

# Shared Heraldry and the Sacred Space: The Building Blocks of João I of Portugal's Imagery<sup>1</sup>

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**ENG Summary:** This study considers the practice of shared heraldry as an instrument of affirmation of late-medieval monarchies, examining the case study of King João I of Portugal. The study of how this sovereign's heraldry was shared with those close to him illustrates how heraldry was understood as an instrument of propaganda for the cause of independence, in the context of the 1383-1385 dynastic crisis, and subsequently in building the imagery of the King and the dynasty he founded. The transposition of this heraldry to the Monastery of Batalha, erected to commemorate the victory at Aljubarrota and later a dynastic necropolis, established a privileged relationship with this monument's architecture and iconography, expanding the same theme of shared heraldry (now in a dynastic context) as an expression of the royal power's legitimacy. **Keywords:** Heraldry; Shared Heraldry; Iconography of Power; Political Theology; João I of Portugal; Monastery of Batalha.

## ES Heráldica compartida y el espacio sagrado: los elementos constitutivos de la imagen de João I de Portugal

**ES Resumen:** Este estudio analiza la práctica de la compartición heráldica como instrumento de afirmación de las monarquías bajomedievales, examinando el caso del rey João I de Portugal. El estudio de cómo la heráldica de este soberano fue compartida con sus partidarios ilustra cómo ella fue entendida y usada como instrumento de propaganda de la causa de la independencia, en el contexto de la crisis dinástica de 1383-1385, y posteriormente en la construcción del imaginario del Rey y de la dinastía por él fundada. La transposición de esta heráldica al Monasterio de Batalha, erigido para conmemorar la victoria en Aljubarrota y consecutivamente necrópolis dinástica, estableció una relación privilegiada con la arquitectura e iconografía de este monumento, ampliando el mismo tema de la heráldica compartida (ahora en un contexto dinástico) como expresión de la legitimidad del poder real.

**Palabras clave:** heráldica; compartición heráldica; iconografía del poder; teología política; Juan I de Portugal; monasterio de Batalha.

**Summary.** 1. Introduction. 2. Shared heraldry between João I of Portugal and his supporters and companions in arms. 3. Heraldry, devotion, and sacred space in the Convent of Santa Maria da Vitória, Batalha. 4. Conclusions. 5. Sources and bibliographical references.

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### 1. Introduction

By virtue of his origins and the troubled circumstances that led to his accession to the throne, João I was among the Portuguese medieval monarchs

who most invested in building his image<sup>2</sup>. For similar reasons, the written and visual representation constructed around this sovereign, after his death, is among the more complex and intense<sup>3</sup>. After the

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<sup>2</sup> Maria Helena da Cruz Coelho, *D. João I, o que re-colheu Boa Memória* (Rio de Mouro: Círculo de Leitores, 2005), 242-275.

<sup>3</sup> Coelho, *D. João I, o que re-colheu Boa Memória*, 276-293.

death of King Fernando I, in 1383, the Portuguese throne fell to infanta Beatriz, his only living descendant, since her male brothers Pedro and Afonso had died in 1380 and 1382, respectively. Following the treaty of Salvaterra de Magos, signed the year Fernando I died, the heir to the Portuguese throne, then a minor, married King João I of Castile-Leon, then the widow of an Aragonese infanta. With Fernando I's demise, the regency passed onto the Dowager Queen Leonor Teles de Meneses, and Beatriz was proclaimed queen<sup>4</sup>.

In this troubled political and dynastic context, positions were exacerbated on two sides. Discontent with the Luso-Castilian arrangement peaked when João I of Castile-León entitled himself as King of Portugal and commanded a military expedition that sought to impose the royal couple's authority and institute a dynastic union. Reaction against this project was led by João, master of the order of Avis, illegitimate son of King Pedro I and, therefore, half-brother of the late King Fernando I. The war that followed extended over three years. Internationally, this uncertain conflict occurred in the context of the Hundred Years' War and of the religious schism that then divided Christianity between obedience to either the pope of Rome or Avignon.

The war of 1383-1385 was not only a military conflict, but also a war of propaganda and image. João I of Castile-Leon naturally emphasized the dynastic legitimacy of his wife Beatriz and the oaths of allegiance following Fernando I's death. Their opponents countered by alleging non-compliance with the stipulations of the treaty of Salvaterra de Magos regarding the Portuguese succession: this treaty foresaw no dynastic union, merely that Fernando I's daughter would inherit the throne, thus guaranteeing that the eventual heir of Portugal, arising from the Luso-Castilian marriage, would never accumulate that office with the crown of León and Castile (which would naturally fall to the Castilian King's children from his first marriage). The defenders of independence grounded their claim on the idea of birthplace<sup>5</sup> and religion (obedience to the pope of Rome) and soon associated the master of Avis with several extraordinary virtues that distinguished him from other mortals and equated him to the mythical King Arthur, presenting him as a predestined and messianic figure<sup>6</sup>. The successes of the independentist cause throughout the first years of the war, in particular Lisbon's capacity to resist the siege imposed by the Castilian King, helped forge this image. Using this argument, the courts gathered

in Coimbra and elected the master of Avis as King of Portugal, on April 6, 1385, nullifying the rights of Queen Beatriz and the claims of Pedro I's other children with Inês de Castro.

But the decisive moment, in both military and propagandistic terms, was the Battle of Aljubarrota, fought on August 14, 1385. More than decisive, the victory was resounding, which is why sources at the time, both Portuguese and Castilian, refer to it simply as the *royal battle*, thus underlining both the confirmation of João I's reign and the advent of what would later be named the dynasty of Avis, and the renunciation of João I of Castile-Leon's project of uniting the Western Peninsular dynasties. The victory at Aljubarrota was achieved under apparently unfavourable conditions for the independentist cause, given the disproportion of forces. Thus, it became part of the providential narrative surrounding João I of Portugal and, complementarily, of the image of the strategist responsible for its success, the Constable Nuno Álvares Pereira, reputed to be a fearless and immaculate knight, and equated with the Arthurian hero Galahad.

## 2. Shared heraldry between João I of Portugal and his supporters and companions in arms

The images of the King and the warrior were thus constructed in counterpoint to each other. Both drew great valour from a victory presented as having been granted by God through the intercession of the Virgin on the eve of the feast of her Assumption. Moreover, both displayed an uncontroversial and intense Marian devotion, evident in their respective emblems. Both had fought at Aljubarrota wearing green (the Virgin's liturgical colour) surcoats (Fig. 1), embroidered with rose branches (the Marian flower par excellence, together with the fleur-de-lys)<sup>7</sup>. The Constable's flag had even included the Virgin in a place of honour in two representations: the Calvary scene, accompanied by St. John; and carrying the Christ Child, expressing the typical religious sentiment of the period<sup>8</sup>. Following the victory and a life full of blessings and honours, the Constable became the richest secular lord in Portugal outside the restricted circle of the royal family itself, and expressed his continuous devotion by building the Convent of Nossa Senhora do Vencimento do Monte do Carmo [Our Lady of Mount Carmel] in the city of Lisbon, where he professed, gaining the significant title of Friar Nuno of Saint Mary, and where he was later buried<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> On the final circumstances of Fernando I's reign, see Rita Costa Gomes, *D. Fernando* (Rio de Mouro: Círculo de Leitores, 2005), 159-175.

<sup>5</sup> Luís de Sousa Rebelo, *A concepção do poder em Fernão Lopes* (Lisboa: Livros Horizonte, 1983), 50.

<sup>6</sup> For the messianic characterization of João I, see Mário Martins, *Alegorias, símbolos e exemplos morais da literatura medieval portuguesa* (Lisboa: Brotéria, 1975), 251-254; Margarida Garcez Ventura, *O Messias de Lisboa: um estudo de mitologia política, 1383-1415* (Lisboa: Cosmos, 1992); and Coelho, *D. João I, o que re-colheu Boa Memória*, 242-293.

<sup>7</sup> Fernão Lopes, *Crónica de D. João I*, ed. Manuel Lopes de Almeida and Artur de Magalhães Basto (Barcelos: Companhia Editora do Minho, 1990), II: 92.

<sup>8</sup> On the uses of the constable's emblems, see Miguel Metelo de Seixas and João Bernardo Galvão-Telles, "O condestável D. Nun'Álvares e as armas dos Pereiras revisitadas" in *Olhares de hoje sobre uma vida de ontem. D. Nuno Álvares Pereira: homem, herói e santo*, ed. Humberto Nuno de Oliveira, Cristina Moita and Ismael Pereira Teixeira (Lisboa: Universidade Lusíada Editora / Ordem do Carmo em Portugal, 2009), 205-217.

<sup>9</sup> On the church of Carmo and the burial of the constable, its founder, see Célia Nunes Pereira, *A Igreja e o Convento de Santa Maria do Carmo de Lisboa, 1389-1755* (Lisboa: Associação dos Arqueólogos Portugueses, 2016).



Figure 1. Surcoat with which João I of Portugal fought in Aljubarrota, which he offered in thanksgiving to the collegiate of Nossa Senhora da Oliveira, Guimarães. Source: Museu Alberto Sampaio, Guimarães, MAS T5.

As for the King, the Marian dimension of his image intensified over the years. Foremost, with his promise on the Battle of Aljubarrota itself. He attributed his victory and kingship to the Virgin's intercession and expressed his gratitude in various ways. By his order, the enemy flags captured at Aljubarrota, including his adversary's royal flag, were soon sent to the Cathedral of Lisbon, dedicated to Santa Maria Maior, where they were hung along the nave. This was also an indication of the decisive role this city, by then head of the kingdom, had played in the war's political and military equations. These Marian and Lisbon connections were intense. It was in this city, more precisely in the old chapel of Nossa Senhora da Escada, next to the church of São Domingos [St. Dominic], that the master of Avis, after hearing the reasons presented by citizens, decided to assume the defence of the kingdom against the Castilian invader, thus beginning, once again under the invocation of the Virgin, the path that would lead him to

royalty. Throughout his life, João I showed a constant Marian devotion and knew how to yield this as an effective instrument of propaganda: even as he was dying, in Lisbon, the King made a point of paying a last tribute to two sacred sites, the cathedral and the chapel of Nossa Senhora da Escada. And his death was manipulated as to coincide with the eve of the feast of the Assumption of the Virgin, the very date of the victory of Aljubarrota<sup>10</sup>.

The constancy of his Marian devotion also explains why, after Aljubarrota, João I made a series of donations, fulfilling his promises. The most significant of such donations was several objects given to the Collegiate Church of Nossa Senhora da Oliveira, in Guimarães<sup>11</sup>, among which was the surcoat the King himself had worn at Aljubarrota<sup>12</sup>. Notably, this church's ceiling was decorated with paintings with a strong heraldic component, forming a commemorative armorial of this battle<sup>13</sup>. While this donation to Guimarães might have been related to the city's prestige as the primitive seat of the County of Portugal, it might also have been related to another type of affinity. In fact, the prior of the Collegiate Church of Senhora da Oliveira was none other than Doctor João de Aregas (or das Regras), the main scholar who had helped the master of Avis in his ascension to the royal throne: he had been the architect behind the aforementioned appointment of the master of Avis as defender of the kingdom in 1383; and he had also delivered the harangue in the courts of Coimbra that led to the monarch's election<sup>14</sup>. Promoted to chancellor, accumulating fortune and honours, João das Regras donated precious assets to the Collegiate Church of which he was prior<sup>15</sup> (Fig. 2); and ordered that he be buried in the suburbs of the city of Lisbon, in the convent of São Domingos de Benfica<sup>16</sup>. Therefore, united in life by a devotion to the Virgin to whom they attributed their extraordinary ascents, the King and his chancellor also shared a special connection with two ecclesiastical institutions: the Collegiate Church of Guimarães and the order of São Domingos.

Significantly, the communion of devotion led King João I to share heraldry with his brothers of arms or cause. This occurred, as seen previously, with the Constable Nuno Álvares Pereira: in the decisive battle, both wore a green surcoat embroidered with rose branches. This was also the case of the Archbishop of Braga, Lourenço Vicente, another front-line fighter at Aljubarrota, who belonged to the highest ecclesiastical hierarchy in the kingdom and was a central figure in the royal election (having delivered the opening speech at the courts of Coimbra). He added a chief to his family's coat of arms laden with three roses,

<sup>10</sup> Armindo de Sousa, *A morte de D. João I, um tema de propaganda dinástica* (Porto: Fio da Palavra, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> On the importance of this religious institution throughout the 14th century, see Maria de Lurdes Rosa, "As andanças dos demónios – uma leitura dos casos de possessão do Livro de Milagres de Nossa Senhora da Oliveira (1342-1343)", in *Santos e demónios no Portugal medieval* (Porto: Fio da Palavra, 2010), 107-158.

<sup>12</sup> Maria José de Mendonça, Maria José Taxinha, and Maria Emília Amaral Teixeira, *O loudel do rei D. João I* (Lisboa: Ministério da Cultura e Coordenação Científica, 1981).

<sup>13</sup> Luís Ferros, "A decoração heráldica do tecto da igreja da Colegiada de Nossa Senhora da Oliveira", in *Actas do Congresso Histórico de Guimarães e Sua Colegiada. 850.º Aniversário da Batalha de S. Mamede, 1128-1978* (Guimarães: s.n., 1981), IV: 383-401.

<sup>14</sup> For this magistrate's timeline, see Luiz Gonzaga de Lancastre e Távora, Marquês de Abrantes, *Apontamentos sobre um Senhor de Cascais. Mestre João Afonso, chanceler do rei D. João I* (Cascais: Arquivo de Cascais, 1980), 90-120. On the election of the monarch and his institutes and symbols, see Rebelo, *A concepção do poder em Fernão Lopes*, 39-56.

<sup>15</sup> *Museu de Alberto Sampaio – Roteiro* (Lisboa: Instituto Português de Museus, 2005), 34.

<sup>16</sup> Gabriel Pereira, *Pelos subúrbios e visinhanças de Lisboa* (Lisboa: A. M. Teixeira & Cia., 1910), 9-15; Álvaro Proença, *Benfica através dos tempos* (Lisboa: Ulmeiro, 2004), 124-127.



undoubtedly also an expression of shared Marian devotion<sup>17</sup> (Fig. 3). As for Doctor João das Regras, he took a coat of arms alternating voided crosses and dragons, saltirewise (Fig. 4). The cross established a connection with the heraldry of the order of Avis and, thereby, with the modality of the royal arms adopted by João I, which was thus cadenced from that of his predecessors on the throne; but also allowed a visual connection with the coat of arms of the Pereira family, namely the same voided cross, which during the fourteenth century became associated with legends of divine protection during the battles in which, since time immemorial, several members of the lineage had participated victoriously<sup>18</sup>. The dragon, in turn, formed a direct link between the chancellor's heraldry and the crest with which João I completed the Portuguese royal arms, probably as an Arthurian dimension, other interpretations notwithstanding<sup>19</sup>.



Figure 2. Processional cross donated by Doctor João das Regras to the collegiate of Nossa Senhora da Oliveira, Guimarães, of which he was prior. Source: Museu Alberto Sampaio, Guimarães, MAS O53.



Figure 3. Stone vault of the funerary chapel with the arms of Archbishop Lourenço Vicente in Braga's cathedral. Source: photo by João Portugal.

Therefore, the emblems chosen by João I and his comrades in arms and cause were connected, having in common the expression of shared religious devotions and identical ideals of chivalry<sup>20</sup>. Importantly, the chosen signs sought to highlight their personal relationship with the divine and that, therefore, they occupied a special place in the sacred spaces erected by these important political actors. These spaces could be related to a particular devotion, such as the Collegiate Church of Nossa Senhora da Oliveira in Guimarães or the chapel of Nossa Senhora da Escada in Lisbon; but this relationship gained an even stronger projection when applied to the burial spaces of the bearers of these emblems. The most notable cases are those of Nuno Álvares Pereira in the Church of Carmo (Fig. 5), João das Regras in the Church of São Domingos de Benfica, both in Lisbon, and of Lourenço Vicente in the chapel of Nossa Senhora da Anunciação (named dos Reis, in the sixteenth century, after the transfer of the sepulchres of Count Henrique and Queen Teresa) in the Cathedral of Braga<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> Miguel Metelo de Seixas and João António Portugal, "L'archevêque Lourenço Vicente et les partages héraldiques au Portugal à la fin du XIVe siècle", *Emblemata – Revista Aragonesa de Emblemática* 27-28 (2022): 137-150.

<sup>18</sup> Miguel Metelo de Seixas and João Bernardo Galvão-Telles, "O condestável D. Nun'Álvares", 205-217.

<sup>19</sup> Miguel Metelo de Seixas, "Stars, Knots, Dragons and Royal Weddings: Badges of the Houses of Braganza and Savoy in a Nineteenth-Century Portuguese Royal Palace", *Visual Resources* 34, no. 3-4 (2018): 1-23. On the insignia of the dragon, also see Francisco de Simas Alves de Azevedo, "A cimeira do Rei de Portugal", in *Estudios Genealógicos, Heráldicos y Nobiliarios en Honor de Vicente de Cadenas y Vicent* (Madrid: Hidalguía, 1978), I: 315-328; Francisco de Simas Alves de Azevedo, "Ainda o dragão do rei de Portugal", *Tabardo* 3 (2006): 55-56; and João Paulo de Abreu e Lima, *Armas de Portugal. Origem. Evolução. Significado* (Lisboa: Inapa, 1998), 102-106.

<sup>20</sup> For a general overview of the phenomenon of shared heraldry, see Laurent Hablot, *Affinités héraldiques. Concessions, augmentations et partages d'armoiries en Europe au Moyen Âge* (Paris: DEA / École Pratique des Hautes Études, 2015).

<sup>21</sup> Ambrósio de Pina, "Os bens da capela de D. Lourenço Vicente, arcebispo de Braga e combatente de Aljubarrota", *Bracara Augusta* XVIII-XIX, no. 41-42 (1965): 122-138.





Figure 4. Tomb of Doctor João das Regras in the choir of the church of São Domingos de Benfica, Lisbon, with his coat of arms. Source: photo by João Portugal.



Figure 5. Tomb of Constable Nuno Álvares Pereira in the Convento f Nossa Senhora do Livramento do Carmo, Lisbon. Source: Friar Manuel de Sá, *Notícias do Real Convento do Carmo, de Lisboa Occidental* [...], 1721, fls. 8-9, Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, IL. 238 CFC4.

### 3. Heraldry, devotion, and sacred space in the Convent of Santa Maria da Vitória, Batalha

However, the King provided the utmost example of the privileged relationship between heraldry, devotion, and sepulchral space, in the greatest architectural achievement of his reign: the monastery of Santa Maria da Vitória, by antonomasia called Monastery of Batalha. Chronicles and historiography have always linked the construction of this monument with João I's pious vow at Aljubarrota. Undoubtedly, the monarch wanted to ensure the erection of a religious edifice near the battlefield to express prayers of gratitude for the victory. Different circumstances forced both the location and the nature of this religious building to diverge from the possible original intentions: the King ended up erecting a Dominican convent in a location relatively distant from the battlefield. Only later did João I add that this same building should include a burial space for himself and the other members of his dynasty. In so doing, the founder congealed in the monastery the inseparable memory of the battle and the dynasty in the monastery, both placed under the protection of the Virgin, and under the sign of predestination. The monastery's dual vocation was related, in both cases, to the desire to raise prayers of thanks to the heavens for the victory, and of supplication for the souls of the founders and their descendants. As duly pointed out, the convent was, in its essence, a house of prayer and memory: these were the reasons for the monastery and its resident religious community<sup>22</sup>.

The monument is notable both for its unusual proportions and its unprecedented architectural and artistic features, as has been abundantly demonstrated<sup>23</sup>. This innovative character also includes iconography throughout various parts of the building,

<sup>22</sup> Pedro Redol and Saul António Gomes, *Lugares de oração no Mosteiro da Batalha* (Lisboa: Direcção-Geral do Património Cultural, 2015).

<sup>23</sup> An extensive bibliography on the Monastery of Batalha can be found in Pedro Redol and Saul António Gomes, *Mosteiro da Batalha. Centro de Interpretação* (Lisboa: Direcção-Geral do Património Cultural, 2014), 191-196.

and a multiplicity of architectural, decorative, and liturgical elements. The monastery's heraldic novelties have also been highlighted, but usually with a focus on specific aspects of these emblematic resources. For instance, highlighting how the Founder's Chapel translates a new organization of Portuguese dynastic heraldry, either by the composition of a coherent coats of arms and its exterior ornaments (namely the crowns and insignia of chivalric or military orders), or by the systematic use of badges, also in a coordinated logic<sup>24</sup>. Noted less frequently, however, is the truly original articulation, found throughout the building, between religious iconography and heraldry.

This articulation, evident to different degrees in the monument, reaches two culminating points: the main portal and the sepulchral chapel built by João I (and therefore called the Founder's Chapel). The portal's iconography was studied in detail and critically by Jean-Marie Guillouët, who indicated the relevance of the heraldry represented there. This author points out, in fact, that the presence of the coat of arms of both João I and his wife Philippa of Lancaster was intended to establish an explicit visual link with the King's vow at Aljubarrota, invoking and

thanking Our Lady for her intercession<sup>25</sup>. However, this issue should be explored further. The theme of mystical royalty appears in the portal in the characterization of Christ, represented in the tympanum in *Maestas Domini*, that is, seated on a splendid throne surmounted by an aedicule, wearing a robe, blessing with his right hand and carrying an orb in his left hand; and also in the figure of Mary, in the gable, with the scene of her coronation, also under an ostentatious aedicule (Fig. 6)<sup>26</sup>. The royal couple's heraldic stones are located above this aedicule (Fig. 7): both shields are crowned and cornered by four angelic supporters, with the King's coat of arms in the heraldic dexter, the most honourable position<sup>27</sup>. The pinnacle that extends the gable and separates the two coats of arms culminates in a fleur-de-lis, a Marian attribute par excellence. There is an evident symbolic interpretation to this sequence: Christ is the supreme king; by his will, Mary was crowned queen; through her direct intercession, the master of Avis rose to regal status, thus sharing the spiritual majesty stemming from God. The royal couple, therefore, owes their condition to the Virgin's intervention, as reminded by the fleur-de-lis between the shields.



Figure 6. Main portal of the Church of Santa Maria da Vitória, Batalha: coronation of the Virgin. Source: photo by the author.

<sup>24</sup> Miguel Metelo de Seixas, "Motivos jacobéus na emblemática quatrocentista da Casa de Avis", *Ad Limina* XI (2020): 153-182.

<sup>25</sup> This author also points out that Batalha's portal was directly inspired by the Cathedral of Burgos, the necropolis of the Castilian-Leonese royal family, thus further stressing the victory achieved over the neighboring enemy. Jean-Marie Guillouët, *Le portail de Santa Maria da Vitória Batalha et l'art européen de son temps* (Leiria : Textiverso, 2011), 105.

<sup>26</sup> Guillouët, *Le portail de Santa Maria da Vitória Batalha*, 97-109.

<sup>27</sup> On the question of heraldic laterality, see Laurent Hablot, "Aux origines de la dextre héraldique : écu armorié et latéralisation au Moyen Âge", *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale* 56, no. 223 (2013): 281-294.





Figure 7. Main portal of the Church of Santa Maria da Vitória, Batalha: aedicule topped by fleur-de-lis, flanked by the coats of arms of João I and his wife Philippa of Lancaster. Source: photo by the author.

The angelic supporters are equally significant: as heavenly messengers, their appearance near the royal shield recalls that, according to the established heraldic legend, Christ had donated the shield to the kingdom's founder, Afonso Henriques. In this way, the angels restate the connection between the royal arms and the myth of Ourique, thereby reinforcing the sacralization of the royal heraldry, and contributing to understand that office as a delegation of Christ's power<sup>28</sup>. Similarly, the angels depicted in Batalha establish a parallel between the kingdom's founder and its refounder: like Afonso Henriques, João I ascended to the throne following a victory achieved through divine intervention. The parallel between Ourique and Aljubarrota also corresponds, in the reign of João I, to an increase of mythographic explanations about the origin and meaning of the Portuguese royal arms, as can be seen in the first heraldic text known for Portugal, the codex *De Ministerium Armorum*<sup>29</sup> (*Book of Heraldry*).

The articulation between iconography and heraldry in the main portal thus provides the key to the monument's meaning and *raison d'être*, while constituting an explicit visual explanation about the origin, nature, and purpose of the royal office. After such intense expression, a visitor is surprised, when entering the church, by the barren character of the naves, enhanced by the space's unusual verticality and amplitude. This relative "emptiness" magnifies the entrance in the building's second most emblem-rich space: the funerary chapel erected by João I. This chapel is unprecedented in Portugal, for its relationship with the church, with which it communicates but does not integrate; for the refinement of its architectural and artistic choices; and for its nature as a dynastic necropolis articulated according to a pre-defined and precise plan. The chapel fully expresses the model of a king, a royal couple and a royal family who want to present themselves as moral and behavioural examples for the rest of society, as already pointed out (Fig. 8)<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> Miguel Metelo de Seixas, *Quinas e castelos, sinais de Portugal* (Lisboa: Fundação Francisco Manuel dos Santos, 2019), 16-18 and 38-39. On the generalized use of legends to explain the heraldry of Western kings, see Laurent Hablot, "Sacralization of the Royal Coats of Arms in Europe in the Middle Ages", in *Political Theology in Medieval and Early Modern Europe. Discourses, Rites and Representations*, ed. Monserrat Herrero, Jaume Aurell, and Angela Micelli Stout (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), 313-336.

<sup>29</sup> *Livro de Arautos. De Ministerio Armorum, Script. Anno Mccccxvi ms. lat. 28, J. Rylands Library*, trans. and ed. Aires Augusto Nascimento (Lisboa: Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa, 1977), 256-258. On the codex, see Werner Paravicini, "Signes et couleurs au Concile de Constance : le témoignage d'un héraut d'armes portugais", in *Signes et couleurs des identités politiques. Du Moyen Age à nos jours*, ed. Denise Turrel, Martin Aurell, Christine Manigand, Jérôme Grévy, Laurent Hablot, and Catalina Girbea (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2008), 155-188; and Maria Alice Pereira dos Santos, *O Olhar Ibérico sobre a Europa Quatrocentista no Livro de Arautos* (Lagos: Câmara Municipal de Lagos, 2008).

<sup>30</sup> Begoña Farré Torras, "Four Princes, One Monument, One Perfect King. The Fifteenth-Century Pantheon of an Idealized Royal Family in the Monastery of Santa Maria da Vitória, Batalha, Portugal", *Portuguese Studies Review* 22, no. 1 (2014): 77-96. This author defends that King Duarte played a crucial role in this symbolic construction. On this sovereign's unquestionable dedication to the memory of his father, see Luís Miguel Duarte, *D. Duarte. Requiem por um rei triste* (Rio de Mouro: Círculo de Leitores, 2005), 292-302; and on his intervention regarding matters of heraldry, see Miguel Metelo de Seixas and João Bernardo Galvão-Telles, "Elementos de uma cultura visual e dinástica: os sinais heráldicos e emblemáticos do rei D. Duarte", in *D. Duarte e a sua época: arte, cultura, poder e espiritualidade*, coord. Catarina Fernandes Barreira and Miguel Metelo de Seixas (Lisboa: IEM / CLEGH, 2014), 257-284.

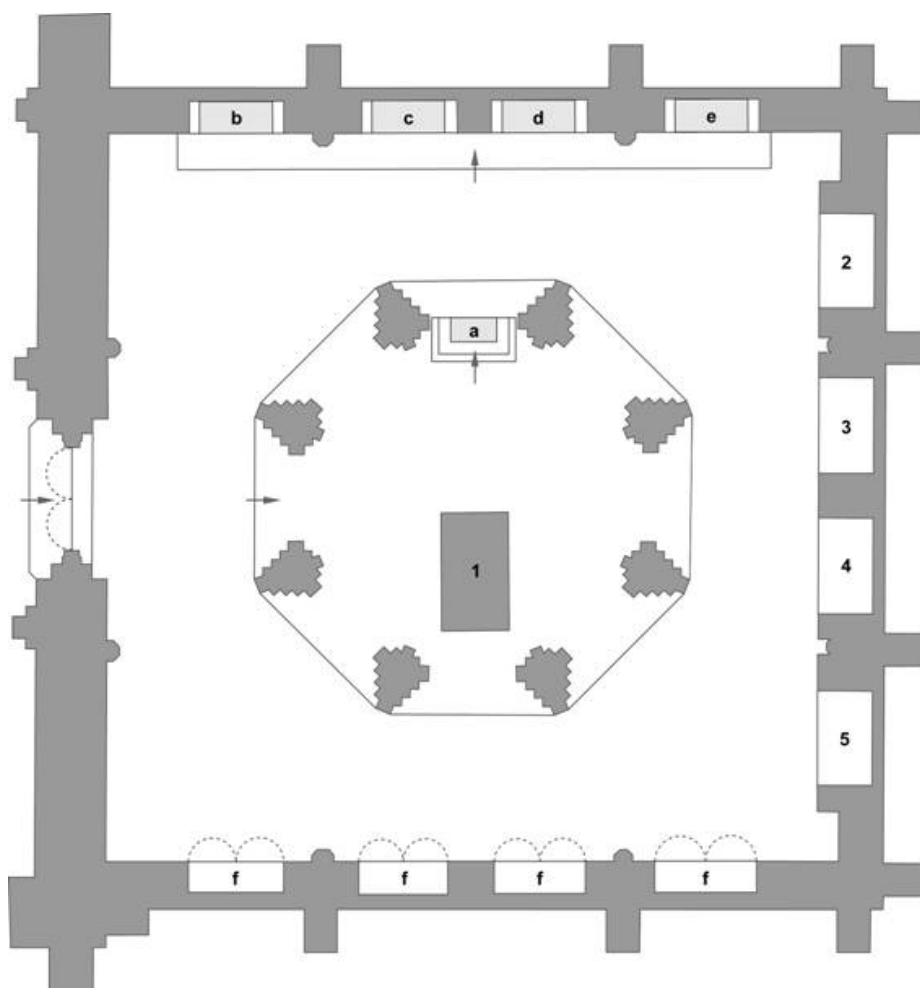


Figure 8. Plan of the Founder's chapel in the Batalha Monastery: 1. Joint tomb of King João I and Queen Philippa of Lancaster; 2. Tomb of Infante Fernando, Master of the Order of Avis; 3. Tomb of Infante João, Master of the Order of Santiago and Constable of the Kingdom, and his wife Isabel de Barcelos; 4. Tomb of Infante Henrique, Master of the Order of Christ, and Duke of Viseu; 5. Tomb of Infante Pedro, Regent of the realm, and Duke of Coimbra, and his wife Isabel de Urgel; a. Former altar associated with João I and Queen Philippa's tomb; b, c, d and e. Former altars associated with the infantes' tombs; f. Former liturgical cabinets to support the altars. Source: Pedro Redol and Saul António Gomes, *Lugares de oração no Mosteiro da Batalha* (Lisboa: Direcção-Geral do Património Cultural, 2015), with the kind authorization of the authors, to whom the author is grateful.

In fact, the Founder's Chapel, with a square floor plan over which rises a large octagonal skylight, excels by the centrality given to the joint tomb of João I and Philippa of Lancaster, placed precisely in the middle of the space, surrounded by eight pilasters, and facing the private altar between the eastern section of these pillars. The couple, represented by two lying bodies wearing regal attributes and holding hands, are thus facing the altar, ready to receive the suffrage for their souls and, in the end times, rise before the final Judgment (Fig. 9)<sup>31</sup>.

In this central composition of the chapel, heraldry plays a primary role. The skylight's capstone, of beautiful artisanship, presents the royal arms with a shield surmounted by a helmet, mantelet, and crown, supported by two angels, and is encircled by rose tracery (Fig. 10). The choice of this heraldic figuration is not gratuitous: the presence of the helmet and insignia suggests the condition of knight prince, with which the King presents himself before eternity, according to the manner and aesthetic widespread throughout the West at the time<sup>32</sup>. This image is reinforced

by the presence of the dragon crest, suggesting a comparison between the Portuguese sovereign and the mythical King Arthur. In the same sense, one can interpret the *raison d'être* of the oldest –and for many years only– monumental heraldic decoration known in Portugal: the ceiling of the Collegiate Church of Guimarães. This work coincided, as we saw, with the donations of João I and João das Reglas following Aljubarrota, and is perhaps another Arthurian evocation, depicting the King with the retinue of his knights of the Round Table.

This parallel also strengthened the image of João I as a lieutenant of Christ and as a perfect knight, a new incarnation of King Arthur capable of defending the kingdom against invading and schismatic forces, and then to project the Christian faith and the kingdom beyond its borders, with the conquest of Ceuta in 1415. The theme of predestination, which arose with the war of 1383-1385 and was magnified with the victory of Aljubarrota, continued with the overseas expansion initiated with the capture of Ceuta in 1415, a transposition to North Africa of the ideals of

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Saul António Gomes, "Percursos em torno do panteão batalhino", in *Vésperas Batalhinas* (Leiria: Magno Edições, 2000), 15-66.

<sup>32</sup> Laurent Hablot, *Manuel d'héraldique et emblématique médiévale* (Tours : Presses Universitaires François Rabelais, 2019), 178-208.



reconquest and crusade. Not by chance, when this city's main mosque was converted into the first cathedral of the overseas territories, it was named Our

Lady of Africa, thus perpetuating the Portuguese tradition of dedicating all the kingdom's cathedrals, without exception, to Our Lady.



Figure 9. Recumbent figures from the joint tomb of João I and Philippa of Lancaster in the Founder's Chapel, church of Santa Maria da Vitória, Batalha. Source: photo by the author.



Figure 10. Vaulted ceiling of the Founder's Chapel, church of Santa Maria da Vitória, Batalha, with the coat of arms of João I as king and knight. Source: photo by the author.

In the tomb, heraldry is represented on the resting João I, who bears a tabard with the royal arms. This is the oldest representation of a Portuguese monarch with this type of dress. Having departed from the traditional model followed by the Portuguese monarchs of the First Dynasty and given the previous discussion

on the importance of Aljubarota to the King's image and memory, one might expect he would choose to be represented with the famous rose-embroidered surcoat he had worn in that battle. Why, then, did he choose the tabard of arms? A possible explanation refers to the coeval doctrine of the king's two bodies,



Figure 11. The hawthorn badge of João I and Philippa of Lancaster (here with the Queen's motto, "Il me plet") in their tomb in the chapel of the Founder, church of Santa Maria da Vitória, Batalha. Source: photo by the author.

one terrestrial and the other mystical, as was clearly formulated by infante Pedro when he addressed King Duarte, his brother: "eu esguardo em vos dobrez pessoa A primeira he uos singularmente a 2.<sup>a</sup> he o senhor Rey. e vos com toda a comunidade de uosa terra" [I see in you two people, the first is you yourself, the second is the lord king and with you all the community of your land]<sup>33</sup>. The continuity of the royal arms allowed the representation of the King's mystical body, who never died, as made evident in the funeral ritual of the breaking of the shields<sup>34</sup>. The choice of the tabard of arms for the lying João I is, in this sense, pertinent as a way of representing the monarch's earthly body covered by his mystical body<sup>35</sup>. Both would merge in the Resurrection, hopefully, into one glorious body. For this, it was necessary to invoke divine and human intercessions.

For precisely this aim, the tomb is covered with other signs: branches of hawthorn, accompanied by the double motto "Il me plet" and "Pour bien" (Fig. 11). These are the badges of the royal couple<sup>36</sup>. The badges arose in Portugal precisely with João I and his descendants, as complementary heraldry, freed from the rigid constraints of heraldic emblems. They expressed individual feats and, more than the coat of arms, established an intimate relation between the prince's

emblems and the culture pervading in his court, particularly chivalric, moralizing, and specular literature. They also established a connection between princely heraldry and a program of affirmation of dynastic identity and royal propaganda, in the context of a developing court culture<sup>37</sup>. Thus, we find the joint representation of the coat of arms and badges, and of the coat of arms with some element of the badge. We begin to see the conjugation of three semiotic levels in the coat of arms: the shield, as an identifying and symbolic element; the exterior elements, as representation of social dignity; and the badge, as personalization and connection with the moral universe and dynastic image. The badge personalizes the heraldic message, while introducing it into the universe of profuse symbolic associations so characteristic of the culture in the late-medieval court.

The choice of the hawthorn, in the case of João I, is interesting given the intersection of its two main symbolic connotations. First, as a Marian attribute, as all plants in the rose family. In this sense, the rose branches decorating the surcoat used at Aljubarrota could have been, more specifically, from hawthorn. What is certain is that in the King's personal banner, depicted in the *De Ministerium Armorum*, the small flower is closer to a hawthorn flower than a rose. But

<sup>33</sup> "Carta que o Jfante dom Pedro emujou a el rey de Brujas", in *Livro dos Conselhos de El-Rei D. Duarte*, introd. António Henrique de Oliveira Marques and João José Alves Dias (Lisboa: Editorial Estampa, 1982), 27.

<sup>34</sup> Seixas, *Quinas e castelos*, 9-35. On this funeral ritual, see Francesca Español, "El 'córner les armes', Un aparte caballeresco en las exequias medievales hispanas", *Anuario de Estudios Medievales* 37, no. 2 (2007): 867-905.

<sup>35</sup> A role that coats of arms frequently assumed in a funereal context. Cf. Laurent Hablot, "L'héraldisation du sacré aux XIIe-XIIIe siècles. Une mise en scène de la religiosité chevaleresque?", in *Actes du colloque Chevalerie et christianisme aux XIIe et XIIIe siècles*, dir. Martin Aurell (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2011), 211-233. For the Portuguese case, see Miguel Metelo de Seixas and João António Portugal, "A heráldica dos Sousas no mosteiro de Santa Maria da Vitória da Batalha", in *A Capela dos Sousas no Mosteiro da Batalha*, ed. Pedro Redol and Saul António Gomes (Batalha: Município da Batalha, 2012), 27-63.

<sup>36</sup> Isabel Paço d'Arcos, "O pilriteiro, empresa de D. João I", *Tabardo* 3 (2006): 57-66; and Miguel Metelo de Seixas, "Emblématique, dévotion, espace sacré : l'exemple de Jean Ier au monastère de Batalha", in *Images and Liturgy in The Middle Ages Creation, Circulation, and Function of Images between West and East in the Middle Ages (5th-15th centuries)*, ed. Carla Varela Fernandes and Manuel Antonio Castiñeiras González (Lisboa, Documenta, 2021), 521-550.

<sup>37</sup> Laurent Hablot, "Le double du prince. Emblèmes et devises à la cour : un outil politique", in *La cour du prince. Cour de France, cours d'Europe, XIIe-XVe siècle*, dir. Murielle Gaude-Ferragu, Bruno Laurioux, and Jacques Paviot (Paris : Honoré Champion, 2011), 281-299.





Figure 12. Crown of the lying statue of João I, alternating roses, and flowers of hawthorn. Source: photo by the author.

beyond this Marian symbolism, the hawthorn added another no less relevant aspect: a Christic connotation. One of the most significant relics for Western royalty was the crown of thorns, which Louis IX of France had acquired from the Latin Emperor of the East, Baldwin of Flanders, and installed in the Palatine Chapel of Paris, the Sainte-Chapelle, erected for this purpose. As Chiara Mercuri demonstrated, this relic was transformed by Saint Louis into an instrument of affirmation of the French monarchy's religious charisma, the basis of a political theology that gradually strengthened throughout the Middle Ages<sup>38</sup>. The crown of thorns, tangible proof of Christ's mystical royalty, was presented as God's pledge to the King of France in sign of his leadership of the Christian flock; on the day of judgment, Christ would come to recover that supreme insignia of his majesty from the French monarchs.

This model of mystical royalty surrounding Saint Louis inspired the imagination of medieval royalty, promoting the symbolic approximation between Christ's crown of thorns and the royal crowns. While there was disagreement among authors as to the botanical species that was braided to produce the crown of thorns, it was however generally accepted that it had a base of sea rush over which were wrapped stems of thorny plants sufficiently flexible for this purpose, namely the thorny burnet, the hawthorn, or the jujube, which presented flowers of similar format and colour<sup>39</sup>. This connection between the hawthorn and the main royal insignia is confirmed

in the lying João I, decorated with alternating roses and hawthorn flowers, in an expressive allusion to the double mystical royalty of Christ and Mary (Fig. 12).

Thus, the hawthorn depicted in João I's tomb was related to the triple royalty present in the heraldry and iconography of the Monastery of Batalha's portal: an image of human royalty, based on the mystical royalty of Christ, through the intercession of the Queen of Heaven. Hence, the side of the tomb facing the altar –that is, towards prayers and salvation– is filled with profuse branches of flowering hawthorn. The heraldry of the royal couple reinforces this interpretation: along with the Portuguese royal arms, Philippa of Lancaster's coat of arms presents the quartered royal arms of France and England, cadenced with an ermine label she inherited from her father, John of Guant. The French royal arms, at the time, contained the celebrated fleurs-de-lis on a field azure, which since St. Louis has been recurrently interpreted as a Marian emblem, complementing the Christic dimension represented by the Sainte-Chapelle relics<sup>40</sup>. In addition, the fleur-de-lis was also a sign of sovereignty for most Western kings. The biblical origin attributed to it was part of the conceptual basis for theorising royal power. This feature was even more valued in the context of the arrival on the throne of a new dynasty, even more founded by a royal illegitimate son<sup>41</sup>.

This double invocation of Christ and Mary as the foundation of royalty was also reflected in the ornamentation of the tomb's private altar, which depicted

<sup>38</sup> Chiara Mercuri, *Saint Louis et la couronne d'épines. Histoire d'une relique à la Sainte-Chapelle* (Paris: Riveneuve Editions, 2011).

<sup>39</sup> Robert Lesage, *Septième centenaire de la réception de la Sainte Couronne d'épines en France, 1239-1939* (Paris: Bloud & Gay, 1939). King Louis IX and his successors generously distributed, among other sovereigns and French vassals, several spines removed from the relic preserved in the Sainte-Chapelle, to the point that, in the 19th century, the crown was reduced to its base of sea rush branches, without any spines. Cf. Pierre Dor, *Les épines de la Sainte Couronne du Christ en France* (Paris: François-Xavier de Guibert, 2013).

<sup>40</sup> Chiara Mercuri, "Stat Inter Spinis Lilium: France's Fleur-de-Lys and the Crown of Thorns", *Le Moyen Age CX*, no. 3 (2004): 497-512.

<sup>41</sup> Hervé Pinoteau, *La symbolique royale française, Ve-XVIII siècles* (La Roche-Rigault: PSR Editions, 2003), 429-450; Michel Pas-toureaux, "Le roi des lis", in *Corpus de sceaux français du Moyen Age, tome II: les sceaux des rois et de régence*, ed. Martine Dalas-Garrigues (Paris: Archives Nationales, 1991), 35-48; and Guillaume de Digulleville, *Le Dit de la Fleur de Lis*, ed. Frédéric Duval (Paris: École des chartes, 2014).

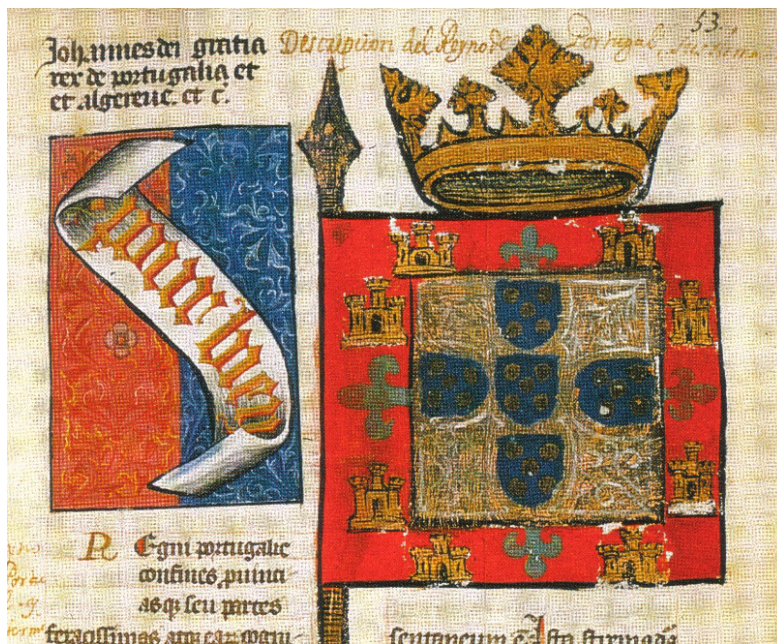


Figure 13. Flag with the royal arms and standard with the badge of João I. Source: *De Ministerio Armorum* (c. 1416), John Rylands Library / University of Manchester, Ms. 28, fl. 53.

the Passion of Christ and the Assumption of Our Lady, together with the Apostolate, perfectly echoing the portal (where the Marian fleur-de-lis also appeared between the royal couple's shields). The merging of heraldry and devotional purpose also found expression in the chapel's polychrome, today barely perceptible, but which was revealed by a recent project<sup>42</sup>. The walls were almost entirely a red/blue bichrome, combined with gold coating applied to the decorative architectural elements<sup>43</sup>. These colours relate to those João I had adopted for his badge, as seen in the aforementioned banner represented in the codex *De Ministerio Armorum*, party per pale azure and gules, with a silver listel bearing the motto "Pour bien" in gold letters, surmounted with a little hawthorn flower (Fig. 13). These were of course the colours of the Virgin: the tunic's red and the mantle's blue. By a happy coincidence, they were also the colours of the English Royal House: the field azure of the French royal arms and the gules of the English royal arms allowed, once again, to play with polysemy<sup>44</sup>. These colours surely indicated the King's devotion and, in the context of his funeral chapel, also

underlined the past and future intercession: that which had guaranteed the victory at Aljubarrota, the ascent to the throne and the success of the North African enterprise; and that prayed for in the end times.

One should bear in mind that, in addition to all the aforementioned elements, the funerary space of the Founder's Chapel must have included many other elements that are now missing or altered, namely stained-glass windows<sup>45</sup>, wall paintings<sup>46</sup>; gothic imagery<sup>47</sup>; tapestries and ornamental drapery<sup>48</sup>; liturgical implements and vestments<sup>49</sup>, flags<sup>50</sup>, and the King's own funerary armament, which both Domingos António de Sequeira and James Murphy observed and drew<sup>51</sup>. In addition, naturally, there were the relics, without which a devotion in that period would not be complete. These were particularly significant as they included, per João I's donation, "a small fragment of the sponge dipped in vinegar used to soften Christ's pain on the cross, as well as a second reliquary of gold and crystal, with a piece of the Crucified's garments, [...] given to the Portuguese monarch by the

<sup>42</sup> António Candeias, Sara Valadas, and Joana Ramôa Melo, "Desvendando as cores medievais. Um estudo de caso: a Capela do Fundador em Santa Maria da Vitória, na Batalha", in *Almas de Pedra. Escultura tumular: da criação à musealização*, ed. Giulia Rossi Vairo, Joana Ramôa, and Maria João Vilhena de Carvalho (Lisboa: IEM, 2019), 319-334.

<sup>43</sup> Pedro Miguel Miranda Rodrigues, *O poder da cor na Idade Média: policromia na Capela do Fundador do Mosteiro da Batalha* (Master's thesis, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 2018). Note that the use of the heraldic colours to decorate sacred spaces, sepulchral or otherwise, was common among the princely families of the period. See for example, in the Portuguese case, their use in the prayer space of infante Fernando, son of João I: João Luís Inglês Fontes, *Percursos e Memória: do Infante D. Fernando ao Infante Santo* (Cascais: Patrimonia, 2000), 55-56.

<sup>44</sup> Since João I, this bichrome played a central role in both the chromatic definition of the impresa of members of the Avis dynasty and in the livery of the Portuguese royal house (here joined by applications of gold). Seixas, *Quinas e castelos*, 45 and 70-71.

<sup>45</sup> Pedro Redol, *O Mosteiro da Batalha e o vitral em Portugal nos séculos XV e XVI* (Batalha: Câmara Municipal da Batalha, 2003).

<sup>46</sup> In addition to the aforementioned red/blue/gold decoration, there are still remains of the wall painting in the private altar of infante Pedro, the painting above infante João's arcosolium and inside infante Henrique's arcosolium, along with diverse polychromatic traces throughout the tombs. Rodrigues, *O poder da cor na Idade Média*.

<sup>47</sup> Namely, the Apostolate that João I offered for his tomb's front altar. Redol and Gomes, *Lugares de oração no Mosteiro da Batalha*, 80.

<sup>48</sup> The number of liturgical or decorative fabrics was substantial. Cf. Redol and Gomes, *Lugares de oração no Mosteiro da Batalha*, 68.

<sup>49</sup> Redol and Gomes, *Lugares de oração no Mosteiro da Batalha*, 82.

<sup>50</sup> Like those used in João I's obsequies. Cf. Coelho, *D. João I, o que re-colheu Boa Memória*, 276-293.

<sup>51</sup> Redol and Gomes, *Lugares de oração no Mosteiro da Batalha*, 80-81.





Figure 14. Founder's Chapel, general view. Source: photo by the author.

Byzantine Emperor Emanuel Palaeologus, during his mission to Paris in the year 1401<sup>52</sup>.

In addition to this central space reserved for the founding couple, the chapel's other three sides (thus, excluding the entrance) are occupied by the tombs (south side), altars (east) and liturgical cabinets (west) of the infantes: Fernando, João (and his wife Isabel), Henrique and Pedro (and his wife Isabel), always following the same order. This arrangement reveals a plan that combines scenographic impact with symbolic depth, as well as an unprecedented aesthetic dimension (Fig. 14). The first notable effect is a visual transposition of the concept of dynastic union, reinforced by the application of a common model to the four tombs (although both Henrique and João managed to introduce their distinctive mark)<sup>53</sup>. In these tombs, the absence of lying bodies (except for Henrique) is compensated by an abundant heraldic decoration, also applied according to a common orientation. From a strictly heraldic perspective, the tombs of the infantes display the royal arms duly distinguished by a coherent system, combined with the arms of their consorts, as well as the insignia of military orders and, eventually, a palatine charge. Thus, the tomb of infante Fernando presents two shields, one with his arms, the other with the cross of the order of Avis; that of infante João exhibits three shields, one with his arms, another with those of his wife Isabel "de Barcelos" and the third with a sword (possibly a double allusion to the order of Santiago and the office of constable of the kingdom); that of infante Henrique bears three shields, one with his arms, another with the cross of the Order of the Garter (surrounded by the respective insignia) and the

third with the cross of the order of Christ; and, finally, that of infante Pedro exhibits three shields, one with his arms, another with the cross of the Order of the Garter (also surrounded by the respective insignia) and the third with the heraldry of his wife Isabel de Urge<sup>54</sup>.

But the sepulchres of the infantes do not exhibit only coats of arms: these are complemented, in all cases, by the entombed's badge, displayed between the shields and in the friezes above. The tomb of infante Fernando exhibits three wreaths with braided roses, with the motto "Le bien me plet"; that of infante João, pilgrim bags with three scallop shells, complemented by wild rose branches, with the motto "Jeai bien reson"; that of infante Henrique, branches of kermes oak and the motto "talant de bien fere"; and that of infante Pedro, a scale (flanking the shields of both spouses), accompanied by oak branches, with the motto "Desir". Without going into the detailed analysis of such a rich set of emblems, it should be noted that these badges also follow an integrated program, both symbolically and formally. They form a set of rare coherence within the heraldic framework of the coeval royal dynasties. And, once again, there is a correspondence in the dedications of each infante's private altar: Fernando's altar is dedicated to Our Lady of the Assumption, who is linked to the vow that led to the Monastery's construction and to the manipulated date of João I's death; João's altar is dedicated to São João Baptista, in a double onomastic reverberation to father and son; Henrique's altar is dedicated to his own martyred brother Fernando, whose relics he promoted as objects of worship, consolidating the sacrificial logic that the entire building is a shrine; and Pedro's altar is dedicated to St. Michael,

<sup>52</sup> Redol and Gomes, *Lugares de oração no Mosteiro da Batalha*, 67.

<sup>53</sup> Begoña Farré Torras, *Brotherly Love and Obedience: The Commemorative Programme of the Avis Princes at Santa Maria da Vitória, Batalha* (Master's thesis, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 2014).

<sup>54</sup> On the significance of the presence of insignias of Portuguese military orders and the Order of the Garter, as well as the Constable's insignia, see Seixas, "Motivos jacobus na emblemática", 153-182.

the punisher and commander of the heavenly hosts, thus uniting scale and sword, and indicating the desire for justice as the main motive behind the actions of the princes and the monarchy's pillar (and note that the wall near infant Pedro's altar was painted with his badge, which thus directly gained further meaning from the archangel's image). The representation of the badges in the tombs and altars of the infantes was completed by their presence in the stained-glass windows and in the cabinets that stored their respective liturgical implements, also identified by each infante's heraldry. This liturgical and emblematic harmony visually translates the concept of a dynasty united by blood (parental and sacrificial), but also by shared devotions and ideals, chosen by God and standing as a moral model.

#### 4. Conclusions

Thus, in both the Founder's Chapel and in the axial portal of the Church of Santa Maria da Vitória, there is an intrinsic relationship between heraldry, sacred space, and devotion, working together to construct an image of the founding King and his dynasty. One might even state that, in Portugal, the plastic expression of heraldry had never before reached such a degree of interpenetration in the sacred space, as what occurs in the royal sepulchral space of Batalha. To such an extent that this space is practically devoid of religious iconography (although, surely most of these elements –among which some relevant objects, such as the painting donated by the Dukes Philippe and Isabelle of Burgundy– were lost with the destruction and restoration of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries): religious icons were only necessary in the central areas, such as the altars; otherwise, the emblematic iconography fulfilled the functions usually exercised through the representation of celestial figures and their attributes.

The semantic weight of dynastic emblems was activated by liturgical rituals, which gave concrete value to the emblems of the mystical royalty of João I and his house. A chain of virtuous beneficence, to use the expression from infant Pedro's work, which linked Christ to the Virgin and the latter to the King, declining various steps... Therefore, to read the sacred spaces of the Monastery of Batalha one must combine iconographic and emblematic readings: because they were conceived in this way, and only a subsequent artificial methodological separation could conceive of a disjointed reading.

Similarly, such connivances between heraldry, devotion and propagandistic purposes allow us to understand the sharing of iconographic features between the king and his faithful. In this regard, it is interesting to note how such sharing is practised with individuals as disparate as the archbishop primate of the kingdom, its chancellor and chief jurist, and its constable, commander-in-chief of the royal host. The uniting feature between these characters is the fundamental role they all played in defending the independence cause and the kingship of João I. The cause thus came to be represented by the common visual signs of the main protagonists, responsible, in the eyes of the political community, for its success.

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