

Heraldry in the convent of Lorvão: sacred space, liturgy, and memory

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Abstract: Despite the provisions against burial inside Cistercian churches, the convent of Lorvão displays a considerable amount of heraldry, evident in coats of arms, funerary tombstones, carvings and paintings, and liturgical objects. This heritage, once much more plentiful, has not all survived to us today; but it is possible to reconstitute some of this wealth through documentary references. This article analyses such remains and references, not considering them in a static way, but in function of their activation and agency in the monastic space and in the relationship that such heraldic images established with the devotional and liturgical practices that ensued there, and with the preservation of the monastic community's memory.

Keywords: heraldry; sacred space; liturgy; devotion; Cistercian Order; convent of Lorvão.

Heráldica en el monasterio de Lorvão: espacio sagrado, liturgia y memoria

Resumen: A pesar de las disposiciones que prohíben el enterramiento en el interior de las iglesias cistercienses, el convento de Lorvão exhibe una considerable heráldica, evidente en escudos de armas, lápidas funerarias, tallas, pinturas y objetos litúrgicos. Este patrimonio, otrora mucho más numeroso, no ha llegado en su totalidad a nuestros días; pero es posible reconstituir parte de esta riqueza a través de referencias documentales. Este artículo analiza tales vestigios y referencias, no considerándolos de forma estática, sino en función de su activación o agenciamiento en el espacio monástico y en la relación que tales imágenes heráldicas establecían con las prácticas devocionales y litúrgicas que allí se desarrollaban, y con la preservación de la memoria de la comunidad monástica.

Palabras clave: heráldica; espacio sagrado; liturgia; devoción; Orden del Císter; convento de Lorvão.

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Introduction

Usually conceived and analysed as a mere code of nobiliary representation, heraldry actually played a more diverse role during the Middle Ages and the Modern Age. One of its most important uses is in its application to sacred space, where heraldry served as a visual link between the world of the living and the dead, relating to the devotional practices that took place there and the fundamental question of the salvation of souls. Within this logic, common to all Christian temples, Cistercian churches and coenobiums take on their own characteristics, related to the guidelines imposed by St Bernard for the decoration of the ecclesiastical space. This text analyses the specificity of the Cistercian case, based on an analysis of the heraldic heritage that still exists in the monastery of Lorvão, seeking to relate it to monastic life and to strategies for preserving community memory.

1. Heraldry and the Church

The subject of this work is part of a double phenomenon, characteristic of the profound transformations that heraldry experienced from the 13th century onwards: on the one hand, the heraldization of the sacred space and, on the other, the sacralisation of heraldry. Both aspects are related to what could be described as the heraldic acculturation of the Church, which took place during these centuries. In fact, the Church's position on heraldry was initially somewhat reserved. When they appeared in the twelfth century, heraldic emblems were configured as a code of representation linked to battlefields and noble or chivalric values, which served as the first source for the constitution of a heraldic aesthetic (Bouyé 2001, 493-542). The simplicity of the compositions, the small number of colours, the preference for geometric elements and the extreme stylization of the figures illustrate this warlike and noble origin. The same can be said of the choice of a piece of armour, the shield, as the privileged support for the representation of heraldic emblems, later complemented by a series of external elements also derived from the uses of war (Hablot 2012, 143-166). The terminology itself enshrined this link: these emblems were given the generic name of arms, while the language used to describe them, fixed from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries onwards, showed a clear predilection for chivalric terminology (Brault 1972).

Thus, heraldry originally cultivated a privileged relationship with the world of war and nobility, which was accentuated by the development of epic literature and chivalric ethics in the late Middle Ages. It is not surprising, therefore, that the clergy of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries generally viewed the heraldic phenomenon with some suspicion. More so since, far from being limited to the sphere of war and nobility, heraldry became so widespread that it was used on the most varied occasions and reached practically all social segments, spreading rapidly throughout all Western Europe (Pastoureau 1993, 37-46). The fact is that this code was the only one in force at the time that was not built on a strictly religious basis. The causes of the success of heraldry are varied, but the fundamental issue of the increase in inter-community communication, with the progressive decline of economic and cultural self-sufficiency (or isolation), and the consequent need for more effective means of identification (Menéndez Pidal 2014, 136-140), must be highlighted.

These signs of communication, in a largely illiterate society, would tend to be of a sonorous and visual nature, not written, hence the projection of heraldry and anthroponymy, instruments of identity that are inseparable from each other in several senses, including an actual sonorous dimension. The clergy's adherence to heraldry thus followed in the footsteps of the rest of society. And often reluctantly so. To a certain extent, there was even a certain incompatibility between heraldic aesthetics and what, until then, had been the main guidelines for the self-representation of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. It is true that this deviation was gradually diluted in the common vertex of the fusion between the pious ideal and the chivalric ideal: a double approach established, on the one hand, by the ethics of the Christian knight and, on the other, by the figure of the warrior monk.

This situation allowed the assumption of heraldic emblems by the clergy to appear gradually less strange and more defensible. In the research that has been carried out over the last decade in the study of medieval Portuguese ecclesiastical heraldry, this progressive integration has been evidenced, both in the case of the cathedral clergy (Saraiva *et al.* 2014, 153-173), and in that of the Lisbon prelates (Seixas 2018, 691-701). As the sources used in these studies show, the reluctance of the different ecclesiastical estates to adopt the heraldic code ended up creating a peculiar sphere: what is known as "ecclesiastical heraldry," in which the freedom to include autonomous signs inside the coat of arms (normally articulating the family arms with elements expressive of religious devotion) coexists with a progressive rigidity in the elements of the exterior of the coat of arms, expressive of the position of the holder in the hierarchy of the institution (Seixas 2004, 55-72). The idiosyncrasy of ecclesiastical heraldry also

led to a constant effort to theorise it, evident in the first treatise on heraldic matters by the jurisconsult Bartolo da Sassoferrato, which tends to acquire greater complexity in subsequent medieval and modern treatises on armorial bearings (Boudreau 1999, 29-52; Seixas 2014, 297-333).

2. Heraldry, the sacred space and the salvation of souls

In its complexity (should we say polyvalence?), ecclesiastical heraldry was fully established in the fourteenth century, especially in the highest ranks of this institution. It would be unthinkable, therefore, for a prelate of this period not to use arms. Another question, complementary and inseparable, but more rarely raised, is that of the use of these arms by each prelate. To focus attention not on the constitution or nature of the heraldic emblem, but on its plastic manifestations: on what physical supports it was produced, with what material and chromatic nature, on what objects, and in what places. And, of course, for which addressees and for what purposes. The presence of ecclesiastical heraldry in churches is part of a wider phenomenon, which Laurent Hablot (2011, 211-233) has called the heraldization of sacred space. A special relationship that heraldry has maintained, from the thirteenth century onwards, with the ecclesiastical space, particularly with funerary chapels. Funerary chapels were places where two complementary concepts converged: the salvation of souls and the perpetuation of the lineage. The presence of the arms highlighted this relationship, making it known to the eyes of the community. As Maria de Lurdes Rosa (2012, 42) observes,

an unequivocal relationship is established between the space of the chapel, the lineage to which it belongs and the salvation of souls; in a certain way, the notion of home, around which the construction of identity and family memory is organized, both materially and symbolically, and transferred to the sacred world and to a supernatural dimension: to the material home, represented by the manor house, corresponds a supernatural 'house', represented by the chapel.

In this sacred space, the family, understood in its temporal succession (which was intended to last until the end of time), played the role of guardian of the souls of the deceased, a role which at the same time inscribed it as an entity intrinsic to the ecclesial space and the worship practiced there (part of the Church, in this sense), and projected it into an openly spiritual dimension (Seixas 2021a, 521-550). The means by which this presence was made visible and active—we would say activated this presence—were precisely the placement of the emblems of the lineage on key points, such as tombs or tombstones, arcosolia or other arches, interior or exterior walls, vault keystones or even, in extreme cases, altar fronts. The relationship thus established was doubly beneficial for the lineage insofar as such an emblematic presence contributed to the sacralisation of the lineage's arms, but also, through the choice of the place and types of concrete manifestation, to the affirmation of the position that this family occupied or intended to occupy in the social hierarchy of its time.

3. Heraldry, the Cistercian Order and the monastery of Lorvão

But in this logic, the Cistercian order seems to have played a peculiar role. In fact, the austerity that the Cistercian churches insisted on maintaining, in line with the aesthetic and doctrinal concerns developed by Bernard of Clairvaux, is well known, and, indeed, has long been pointed out by Georges Duby (1979). In this sense, Cistercian monasteries were distinguished from others by a systematic refusal to allow burial in the sacred space of their churches. This measure corresponds to the same precept that led to the exclusion of decorations that were not strictly religious, or to the elimination of the tropes included in religious chants. It was a matter of amputating everything that was too much and a source of distraction in relation to what was the religious essence of the temple and of the rituals practiced therein.

What, then, is the explanation for the attraction that the noble families, including the royal house itself, felt for Cistercian monasteries, where they could not occupy the sacred space so intensely? Despite this limitation, the truth is that the Cistercian communities, precisely because of the rigor of their rule and their way of life, presented themselves as guarantees that the testamentary dispositions in favour of the souls of the deceased would be fulfilled with a much more certain efficacy than that of other religious congregations or, worse still, of the secular clergy. In this equation, the choice of Cistercian monasteries thus revealed a sure guarantee of the fulfilment of pious obligations to the detriment of the insertion of tombs inside the church and the corresponding profusion of heraldic decoration.

The scarcity of heraldry inside Cistercian churches is even more visible in Lorvão, where it is aggravated by the fact that almost nothing has survived from medieval times. There are two fundamental reasons for this. Firstly, the prosperity of the community itself during the Modern Age, which allowed for a systematic remodelling of the monastic spaces, making the whole edifice, as it can be seen today, essentially Mannerist and Baroque. Secondly, the disappearance of the vast movable heritage following the extinction of the religious orders decreed in 1834, but which in the case of the female communities allowed survival until the death of the last nun of each convent. This occurred, in the case of Lorvão, only in 1887, leading to the dispersal of its numerous and precious possessions, such as liturgical objects, vestments, codices, transferred to other locations. Fortunately, some of these assets were preserved, either in the National Archive (Torre do Tombo), the Portuguese National Library, or the library of the University of Coimbra, or in museums, especially that which would become the Machado de Castro National Museum, in this same city.

Even so, it is possible to analyse the heraldic heritage of the monastery of Lorvão through what remains of it in loco. We will try to do so by refuting the “static” character of heraldic studies centred on a formal analysis, which decontextualizes the plastic nature of the manifestations. On the contrary, we will try to understand the heraldic manifestations according to their effective functions, adequacy to the space in which they were inserted, and to the rituals and other practices that took place there. In this sense, several keys are proposed for analysing the functions played by heraldry within this monastic space.

4. Heraldry, demarcation of space and monastic memory

Firstly, let us consider the identifying and delimiting function of the space. This can be seen in the delimitation of the monastery’s enclosure, separated from the few buildings in the neighbouring village by a stream. The presence of this watercourse, channelled in the seventeenth century on the initiative of the religious community, allowed the monastic enclosure to be clearly separated, especially since a small bridge had to be crossed to reach the monastery. At the end of this bridge, there is a Mannerist entrance portal, dated 1636 (Fig. 1). In the centre and at the top of this portal, a heraldic stone is placed, thus taking on a clear visual central character. The coat-of-arms, placed upon a wide shell-shaped cartouche, shows a party of the royal arms of León and Portugal, with the lion of the former facing by *courtoisie*, i.e., looking towards the sinister instead of towards the dexter side, so as not to turn its back on the Portuguese royal arms (Fig. 2). Above the shield, the mutilated remains of the royal crown can be seen, probably destroyed as part of the republican vandalism following the establishment of this regime in 1910.



Fig. 1. Entrance portal to the monastic enclosure of Lorvão. Photo: author.



Fig. 2. Coat-of-arms attributed to the Infanta-Queen Teresa in the entrance portal to the monastic enclosure of Lorvão. Photo: author.

These are the arms retrospectively attributed to the Portuguese Infanta Teresa, daughter of King Sancho I of Portugal and wife of King Alfonso IX of León. The heraldic principle defined and universally followed from the fourteenth century onwards was applied to this infanta-queen: her husband's coat of arms should be worn on the dexter side and her own on the sinister side. This kind of recreational principle of the heraldry of queens was, moreover, applied in the scholarly works of the Early Modern Age, such as José Barbosa's *Catalogo chronologico, historico, genealogico, e critico das Rainhas de Portugal, e seus filhos* (1727) or António Caetano de Sousa's monumental *Historia genealógica da Casa Real Portuguesa* (1735-1749). It should be noted, however, that another coeval source of the enclosure portal, the codex *Livro Primeiro dos Tombos do Real Mosteiro de Sancta Maria de Lorvão*, dated 1635, presents the inverse partition: on the right side the Portuguese royal arms, on the left the Leonese ones (Rodríguez 2018, 92). This inversion may have to do with the controversial character of her marriage, which was, as we know, annulled by the Holy See; or it may be an application of the principle of precedence that should be given within the kingdom, to the royal arms over all others. In any case, we do not know which arms this infanta would have used during her lifetime: her known seal does not contain heraldic elements (Jasperse 2020, 337; Morujão 2020). The arms that decorate the entrance to Lorvão are a recreation of the seventeenth century, when the process for the beatification of the Infanta-Queen was at a particularly active stage, undertaken on the initiative of the nuns of the Lorvão community. Thus, the entrance to the monastic space is marked by this imaginary heraldry of Infanta-Queen Teresa, which is somewhat surprising. It would, in fact, be more natural for the arms of the Cistercian congregation or the monastery itself to be present here.

The presence of such arms can be explained by the hagiographic and historiographic construction of which this infanta-queen was the subject until she became, to all intents and purposes, the Blessed Teresa of Portugal, or, as she became better known, one of the Holy Queens. This transformation was undertaken, as mentioned above, on the initiative of the religious community of Lorvão, which thus intended to highlight the importance of its coenobium within the framework of Portuguese history, highlighting the figure of that princess as the individual responsible for the transition from the male Benedictine monastery to the female Cistercian convent. The identity of the monastery of Lorvão in the early modern era was, therefore, based on the praise of its royal founder, object of intense devotion not only by the nuns but also by the increasingly numerous population that came to the monastery on pilgrimage. It is within the framework of this religious devotion that

we should understand the choice of the arms attributed to the founding queen to mark a space as significant as the entrance portal to the monastic enclosure.



Fig. 3. The two portals giving access to the convent of Lorvão. Photo: author.



Fig. 4. Coat-of-arms attributed to the Infanta-Queen Teresa in the entrance portal to the convent of Lorvão. Photo: author.

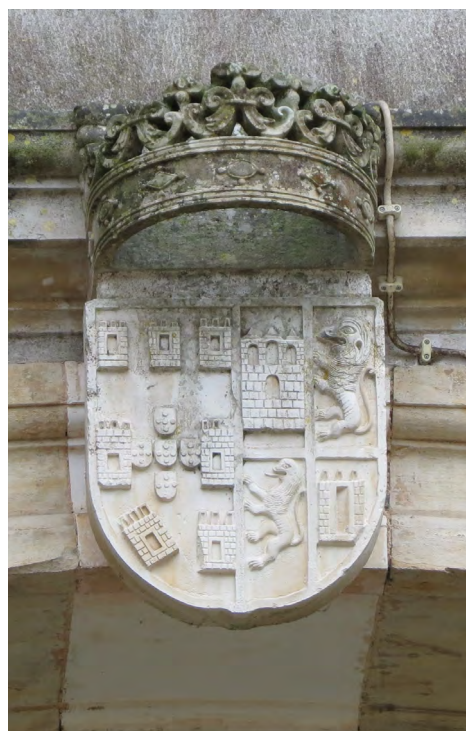


Fig. 5. Coat-of-arms attributed to the Infanta-Queen Teresa in the entrance portal to the church of Lorvão. Photo: author.

Similar reasons would have been behind the decoration of the two portals giving access to the convent building, both equally Mannerist: on the right, the one leading directly to the church, and on the left, the one giving access to the convent's entrance hall in the wing of the abbesses' palace (Fig. 3). The arches of both portals are topped with stones bearing coats-of-arms party: in the dexter, the Portuguese royal arms, and in the sinister, the royal arms of Castile-Leon (i.e., quarterly the castle of Castile and the lion of Leon, both canting arms); each of the coats-of-arms being topped by an open royal crown, which in this case escaped the republican fury of destruction (Figs. 4 and 5). As in the *Livro primeiro dos tombos...*, here too we can see the inversion of the natural order of the Infanta-Queen Teresa's arms, with the Portuguese arms placed in the most honourable position. But both these shields have a more unusual feature: instead of the arms of León, they bear the Castile-Leon quartered. This is anachronistic and illogical, since at the time these kingdoms were separate, and, thus, Teresa was never queen of Castile, but only of León. From a stylistic point of view, it is interesting to note that both the castles and the lions depicted on these arms adopt an archaic stylization: perhaps this was a way for the artist or the commissioner to signal the antiquity of the arms that were to be featured and attributed to a character who had lived in the early history of the kingdom. As with the gateway to the enclosure, the absence of the insignia of the Cistercian order or of the convent itself is surprising. The fact is that in this case, unlike the gateway to the enclosure, the heraldic message, purely dynastic so to speak, is complemented by ample religious iconography which does refer to the saints of the Cistercian order. Including the Infanta-Queen Teresa, of course.



Fig. 6. Cistercian arms on the fountain in the atrium of the priests' and visitors' residence at Lorvão. Photo: author.

Still outside the convent buildings, there is another heraldic presence that can be seen in the residence that served to receive the priests who performed functions of support to the community, namely in the celebration of masses and in the administration of the sacraments, as well as occasional illustrious visitors. In the elevated atrium that serves as the entrance to this building, there is a small fountain, topped by a coat of arms (Fig. 6) with the Portuguese royal arms in the dexter and the Cistercian insignia in the sinister (a band chequy and two fleurs-de-lis; see Rodríguez 2018). This conjugation identifies the congregation of Alcobaça, to which the monastery of Lorvão belonged, and to which the priests assigned to Lorvão owed obedience. Finally, the vast landed heritage of the monastery of Lorvão could not fail to be equally marked by its heraldry: the demarcation landmarks usually bore identifying signs which were intended to be easy and unequivocal in their decipherment. It is likely that this type of landmark was used in the second half of the sixteenth century by order of Abbess Bernarda de Lancastre, when she commanded a "careful demarcation between the monastery's properties and the goods of the Duchy of Aveiro, which were then located in the region of Bairrada. There were also registers of all the monastic properties, from Entre-Douro-e-Minho and Trás-os-Montes to the region of Abiul" (Borges 2002, 174). Unfortunately, we have no news of any of these landmarks, which were perhaps destroyed during

the nineteenth century, not only because possession of this heritage passed effectively to new owners, but also because such signs were generally perceived as remnants of “feudal” powers, whose memory was to be erased, and were therefore targeted for destruction.



Fig. 7. Coat-of-arms of the Cistercian congregation of Alcobaça in the lamps of the church of Lorvão. Photo: author.

5. Heraldry and the cohesion of the monastic community

On entering the sacred space of the church, another function of heraldry is revealed to us. It is no longer a matter of identifying and delimiting the space, since anyone entering the church from outside has necessarily already passed by two heraldic stones with similar functions. Inside the church, on the other hand, there are several heraldic occurrences of the kind whose absence was conspicuous outside. In fact, in the beautiful baroque church that is now Santa Maria de Lorvão, one can observe the repeated presence of Cistercian heraldry. It is present in various forms and in various types of heritage. Observe the lamps that hang along the walls of the nave: on each of their faces there is a small metal medallion with the party coat-of-arms of the congregation of Alcobaça (Fig. 7). What were these arms used for in this context? We believe that here they had a function of bringing together the community, based on the repetition of its identifying signs, which contrasts strongly with the strategy applied to heraldry with functions delimiting space, in which a simple occurrence is sufficient.



Fig. 8. Choir of Lorvão. Photo: author.



Fig. 9. Portuguese royal arms decorating the choir of Lorvão. Photo: author.



Fig. 10. Leonese royal arms decorating the choir of Lorvão. Photo: author.



Fig. 11. Cistercian arms decorating the choir of Lorvão. Photo: author.

This function of gathering is even more evident and makes even more sense in the eighteenth-century choir (Fig. 8), topped by a frieze alternating the Portuguese, Leonese and Cistercian arms (Figs. 9, 10 and 11). It is worth considering this choice. The choir played an essential role in the community life of the nuns since it was here that they gathered for the religious services. The systematic repetition of the heraldic elements in a way reinforced the role that the structure of the choir itself played: to unite the nuns who were part of the community, integrating them into the space where some of the most important rituals of monastic life were performed, considered not in the individuality of each nun, but in the totality of the gathered community, in which such personalities had to be dissolved. It is interesting to note that, in this case, the chosen signs can be combined to represent several entities: the heraldry of the order (the Cistercian insignia considered separately), of the congregation (the Cistercian insignia combined with the Portuguese royal arms) and of the monastery of Lorvão through the reference to its founder, Blessed Teresa (combining of the Portuguese and Leonese royal arms). It is, therefore, a composition in the Baroque taste, which so valued the polysemic readings of images, particularly those of heraldic nature (Couhault 2021, 5-32, and specifically on the Portuguese case, Seixas 2021b, 63-78).



Fig. 12. Monumental heraldry in the doorway communicating the choir with the conventual building of Lorvão. Photo: author.



Fig. 13. Infanta-Queen, the Blessed Teresa's tomb, chancel of Lorvão. Photo: author.



Fig. 14. Infanta, the Blessed Sancha's tomb, chancel of Lorvão. Photo: author.

This same triple heraldic conjugation under which the community of nuns gathered for religious services is repeated in the monumental stone that tops the western doorway connecting the choir with the conventual building (Fig. 12). In fact, three shields are combined on it: in the centre, the Cistercian insignia in its Alcobaça form, topped by a mitre; to the dexter, the party of León and Portugal, with the lion facing in courtesy, topped by a closed royal crown; and on the sinister, the Portuguese royal coat of arms, also crowned. Two other cases of this function of heraldry are found in the most sacred part of the ecclesiastical space: the chancel of the church. Indeed, here are the tombs of the two infantas beatified in 1705, known as the “Holy Queens”: in the most honourable place, on the Gospel side, Teresa (Fig. 13); and, on the Epistle side, her sister Sancha (Fig. 14). This was not the original location of the tombs, which until the time of Abbess Briolanja de Melo (1564-1574) were in the choir, thus accompanying the gathering of the nuns for the offices. Their transference to the chancel corresponds to the stimulus for the beatification of the infantas, based on the pre-existing cult, and which received, in the second half of the sixteenth century, the active support of Cardinal Henrique (future king between 1578 and 1580) as the abbot commendatory of Alcobaça, as well as the King Sebastian I, responsible for the request to open the process with the Holy See in 1575 (Borges 2002, 176-178; Marques 2011). This process was part of a series of attempts by the Crown to sacralise the dynasty, some successful (such as the canonization of Queen Santa Isabel in 1516 and the beatification of Princess Santa Joana in 1693), others inconclusive (that of the first king of Portugal, Afonso Henriques).

In Lorvão, it was therefore a matter of removing the tombs from a place where only the monastic community could see them and transferring them to a place where they would be accessible to popular devotion. It is clear that the increase in the cult of the Holy Queens that would ensue, would in turn be one of the favourable factors to take into account in the process of beatification; it also caused a remarkable mystical fervour in the monastic community. The process, however, proved long and uncertain. The high income of the convent, then the second richest in the kingdom after Alcobaça (Serrão 1987), made it possible to sustain the expenses arising from the process; which, nevertheless, could only be brought to a positive conclusion through the political, diplomatic and financial support agreed upon by King Pedro II and the queens Maria Francisca of Savoy and Maria Sofia of Newburg (Borges 2002, 202-208). The beatification of the Holy Queens, finally achieved in 1705, was received with jubilation by the Cistercian community and the Crown, and it led to a final change of sepulchres.

These are the ones that can be seen today in the chancel of the church of Lorvão. They were commissioned by Abbess Mariana Teles de Meneses. She had altars built for the cult of the Holy Queens, for the centre of which she commissioned the goldsmiths Manuel Carneiro da Silva and Domingos Pinto Ferraz to build two silver urns, to which the bodies of the infantas were solemnly transferred in 1715, in a ceremony presided over by the Bishop-Count of Coimbra, António de Vasconcelos e Sousa, “who a few years earlier had also transferred the relics of the Princess Santa Joana, in Aveiro” (Borges 2002, 421-425). These urns follow a similar model, varying only in the heraldic elements that identify them. Thus, that of Teresa has a shield party of the Portuguese royal arms on the dexter and, on the sinister, a quartered of the arms of Castile in the first quarter, those of Leon in the second and third, and in the fourth a semy of crosses debruised by a host (Fig. 15). If the presence of Castilian and Leonese arms is easily explained, despite its historical incorrectness already mentioned, the fourth quarter requires more careful attention. These are the imaginary arms attributed by late medieval and modern armorials to the kingdom of Galicia (Menéndez Pidal 1999, 285-299), which were later taken over by the respective province and its identity movements, later forming the heraldry attributed to the autonomous government of this region (Barreiro Fernández and Villares 2008, 33-103). Why this surprising inclusion of the arms of Galicia on the shield attributed to Teresa of Portugal? There may be a historicist explanation: in fact, her husband Afonso IX also held the title of King of Galicia. But there may also be a more political explanation: King João V of Portugal had inherited from his father, Pedro II, involvement in the Spanish War of Succession (1701-1714) and, as compensation for the Portuguese war effort, he demanded, in the negotiations that would lead to the signing of the Treaty of Utrecht in 1715, the cession of Galicia to the Kingdom of Portugal. The shield of Teresa’s urn is topped by the open royal crown and flanked by two angels, which are in fact the usual tenants of the Portuguese royal arms, but which in this context serve both to allude to the divine origin attributed to this heraldry and to reinforce the idea of dynastic sacredness, strengthened by the beatification of the Holy Queens.



Fig. 15. Coat-of-arms attributed to the Infanta-Queen Blessed Teresa in her urn. Photo: author.



Fig. 16. Coat-of-arms attributed to the Infanta Blessed Sancha in her urn. Photo: author.

As for the urn containing Sancha's body, it bears the plain arms of Portugal, surrounded by angels, and topped by a crown, in a composition similar to that of her sister (Fig. 16). The attribution of the plain arms of the kingdom was justified according to the norms in force at the time of the creation of the new tombs, because this infanta never married. In addition to the heraldry described, both tombs present on the anterior face (not visible) the coat-of-arms of the congregation of Alcobaça, topped by mitre and crosier (Rodríguez 2018, 94); as well as, on the lateral faces, emblematic compositions in the conceptual taste of the eighteenth century (Borges 2002, 429-430). Such compositions aimed to highlight the path of mortification and dedication to the faith followed by the two princesses, who thus provided the devotional and behavioural example that was to be followed by the monastic community.



Fig. 17. The mythical origin of the Portuguese royal arms represented in an engraving by Father António Soares de Albergaria in his *Tropheos Lusitanos* (1632). Image in the public domain.

6. The special case of the repetition of the Portuguese royal arms in the monastery of Lorvão

A relationship was thus established between the Portuguese royal coat of arms and the convent which went far beyond simply identifying the princesses buried there. Two complementary directions can be noted in this sense. Firstly, an analogy between the meaning of the examples of sanctity offered by the bodies of the two infantas, and the meaning attributed at the time to the Portuguese royal heraldry. The shield with the *quinois* was explained, in fact, as having been awarded by Christ to Afonso I on the eve of the Battle of Ourique as a sign of the victory that would allow him to be acclaimed as the first king of Portugal (Fig. 17). The five escutcheons were a visual proof of the mystical vision that the first king had, recalling simultaneously the cross and the five wounds of Christ. The bezants on each escutcheon alluded, in turn, to the thirty silver coins for which Judas had sold Christ, as a sign of the Redemption of mankind (Seixas 2019, 59-71). The message of the royal coat of arms was thus linked to the exemplarity of the two princesses who had been beatified, providing the monastic community with an integrated model of devotion. More so because King John V had obtained, in many privileges requested and granted from the Holy See, that the Holy Queens should have, for devotional purposes, a status similar to that of the canonised, having received for this purpose a mass and their own religious office in 1709 (Brazão 1937, 16).

Secondly, the presence of the Portuguese royal coat of arms alluded to the circumstances of the re-founding of the monastery by the Infanta-Queen Teresa, which also corresponded to her entry into the female and Cistercian sphere, dignifying it as a royal foundation. It is certain that this reconversion of the monastery of Lorvão seems inseparable from Teresa's actions as a challenger of the authority of her royal brother Afonso II, in the context of what became known as the "question of the infantas" (Vilar 2005, 85-113; Costa 1963). From then on, Lorvão became one of the centres of power of the noble families associated with the resistance to the attempts of centralisation of royal power, as can be seen from the lists of its nuns and, even more, by the exercise of the position of abbess, recurrent in certain families loyal to the infanta-queen, such as the Sousa and Briteiros lineages (Coelho and Martins 1993, 489; Rêpas 2021, I, 320-328). The aristocratic dimension of Lorvão, created in these circumstances, was maintained over the centuries and has never been denied. For Lorvão, as for the monastery of Arouca (founded by another of Teresa's sisters, the Infanta Mafalda),

it seems legitimate to speak of the existence of a ‘royal reference of monastic choice’, if we may call it so. It should be remembered that the monasteries of Arouca and Lorvão, those which are demonstrably sought after by the high nobility, have in common the extreme connection to the royal family. Both owe their dynamics as female Cistercian houses to the presence of two queens—Mafalda in Arouca and Teresa in Lorvão—who not only contribute to the material enrichment of these monasteries, but, at the same time, by the mere fact of their presence in the institution, confer on them a unique dignity in terms of religious houses (Coelho and Martins 1993, 481).

It has already been pointed out that this fully aristocratic characteristic of the monasteries of Lorvão and Arouca was in no way extendible to the other Cistercian female communities existing in Portugal during the Middle Ages, which constituted a multifaceted set, in multiple aspects (Rêpas 2023, 333-350).

The aristocratic dimension of Lorvão and its privileged connection to the Royal House was reinforced with the transfer of the body of Sancha, sister of the founder, as well as that of Urraca, daughter of King Afonso III, who died and was buried there in 1281, whose tomb “was decorated with a calvary and two shields with the royal arms” (Borges 2002, 138). Some of the families of the high nobility associated with this coenobium maintained close relations with the Royal House, either by exercising the highest positions at court or even by direct or indirect kinship relations, thus reinforcing the understanding of Lorvão as a “royal monastery.” Among the families that ruled the convent in the late medieval period, two lineages stand out, Cunha and Eça, who provided successive abbesses (Rêpas 2005, 63-91). It is interesting to note that both families have a close connection to the Royal House, transmitted by their heraldry: the Cunha (branch of the Lords of Tábua), related by marriage, bear an bordure with the royal *quinois*; as for the Eça, they were descendant from the union of Pedro I of Portugal with Inês de Castro, which translates into the fact that they use the same royal arms with a Saint Francis cord as mark of cadency.

7. Vanished heraldry: the marks of the abbesses

Although there are no heraldic marks of these abbesses in the convent of Lorvão today, there are sources that describe them. Thus, the “General inventory of the relics of the Lorvão monastery” made by Manuel Pereira da Silva Leal in 1722 reports the presence in the main altar of the church of a reliquary of the Holy Cross of gilded silver decorated with two shields of Eça, a similar metal cross with a shield of the same arms and a crystal reliquary containing a thorn from the crown of Christ equally decorated with two shields of these arms, all these pieces having been ordered by the Abbess Catarina de Eça. All these heraldic presences were completed by the liturgical vestments and the codices also used for the celebration of masses, all of which bore the abbess’ coat of arms (Gama 1985, 161-170). She was laid in the neighbouring chapter room, identified by an inscription presenting her as “Catarina de Eça granddaughter of King Pedro I” (apud Borges 2002, 559).

The same source points to the existence of another grave with elements of Portuguese royal heraldry, that of the Abbess Maria de Lancastre, who died in 1668, and whose epitaph stated “daughter of the Count of Sortelha and granddaughter of D. Jorge [illegitimate son of King João II of Portugal],” ornamented with the arms of the ducal house of Aveiro, that is, the Portuguese royal arms with a fillet sable to indicate bastardy (apud Borges 2002, 559; see also Mata 2018, 319-333). Hence, heraldry marked the family dominance within the monastic space, offering to the contemplation of the nuns, in the places they had to pass through every day, the signs of the lineages that governed the community. Signs that reiterate, in these cases, the proximity in relation to the Royal House and, naturally, to the Infanta-Queen herself, the re-founder of the monastery. This also explains why the royal heraldry is spread throughout the different conventual spaces, as proven by the abundance of furniture and paintings that still survive today, such as the cupboard in the old chapter-room, gilded carved woodcarvings, or the paintings representing the three Infantas Teresa, Sancha and Mafalda (Fig. 18) or Queen Saint Isabel, wife of King Dinis (Fig. 19).



Fig. 18. Blessed Infantas Teresa, Sancha, and Mafalda along with the Portuguese royal arms in a painting belonging to the convent of Lorvão. Photo: author.



Fig. 19. Queen Saint Isabel in a painting belonging to the convent of Lorvão. Photo: author.

This profusion of royal heraldry, in so many different dimensions, served to visually affirm the symbolic parallelism between the monastic institution and the monarchic institution, asserting itself as a distinctive sign of the convent of Lorvão and functioning in this sense as the visual cement and identity of this monastic community. Perhaps the culmination of this parallelism can be summed up in a piece once kept there as a genuine treasure: “a red stone vase garnished with silver gilt with the coat of arms of León on one side and those of this Kingdom on the other, from which it is traditionally said that Queen Teresa drank from, which performs many

miracles” (apud Borges 2002, 557). In this piece, the arms miraculously donated by Christ to the first king of Portugal were part of an object that, because it belonged to a sanctified member of this same royal lineage, was itself a producer of miracles. And it was conceivably adduced as such during Teresa’s beatification process.

8. Heraldry and devotion

The connection of heraldry to the sacred dimension was not, however, limited to the establishment of such parallels. There was also a third function of heraldry, which we will call devotional. It is a heraldry of a different nature from that which we have observed so far, since it does not refer to shields actually used by the characters identified in them, but by entities of a religious, ahistorical nature, for which imaginary arms are invented. This procedure undoubtedly has its origins in medieval practices, but it is in the Modern Age that it is most widespread (Dennys 1975, 89-111), establishing deep links with literary production of a religious nature, alongside an epic dimension (Loskoutoff 2000). In Lorvão, this type of religious heraldry is found in a single place: the cloister. A place of silence, reading, meditation and prayer, the cloister was a fundamental space for monastic life, especially as regards the devotional practices, so to speak, private to each nun or group of nuns, as opposed to the spaces where the whole community was obliged to meet and act exclusively together. As Catarina Fernandes Barreira (2022, 69-84) points out, this assertion is particularly relevant in the case of the Cistercian communities, because of the interdiction of processions inside the church: these were therefore concentrated in the cloistered spaces.

Such devotional practices are particularly visible in the cloister of Lorvão. This is no longer the medieval cloister, demolished at the end of the sixteenth century and replaced in the following century by the one that can be seen today. As Nelson Correia Borges (2002, 226) observes, the cloister of Lorvão has the characteristic of having its ground floor entirely filled with devotional chapels, which is unusual and was only possible because the other cloistered dependencies (such as kitchen, oven, refectory, former dormitory) were on the upper floor. Of the thirteen chapels in the cloister, three display religious heraldry. They are, in chronological order of their construction:



Fig. 20. Chapel of St John the Baptist, cloister of Lorvão. Photo: author.



Fig. 21. Arms with *Agnus Dei* in the chapel of St John the Baptist, cloister of Lorvão. Photo: author.

- The chapel of St John the Baptist dated 1602 (Fig. 20), in whose arch there is a shield with the *Agnus Dei*, topped by a cherub's head (Fig. 21). The same iconographic motif of the *Agnus Dei* is repeated in two medallions of the interior, although without heraldic framing.



Fig. 22. Chapel of Nazaré, also called Desterro, cloister of Lorvão. Photo: author.



Fig. 23. Arms of the Holy Ghost in the chapel of Nazaré, cloister of Lorvão. Photo: author.

- The chapel of Nazaré, also called Desterro, erected in 1603 and where the primitive tomb of the Infanta Sancha was laid (Fig. 22), in whose arch one can observe a shield with the radiant dove of the Holy Spirit, supported by two angels and also topped by a cherubim head, itself flanked by two other angels conceived as putti (Fig. 23).



Fig. 24. Chapel of the Lord of the Calvary, cloister of Lorvão. Photo: author.



Fig. 25. Arms of the Passion in the chapel of the Lord of the Calvary, cloister of Lorvão. Photo: author.

- Finally, the chapel of the Lord of the Calvary remodelled in 1641 (Fig. 24), whose arch presents a shield with the five wounds of Christ (Fig. 25), already very worn, which is associated with two other iconographic elements of the Passion represented in the lateral part of the arch: to the dexter three nails tied, to the sinister the crown of thorns.

As we can see, this religious heraldry represents some of the top figures of Christian devotion (Christ, the Holy Spirit, Saint John the Baptist), and is linked to the type of ritual practices that took place in this same space, which included not only manifestations of private piety, but also, as we have seen, the holding of processions (Barreira 2017, 83-103). Certainly, some absences in this devotional heraldry may be surprising, particularly the heraldic signs of the Virgin, so present in Portuguese churches. But we should, once again, remember the basic heuristic question: what we see today is only a pale reflection of the wealth of former times, which encompassed altars, images, liturgical objects and vestments, decorative fabrics, codices, and furniture, much of which would naturally have been laden with heraldic figures.

9. Memories of the lineages of nuns and their parentage

In the same cloister, other heraldic occurrences can be observed which are not related to the devotional nature described above - a set of tombstones. Also here, it should be remembered that what remains today is only a part of what once existed. Of the approximately two hundred noteworthy burials today, many are reduced to a simple date, while others combine this information with the name of the buried. Only a few of these tombstones contain heraldry. In fact, the successive reconstructions of the cloister can be seen in the fragmentary nature of some of these heraldic occurrences: fragments of gravestones with reused shields, impossible to identify, can be observed. Equally difficult to identify is the case of a gravestone with a Calvary next to which a shield fretty (perhaps the Correia family arms) is drawn, but without any legible inscription (Fig. 26). There are only three fully identifiable heraldic headstones, one of which unfolds into two shields.



Fig. 26. Tombstone with a shield fretty, cloister of Lorvão. Photo: author.



Fig. 27. Tombstone of Ana de Vilhena, prioress of Arouca, cloister of Lorvão. Photo: author.

One of these gravestones does not seem to have any direct relationship with the community of Lorvão, since it corresponds to the tomb of Ana de Vilhena, prioress of the monastery of Arouca. It is identified by an epigraph and by a shield quarterly, in which the first and fourth quarters are so worn that they cannot be read (but it can be presumed that they contained Vilhena's arms), while the second and third are barry, which is difficult to identify because it is a composition used by several Portuguese families (Fig.

27). The burial of a prioress of Arouca in the cloister of Lorvão may be surprising. Perhaps the nun was here in the performance of any specific function or on a fortuitous displacement, having been surprised by death; or perhaps her presence was somehow related to the government of Francisca de Vilhena, possibly her relative and abbess of Lorvão between 1647 and 1650, responsible for the remodelling of the chapter room (Borges 2002, 244).



Fig. 28. Tombstone of Leonor Coelho, sub-prioress of Lorvão, cloister of Lorvão. Photo: author.



Fig. 29. Arms of Coelho in the other part of Leonor Coelho's tombstone. Photo: author.

The second heraldic headstone belongs to Leonor Coelho, who was sub-prioress of Lorvão, deceased in 1494 as indicated in the epigraph. The tombstone shows a half-round shield, with a small beak at the top and another at the bottom, with a lion as the only figure (Fig. 28). These arms would be difficult to identify in the absence of a complementary inscription. The name of the buried woman, however, allows an undoubted identification with the heraldry of the Coelho family, represented here only by its main figure (the lion), i.e., without its bordure with rabbits (of canting nature, since “Coelho” means rabbit in Portuguese). The beautiful stylisation of that heraldic beast, very much in the taste of late medieval art, should be noted. The tomb of Leonor Coelho presents a particularity: carved into the extension of the same stone, another square is enclosed with a shield containing the same heraldic figure, but without any inscription (Fig. 29): we can infer that it contains the body of a relative. In the three sepulchral shields, notable is the absence of any external elements indicating the monastic condition or ecclesiastical dignities of the buried.



Fig. 30. Tombstone of Cecília de Góis da Silveira, of her daughter Margarida da Silveira, abbess of Lorvão, and of her aunt Maria de Brito, nun of Lorvão, cloister of Lorvão. Photo: author.

Finally, we find in the cloister of Lorvão a tombstone that does not belong to a nun. It is the grave of Cecília de Góis da Silveira, identified by a long epigraph and by an imposing coat of arms (Fig. 30). The inscription explains that this was the wife of Domingos Leitão, chief constable of Queen Leonor (third wife of King Manuel I) and later of the Infanta Maria her daughter, ambassador of Portugal to the kingdom of France, and that, being a widow, she and her daughters retreated to this convent, where she died in 1599. Domingos Leitão was indeed an important courtier in the reigns of Manuel I and João III; and his connection to the Infanta Maria

perhaps explains why his widow was retreated here. In fact, Maria had a predilection for this religious house, of which her niece Bernarda de Lancastre was abbess (Borges 2002, 255). The shield is presented in a lozenge format, typical of feminine heraldry and which is perhaps, in this context, indicative of the proximity of the buried woman in relation to courtly habits (let us remember that the Infanta Maria also used a lozenge shield, but with the dexter side empty, for never having married). The heraldic composition is a party: to the dexter, a field with three fascces, which must correspond to Leitão's arms, i.e., her husband's, although in this case they are also the arms of Silveira (with a colour variation not observable on the stone, which is not painted); to the sinister, the arms of Góis. The shield is placed on the chest of an eagle, whose meaning is not easy to determine. Perhaps it is a devotional reference to Saint John the Evangelist, whose attribute is an eagle? This hypothesis is supported by the fact that one of the daughters of Cecília de Góis da Silveira is Margarida da Silveira, who was abbess of Lorvão and, as we have seen, builder of the chapel dedicated to Saint John in this same cloister. It is certain that, in this case, it is the Baptist and not the Evangelist. But perhaps one wanted to gloss over the onomastic similarity, according to the conceptualist precepts then in vogue. In any case, the abbess was buried with her mother under this gravestone in 1633, together with her aunt Maria de Brito (Borges 2002, 256).

10. Mnemonic function of heraldry

In all these cases of tombstones, what function did the heraldry play? Besides the identification purpose, there was a mnemonic utility: the arms were meant to remember who was buried there and, in this way, to recall the pious obligations that the buried had entrusted to them for the salvation of their souls. In this sense, the heraldry in stone would be complemented by the set of other heraldic expressions that have since disappeared, namely paintings and decorative fabrics, sacred images, reliquaries, liturgical vestments and objects. The ensemble of these heraldic objects served to keep alive the memory of the buried nuns and to guarantee that the community would continue to perpetuate their devotions and pray for their souls. As Nelson Correia Borges (2002, 249) points out:

Examples abound in death certificates that the nuns were generally buried near the chapel that had most aroused their devotion. It was as if their mortal remains were to perpetuate the prayer made while they were still alive, united with the successive generations of nuns who formed the pulse of the community over the centuries. In the same way, the living nuns prayed there in union with the departed ones.

This mnemonic aspect of heraldry would go back to the early times of the Cistercian community of Lorvão, its vestiges having disappeared for the reasons already mentioned. A fortuitous archaeological discovery, made in the early twenty-first century (first mentioned in Borges 2002, 147), has brought to our attention a heraldic vestige literally buried until then in oblivion, and which can be considered an example of medieval mnemonic practices. It is a small funerary plate from the end of the thirteenth century, referring to the Abbess Urraca Rodrigues, heraldically identified in the lower part of the tombstone by three equal shields with a flowery and empty cross without any external ornamentation (Fig. 31).



Fig. 31. Funerary plaque of Urraca Rodrigues de Briteiros, abbess of Lorvão, chapter room of Lorvão. Photo: author.

Teresa Schedel de Castello Branco (1989) has shown that this abbess, who led the community of Lorvão between 1276 and 1280, belonged to the Briteiros lineage; further António Castro Henriques and Tiago de Sousa Mendes (2012, 41-51) have identified, without a shadow of a doubt, that the arms belong to this same lineage. The family in question has already been studied as an example of noble ascension between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, which progresses from the simple condition of *milites* (vassals of lords) to the category of *ricos-homens* (Ventura and Oliveira 1995, 71-102). On this journey, “in a rigid control of nuptiality, some women are sent to convents. And many are those who go. To two monasteries essentially: Arouca and Lorvão,” as is the case of Marinha Gomes, first nun in Arouca, then abbess of Lorvão, whose nieces are sent to the same convents: “Urraca Rodrigues was abbess of Lorvão, Maria Rodrigues nun in Arouca. And even in the next generation Aldonça Anes, daughter of João Rodrigues was abbess of Arouca and nuns were the four daughters of Mem Rodrigues” (Ventura and Oliveira 1995, 82). Luís Rêpas devoted particular attention to the Cistercian prelates of this family, especially to Marinha Gomes de Briteiros, nun in Arouca and later abbess of Lorvão (2021, II/2, 339-352), whose family background and biographical path this author traces in an exemplary way; and to the three sisters Maria (2003, 234-236; 2021, II/1, 779-785), Teresa (2021, II/1, 965-979), and Urraca Rodrigues de Briteiros (2021, II/2, 398-401), all of them nuns from Arouca or Lorvão, for whom he also systematizes all known documentation. The same author also mentions an equally interesting heraldic fact: according to Count D. Pedro de Barcelos’ *Livro de Linhagens* (Book of Lineages), on elevating Rui Gomes de Briteiros (father of the Abbess Urraca) to the status of *rico-homem*, King Afonso III granted him the right to bear *pendão e caldeira* (banner and caldron), as insignia proper to his new and high status. Perhaps the use of the cross as a feature of the arms in this lineage, which is documented from the next generation onwards, stems from such a concession.

As Maria Helena da Cruz Coelho and Rui Cunha Martins (1993, 489) point out, in this period there was a predominance of two families of the high nobility, Sousa and Briteiros, in the monastery of Lorvão. Luís Rêpas, in turn, distils for the set of Cistercian monasteries founded by the Portuguese *Infantas*, seven nuns from these two families that are documented at this time, three of whom were abbesses of Lorvão, two of Arouca and one of Celas (2021, II/1, 781). The gravestone of the Abbess Urraca Rodrigues de Briteiros is the vestige of a practice of heraldic occupation of monastic space that must have known a notorious intensity in the medieval monastery of Lorvão. Even more so because, in the case of the Sousa family, this period also saw the fusion of their arms, in several ways, with the Portuguese royal heraldry (Seixas and Galvão-Telles 2012, 411-446), which corresponded, as we have seen, to the privileged heraldic emphasis in the monastic space of Lorvão.



Fig. 32. Heraldic figures of Teresa Luísa de Carvalho, abbess of Lorvão, in the doorway connecting the choir with the conventual building of Lorvão. Photo: author.

A final manifestation of heraldry with mnemonic function can be found in the choir. Here we had occasion to analyse the triple heraldic stone of the doorway communicating with the convent building. If we look again at this doorway, we can see, below the central cornice, another heraldic element loosely represented, that is, without being framed within a shield: a star contained within four crescents joined millsailwise (Fig. 32).

These are the arms of the Carvalho family, here alluding to the Abbess Teresa Luísa de Carvalho, who led the community for two triennia in the first half of the eighteenth century and was responsible for the destruction of the primitive church and its replacement by the Baroque temple that we can see today (Borges 2003, 617). This use of heraldic figures without being contained within a shield corresponds, at the time, to an Italianizing taste, which would also be repeated, with these Carvalho arms, by the most prominent member of this family in the eighteenth century: Sebastião José de Carvalho e Melo, first Count of Oeiras and later first Marquis of Pombal (Galvão-Telles and Seixas 1999, 55-95). In the case of Lorvão, these heraldic figures had the function of perpetuating the memory of the personage who, as abbess, was responsible for the erection of the new and grandiose temple.

Conclusion

Having reached the end of this heraldic tour of the monastery of Lorvão, the presence of signs of this type are relatively numerous, despite the considerable losses suffered over the centuries. But above all, the intensity of the presence of the Portuguese royal coat of arms stands out in multiple variants. Firstly, as a reminder of the Infanta-Queen Teresa and, to a lesser extent, of her sister Sancha, both linked to the hagiographic construction of the “Holy Queens.” The religious community of Lorvão built its identity on the presence of these princesses and on the respective beatification process, which would give rise not only to intense devotional practices, but also to its own liturgical uses. Royal heraldry therefore became part of the visual identity of the community, both for internal purposes and for outside observers (especially the abundant pilgrims). At the same time, the highly aristocratic character of the convent allowed the abbesses’ heraldry, which often included the royal arms, to corroborate this sacred and dynastic dimension. More so since the royal heraldry benefited from a mythographic explanatory process that presented it as a gift from Christ to the founder of the kingdom and dynasty, providing a symbolic Christological interpretation. This interpenetration between heraldry and the sacred dimension also finds parallel in the amount of devotional imaginary heraldry that adorns the cloister of Lorvão. In this same space the tombstones were concentrated, in which the presence of the heraldry of the buried allowed them to be remembered and the pious obligations they had instituted for the salvation of their souls were also remembered. Various complementary functions are thus defined which the heraldry served in this religious space, identifying spaces and people, providing a visual strengthening for the religious community participating in devotional and liturgical practices, guaranteeing the survival of the memory of the buried and the patrons.

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