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Publicizing the war in urban context, Portugal – 1319-1324 *

Sandra Amaral Monteiro

1. The source and the problem

We mean to analyse a narrative source from the Portuguese medieval chronicles in order to understand the ways in which an image of the series of episodes making up the civil war of 1319-1324 was built. The memory then produced told of a conflict that was mostly played out in urban spaces, and which opposed the King, D. Dinis (b.1261, r.1279-1325), and his son and legitimate heir, the prince D. Afonso. The reasons given as having originated the confrontation, and the involvement of a kingdom divided between parties, point to something more than a private conflict, between related parties.

We shall see how the private and public spheres intermingle, both at the level of what social powers are mobilised, and at that of what means are engaged in the holding of positions, and in ensuring their success. In this civil war (as well as in this narrative), the permanence of a rural world, in which private and public conflicts are not distinct in character, is confronted with the emergence of an urban world, most apparent in the 1419 text, in which the public nature of the issue of power is asserted. The contradiction between the modern means of political intervention and the traditional content of the texts that were read in the cities is also shown by this narrative.

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The text from which we depart is the chapter of the *Crónica dos sete primeiros reis de Portugal* which deals with the reign of D. Dinis. This text is one of several versions of the lost *Crónica de 1419*. According to various studies, one should attribute this chronicle to Fernão Lopes, D. Duarte's chronicler and guardian of the kingdom's archives since 1418. This chronicle, showing a clear bias towards D. Dinis, is commissioned in a context of reformulation of "official" memory. Once the crisis of 1383-1385 is closed, and the Castilian attempt of annexation is vanquished, the Portuguese (as opposed to the Peninsular) past is reviewed, in order to assert the power of the newly founded house of Avis and of King D. João I.

2. *The context: the reign of D. Dinis*

Some of the most striking aspects of D. Dinis' reign might help us to contextualise and understand the conflicts we are to analyse. Urban contexts, rather than other features of the period, will be privileged in our analysis. This was a reign of some economic advance, due in part to material gains previously accumulated during the Christian *Reconquista* of the Peninsula, but also linked to factors such as the growth of the cities and the livening of urban activities (internal trading, supported on a municipal level by free markets, as well as North-European commerce, were added to the traditional benefits for mining and agricultural activities).

The Portuguese borders having been set since 1297, the affirmation of royal power, exercised in the King's constant travels throughout the national territory (in spite of a trend towards the settlement of the court), was played through an alliance with the cities. D. Dinis meant to use the cities as focal points from which to establish, and extend to all the Kingdom, his model of political and administrative centralisation. A discourse of lawful rationality, rather than a show of arms, was meant to uphold this centralisation – although the resistance of wide strata of the population made armed confrontation inevitable in some occasions.

Centralisation, viewed as an improvement of the administrative, legislative, judicial or military systems (giving them greater technical competence and efficacy), was achieved through measures such as the adoption of the common language in the Crown's official documents or the formation of an increasingly specialised body of jurists, bailiffs and other officers of the Crown, who promoted the execution of the regal body of legislation which enabled the administrative corps to collect rents. The bureaucratisation of the towns also increased, as well as the dependence of the notary upon the Crown.

The concentration of political and economic power, linked as it was to a policy of alliances with the towns, resulted in a legal and military fight against the manorial powers (which is certain from 1281 onwards). D. Dinis followed in both his father's and grandfather's steps (albeit in a more insistent and systematic manner), defending the Crown's jurisdiction against the extension of manorial rights, which he saw as abusive. The local inquiries, which preceded more systematic ones, sought to measure the legitimacy of the means by which noblemen acquired and transmitted their privileges (*honras*), as well as any questions of jurisdiction that were raised by the Crown's officers (judges, bailiffs, etc.). Several conflicts with the nobility arose from this situation, leading to complaints in the *cortes*; conflicts which the King made nearly permanent by creating inquest commissions whose unchanging verdict was that there had been undue usurpation of royal rights. Initially, the nobility resists in the courts, then by disobeying the royal officers, and, at last, in open rebellion, by finding a leader in the heir to the throne, as we shall see next.

3. *Analysing the text*

3.1 *The conflict*

One normally associates the image of a war with descriptions of grandiose battles – these bloody episodes are, however, rare and incidental in the late middle ages.

War is essentially defensive: it draws on a strategy of fatigue, with multiple encounters; and it tends to be prolonged indefinitely.

In the narrative given by the chronicle, violent episodes are also rare and relatively underscored, as compared with other elements which contribute to the development of a hostile and antagonistic atmosphere.

What sort of a conflict is this? The notion of “civil war” is implied in the very text of the chronicle, in the reference to the confrontation of March 1322 in Coimbra, which has the greatest of the Portuguese noblemen involved, in both parties, father against son and brother against brother.

The conflict appears, in the first place, as internal in nature, although it occasionally overreaches the Kingdom’s borders, as it happens when either party uses Castille as a safe haven, or when the King’s opposers go there to seek external support. Foreign Courts are seen as potential harbours for treason against the monarchy (as D. Dinis sees the institution) and for threats to the Kingdom’s integrity. In spite of this, the Portuguese King sometimes allies himself to other kings of the Peninsula, in issues pertaining to political diplomacy, dynastic and family policies, or the pursuit of the Christian war against the moors of Granada.

The internal nature of the conflict is accentuated by the fact that it was a private matter resulting from a quarrel within the royal family. A quarrel begun, as the chronicler sees it, by the unfair and unjustified jealousy that the prince, D. Afonso, felt of how the King treated his bastard sons (specifically, D. Afonso Sanches and D. João Afonso, since D. Pedro, Count of Barcelos, who was also an illegitimate son, initially took the side of D. Afonso). Such feelings were not merely emotional in origin (or the regal actions would have put a stop to the conflict), but were linked (according to the chronicle) to the disrespect of the natural and Christian obedience which a son owes a father, and a subject owes a king. Despite the fact that he had been associated to the Crown early on, the prince is represented as yearning for a greater economic power (he coveted the riches his father had accumulated), and for the power to exercise justice.

As the chronicle tells it, this family conflict, between a father and a son accused of not loving the former, spawned new feelings of solidarity that involved the entire kingdom, at first by spreading to more distant relatives, then throughout the feudal ties, to high dignitaries of the Church, including the Pope, John XXII (1316-1334), to the military orders, but also to the populations of the towns and to officers of the Crown.

How can this vision of events be interpreted? It does focus upon an essential issue, marking the start of the confrontations (1319) – the claim made by the prince D. Afonso over the power to dispense justice in the kingdom. The prince goes so far as to procure the support of the Queen of Castille, who writes to D. Dinis, pleading the prince's case.

Outside a more or less psychological and voluntarist kind of explanations: the account of the prince's displeasure at the privileges given to Afonso Sanches or a power struggle with a King whose reign lasted overlong, and with whom the responsibilities of government had long been shared, our understanding of the future king's motivations is shallow. We do not clearly grasp his commitment to that which was, after all, the claim of a manorial nobility trying to obtain a less rigorous judicial administration. He was, in any case, truly a herald of the manorial party's complaints against the way the King used judicial power to repress manorial abuses. A body of officers (jurists and judges of the Court, now aided by a host of locally placed and itinerant officers) endowed with a technical, tendentially rational and equitative knowledge and expertise, unfavourable to the nobility's ancestral traditions, was the Crown's instrument in this repression.

In order to understand how, at that moment, the manorial nobility was mobilised, and formed a party against the King (receiving very little, and yet significative, support among the court nobility), one must keep in mind how the conjuncture had changed since that time when the two preceding kings, Sancho II and Afonso III, had made the first essays in centralisation and administrative bureaucratisation. Once the *Reconquista* was finished, the wealth from the looting and pillaging of the cities of the Islamic South stopped flowing in. The manorial nobility

thus watched its source of land and income disappear and, consequently, its political and social influence diminish, finding no alternative other than the exorbitation of its powers and prerogatives. The nobility kept taking for itself the dues that were once paid to the King, until that time when he considered that the judicial means he had employed since 1281 had worn out their use, and resorted to armed conflict.

3.2 *The space*

A study of the geography of confrontations shows an almost exclusively land-based conflict, with the single exception of the river Tagus, used by D. Afonso as a point of entry into Santarém. The north (rural and manorial) and centre (urban and municipal) of the kingdom are the main stage for a series of errant incursions in which the cities are stopping places that become the site for most of the episodes. As we shall see, the spatial distribution of these conflicts may be seen as a close metaphor of the royal project of centralisation. The diversity of routes, the abundance of toponyms and characters that can be found in the narrative leave the reader with the impression of a rapidly occurring sequence of events.

One should also point out that most of the spaces (which the chronicle refers to) in the urban centres are public, with the exception of royal residences (as in Benfca, on the outskirts of Lisbon), churches under the King's patronage, and one more private place mentioned, some "*houses*" near Santarém, belonging to the family of one of the kingdom's bailiffs, partisans of the King, who give lodging to D. Dinis.

The northern part of the kingdom, which is, with its essentially rural nature, and dense population, the privileged space for manorial nobility, is given a much smaller part in the text. Five cities and large towns are mentioned north of the Mondego river (Braga, Guimarães, Porto, Gaia and Feira). All of these towns are taken by the prince early in 1322, with the one exception of Guimarães, sieged in vain and secured by the King's chief bailiff, with the aid of his stewards and other villagers. The aforementioned bailiff was the head of a house that had previously engaged in conflict

with D. Afonso. Only the conquered castles are mentioned, besides one instance in which the city of Porto appears, with a reference to the Sé (although no conflict took place there). The Sé is the only cathedral the chronicle refers to, in spite of the importance of these holy spaces as places of memory (harking back to the city's own origins), as well as of the spiritual and temporal usages of the space. Other sacred spaces, be they diocesan or not, closer to the everyday lives of the urban communities, took this role. This may be partially explained by the feud between the Crown and the bishops (namely, the bishops of Lisbon and Oporto), which is a striking feature of D. Dinis' reign.

South of the Mondego, the conflict's geography is once more predominantly urban. The actual confrontations in arms are confined to the outskirts: these are rural spaces, described by the chronicler only in terms of a few physical characteristics (or of the number of leagues from the nearest urban centre). It is as if the writer means to set the distinction between a new type of action, which the partisans of royal centralism prefer, and which is urban, official, public, orderly, rational, efficient, and based on word and argument, and the other, more rural type of conflict resolution, which is private, more chaotic, largely left to chance, based on military and armed power, and manifestly inefficient, at times almost laughable (as in the struggles ending with the flight of the combatants).

These confrontations take place in the outskirts of Lisbon (in Alboegas, near the woods of Loures, near the royal residence at Benfica, near Lumiar and even close to Sintra), Coimbra (skirmishes on the outskirts and at the Olivais) and Santarém (near the above mentioned private "*houses*"). Let us now look closer upon the most protected of urban spaces, the *alcácer*. Confined by walls, gates, fences and other fortifications, which surround a central building – which may be a castle, palace, monastery, etc. –, and the town, its defence is assured even if the outskirts should be lost to the enemy. In it, the various spaces (profane and sacred institutions, centres of economic activity) are linked by the streets, which act as arteries through which urban life flows.

Lisbon, where the *cortes* are, at the prince's request, convened in 1323 to discuss matters of justice, is one of the King's most trustworthy towns. A large number of his partisans come out of this city, and its outskirts. In this space, the King feels at home: he may operate comfortably (two of the texts he has proclaimed are first publicly read there) – the prince's arrivals being the only threatening factor. The reason D. Afonso invokes, on one occasion, for entering the city with his men, calls up this universe where the different powers are geographically and symbolically distributed, bringing to light the tensions inherent to a conflict where either party tries to take upon itself the entire range of power. D. Afonso makes it known that he means to pay a pious visit to the monastery of S. Vicente de Fora, which had been donated to the augustinian canons of Santa Cruz de Coimbra by D. Afonso Henriques, the first king of Portugal. S. Vicente was a martyr disputed with the Sé. He watched over the city and the knights, knights who kept vigil by his body in order to gain energy for the war.

Coimbra is another of the cities in which D. Dinis has the most power and remains longest, as is fitting in the aforementioned context of domination of the municipal centre and south. As such, the city took early on the status of a power symbol that must be conquered, and so was subject to several incursions. On December 31, 1321 the prince took the castle, the vital centre of the city, which was later also taken. Following his sojourn in this city, D. Afonso headed north, and set a siege to the city of Guimarães. Having been informed that the King, aided by the "Estremadura" and by the military orders (which is to say, once again, with the support of the south and centre) had taken hold of an abandoned Coimbra, D. Afonso returns, entering in several skirmishes in the city (early March 1322). In May (after the Queen has interceded once more) new peace talks follow.

As a result of these negotiations, the prince receives the manorial rights to the towns he had taken (Coimbra, and also Montemor, Feira, Gaia and Oporto), but is obliged to pay homage to the King for them (we shall say more on this subject in the discussion of the conflict's closure). These episodes clearly show how central Coimbra

is to the conflict's geography, both physical and political. The image of D. Afonso's hurried return, leaving behind a northern city which opposed him, isolated in the midst of manorial territory, suggests very strongly that it was in the urban centre that the outcome would be decided. It was there, in the urban centre, that one should concentrate one's efforts, for that was the arena where the capacity to influence the kingdom's government could be won or lost.

The examination of these incidents narrated in the chronicle allows us also to follow the King's movements in the urban space. Unable to penetrate the city walls (at once boundary and protection to the city), he eventually enters by the *alcáçova* near São Lourenço. Even prior to the confrontations, the setting of the central characters in two holy places is significant, invoking the memory of two spiritual currents that answered the crisis in Christian piety in the late middle ages. The prince moves to the church or monastery of Santa Cruz, the property of Augustinian canons. Living as secular monks, the canons had strong ties to the aspirations of the manorial nobility of Coimbra, interested in lessening the power of the civic organisations. As for D. Dinis, his location in the church of S. Francisco is clearly an appropriation of the whole symbolic universe of the 13th century, giving it a new context in order to make it a proper setting for the civil war of 1319-1324.

Let us now look at events in Santarém, a major centre which is the seat of the King's governments (and where he dies on January 7, 1325, as the chronicle reports). Santarém was an important source of support to the prince, which is clearly visible in the hostilities of February, 1324, which happened inside the urban space. D. Afonso arrives by way of the Tagus, casting anchor near the church of Santa Iria and takes the castle, after entering the *alcáçovas* by the Frei Ladrão door. The prince's refusal to admit the King into the town forces D. Dinis into rather different spaces. He moves from the town's limits to the collegiate church of S. Nicolau, in the oldest centre of the burgh, near the mosque. This is an area of great economic vitality, which is connected to the processing, storing and selling of agricultural goods. It is a curious matter that

this is a space associated to the King, in spite of the fact that the town troops fought alongside D. Afonso.

Another episode in which some of the municipal population plays an important part happens in Alcobaça. Several inhabitants of Leiria took refuge at the local church (in all likelihood, that of the monastery of Santa Maria, whose abbot was the King's confessor), after they had allowed the prince and his troops to enter the town, early in 1322. The King's punishment (which we know of through other sources for this act of treason was to have the offenders beheaded and burned. The chronicle shows this action as stripped of any cruelty or violence, reduced to the carrying out of the regal intention that justice be done (identified with a global and rational discourse, in no way emotional or casuistic). The punishment of people who might have been innocent, or connected thinly to the opposing party, is tied to a superior ground, one of the fulfilment of a collective history, which the King invokes when he mentions the "*monuments of the kings, his grandparents*" which were inside the church. It is as if the calling up of the memory of a common past, made holy by the insertion in the church's space, should amplify and justify the condemnation of the defilement.

The church of Alcobaça is an intermediate symbol, midway between a collective destiny and the destiny of the town of Leiria, a place of mediation and of the restoring of order (in the church as in history, in Leiria as in the kingdom). Conciliation also meant here the reestablishment of family concord. This is apparent in the repeated interventions of the Queen D. Isabel, who was accomplice to her son, and yet was also the maker of the peace that was made in May 1322. This peace was not to be a lasting one, and disorder returned to the kingdom (and to the royal family). Two churches, in different locations, were chosen so that D. Afonso and D. Dinis, could, separately, take their oaths to keep the terms of the peace. The prince takes his at Pombal, where his mother is, at the altar of the church of S. Martinho de Pombal (May 1322). D. Dinis at the royal chapel of S. Simão, in the royal residence at Leiria. This residence had been renewed by D. Dinis before 1300, and turned into a relevant piece in royal policy. At

that time, the prince, not yet of age, who stayed frequently in the town, made the ties that would later afford him the support of part of the local aristocracy. Leiria is also one of the King's favoured sites, fourth in importance after Lisbon, Santarém e Coimbra.

We shall now see what means are employed in the urban context (which is by now somewhat more familiar) to publicise the civil war.

3.3 The publicitation of war

The strategies that either party followed to promote the publicitation of the confrontations at various moments were, by making possible the acquisition of aid for the positions announced, an efficient component in the mobilisation of the towns. The public show of arguments, based on the oral and written word, through texts that were publicly read and reproduced, entails a practice of politics that is characteristic of urban development. These are the first steps on the long road toward the affirmation of the written word, collective reading and proclamation as instruments of political action (in this case, also of military action). Steps being taken in an oral society which had only recently made the transition from the Latin to the romance in official documents. The intent to mobilise opinions and to gain support is clear, although one can not yet speak of “public opinion” in terms of a structured and permanent space. Public places are used in the shaping of opinion. This is, obviously not to say that there is a public current through which opinion is created.

Even from the chronicle's point of view, we cannot know who read or heard these texts, except when they move within a private sphere (as in correspondence sent or received). Those people who were meant to be convinced by the hearing of these texts were possibly already won over or aligned according to family solidarities and obligations. One should keep in mind that the King, aware that he could not depend upon the feudal ties to work, had set up, in the first half of the 15th century, mechanisms that allowed him to recruit and maintain an army. The affirmation of the rising states and royal centralisation brought to the theatres of war a new type of army which was

meant to be permanent, and was composed of a set number of effectives from the municipalities.

The chronicle mentions, and quotes at length (in direct speech) several texts: those accompanying judicial suits, private correspondence, royal letters and missives from the pope. These echo a later usage of rhetoric in speech construction, based on a new paradigm, which already bears some humanist markings. They also translate a new way to conceive war, which takes up the notion (also present in ancient rhetoric) of a struggle for the common good, rather than over issues of individual power. This is a double-edged concept: it is at once more likely to inspire the sympathy of populations, and more dependent on popular adhesion for success.

The exchange of correspondence between the participants of this conflict, which is then made public by reading out loud in various places and institutions, is perhaps its most interesting and innovative feature. This is especially true if one thinks of the whole body of narratives of feudal battles, even for the late middle ages. This new way of conceiving (and practising) the defence of a position and of gathering support for a cause can only be understood in a context of urban development.

Two kinds of strategy are discernible. The one followed by the prince is, early in the conflict, characterised by the elaboration and publicity of a written text to be publicly read – he sends a letter to the judges, denouncing a supposed conspiracy, led by his brother D. Afonso Sanches, to kill him, and thereby alter the order of succession, and promote the redistribution of wealth. He also denounces the conspiracy to the King, hoping that measures will be taken. However, he soon abandons the written measures, and takes to spreading his “*intrigues*” and “*falsehoods*” (as the King describes them) by the propagation of rumour. One of the rumours he initiates in Coimbra, Santarém and elsewhere curiously pertains to a supposed letter by D. Dinis and thirty two of his most trustworthy towns, attempting to sway the pope against D. Afonso – this reveals the knowledge the prince had of the King’s strategies and of the type of forces that backed him.

The prince's strategy of rumour was actually the most appropriate to the diffusion in restricted circles, often secretive, and linked to the incapacity this nobility showed in the activation of mechanisms that would ensure a widespread communication, in a sparsely inhabited territory. The downplaying of the prince's actions, in no way innocent, is achieved by frequent slander of his supporters (generically spoken of as "*wrongdoers*" or "*outlaws*") although some of the highest and most prestiged manorial nobles were to be counted among their ranks.

As for the King, one must keep in mind that that was only one of his means of propaganda. The Crown's ideology was exposed so as to generate loyalty to the monarchy (a collective adhesion to its principles, and a strengthening of passions and affective bonds). The propagation of these ideals was to be brought about through various symbolic rituals, urban performances (at fairs and cross-roads), through written documents in the chancelleries and monasteries (with diversified means of circulation), and through a constant presence as visual language in the decoration of several buildings.

In this chronicle, D. Dinis is represented as a father and King disrespected by his heir, who nonetheless acts with the complicity of his mother, the Queen D. Isabel. She often appears as her son's partisan and, at the same time, as a mediator and even resolver of conflicts. The King often finds himself having to publicly deny the rumours set off by the prince, which he does by gathering large urban assemblies (an easier audience to round up than that of his son), at which he gives testimony of his indignation and seeks backing for his reasoning.

Three royal texts are proclaimed in the towns, according to a "*publish and defend*" formula. The first is proclaimed in Santarém (July 1st, 1320), following a letter by D. Maria de Molina, in which she pleads for the prince the concession of the kingdom's justice. The King saw his son's calling upon such high personages in Castille as an act of open rebellion. Such acts of treason would, according to the chronicle, be dispelled by the condemnation to the death of those who stood with D. Afonso. Two

other such texts were read in Lisbon (May 15th and December 17th, 1321), but are not mentioned in the chronicle. The chronist focused instead upon the royal strategy of making two other documents widely read: a letter from a town denouncing the fact that the prince had tied them to his party, and a letter from the Pope.

This is one of the two letters written by the Pope. Both are reproduced and used profusely, and are extensively quoted in the chronicle. This was, at the last, a way of bringing the highest authority in Christendom into the conflict. It was the Pope's express will that this first letter be made known to the nobles and people in all "*towns, castles and fortresses*". D. Dinis ordered its publication throughout the kingdom, and especially in those places where the prince was most influent. The missive, addressed to the high dignitaries of the church, defends D. Dinis and threatens D. Afonso's partisans with excommunication (admonishments and excommunications, handled by the Bishop of Évora, would fall upon both the ecclesiastic and the secular). The second letter, addressed to D. Afonso, recalls the arguments in favour of his father, and appeals to obedience (as a son and as a subject). Disobedience is presented as contrary to the moral that upholds Christian kings (who should better be preoccupied with increasing their territory), to natural law, and to God's law.

Let us then look upon one last document, the text signed by a group of municipal judges, and addressed to the King, meant to be publicly read to the Portuguese nobles. It was written in answer to a letter sent them by D. Dinis (an episode related to the prince's letter). The fact that the town stands with the King (as the judges' opinion seems to indicate), is not merely a result of the means used by D. Dinis to justify his conduction of the kingdom's affairs to them. The written form of these means holds in itself a symbolic charge as an instrument of the holy, but this support is also forthcoming from the very content of the projects he makes public: the proposal of a project of peace, which dispels the fear of a war that might be set off by the manorial north, is appealing to an urban community.

3.4 The conflict's political closure

The civil war was ended in 1324, the terms of the peace having been confirmed and sacralized in May by the Pope's envoy to Santarém, the Bishop of Compostela. The cessation of violence was achieved through a set of concessions on the King's part, both in favour of the prince (his rents are increased, and Afonso Sanches, his brother, was resigned from the high-ranking offices he had held), and of the manorial nobility (a series of royal officers, linked to royal centralisation, are replaced by others who are favourable to this nobility).

Although this outcome calls to light the relative frailty of the King's anti-manorial policy, and although the privileges of the manorial nobility would not easily be extinguished, the fact remains that many of the progresses made toward royal supremacy were already irreversible. One year before the death of D. Dinis, the triumph of royalty became intimately connected to urban development. A concept of war as serving the stability of the kingdom, rather than personal feuds, was established as a model.

The municipal, public, and urban model established itself also on the level of narrative, as may be seen in the account of the rebellion of the future D. Pedro I against his father, D. Afonso IV, or of the acclamation of D. Beatriz, during the crisis of 1383-1385. From then on, a narrative of a civil war lacking a spatial background became unthinkable. And the victor was whoever was backed by the larger towns.

In a time when history seeks the study of that which is hidden, private, it nonetheless makes sense to focus upon that which, in a given context of Portuguese medieval history, was intentionally made public, external, visible, and collectively assumed. Particularly because, as we have seen, this is one more way to observe the close connections that exist between the private and public spheres of social behaviour. Each eye values that which interests one the most, that which it believes to provide the best explanation for the questions it poses – in this case, to understand how the ways of conceiving and carrying out a war witness the changing late middle ages, on the road to modernity. ■