonor died. She was to be one of the world’s first owners of a kunstkammer, composed mainly of wonder objects she bought in the East through the agency of royal officers in India.30 Although she continued the tradition of giving liturgical and devotional items to churches and made donations to religious institutions, it is evident that she was also interested in acquiring entirely different objects. What is most significant about Catarina’s collection is its lay character and the reduced attraction that sacred objects exercised upon her, offering thus a profound contrast with the concerns of D. Leonor. It can be said that she brought about a secularization of luxury possessions; rather than being incorporated in any private chapel or oratory the purpose of her collection was to signify mastership of the world through objects that few people could obtain: the ‘rarer the better’ (Pl. 20).31

Natural objects were not to be offered for view in their original form. Goldsmiths mounted them in silver or gold, thus effecting their appropriation by the West. Interest in them was thus political rather than scientific. These objects were not to be studied; curiosity and knowledge about them were secondary, because they were meant to represent domination over other lands and peoples. Moreover, many owed their presence in the collection to the magical powers that were attributed to them, such as bezooar stones, said to act against poison (see Pl. 21). Others, like the precious carved ivory caskets from Ceylon, were admired for their craftsmanship (see Pl. 22). Catarina was also the purchaser of 29 portraits of members of her family, and invested in Flemish tapestries.32 Her most frequent residence was the Paço da Ribeira, built by D. Manuel I, where women’s (and their children’s) lodgings were completely segregated from men’s.33 Specific habits and practices distinguished the female court from the male; seats, for example, varied according to gender: according to the Moorish tradition, women and children would sit on cushions set in a wooden platform covered in carpets; the Queen herself would sit on cushions whilst receiving ambassadors on her own but, during general receptions, when the king was present, she was to sit on a chair beside him under a platform covered by a canopy, whilst the rest of the family sat on cushions.34
Queen Catarina exerted considerable influence over her husband’s political decisions until he died in 1557, and she sat in his private council on a regular basis. After the king’s death she became regent to the throne during the childhood of her grandchild D. Sebastião (1557–62). Her progeny with King João III was marked by failure: all her nine children died either in childhood or adolescence. This, together with the fact that she had been raised in virtual isolation with her mentally disturbed mother at Tordesilhas, suggests that political strategies might not be the only explanation of her collecting habits; they may have had a deep root in ‘an impossibility to invest in human relationships’. It is a fact, however, that her collecting interests were radically different from those of Beatriz and Leonor. In Catarina de Austria’s lifetime, the fascination with exotic objects from the East – not just luxury textiles – took root in other European courts. In a period in which exotica were considered as *mirabilia*, Asia was not only a source of the exotic, but also a producer of manufactured goods which could display a sophistication that rivalled the best European craftsmanship, and sometimes surpassed it. Earlier on, Catarina’s aunt Margaret of Austria (1480–1530), her father’s sister and regent in the Low Countries on behalf of her brother Emperor Charles V, had also based her collection on exotica, but not from Asia. She symbolically incorporated the newly founded Americas as a Habsburg domain in a collection of objects brought by Cortés to Europe after the conquest of Mexico: this collection had been offered to her by Emperor Charles V. Catarina’s fascination with the East, however, was imitated, both in Madrid and Vienna, by other Habsburgs, such as Philip II, Ferdinand II, Rudolf II and Emperor Mathias, who also brought together a vast array of curiosities from the East. In Portugal, however, Catarina’s collection did not have followers, at least in the royal family. Nor did she choose to mention any *mirabilia* in her own will, drawn up in 1574. It is surprising to see that such objects, that she took so many years to collect, are not mentioned in her testament, which is on the contrary careful to list the religious items she left behind.

When compared to D. Leonor, D. Catarina had only a modest number of relics, as well as liturgical vestments, that were divided after her death among several convents and monasteries. Instead of privileging a single convent, as D. Leonor had done with the nunnery of Madre de Deus, she distributed these possessions to various institutions located not only in Lisbon but also in other areas of Portugal and even Castile. A preference for the Jesuits’ main church in Lisbon, S. Roque, where the Queen had a chapel built, can however be detected.

As far as her secular collection goes, even if this is not mentioned in her last will, several inventories, drawn up by the Queen’s successive chambermaids, list and describe the objects in relative detail. Also, most purchases are known through the considerable number of documents that have survived from her account books. If both inventories and purchase registers had disappeared, the collection would be unknown to us, as it vanished after her death. It was mysteriously dispersed, and little is
known about what became of its contents. Its fate tells of the vulnerability of profane objects; even if the sacred ones were not entirely immune to dispersal or destruction, the survival of the former was more precarious as they did not command the same respect as devotional ones. Also, we do not know how ‘public’ was the queen’s collection; Jordan believes that the objects were not displayed but kept in locked leather chests in one of the three rooms of her private quarters, which were separated from the king’s. If this is the case, few people might have known they existed, and thus it became easier to dispose of the ‘treasure’ she amassed during decades. In 1564, Ferdinand II of Austria gathered together his scattered collections in a central location, prohibiting their sale or future dispersal. That was not the case with D. Catarina: without legal protection, her collection became vulnerable to political instability and financial difficulties.

Different patterns of female conspicuous consumption seem to emerge out of these three cases. The first two women participate in the ideal of voluntary poverty promoted by mendicant convents; their action is mostly confined to the sphere of devotion and to the patronage of religious institutions; their consumer behaviour is mainly directed to the purchase of lavish liturgical goods. D. Catarina would to some extent continue this tradition but, perhaps as a consequence of her familiarity with political power, she would develop considerably her consumer interests to profane precious objects, brought from all the parts of the world where the Portuguese traded. All these women acquired exotic valuables from the areas into which the Portuguese maritime commerce was expanding, but two of them limited their fruition to religious practices and to private or privatized religious spaces; only Catarina accumulated them independently from their religious use. While the transmission of their most valuable possessions had, in the case of Beatriz and Leonor, a circumscribed and eminently local destination, which reiterated their spiritual and patronage ties with a territory and specific religious institutions, Catarina’s donations were much more widely distributed throughout the kingdom. Leonor and Beatriz gave special attention to relics, as did D. Catarina, although to a lesser extent. They did so at a time when relics seemed to have lost appeal among their male Portuguese counterparts, at least for private use. We do not know if this feminization of relics is a specifically Portuguese phenomenon, but it points to a context in which women had to rely mainly on devotion to legitimize their authority. Although this hypothesis stills requires further research, no evidence has been found that might connect Portuguese kings of this period to the construction of collections of relics.

Male possessions

Inventories of the material possessions of kings follow a different pattern from those of their female kin. We shall look at two examples of male members
of the Royal family, D. Manuel I, brother to D. Leonor, and his eldest son and heir D. João III, husband to D. Catarina de Austria. The inventories of the goods belonging to the two men gave clear priority to the recording of weapons, armour and riding equipment, with careful note being made of the ones which the king would use on ritual occasions. Neither of the kings participated in any war during their reign, so these items were used mainly in parades and horse games. The interest of King D. Manuel's inventory of 1505 lies mainly in the listing of thematic tapestries from Flanders that were to decorate the walls of the paços he would inhabit. Also, it refers to three separate groups of tents which show the itinerant character still retained by the monarchy in this period. The first consisted of four tents which recreated the king's main palatial rooms - one for the sala (reception room), another for a chapel, another used as a bedroom and finally one to be used for wardrobe. A second group included ten tendilhões (smaller tents). A last group consisted of eight tents 'for the misericórdia', with Latin inscriptions on the spiritual value of charity, though the use to which they were put is still uncertain.

D. Manuel's possessions are striking for the limited number of items of furniture: two folding tables from Nuremberg but no chairs or cabinets. We know that beds existed, because the fabrics that decorated them are mentioned, but the inventory only refers to the portable one where the king would sleep inside the tent that was to be used as bedchamber. Only wooden chests were abundant, supposedly to store objects, namely the previously mentioned tents. Another inventory which is dated 1522, and deals mainly with his wardrobe and jewellery, reveals his taste for Moorish garments, weaponry and orientalia. Both inventories were related to conquest and discovery: Islamic objects were part of war booty, because military campaigns in North Africa, albeit without the king's presence, continued during his reign. Asian objects were the ultimate novelties from recently discovered Asian territories. One of the most impressive is the monstrance he offered to his newly founded monastery of Jerónimos, a building specifically built to commemorate Vasco da Gama's discovery of the maritime route to India. Also, the object was made with the first tribute in gold paid to the admiral by the inhabitants of Quiloa (East African Coast) in 1506 (see Pl. 23).

The 1522 inventory, produced a year after the king's death, does not include many objects related to devotional and liturgical functions; those seem to have been included in other inventories that were lost. In any case, neither of the remaining inventories mentions relics, nor does the king's last will. D. João III, whose inventory was drawn up in 1534, 13 years after his succession to the throne, showed the same absence of relics. The criteria used in its ranking was different from the 1505 example we have examined, as it listed items according to their material (gold, silver, other metals, cloth), and it mixed together devotional objects with tableware or ceremonial attire for horse-riding. The number of chests and coffers increased, and there were more pieces of furniture, two big tables being mentioned as well as cabinets and chairs.
Both kings actively patronized churches throughout the kingdom. A detailed study of gift-giving by king D. Manuel I is still to be undertaken, although some historians have already referred to the presence of luxury liturgical cloths and precious objects from Asia in his donations. The recipient convents and churches were located not only in the Lisbon area (the Colletine nunnery of Madre de Deus, the Hieronymite convent of the Nossa Senhora da Pena at Sintra, the Augustinian Convento da Graça and also the Igreja da Conceição de Lisboa) but also as far as in the Atlantic islands of the Azores and Madeira, the Moroccan fortresses or India. These gifts were mainly composed of altar frontals, vestments and altarpieces, together with chalices and crosses. D. Manuel had been giving to churches long before he became king: several donations are known to have been made to churches located in areas that belonged to the Order of Christ whilst he was Duke of Beja, and great master of the order. This is not surprising, since one of the duties of its members was to be responsible for the building of churches and the provision of their liturgical apparatus.

D. João III continued the tradition of gift-giving to religious institutions, although those he chose to patronize were not the same as his father’s. Among them was the convent of the military order of Santiago de Espada, whose headquarters were in Palmela, a town within easy reach of Lisbon. The liturgical objects listed are similar to those which might be found in any sacristy, but do not include any relics. The date of this inventory is significant, because it was drawn up shortly after its great master D. Jorge died in 1550, and the order became an official property of the Portuguese Crown in 1551. The inventory not only testifies to the importance of the moment in which gifts were given, but also bears witness to the fact that recipient institutions became in turn donors to other churches within their territories. This was the case with worn-out garments from the convent of Palmela: they could be constantly recycled and/or given to smaller institutions, such as the Misericórdia of Alcochete and to several churches of the area.

Nevertheless, recycling or redistribution was not random: some objects were saved from destruction or did not leave the church to which they were given in the first place. The criteria for the choice of such objects deserves some attention: for instance, the church of the Madre de Deus still keeps in the choir most of the relics that are included in the inventories studied for this chapter, as well as other relics that were added later on. Whilst relics were priceless and their exchange value was not subject to commercial considerations, the gold and silver of which many religious objects were made were valued for their weight and could be melted, even if canon law forbade their secular use, determining that they should be converted into other sacred objects.

The abundant offerings to churches and monasteries not only testify to the kings’ concern with eternal salvation, but were also made at a time when a new relationship with ecclesiastic institutions was taking shape. The tradition of religious patronage was not new, and it dated back to the Middle Ages; nevertheless, the pace of donations intensified during D. Manuel’s reign,
when major changes were taking place that were to greatly strengthen the
king's prerogatives in ecclesiastical matters. The Portuguese kings became
autonomous in the choice of bishops, whose appointment was to be subject
only to the confirmation of the Holy See, and the Military Orders suffered a
process of administrative appropriation by the Crown that culminated in 1551
when the king became by right the grand master of the three existing orders:
Christ, Avis and Santiago.55 Of great importance also was the formation of the
Portuguese padroundo, whereby the Crown controlled the evangelization of its
overseas territories and sponsored their ecclesiastic structures.56

D. Manuel's donations thus belong to a moment when the Crown was
engaged in creating a new balance of power with ecclesiastical institutions,
and are evidence of the need to establish with them relationships firmly
based on patronage. These were to operate also overseas, from where most
new confraternities, both misericórdias and others, wrote frequently to the
king asking for the donation of altarpieces and banners. The king acted as
the protector and patron of the Catholic Church in the Empire. Royal gift-
giving therefore formed part of a political strategy aimed at securing a new
equilibrium in the relationships between crown and church but undoubtedly
had also a wider institutional and territorial significance.

Conclusions

The evidence from the analysis of patterns of consumption amongst members
of the royal family in Portugal during the sixteenth century points to a gender
divide. In a world where women could have power but not authority, religion
seems to have been an instrument by which they made their presence felt and
achieve some autonomy from men. Whilst men acquired objects that testified
to their secular power, such as weaponry and armour, women were more
dependent on the appropriation and creation of personal religious spaces in
order to establish an identity of their own. Women of the royal family were
especially free to dedicate themselves to such initiatives either as relatively
young widows – the examples of Beatriz and Leonor – or as heads of a princely
female household, which took the form of a separate quarter in the royal palace
– in the case of Catarina de Austria. Relics, in particular, appear to have been
essential to female modes of devotion. Both D. Beatriz, Duchess of Beja and
mother to Manuel I and D. Leonor, D. Leonor herself and, to a lesser extent,
D. Catarina, had to search for forms of authority that were subaltern when
compared to their male kin, invested as they were with a political authority
that the women could not exercise in their own right, except in periods of
regency. This is not to say that men did not value relics: in Portugal, several
male monasteries possessed impressive collections that dated back to the
foundation of the kingdom. The difference is that relics do not seem to have
been privately owned by men, but were kept in institutions, whilst the women
we have studied owned them individually before bequeathing them to
religious institutions. The two kings whose possessions we have examined – D. Manuel and D. João III – seem to have had little use for relics during the period when the early modern state was coming into being. Both kings, in spite of keeping in touch with the procedures needed to prepare for their afterlife, seem to have developed a material life in which luxury, tied to the staging of chivalric rituals, played an increasingly important part. Secular possessions, in this context, and especially the ownership of marvellous objects from the maritime empire, seem to have had a role in the formation of the emerging state.

Gift-giving by men was both geographically and institutionally broader in scope than that by women. In the case of patronage of ecclesiastic institutions, as we have seen, donations had the purpose to reaffirm the king as the protector of the Catholic Church in the empire. Also, they could play a part in the renegotiation of relations between crown and church, as in the case of the monarchy’s new role in relation to the military orders. In either case, the circulation of things from king to Church seems to have served political rather than devotional purposes. Finally, the importance that material possessions had at this time is a useful reminder that charity to the poor, although crucial to the spiritual comfort of the rich and a pillar of state-building, occupied a relatively small place in the minds and budgets of the members of the reigning elite.

Notes

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5 These institutions stored the commodities related to overseas trade, both those intended for local exchange and those brought in the ships. Casa da Guiné e da Mina dealt with exchanges in East Africa, mostly concerned with gold, slaves, pepper, civet cats and ivory. The trade with Asia would diversify the range of luxury products, among them spices, and would be dealt with by a new institution, the Casa da Índia.


10 For an inventory of the books they possessed, see Sousa Viterbo, A Livraria Real especialmente no Reinado de D. Manuel. Memória apresentada à Academia Real das Ciências de Lisboa (Lisbon: Typographia da Academia, 1901); and Isabel Villares Cepeda, ‘Os Livros da Rainha D. Leonor, segundo o códice 11352 da Biblioteca Nacional’, Revista da Biblioteca Nacional, 2nd series, 2/2 (1987), 51–81. D. Leonor sponsored the publication, among other books, of Ludolf of Saxony’s Vita Christi, works by Christine de Pisan, and Boasso Deleitoso, an anonymous work concerned with the spiritual path to perfection and contemplative life. The king, in turn, ordered the publication of catechisms and manuals for confession; see D. Diogo Ortiz, Catecismo pequeno da doctrina e instrução dos que xipão ham de crer e obrar para conseguir a benaventurança eterna (Lisbon: Valentim Fernandes and João Pedro de Cremona, 1504). Elsa Maria Branco da Silva (ed.), O Catecismo Pequeno de D. Diogo Ortiz Bispo de Viseu (Lisbon: Colibri, 2001); and Garcia de Resende, Breve Memorial dos pecados e cousas que pertencem ha confissão (Porto: Joaquim de Oliveira Bragança, 1980). On the attitudes towards charity and salvation expressed by this literature see Isabel dos Guimarães Sá, ‘“Fui em tempo de cobiça”: sociedade e valores no Portugal manuelino através de Gil Vicente’, Revista de Guimarães, 112 (2002), 57–82.

11 His views on material and spiritual wealth were repeatedly quoted in Ludolf of Saxony’s Vita Christi, and one of his works was published in 1522, translated by António Frei de Beja, Tradução da Epistola de S. João Chrysostomo (Lisbon: Germão Galharde, 1522).


13 Other studies suggest that, in spite of the religious rhetoric on charity and voluntary poverty, the money actually spent on charity was far below the investment on a lavish lifestyle and luxurious commodities. See for instance Mary Hollingsworth, The Cardinal’s Hat. Money, Ambition, and Everyday Life in the Court of a Borgia Prince (London: Profile Books, 2004). The recent publication of the documents concerning the will and its execution of archbishop of Braga D. Diogo de Sousa also demonstrate higher household expenditures than post-mortem donations to the poor. This archbishop was a court nobleman to whom D. Manuel entrusted the kingdom’s most important diocese in 1505. See ‘Testamento de D. Diogo de Sousa com os documentos da publicação e execução do mesmo’, in Rui Mauricio (ed.), O Mecenato de D. Diogo de Sousa Arcebispo de Braga (1503–1532). Urbanismo e Arquitectura (Leiria: Magna, 2000), vol. 2, 305–480.
14 See Instituto dos Arquivos Nacionais/Torre do Tombo (henceforth IAN/TT), Gaveta 16, maço I, doc. 24, ‘Contrato que se fez com o mesteiro da Conceição de Beja, a respeito da instituição de capela da infanta D. Beatriz’ (1510.02.18). Since the creation of a chapel was a contract, it should have been celebrated while she was alive. As she had died in 1506, it took her son’s intervention to legitimize it.

15 The testament of the *infanta* is not known, but the proceedings of its execution have been published by Anselmo Braamcamp Freire, ‘Inventário da infanta D. Beatriz 1507’, *Arquivo Histórico Português*, 9 (1914), 64–110.

16 Her life and property are well known thanks to the work of Ivo Carneiro de Sousa, *A Rainha D. Leonor* (1458–1525). *Poder, misericórdia, religiosidade e espiritualidade no Portugal do Renascimento* (Lisbon: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 2002).


18 *Devotio moderna* was a religious movement of the late Middle Ages that originated in the new demands of the laity concerning spirituality, inspired by mendicant devotion. Devout practices were based on the imitation of Christ, penance and prayer. Also, as never before, it witnessed the participation of a large number of women.

19 Lisbon workshop, ‘*The Arrival of the Relics of Santa Auta at Madre de Deus*’, c. 1517, oil on panel 70.5 × 76 cm (27⅔ × 30 inches), Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon, inv. 1462 B; Anonymous Flemish, ‘*The Panorama of Jerusalem or Christ’s Passion*’, c. 1500, oil on panel 200 × 200 cm (78⅔ × 78⅔ inches), Museu Nacional do Azulejo, Lisbon.


22 Biblioteca Nacional de Lisboa (henceforth BNL), cod. 11352, *Relações de bens legados pela rainha D. Leonor e outros inventários do mosteiro da Madre de Deus de Xabregas, 1537–1557* (?).

23 It should be noted that by the time the inventory was drawn up some confusion had affected the collection, as by then many bones and other objects had lost their *nominae* and thus the reference to the holy characters they belonged to.

24 See IAN/TT, Fundo do Convento da Madre de Deus de Lisboa, docs 13 (1517.04.08), which includes the emperor’s letter, in Latin, and its translation, in what seems to be D. Leonor’s handwriting, whilst doc. 14 is a letter inquiring about the whereabouts of the relics, whose arrival was anxiously awaited (1518.05.19). On the procession see Kate J.P. Lowe, ‘Rainha D. Leonor of Portugal’s Patronage in Renaissance Florence and Cultural Exchange’, in *Cultural Links between Portugal and Italy in the Renaissance*, ed. Kate J.P. Lowe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 225–48.

25 Statutes of the Colettle Order prescribed, among other rules, that their personal wealth should be distributed to the poor. See IAN/TT, Manuscritos da Livraria, n. 1077, *Estatutos de Santa Coleta, sobre a regra de Nossa Madre S. Clara*.

26 Carneiro de Sousa, *A Rainha D. Leonor*, 831 and 178. IAN/TT, Chancelaria D. João III, Livro 44, fl. 68 (1538.05.20). This document quantifies but does not describe
the items. Among them, there were 40 pieces of silver weighing approximately 12.5 kilos, 4 golden ones weighing about 200 grams. An inventory of part of her books demonstrates that most of them were devotional (Cepeda, ‘Os livros’, 51–81).

27 In Abílio José Salgado and Anastácia Mestrinho Salgado, O Espírito dos Misericórdias nos Testamentos de D. Leonor e de Outras Mulheres da Casa de Avis (Lisbon: Ed. da Comissão para os Quinhentos Anos das Misericórdias Portuguesas, 1999), 26.

28 BNL, cod. 11352.

29 Both Leonor’s parents, Beatriz and Fernando, belonged to the royal family: they were first cousins and both grandchildren of king D. João I. Upon her husband’s death in 1470, Beatriz held considerable power, not only due to her land dominions, but also to the control of the Order of Christ in the hands of her underage children. The connection with Isabel the Catholic, her niece, made her an essential element in the relations between Portugal and Castile.


33 Boys would leave the women’s quarters during adolescence, but girls would stay. Senos, O Paço da Ribeira, 120–22. A foreign visitor to the Portuguese court remarked that men could only present themselves at the threshold of the women’s apartments, in which daughters of the royal family were expected to keep to the company of their mothers and sisters, as well as their very young brothers. Giuseppe Bertini, ‘The Marriage of Alessandro Farnese and D. Maria of Portugal in 1565: Court Life in Lisbon and Parma’, in Lowe, Cultural Links, 56.


35 Ana Isabel Buescu, Catarina de Austria. Infanta de Tordesilhas, Rainha de Portugal (Lisbon: Esfera dos Livros, 2007), 250–57.

36 One of the children who lived to be 16 years old was the posthumous father of the heir to the throne, king D. Sebastião, who was raised by his grandmother Catarina de Austria. Maria (1527–45) was 18 when she died as the first wife of Philip II, whom she wed in 1543.


40 Her testament is dated 1574, but a codicil was added in 1577, just before her death in 1578 (see Salgado and Salgado, O Espírito, 1999).

41 In Salgado and Salgado, O Espírito, 1999, 122–3.

42 IAN/TT (Inventario de móveis, vestuário, tapeçarias e utensílios vários) (séc. XVI), Casa Forte, n. 64; (Receita das jóias, peças de ouro e prata da Rainha D. Catarina), 1528, Núcleo Antigo, n. 790; Núcleo Antigo, n. 791 (1534); (Receita do móvel e jóias da Rainha D. Catarina), 1539–43, Núcleo Antigo, n. 792; Núcleo Antigo, n. 754 (1545); Rol de várias despesas de compra de trastes, Núcleo Antigo, n. 932; Livro da Receita de todas peças de ouro ... (1545), Núcleo Antigo, n. 793; Livro da câmara da Rainha Nossa Senhora da receita de pedraria ... (1550), Núcleo Antigo, n. 794.

43 Annemarie Jordan speculates that some of the objects were stolen by D. António Prior do Crato, a contender for the throne of Philip II, in order to finance military action against the Spaniards (Jordan, ‘The Development of Catherine of Austria’s Collection’, 67). Others were taken to Castile when Philip II visited Lisbon in 1580.


45 Evidence concerning Philip II’s collection of relics points in the opposite direction, as this king tried to construct political unity through the assemblage of religious objects from his kingdoms, even at the expense of bitter local opposition. See Guy Lazure, ‘Possessing the Sacred: Monarchy and Identity in Philip II’s Relic Collection at the Escorial’, Renaissance Quarterly, 60 (2007), 58–93.


47 D. Manuel would have at his disposal several paços, either in Lisbon or in the kingdom. He abandoned the one of Alcânovas for the construction of the Paço da Ribeira, as we have seen, but would often go to the palace of Santos, a summer retreat by the Tagus just outside the city. This inventory from 1505 refers explicitly to its chapel and oratory, but we do not know if the other items refer only to this paco. For an overview of the palaces used by the royal family until 1580, see Jordan, ‘Portuguese Royal Collections’, 9–30.

48 In Freire, ‘Inventário da Guarda-Roupa’.


51 Some examples of these many donations are: IAN/TT, Corpo Cronológico, I-16-37 (donation to the monastery of Penha Longa, 1514.10.14); I-15-83 (donation to the Conception, 1514.07.06); I-15-70 and I-15-86 (donations to churches in
the island of Faial, in the Azores); 1-15-17 (donation to a church in Mazagão, 1514.08.08); 1-15-119 (donation to the Misericórdia of Aveiro, 1514.08.26) and 1-17-91 (donation to a church in Calecute, India, 1515.03.07).

52 Donations were made between 1489 and 1494, the year before he became king. See IAN/TT, Gaveta 7, maço 18, doc. 1.


54 IAN/TT, Mesa de Consciência e Ordens, *Livro da Prata Ornamentos de Santiago deste Convento de Santiago da Espada, Anno 1555*.
