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**What's in a signature? Assessing the use of the royal
signature by the Queens of Portugal
in the late Middle Ages**

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Special Issue

Las mujeres de las monarquías europeas I. Espacios institucionales, prácticas de poder e identidades (ss. X-XVI)

Women of European monarchies I. Institutional spaces, power practices and identities (10th-16th centuries)

Ángela Muñoz Fernández - Diana Pelaz (Coords.)

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What's in a signature?
Assessing the use of the royal signature
by the Queens of Portugal in the late Middle Ages*

Inês Olaia
(Universidade de Lisboa)

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Abstract

A signature is a personal sign left by the emissary of a document. In the Middle Ages a royal signature was a powerful representation of the monarch. The Queens of Portugal are no exception to both ideas. Through the centuries, the typical queenly signature became part of the queenship apparatus. However, these royal women had the choice to manipulate the signature to some extent to represent themselves and their circumstances. This paper reflects on the meanings of the establishment of a queenly signature and the insights the shifts upon that signature can give us.

Keywords

Royal Signature; Royal Signature; Late Medieval Portugal; Self-representation.

Resumen

Uma assinatura é uma marca pessoal deixada num documento pelo emissário. Na Idade Média a assinatura régia foi uma representação poderosa do monarca. As rainhas de Portugal não são exceção a ambas as ideias. Através dos séculos, a assinatura típica da rainha tornou-se parte integrante da função de consorte. Contudo, estas senhoras tiveram a possibilidade de modificar a assinatura até certo grau, para se representarem e responderem às circunstâncias. Este artigo reflete sobre o significado da criação da assinatura reginal e o que podemos compreender através das mudanças que a mesma sofre.

Palabras clave

Assinatura Régia; Reginalidade; Portugal Medieval; Autorrepresentação.

1. *The use of a royal signature by the kings of Portugal.* – 2. *The first few queenly signatures.* – 3. *The value of an infanta's signature.* – 4. *The queenly signature in the 15th century.* – 5. *Transitioning to the 16th century.* – 6. *Signing for somebody else.* – 7. *A final evaluation.* – 8. *References.* – 9. *Curriculum vitae.*

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A signature is usually a sign of personal acceptance of a document. It is designed to finish a text stating that a specific person gives their consent to what is written, through a personal and unrepeatable sign: the writing of one's name by one's own hand. Royal signatures bear very little difference in this respect: kings, queens, princes, and princesses sign documents in their own handwritings as a means of validation. In Portugal, they signed with their titles throughout history, in the same fashion Spanish monarchs did, but not the French or English. The power of signing a document is no mere formality. The struggle between Juana, the so-called "Mad" queen of Castile and the people around her in that respect is famous. Bethany Aram said that the signature of a monarch "represented the royal person and conferred authority upon the recipient", working in a similar fashion to a seal. *Las Siete Partidas*, a 13th-century Castilian law code compiled by Alfonso X, advocates for the respect subjects should show towards anything that represents the king in his absence (Aram, 1998, quote from p. 346.) The code was known and likely to be used in Portugal.

This paper will assess the use of a standardized signature by the queens of Portugal in the late Middle Ages. We will explore how that signature, even though a formal part of the queen's office, was shaped and used by the women wearing the title to represent themselves. The queen's signature has not received much attention until now. There are a few recent studies of signatures for the kings of Portugal¹, both in singular cases and grouped together. As for studies of queenly signatures of other kingdoms, there are at least a couple of singular studies for individual queens², but no overviews. Even though the signature of the queen of Portugal has not attracted much attention, it is as meaningful as the king's. The main argument in this paper states that the signature was a means for the queen to assert her authority and express her identity, especially when her condition was challenged by public contest or the existence of other royal women.

¹ Gomes, 2019 studied King Dinis' and Ávila Seoane, 2020, took a group look at the king's signatures.

² Aram, 1998 studied how Juana, the so-called "Mad", queen of Castille used her signature; Theresa Earenfight, 2021, pp. 179-181 called attention to how Catherine of Aragon, queen consort of England to King Henry VIII, signed a letter to her daughter, Mary after losing her position as queen consort.

1. *The use of a royal signature by the kings of Portugal*

The kings of Portugal signed documents *de manu propria*, since the early 14th century. King Dinis was the first to use such a mechanism of authentication. He signed in a variety of ways, from writing his name to stating that he saw the document and wrote down the line saying so (Gomes, 2019). The royal signature will only be standardized in the hand of his great-grandson, King Fernando I, later in the century. From then on, the king's signature tends to be constituted of a guarding line³, the old pronoun "el" (the) and the word "Rey" (King). The addition of a cross-like group of dots (*quinas*) in front of "Rey" became a permanent part of the signature by the mid-15th century. In the second half of the 15th century the king's signature will also be used to assist the claims to the Castilian throne through the addition of a title - "Rey e principe" ("King and Prince", for Manuel I, heir to the Castilian throne through his wife) - or a change in language - "Yo el Rey" ("I, the king", in the Castilian tradition for the throne-claimant through his niece, Afonso V) (Ávila Seoane, 2020).

The first queenly signature provided by the research belongs to Queen Leonor Teles (b. c. 1350 – d. c. 1406; queen consort 1372-1383) the wife of King Fernando (b. 1345 – d. 1383, king since 1367). The queen copies her husband's signature. She signs "A Rainha" ("The Queen")⁴, guarding her signature with a line and adding a few dots at the end.⁵ Future queens will keep this structure as the traditional queenly signature, even if the dots are inconsistent.

³ This line is also known as "frame" since it encloses the signature. We opted to keep the idea of protecting the signature by translating the Portuguese term "linha de guarda" in a closer way.

⁴ The first recorded signature we found dates from 1374. Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo (henceforth ANTT), Coleção Especial, cx. 72, mç. 19, nº 1. Signature presented below.

⁵ Ribeiro, 1813, pp. 25-36 was the first to notice the queen's signature and to attempt a systematization of the use of royal signatures.

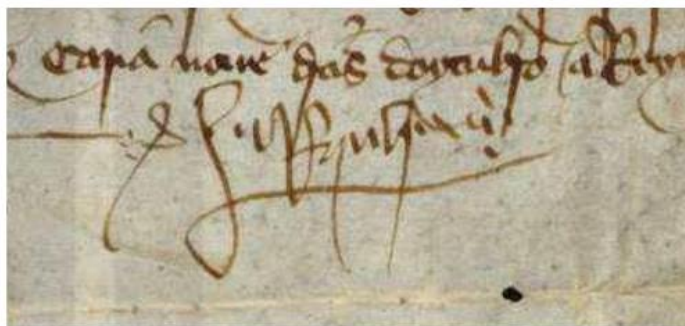


Fig. 1: ANTT, Coleção Especial, cx. 72, mç. 19, nº 1.
(Courtesy of ANTT)

2. The first few queenly signatures

The arrival of the first queenly signature needs to be explained. Queen Leonor is an interesting case because of her particular circumstances in the context of the medieval queens of Portugal. Her marriage to King Fernando was contested. Queen Leonor introduced yet another change in her time that alas did not stay for the future: the *intitulatio* as “by the grace of Saint Mary” instead of God⁶. It is an incredible break from tradition and a bold claim by the queen, yet to be fully understood: Leonor seems to state that her role as queen was given to her by the Virgin, instead of God, distancing her *intitulatio* from her husband’s, king by the grace of God. We can assume that Leonor was putting herself under the Virgin’s guard because Mary is the perfect religious role model (Rodrigues, 2016, p. 86).

The Queen of Heavens is the mother of God and an intercessor for Christian people on Earth, as Leonor is the peer of her husband, the mother of his heir and, maybe, the intercessor for her people. King Fernando is also the king who states that the queen is his companion in governing the Kingdom, and, as such, she cannot be counted among the higher ranks of nobility when he is setting the limits of jurisdiction over the lands of the nobles (Campos, 2008, p. 43). For King Fernando, the Queen is more than just a noble. So, *intitulatio*, paired with the king’s

⁶ Neves, 2005, pp. 367-376 published a few charters where the queen uses this regnal title. We can add one more: ANTT, Ordem de Cister, Mosteiro de S. Dinis de Odivelas, liv. 1, fl. 76.

claims and issues around Queen Leonor's marriage gave us a wider look into the reasoning behind the birth of the queen's signature: it is a sign of her authority. Leonor seems to have been looking for means to assert her right to be on the throne. From Queen Leonor's case we can see that when we pair the study of signatures with a study of reginal titles, it becomes clear that these signatures are political tools as well.

If we investigate the next queen, Philippa (b. c. 1360 – d. 1415, queen since 1387), daughter of the Duke of Lancaster and consort of João I of Portugal (b. 1357 – d. 1433, king since 1385), something different emerges. There are very few documents remaining in their original forms from her time, but the ones left give us a dual-sided view of Philippa's identity. Her signature for documents issued as the queen of Portugal follows the form of her predecessor: "A rainha" ("The Queen"),⁷ and a guarding line.

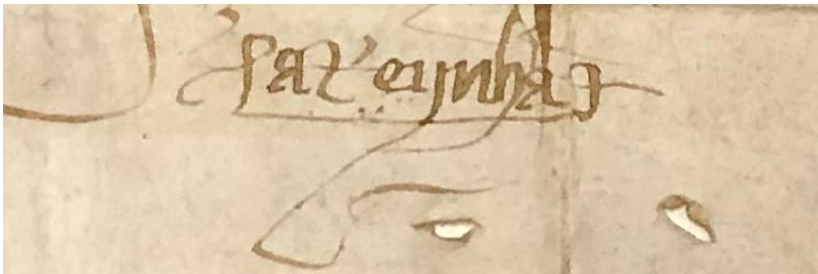


Fig. 2: ANTT, Mosteiro de Santos-o-Novo, nº 23.
(Courtesy of ANTT)

⁷ Signature bellow: ANTT, Mosteiro de Santos-o-Novo, nº 23.

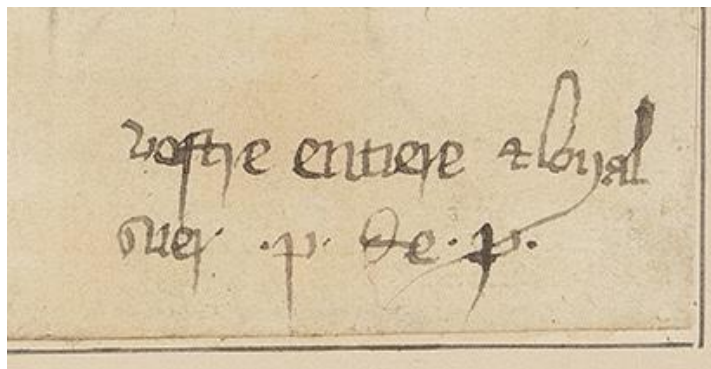


Fig. 3: BL, Cotton Vespasian F III, f. 98r.
(Courtesy of the British Library Board)

There is, however, a letter sent to her brother, Henry IV, king of England, which she does not sign with her royal title. Instead, Philippa signed “P. de P.”⁸. The letter is written in French to her brother, and the signature can be read as “Philippa de Portugal”. It might be possible to see here the duality of the king’s body⁹ transposed to Philippa’s signature: in Portugal she is only “The queen”, for her brother she has a name and a personal identity, even though it still encapsulates her royal role. It is a single example in 100 years. Other historians have misread the guarding lines in the queen’s signatures with their names, believing that the line would represent their first names¹⁰, something we can’t support. Philippa seems to be the sole queen to sign a letter with something else than her title. Regardless of the contents and destiny of the letters, it seems that no other queen has resorted to a different signature than the traditional one¹¹. Even though we cannot see their individual

⁸ British Library, Cotton Ms. Vespasian F III, fl. 98r. Signature presented above.

⁹ The idea that a king has two bodies – the physical and imperfect mortal one, and the immaterial one, that encapsulates the idea of the ruler – was studied by Ernest Kantorowickz in his classical 1957 work, recently republished.

¹⁰ Sousa, 1987 and Neves, 2005, p. 111, both assume that the guarding line on Queen Leonor of Lancaster’s (for the first) and Queen Leonor Teles’ (for the second) signatures are an indication of their names. However, all other queens will use some variation of that line, and all kings use lines very similar to the queens’. This is done despite of their given names.

¹¹ When writing “from her own hand” (“de mi mano”) and in Castillian to her brother, Juan, king of Navarre, Leonor of Aragon still signs “The queen”, in Portuguese. All the

identities shining through the signature in that perspective, we cannot ignore the oddity of Philippa's signature in the letter to her brother, even if a single example refrains us from taking on larger and definitive conclusions. In fact, later in that century and elsewhere in Europe, Juana, "the Mad", queen of Castile in title seems to have signed her personal letters to her family with her name and the formal documents with her title (Aram, 1998, p. 334). The oddity might be the act of signing everything with one's rank instead of one's name. Broader research is needed to assess the issue comparatively.

3. The value of an infanta's signature

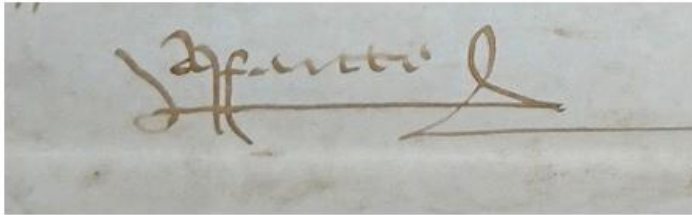


Fig. 4: ANTT, Coleção Especial, cx. 72, mç. 26, n^o 1.
(Courtesy of ANTT)

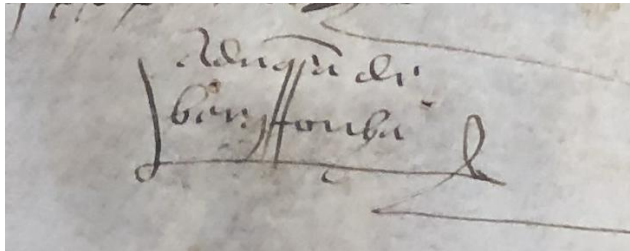


Fig. 5: ANTT, Coleção Especial, cx. 72, mç. 26, n^o 2.
(Courtesy of ANTT)

daughters of the Catholic Monarchs that married king Manuel use their royal signature when writing to their parents. We don't know for now if any queen of Portugal has resorted to different signatures in more private correspondence, but it seems unlikely. Queen Leonor's letter was published in: Gomes, 2017, pp. 362-363 (doc. 379).

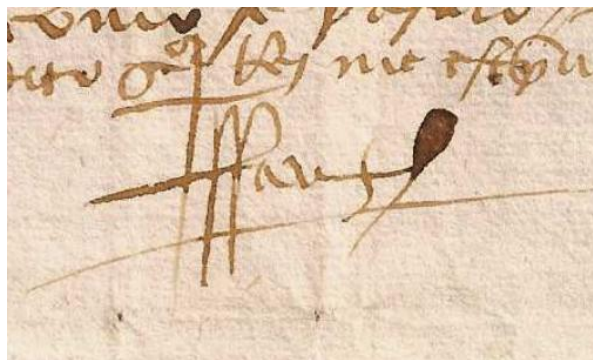


Fig. 6: AHMC, Col. COI, nº 77.
(Reproduced with kind permission of the archive)

Philippa's daughter, Isabel of Portugal (b. 1397 - d. 1471, duchess since 1428), future duchess of Burgundy, took up her mother's role when she died (Silva, 2013). Isabel's signature seems to be a reflection of her mother's: while all her younger brothers sign with a version of their names, Isabel mimics her mother's style and the signature of the heir to the throne. So, as the future king signs: "Infante"¹² (prince¹³), and their younger brothers sign both Infante and their names¹⁴, Isabel simply signs "A infante" (the princess)¹⁵, almost as if she's the counterpart of her

¹² For example: Arquivo Municipal de Coimbra (henceforth AMC), Cartas Originais dos Infantes, nº 20.

¹³ Note that the introduction of the title "príncipe" (prince) to name the royal heir, is a later 15th century addition to Portuguese royal titles. The title used at this time is "infante" for all the royal children. Later in the century, the heir will be "príncipe" and the other children "infante". As the difference did not exist at the time of Duarte, Isabel and their siblings, we opted to translate "infante" simply as "prince" to avoid linguistic issues. Later in this paper "príncipe" will be translated to "prince heir" and "infante" to "prince".

¹⁴ Throughout their lives Prince Pedro signs "ifamte dom p" ("ifamte dom Pedro", "Prince Pedro", eg. AHMC, Cartas Originais dos Infantes, nº 25), Prince Henrique (Henry, the Navigator) signs "i.d.a." ("ifante dom Anrique", "Prince Henrique", eg. ANTT, Coleção Especial, cx. 72, mç. 8, nº 2), Prince João signs "Ifat do Jº" ("Ifante dom Joam", "Prince João" eg. ANTT, Coleção Especial, cx. 72, mç. 9, doc. 1) and Prince Fernando signs "ifante dom fernando" ("Prince Fernando", eg. ANTT, Gav. 16, mç. 2, nº13).

¹⁵ ANTT, Coleção Especial, cx. 72, mç. 26, nº 1. Signature presented above.

brother. Perhaps Isabel was claiming a “female primogeniture”, a position for the first-born daughter. It is true that no other female children of King João and Queen Philippa survived, but we can't ignore that Isabel is detaching herself from her brothers. Half a century later, another sole surviving female child of a royal couple signs in the same fashion¹⁶. The feeling that Isabel is following a Portuguese custom by using only the title to sign documents is stronger when we look at her life as duchess of Burgundy. While in Portugal, after her marriage by proxy to the duke, Isabel signs “a duquesa de Borgonha” (the duchess of Burgundy)¹⁷, later documents from her time in the duchy are signed with her own name, Isabel¹⁸. The noticeable difference might call for a wider study of regnal signatures in medieval Europe and their meanings.

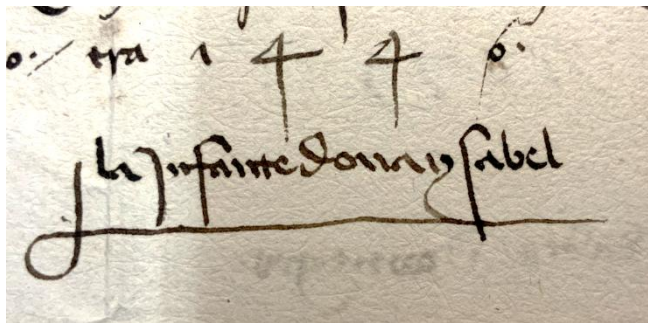


Fig. 7: ANTT, Cabido da Sé de Coimbra, 2ª incorporação, mç. 43, doc. 2049. (Courtesy of ANTT)

-
- ¹⁶ Joana, daughter of Afonso V of Portugal, notified her father's victory in Arzila to the municipality of Coimbra. Styling herself as “eu, a infante” (“I, the princess”), she signs the letter simply as “Iffante” (“Princess”). She was the sole daughter of Afonso V and Isabel of Coimbra; her brother João, held the title of prince heir (“príncipe”) and was also in the expedition that conquered Arzila. AHMC, *Cartas Originais dos Infantes*, nº 77. Signature presented above.
- ¹⁷ ANTT, *Colecção Especial*, cx. 72, mç. 26, doc. 2. Signature presented above.
- ¹⁸ A small sample of these can be found in Mollat, 1964. Sommé, 2009, p. 21, briefly studied the use of the signature.

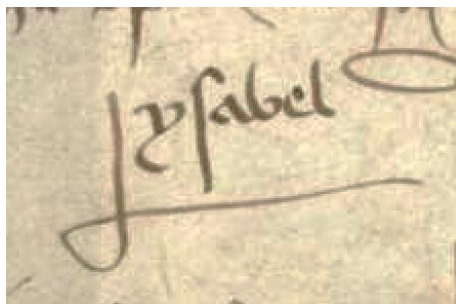


Fig. 8: ANTT, Mosteiro de Santa Cruz de Coimbra, 2ª incorporação, mç. 53, nº 1. (Courtesy of ANTT)

How rigid these hierarchies were and how important it was to be allowed to use these titles is also visible in another woman's signature from Isabel of Portugal's time. Isabel of Urgell (b. 1409 – d. 1469, duchess since 1428) was the wife of Prince Pedro (b. 1392 – d. 1449), one of Isabel of Portugal's brothers, Duke of Coimbra. Isabel was the daughter of *Infanta* Isabel of Aragon and Jaume II of Urgell. Our duchess of Coimbra was, via her mother, the granddaughter of King Pere IV of Aragon and his last wife, Sibilla of Fortiá. Isabel of Urgell could use the title of "infanta" of Aragon on her own right for that reason.¹⁹ Her husband died in arms against the king in 1449, and his dignity was lost.²⁰ The interesting fact about Isabel's signature relies on its relationship with her Portuguese royal title and the troubles of her life. As the wife of an *infante*, Isabel was allowed to also be *infanta*. As duchess Isabel signed "La infante dona Ysabel" in 1440²¹, for example, and only

¹⁹ In her last will and testament, Isabel styles herself "Ifante dona Isabell d'aragam" (Princess Isabel of Aragon), followed by her husband's titles prior to his death (In a non-paleographic transcript: "mulher que fui do ilustre príncipe e virtuoso senhor o infante D. Pedro duque de Coimbra" – "previously wife of the very noble prince and virtuous lord prince Pedro, duke of Coimbra" ANTT, Ordem de Cister, Mosteiro de S. Dinis de Odivelas, liv. 8, fl. 266v). Isabel's inheritance allowed her son, also named Pedro to claim the throne of Aragon. He died shortly after doing so (1463-1466). An account of his life can be found in Fonseca 1982.

²⁰ About the circumstances of Prince Pedro's death in battle see: Costa Gomes, 2012 and Rodrigues, 2018.

²¹ ANTT, Cabido da Sé de Coimbra, 2ª incorporação, mç. 43, doc. 2049. Signature presented above.

“Ysabel” after the death of her husband²² Isabel lost all her lands and titles as a consequence of his demise, and her signature reveals so: she lost the title of “infanta” of Portugal by marriage. Even though she still styles herself at the beginning of documents as “infanta”, she doesn’t sign accordingly.

4. The queenly signature in the 15th century

When a queen needs to assert her identity, one of the resources available to her throughout the 15th century is the signature. In general, besides the handwriting, the only signs of a queen’s identity in her signature are her personal marks, as we have mentioned, when designing the guarding line, as previously mentioned. A few queens in the 15th century went beyond this limit. We will now take a quick look at all the consorts of heirs and kings of Portugal up to 1525.

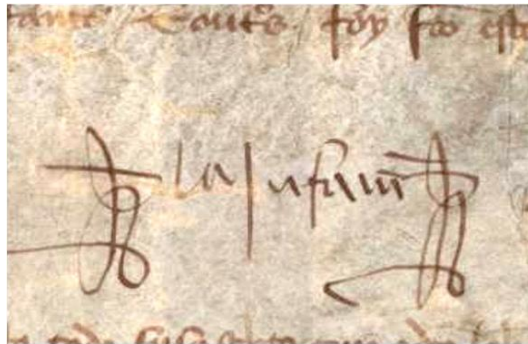


Fig. 9: ANTT, Gavetas, Gav. 17, mç. 1, doc. 2.
(Courtesy of ANTT)

²² ANTT, Mosteiro de Santa Cruz de Coimbra, 2^a incorporação, mç. 53, n^o 1. Signature presented above.

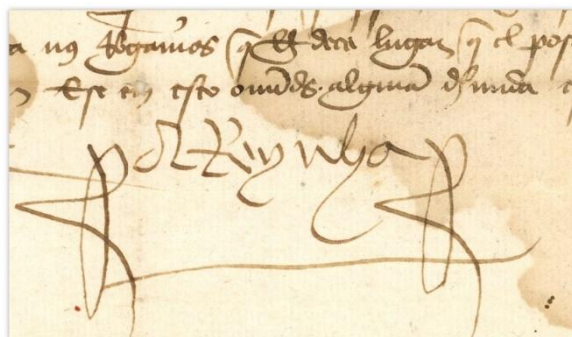


Fig. 10: Arquivo Histórico do Município de Elvas, 1586/82, fl. 411. (Courtesy of archive)

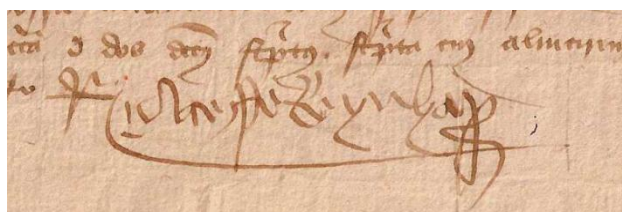


Fig. 11: AHMC, Col. COI, nº 53²³. (Courtesy of the archive)

Leonor of Aragon (b. c. 1402 – d. 1445; married 1428, queen consort 1433-1438) married Prince Duarte of Portugal (b. 1390 – d. 1438; king since 1433) in 1428, and was a princess-consort for 5 years, queen-consort for another 5. Her signature shows a clear evolution from *infanta* of Portugal and Aragon to queen, by changing the language in which she signs. While Leonor is the wife of the heir to the throne, Prince Duarte, she signs in a foreign language and titles herself not only as wife of the heir or Portugal, but also *infanta* of the realms of her father²⁴. When Leonor be-

²³ Arquivo Municipal de Lisboa – Arquivo Histórico, Chancelaria Régia, Livro 2º de Duarte e D. Afonso V, doc. 15.

²⁴ Among others, see: ANTT, Ordem de Cister, Mosteiro de S. Dinis de Odivelas, liv. 1, fl. 70 e 71. Leonor styles herself “Dona Leonor pela graça de Deus primogénita de Portugal e do Algarve infante de Aragão e da Sicília”. Leonor signs “La infant”, following the “t” with an abbreviation sign. It is likely that it means “infanta” (Catalan or Aragonese) or even “infantisse” (Latin). Either way it seems a nod to the Crown of Aragon.

comes queen of Portugal, every sign of her foreign ascent disappears: the title of infanta of Aragon vanishes, and her signature turns to Portuguese²⁵. The only signs of her identity are the very distinctive guarding lines. Leonor's signature, as a widow, is yet another sign of her changing status and identity: keeping the same guarding lines, she changes her signature in accordance with a Castilian tradition, already used by her mother²⁶. Leonor signs at that time in Portuguese as "A triste Rainha" ("The sad Queen").

Leonor of Aragon was keen on constructing a strong image of an Aragonese princess before rising to the throne, as Rodrigues has pointed out (Rodrigues, 2021). Portugal had recently been at war with Castile. Leonor came to Portugal by land from Castile and had some issues at the border, when people believed that Castile was again invading the kingdom. Leonor also grew up as a daughter of a Castilian *infante*, so the need to show herself as Aragonese was strong. However, the Aragonese strong note might have worked against her later: one of the accusations against her when she lost the regency of the kingdom in the late 1430s was that she was a foreigner. As much as her identity efforts should not be counted as a single factor – Leonor was a sister of the "Infantes de Aragon", the offspring of Fernando de Antequera and Leonor de Albuquerque – it certainly did not help her case. Leonor also lived briefly at the Portuguese court sharing the space with her sister-in-law Isabel before Isabel herself married, in 1428. If Isabel's signature points her as "the princess", Leonor was actually "the princess", because she was the wife of the heir – and she said so in her royal title. It is possible that Leonor opted for the Aragonese signature both for practical reasons – to distinguish herself from Isabel while they were at court at the same time – and for identity issues as a foreigner.

On another note, it is impossible to look at Leonor of Aragon's signature as a widow and not to remember her husband's works. King Duarte of Portugal is known, today, as the "king-philosopher", for the books he wrote. One of them,

²⁵ Among others: ANTT, Ordem de Cister, Mosterio de S. Dinis de Odivelas, liv. 1, fl. 79. Leonor now styles herself as "Dona Leonor pela graça de Deus rainha de Portugal e do Algarve e senhora de Ceuta", and signs in Portuguese.

²⁶ There are several examples, since Leonor of Aragon was regent for her son and signed numerous documents. For all, see, for example: Arquivo Municipal de Lisboa – Arquivo Histórico (henceforth AML-AH), Chancelaria Régia, Livro 2º de D. Duarte e D. Afonso V, doc. 15.

called “Leal Conselheiro” (“The Loyal Counsellor”)²⁷, is a manual on how to be loyal to your King and to God. Duarte explained in the prologue that he wrote the book at request of his wife. When we read it today, we see a treatise on emotions and behaviour like nothing else in medieval Portugal. One of the emotions he devotes more time to is sadness, and the feeling of missing someone that you have lost. It is impossible not to not think about the connection between the queen’s signature and the king’s book when we know this. It is true that Leonor’s signature as widow is part of her cultural heritage. Could the queen also signaling something by referring to her husband’s words on sadness and grief through her signature?

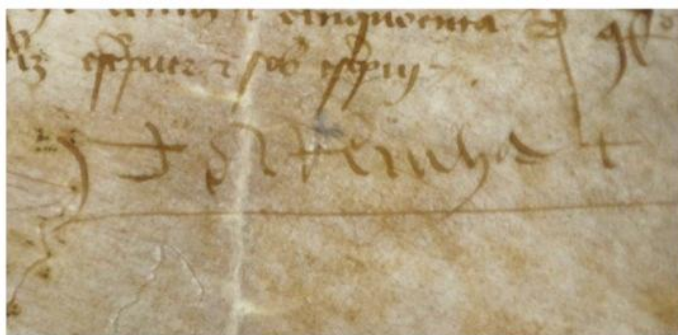


Fig. 12: Signature from: ANTT, Ordem de S. Jerónimo, Mosteiro de S. Jerónimo de Penha Longa, mc. 2, nº 47. (Courtesy of ANTT)

Leonor’s successor as queen was the daughter of Prince Pedro and Isabel of Urgell. Isabel of Coimbra (b. 1432 – d. 1455, queen c. 1447) married Leonor’s son, Afonso V (b. 1432 – d. 1481; king since 1438), in 1447 or 1448. The new queen returned to the traditional queenly signature. It is in Isabel’s time that the King will always sign without exception with five dots forming a cross at the end of his title. Historians have theorized that this derived from a tradition end-signal of text in a document. By Afonso V’s time, it is possible that the sign was charged with a sym-

²⁷ The most recent edition of the book is a digital edition found in <<https://search.library.wisc.edu/digital/ALealConselheiro>>. For full reference see reference list.

bolic meaning. As in the royal arms, it might have been understood as a nod to the tradition that Afonso Henriques, Portugal's first king, defeated 5 Moorish kings in a battle (Ávila Seoane, 2020). For practical or symbolic reasons, the five dots are a permanent mark of every Portuguese royal signature from this point on. Isabel's signature does not seem to reflect that change immediately. We can, however, ask if the two small crosses that open and close her signature and act as guarding lines are some sort of nod to that tradition. Isabel of Coimbra's style of designing those personal marks does not reflect the hand of her mother, Isabel of Urgell, or of any other queen. If that means a personal intention with a certain meaning or only a personalization mark is hard to confirm.

5. Transitioning to the 16th century

The last group of queens we are going to analyze is a set of three wives, a widow and a frustrated pretender to a throne that shared the public space in the late 1400's-early 1500s. Before we move to the actual queen-consorts of this time, we must keep in mind that there is one forgotten woman in Portugal who called herself queen at this time: Juana de Trastámara (b. 1462 – d. 1530), the frustrated pretender to the throne of Castile (c. 1475). Juana married in 1475 and was forced later to unmarry Afonso V. She styled herself in the regnal tradition of Castile when signing documents (“Yo la reyna” – I, the queen)²⁸. While the marriage was not dismissed, Afonso V signed mainly in the same fashion, with a full list of the Castilian territories he was claiming through her in his title²⁹. Juana kept signing in the same way until the end of her life.³⁰

²⁸ ANTT, Corpo Cronológico, Parte II, mc. 14, nº 55. Signature presented bellow.

²⁹ Ávila Seoane, 2020, published several of Afonso V's Castilian signatures. For his title, the chancellery register kept the references, along with several loose documents. For the chancellery records see, for example: ANTT, Chancelaria de Afonso V, liv. 30.

³⁰ Ávila Seoane, 2023, studied Juana's handwriting and published her last wishes.

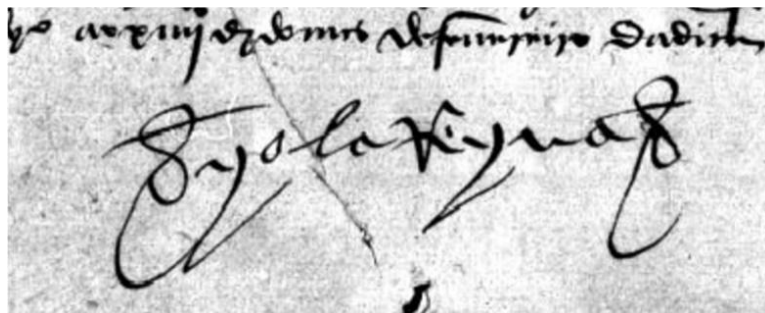


Fig. 13: ANTT, Corpo Cronológico, Parte II, mç. 14, nº 55.
(Courtesy of ANTT)

Following the chronology ahead, Queen Leonor of Lancaster (b. 1458 – d. 1525, queen consort 1481-1495) was brought to the throne with her husband in 1481. She signed as queen-consort in the same fashion as her predecessors: “A rainha”³¹, or shortening it to only “Rainha”.³² Either version of the signature had a guarding line and 5 dots forming a cross³³. As far as the research showed, Queen Leonor is the only queen that uses two reginal signatures. The use of either signature bears no clear connection with the type of document the queen is issuing.³⁴

³¹ For “A rainha” see, for example: ANTT, Gavetas, Gav. 14, mç. 2, nº 14. Signature presented bellow.

³² ANTT, Corpo Cronológico, Parte I, mç. 11, nº 37 or ANTT, Gavetas, Gav. 17, mç. 9, nº 12. It is unclear why Queen Leonor used a simpler signature, since it appears in both formal and routine documents. It could be the case that the queen tended to use a simpler signature in less formal documents and later started using the simpler version everywhere.

³³ There is one single example of Queen Leonor of Lancaster not using her royal title. When Queen Isabel of Castile and Aragon died during Queen Leonor’s regency in 1498, the letter announcing the event to Évora’s municipal authorities is signed with only 5 crossed dots. It could be the case that the queen had too many documents to sign (she probably needed to send a similar letter to other municipalities) and simplified her signature. Arquivo Distrital de Évora (henceforth, ADE), Fundo: Arquivo Histórico Municipal de Évora, Sala 9, Cx. 29, liv. 73 (Liv. III de Originais), fl. 90. This could be understood as a sort of “rubric”, defined by Ribeiro, 1813, 14-15.

³⁴ Or to have been written by a different hand than the queen’s, as it happens with the king. Dias, 2016.

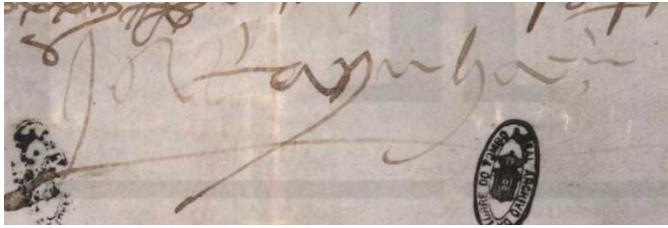


Fig. 14: ANTT, Gavetas, Gav. 14, mç. 2, nº 14.
(Courtesy of ANTT).

Queen Leonor, as every other queen-consort of Portugal up to her time, used her title as a mirror of her husband's. When he died in 1495, she was a widowed queen, but also the sister of the new king. In fact, Leonor was also the daughter of Afonso V's brother Fernando, and as such, cousin of her husband, and did not have surviving children. Her brother Manuel (b. 1469 – d. 1521, king since 1495) thus succeeded to the throne. The kings of Portugal tended to add every new territory, discovered, colonized, or just commercially monopolized to their titles. Manuel had one of the longest and everchanging royal titles of the period. Leonor, however, kept hers as a mirror of her late husband's, stopping at a third of the way through in size compared with her brother's³⁵ Her signature was, throughout her life, the traditional queenly signature: only "The queen"³⁶. This might have posed a problem to her sisters-in-law, wives of her brother.

Many of the documents we have from the three successive wives of King Manuel I are "alvarás", routine administration, or daily letters to municipalities, simpler documents that do not state the queen's name or title. These documents all start with a simple: "Nos, a rainha" ("we, the queen"), adding nothing else to identify her. We can tell them apart easily mainly because every queen decided to sign in their natal language, breaking a century-long tradition of signing in Portuguese. Isabel of Castile and Aragon (b. 1470 – d. 1498, princess since 1490³⁷, queen consort since 1497) and Maria of Castile and Aragon (b. 1482 – d. 1517, queen since 1500) were sisters and successive queens of Portugal. They were also daughters of the

³⁵ ANTT, Gavetas, Gav. 17, mç. 9, nº 12.

³⁶ *Ibi*, Gav. 17, mç. 1, nº 18, for an example of Leonor's title in this period.

³⁷ Isabel's first husband, Prince Afonso, was the son of Queen Leonor of Lancaster and King João II. Even though he died less than a year after the marriage, Isabel retained the title when she returned to Castile.

Catholic Monarchs and signed in Castilian. Their personal handwritings have been studied, even though holographic texts are rare. They both make use of a humanistic cursive script, but they are distinct: Queen Isabel's handwriting seems more fluid and regular than her sister's (Ávila Seoane, 2017).

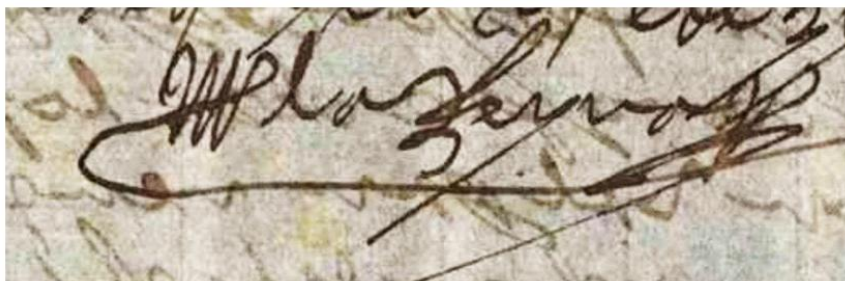


Fig. 15: ANTT, Gavetas, Gav. 16, mç. 2, nº 1, fl. 11v.
(Courtesy of ANTT)

For Isabel, no signed originals seem to survive from the period she was queen. However, we can assert her Castilian signature by another fact: she had previously been married to the heir to the Portuguese throne, Prince Afonso (b. 1474 – d. 1491) and became a widow. In that period, she was not the heir to her parents but the widowed wife of Afonso. Isabel signed in Castilian “La princesa”.³⁸ When she became the heir of Castile, already as queen of Portugal, there are transcripts of documents that show her signing “yo la reyna e princesa” (Ávila Seoane, 2015, pp. 191-192 (doc. 22)). If this signature is accurate, this is another sign of a mix of traditions in Isabel's hand, since now she signs in the Castilian tradition. Her sister Maria and successor as queen of Portugal signed as “La reyna” (“the queen”)³⁹, following the Portuguese structure for the queenly signature, but using her natal language.

³⁸ ANTT, Corpo Cronológico, Parte I, mç. 1, nº 49.

³⁹ In her last will and testament, for example: ANTT, Gavetas, Gav. 16, mç. 2, nº 1. Signature presented above.

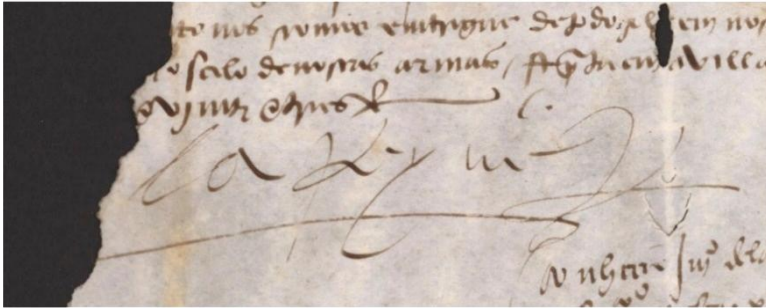


Fig. 16: ANTT, Gavetas, Gav. 20, mç. 6, nº 44.
(Courtesy of ANTT)

Finally, as the third wife of King Manuel, we have Leonor of Austria (b. 1498 – d. 1558, queen consort of Portugal 1518-1521). Leonor was a daughter of Juana, “The Mad”, and Philipp the Good, thus a sister of Charles V. She grew up in the Low Countries and signed in French – “La Reyne”⁴⁰. As it was previously said, the language of the three queens’ signatures changed, even though in structure they followed the Portuguese custom.

We have seen that, by Manuel I’s time, two other women besides his wives were signing documents as queens: one in the Castilian regnal fashion, the other in the Portuguese. His wives seem to find a compromise, by adopting a Portuguese structure and adjusting it to their natal languages. Thus, the diversity in the queenly signature seems to be a sign of a need for a different identity, besides that of being the queen of Portugal in itself. Alongside with the fact that they are likely to be somewhat competing for the public space with one or two other women, the wives of Manuel I also kept strong ties with their natal kingdoms: when Isabel of Castile and Aragon died, she was the presumptive heir to her parents’ thrones; Maria’s household was paid for some time by her parents. Leonor of Austria did not have time to show herself much. A pawn in her brother’s game, Leonor married the king of Portugal, became widowed within a couple of years, and was called back to Castille, just to be married to the king of France shortly after. All three women kept in the *intitulatio* the title of “infanta” of their natal territories, another never seen

⁴⁰ We can find her full title and signature in, for example: ANTT, Gavetas, Gav. 20, mç. 6, nº 44. Signature presented above.

break from tradition never seen and a sign of how close their identities needed to be also to those territories.

6. Signing for somebody else

There is one single queen with whom we can evaluate the queen's role in the government of the kingdom and the importance of a personal signature. Queen Leonor of Lancaster and King João II are known to have been a troubled royal couple. The king's struggle with the nobility that led to the murder of Queen Leonor's brother, Diogo, the death of the couple's heir, Prince Afonso, in 1491 and the subsequent attempts by King João II to have his illegitimate son ascend to the throne are all factors that historiography has taken into account to tell that narrative. What has been left out is a small period in 1484. After the king found out a conspiracy to kill him led by the nobility, he stabbed to death with his own hands Duke Diogo of Viseu, brother of Queen Leonor in August 1484. There are accounts that Leonor was very much affected by her brother's death.⁴¹ In September the king left for the border to subdue a castle and left Leonor to rule.⁴² He came back from this military expedition sick⁴³. The queen continued to replace him during his illness: the royal chancellery records several documents she signed for him⁴⁴. There is also a letter sent to the city of Lisbon by the king thanking the officials for their concern and prayers for his health and talking about a meeting with ambassadors of Castile. The queen signed the document to help him preserve his health⁴⁵. Conversely, in the 1490s Queen Leonor fell sick in Setúbal. This time, to help her regain her health, it was her brother, Manuel, Duke of Beja (and future King Manuel I) who signed her letters⁴⁶. By these examples we can gather that by Leonor's time the royal seal and trust put in officials to issue letters and documents was not enough. The hand of someone with the appropriate rank and permission is needed.

⁴¹ *Viajes*, 1878, p. 39.

⁴² AML-AH, Chancelaria Régia, Livro 2º de D. João II, f. 33 e 33v.

⁴³ The queen herself writes to Lisbon requesting prayers for the king's health. AML-AH, Livro 2º de D. João II, doc. 30, f. 47 e 47v.

⁴⁴ There are several examples from October 1484. Among them is: ANTT, Chancelaria de D. João II, liv. 22, fl. 65v.

⁴⁵ AML-AH, Chancelaria Régia, Livro 2º de D. João II, f. 48 e 48v.

⁴⁶ AML-AH, Chancelaria Régia, Livro 3º de D. João II, doc. 75, fl. 88 e 88v.

7. *A final evaluation*

Even though the non-verbal elements of the signature differ from queen to queen (the design of the guarding lines and the use of crossed dots), the verbal structure seems to point at an important identity factor for these women. As we have seen, a signature set in parchment or paper in other language than Portuguese is usually paired with a regnal or princely title that reflects that choice, either in queens' or kings' hands. In the case of women, this happens when there is another woman with a similar title or signature in the kingdom when new princesses arrive, when they need to assert their identities in a certain way or when the ties with their natal kingdoms are particularly strong. All the above might be true at the same time.

A queen's signature can also show us two aspects of their lives. First, how the identity of a woman who becomes queen can be shredded in different parts, if we take Philippa's signature to her brother as such. Second, we can also see how the evolution of a signature can be a sign of an evolving identity, as we have seen with Leonor of Aragon. Throughout her life, Leonor signed in three different ways, all with deep layers of meaning.

In the end, we also need to stress that this study seems to show that the queen's signature is, in fact, part of the means of representation and validation belonging to the office itself. If it was not the case, we should have seen more signatures in foreign languages, for example. The queen's signature is born in a crucial moment of definition of the office: as we have seen, Leonor Teles was considered by her husband as his companion above all nobility. She changed her royal title and started signing documents soon after she married.

A study in this area helps understand the tools available for the queens of Portugal to express their multiple identities, and perhaps in the future reflect on the same issue in broader contexts. A brief evaluation of the eldest royal daughters' signatures also shows signs of their role within the monarchy. A signature is much more than a validation sign in this domain: it reflects the political issues of the time, the roles these women played for their natal families and the Portuguese crown. A signature is a glimpse at the personal agency and identity of every queen, within the limits the office offers them to express themselves.

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9. *Curriculum vitae.*

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