Introduction

The aim of this book is an in-depth study, on the scale of a small country, of an historic problem which on many occasions is dealt with in a generic or essentially theoretical manner: the emergence of a specific social form, that is the court in Europe, prior to the nineteenth century. It is an attempt which concentrates systematic research of sources upon a defined period (between 1300 and 1450) while at the same time resorting to the widest possible comparison of the phenomena being studied within the larger sphere of the existence of the medieval courts.

The sociologist Norbert Elias, to whom we are indebted for a fundamental contribution towards the definition and study of the court as a social form of the past, did not consider its existence exclusively in the form of an absolutist court, although he mentions the growing importance which it assumed during the modern period of European history (between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries). Among the many passages of his writings which he dedicated to the problem, the book concerning the French court of Louis XIV, published for the first time in 1969, stands out, as do the important chapters on the emergence of the noble and royal courts during the medieval period contained within the ambitious construction of his work 'on the process of civilisation', which appeared in a number of versions across several decades (between 1930 and 1970).[1]

The greatest value of the work of Norbert Elias towards the realisation of this study resulted, however, from a number of fundamental contributions of his sociological theory, besides the conclusions resulting from the empirical cases which he mentioned or analysed in greater detail.[2] In spite of the increasingly

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[1] Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978–82); Norbert Elias, *The Court Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983).

[2] Norbert Elias, *What Is Sociology*? (London: Hutchinson, 1978); Norbert Elias, 'Figuration', 'Soziale Prozess', 'Zivilisation', in Bernhard Schäfers (ed.), *Grundbegriffe der Soziologie* (Opladen: Leske und Budrich, 1986), pp. 88–91, 234–41, 382–97; Norbert Elias, *The Society of Individuals* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

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critical tone which one detects on the part of some historians regarding these
empirical results and even the cultural framework and the presuppositions from
which there emerges the thesis on the 'process of civilisation',[3] I believe that
the contributions of Norbert Elias are too important to be overlooked. I refer to
the concepts of configuration and process on the one hand and, on the other, to
his suggestions as to a sociology of royalty.

To consider the medieval court as a social configuration or a 'network of
interdependent human beings, with shifting and asymmetrical power balances'
implies for the historian the construction of a new subject.[4] Some results consid-
ered to have been learnt through social history and through the institutional and
political history of Europe must become the object of a critical eye when one
studies the interactions between the kings and the nobility and the way in which
their mutual dependence became established in the Middle Ages, in particular
during the later period. Rather than setting off with an analysis and description
merely external to the social groups, for example of the nobility, and accepting,
without questioning them historically, the criteria (juridical or otherwise) of
classification used by sources available, this is an assessment as to how social
relations were formed by which groups, and even individuals. The court is seen
as the place and the context from which many of these criteria of classification
appeared, as well as the values associated with the nobility. In other words,
we find that royalty and the nobility became mutually engendered at the end
of the Middle Ages, although the conflict and bitter battles that appear to have
placed them one against the other and that occupied the first level of political
events in Portugal, as in the majority of European countries, weighed heavily.
Far from constituting an immutable entity closed in upon itself, the medieval
court affirms itself as a process, or a dynamic sequence of conditions leading
to the constitution of a centre from which there emerge determined values and
categories that are shared diversely by society both in time and in space.

The proposals of Norbert Elias, which examined a sociology of royalty, in turn
challenge the study of the figure of the medieval king solely by his qualities and
attributes, as an *a priori* fact of ancient societies or the mysterious emanation of
the political doctrines of the past, contrasting it with the notion of a royalty which
is 'constructed' through concrete, social mechanisms that can be analysed. To
study the court implies detecting what practices and what processes led to the
specific position of the kings, or reconstructing among the functions of this

[3] For example, Jeroen Duindam, *Myths of Power: Norbert Elias and the Early Modern European
Court* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press [1994]); Daniel Gordon, *Citizens without
Sovereignty: Equality and Sociability in French Thought, 1670–1789* (Princeton: Princeton
University Press, 1994).

[4] Godfried von Benthem van den Berg, *The Structure of Development: An Invitation to the Sociology
of Norbert Elias* (The Hague: Institute of Social Studies, 1971); Artur Bogner, 'The structure
of social processes. A commentary on the sociology of Norbert Elias', *Sociology*, 20 (1986), 3,
387–411.

human configuration one which appears to me to be fundamental: the making
and maintaining of royalty itself. Such was the medieval concept, as we shall
see, which created a necessary link between the court and the king, with one
reality being unable to exist without the other.

The interpretation of royalty in this progressive perspective by an analysis of
how its position of supremacy grew, separated as it was from society, implies
the reconstruction of the functions that the court performed. The main obsta-
cles to this functional study reside in the mixed and enduring character of the
organisation of the court. Mixed because the medieval court challenges the cat-
egorical distinction, which has as its origin Greco-Latin thought, between the
government of the household and the government of the public thing, between
oikos and *polis*, between *domus* and *res publica*.[5] This presents a formidable
obstacle, since these categories still remain subjacent to the historical explana-
tion of European monarchic institutions, as they were also used by medieval
thinkers when forging theoretical instruments and the concepts which allowed
them to think and to explain power. On the other hand, the formal organisation
which presided at the medieval courts, with its internal structure in distinct
departments, survived and reproduced itself not only in space but also in time
throughout the medieval period and even beyond the fifteenth century, in long
lines and internal cores, in spite of the changes which made the court the centre
of a larger, more complex web of relations and institutions, giving body to the
ever-changing and intermittent reality of the bureaucratic state of the *ancien
régime*.

Since it was not an institutional reality in the juridical and formal meaning
of the word, as long as the court was a human configuration it remained in
an indistinct state between public and private – John of Salisbury suggested
that the king himself played a part in the two spheres – and so became hard
to individualise. The actual medieval definition therefore served as a starting
point: the court was the place of the presence of the king, and the group of
individuals who accompanied him (chapter 1). It was a physical, concrete space
within which not only the members of the restricted circle of *familiares* of the
king and queen moved, but also all those who became the body that mediated
between the powers of the monarch and the kingdom, becoming a part of
his entourage. It was, therefore, inevitable that other institutions should rise
from within this tapestry of diverse functions exercised in the early court, and
this led to the formation of bureaucracies and autonomy in various spheres of
activity. But besides being a simple sum of all these institutional mechanisms,
the court remained an indivisible human configuration in that dual entity which
the medieval texts suggest – a space, a group of individuals. How this space
became organised in Portugal, who these individuals were and 'in which ways

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[5] Aloys Winterling, *Zwischen 'Haus' und 'Staat': Antike Höfe im Vergleich* (Munich: Oldenbourg,
1997), pp. 1–9, 11–25.

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they were bonded to each other', these are the questions which this book seeks, above all, to answer.

The perspective of the study of the old courts that Norbert Elias termed 'genetic' thus inspired in me a new examination of the concrete forms of the human organisation which surrounded the medieval kings, termed in a restricted and somewhat pejorative way 'domestic' by the majority of authors. The comparison of these organisational forms allows for the detection of common regularities and principles within the western European profile. This will be not only a description of these but, as suggested by Fredrik Barth, an attempt to explain the similarities, by studying the social processes which cause these regularities of forms that can be observed historically, since they govern and determine the constraints and the incentives beneath which men group and interact within this particular formation.[6] The construction of royalty, with the permanent tension of power relations that constitute court society, seems to be one of these processes. With regard to this problem, it is important to return to the large number of classic studies of Percy Schramm and Ernst Kantorowicz because of the attention which they give to an interpretation of medieval royalty in its link with the complex of ideas, practices and traditions stemming from late antiquity, namely through the Byzantine transmission and synthesis with barbarian royalties, which complex is constantly reinterpreted and 'translated' by fundamental and paradigmatic institutions that were, for the Middle Ages, the papacy and the Empire. The European medieval court is not contained outside this cultural complex of multi-secular density, becoming as it does a group of intercommunicating practices and devices, beyond the actual plan of a country and a period. This perspective allowed me to break from an overspecialised vision of the Portuguese court, which is based upon unproven postulations of isolationism and incipient structure of the monarchic institutions. If we recognise that a royalty exists in Portugal from the middle of the twelfth century, then we must examine the processes which allow for its reproduction and, among these, the emergence of the human configuration which is the court then appears as one of the most important, indeed the essence.

This book does not propose entirely to resolve the general questions which have been advanced. It is important to emphasise, however, that they are subjacent to the strength of understanding of an actual case, that is the Portuguese kingdom at the end of the Middle Ages. This study is limited to dealing as deeply as possible with the problems raised by the use of this chosen perspective. The study today of medieval Portugal, its obstacles and inherent insufficiencies, and also the wealth of an historiographic tradition in constant change, all define the necessary context of this research. Choices as to sources and methods used are, of course, dictated in many cases by this historiographic context. Portuguese

[6] Fredrik Barth, *Models of Social Organisation* (London: Royal Anthropological Institute, 1971).

sources of the medieval period, as is well known, remain largely unpublished. In the particular case of sources produced by royal institutions, the problem is aggravated by a periodic interruption and distortion of the written transmission itself, accompanying as it does the vicissitudes of the memory of royalty, with many of the medieval sources being successively truncated and rewritten, in particular in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

The Iberian context to which I systematically return, which places the kingdom of Portugal in parallel with those of Leon, Castile and Aragon, does not however appear as a mere subtlety or easy solution in the face of the fragmentary and heterogeneous character of Portuguese sources. The texts and customs that originated from the several kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula formed part of the cultural horizon of the Portuguese of the age, and moulded and played a part in their perception of things. For this reason, many problems need to be interpreted within an Iberian framework where they find their possible significance, and rejection or neglect of this framework is scientifically indefensible. By crossing the perspectives, it seems to me that the court of the Portuguese kings could in turn clarify in several ways the existence of human configurations which are similar in the other territories contained within modern Spain.

In approaching this complex social medium, that is the court of the end of the Middle Ages, I turned to two valuable work tools: genealogy and prosopography. Each complements the other in this attempt to reconstruct court society with an analysis of individual biographies, as well as family recollections and the use of criteria of social classification as defined by the age itself. It is a matter of approaching the status groups, gender groups, professional groups and family groups within the dynamic of their relationships and the framework of a social formation with its own mechanisms of cohesion, its own hierarchies and even, following the hypothesis of Norbert Elias, with its distinctive modes of being and behaving. A detailed reconstruction of this type demanded a prosopographic examination in which the data relative to the identification and chronology of hundreds of individuals, the positions held and functions performed in the royal service were investigated, as also were the terms relative to their status and to the interpersonal relationships of varying types which appeared. For the study of family recollections of the nobility, I was able profitably to put to use the rich Portuguese genealogical literature, particularly the *Livro de Linhagens do Conde D. Pedro* (*c*. 1340, with two later versions, both in the fourteenth century) and the *Livro de Linhagens do século XVI*, and studied and added to the data stemming not only from these, but also from other sources, both factual and narrative, of varying types and origins. From the methodological point of view, recourse to the collation of these various sources was an option that I considered, so abandoning the hypothesis of construction of a prosopographic series based on one sole documentary typology.

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The detailed framework described in this book aims to display the principal results reached, outlining Portuguese court society in its development across one and a half centuries. The principal challenge that the description has to confront is the necessary articulation of the several scales of analysis, given that the research had as its departure point an inquiry which was, by its minute nature, destined to reconstruct the dense mosaic of family and individual histories. I therefore sought a thread necessary for the construction of an image of the group of court society (chapter 2). Such an image does not, however, result from the simple juxtaposition of these family or individual histories or from the generalisations that can be drawn from them. This study was intended not to remain constrained by systematic investigation of the trajectories of individuals and groups but rather simultaneously to reflect on that 'network of human inter-relations which reproduced itself during successive generations' (Elias), which was the royal court. For this very reason, I analysed the court not simply of one monarch, but of a succession of monarchs, encompassing in the period studied an important dynastic change. The description of the several groups interacting in the Portuguese court of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries is completed by an analysis and explanation of the interwoven relationships between themselves and the king, resulting in this particular configuration (chapter 3). As will be seen, different ways of existence of the court correspond to the various types of interaction, and these interactions are in turn fundamental to the explanation of the hierarchies, the internal tensions and even certain features of the organisation of the court.

A second part is added to the principal body of the text, in which other important aspects of medieval court society are explored, in particular the forms of life which characterise it. Since this is also a spatial reality, as written of in medieval texts, the royal court must be viewed in its characteristic mobility, with an analysis of the progresses when the monarch symbolically appropriated territory, so manifesting his presence (chapter 4). This space, which can be topographically placed successively on a chronological axis, is a true site of power and reveals in its relations with the physical reality of the country an entire geography of royalty. The medieval monarchs appear thus as true agents of change of the countryside, stamping upon it signs of conquest, possession and realisation of resources. At the end of the Middle Ages Portuguese kings prolonged more and more their stay in certain places, and these progressively became different from the great stopping posts; places began to compete with each other, so generating a hierarchy from which was finally to emerge a capital: Lisbon. The medieval court appears not only as a particular human configuration but also as a spatial-temporal complex which the royal presence reproduced in several ways, for example in relation to the city, through the urban palace, and through the royal entry. Or it might lead to territory that was a privileged dominion of a relationship of royalty with the natural world, carefully delineated through hunting. Or

again in the use of the multiplicity of palaces and residences which were spread across the kingdom where the memories of certain monarchs as well as other dynastic or religious memories were incorporated.

Finally, particular attention was given to ritual and ceremonies because of their importance in the regulation of the collective life of the courtier, and I sought to unravel a specific rhythm of the times of court (chapter 5). My perspective is not, however, that of a 'ritualistic' vision, in the sense described by Mary Douglas, of functions performed by this social configuration.[7] The performance of rituals and ceremonies constitutes one of these modes of 'fabrication' of royalty already referred to, but it is not the only one. In this process, which includes multiple factors, ceremonies cannot be seen as the product of an entirely independent and 'self-contained' activity, since it is only one mode of activity among others. The perspective of analysis chosen does not follow the diverse paths of this enormous subject, but rather seeks to reduce it to a precise, problematic axis. The various rites and ceremonies were what ordered time at court, and this generated determined cycles of a framework of fundamental life whose global design we must find once again within a larger framework. I could not, therefore, limit my study to the more spectacular royal ceremonies or those that appear to project more clearly the society of court in relation to that which was exterior to it. Although the knowledge that we possess of them is very unequal, I tried also to identify the more modest ceremonies and rites, unravelling their systematic arrangement based on a typology that distinguishes the temporal modalities that arise. From this perspective, the search for possible meanings becomes related to the whole not simply at the level of isolated ceremonies. The problem of rites gains by being examined in conjunction with the processes of configuration and formal organisation of the organism that surrounded the kings, which can be studied as a true system of social roles where the courtier became the agent of a 'leitourgia' (in its etymological meaning of 'service') of royalty. The ritual function was a duty which, being in many cases central to the establishment of its identity, did not, as we shall see, exhaust all the aspects of its activity.

The text that follows is a revised and enlarged version of the first edition in Portuguese of 1995, with the more significant changes being concentrated in chapters 2 and 5. I should like to express my thanks for all the criticism made during the intervening years that allowed me not only to improve on it in many detailed aspects but also to make more clear and precise the expression of my ideas. In essence, the principal argument of the book remains the same.

The writing of the first version of this book owes much to José Mattoso who followed the project from the beginning, discussing my hypotheses and making important criticisms and suggestions. In so many cases there can be

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[7] Mary Douglas, *In the Active Voice* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), pp. 34–8.

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seen the mark of his insight, his empathy and his knowledge. The seminars
and work sessions with Vitorino Magalhães Godinho, which I had the privi-
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growing original. I should like to express here my recognition of her fine work.

1. *The court: outlining the problem*

THE MEDIEVAL CONCEPT

The Middle Ages used a diverse group of words when speaking of the court of
the kings. From the point of view of the history of concepts, it is of interest to
distinguish carefully the span of social and political meanings and experiences
that can be expressed by these words, paying particular attention to the rise
of new meanings in old words or of neologisms. With a valid and historically
coherent definition of the subject of this book in mind, these are, in general,
valuable indicators of important changes. As Koselleck states, we can interpret
human history in a restricted sense through the concepts of the past, even if the
words that are related to these concepts are still in use today. This task requires a
work of critical distancing which accompanies both the fundamental historicity
and the sedimentation, which is evident in the vocabulary of a given society, of
successive uses of a constellation of words. For such, the author reminds us,
past uses of a concept should in some way be redefined by the historian.[1]

While Latin predominated as the written language in the medieval west,
texts resorted to several names for the court – *curia*, *aula*, *palatium*, *schola* –
at the same time as the binominal of words was to emerge that was to take
precedence over all these: *cors/curtis*.[2] The formation of a synonym between
'curia' and 'court' is a first aspect deserving our attention. In classical Latin,
curia and *cohors* (from *cors* and *curtis* in medieval Latin) were far from being
synonymous. *Cohors* initially meant the empty, restricted space in the interior
of a residential complex and, at the end of the classical age, the use of the
term extended to military language to mean a certain group of soldiers (six
centuries), possibly by association with the space occupied in the camp by each
of these units. This use later led to *cohors* becoming the common name given

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[1] Reinhart Koselleck, *Le Futur passé: contribution à la sémantique des temps historiques* (Paris:
Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 1990), pp. 99–118.
[2] Egbert Türk, *Nugae Curialium: le règne d'Henri II Plantagenêt et l'éthique politique* (Geneva:
Droz, 1977), pp. 3–5; Aurelio Roncaglia, 'Le corti medievali. Premessa', in *Letteratura Italiana*
(Turin: Einaudi, 1982), vol. I, pp. 33–6.

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to groups of armed men such as a praetorian guard (*cohors praetoria*), and was then handed down to the Middle Ages by numerous texts. More important for us, however, is the evolution which led *cohors* to become *cors/curtis*, a word which during the High Middle Ages served to mean the centre of an agrarian complex both in its materiality (still existing today in the Portuguese 'corte', a synonym for a courtyard or stable area), and in evoking the centre of noble power.[3]

As for the word *curia*, its most frequent use in the Latin world was in the institutional and political sphere as a synonym for *senatus*, or the municipal government. From here comes its association, for example, with *decurio*, while the *curialitas* in imperial Roman society was merely an alternative meaning for the order of decuries. In *Lex Visigothorum* or in Isidore of Seville, for example, as also in the Merovingian texts, the use of *curia* and *curialis* prevails when used to refer to municipal institutions. But, as Georges Duby remarks, 'from the eighth century in those texts which we have, *curia* tends to be confused with *curtis*, meaning the fortification from which public power is legitimately driven back, while the scribes and the better-educated inversely used the word *curtis* when speaking of the royal palace: *in curte nostra*, as Charlemagne said in the most important decrees'.[4]

Thus, during the High Middle Ages, two words began to approximate each other and be used to mean respectively: the material centre of the household (or, by extension, a domestic group) and an organism comprising men who acted 'collectively' and were invested in some form with public authority. The two versions that today clearly are opposites of the public and the private therefore appear to become associated in this binominal of words. We can also conclude by analysis that other names were given to the court of the kings, for example *palatium* and *aula*. In turn, these refer to the materiality of the house, of the royal residence. The word *palatium* meant, in particular in the Low Empire, the magnificent imperial residence built on the Palatine, which was evoked in their common name by all the royal or princely residences of the medieval west.[5]

[3] There are several examples in J. F. Niermeyer, *Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus* (Leiden: Brill, 1977) s.v. 'curtis'; J. Corominas and J. A. Pascual, *Diccionario crítico etimológico Castellano e Hispánico* (Madrid: Gredos, 1980) s.v. 'corte'; Ramón Lorenzo, *Sobre cronologia do vocabulário Galego-Português* (Vigo: Galáxia, 1968). On the name given to the housing of animals: Alberto Sampaio, *Estudos económicos* (Lisbon: Vega, 1979), vol. I, p. 78.

[4] Georges Duby (ed.), *Histoire de la vie privée* (Paris: Seuil, 1985), vol. II, p. 30. Later, 'technical' Latin of the universities returned to the original name of 'curia', which is found in the texts of Justinian Law. However, the word appears not to have been much used outside the juridical sphere: Pierre Michaud Quentin, *Universitas: expressions du mouvement communautaire dans le moyen âge latin* (Paris: Vrin, 1970), pp. 141–2.

[5] C. D. Du Cange, *Glossarium Mediae et Infimae Latinitatis*, ed. L. Fabre (Paris: Librairie des Sciences et des Arts, 1938), vol. VI, pp. 98–107. On this subject, the essay by Alain Labbé, *L'Architecture des palais et des jardins dans les Chansons de Geste: essai sur le thème du roi en majesté* (Paris: Champion-Slatkine, 1987).