

## Bulletin for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies

Journal of the Association for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies

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Volume 49

Issue 1

Article 2

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2025

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Rita Costa-Gomes

rcostagomes@towson.edu

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#### Recommended Citation

Costa-Gomes, Rita (2025) "Governing Portugal in 1426: The Letter from Bruges," *Bulletin for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies*: Vol. 49 : Iss. 1 , Article 2.

Available at:

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## Governing Portugal in 1426: The Letter from Bruges<sup>1</sup>

Rita Costa-Gomes

Place matters. It matters especially when you are writing letters, since the physical separation of the two sides involved is crucial to this form of written communication. A letter is, in the lesson of Ancient Rhetoric, like a conversation with an absent person. One such epistolary dialogue is the subject of this talk exploring the exchange between two people separated in space. The author of the text I will discuss was a prince, Pedro, Duke of Coimbra, then staying in Flanders in the city of Bruges. The addressee was the heir of the throne of Portugal, Prince Duarte (or Edward), residing somewhere in central Portugal, probably in one of the two cities of Lisbon or Santarém.<sup>2</sup> It was the early months of the year 1426.

The history of fifteenth-century Portugal may be familiar to most of us because of the early expansion and conquests of the Portuguese across the Gibraltar strait in Morocco, or the navigations along the African coast and the early colonization of Atlantic islands. It is crucial to consider, nonetheless, that the travel and migrations of the Portuguese took place in other directions as well, most notably in Iberia and elsewhere in Europe. In fact, the first half of the 1400s saw many common people - clergymen, merchants, students, sailors, artisans and artists, to name but a few - leave the country and settle or remain in longer or shorter stays scattered throughout the European continent. The Portuguese aristocracy was moving as well. Prince Pedro of Portugal (1392-1449) was one of the members of the royal family who travelled abroad, a well-known case of these displacements. His travels were reconstructed in an interesting book published in the mid-twentieth century by the Luso-American scholar Francis M. Rogers.<sup>3</sup> Other less mentioned cases of travelling princes of the early 1400s include the count of Barcelos Afonso and his son the count of Ourém,<sup>4</sup> prince Fernando of Portugal,<sup>5</sup> princesses Isabel (Duchess of Burgundy) and Beatriz (Countess of Arundel), women who lived

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<sup>1</sup> This text is the slightly revised version of the keynote address delivered at the 53<sup>rd</sup> Annual Meeting of the ASPHS. Notes were added providing bibliographical references.

<sup>2</sup> Lisbon and Santarém represent more than 50% of visits of the top ten most frequented places by the Portuguese court of João I. For the raw data see H. Baquero Moreno, *Os Itinerários de El-Rei D. João I (1384-1433)* (Lisbon: Instituto de Língua e Cultura Portuguesa, 1988).

<sup>3</sup> Francis M. Rogers, *The Travels of the Infante Dom Pedro of Portugal* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961). See also Margarida Sérulo Correia, *As Viagens do Infante D. Pedro pelas Quatro Partidas do Mundo* (Lisbon: Gradiva, 2000), 38-53.

<sup>4</sup> Beatriz Van Zeller, *A Viagem de D. Afonso Primeiro Duque de Bragança* (Vila Viçosa: Fundação da Casa de Bragança, 2021); Aida Fernanda Dias (ed), *Diário da Jornada do Conde de Ourém ao Concílio de Basileia* (Ourém: Câmara Municipal de Ourém, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> João Luis Inglês Fontes, *Percursos e Memória: do Infante D. Fernando ao Infante Santo* (Cascais: Patrimonia, 2000).

abroad most of their adult lives, yet remained connected to Portugal.<sup>6</sup> Taking heed of these facts, many historians have argued that the engagement of the governing elites of the kingdom of Portugal with other European cultures, their knowledge of foreign realities, cannot be dissociated from the cultural innovations taking place, as Magalhães Godinho once wrote, in the interconnected maritime peripheries of Iberia. Most especially, those innovations that made possible the early expansion of the Portuguese.<sup>7</sup>

Duke of Coimbra since 1416 and an active member of the Royal Council, prince Pedro showed since his twenties a commitment to the internal affairs of the kingdom and to the political and military projects of his father and of his older brother Duarte. His European itineraries took him to England, Flanders and Germany, Austria and Hungary. In Italy he stayed in Venice, Padova, Ferrara, Florence and Rome. On his return to Portugal, he was in Barcelona and in several Castilian cities. From July 1425 to September 1428, that is, during more than three years of absence, the Duke of Coimbra left the government of his territories and patrimony in the hands of his father and pursued his own goals, together with the interests of Portugal, in some of the most important European power centers of the age.

Duarte, during those same years, was deeply involved in the government of the Kingdom under the aegis of his father, the ruling king João I of Aviz. Born in 1391 and named after his mother's ancestor Edward III of England, this prince, as the second-born son, was not destined to the throne. But the death of an older brother soon put him in the path to succeed João I, a job for which he prepared since childhood, taking up much of his youthful years. Associated to the government after 1416-18, it is now well established that Duarte took growing responsibilities both as a legislator (starting with his 1418 revision of the "*regimento dos corregedores*") and in the daily dispatch of bureaucratic affairs.<sup>8</sup> This happened to such a degree that he was said to be thoroughly familiar, at the time of the epistolary exchange of 1426, with most of the pending affairs and the complexities of ruling the kingdom.

As a co-ruler, Duarte knew well the centrality of the Royal Council in the processes of decision and the mechanics of governance. He did describe, in his own

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<sup>6</sup> Monique Sommé, *Isabelle de Portugal, Duchesse de Bourgogne. Une femme au pouvoir au XVe siècle* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 1998); Manuela Santos Silva, "O casamento de D. Beatriz de Portugal (filha natural de D. João I) com Thomas Fitzalan (Conde de Arundel) – paradigma documental da negociação de uma aliança" in Ana Leal de Faria, Isabel Drumond Braga (eds), *Problematizar a História: Estudos de História Moderna em Homenagem a Maria do Rosário Themudo Barata* (Casal de Cambra: Caleidoscópio, 2007), 77-91.

<sup>7</sup> Vitorino Magalhães Godinho, "O Mediterrâneo no horizonte dos Europeus do Atlântico" in *Mito e Mercadoria. Utopia e Prática de Navegar (séculos XIII-XVIII)* (Lisbon: Difel, 1990), 180-221.

<sup>8</sup> The fact is highlighted by his modern biographer Luis Miguel Duarte, *D. Duarte. Requiem por Um Rei Triste* (Lisbon: Círculo de Leitores, 2013), 60-70. Since João I died only in 1433, the young prince assumed governing tasks for 17 years before his ascent to the throne.

writings, how this institution evolved in the last decades of his father's life and how it functioned after 1433, that is, during his own reign. Duarte recorded in his personal notebook or *Livro dos Conselhos*, for instance, how his father used to often meet with a restricted part of the larger body of his royal councilors. This practice Duarte himself continued and further advanced by requiring, for instance, the rotation of his siblings' participation in this more secretive and efficient mode of consultation.

A dozen vernacular essays from the early 1400s have survived, authored by different members of the Portuguese royal family, written to convey each person's circumstantial political advice to the king. They are usually named "*pareceres*" (opinions). As occasionally mentioned in their prologues, the texts characteristically addressed specific queries or agenda items of the Royal Council that were put forth by both rulers, João I and Duarte.<sup>9</sup> Some still bear the mark of epistolary communication, namely by the presence of salutation and/or parting formulas, a fact that suggests that not all of them may have been communicated in person and took instead the form of long missives. Each of these texts also has its own paths of transmission to the modern reader - in other words, its own history. A few were collected in manuscript form in miscellaneous codices, others were copied in the "books of notes" of the secretaries of the Royal Council. Fifteenth-century Portuguese chroniclers such as Gomes Eanes de Zurara (c. 1410-c.1474) or Rui de Pina (1440-1522) refer to these "*pareceres*" or even incorporate them more or less extensively in their historical works.

The existence of this body of missives led Rodrigues Lapa to propose that we should consider the flourishing of one specific textual genre in the Portuguese court of the fifteenth century: the "letter of counsel" (*carta de conselho*) or, as we could also call it, the letter of political advice.<sup>10</sup> In my own study of the Royal Council I discussed how these letters could differ from other textual sources named in the 1400s as "*pareceres*" (opinions) and "*determinações*" (decisions). These appear to be distinct types of texts, albeit all directly issued from the meetings of the Royal Council.<sup>11</sup> Again, the consideration of place in the dating and critical

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<sup>9</sup> A modern critical use of these sources was pioneered by Vitorino Magalhães Godinho in his *Documentos sobre a Expansão Portuguesa* (1943-1956), now available in a revised edition: Vitorino Magalhães Godinho, *Documentos sobre a Expansão Quatrocentista Portuguesa* (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, 2011), 2 volumes.

<sup>10</sup> Manuel Rodrigues Lapa, *Froissart e Fernão Lopes* (Lisbon: Imp. Beleza, 1930), 11. See also his *Dom Duarte e os Prosadores da Casa de Aviz* (Lisbon: Seara Nova, 1972), ix. More recently Maria Filomena Coelho, "Cartas Políticas da Dinastia de Avis: a arte de ditar o bem comum (século XV)", *Revista Brasileira de História*, 36/72 (2016) 85-103. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1806-93472016v36n72\\_006](http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1806-93472016v36n72_006)

<sup>11</sup> Rita Costa Gomes, "Le Conseil Royal au Portugal (1400-1520)" in Cédric Michon (ed), *Conseil et Conseillers dans l'Europe de la Renaissance* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2012), 144-174.

appreciation of these texts (Were they communicated from afar? Where were they composed?) can greatly improve our understanding of the mechanisms used to generate political trust among the governing elites of Portugal in the 1400s. Without developing this point further, I want to simply stress the variety and the importance of this textual production for any discussion of political action and political discourse in fifteenth-century Portugal. The significant body of texts resulted from the renewal of the practice of “counsel” or royal advice put forward by the rulers in the Aviz court. Their common characteristics are related to the institutionalization of this political practice. Their emergence does not speak, therefore, of interpersonal or family relations only, as important as those may have been.

The Letter from Bruges of prince Pedro is an early surviving example of this type of writing flourishing at the Portuguese court: the “letter of counsel”. It shares with other contemporary letters and “*pareceres*” a few characteristics: it corresponds to a previous request or set agenda, it is authored by someone who took part in the Royal Council meetings and deliberations, it has a pragmatic tone recommending specific actions or decisions. The pragmatism is the most striking aspect to any modern reader of the Letter from Bruges, as I will further discuss later. Both the exceptional clarity and rationally organized content of this epistle, as much as the originality of the ideas expressed therein, contributed to building an aura of uniqueness and clairvoyance for its author. Situating the letter in the context of a larger panorama of textual production only enhances, in fact, our perception of the rhetorical effect achieved by prince Pedro in his vernacular prose.

The Letter from Bruges became a historical source at a relatively late date. For centuries, it was a treasured text accessible to but a few privileged readers. Contrary to what happened to other examples incorporated in the chronicles of the 1400s (and later printed), this text was first published in 1810 by João Pedro Ribeiro, an erudite member of the Royal Academy of Sciences.<sup>12</sup> Its manuscript tradition is relatively sparse, starting with only one 16<sup>th</sup>-century testimony (*Livro da Cartuxa*) and no more than three known copies in the 1600s.<sup>13</sup> It was the influential work of the nineteenth-century historian Oliveira Martins (1845-1894), in fact, that was responsible for the canonical position that the text subsequently

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<sup>12</sup> João Pedro Ribeiro, *Dissertações Chronologicas e Criticas sobre a Historia e Jurisprudência Ecclesiastica e Civil de Portugal* (Lisbon: Academia Real das Ciências, 1810-1836), Volume 1, 398-411 (Document CXVIII) <http://purl.pt/12115>. For the intellectual context of this work: Aníbal Barreira, “João Pedro Ribeiro, sua posição na historiografia nacional”, *Revista de História*, 2 (1979), 51-63. <https://ler.letras.up.pt/uploads/ficheiros/6326.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> BITAGAP Texid 5944: *BITAGAP (Bibliografia de Textos Antigos Galegos e Portugueses)*. Dir. Arthur L-F. Askins. The Bancroft Library. University of California, Berkeley, 1997-. [https://philobiblon.upf.edu/html/bitagap\\_en.html](https://philobiblon.upf.edu/html/bitagap_en.html). Consulted: 01/20/2025. The manuscripts listed in BITAGAP date mostly from the eighteenth-century (seven items).

took, for its centrality in the historical interpretation of fifteenth-century Portugal.<sup>14</sup> In his “*Os Filhos de D. João I*” from 1891, a book that is a gallery of biographical portraits of the descendants of João I, Oliveira Martins made extensive use of the text, and republished it. In his evocative, trenchant prose, the historian focused on what the text could reveal about individual behavior and the relationship between the princely brothers.

The influence of this historical work extended beyond readers of Portuguese language. Oliveira Martins’s book was translated into English in 1914, and a Spanish version was issued in Buenos Aires in 1946. It remains available in printed format and sells quite well, to this day.<sup>15</sup> The ways that Oliveira Martins read the Letter from Bruges and used it to build contrasting figures of both princes Pedro (the “Portuguese Hamlet”, as the historian called him) and Duarte (an “effeminate” ruler) decisively influenced more than one century of textual interpretation. Among the Portuguese historians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century who worked with the Letter from Bruges, special mention should be made of António Sérgio (1883-1969), Jaime Cortesão (1884-1960), Alberto Veiga Simões (1888-1954), Vitorino Magalhães Godinho (1918-2011).<sup>16</sup> One of its most quoted passages became the paragraph in which prince Pedro refers to the affairs of Ceuta, as modern historians discussed the possibility of Pedro’s opposition or skepticism regarding the utility or feasibility of keeping up with the defense and permanent occupation of the Moroccan city.

But the Letter from Bruges has a much wider scope, as we shall see next.<sup>17</sup> What was, in a brief summary, its content? After a prologue mentioning the request of Duarte for written advice (“*um escrito de aviso*”) and after making interesting distinctions between the ruler as a person and the ruler “together with the community of the land” (that is, the king as a body politic), the author dedicates the first third of the text to the reform of the Church. In this section, Pedro identifies five major problems to address: the excess of individuals taking minor orders, the willingness of the prelates to ordinate those who were ignorant of Latin and did not have the skills or willingness to perform their duties, the loss of royal control over the property of the private endowments for funerary chapels and hospitals, the

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<sup>14</sup> Sérgio Campos Matos, “J. P. de Oliveira Martins” in *Dicionário de Historiadores Portugueses* [https://dichp.bnportugal.gov.pt/historiadores/historiadores\\_oliveira\\_martins6.htm](https://dichp.bnportugal.gov.pt/historiadores/historiadores_oliveira_martins6.htm)

<sup>15</sup> Digital version of the first edition available at <https://archive.org/details/osfilhosdedjooi01martgoog>

<sup>16</sup> See the essays and bibliographies of each of these historians in the useful *Dicionário de Historiadores Portugueses* <https://dichp.bnportugal.gov.pt/index.htm>.

<sup>17</sup> We used the two editions: Artur Moreira de Sá (ed), *A Carta de Bruges do Infante D. Pedro* (Coimbra: Coimbra Editora, 1952); João José Alves Dias and A. H. Oliveira Marques (eds), *Livro dos Conselhos de El-Rei Dom Duarte: Livro da Cartuxa* (Lisbon: Estampa, 1982), 27-39. A partial translation of the letter into English is available in Olivia Remie Constable (ed), *Medieval Iberia: Readings from Christian, Muslim, and Jewish Sources*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 455-462.

urgency of royal supervision over the men of religion, specifying the cases of monks and friars and pointing out their differences.

Inserted in this same section is a long *excursus* describing a possible reform of the University of Lisbon, a plan intended to address the lack of qualified people not only for the role of priests and church prelates, but also as a possible field of recruitment for the royal officers of justice and the different instances of government. The model advocated by prince Pedro was the organization of at least ten colleges, linked to five or six churches whose rents would support students and college officers living together in a dedicated building. Colleges should also be promoted by the bishops and by the main religious orders of the Benedictines, the Cistercians and the Augustinian canons. This was to be done following the model of Oxford or Paris (*“per maneira dos de Uxonia e de Paris”*) and should be put under supervision of people who had studied at such universities. Opening this passage of the letter, prince Pedro states that these ideas resulted from his exchanges with another person or source of information on this matter (*“segundo ouvi dizer a outro que nisto entendia mais do que eu”*), thus explaining his ways of also taking advice and collecting opinions abroad about the subjects that were of interest to the tasks of government.

The second, longer part of the letter the prince devoted to what he names “secular matters” (*“cousas temporaes”*). The organizational frame he adopts here is the one of the cardinal virtues, since “the ruling/*regimento* of the land comes from the four cardinal virtues”: fortitude, justice, temperance, and prudence. Each of these sections covers a diversity of related fields of governance. The exception is “temperance”, quickly dispatched in a couple of sentences because Pedro deems it quite practiced in the kingdom and delegates the task to preachers and confessors to whom his addressee would have easy access.

So it falls to “fortitude” to describe all matters pertaining to the organization of war and the defense of the land, including how to act upon the recent reform of recruitment methods, ways to address the expenses with fortifications and arsenals, and the management of resources in horses and weapons. “Justice” takes a harsh critical stance regarding the state of the kingdom’s affairs, since prince Pedro can find it only, in an indisputable and clear way, in the heart of the king and his brother Duarte - “and if there are others, I am not so sure” (*“e se mais são eu não sou certo”*). Here the problems require close direct inspection from the ruler, Pedro claims. One of the goals must be the remediation of tardiness, for as he explains “those who win their cases so late, are the ones who truly lose” (*“aqueles que tarde vencem, ficam vencidos”*). But most of all the prince should execute the knowledgeable compilation and enforce the use of the laws of the land.

The final section of the Letter from Bruges attaches the most important virtue of rulers, Prudence, to a multiplicity of subjects that may appear at first sight random. One common thread connects them. Mostly, the Duke of Coimbra

addresses new aspects of Portuguese society. For instance, recent changes in social mobility and in the ways of life due to the growing attraction of the court and aristocratic households, raised the level of expenses and drained the resources of many. Here he inserts the question of maintaining the recently conquered (1415) city of Ceuta, as already mentioned. Political innovations are proposed, such as the need for the presence of men from the cities (non-noble subjects) in regular instances of frequent royal consultation and decision like the Royal Council.

Before the brief conclusion and parting words, prince Pedro claims he cannot resist two topics that are close to his heart, although unrelated to the previous framework: the choice of dependents and servants by noblemen, and the promotion of horse breeding in the kingdom because of its importance for war.

As you can see, this text is ambitious in scope and seductive in its panoramic approach. Historian Luis Miguel Duarte, in a book written for the general public, could not resist the statement a decade ago that the Letter from Bruges would show “most of the evils of fifteenth-century Portuguese society still remain unsolved, 600 years later”. Words we must take with a grain of salt, obviously. Words which function, most of all, as a testament to the power of Pedro’s sentences.

I want to propose, instead, other questions to your consideration. If this letter shows the political reasoning of its author, we want to know, more generally: what did it mean to govern, for prince Pedro? We also wonder which role was the Duke of Coimbra assigning to himself with the composition of this remarkable text. We want to know, as well, in what ways could all these ideas and statements relate to actual, specific situations and changes taking place in Portugal, in these years of 1425, 1426, and 1427. In other words, which impact or influence could have had the actual political situation of these years in the content of the letter? And finally, if it were written from Bruges, how exactly does place matter in the composition of this letter? It seems to me that if we can answer such questions we can get at something larger and important to consider: how was writing becoming, for the aristocratic elites, a form of political behavior and action in fifteenth-century Portugal?

For prince Pedro and most probably also for Duarte, who seems to have initiated this exchange, to govern was, first of all, to formulate and to reason about the problems and obstacles that the ruler faced. This intellectual task was done in light of the ethical project demanded by the exercise of Justice and the search of the “common good”, a concept of great importance in the texts of the Duke of Coimbra, as Saul Gomes has clarified.<sup>18</sup> One main aspect of this definition of what governing would be, for both princes involved in this exchange, resided in the linkage of two tasks: the rational exercise of formulating the obstacles must

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<sup>18</sup> Saul António Gomes, “‘República’ e ‘bem comum’ no pensamento político do infante D. Pedro, duque de Coimbra”, *Biblos: Revista da Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Coimbra* 8 (2010), 83-94.



correspond to specific modes of action. So the prince must act at the level of social norms as well as legal rules, and he must set up disciplinary mechanisms - for example, in the sphere of church affairs, or in that of Justice. This is especially clear when the Letter from Bruges provides detailed advice about two groups of people: clergymen (prelates, priests, religious men) and the nobility serving the king or entering the dependence of others - what the text refers to as the “multitude of vassals” (“*a multidão dos vassalos*”). The dependents of the princes and great lords were, in the view of prince Pedro, especially in need of disciplining action. Those powerful and wealthy enough to attract others to their service also had special duties in lordship, and that was another reality that required the ruler’s attention.

But these were not abstract principles nor vague pronouncements, valid for all times. In the years 1425 to 1427 Portuguese rulers, both João I and Duarte, were consumed by impending conflicts with the church hierarchy of the kingdom. Headed by the powerful Archbishop of Braga, in December of the same year of 1426 the main part of the kingdom’s prelates compiled a long collection of complaints about royal disciplinarian actions, to present at the papal curia. They specifically mentioned some of the policies recommended in the Letter from Bruges. Namely, they contested the king’s authority to chastise and punish clergymen, and the royal insistence in keeping under secular jurisdiction and the king’s control the property endowed by lay people for funerary chapels and for charitable foundations, set up for the assistance of the poor and the sick.

We have seen how the Letter argues that the tasks of governance, for Prince Pedro, encompassed these realities, which many saw as the main or exclusive domain of the church. For the author of this letter, in contrast, the king should claim the role of “rector” or guide of the church itself, and Duarte should act, as the text states, himself as a prelate. Such guiding authority falls squarely into the parameters of a figure of “pastoral” rulership (as defined by Foucault). That is, the ruler would be claiming the care for the totality of the flock as well as the individual (*omnes et singulatim*) - the latter side seen mostly in the punishment or correction of the failing clergyman, the corrupt monk, or the vagrant friar. Thus the authority of the ruler should extend, Pedro claimed, over the crucial choice, nomination, education, but also over the careers and actions of all ecclesiastics of the kingdom.

As modern historians have noted, for instance Maria de Lurdes Rosa, these positions dovetail with the reforming initiatives of both Duarte and Pedro which involved the protection and patronage of new or reformed monastic communities.<sup>19</sup> Such was the relevant context that we must consider for a more thorough understanding of this important missive and its programmatic content. In August

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<sup>19</sup> Maria de Lurdes Rosa, “D. Duarte e as almas dos defuntos. Bens espirituais, caridade e misericórdia na reconfiguração do poder régio” in Catarina Barreira and Miguel Metelo Seixas (eds), *D. Duarte e a sua época. Arte, cultura, poder e espiritualidade* (Lisbon: Instituto de Estudos Medievais/Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 2014), 121-152.

1427, the Portuguese rulers successfully negotiated a compromise with the complaining prelates, and these ended up asking Pope Martin V to drop their cause. Historian Rosa concludes thus: “in all this process Duarte had a significant protagonism as he was actively involved in the search of new ways to engage the clergymen, ways that could be more coherent with his views of a reformed church”.<sup>20</sup> The Portuguese context was therefore one of acute political debate and emerging alternative religious visions which pushed against the *status quo* of the ecclesiastical institutions as those emerged from the disarray of the Great Schism.

The impact and timely intervention of Pedro, with the writing and sending of the Letter from Bruges, positioned him as an indispensable and valuable counselor of Duarte in these crucial matters. A political goal that this letter brilliantly achieved was to bring its author squarely into the core of the debate, despite his physical absence from the kingdom. And *timely* is the key word here. The ideas of the Duke of Coimbra were not meant to be utopian projections (as interesting as those could be to modern readers), much less timeless frames for recurring problems situated somehow out of time and place. The ideas and arguments were seen by the author of the letter as his contribution to the debate of current events and part of the tasks of governing.

And here, I will also point to shared knowledge in the cultural context that both princes experienced at the Portuguese court. The ethical frame of the Letter from Bruges, specifically of its second part, is entirely coherent with the explanation of virtues by Alonso de Cartagena in his treatise “*Memoriale Virtutum*”, written for and dedicated to the same prince Duarte of Portugal. Referring to the occasion of their encounter at the Portuguese court in 1422, the Castilian author describes how Duarte was especially attentive and eager to learn from others while he participated in the conversations that they had then about the subject of virtues. These are his words addressing Duarte: “what you knew, you would teach without arrogance, and to what was said you listened without disdain”.<sup>21</sup> Such attitude would be, in the praise put forward by Cartagena in his prologue, a sure proof of the orientation towards Prudence that he aimed to ascribe to the young heir to the throne of Portugal.

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<sup>20</sup> Rosa, “D. Duarte e as almas”, 138 (my translation). The abundant correspondence of Duarte with the power-broker Portuguese Abbot of the Florentine Badia, Gomes Eanes (a man close to the *curia* of Martin V and Eugenius IV) documents this in a clear way: Rita Costa Gomes (ed), *A Portuguese Abbot in Renaissance Florence. The letter collection of Gomes Eanes (1415-1463)* (Florence: Olschki, 2017).

<sup>21</sup> “*Etenim qui auidē uirtutes loqui et audire uult, uirtutibus utique proponit, et cum hinc inde uerba fierent, docti hominis utrumque opus agebas, quia et que nosti sine arrogantia docebas et que dicebantur sine dedignacione audiebas...*”: A. Hernansanz Serrano, “Hacia una edición del *Memoriale Virtutum* de Alfonso de Cartagena”, *Cuadernos de Filología Clásica. Estudios Latinos* 6 (1994), 191.

It was to Prudence, I would like to recall, that Cartagena devoted the main part of his treatise.<sup>22</sup> This suggests that we should also pay special attention to this specific section of the Letter from Bruges, which has been shadowed in modern interpretations by the cherry-picked passages referring to Ceuta or to the reform of the University. As an attentive reader and participant of the conversations taking place at the royal chamber in the early 1420s, and to which Cartagena alluded, we observe how the Duke of Coimbra built with his “framing” architecture of the princely human virtues a rhetorical device directly related to the Iberian cultural context. Place matters. The young prince could experience a certain detachment, being “in between” places and absent from the realities he considered in his missive. He may have thus gained some freedom to explore his ideas and collect advice from others. But his perspective remained firmly grounded in the singular cultural word of the Portuguese royal court. In Bruges, Pedro seems to have been in contact with commercial and urban elites, “experts” familiar to the Portuguese merchant presence in the city, rather than (as was often hypothesized) with aristocratic circles attached to the Court of the Duke of Burgundy. As Jacques Paviot established, the Duke (and therefore his court) was absent from Bruges at the time of the visit of the Duke of Coimbra.<sup>23</sup>

Still addressing the Portuguese cultural context of the 1420s, let us focus on the writing of this letter, in and by itself. Which models, which epistolary practices does it relate to? The Latin secretary of prince Duarte, João Rodrigues, requested in 1429 to have a book made in Italy with copies of the letters of the humanist Coluccio Salutati (1331-1406). This would be a textual trove of models he wanted to bring with him from Florence, with the purpose, in his own words, “to help me in my office”.<sup>24</sup>

There was, therefore, a clear interest of Portuguese courtly circles in the epistolary Latin prose of the famous Florentine chancellor, one of the early proponents of the importance of civic duty and public life together with the need to surpass the constraints of the *dictamen* in the writing of letters.<sup>25</sup> We don’t know which ones precisely were copied for the secretary João Rodrigues, and this is of import because Salutati wrote many different types of letters using a variety of

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<sup>22</sup> Mar Campos Souto, “Los sistemas de filosofía moral en el “Memorial de Virtudes” y en el “Oracional” de Alonso de Cartagena” in Andrew M. Beresford, Alan D. Deyermond (eds), *Proceedings of the ninth Colloquium Medieval Hispanic Research Seminar* (London: Queen Mary and Westfield College, 2000), 73-84.

<sup>23</sup> Jacques Paviot, *Portugal et Bourgogne au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Centre Culturel Portugais/Fondation Calouste Gulbenkian, 1995), 31. The often repeated inference that, while in Bruges, the Duke must have negotiated in person the marriage of his sister Isabel with the Duke of Burgundy is not corroborated by the Burgundian sources. The two princes may never have met.

<sup>24</sup> See *A Portuguese Abbot*, letters 291, 295, 329, 336.

<sup>25</sup> Ronald Witt, “Coluccio Salutati” in *In the Footsteps of the Ancients: The Origins of Humanism from Lovato to Bruni* (Boston: Brill, 2003), 291-337.

styles. What we can be sure is of the personal encounter in Rome of the same Rodrigues with prince Pedro when he finally reached the eternal city in his travels, where Rodrigues for a while served as proctor in the curia.<sup>26</sup>

I will conclude recalling three remarkable things about the Letter from Bruges. First, it provides a definition of the process of governing Portugal articulated as a specific set of beneficial and disciplinarian actions which had, for the princely rulers, a moral dimension.

Secondly, as seemingly shared between the two princes involved in this epistolary exchange, governing appears fundamentally as a problem-solving and rational exercise, woven into a larger complex of religious and ideological arguments denoting an expected familiarity with the main sources of political and religious doctrine of late medieval times and early humanism. I would highlight the lack of mention in this letter to the Divine Providence or to astrological ratiocination, which we know was so influential at the court of Portugal in these same years.

Thirdly, this letter attests to a mature development of a language and an epistolary tradition attached to the act of “giving counsel” and participating in the sphere of “secrecy” or “*puridade*” of the monarchs. It was in such sphere that political trust (the making, or the loss of it) flourished, and that new types of political writing emerged in the 1400s.

One last point. It is a fact that we know much better what the governing elites of the kingdom of Portugal thought and advocated in the 1400s than the opinions of those who were governed. What would be the perspectives “from below” on the questions raised by the Duke of Coimbra? The voices reaching the Parliamentary meetings of Portugal (*Cortes*) were those of restricted groups governing the cities and municipalities of the kingdom. In other words, those were the voices of non-noble local elites, voices sometimes dissenting from the rulers and their aristocratic entourage, but not necessarily aligned with the common people of Portugal. Much of the program delineated in the Letter from Bruges, as far as we can tell, garnered support from some of the non-noble elites whose voices were heard in parliamentary meetings. Most notably, we can detect there a similar understanding of the reforming duties of kings facing the church. Major cities such as Lisbon, in ways similar to prince Pedro, also advocated for the need for a representation less solemn and more frequent than the “*Cortes*” by having men from the cities regularly participate in the Royal Council.

The latter political measure would come to the fore again a decade later, in 1439, when Prince Pedro obtained the regency after the death of Duarte, becoming himself the *de facto* ruler of Portugal. But those were other times, other places. And not much can be gained by retro projecting future political circumstances into the

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<sup>26</sup> *A Portuguese Abbot*, letter 261.

understanding of the crispness and audacity of the ideas and words of a young travelling prince.