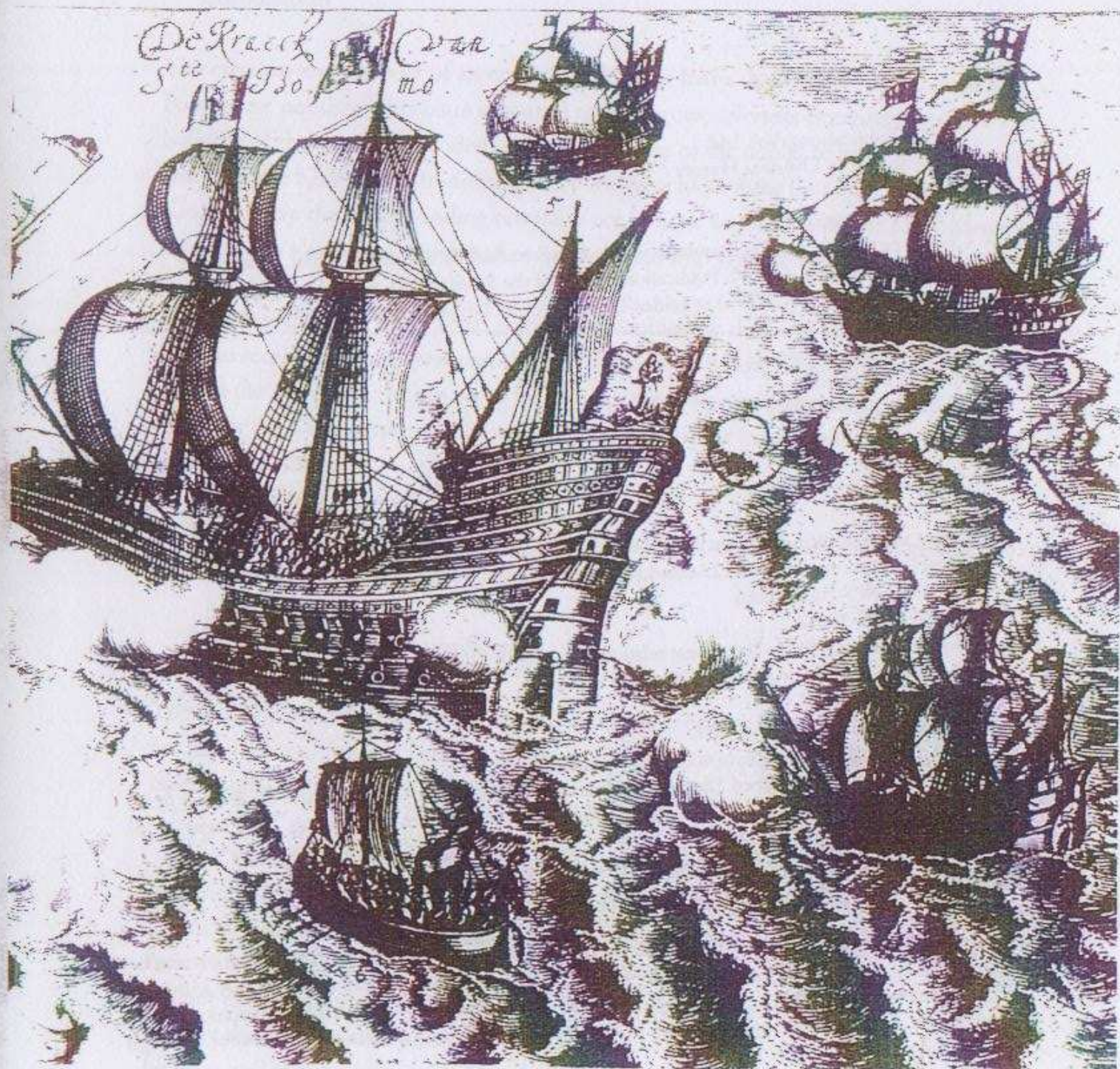


Rivalry and Conflict

European Traders and Asian Trading Networks
in the 16th and 17th Centuries



Ernst van Veen and Leonard Blussé (eds.)

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Portuguese nobility and overseas government The return to Portugal (16th to 17th centuries)

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Introduction¹

The creation and support of an empire in the East had a deep social impact on the Portuguese nobility. This issue is central to Portuguese overseas expansion because the building of the empire depended on the willingness of the nobles to leave their homeland and fight the King's wars. In doing so they would achieve *fama* (honour) by serving the King and reap the corresponding reward, since honour was not considered an intangible concept, but something which had to be translated into *proveito* (profit).

The first question to be asked is why some nobles felt the need to leave the kingdom in order to receive *fama* and *proveito*; the second question is how these continuous departures shaped the nobility at home or, to be more precise, who within this group, gained the most from the eastern exploits: the ones who left for foreign shores or those who remained at home.

Rather than presenting definite conclusions, this paper is intended to share thoughts and raise questions about this complex set of problems.

The nobility: internal stratification

The social field of the nobility in the 16th and 17th centuries is a rather complex subject that has not yet been studied in sufficient depth. The following will give a brief characterization based on the findings so far.

The Portuguese nobility was a social group that grew considerably during these two centuries. This growth was directly related to the particular features of the existing political system. On the one hand the Crown created, expanded and strengthened the most important means and devices of patronage. On the other hand it is important to stress that the Crown did not enjoy a monopoly over the distribution of posts and privileges. Until the mid-16th century the military orders also acted as patrons and so did the Queen's and *Infantes'* households as well as some major titled houses like the Bragança's, the Aveiro's and the Vila Real's.

To some extent, they competed with the Crown, besides exerting an important degree of political pressure by placing their retainers in a wide range of government posts.² This situation arose in particular during the period when the requirement for administration and military defence of the Empire was constantly growing and the empire was reaching its maximum geographical dispersion, which led to increases of available posts and to the subsequent growth of opportunities for rendering service.

The *fidalgos* were a very heterogeneous group that we can differentiate through degrees of political power, wealth, social status, influence and so on. They had in common that they descended from families listed in the medieval lineage books or that they were able to prove that they had at least three generations of ancestors, which were recognised as noble by the Crown. From the 15th century onward this group grew significantly due to both biological reproduction and the overall growth in opportunities for rendering service. However, despite the opening up of the group during the 16th and 17th centuries, in the following century the top echelon of the *fidalgua* numbered fewer individuals and noble houses, because all the major privileges granted by the king had been concentrated on a quite restricted elite.³ This is one of the reasons why the system of classification for defining the composition of the aristocracy in the 16th and in the first half of the 17th century should be extended. It must include not only titled individuals and holders of jurisdictional *senhorios* but also indicators such as belonging to certain lineages, type of household offices held, and the occupation of military posts and senior administrative posts, both on the mainland and overseas.

The lower echelons of the *fidalgua* included numerous individuals and family groups that were excluded from all the major posts and therefore from the main privileges granted by the monarchy. They included the secondary branches of family groups of jurisdictional lords and some medieval family groups settled in the countryside.

Within the vast category of nobility we must also differentiate the *fidalgua* from the plain noblemen. Plain noblemen were those who were not *fidalgos*. They were legally privileged but they didn't belong to the *noblesse de sang*. The poor *fidalgos* cannot be easily differentiated from the plain nobles unless we know their genealogical background. While the poor *fidalgos* were basically recognized through the hierarchy of their parentage and the predominant systems of inheritance, the segregation of plain nobles was above all due to their family's social background (i.e.: merchants, New Christians, small office holders). This factor limited the reach of their mobility trajectories far more than was the case with individuals of noble lineage.

Consequently, there was a difference between the two groups (*fidalgos* and plain nobles), which was related to the need for social recognition and that encouraged those without

fidalgia to develop more aggressive strategies for social interaction. They had to look and act like *fidalgos* in order to be accepted as if they were one of them. The natural way to achieve this was by means of military service and by marrying into the *fidalgia*. The latter was not an easy task, given the existing ideological obstacles against uneven marriages and also the Crown did not easily accept this 'blood laundering'. The severity of the opposition increased after Pope Pius V in 1570 issued the bull, which required purity of blood in order to be accepted in the Military Orders and which was progressively applied to the granting of other nobility favours⁴. As late as the end of the 17th century and the beginning of the 18th century, it was still difficult to overcome such background handicaps and proof of the quality and purity of the blood of one's remote ancestors was staunchly required⁵.

The nobility, social mobility and remuneration of the East

Historians agree that the 16th and 17th centuries witnessed a high degree of social mobility, the main consequence of which was the growth of the lower echelons and the opening up of the nobility. The main paths to ennoblement were open to those who served the Crown through administrative and mercantile activities, especially if they belonged to the King's entourage. We can therefore say that, although the Portuguese worldwide expansion constituted the most important stage for strategies to be pursued and competition to be played out among the *fidalgia*, the administrative and courtly sectors produced far greater social rewards and the most outstanding processes of ennoblement⁶. And although this ennobled group was not expected to display military skills, they were also essential players in the construction and maintenance of the Empire.

As regards the impoverished inherited *fidalgia*, there is no doubt that war remained the main vehicle for rendering service and therefore the main way for their promotion. As Portuguese wars were waged abroad, they had no other alternative than to leave the realm. Although the individual biographies of some leading figures involved in the process of overseas expansion have been published, there are few global studies. Two examples of the latter are James Boone's analysis based on genealogy⁷ and Ivana Elbl's work based on the remuneration of services rendered to the monarchy.⁸ They both point out motivations for leaving Portugal and they agree on the importance of the Expansion as a vital escape valve to reduce the danger of gradual social disqualification or even social downfall related to the demographic growth of the nobility. Ivana Elbl highlights another important aspect: the progressive scarcity of grants traditionally distributed by the Crown as a remuneration for services rendered (land and jurisdictions) and the necessity to use alternative awards (such as *moradias* of the royal household, pensions, marriages, etc.). She also stresses motivation for the accumulation of wealth as a determining factor in the decision taken by members of the *fidalgia* to leave the home country. However she makes a social distinction between

the military settings: while the high nobility and *morgados* (first-born sons and heirs) fought their wars in Morocco, members of the secondary branches of the higher nobility, second-born sons and bastards fought in the East and other overseas territories.

As the main privileges granted by the monarchy were seldom used to reward oriental exploits, it is important to study more closely what kind of benefits the poor *fidalgos* received from their military careers within the empire. The question of what happened after their return, which is the main concern of this paper, raises several issues linked to the ways in which people were re-integrated into Portuguese society.

First of all, it is difficult to construct a single model of social trajectories, since a range of variables comes into play, with multiple possible combinations. It is evident that the diversity of career paths cannot be dissociated from the social conditions in which individuals found themselves when leaving Portugal (such as e.g. parental social background, the status and hierarchy of birth, and the age at which careers were launched). At the same time, career development was dependent on several external limiting factors, such as the chances of survival, the characteristics of individual actions and the merit which was attributed to them – both in the East and in the kingdom at the King's court.

Secondly, the strategies for the consolidation and/or enhancement of social status should be analysed by examining not only the ways in which accumulated resources were used but also their effects in the short and the long term. Consequently, one has to focus on both the intra-generational and the intergenerational processes. For reasons of convenience and ease of access to data, historians have preferred to study the former rather than the latter. However, the former approach does not provide nearly such a good picture of social processes of mobility, because during the *Ancien Régime* these tended to stretch over long periods. The following will therefore analyse the conditions of social mobility in the *fidalgua* both in the short and the long term.

Intra-generational mobility of the lesser nobility

The great majority of the adventurous and poor *fidalgos* departed for the East because the Crown had appointed them to some kind of military post for a period of three years. The monarchy also offered other incentives for departure such as financial support towards sailing expenses as well as pensions paid once in India.⁹ Faced, however, with the constant need of men to fight in the empire, the Monarchy avoided such short periods of service by implementing a reward system that encouraged longer stays, i.e. the more notorious and prolonged their exploits the more they could expect from the Crown's gratitude. However, these acts of royal grace had certain limitations. The most common rewards were new

appointments to the *capitanias* of the military fortresses overseas, the leadership of *armadas* within the Indian Ocean, licences for voyages and permits for the acquisition of spices or other Eastern products.¹⁰ Clearly then, the costs of building and maintaining the Eastern Empire were basically paid for by its own resources.

Within this institutional framework the lower *fidalgua* faced a dilemma. Either to return to Portugal as soon as possible after the minimum period of time of service and relinquish their immediate desires for fame and profit, or to stay longer in order to get richer and therefore be able to attain the required social status which they really longed for. To remain longer in service in the East would mean for these men higher payment by the Crown as well as private profits from local networking and business which could only be achieved after they had acquired the necessary local knowledge. Many *fidalgos* therefore preferred to remain longer and it is necessary to differentiate them from those that returned on completion of three years.

With regard to the developments within one generation, it should be noted that the Crown system for reward described above did not provide the conditions for a high degree of social mobility, unless one served for a long period in the State of India. In order to benefit from the royal grants in the East, without having to serve so many years, the *fidalgos* could sell the right to be appointed. In the vocabulary of those days it was called *renunciar*. The relative importance of this practice is unknown, nor do we know whether it brought crown servants any significant advantage, but we do know that the greatest demand was for the grants which were most profitable or which would lead most easily to forbidden enrichment, such as voyages to China, or posts at Ormuz and Malacca for example. However, the most common phenomenon was the transfer of these Crown awards to their heirs, which encouraged the members of the next generation in the family to go East.

As already mentioned, the type of strategies pursued for forging family alliances and the adopted succession practices are the best evidence to measure the success of the mobility trajectories. To marry within the same social level already required reputation and some wealth, but to marry into the well-established *fidalgua* was far more demanding. Besides good birth, fortune, reputation and good connections at court, visible signs of social recognition were also required. Thus, rarely did a start from a very low social ranking lead to a meteoric rise;¹¹ whereas serious military mistakes or insistent rumours of irregularities on the part of those occupying the posts considerably reduced the success rate of social investments.

Although wealth was an important requirement to improve social recognition, historians have had serious problems in assessing the private wealth transferred to Portugal. By this we mean illegally acquired riches, having said already that the actual payment of services by the Crown had little economic relevance. We know that fortunes were made¹² although there is

a high probability that most of the *fidalgos* were not able to amass a great deal during their time in the East. Amongst the fortunate *fidalgos* who returned to their home country there seem to have been two main patterns of investment behaviour: investment of accumulated wealth in government bonds (*padrões de juro*),¹³ and investment in marriages to members of the upper nobility in order to forge social alliances.

The general pattern of the acquisition of government bonds can best be verified by reference to the voluminous records in the regal chanceries, but it is evident that this was not the only way in which the nobility invested its money. However, there are no monographic studies enabling verification of the extent and relative weight of other kinds of potential investment practice, such as the acquisition of urban and rural property, improvements made to property, and investment in death. The extent to which nobles spent their wealth on conspicuous consumption is equally unclear.

Current knowledge provides us with an idea of the eminently non-reproductive character of these investments, and how rapidly the accumulated wealth dissolved. Even contemporary sources point to this fact, describing lavish expenses and exaggerated forms of ostentation, so the pattern rings true, if only due to a natural craving for social recognition on the part of consumers. But even the purchase of government bonds, encouraged by the monarchy, suffered from the precarious nature of investments in general. Interest-rate fluctuations and the possibility of their remission during periods of high inflation could cause such investments to augur badly for the investors.¹⁴ However, their transactional nature also meant that they could be used for social strategies, especially matrimonial alliances and inheritance practices.

Even so, despite the fragmentary nature of the information available, it is possible to surmise about the underlying causes of the weak immediate social impact of the majority of oriental trajectories. It is clear that all the devices used by aristocrats to accumulate wealth and to control rigorously the succession of their houses¹⁵ had not yet become a general phenomenon, at least not in the case of the secondary nobility. Individual efforts were not aimed at increasing the wealth of the houses of progenitors or eldest brothers, but were directed basically towards the constitution of the individual's own house. Individualist strategies triumphed and worked against the concentration of resources. It caused the multiplication of units of noble reproduction (which provides a good reason for the growth in their numbers), but did not create the material bases for any meteoric social rise.

Good marriages were socially much sought-after, but the effect of inflation on the value of dowries was a factor in the impoverishment of many family units, especially if they decided to marry off several children; which they often did. Even the aristocracy had their

complaints on this subject. According to Dom Jaime, Duke of Braganza in 1530: 'These days grand weddings are those of common people or New Christians who, in order to mask their commonness or Jewish origin are seeking marriages with people from a different social standing, and who have such low moral standards that they want to sell themselves for money, well, they can find people willing to pay. Then there are rich people from India who have cheated your Royal Highness, and so they are easy-come easy-go with their money. As for the daughter of Dom Francisco de Almeida (the viceroy) who was a widow, she probably had 30 or 40 thousand *cruzados* to marry the Earl of Tentúgal, which she must have inherited, because her father did not give her the money. This made people think that the earl had made a poor match, but Your Highness should know that only people who wanted to get their hands on her inheritance thought that way'.¹⁶

Matrimonial alliances also lead to patrimonial instability. Among the lesser nobility, cases of series of marriages involving several sons are common throughout the 16th century and almost always mark the beginning of mobility processes. In these cases, an investment was made in all the sons almost without distinction, which created favourable conditions for the dispersion of the wealth of the houses involved and reveals a clear interest in the enlargement of the social networks among the nobility in the home country, most of whom were courtiers. A good example is that of the generation of the brothers and sons of the *fidalgo* António Saldanha, the celebrated captain-in-chief of the Red Sea and captain of Sofala. He was one of six siblings, of which two brothers (himself included) and two sisters married. The arrangements he made for the following generation were similar. The main difference lay in the fact that he sent some of his daughters to a convent and that only one married whereas he displayed caution in marrying off his eldest son and successor at an early age.

In this connection the differences between *fidalgos* and plain nobles were not great. What perhaps distinguished the *fidalgos* was their natural propensity for investment in war. António de Saldanha expresses this clearly: 'I married my elder son to the daughter of Rui Lourenço de Távora, and there remain at home another six males and four females. My sons I have taught to be pilots and sailors and I will provide them with material support and then tell them that they should go to India as if it were Rome; as for my daughters, I will send them to convents, not those of the strictest kind but those of a more relaxed nature, so they don't give me any trouble'.¹⁷ And in fact six of the eight sons who reached adulthood served in India; this was similar to the strategy followed by his father, who sent three of his four sons into the army.

More aggressive mobility strategies, which were less influenced by the noble ethos, were pursued by the recently ennobled. They sought to build kinship networks by

means of socially advantageous family alliances. Although status was sought for sons, the aim was female hypergamy, i.e. to get the daughters to marry into an upper social level, with lavish dowries being given. We have already heard the Duke of Braganza's remark. It suits both the cases of Fernão Gomes da Mina (a rich merchant who was ennobled in late fifteenth century) and Rui Fernandes de Almada (a rich *feitor* in Flanders and afterwards ambassador in France under King John III).¹⁸ The first one married his three daughters to *fidalgos* and married off two of his three sons (although less successfully in social terms) while the third went into the Church. As for the de Almada his highly successful career made it possible for him to have his two daughters married to well known *fidalgos* and to establish a wealthy *morgadio* for his only son. Another example is the marriage of the only daughter of Afonso Mexia, overseer of the exchequer of India from 1524 to 1532 and registrar of the exchequer in Portugal, to the second-born son of the grand-chamberlain of King Manuel. The magnitude of social ascent achieved by means of these alliances was enhanced by the combination of wealth and good reputation, or by favours conferred by important courtiers or even the monarch, as a reward for eminent political and administrative service. There is an even more significant example after 1580. Dom Cristóvão de Moura, the renowned political servant of Philip I (Philip II of Spain), came from a relatively poor noble background. It was due to prestige associated with regal grace and favour that he was able to find spouses for his relatives of low social standing among a 'very honoured' *fidalgua* that was well-provided with inheritances.¹⁹

The negative impact of a poor reputation, or even on those falling out of favour because of poor performance in a government office, was very often felt in terms of a reduction in accumulated wealth (property was confiscated, seized or had to be returned in part) and could cause someone to sink into obscurity for the rest of his life. However, as the assessment of performances was very often the result of hearsay, the situation could sometimes be reversed and honours and property subsequently restored.

It is true that the size of bequeathed fortunes also had an effect on social success. There is the obvious example of Afonso de Albuquerque or that of Nuno da Cunha, whose temporary disgrace involving a royal servant had little negative impact on his descendants. The case of Afonso de Albuquerque and his inheritance is well documented²⁰: his only son, a bastard, married a daughter of the first Earl of Linhares. Nearly a century and a half later, the intrusive governor of India, Brás de Castro (1653-1655), who had become rich and whose daughter was his only heiress, did not have any difficulty in marrying her to Aires Teles de Meneses, son and successor of the first Earl of Vila Pouca. One can therefore safely say that the misfortunes of the governors of India (there were thirteen of them between 1505 and 1650, which makes up a little more than a quarter of the total) largely affected

only the men themselves and any negative effects were only felt by their descendants when there was very little to inherit.

The ownership of property was also unstable due to the adopted inheritance practices. As these *fidalgos* were not awarded Crown property (which was under the provisions of *Lei Mental*), they entailed their property in order to keep everything in one hand and therefore to be able to perpetuate their lineage, their noble status and their own memory as well as that of their ancestors, their successors and their descendants. This is how the common law, which provided for the legal partition of property equally among heirs, was circumvented. However, this practice created another kind of constraint, namely of a biological nature. To put it more clearly, the purpose of *morgadio* was to avoid either the partition of the inheritance among the heirs or its sale because the general idea was that the memory of the founder was linked to the property. In order to achieve this purpose the founder of the *morgadio* included several clauses in its contract, which regulated the succession to the closest members of his family. First-born males came first, of course. But if there was no direct male successor the *morgadio* should be transmitted to the closest relative of its last holder. This meant that, some generations after the founding contract, the *morgadio* could be inherited by someone with no relationship at all to the founder. It all depended on the biological capacity to ensure a continuous male line. These phenomena can only be assessed over the long term but, as we shall see, they are of fundamental importance to understanding the fluidity of the nobility's social field during the 16th and 17th centuries.

Meanwhile, the consequences of the extremely high mortality rate among *fidalgos* in the East should not be forgotten. Many of them left Portugal at a young age (14 or 15 years old), were therefore single and died without producing descendants and, in many cases, before receiving their share of the family inheritance. Others went out to the East as newlyweds with only one or two children and, given the high infant mortality rate, often only one heir remained or their line of succession was completely extinguished. In the latter case their next of kin (father, brothers or nephews) could claim their services and patrimony. This resulted in an opportunity to concentrate the resources in the hands of one member of the family, thus facilitating his social promotion. However, such unexpected inheritances could also change the natural line of succession and make it possible for a poor secondary branch of the family to rise to prominence.²¹ In cases where only one female heir was left, she was presented with the opportunity for an extremely socially advantageous marriage, which in practice meant that the wealth was transferred to a different family group. In both these cases only a meticulous reconstitution of life trajectories enables an assessment of the economic and social impacts of the interruption by death of so many noble careers. Let us therefore turn to a few examples to examine how patrimony and memories changed hands and who were the most stable beneficiaries.

Intergenerational mobility of the lesser nobility

The inheritance and destiny of the property accumulated by Afonso Mexia in his successful career constitutes a good example, which elucidates some of the main questions examined in this paper. His career was described in detail many years ago.²² He belonged originally to a provincial family of commoners (from Campo Maior, near the Castilian border, in the province of Alentejo), which came to court after being accepted into the 1st Earl of Portalegre's entourage. Mexia gained the confidence of the monarch, who promoted him to posts in the exchequer of the kingdom and later sent him to India as overseer of the exchequer. Indisputably a notable figure in the East, he was involved in the complicated process of deciding who should succeed Dom Henrique de Meneses as governor. As he supported Lopo Vaz de Sampaio against the appointed governor Pero de Mascarenhas, he was largely responsible for the series of political events between 1526 and 1529.²³ After winning the dispute, Lopo Vaz de Sampaio rewarded Mexia's efforts by granting him the captaincy of Cochin.

Whereas the governor whom Mexia had so tenaciously supported suffered significant reprisals for his conduct, Afonso Mexia did not. Although he was kept in prison, in 1534, he returned to Portugal and in 1535 travelled to Arzila again, where his exploits won him confirmation of the privileges of knight, granted by the king in 1539.²⁴ Reinstated at court he 'found favour again' and was 'greatly feared' by his contemporaries.

In parallel with his professional career, let us examine how he managed his private affairs. Firstly, the family (cf. the genealogical table 1): he married Beatriz Carreira de Almada, daughter of Pedro Carreiro, the learned auditor of Queen Catarina's lands, thereby marrying into a family of jurists and Lisbon people. His wife's grandfather, Bartolomeu Gomes de Almada, was a law professor (*Prima de Leis*) at the *Escolas Gerais* of Lisbon and later in Coimbra, and had married another Beatriz Carreira, daughter of a citizen of Lisbon.

Beatriz Carreira de Almada bore Afonso Mexia a son, Jerónimo Mexia, and a daughter, Brites Mexia. As already mentioned, Brites married Dom António Manuel, second son of Dom Bernardo Manuel, King Manuel's chief chamberlain. The size of the dowry was in keeping with such a socially advantageous marriage: 3 *contos* and 200 *milréis* (8,000 *cruzados*). But Brites and Dom António remained childless and so the line was extinguished. Meanwhile, Jerónimo, Mexia's son, upheld the tradition of alliances with jurists by marrying Francisca Tibão, whose father and mother moved in higher court circles, and they produced an only child, Beatriz Mexia, who was thus the sole heir to her father's property.

Let us return to Afonso Mexia in order to assess the management of his wealth. In 1523, before leaving for India, he was the title-holder of three life annuities: one worth 8,800 *réis* that he inherited from his brother, Lopo Mexia, in 1509; another worth 6 milréis, that he bought from a courtier of the second Earl of Portalegre in 1522;²⁵ and a third worth 20 milréis along with a knighthood.²⁶ In 1523 he was appointed public and judicial notary of Campo Maior, more an honorary position, presumably in order to increase his income, because he could not have served effectively in the Alentejo as he held more important posts at court.²⁷

As an old man, Afonso Mexia took a series of decisions designed to settle the terms of his bequest. In 1550 he established a *morgadio* involving all the property of his third share, with the exception of 1,000 *cruzados*, which he set aside in order to be able to freely dispose of in his testament. As part of the *morgadio* he entailed sizeable land-holdings in the Alentejo, mostly in the Campo Maior area.²⁸ Of more interest than the patrimony involved are the clauses governing succession, by which he sought to establish the lineage and his recently acquired noble status, following the example of the usual arrangements made by nobles of lineage. His successors were obliged to use his surname, Mexia, and his arms – his identifying insignia and thus those of his memory. Moreover, in the event that his successors would attempt to circumvent these clausal obligations, in particular when one heir would inherit two *morgados*, the inheritance would pass on to the second-born child, even if this should be a daughter. Additionally, the usual clauses were included providing for male preference and primogeniture, and the exclusion of disabled children and clergymen. He also built a rich and noble chapel for himself and his descendants at the Monastery of São Domingos in Lisbon, insisting on the fiction of ancient nobility by having inscribed in marble the names and titles of his ancestors as far back as his great-great-grandfather, Commander of Leon.²⁹

In 1555, he took advantage of the financial difficulties of the monarchy, which was forced to sell government bonds at 8%, by purchasing some for his daughter's dowry which provided her with an annual income of 256 milréis³⁰ and he bought for himself another bond to the value of 312.50 milréis, which enabled him to receive an annual *tença* of 25 milréis.³¹ On his death in 1557 he was said to be a rich man, and indeed he was.

The marriage of Afonso Mexia's only granddaughter and successor to the third and youngest son of the second Earl of Sortelha, Dom Álvaro da Silveira, marks the first transference of Mexia's property to another family group. Biological vicissitudes caused Sortelha's elder sons to die young and Dom Álvaro came into the indivisible inheritance of his father, although this was challenged in the high court by one of his nephews. The

latter was eventually forced to give up his claim, although they were able to keep the title of Earl of Sortelha. The case dragged on from 1589 to 1619.³²

Dom Álvaro da Silveira's eldest son became the successor in the paternal household and *morgadio* of the Mexias, but his marriage did not produce any children and the inheritance fell to the second-born son, Dom Jerónimo da Silveira. However, before receiving his inheritance and, as was the case with so many other second sons, Dom Jerónimo was destined to leave Portugal for the East where he made numerous voyages to China and eventually married. He later returned to his home country as a widower and married Dona Beatriz de Albuquerque, the daughter and heiress of Jorge de Albuquerque, grand-captain of Ceylon, who had spent more than twenty years in the East fighting the Dutch. The marriage produced two children: the daughter married a young *fidalgo* of the royal household; the son, Dom António da Silveira Albuquerque, did a little better by marrying a daughter of the *morgado* of Caparica who held several commands in the Military Order of Santiago. The advantage this marriage brought with it was the accumulation of inheritances as António had inherited not only all the worldly goods of his grandparents, Beatriz Mexia and Jorge Albuquerque, but also the services and property of his paternal uncles who had died in India, as we shall see.

Let us turn now to Jorge de Albuquerque who had already inherited a household with several generations of services. To make it clear we shall tell his story from the beginning (cf. the genealogical table 2).

Fernão Gomes da Mina, Albuquerque's great-grandfather, already referred to above, was the founder of this lineage and was ennobled by the king. During the three following generations succession proceeded normally and the inheritance was transmitted by male primogeniture. Estêvão de Brito was the successor of the second generation of the house of the Fernandes da Mina and he inherited his father's *alcaidaria-mor* and command in the Military Order of Santiago. He married a *fidalgo's* daughter and produced eight children. Like in many other *fidalgo* families, Estêvão de Brito sent his youngest male sons to the East and they managed to hold government posts in Sofala and Mozambique, the Moluccas and Chaul. The need to produce a worthy record of service encouraged them to prolong their stays and even to marry there.

The fifth son in order of birth was Fernão de Albuquerque who married a daughter of a *reinóis* who was a native of Baçaim. Fernão had been in India for 50 years when he was appointed governor of India in 1619, succeeding, in the first *vias de sucessão*, the latest viceroy, the Earl of Redondo, Dom João Coutinho. He ruled the State of India until 1622 in very difficult military circumstances. He was held accountable for the loss of Ormuz and

returned to Portugal in disgrace.³³ However, on returning to Portugal as a widower, he was able to marry the daughter of a recognized *fidalgo*.

While he still served in India, the King gave Fernão a passage to China as a reward for his services as chief-captaincy of Malacca, and for the services of his dead sons.³⁴ In 1616 he was granted the fortress of Damão, to dispose of as he wished, and that of Goa for life, along with an annuity of 500 *xarafins* and 80,000 *réis* with a habit of the Military Order of Christ. He refused the latter because he had higher expectations: he thought he deserved a command.³⁵

His first marriage produced seven children all of them born in the East: four sons and three daughters. None of the females married, while three of the sons served as soldiers. The two elder sons died overseas and the third son in order of birth, the above-mentioned Jorge Albuquerque, became the heir of the paternal household. Like his father, he married first in India and again, after his return, in Portugal, where he served as counsellor of the Overseas Council.³⁶ In 1616, the enquiries made to enable him to be admitted in the Military Order of Christ certified that all his ascendants were old Christians, who had no impure blood and lived like noblemen.³⁷ As has already been mentioned, Jorge Albuquerque left only one daughter who married Dom Jerónimo da Silveira, a member of a secondary branch of the family of the Earl of Sortelha.

The trajectories of these two family groups show some important features of social mobility, which turned commoners into plain noblemen and plain noblemen into *fidalgos*. The prestige of these two families began in both cases after a successful career as a commoner who was ennobled as a reward for administrative services (the Mexia family) or mercantile services (the Mina family). During the following two generations, their main objective was to remain in the kingdom and marry their sons and particularly their daughters into *fidalgua* families. Once they managed to have their *fidalgua* status recognised, their behaviour in relation to their descendents changed by acting like any other *fidalgo* family. They increasingly sought to send their sons into war in the East or into an ecclesiastic career. The immediate result of this practice was the reduction of the family reproductive capability, thus increasing the concentration of wealth. It is not relevant to pay too much attention to the precociously extinguished male line of the house of Mexia, which was due to chance, but instead we should look into Álvaro da Silveira's offspring. Despite eight sons, only one managed to succeed him and this situation is comparable to the Fernandes da Mina's where the steady production of several males in different family branches nevertheless saw the male line extinguished in the mid-17th century.

The two families also had a common desire to establish illustrious memories. Afonso Mexia established a *morgado* and built a chapel thus recording for posterity not only his

surname, but also his family's part in the military re-conquest of Portugal. Meanwhile, Fernão de Albuquerque decided to adopt the surname Albuquerque in a clear attempt to draw benefit from the already well established memory of Afonso de Albuquerque³⁸ with whom he had more affinity than kinship (Joana da Silva, grandmother of Fernão de Albuquerque, who brought him up, married Fernão de Albuquerque, elder brother of Afonso 'the Terrible').

Due to the concentration of heritage and service, Dom António da Silveira e Albuquerque e Mexia, the successor of both these families, was able to amass a series of high distinctions from the monarchy and to reach one of the higher echelons within the nobility. He was however never fully accepted. Among the nobility there were persistent rumours about the socially humble origins of his ancestors and their family's vicissitudes throughout the centuries. In addition, towards the end of the 17th century very strict genealogical investigations brought back the memory of the less-than-flattering epithets of *old nobles of India* and *casados* which some decades before had been given to his ancestors Fernão de Albuquerque and Jorge de Albuquerque, along with the suspicions that they were tarnished by impure blood.³⁹

Conclusion

The examples given represent a model for the social mobility of the lesser nobility in Portugal in the early modern period. Entry into the nobility was possible following successful careers either in administration or in trade. It was a relatively easy and rapid process. Access into the *fidalgua*, on the other hand, was much more demanding, for it involved social recognition and acceptance of status for at least three generations, adoption of the *fidalguias's* cultural values and permanent competition for fame and reputation.

The initial stage in the route towards social mobility implied a strategy, which would mobilize all family resources. Sons were encouraged to conquer or defend their social status by means of their individual performances, whereas also the daughters were used as a means to further the status of the entire family group. The combination of military service and marriage appears to have been a measuring instrument of the family's social esteem. The effects were not necessarily cumulative, given the fact that betting on numerous marriages, thereby spreading the social network, could also lead to the *dispersion* of wealth. On the other hand, the benefits for the whole family due to military honours bestowed on one of its members would only work if the latter died unmarried. A marriage would start a whole new process.

This pattern of soldier sons and well-married daughters tends to change during the periods of consolidation of the *fidalgo* status. In this second stage of the mobility process,

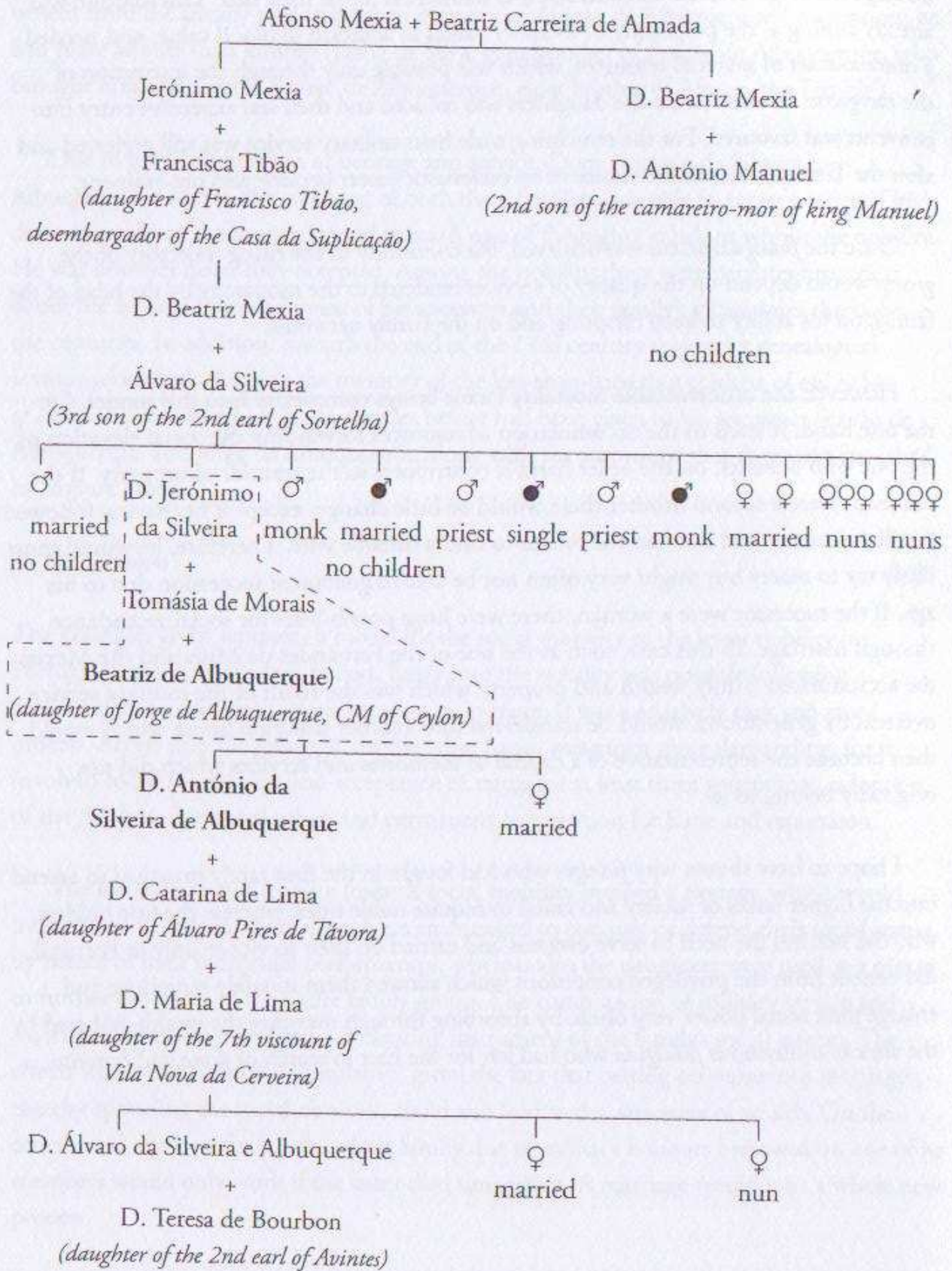
there is a tendency to protect the male heir from the risks of war and lead him into an early marriage as a guarantee of biological continuity. The importance of social projection through marriage alliances remains but it is transferred to the male heir. This solution was already aiming at the perpetuity of memory values in addition to blood values and needed a *concentration* of material resources, which was possible only through the institution of the *morgadio*. Investment in the daughters was reduced and their less expensive entry into convents was favoured. For the remaining male heirs military service was still preferred and after the Trento Council, the choice of an ecclesiastic career became also pre-eminent.

Once the *fidalgua* status was achieved, the continuity in the rising trajectory of the group would depend on the quality of services rendered to the monarchy by the head of the family, on his ability to keep offspring and on the family networks.

However, the unforeseeable mortality factor brings complexity into this model. On the one hand, it leads to the accumulation of resources forwarding the social elevation of the one who benefits; on the other hand it contributes to the transfer of property. If the successor were a second brother there would be little change, except if he, having followed a military career, had not had the means to find a suitable wife. Therefore, he would most likely try to marry but might very often not be able to guarantee succession due to his age. If the successor were a woman, there were huge possibilities for social ascendance through marriage. In this case, such as the one of the Fernandes da Mina and the Mexias, the accumulated family wealth and property which was the result of the military service overseas by generations, would be transferred into another *fidalgua* house which would then become the representative of a capital of memories and services which did not originally belong to it.

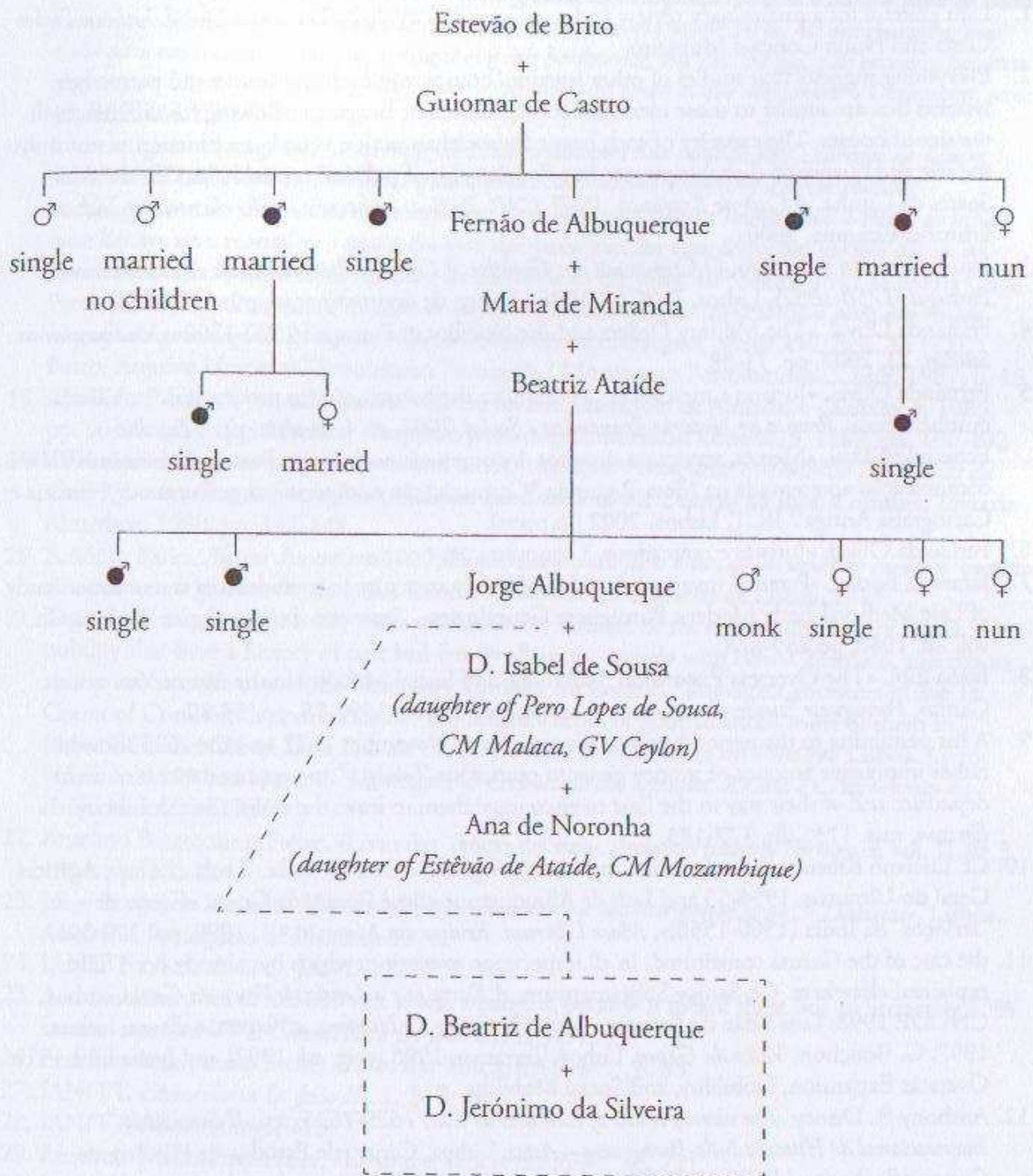
I hope to have shown why *fidalgos* who had fought in the East rarely managed to ascend into the higher ranks of society and failed to acquire noble titles; whereas the title holders, who did not feel the need to serve overseas and carried on their service mainly in Portugal, did benefit from the privileged conditions which allowed them to safely reproduce and enlarge their social power very often, by absorbing through marriage the wealth gathered by the almost anonymous *fidalgua* who had left for the East in search of *fama* and *proveito*.

Table 1: The Mexia / Silveira



♂ = male members who fought or preached in the East.

Table 2: The Fernandes da Mina



♂ = male members who fought in the East.

Notes

1. I am grateful for a preliminary review and commentaries made by Fernanda Olival, Leonor Freire Costa and Nuno Gonçalo Monteiro.
2. Everything suggests that studies of other *senhorial* houses reveal administrative and patronage systems that are similar to those identified for the House of Bragança, allowing for differences in the size of houses. The capacity of each house for social attraction varied as a function of not only the size and quality of alienable powers but also the sum of political capital held. Cf. Mafalda Soares da Cunha, *A Casa de Bragança. 1560-1640. Práticas senhoriais e redes clientelares*, Lisboa, Editorial Estampa, 2000.
3. Nuno Gonçalo Monteiro, *O Crepúsculo dos Grandes. A Casa e o Património da Aristocracia em Portugal (1750-1832)*, Lisboa, IN/CM, 1998 (dissert. de doutoramento, mimeo., 1995).
4. Fernanda Olival, «The Military Orders and the Nobility in Portugal, 1500-1800», *Mediterranean Studies*, XI, 2002, pp. 71-88.
5. Fernanda Olival, «Juristas e mercadores à conquista das honras: quatro processos de nobilitação quinhentistas», *Revista de História Económica e Social*, 2002, n.º 4, 2ª série, pp. 7-53 and Fernanda Olival, «Mercês, serviços e circuitos documentais no Império Português (século XVII), comunicação apresentada na Mesa-Redonda "Comunicação e Império", org. Centro de História e Cartografia Antiga / IICT, Lisboa, 2002 (in print).
6. Fernanda Olival, «Juristas e mercadores à conquista das honras...»
7. James L. Boone, «Parental investment and elite family structure in preindustrial states: a case study of Late Medieval-Early Modern Portuguese Genealogies», *American Anthropologist*, Washington, vol. 88, 1986, pp. 859-878.
8. Ivana Elbl, «The Overseas Expansion, Nobility, and Social Mobility in the Age of Vasco da Gama», *Portuguese Studies Review*, vol. 6, n.º 2, Fall-Winter, 1997-98, pp. 53-80.
9. A list pertaining to the period between the months of November 1622 and June 1623 shows a rather impressive amount of money given to numerous "fidalgos" to support the cost of their departure and of their stay in the East to encourage them to leave the realm. British Library, Egerton, mss. 1135, fls. 177-183.
10. Cf. Luciano Ribeiro, (introd., index and notes), *Registo da Casa da Índia*, 2 vols., Lisboa, Agência Geral do Ultramar, 1954-55 and Luís de Albuquerque e José Pereira da Costa, «Cartas de "serviços" da Índia (1500-1550)», *Mare Liberum. Revista dos Mares*, n.º 1, 1990, pp. 309-396.
11. the case of the Gamas constituted, in all respects, an exception, which has already been fully explained elsewhere. Cf. Sanjay Subramanyam, *A Carreira e a Lenda de Vasco da Gama*, Lisboa, CNCDP, 1998; Luís Adão da Fonseca, *Vasco da Gama. O Homem, a Viagem, a Época*, Lisboa, 1997; G. Bouchon, *Vasco da Gama*, Lisboa, Terramar, 1998 [orig. ed. 1997] and Ivana Elbl, «The Overseas Expansion, Nobility, and Social Mobility...»
12. Anthony R. Disney, *The viceroy count of Linhares at Goa, 1629-1635*, sep. *II Seminário Internacional de História Indo-Portuguesa – Actas*, Lisboa, Centro de Estudos de História e Cartografia Antiga / IICT, 1985. There are chronicles and genealogical works that make some references to *fidalgos* who were suspected of illegally acquiring wealth and who were therefore prosecuted and in many cases acquitted. Other records register only that some *fidalgos* were famous for their wealth when they came back from the East. Nothing is said however about how much this wealth amounted to and how it might have been invested.
13. Joaquim Romero Magalhães, *Padrões de juro, património e vínculos no século XVI*, sep. *Mare Liberum*, 2001. 21-22, pp. 9-24.
14. *Idem, ibidem.*
15. Nuno Gonçalo Monteiro, *O Crepúsculo dos Grandes. A Casa e o Património da Aristocracia...*
16. In the original Portuguese, "os casamentos que agora são grandes são de Villãos ou de cristãos novos,

que por redimir sua uilania, ou judiaria quando querem auer pessoas de diferente estado que ção baixas que se querem uender por dinheiro estes taias as compraão Ou he de pessoas que uem da India ricos de Roubar a V.A. que assim como lhe custa pouca a ganhar tem em pouca conta de o dar e a filha de Dom francisco de Almeida que era ueuua de outro marido bem aueria mister 30 ou 40 mil cruzados, que tinha para cazar com o Conde de Tentugal os quais herdou não lhos deu seu paj, e de entonçes hauerem que cazou o Conde mal, crea V.A. que o não ouue ninguem senão os que dezejauam o Cazamento para sy", BPE, cód. CIII/2-22.

17. In the original Portuguese, "casey meu filho mais velho com hua filha de Ruy Lourenço de Tavora ficam me em casa outros seys machos e quatro femeas aos machos Ynsynarey a serem pilotos e marjnheiros e meter lhej palhas como cegaregas e dyr lhey que se vam a Imdia como a Roma as filhas mete llas hey neses moesteiros o nanja dos mais apertados mas dos mais largos por me não darem ao demo tantas vezes", letter from António de Saldanha to the king, 16th March 1547 in Maria Clara Pereira da Costa, *O cronista Frei Luís de Sousa em documentos (II) (contribuição para um estudo biográfico e genealógico)*, 2^a edição, *Cartório Dominicano Português, Século XVI*, Fasc. 14 (11), Porto, Arquivo Histórico Dominicano Português / Movimento Bartolomeano.Costa, 1987, p. 13.
18. Maria do Rosário Themudo Barata, «Quem foi Rui Fernandes de Almada?», *Oceanos*, 3, 1989, pp. 96-99 and Rafael Moreira, «Requiem por um monumento», *Oceanos*, 3, 1989, pp. 100-102.
19. Christopher C. Lund (introd. notes and index), *Anedotas Portuguesas e Memórias Biográficas da Corte Quinhentista. Istórias e Ditos Galantes que Sucederão e se Diseraõ no Paço*, Coimbra, Livraria Almedina, 1980, pp. 147-148.
20. António Baião, *Alguns descendentes de Albuquerque e o seu filho à luz de documentos inéditos: questão da sepultura do governador da Índia*, Lisboa, Academia das Ciências de Lisboa, 1915.
21. This phenomena explains why there were so many families of the eighteenth century upper nobility that have a history of past bad family alliances, namely with New-Christians, merchants and so on, as is the case of the Carneiro e Cunhas, for instance. The direct ancestors of the 1st Count of Cunha (title dating from 1760) forged a series of poor alliances, some of them in India. Cf. Isabel Cluny, *Dom Luís da Cunha e a ideia de diplomacia em Portugal*, Lisboa, Livros Horizonte 1999 and Nuno G. Monteiro, *O Crepúsculo dos Grandes. A Casa e o Património da Aristocracia...*, p. 193.
22. Anselmo Braamcamp Freire, «Livro das Tenças del Rei», *Archivo Historico Portuguez*, vol. II, nº 3, 1904, pp. 215-224.
23. Jorge Borges de Macedo, *Um caso de luta pelo poder e a sua interpretação n'«Os Lusíadas»*, Lisboa, Academia Portuguesa de História, 1976.
24. IAN/TT, *Chancelaria D. João III*, L. 27, fl. 56.
25. At a purchase price of 40\$000 réis, it was a bargain, because it meant there was an attractive 15% interest rate. IAN/TT, *Chancelaria D. João III*, L. 51, fl. 79.
26. Anselmo Braamcamp Freire, «Livro das Tenças del Rei»..., p. 85.
27. IAN/TT, *Chancelaria D. João III*, L. 3, fl. 79.
28. IAN/TT, *Núcleo Antigo*, 213.
29. Anselmo Braamcamp Freire, «Livro das Tenças del Rei»..., p. 221.
30. IAN/TT, *Chancelaria D. João III*, L. 53, fl. 327-332.
31. IAN/TT, *Chancelaria D. João III*, L. 71, fl. 63.
32. IAN/TT, *Chancelaria de Filipe I*, L. 17, fl. 313 e *Arquivo da Casa de Abrantes*, nº 153. One of the most important nobility complaints was the different legal regime that ruled succession in the *morgadios* and in the Crown goods. As we can see in this case it allowed the partition of the inheritance between the uncle and the nephew, which was considered a totally undesirable solution. This issue was solved by the new Bragança dynasty in 1641, by defining that the grandson of the deceased should be preferred over his uncle. By doing so they assured that primogenital line would prevail over secondary branches.

33. As a matter of fact it was this particular circumstance that explains the need for rehabilitation and the ordering of a book telling his life story. Cf. Luis Marinho d'Azevedo, *Apologeticos discursos offerecidos a Magestade del Rei Dom Ioam Nosso Senhor quarto do nome entre os de Portugal em defenza da fama e boa memoria de Fernão d'Albuquerque do seu Conselho, & Governador, que foi da India...*, Lisboa, 1641. In any case it must be said that this kind of rehabilitation procedure was quite widespread.
34. Their names were Estevão and Manuel de Albuquerque. They died in Malacca serving as captains of two boats under the command of the viceroy Dom Martim Afonso de Castro, cf. Luciano Ribeiro, (introd., index and notes), *Registo da Casa da Índia*, vol. 1, p. 461.
35. Luis Marinho d' Azevedo, *Apologeticos discursos offerecidos a Magestade del Rei Dom Ioam ...*, fl.11v.
36. He was a person of influence in the first decade of the new Bragança dynasty as can be proved by his role in the beginnings of the Overseas Council.
37. IAN/TT, *Habilitações da Ordem de Cristo*, Letra J, mço 24, n.º 111. To live like a nobleman meant that they didn't work with their hands and that they had servants, slaves and horses.
38. Luis Marinho d' Azevedo, *Apologeticos discursos...*, p. 6.
39. Although the inquiries to his ancestors genealogical and social background didn't present this kind of doubt, in 1683 the inquiry conducted in order to admit Dom Álvaro da Silveira e Albuquerque e Mexia in the Military Order of Christ raised the suspicions on the purity of blood of Beatriz de Albuquerque. As the authorities were not able to present clear proofs of this blood imperfection, the candidate was admitted in the Military Order of Christ. However the investigation raised the suspicion that somehow spread among the upper circles of the nobility. Cf. IAN/TT, *Habilitações da Ordem de Cristo*, Letra A, mço. 8, nº13.