



Authority, Guidance, and the Management of Land: Key Motives Behind the Establishment of the Queen's Chancellery in Early Fifteenth-Century Portugal

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Abstract

The Portuguese Royal Chancelleries preserve a substantial number of royal charters issued for the queens consort. Through these charters, they were granted royal revenues and rights collected from various towns belonging to the Crown's patrimony, derived from their exercise of jurisdictional authority over these places and their inhabitants. From the early fifteenth century onwards, there was a growing rationalization of the functional and political communication between queens or *infantas* (royal daughters or daughters-in-law) and the local authorities of the lands over which they held lordship. This process involved the creation of property registers (*tombos*) and cartularies in which all documentation exchanged between kings, queens, and the Crown's lands was to be recorded. At the same time, the queens also established their own chancelleries where the documents they issued were preserved.

Keywords: Queenship, Queens' Lands/Towns, Queen's Chancellery, Queens' Household, Queen's officials

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The Genesis of the Royal Consorts' Domains

The territories over which the queens of Portugal held lordship during the medieval and early modern periods were part of the Crown's patrimony and, as such, were typically located in areas where royal authority was most firmly established.

In the years following the conquest of the main fortified settlements in the Tagus River valley by King Afonso I of Portugal (ca.1140-1179), although efforts were made to extend the expansionist drive southward, the primary concern of the new administration appears to have focused on the settlement of the territory lying north of Lisbon.

For reasons of military strategy and colonization, portions of these territorial zones were gradually alienated in favor of members of the local aristocracy, newcomers from other parts of Christendom, monastic orders, and, later, certain military religious orders. Nonetheless, whenever he could rely on a sufficiently large population base and had a military contingent at his disposal, the monarch would seize control of existing castles, or commission the construction of new ones in strategically or defensively advantageous locations—or in areas with undeniable economic viability—for the purpose of installing settlers. Thus, from the second half of the twelfth century onward, most of the towns developing in this central region of Portugal remained under royal control, organized militarily and, in the early stages, certainly also in civil matters by a royal-appointed castle governor, *the alcaide* (Manuela Santos Silva 1996, 109-116).

Some towns, which encompassed extensive and resource-rich territories, actually never ceased to be part of the Crown's domain. Localities such as Óbidos, Sintra, Torres Vedras, Alenquer, and Torres Novas, among others¹, were granted to queens consort on a lifetime basis, reverting to royal possession upon their death. The king could then decide whether to reassign them to the succeeding queen in a similar manner. Until the fifteenth century, whenever two queens coincided—the king's mother and his wife—the latter was assigned a set of towns distinct from those held by her mother-in-law. This practice resulted in an overall increase in the number of settlements granted by the Crown. From the reign of João I (1385-1433) and Philippa of Lancaster (1387-1415) onward however, the composition of the queen's patrimony became standardized. In cases where the heir to the throne married before his accession, or when two queens coexisted, the original patrimony was divided between the consort queen and the dowager queen (Silva 1994a, 111-120; Silva 2013a, 279-288; Silva 2013b, 132).

Focusing on towns that had been granted a royal charter of rights (*foral*), these donations to queens consort transferred to them all rights and revenues previously enjoyed by their royal husbands in those localities, often including the right of ecclesiastical patronage (*padroado*) (Ana Maria Rodrigues and Silva 2010, 209-228).

In many instances, such donations coincided with the formalization of the marriage contract. They reflected several longstanding traditions:

- the *propter nuptias* gift was intended to secure the wife's financial autonomy in the event of her husband's premature death, which evolved from the Roman concept of *dos*, originally referring to the provision made by the parents of both spouses. Thus, the *propter nuptias* gift from the bridegroom appears to complement the dowry bequeathed by the bride's parents (Ruth Mazo Karras 2012, 15; Didier Lett 2000, 89);

- the so-called "morning gift," or "purchase of the body" which, by the late Middle Ages, was understood as a payment made in honor of the bride's lineage and person—that is, as

¹ Abrantes, Porto de Mós, Vila Viçosa, Monforte, Ourém, Atouguia, Aveiro, Sacavém, Frielas, Unhos and others (Ruy D'Abreu Torres 1981, 230-232).

compensation for the loss of her virginity (Georges Duby 1988, 178; Karras 2012, 18-24; Lett 2000, 86-89; Rodrigues 2007, 3);

- the payment of the *arras*, was initially a pledge of future marriage represented by a portion of the bridegroom's income given to his betrothed, and was gradually postponed until the wedding, eventually evolving into the primary form of financial support for married women throughout their lives. The *arras* enabled married women to maintain their own household and thus ensured a degree of economic independence from their husbands (Francisco da Fonseca Benevides 2007, 23-24).

Despite these diverse purposes, the donation was typically formalized through a single act, most commonly referred to simply as *arras*. This custom endured for a long time in the western Iberian kingdoms and was regulated in the *Lex Visigothorum* or *Liber Judiciorum* ever since the reign of the Visigothic king Recceswinth (653–672), and it remained present in the legal codes of the thirteenth century.²

The Chancellery Books of nearly all Portuguese monarchs have preserved and transmitted the charters that allowed queens from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries to benefit from substantial income derived from their seigniorial lands. This revenue consisted primarily of rents and rights, which were customarily collected by the king in his capacity as holder of royal prerogatives. Yet the *arras* donations not only conferred economic advantages; they also enabled the royal consorts to exercise juridical supremacy over the inhabitants of the towns and surrounding districts, including their local authorities, because these were *arras* granted from the possessions of the Royal Crown.³

However, in the fifteenth century, as a reminder of its origins, this type of concession came to be known as *câmara* (chamber), reflecting its economic purpose of providing resources for the maintenance of the queen's household (Rodrigues 2007, 4-5).⁴ Nevertheless, throughout their married lives, queens frequently received additional lands as gifts. Royal charters explained these as grants for their maintenance (*mantimento*), intended to supplement their income so as to enable the queens to meet their daily expenses, which included the sustenance of all those who formed part of their household (Silva 2010, 207-227).

Not all of the grants bestowed by the kings upon queens or princesses consort, queen's dowager, or, in exceptional cases, daughters, provided them with anything beyond mere economic revenues.⁵ In contrast, other grants appeared to confer virtually unrestricted authority over the territories in question; in such cases, the monarchs had transferred to their wives all associated rights, revenues, and prerogatives. Indeed, in 1375, when King Fernando (1367-1383) defined the scope of authority exercised by the great lords over their territories, he notably excluded the queen, on the grounds that her involvement in the governance of the realm rendered such limitations inapplicable (Isabel de Pina Baleiras 2012, 176-177). Accordingly, upon his marriage to Leonor Teles in 1372, King Fernando granted her a charter of *propter nuptias*, dowry and *arras*, thereby providing her with the means necessary to fulfil the responsibilities and uphold the *status*

² *Fuero Juzgo* 1792; *Fuero Real de Alfonso X* 2015; *Las Siete Partidas del Rey Don Alfonso el Sabio*, 1807.

³ Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo (ANTT). *Gavetas*, 13, M. 5, 13 1334.

⁴ It is said in the "Segunda Partida" (Title XIV, Law III of *Las Siete Partidas del Rey Don Alfonso el Sabio* 1807): "Chamber was the name formerly given to the Queen's household" - The translations, made from Portuguese sources, are my own.

⁵ King Pedro I (1357-1367), for example, in the donation he made to his mother, did not hesitate to clarify that the "royal jurisdiction" he granted her did not include "criminal acts criminally attempted, in which the jurisdiction is and ought to remain mine and that of my successors." (*Chancelarias Portuguesas. D. Pedro I (1357-1367)* 1984, 1).

associated with queenship, as befitted her position. This grant comprised the towns, lands, and places of Vila Viçosa, Abrantes, Almada, Sintra, Sacavém, Frielas, Unhos, Torres Vedras, Alenquer, Atouguia, Óbidos, Aveiro, and the territory of Melres in Ribadouro:

We make a pure donation *propter nuptias*, of our own free will and with full knowledge, of our towns, lands, and places [...] together with all other royal rights, both corporeal and incorporeal, temporal and spiritual; and with the patronage of churches and monasteries; and with full lordship, both high and low; and with all criminal and civil jurisdiction and authority, both *mero* and *misto imperium*, and full jurisdiction; and with all subjection and execution, both over persons and over property, in the same full manner in which we hold and rightfully ought to hold them.⁶

As evidenced by this passage from the donation charter, there appears to be no indication that any limitations were imposed on the queen consort's exercise of full jurisdictional authority. And following this generous concession, all queens appear to have been granted "full high and low lordship, criminal and civil jurisdiction, higher correction, with mixed imperial authority and full jurisdiction" over their lands (Silva 2013b, 279-288).

The administration of the Queen's estates

The queens enjoyed considerable wealth in their domains. To start with, they received all the monarchs' possessions in each of the towns and the surrounding countryside, consisting not only of public facilities (such as markets, ports, rivers, and so on) but also of buildings and lands ascribed to the kings' service. In addition, as mentioned before, they were entrusted with the royal rights and the royal rents received locally.

The queen's officials and her household

Thus, beyond what it represented in terms of authority for the queens, the exercise of full jurisdiction was useful to them, especially from an economic standpoint. Their husbands, the kings, granted them all the rights belonging to the Crown in the designated territories, and the queens' officials collected *jugas* (a tax in kind imposed on cultivated land of a certain size that required at least one pair of oxen to plow) and *oitavos* (a share of the produce) as well as any requests that the Ladies deemed necessary from the inhabitants of their lordship (Rodrigues and Silva 2010, 216). Naturally, this implied that the queens had a permanent staff of officials in each of their lands, who would frequently report to the queen's auditor (*Ouidor*), who could replace or perform functions similar to those of the judge appointed by the Crown (*Corregedor*), whose intervention was only authorized in exceptional occasions.⁷

Aided by the notaries (*Tabeliães*) who, in the lands belonging to the queens, ceased to represent the king in order to serve the queen, her *Ouidor* would receive information about the performance of municipal officials and was responsible for ensuring that they complied with the commands of their Lady.⁸ Unless the Lady herself chose to conduct the judgment and reprimand of local officials—which sometimes happened, as we will see—the responsibility fell to him.

⁶ANTT, *Chancelaria de D. Fernando*, L.º.1, 107 - 108; L. 2, 60 - Eixo, January 5, 1372.

⁷ *Ordenações Afonsinas* 1984, L.º.I, [Título VIII, Item 3], 69-70.

⁸ *Ordenações Afonsinas* 1984, L.º. II, [Título XXXX], 295-298.

But beyond monitoring the conduct of local authorities, the queen's *Ouvidor* also had the important task of representing the judicial authority vested in his Lady in her domains and of overseeing the cases that reached him through appeals from first-instance judgments. The scope of the *Ouvidor's* duties is outlined in a letter dated September 29, 1430, sent by King João I to the Crown's *Corregedor*, João Mendes. In this letter, the monarch specifies the circumstances under which functions should be delegated to the queen's principal official—in this case, the Princess Consort Leonor of Aragon:

And concerning the handling of cases, do not concern yourself with taking on any criminal or civil matter of the natives and residents of the said towns and each of them, nor accept any general or specific summons or complaints from any of these people, but refer all such matters to the *Ouvidor* of the said Infanta, so that he may judge them in accordance with the law.⁹

Nevertheless, as became evident from the characterization already provided regarding the nature of the queens' lordships, their estates included above all, entities responsible for overseeing and collecting all rights and revenues to which the queen was entitled. Indeed, her patrimony primarily consisted of rents, which served to support the maintenance of her household. *Almoxarifes* (revenue officials), *Mordomos* (stewards), and *Despenseiros* (treasurers) seemed to be the most active representatives of the queens, receiving all rights granted by the kings to their queens in specific locations. As previously mentioned, the queen's officials were thus authorized to collect taxes from rural landowners based on their agricultural output. Occasionally, the officials also expressed concern about whether the farmlands were being adequately utilized, dispatching their agents to inspect agricultural activities.

In the Óbidos region, near the ocean, the queens' officials were also responsible for collecting rents in kind derived from fishing activities, but also in cash from commercial seaports, such as the Porto de Salir¹⁰, located to the north of the town. However, in that same harbor—as in Atouguia, which also belonged to some of the queens—the monarchs were reluctant to fully relinquish, on behalf of their wives, the rights to which they were entitled concerning the collection of duties on goods arriving by sea (João Martins da Silva Marques 1980, Doc. 26, 20; Doc. 17, 11).

How much were all these rights and rents worth? Unfortunately, there are no consistent series of account books allowing us to answer that question satisfactorily (Rodrigues and Silva 2010, 217-220). Nevertheless, it was with these economic resources that the queens maintained their households, which comprised a fluctuating number of ladies-in-waiting and several dozen officials who supported them in their royal functions and attended to their personal and familial needs. Both men and women in the service of the queen were entitled to remuneration. The variability of the payments undoubtedly allows for a hierarchy of the value attributed to the services rendered, but above all, it reflects the social status of those who provided them (Silva 2018, 278-280).

Drawing upon a range of sources, it has been possible to reconstruct some of the expenses borne by Queen Philippa of Lancaster (1387-1415) in remunerating the members of her household. The budget for Philippa's first household was twenty thousand *dobras*, with which she was expected to support seven noble women and what we believe to have been a significantly larger

⁹ ANTT, *Gaveta 17*, M. 2, 13 (Óbidos, September 29, 1430).

¹⁰ ANTT, *Núcleo Antigo*, 315, 46.

number of men, holding clearly defined positions, in her service (Fernão Lopes 1983, 224-225). But it was only eight months later, in October 1387, that the king summoned the representatives of the three estates to an assembly (*cortes*) in the town of Braga and, with his advisers, he made decisions about the income that those women who lived in the queen's household should receive. According to the chronicler Fernão Lopes, the average amount earned by the household ladies was 150 *libras* (a Portuguese unit of account), but there were exceptions. One of the 'damsels' – Dona Beatriz de Castro, considered as the one of highest status – earned 1000 *libras*, the equivalent to 20 *dobras*. Philippa's lady-in-waiting Beatriz Gonçalves de Moura, a widow appointed with the aim of teaching the English queen the local Portuguese uses, received a little less, 800 *libras* – 16 *dobras castellãs*. Her daughter, Teresa Vasques Coutinha, was paid 200 *libras* as the queen's main chambermaid. Those who had lower wages (150 *libras*) were called *donzelas* – 'damsels' – as they were generally younger than the dames (*donas*), unmarried, and entirely dependent on the queen, as they, unlike the other female attendants, did not own a household or have significant sources of income. Ultimately, the chambermaids' remuneration amounted to only 60 *libras*, underscoring their lower status within the household hierarchy (Lopes 1983, 285).

Quantitative data concerning those now referred to as the 'residents of the queen's household' only re-emerge around 1405. A list of the residents of the royal court offers insight into the identities of 30 *donas*, whose maintenance cost the queen 52,600 *libras* per month, in addition to the expenses associated with 10 maids and several servants.

As for the men in the queen's service, their number was even higher. Among the officials, 27 names could be found, to which could be joined the 31 servants of the stable, most of them horsemen, essential for an itinerant court. A kind of veterinarian and a farrier were also needed for the maintenance of the horses' good health.

Those who earned the best wages were the Majordomo (*Mordomo-Mor*) – 9000 *libras* – followed by the Chancellor (*Chanceler*) – 6000 *libras*. Philippa's private secretary (*Escrivão da Puridade*) earned 2300 *libras*, 600 *libras* more than the kitchen-scribe (*Escrivão da Cozinha*). Philippa's cook and her tailor, both named *Richarte*, were probably English and both received 1600 *libras*. A total of approximately 50,000 *libras* was allocated to cover the remuneration of the male household officials (*Monumenta Henricina* 1960, 289-293).

In addition to the spending on personnel, were expenses with wardrobes and distributions of food – bread and wine. Most of these men and women lived most of the time in court and were rewarded for it through the queen's income.

When accompanying their lady on visits to her lands, both her female companions and her officials could also make demands for lodgings, bedding and maintenance in each one of her towns (*aposentadoria*), and especially inside the churches, through the right of patronage (Rodrigues and Silva 2010, 219). Within this context, requests were at times made for cereals such as wheat or barley to support the household maintenance staff; on other occasions, they concerned clothing and lodging for the queen's officials, as well as for lepers who, at the queen's expense and accompanied by her attendants, came to her domains seeking healing in the local medicinal waters.

The record-keeping of charters issued by the king and the queens: genesis of the Queen's chancellery

Philippa of Lancaster married João I, King of Portugal, in February 1387, and for twenty-eight years she managed the affairs of the queen's household and lands. Thanks to a combination of various sources, we were able not only to gain a clearer understanding of the structure of the queen's household, but also to shed light on the administration of the queen's lands. As we have seen, not only did the chronicler Fernão Lopes provide valuable information on the establishment

of Philippa's entourage, but we also have access to listings of the residents of the Royal Court that include members of the queen's household. Furthermore, the archive of one of the queen's towns has yielded previously unknown documentation from the period during which Philippa was responsible for the administration of the Queen's lands. This material reveals certain practices introduced at that time and later continued by her successors, offering valuable insight into the queens' relationship with their estates.

On March 19, 1410, Queen Philippa of Lancaster (1387-1415) ended a charter addressed to the judges and justices of her lands and towns, recommending to them:

And from this charter, have the contents taken in a public form in each of your towns and places, and we command that it be registered in the books of those municipalities, and likewise in each of the aforementioned towns and places, and have it sent by one of the gatekeepers of that town or place closer to you, and the other town to another place closer to them, in such a way that all may be informed of it (Silva and Gonalo Melo da Silva 2024, 57).

The suggestion to disseminate, copy, and keep in the books of the municipalities the charters addressed to them, was repeated in other communications from the same queen to the towns that belonged to her *seigneurie*. In the town of 3bidos, the recommendation was followed. As described in a document dated August 31, 1411, after the reading of another message from the queen, the proctor Afonso Eanes:

[He] told the said judge that the said charter was written on paper and could be easily torn, which could jeopardize the rights of the said council. However, he requested that the said judge order him to be given the draft of the said charter in a public form with the notary's seal. And the said judge, upon examining the said charter and finding it was not erased, interlined, or altered in any suspicious manner and considering it was written on paper, granted his authority and instructed me, the notary, to provide the draft of the said charter of the said council in a public form with my seal. And I, the notary, duly provided it on the same day, as mentioned above (Silva and Silva 2024, 59).

At the end of the reading of two other charters from Queen Philippa, dated from the previous year, the notary public attested that:

The said charter, being thus presented and read as aforementioned, the said judge ordered me, the aforementioned notary, to record it in this book in a public form, as the said charter commanded. And I, by his command, wrote down this instrument and placed my signature, which is (S.T.). *Gratis pro Deo*. (Silva and Silva 2024, 58).

(...) to register the said charter in the book of the council registers of this town in a public form, with only my seal, and he granted me his ordinary authority for this purpose (Silva and Silva 2024, 56).

It is thanks to these guidelines set by the only English queen of Portugal, and continued by her successors in charge of the Queens' towns¹¹, that the municipalities under their authority were obliged to register in a book all documents sent to them by the queens or kings of Portugal which had municipal relevance. This practice allows us to learn more about the political communication between the queens and the towns that constituted their lordship. In the "Óbidos' Council Book of Registers" (*Tombo do Concelho de Óbidos*), there is a segment with "charters and privileges that the council has, which are kept in the trunk of the said council, for which this council has one key" (Silva and Silva 2024, 49). Within this section, consisting of sixteen out of the nineteen folios of the "Council Book", there were, in addition to some royal charters, missives addressed to the council of Óbidos and other towns, by Queen Philippa of Lancaster, her daughter Isabel -who replaced her mother after her death in 1415- and Leonor of Aragon, wife of the prince and successor of João I, the future king Duarte.

The *Tombo* (book of council registers) is the oldest document preserved in the Historical Archive of the Municipality of Óbidos. The first three folios correspond to the actual council registers, which list the properties that, at the time - the mid-1430s - belonged to the municipality (Silva and Silva 2024, 43-49). However, a barely visible caption at the end of the council registers - on the verso of the binding - provides precise information about its origin. It states that it is the:

Section of the book of council registers belonging to the Municipality of Óbidos, made by the order of Martjm de Santarem, Corregedor, during the time of Martjm Annes do Forno, procurator of the said Council, and Joham Fernandez, scribe. It began in January, of the Era 1424, in which the contracts, charters, privileges, and freedoms of the said Council are to be placed (Silva and Silva 2024, 83).

On the indicated date - January 1424 - the town of Óbidos was under the administration of Princess Isabel, the only daughter of King D. João I and Queen Philippa of Lancaster.¹²

However, based on documentary evidence, it appears that this specific section titled "Das cartas e privilegyos que o concelho ha..." (Silva and Silva 2024, 49) began to be compiled during the reign of King João I, at a time when Queen Philippa of Lancaster was organizing the administration of the lands granted to her by her husband.

It consists of a list of 29 summarized charters sent to the Council of Óbidos by the kings Dinis, Afonso IV, Pedro I, Fernando I, João I, and Duarte, as well as by Queen Philippa of Lancaster. (Silva and Silva 2024, 49-55). Nevertheless, at the time when the list and its summary were compiled, there likely still existed some of those documents, presumably stored in the chest kept at the Town Hall (Silva and Silva 2024, 49-55).

The remaining folios mostly transcribe full charters that were read in the council meetings of Óbidos by their conveyors or other local authorities and granted to local entities. There are 22 complete charters transcribed. A significant portion of these documents concerned the administration of Óbidos as part of the assets belonging to the queen's household. The grantors of

¹¹ On November 3, 1424, at the Town Hall of Óbidos, a letter from Queen Philippa dated 1411 was read and Fernão d'Álvares, *Ouvidor* of Princess Isabel, stated that "since the said letter was written on paper and could be lost, and because it concerned the common good of all and had passed through many hands, he ordered me, Vasco Eanes, notary of the said Lady Princess in the said town and clerk of the municipal chamber of the said council, to transcribe it into the *Livro do Tombo* of the said council, under my seal, with the day, month, and year duly recorded (Silva and Silva. 2024, 82).

¹² (Ana Paula Jerónimo Antunes 2012). This particular circumstance will be addressed in greater detail later in the text.

these charters were the previously mentioned ladies of Óbidos: Philippa of Lancaster (1387-1415), her daughter Isabel (1415-1428), later Duchess of Burgundy, and Leonor de Aragon (1428-1440), sister-in-law of Isabel and daughter-in-law of Philippa. Among the charters issued by the royal chancelleries, some were granted by Fernando I (1367-1383) and the majority by João I (1385-1433).

Preceding the original text of each charter was a description of its reception or of the occasions on which it was read aloud during a council meeting, including details of the location and the individuals who witnessed the act. The closing section of the charter outlined the measures to be undertaken by the council in compliance with its stipulations.

Interestingly, some judicial sentences regarding communal property were also deemed significant enough to be included among the documents in this second part of the Council Registers (Silva and Silva 2024, 60, 71, 80-81).

The management of the Queens' Lands by Queen Philippa of Lancaster

In his chronicle of King João I, Fernão Lopes informs us that, following the celebrations held in Porto on the occasion of the king's marriage to Philippa of Lancaster, 'the King arranged a household for the Queen and assigned her a fixed income for her expenses, until such time as he granted her, as he had promised, lands for the governance of her person and household' (Lopes 1983, 224-225).

These and other measures taken on the occasion of King João's marriage may have been agreed upon with the procurators of the 'cities and towns' whom he had summoned to be present in the city of Porto on 14 February 1387, as well as with representatives of the nobility and the clergy, who were already in attendance to witness the royal wedding (Armindo de Sousa 1990, 295). The subsequent information provided by Fernão Lopes regarding the queen's household—namely that the King granted lands to the Queen and assigned incomes (*moradias*) to the women of her household—reflects decisions that were likewise taken in the *cortes*, this time held in Braga, in October of the same year (Sousa 1990, 298).

However, the charter by which Philippa was granted several towns as part of her *arras* is no longer extant. Thus, documents preserved in the archives of ecclesiastical institutions in those territories, as well as in the Chancellery of King João I, provide the earliest information regarding these grants. On June 9, July 7, September 29, and October 4, 1387, four different notaries acting on behalf of the queen were documented in that town.¹³ On October 20, 1387, a notary-general for the queen's lands authored a document concerning the interests of the Collegiate Church of São Pedro de Óbidos.¹⁴ In Coimbra, on August 8, 1387, a royal charter signed by the king 'in the presence of the queen with whom we spoke, and according to her wishes' already revealed that, prior to that date, the town of Sintra and its surrounding lands had been granted to Queen Philippa, along with other locations that, unfortunately, are not specified.¹⁵ A few months later, on November 27, while the court was still in Braga in the aftermath of the recent meeting of the *cortes*, the king also responded to complaints presented by the municipal council of Torres Novas. These revealed that some inhabitants within the walled town had obtained from the queen's chancellor, and in the name of the said Queen, confirmation of a privilege previously granted to them by King Fernando, which the current monarch did not intend to renew.¹⁶ From this, we may conclude that,

¹³ ANTT, *Colegiada de Santa Maria de Óbidos*, M.14, n.º.277; M.8, n.º.148, 150 e 147.

¹⁴ ANTT, *Colegiada de São Pedro e Santiago de Óbidos*, M.1, n.º.12.

¹⁵ *Chancelarias Portuguesas. D. João I* (2004) vol. II, T.I [II-261], pp.151-152.

¹⁶ *Chancelarias Portuguesas. D. João I* (2004) vol. II, T.I [II- 239], pp.141-142.

by the time this privilege was confirmed, Torres Novas had already become part of the queen's lands.

For two other towns, evidence of their connection to Queen Philippa appears later. Two letters dated 1393 indicate that, at least by that year, the queen was concerned with the state of her town of Torres Vedras, where the effects of the recent war were still being felt, particularly in the organization of church archives.¹⁷ There, she held certain crown lands (*reguengos*), to which she had sent Bartolomeu Eanes to inspect and report “on how the lands of our royal demesne, from which we are to receive a quarter share, are being used.”¹⁸ In Montemor-o-Velho, there were judges acting on behalf of the queen in 1395, and again in 1407. Two years earlier, in 1405, Queen Philippa had even supported the town's municipal council in its claim to criminal jurisdiction over the village of Tavadre, which the cathedral chapter of Coimbra sought to bring under its control (Maria Helena da Cruz Coelho 2010, 15).

Queen Philippa thus held jurisdiction over six towns. After her death, her husband acceded to their son Pedro's request that Montemor-o-Velho be incorporated into the Infante's patrimony (Coelho 2010, 94). Aside from this exception, however, it is evident that from her time onward, the composition of the queens' patrimony achieved an unprecedented degree of stability. With few exceptions, the lands granted henceforth were Óbidos, Sintra, Alenquer, Torres Vedras, Torres Novas and Alvaiázere (replacing Montemor-o-Velho). As we mentioned before, from the reign of King Duarte onward, it is asserted that this group of towns constituted what came to be known as her *câmara* (Rodrigues 2007, 5).

Among the charters issued by Philippa to her towns, there is evidence of her concern for the effective management and profitable use of agricultural resources. For instance, there is evidence of her concern for the use of her royal estates, as she sent her overseers to inspect the state of cultivation.¹⁹ On some occasions, the queen requested provisions, such as wheat to be provided as assistance, while in others, she called for the inspection of cargo delivered by the tenants (Silva and Silva 2024, 49-50). She also demonstrated awareness of the difficulties in supplying her cities with fish due to the silting of rivers and lagoons (Silva and Silva 2024, 58-59; 80-81). Through the documentation preserved in the sector of charters and privileges in the “Óbidos Council Book of Records” we clearly perceive the presence of her officials in the towns and the roles they played, sometimes even providing services to the council itself.

In Óbidos, she had in her service, at the very least, Rodrigo Eanes - a law graduate as the queen's *Ouvidor* (1401) - Pedro Eanes and Estêvão Eanes - the queen's notaries (1410). However, it is possible to complete this picture in earlier and later years. As we have seen, in 1387, the year in which Óbidos became Queen Philippa's town, we find four different notaries serving the queen, later stabilizing with João Domingues, who also served as a notary in the registry of the Church of Santa Maria de Óbidos, between at least 1390 and 1405. However, he was not the only one: Pedro Eanes served in the town in 1401, 1402, and 1403, Pedro Eanes, Vasco Eanes, and João Vasques had rarer but repeated appearances in that capacity between 1401 and 1414.²⁰ We also know that a chaplain of the queen, Nicolau Mendes, was rector of the Church of Santa Maria de Óbidos in 1406, indicating that the queen's presence, at least in this town, extended even into the spiritual

¹⁷ ANTT, *Colegiada de Santa Maria do Castelo de Torres Vedras*, M.16, n.º.21; M.22, n.º.27 – Lisbon, June 9, 1393.

¹⁸ ANTT, *Colegiada de São Miguel de Torres Vedras*, M.6, n.º.120 –Lisbon, March 3, 1393.

¹⁹ ANTT, *Colegiada de São Miguel de Torres Vedras*. M.6, n.º.120 –Lisbon, March 3, 1393.

²⁰ ANTT, *Colegiada de Santa Maria de Óbidos*, Maços 1-16.

domain.²¹ After Philippa's death, from 1416 onwards, these officials were replaced by those serving her daughter and daughter-in-law, the princesses, until 1434.²²

However, through the limited extant documentation, it becomes evident that any active intervention by the queens in their lands was met with great resistance. In the *Cortes* of Coimbra in 1395, the representatives of the council of Óbidos complained to the king that, contrary to what had been established in previous assemblies, the queen appointed a book-keeper and a scribe for the guardianship of minors, thus usurping the functions that the local judges considered their own.²³ The lament was repeated 15 years later when Queen Philippa attempted to appoint judges and scribes in her towns, likely individuals with academic training or at least knowledgeable in law and notarial writing, again to handle matters concerning orphans and testamentary dispositions, commonly referred to as *resíduos* (Silva and Silva 2024, 57). Eventually, the queen gave in, considering it best for the well-being of the people of her towns and places or to avoid potential revolts against her administration. The local judges continued to handle the cases, with their judgments later registered by the notaries appointed by the queens in the council's books.

However, the queen's lordship also seemed to be perceived as an intermediary between the king's authority and administration and the local authorities. In various situations, appeals were made to the queen to support measures proposed by the municipalities that aimed at solidarity in tasks that were of common interest, such as river dredging, construction and reconstruction of fountains, bridges, and roads, among others (Silva and Silva 2024, 61-62; 81-82). On some occasions, the king himself addressed the inhabitants of Óbidos and their neighbors, seeking to motivate them for joint tasks of communal interest. This happened in 1400 and 1413 when, at the request of the Council of Óbidos, he sent charters to the neighboring circumscriptions of Atouguia and Cadaval, urging them to participate in the dredging works of the Lagoon (Silva and Silva 2024, 54; 61-65). He also expressed his willingness, in line with the queen's opinion, to oblige everyone to work for the common good that would result from such works (Silva and Silva 2024, 58-59).

Sometimes even the local ecclesiastical authorities appealed to the queen's influence in superior appointment magistracies.²⁴ Although the administration of Queen Philippa seemed to have been generally marked by harmony with local counterparts as well as with her husband and lord, King João I, she nevertheless compelled him to clearly define the extent of her jurisdiction and, in turn, the limits of royal intervention in the queen's towns. Her successors at the helm of the queen's household would value this attempt to define their powers and continue this discussion with the king.²⁵

However, when comparing Queen Philippa's approach to the challenges of managing her lands with that of her daughter and successor, the differences are striking. It is evident that the queen mother demonstrated a more flexible disposition in responding to the reactions of the councils within her lordships to her impositions.

²¹ ANTT, *Colegiada de Santa Maria de Óbidos*, M. 7, n.º121.

²² 1416 – Vasco Eanes, Notary of the Princess and Clerk of the Municipal Council; 1418 – João Fernandes, Notary of the Princess; 1423 – Vasco Fernandes, Notary of the Princess and Clerk of the Municipal Council; 1424 – Afonso Eanes do Cadaval, Clerk of the *Almoxarife* (Revenue Officer); Fernão d'Álvares, Auditor (*Ouvidor*) of the Princess; Vasco Fernandes, Notary of the Princess and Clerk of the Municipal Council; 1425 – Pedro Eanes, Servant of Princess D. Isabel; 1426 – Fernão d'Álvares, Auditor of the Princess; Vasco Fernandes, Notary of the Princess and Clerk of the Municipal Council; 1434 – Doctor Ruy Fernandes, Auditor of the Infant.

²³ ANTT, *Chancelaria de D. João I*. L.º2, fs. 95v-96.

²⁴ ANTT, *Colegiada de São Miguel de Torres Vedras*, M. 6, n.º120– Lisbon, March 3, 1393

²⁵ ANTT, *Gaveta 17*, M. 2, n.º13 – 1430 – Óbidos, September 29.

The management of the Queens' Lands by Princess Isabel of Portugal.

After her mother's death in July 1415, the only daughter of the kings of Portugal, Isabel, inherited the lands and properties that constituted the queen's estate, to hold them until there was a new queen in Portugal (Silva 1994, 85-109).

Royal consorts had the right to retain the lands granted to them by their husbands at the time of marriage until their own death. In this case, however, it was a provisional donation of the 'queens' lands' to an unmarried Princess who would never become Queen of Portugal. Therefore, the lifelong nature of the grant was removed, giving way to certain conditions, which would cease either when the beneficiary changed her marital status or when a new or future queen ascended to the throne. Nevertheless, between 1415 and 1428 – the year her elder brother married Leonor of Aragon – Isabel was practically the only Lady at the Portuguese court, likely performing roles very similar to those of a queen (Antunes 2012, 74-94). We know, for example, that in late 1415, it was Isabel who organized the reception in Évora for her father, her brothers, and the other knights and retinues following the victorious campaign in Ceuta (Gomes Eanes de Zurara, n.d., 95-96).

The Princess also played a significant role in supporting religious foundations, some of which had been established by her mother, while others were founded by the Princess herself with the support of her father (Antunes 2012, 72-75; António Domingues de Sousa Costa 1970, 155-156). It was the income from the queens' lands that enabled them to play a significant role as founders of pious works.

But we also have some evidence of the role she played specifically in the administration of the queen's lands. There are numerous instances in which she directly contacted the authorities of the Municipality of Óbidos, and her charters constitute the most numerous species that the *Óbidos' Council Book of Registers* has preserved. She maintained her own archival record, from which she had documents transcribed into each municipal register, selecting those she deemed relevant to local administration (Silva and Silva 2024, 68, 70-71). Moreover, the six charters issued by Fernando I, the twelve charters of João I, and the three complete charters of Queen Philippa—one of which appears in duplicate—also appear to have been transcribed from the princess's personal register.

The princess's style in her communications with her lands is very direct, suggesting that she relied on few, if any, intermediaries. It is difficult not to be tempted to hope for evidence that she herself composed and wrote her letters. As a means of identification and validation, we have the testimony that the documents were “signed by the hand of the said lady and sealed with her cameo” (Silva and Silva 2024, 72).

It is between 1423 and 1427 that a vigorous relationship between the princess and, at the very least, the town of Óbidos, becomes evident. Both the king and the municipal council are reminded of the gains secured by her mother, Queen Philippa, regarding the limits of royal officials' jurisdiction within her lands (Silva and Silva 2024, 68-71). The regional *corregedor* was barred from taking action, and the council was prohibited from accepting regulations, ordinances, judgments, letters, or warrants issued by him. Additionally, changes were introduced to the procedures for the recruitment of pack animals and men for military service, even though military affairs were exclusively under the authority of the king and his officials. (Silva and Silva 2024, p.79).

It seems possible to discern, in the manner in which these measures were articulated, a strong desire on the part of the princess to assert herself as the supreme authority within her lordship, without whose consent nothing held validity. To the judges of Óbidos, who were preventing Diogo Henriques from taking possession of the office of judge of the orphans in the

town—a mission to which he had been appointed by the monarch—the princess requested that they refrain from doing so, further adding that “it is my grace and will that he hold it as if he had it by my own charter” (Silva and Silva 2024, pp.72-73).

The Town Council, however, did not take kindly to the impositions of its Lady. In 1427, the Council even sent her a list of “grievances” which it felt were being inflicted upon it, to which Princess Isabel responded by letter dated from Évora on December 2 of the same year. From the tone of her replies, one can surmise just how contrary they must have been to the wishes of the municipal officials.

Princess Isabel did not differ from her predecessors in the interest she showed toward her lands. These territories provided the essential revenues needed to maintain her household; however, it was not always easy to persuade the inhabitants of her domains to make their contribution. The municipal magistrates, lacking any legal means to exempt themselves from such obligations, would attempt to dissuade the queens by invoking the poverty of the people and the meagerness of agricultural production. This was precisely the excuse put forward by the farmers of Óbidos to avoid paying a pound of barley each, which was to make up the ten *moios* (a capacity measure used for cereals) demanded by the princess. She, however, responded mercilessly, stating that “it is rather a matter of your unwillingness to serve me than of any actual lack” and went so far as to suggest that, if necessary, the levy should be imposed even upon those who claimed exemption on account of privileged status.

There were also complaints from Óbidos regarding the conduct of the royal *escrivão dos contos* (accounting scribe), who was accused of seizing clothing from local farmers during his visits to the municipality. Yet, in response to this concern, the princess showed little empathy, replying that the damage caused could not have been significant, given that the said official did not travel with a large entourage.

Likewise, the princess rejected the criticisms raised by the municipal officials regarding the issuance of warrants that compelled them to provide clothing and lodging to lepers who were brought to the region by the Provider and Administrator of the Leper Houses and Hospitals within her domains, Frei Agostinho of the Third Order of Saint Francis. A few kilometers from the town of Óbidos was a thermal area which, from an early date, had been used for treating skin diseases. In 1427, Princess Isabel expressed concern over the lack of adequate housing for the patients she had sent to the *Caldas* (warm waters) of her town, and declared that, considering, “Frei Agostinho is a good and capable man, who will see to it properly,” she deemed it appropriate and commanded that he be entrusted with the administration of those facilities, instructing him to oversee repairs and improvements “as he sees fit”. To that end, she allocated “the *vintenas* of that town and its surrounding lands, as well as some beasts to transport lime, timber, and whatever else may be necessary for the task” (Silva and Silva 2024, 76). In other words, the princess’s charitable undertaking was to be carried out with the collaboration of all local inhabitants.

What seemed to most concern the local administrative elite, however, was the fact that the Princess, “over trivial matters,” summoned judges and other officials into her presence to account for their actions. According to their claims, such pressure on magistrates led many to refuse the office in the following year. They therefore requested that they only be summoned by letters issued through the royal chancellery—that is, by order of the king. Princess Isabel, however, explained that she retained the right to summon them either by *alvará* or *portaria*, “as has previously been my will” and added:

“And you may be certain that I shall do so whenever any one of you, in the exercise of your office, fails to comply with my orders” (Silva and Silva 2024, 75).

In other words, the need to constantly reaffirm her authority reveals that Princess Isabel—being neither queen nor having received her lordship through the usual channels—faced difficulties at times in asserting her authority over her domains. Nonetheless, this did not prevent her from exercising, to the fullest extent, all the powers to which she was entitled.

Indeed, on October 24, 1423, she had confirmed to the town council and its leading men of her town of Óbidos “all their privileges, liberties, honors, and good usages and customs which they possessed and had enjoyed during the time of the other queens who came before”. And even though Isabel was not a queen, even prior to this, there was, at least since 1418, a notary acting in her name in the town (Silva and Silva 2024, 64-65). The public notary was a royal official appointed in the cities to oversee commercial transactions on behalf of the Crown. However, when a queen was granted a town from the Crown for her usufruct, the notary would henceforth act on her behalf.

Conclusion

Receiving, either at the time of marriage or later during the course of the union, certain lands and, above all, small towns that belonged to the patrimony of the Crown of the Kingdom of Portugal, the queens consort of Portugal were able to enjoy economic autonomy throughout their lifetimes. From the territories under their authority, they received royal rights and revenues; and in cases where the donation had been made as *arras*, they also held an authority comparable to that of the king within those lands under their jurisdiction. This authority brought economic benefits in the form of fines, taxes, and other monetary or in-kind exactions from the local populations. To ensure the collection of such revenues, each of the queen’s towns had its own body of officials under her jurisdiction.

With the revenues from their lands, queens were able to support those who served in their household—both men and women—and to fulfil certain roles traditionally assigned to royal consorts, such as the distribution of alms and royal favors, as well as the foundation and maintenance of religious institutions. These functions were undoubtedly significant in shaping a queenly identity that rendered them politically influential figures within their husbands’ realms. Nonetheless, they remained aware that the foundation of their importance lay in the territory that comprised their lordship. It was this territorial base that enabled them to maintain a household staff that could operate independently from that of the king and perform functions of varying degrees of public significance.

Although it is difficult to prove that, during their tenure as queens consort, they visited or resided more frequently in the lands they held in lordship than in those under their husbands’ administration, this bond became stronger and more visible upon widowhood, with many of these towns serving as places of refuge for the dowager-queens. In their towns, the king’s officials had a limited scope of authority, particularly with regard to the enforcement of judicial sentences. Nevertheless, some uncertainties persisted—so much so that certain queens demanded categorical clarification from their husbands.

Assessing the income that medieval queens of Portugal derived from the administration of their lands is an impossible task, due to the absence of account books and other sources that might provide such data. What can be done to understand the nature and scope of the “queen’s business” is to gather the available information concerning the assets that belonged to them, identify those responsible for managing these holdings on the queens’ behalf, and examine how the resulting revenues were employed. This is what I have attempted to do in this essay.

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