

Imago as political identity: The Royal Seals of the Kingdom of Portugal*

A Imagem como Identidade Política:
os selos régios do reino de Portugal

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Abstract

In this text, the author contextualizes the use of Portuguese royal seals in the medieval centuries, observing their aesthetic composition and the political and symbolic significance of the respective imagery, predominantly heraldic, a discourse that is only broken in the seals of some queens. Portuguese royal seals are pieces that project notions and meanings that are strongly symbolic and have a consistent abstract representation about the conception and nature of majestic power in the monarchy of medieval Portugal. The structural lines of Lusitanian royal sigilography are exposed, in which the non-existence of the seal of majesty stands out, and conjunctures or cycles of originality are defined, compared to the European royal chancelleries of those centuries, and exceptions, as is the case with the conjunctural use of the seal equestrian only between the reigns of kings Afonso III and Fernando I (1248-1383).

Keywords

Sigilography; Royal seals; Medieval monarchy; Portugal.

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Resumo

Neste texto, o autor contextualiza o uso dos selos régios portugueses, nos séculos medievais, observando a sua composição estética e a significação política e simbólica da sua imagética, predominantemente heráldica, discurso este apenas quebrado nos selos de algumas rainhas. Os selos régios portugueses constituem peças que projetam noções e significações, fortemente simbólicas e de consistente representação abstrata, acerca da conceção e da natureza do poder majestático na monarquia portuguesa medieval. Expõem-se as linhas estruturais da sigilografia real lusitana, em que avulta a inexistência do selo de majestade, e definem-se conjunturas ou ciclos de originalidade, face às chancelarias reais europeias desses séculos, e de excepção, como sucede com o uso conjuntural do selo equestre apenas entre os reinados de Afonso III e de Fernando I (1248-1383).

Palavras-chave

Sigilografia; Selos régios; Monarquia medieval; Portugal.

In the Mediterranean, seals have always been symbols used by lords and other ruling powers, much in the same way as they were employed by other civilisations. This type of three-dimensional, material object, with a height, breadth, and width – physical objects, which may be expressed and conveyed through drawings or words, which never replace nor are, of course, the seal itself – truly is an *insculpta imago*; especially as it isn't always accompanied by legends or inscriptions.¹

A seal, as we all know, certifies the authenticity of written documentation produced by a chancery. Every chancery had its own seals, as a rule, and every kingdom had its chanceries, *i.e.* bodies that issued legal documents to enforce the public implementation of justice, taxes and governing policies.

During the Middle Ages, the Mediterranean world underwent a decisive historical process in terms of the formation of present-day nations. The political cartography of the current states was effectively built in the Middle Ages. The affirmation of medieval national monarchies was followed by royal and seigniorial dynasties which were forced to address the consolidation and assertion of their own identities. A political, cultural and dynastic identity invariably uses places and material means to enhance its self-awareness, while publically projecting the discourse that legitimates its own existence. A dynasty's process of political consolidation, on a par with that

¹ *Good Impressions. Image and Authority in Medieval Seals*, ed. by Noël Adams/John Cherry/James Robinson, London 2008 (British Museum research publication, 168); Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak: *Form and order in medieval France. Studies in social and quantitative sigillography*, Aldershot 1993; *I sigilli d'oro dell'Archivio Segreto Vaticano*, ed. by Aldo Martini, Milan 1984.

of an emerging nation, necessarily values every strategy concerning the social legitimation of its own *potestas* and *auctoritas*.²

Managing this process of political legitimation of an incumbent dynasty brings the work performed by the chanceries in service of these powers to the fore. All medieval monarchies had chanceries charged with producing written documents to illustrate the exercise of power and to regulate public administration in general. Chanceries issued documents drafted in accordance with official templates and forms, together with proof of their authenticity – generally conveyed through signs, autographs and seals affixed to these instruments, ensuring that they were true and could not be breached.

Portugal, located on the western Atlantic coast of the Iberian Peninsula, became a State in the 12th century. Though its political genesis became manifest and irreversible from the time the territories of Galicia, *Portucale* and *Conimbriga* were united under the same county, the kingdom itself was born when Afonso Henriques, a young nobleman and heir to these counties, entered the political scene in the early twelfth century. In 1128, as a result of the well-known battle of São Mamede, Galicia and the territories south of the Minho River split forever. From then on, the Kingdom's vital space was formed from the ancient counties of *Portucale* and Coimbra.³

In 1139, Afonso Henriques achieved a great victory, in Ourique, over several Muslim kings. From that date onwards, documents issued on his behalf granted him the title of *rex portugalensium*, the king of the Portuguese people. Before, he had been given more modest titles, such as *infans*, *dux* or *princeps*. Afonso Henriques extended his kingdom to the Tagus River. In 1147, he overcame the Muslims and took hold of the populated and wealthy cities of Santarém and Lisbon. Militarily speaking, Portugal was consolidated as a nation. Its international and political acknowledgement came from Rome, in 1179: the papal bull *Manifestis probatum*, issued by Pope Alexander III, granted the monarch the royal title. Afonso Henriques died in 1185, concluding the long inaugural reign of the first dynasty of Portugal.

² *Sigilli e Poetere. Sigilli medievali dell'Archivio di Stato di Bolzano*, exhibition catalogue (Bolzano, Museo Civico, 2002), ed. by Armida Zaccaria, Rovereto 2002; Pièrre Bony: *Un siècle de sceaux figurés (1135-1235). Le Sceau image de la personne en France d'Oil, Angleterre, Ecosse et Pays de Lorraine*, Paris 2002; Adrian Ailes: *Powerful impressions: symbols of office and authority on secular seals*, in: *Signs and Symbols*, conference proceedings of the 2006 Harlaxto Symposium, ed. by John Cherry/Anne Payne, Donington 2006 (Harlaxton medieval studies, 18), p. 18-28; Saul António Gomes: *In limine conscriptionis. Documentos, chancelaria e cultura no Mosteiro de Santa Cruz de Coimbra (Séculos XII a XIV)*, Coimbra 2007, p. 832-922; Id.: *Imago & Auctoritas. Selos Medievais da Chancelaria do Mosteiro de Alcobaça*, Coimbra 2008; ID.: *Introdução á Sigilografia Portuguesa. Guia de Estudo*, 2ª edição revista e ampliada, Coimbra, 2012; Ferran de Sagarra y Siscar: *Sigilografia Catalana. Descripció i estudi dels segells de Catalunya*, 3 vols., Barcelona 1915-1922; Juan Menendez Pidal: *Catálogo de los Sellos Españoles de la Edad Media*, Madrid 1921; Faustino Menendez Pidal de Navascues/Mikel Ramos Aguirre/Esperanza Ochoa de Olza Eguiraun: *Sellos Medievales de Navarra. Estudio y corpus descriptivo*, Pampelona 1995.

³ *List of Portuguese kings*. First dynasty: Afonso Henriques (1128-1185), Sancho I (1185-1211), Afonso II (1211-1223), Sancho II (1223-1245/48), Afonso III (1245/48-1279), Dinis (1279-1325), Afonso IV (1325-1357), Pedro I (1357-1367), Fernando I (1367-1383). Second dynasty: João I (1383-1433), Duarte (1433-1438), Afonso V (1438-1481), João II (1481-1495), Manuel I (1495-1521), João III (1521-1557), Sebastião (1557-1578), Henrique (1578-1580).

After Afonso Henriques, twelve other monarchs (divided between two dynasties) ruled Portugal until the end of the 15th century. The first dynasty, known as the *agonise* or Burgundy dynasty, ended in 1383 with the death of Fernando I. Two years later, in 1385, a new king – João I – started the second royal dynasty of Portugal, called the dynasty of Avis, which lasted until 1580.⁴

The study of the medieval sigillography of the Portuguese royalty is still in its infancy. Although, *grosso modo*, the seals of the monarchs are known from individual examples, systematic research, contextualising analyses and problem-oriented studies are scarce. We know, for example, that royal chanceries used many types of seal matrices, though generally speaking research is constantly coming across the same types of seal impressions: the large wax seal, the lead seal, and the bas relief seal embossed on paper.

Portuguese royal sigillography stimulates the in-depth study of the origins and identity of Portugal, which is why it is so interesting to try and discover the seal or seals used by the country's first king and, consequently, the ideological and political discourse contained in these symbols of identity.⁵ However, the production of significant images of identity by the Portuguese royal chancery is remarkably scarce. In fact, rather surprisingly, we have not yet come across a seal that may have been used by the first king. Starting in 1128, when the then future King of Portugal began signing documentary deeds, the chancery underwent a complex process of consolidation and affirmation. Several documents were produced by third parties and then submitted to the royal chancery, but their endogenous forms never changed. In fact, the capacity to centralise the processes of issuing and certifying royal documents was only sufficiently achieved in 1170, when a new chancellor, Master Julião Pais, took office.⁶

As previously mentioned, we have no knowledge of any seal belonging to the first king of Portugal. In 1738, the founder of the field of Portuguese sigillography, D. António Caetano de Sousa, blindly accepted that two documents drafted during Afonso Henriques' reign and displaying seals were proof of existence of the first royal

⁴ See *Portugal em definição de fronteiras. Do Condado Portucalense à Crise do Século XIV*, ed. by Maria Helena da Cruz Coelho/Armando Luís Carvalho Homem, Lisbon 1996 (Nova História de Portugal, 3); *Portugal na Crise dos Séculos XIV e XV*, ed. by António Henrique Rodrigo de Oliveira Marques, Lisbon 1986 (Nova História de Portugal, 4).

⁵ D. António Caetano de Sousa: *História Genealógica da Casa Real Portuguesa*, ed. by Manuel Lopes de Almeida/César Pegado, [Lisbon, 1739], reprint, Coimbra 1947, vol. IV, p. 1-98; João Pedro Ribeiro: *Dissertações Chronologicas e Criticas sobre a Historia e Jurisprudencia Ecclesiastica e Civil de Portugal*, vol. 1, Lisbon 1860, p. 83-149; Conde de Tovar: *Esfragística Medieval Portuguesa*, Lisbon 1937; Rui de Azevedo: A chancelaria régia portuguesa nos séculos XII e XIII *Revista da Universidade de Coimbra*, 14, 1940, p. 31-80; Id.: Primórdios da chancelaria de D. Afonso Henriques. *Revista Portuguesa de História*, 1, 1967, p. 161-166; Luís Gonzaga de Lancastre e Távora: *O Estudo da Sigilografia Medieval Portuguesa*, Lisbon 1983; Joaquim Ferraro Vaz: *Numaria Medieval Portuguesa, 1128-1383*, 2 vols., Lisbon 1960-1962; Maria do Rosário Morujão: A sigilografia portuguesa em tempos de Afonso Henriques *Medievalista*, 11, 2012, <http://www2.fcsh.unl.pt/iem/medievalista/medievalista11/morujao1103html>.

⁶ Avelino de Jesus da Costa: La chancellerie royale portugaise jusqu'au milieu du XIIIe siècle *Revista Portuguesa de História*, XV, 1975, p. 143-169; Saul António Gomes: *Introdução à Sigilografia Portuguesa. Guia de Estudo*, Coimbra, 2 ed., 2012, p. 91-106.

Portuguese seal. One document is a charter written in 1153 to Bernard, the founding abbot of Clairvaux, granting him exclusive authority (*cautum*) over the Monastery of Alcobaça. This deed, with its pendent seal, was submitted for extensive diplomatic examination by João Pedro Ribeiro in his *Dissertações Cronológicas e Críticas*, published in the early 19th century. Ribeiro concluded that the seal in question is a fake, in the sense that it was affixed after Afonso Henriques' reign. The second instrument, with only the remnants of a seal, is a 1160 charter granting property in Ladeia, near Coimbra, to the canons regular of the Santa Cruz monastery in Coimbra. Here too, as with other documents, the seal was affixed at a later date.⁷

It should be noted that several documents by D. Afonso Henriques were certified by kings who came after him, particularly by D. Afonso II. Consequently, such certifications invariably bear Afonso II's seal, instead of Afonso Henriques'.⁸

Caetano de Sousa's mistake has been uncritically repeated by other historians who paid no attention to the fact that the wording in these documents does not even mention any affixed seals.⁹ Furthermore, we cannot agree with them or with other, more recent historians who, based on the certification formula of Afonso Henriques' royal documents, namely the *rota*, interpret the word '*sigillum*' inscribed therein as being equivalent to a seal. This is the case of a letter dated 1169, "SIGILLVM REGIS DOMNI ALFONSI. SIGILLVM REGIS SANCII",¹⁰ quite an odd, not to mention suspicious, formula, particularly as it is the only document of that royal chancery to bear it. Obviously, *rota* and *signa* are not seals, but mere drawn signals of corroboration or certification. Some of these signs, which indeed have profound ideological value, designed with the capital letters of the word PORTUGAL, express the clear political conscience of royal chancery officials of the new Iberian kingdom.¹¹

The first specimens of Portuguese royal seals which survived to today belong to the reign of Sancho I (1185-1211). These are bifacial seal impressions in the shape of oblong shields, produced with red or brown wax. The seal bears five small shields arranged in the shape of a Latin cross. Each small shield is loaded with bezants. The legend opens, on the obverse, with a cross, followed by the formula "S(igillum) Domini Sancii", broken here and resumed on the reverse with the words "Regis Portugalensis".

We should pay close attention to this title, as it translates a spatial or geographical concept rather than an ethnic one. Indeed, older documents of the royal chancery,

⁷ Lisbon, Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo – Mosteiro de Alcobaça, Documentos Régios, Maço 1, nº 1; *Documentos Medievais Portugueses. Documentos Régios*, vol. I: *Documentos dos Condes Portugueses e de D. Afonso Henriques, A. D. 1095-1185*, ed. by Rui de Azevedo, Lisbon 1958-1962, documents 243, 275, 286 and 290.

⁸ *Documentos Medievais* (as in n. 7), documents 299, 301, 302, 309, 327, 333, 335 to 337.

⁹ Gomes: *Introdução à Sigilografia* (as in n. 4), p. 91-93.

¹⁰ *Documentos Medievais* (as in n. 7), document 294

¹¹ On the "rota" in the royal Portuguese chancery see José Marques: A influência das bulas papais na documentação medieval portuguesa. *Revista da Faculdade de Letras – História*, XIII, 1996, p. 25-44.

from the 1130s and 1140s, contain the formula *rex portugalsium*, *i.e.* the King of the Portuguese people, a fact which the historian José Mattoso has brought to our attention.¹² The nature of this expression refers, quite understandably, more to the social and ethnic element than the geographical one. The Portuguese royal title was, however, stipulated as *rex portugalsis*, thus highlighting the geographical territory over which the king exerted his power; the Portuguese king's territory was inhabited by people of different ethnic origins and cultures.

King Sancho I was succeeded by Afonso II, who became known to Portuguese history as the *Legislator*, after the number of legal and administrative reforms he implemented. He reigned from 1211 to 1223. During his reign, the royal chancery became more complex. The instruments promulgated by the sovereign were recorded in duplicate in notarial register books; there were separate books for fiscal matters. King Afonso II ordered many general inquiries to be carried out in the kingdom. The minutes of the committees that executed these orders still exist, and bear original and invaluable witness to the administrative and judicial power of the Portuguese crown in the first quarter of the century.¹³ Afonso II also adopted measures to set up a royal public notary's office in the kingdom, breaking with the supremacy of notary services provided by ecclesiastical registrars and public notaries, or even by some municipalities. This issue has been discussed at some length in modern Portuguese medieval historiography.¹⁴

It was Afonso II who introduced lead seals in the Portuguese royal chancery. Ever since then, Portuguese monarchs have used wax seals on common diplomas, and lead seals on solemn ones. In medieval Portugal, only kings used lead seals. We don't know of any medieval Portuguese royal seal impressed in any other metal. The seals of Afonso II, in either wax or lead, by and large kept to the models used by his father: Bifacial seals with small shields loaded with bezants on both sides, in the shape of a cross. Only the legend with the king's name, on the obverse, changed – “† S(igillum) Domini Alphonsi” – while the reverse bore a reference to the status of the Portuguese king: “Regis Portugallensis”.

King Sancho II ruled from 1223 to 1245. His reign was marked by several political crises, and a chronic incapacity to rule. In 1245, at the Council of Lyon, Pope Innocence IV decreed King Sancho II of Portugal's deposition, deeming him a “*rex inutilis*”. As far as we know, Sancho II only issued wax seals. Apart from the title, which states his name, the designs were similar to those of previous kings.¹⁵

¹² José Mattoso: *Identificação de um País. Ensaio sobre as origens de Portugal. 1096-1325*, vol. 1: *Oposição*; vol. 2: *Composição*, Lisbon 1985.

¹³ Maria José Azevedo Santos: *A Chancelaria de D. Afonso II (1211-1223). Teorias e Práticas*, in: Ead.: *Ler e Compreender a Escrita na Idade Média*, Lisbon 2000, p. 11-58.

¹⁴ Bernardo Sá Nogueira: *Tabelionato e instrumento público em Portugal. Gênese e implantação (1212-1279)*, Lisbon 2005.

¹⁵ Sandra Virgínia Pereira Gonçalves Bernardes: *Sancius Secundus Rex Portugalensium. A Chancelaria de D. Sancho II (1223-1248)*, Coimbra 2003.

When King Sancho II was overthrown, domestic civil war broke out. In 1248, his brother and successor, Afonso III, proclaimed himself king of Portugal. With him, Portuguese royal sigillography underwent substantial changes. The wax seal, in the shape of an oblong shield, and the lead seal – changed to a circular shape – were preserved. More importantly, it was Afonso III who introduced the so-called ‘equestrian’ seal in the royal chancery. The obverse of the seal displays the King as an equestrian figure attired in military equipment and covered with monarchical insignia. It was also during the reign of Afonso III that the national royal heraldry incorporated the castles along the border of the shield, a significant innovation in the Portuguese royal chancery.

Apart from this renovation of the Portuguese royal sigillographic design, Afonso III added a new title to the legend, which read “† S(igillum) Domini Alphonsi”, and “Regis Portugaliae et Algarbii” on the obverse. A noteworthy change, this one, since instead of “Portuguese king” or “*portucalense*”, the legend now stated “King of Portugal”, thus highlighting the *regnum* and not so much the nationality. In 1249, Afonso III completed his conquest of the Muslim territories currently known as the Algarve, in southern Portugal, and the word “Algarve” was then included in the royal title.

For many years, historians explained the innovative introduction of castles in the Portuguese royal arms as the result of the Algarve’s conquest. This explanation, however, isn’t very convincing. The castles that Afonso III incorporated in the dynastic arms aren’t a symbol of the castles he allegedly took in the kingdom of the Algarve, but rather a symbol of his genealogical roots. Before he became king, as the count of Boulogne-sur-Mèr, Afonso had already used these castles on his coat of arms. When he came to power, he preserved these heraldic elements of his county, thus causing some confusion about the actual historical meaning of the castles on the arms and seals of the Portuguese royalty.

Afonso III died in 1279. His son, King Dinis (†1325), as well as his other descendants, Afonso IV (†1357), Pedro I (†1367) and Fernando I (†1383), preserved this sigillographic typology. While their seals were adapted to each individual ruler by changing the names to those of the relevant monarch, wax seals in the shape of oblong shields were maintained, as were circular lead seals, and equestrian seals, also round and impressed in wax.

Seals of majesty are never found in the medieval sigillography of Portuguese kings. In this, the Portuguese differ from other contemporaneous European chanceries, for instance the chancery of Castile and León where, alongside a widespread use of the equestrian seal, there are also examples of seals of majesty, particularly during the reign of Sancho IV (1284-1295). The only figurative seals of Portuguese royalty are the equestrian ones, which were only used in solemn occasions between the reign of Afonso III to Fernando I, *i.e.* from the second half of the 13th century

until 1383. The new dynasty of Avis completely abandoned this type of seal, and resumed using exclusively heraldic seals. However, at this point in time, although Portuguese monarchs of the second dynasty abandoned the equestrian seal model and apparently favoured the dominant designs from when the Portuguese nation was founded, we are also forced to acknowledge that the new monarchs sought to introduce novel aspects into the royal seal.¹⁶

King João I, for example, added the fleur-de-lys cross of the Military Order of Avis to his coat of arms, and the royal shield with the five *quinas* (small shields) resting on top. The royal heraldic composition is further enhanced by the helmet on top of the shield, with a wyvern as its crest, occasionally nestled between a bed of acanthus leaves. In 1485, King João II effected some changes to the royal arms: he removed the cross, allegedly of the Order of Avis, and set the *quinas* on either side vertically.

Between the 15th century and the first half of the 16th century, the number of castles along the border of the royal arms was gradually reduced to seven. The bezants in each *quina* were likewise limited in number, to a total of five. Finally, the royal crown, associated with a helmet, was used more and more as we move towards the late fourteenth hundreds.

Portuguese History underwent an incredible transformation in the 15th century, in no small part due to Atlantic maritime discoveries and conquests in Northern Africa. Consecutive events led to changes in the titles of the kings of Portugal engraved in the legends of their seal matrices.

In 1415, when the Moroccan city of Ceuta was conquered, the legend of the seal of King João I announced: “† Sigillum Domini Joannis Regis Portugaliae Algarbii Domini Ceptae”. This legend was improved by Duarte I, his successor, during his short reign (1433-1438), with the expression *Dei gratia* added to the royal title: “Sigillum Domini Eduardi Dei gratia Regis Portugaliae et Algarbii Domini Ceptae” (1434). His lead and wax seals also displayed a small variant at the end of the legend. The lead seal read “Domini Ceptae”, while the wax seal read instead “Ceptaeque Domini” (1434).¹⁷

Duarte I's son, King Afonso V, turned out to be more ambitious in terms of his chosen title. On a seal from 1449 we find the legend “Sigillum Domini Alphonsi Dei gratia Regis Portugaliae Algarbii Ceptaeque Domini”. Another seal bears a different legend; “Sigillum [...] Domini Alphonsi Dei gratia Regis Portugaliae et Algarbii V. Ceptae Domini Africa”,¹⁸ which celebrates the Portuguese conquests in North Africa. From 1471, with the conquest of the city of Arzila, in Morocco, the title of the king

¹⁶ Gomes: *Introdução à Sigilografia* (as in n. 6), p. 98-99.

¹⁷ De Sousa: *História Genealógica* (as in n. 5), p. 1-98.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 85, plate M, engraving by Gabriel François Louis Debrie, LXII.

of Portugal was amended to bear the the following formula “of here and beyond the sea in Africa” (“daquém e dalém mar em Africa”). In 1475, Afonso V invaded the kingdom of Castile to assert his claims to the Castilian throne. For about two years after that, the legend on his seals announced a rather pompous title: “Sigillum Serenissimi Alphonsi Dei gratiae Regis Castelae, Legionis, Portugaliae etc”.¹⁹

The adjective “serenissimu” was preserved in the sigillographic title of his successor, the aforementioned João II, know to History as the *Perfect Prince*: “Sigillum Serenissimi Joannis II Regis Portugaliae et Algarbiorum citra et ultra mare in Africa Guineae Dominus”.²⁰

Finally, I would like to highlight the legend of Manuel I, the *Fortunate King*, which includes the following solemn phrase in a 1514 seal: “Sigillum Serenissimi Emmanuelis Regis Portugaliae et Algarbiorum citra et ultra mare in Africa Dominus Guineae ac Conquistae Navigationis et Commercii Aethiopiae, Arabiae Persiae etc.”²¹

As previously stated, the medieval sigillography of the Portuguese crown is still an open question, in need of a systematic documentary approach by individual reign and seal. Portuguese medieval sigillography is likely lacking a good quantitative or serial component. With that in mind, it is possible to draw the following general conclusions from the existing framework. First, the design of Portuguese royal seals shows a great degree of unity and stability. Dynastic changes did not impact on the essence of the symbolic images – the five small shields, or *quinas*, loaded with bezants – which have given the seals of Portuguese kings their basic structure practically since the kingdom was first established. In practice, this meant adopting a heraldic and seldom figurative structure for seals. We can therefore conclude that Portuguese royal seals were essentially heraldic-abstract. The only exception to this model is the equestrian seals introduced by Afonso III, and used until the end of the reign of Fernando I. The second dynasty, which began with King João I, abandoned this model; never again did Portuguese royal seals adopt any iconography depicting human figures.

This avoidance of human depictions in Portuguese royal seals is idiosyncratic. We know that, in Portugal, public appearances by the king were rare events; it was only during special festive occasions that the king would parade with pomp and ceremony. Otherwise, it is rather telling that both kings and queens of Portugal attended religious services from inside tents assembled in cathedrals, with the express purpose of preventing the people from seeing them. Even in depictions of the king as an equestrian figure, between 1250 and 1380, the monarch’s face is hidden by his helmet and armorial bearings, as if the king’s subjects were forbidden from seeing

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, LXI.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 87, plate N, engraving by Gabriel François Louis Debrie , LXVI and LXVII.

²¹ *Ibid.*, LXXIV to LXXVI.

his face, as if it could only be looked upon by a few privileged individuals. This is a specificity of the Portuguese monarchy, influenced to some degree by Hispanic traditions in a wider multicultural context – Latin as well as Visigoth and Arabic – of depictions of sovereign power. Kings or sovereigns enjoyed a degree of holiness, which rendered them untouchable and ‘invisible’.

A few final remarks, one of which concerns the seal of the Portuguese queens. What is surprising in this context is that queens and princesses are represented in the seals as sphinxes, which, in fact, makes the sigillography of the Portuguese monarchy all the more original. We do know of one queen of Portugal who adopted an exclusively heraldic figure: Isabel of Aragon, the wife of King D. Dinis, who died in 1336 with a reputation of being a saint. No other queen since has been represented in Portuguese seals with her face uncovered.

Furthermore, in Portugal, Portuguese royal arms always represent the country, as attested to by medieval sigillography and heraldry. There is no difference between one and the other in these fields; the country intimately shares the symbolism of its kings. Portuguese kings are forced to observe and respect the long, genealogical traditions of heraldic representation.

The legendary *miracle of Ourique* was documented for the first time in Portuguese chronicles at the end of the 14th century. According to the legend, Christ appeared to Afonso Henriques in 1139, immediately before the battle of Ourique.²² The legend tells that Jesus promised the *rex portugalensium* that, if he had the sign of the cross and his five wounds painted on the arms of the soldiers, his army would defeat the five Moorish kings in the upcoming battle. The legend is largely an adaptation of the equally renowned dream or revelation of Christ to Emperor Constantine when he was preparing to conquer Rome in 311.

The *miracle of Ourique* was widely disseminated and worked upon after the new dynasty of Avis came to power in Portugal, *i.e.* after the revolutionary events of 1383-1385. The bezants drawn on each shield were reduced to five, in memory of the 30 pieces of silver for which Judas sold Christ to his enemies.

This was a useful invention that added imagery to the social memory of the Portuguese people, and it is recalled every time the country’s independence is in danger. The legend or myth of Ourique quite simply suggested that Portugal was a country founded by Christ himself. The seven castles along the border of the royal arms, as stipulated in the 16th century, are claimed to be the last seven castles conquered in 1249 by King Afonso III, in the kingdom of the Algarve – notwithstanding several attempts to implement the design as early as the mid fourteenth hundreds. Whether they were these castles or not is something no historian can be sure of to this day.²³

²² Aires Augusto Nascimento: O Milagre de Ourique num texto Latino-medieval de 1416. *Revista da Faculdade de Letras*, 4ª série, 2, Lisbon 1978, p. 365-374.

²³ João Paulo Abreu Lima: *As Armas de Portugal: origem, evolução significado*, Lisbon 1998.

Nonetheless, they were symbolic references to war, which were quite useful for a Kingdom that, since 1415, had been progressing towards overseas expansionism and to conquer Muslim cities and settlements along the coast of Morocco, as well as to occupy the deserted archipelagos of the Atlantic. Furthermore, these references greatly pleased the Franciscan religious movement, which had always been quite popular among the lower classes of Portugal and played a leading role in evangelising the territories discovered and conquered by Portugal since the late Middle Ages.

However, the images on the seals of the Portuguese kings contradict the legends told about the origin of the Portuguese nation. They do not deny them entirely – particularly because, to some extent, the explanations and legends developed from the interpretation of this heraldic grammar; these legends were inherent to the founding myths of the Portuguese nation. However, it is not possible to study and decode these legends without first studying the seals of the Portuguese kings archaeologically.

These seals, we may conclude, are one of the most significant documentary sources for studying the origins of the kingdom of Portugal and its early political identity – without forgetting that Portugal's current borders were enshrined in the Treaty of Alcanizes, signed in 1297 – and, concurrently, for understanding how, in the context of a continuous dynamic of changing dynasties, powers, wars and confrontations between different cultural factors, both Atlantic and Mediterranean, Portugal was shaped, and came to be identified as the Medieval kingdom “where”, as a contemporary poet wrote, “land ends and the sea begins”.

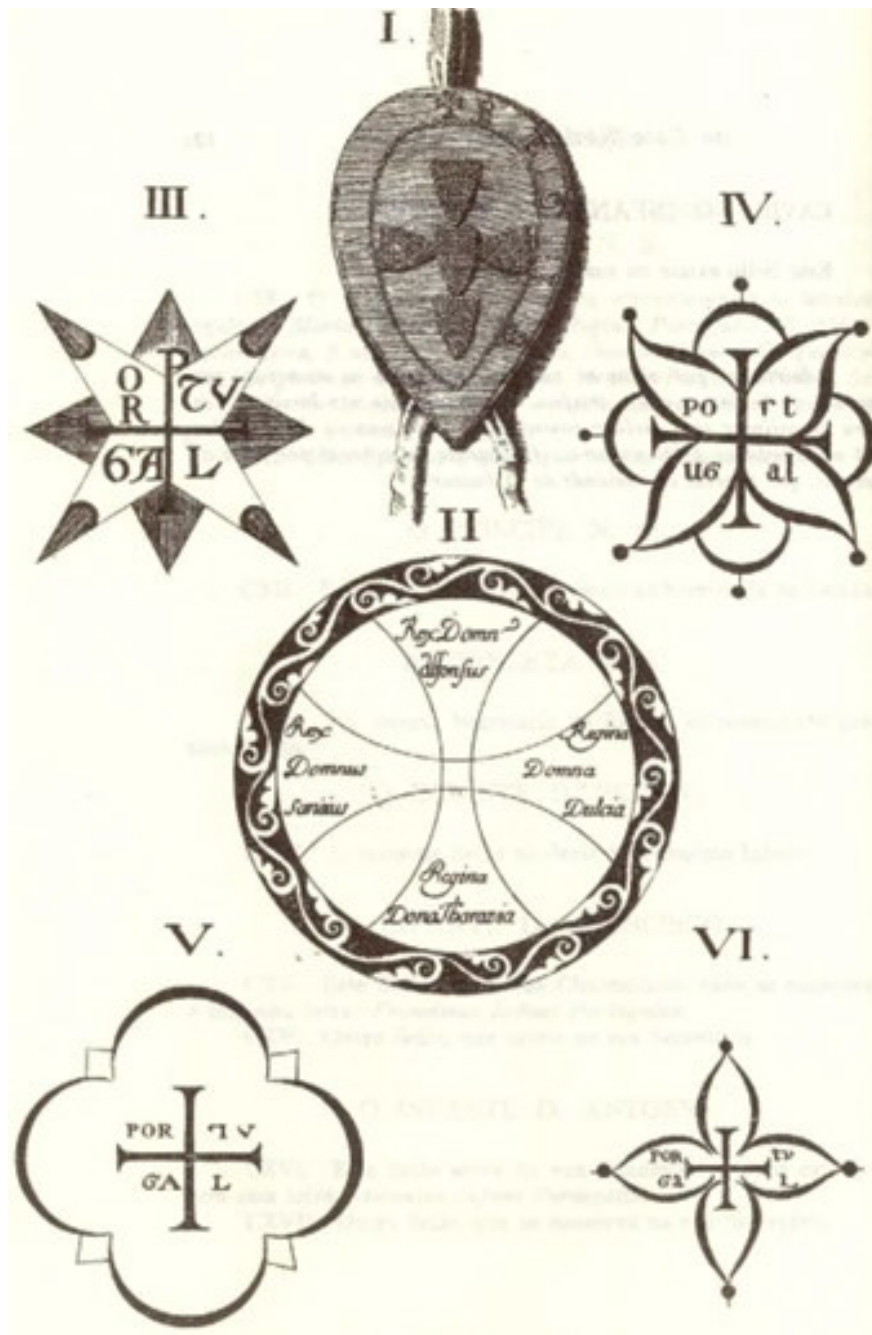


Figure 1. Rota, signs and the (forgered) seal of Afonso Henriques (1128-1185)²⁴.

²⁴ All images were taken from the book *Introduction to Sigilography in Portugal. Study Guide* (Coimbra, 2012), p. 253 and following.

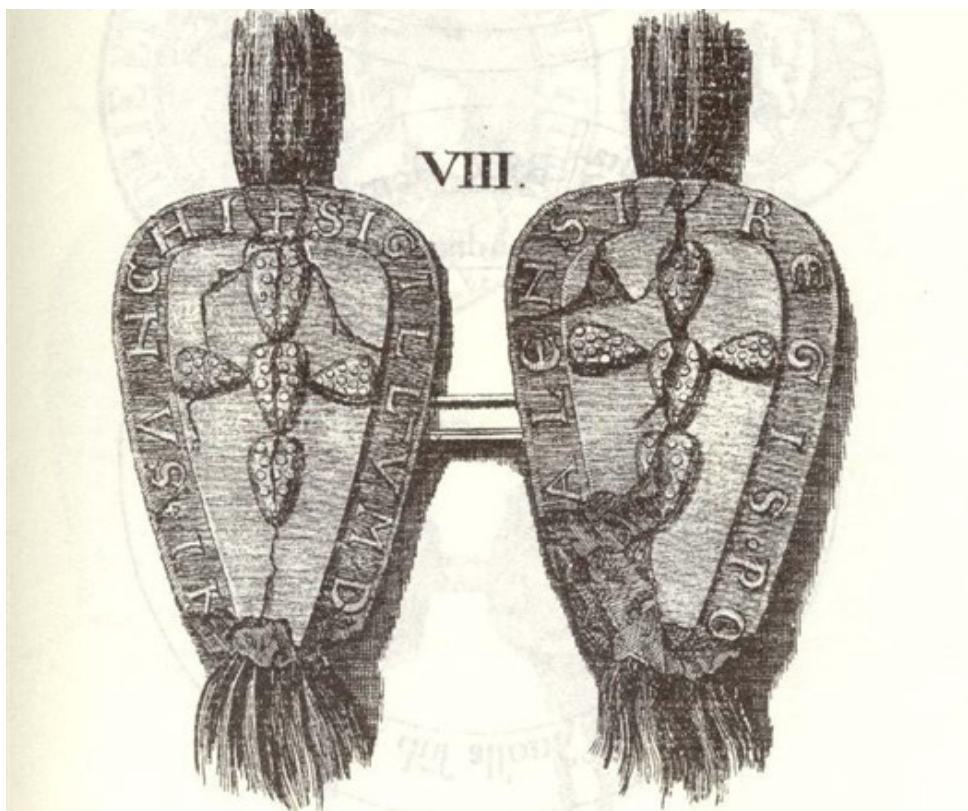


Figure 2. Seals of Sancho I (1185-1211).



Figure 3. Seal of Afonso, count of Boulogne-sur-Mer, with representation of castles (1241), future king Afonso III.

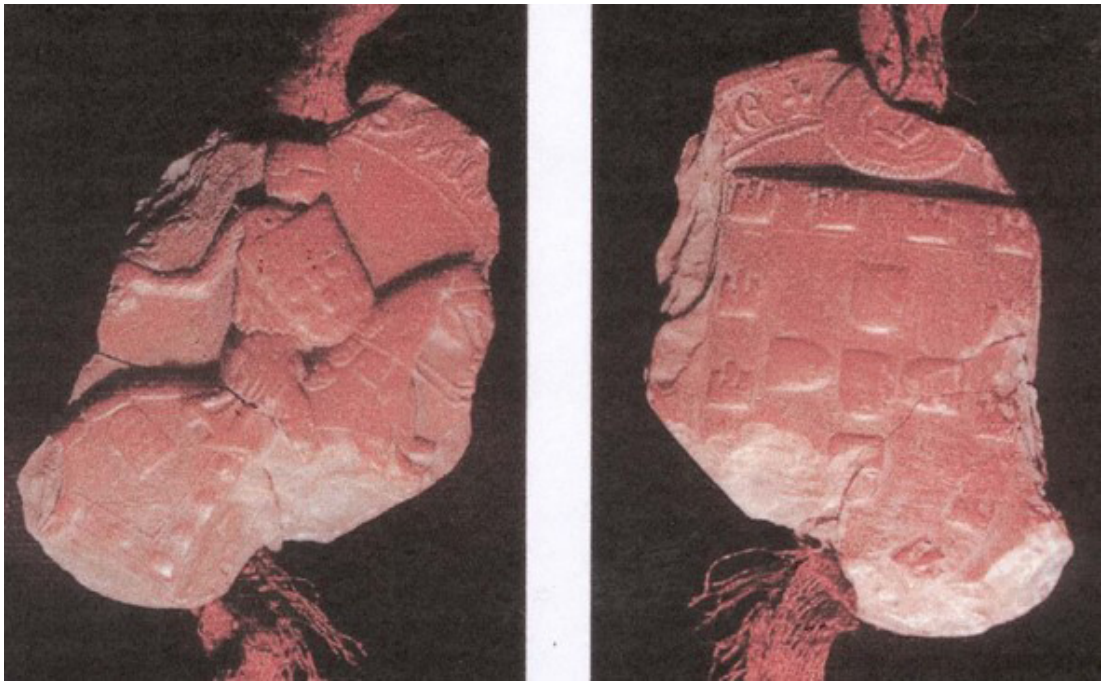


Figure 4. Equestrian seal of Afonso III (1263).

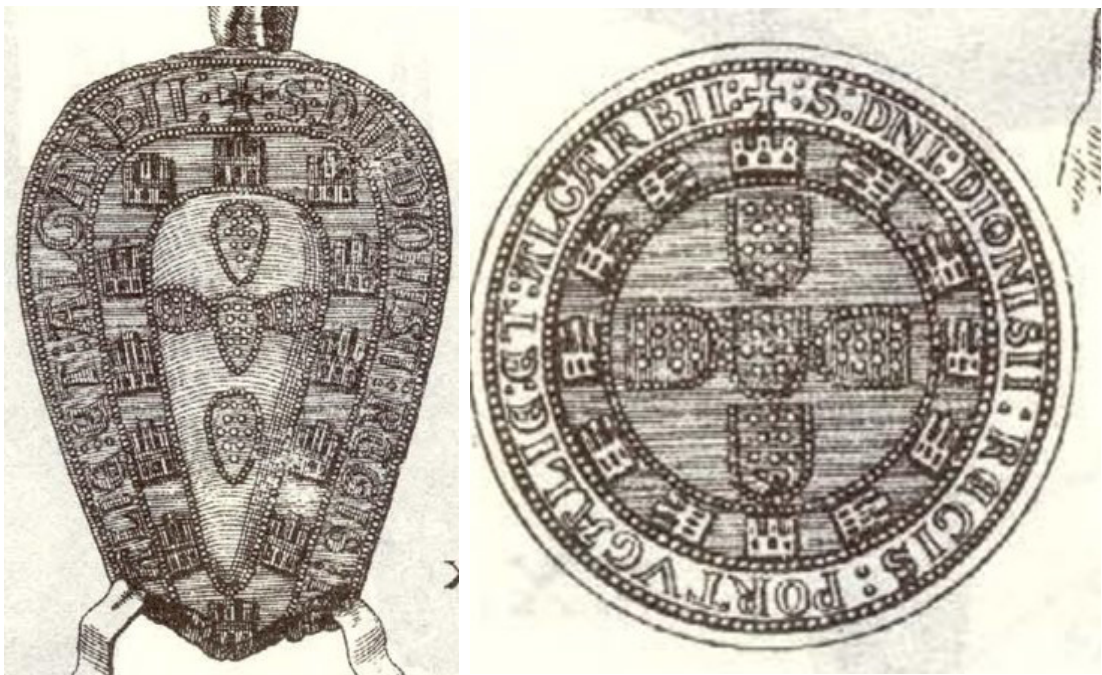


Figure 5. Wax and plumb seals of Dinis (1279-1325).

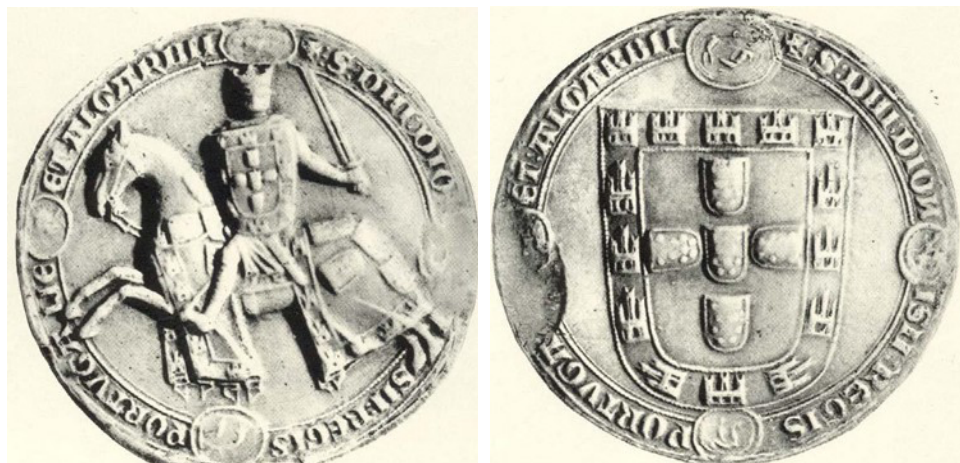


Figure 6. Equestrian seal of Dinis (1279-1325).

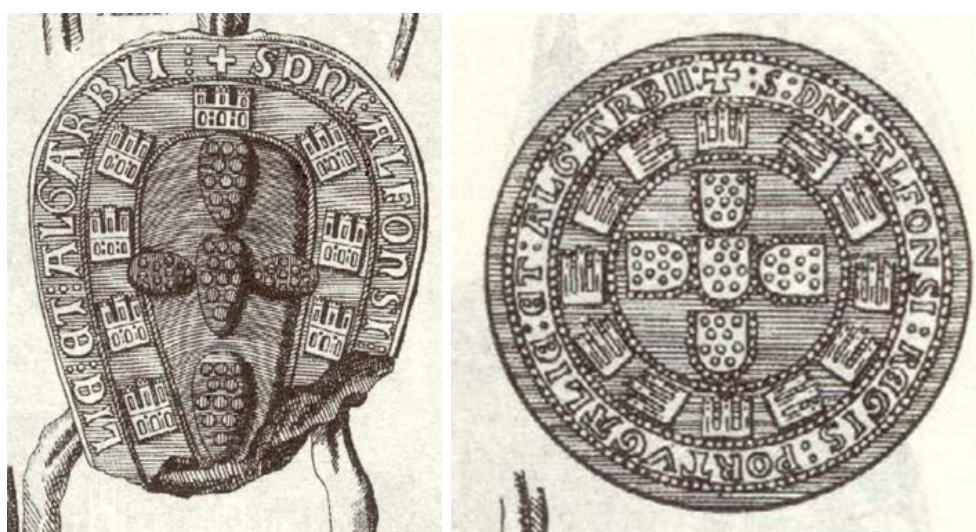


Figure 7. Wax and plomb seals of Afonso IV (1325-1357).

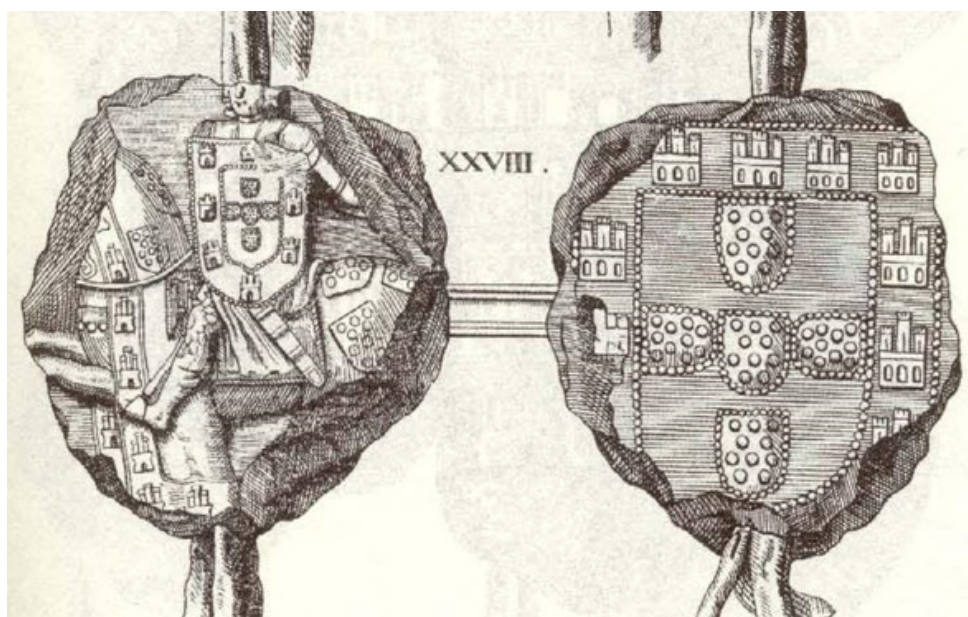


Figure 8. Equestrian seal of Afonso IV (1325-1357).



Figure 9. Wax and plomb seals of Pedro I (1357-1367).

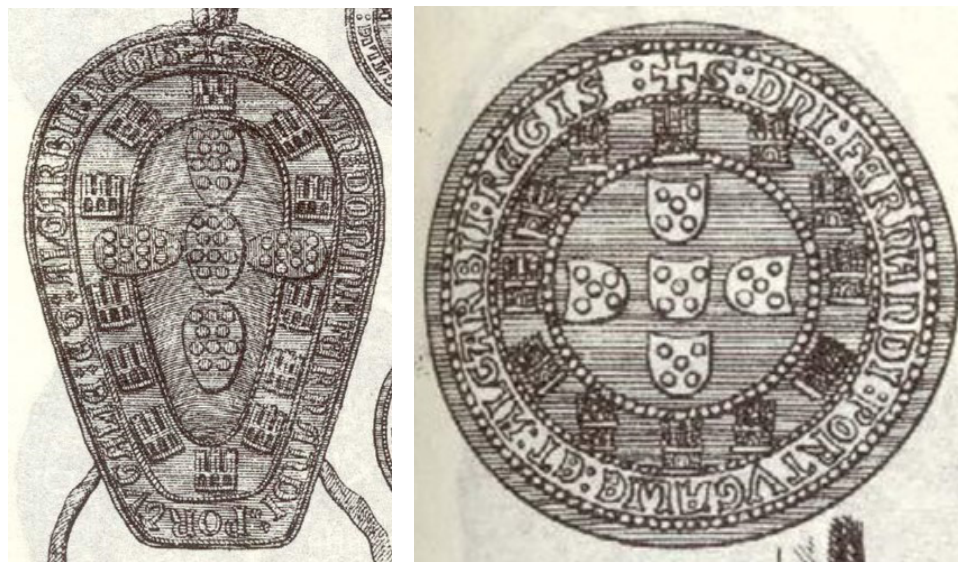


Figure 10. Wax and plomb seals of Fernando I (1367-1383).



Figure 11. Equestrian seal of Ferdinand I (1367-1383).

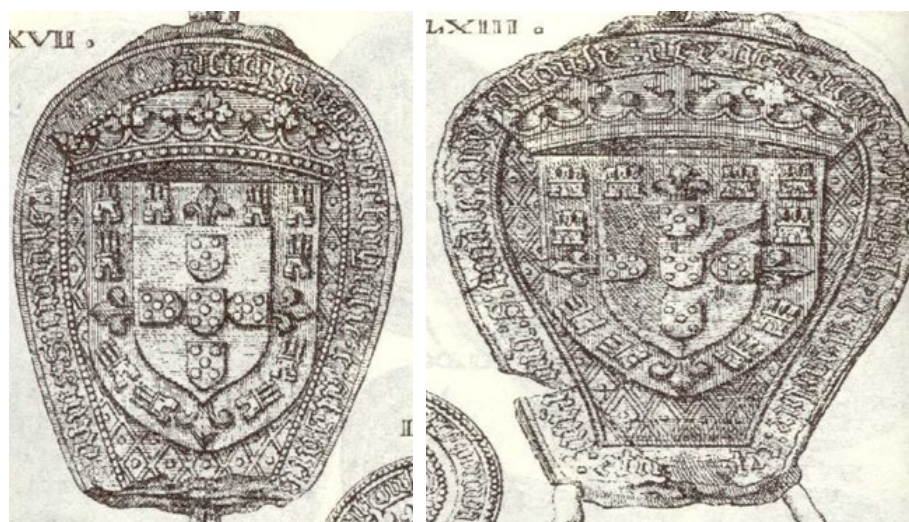


Figure 15. Seals of João II and Afonso V.



Image 16. Some seals of king Alphonse V (1438-1481); Seal of Afonso V as “serenissimus rex” of “Castelle: Legionis: Portugaliae” (1476).

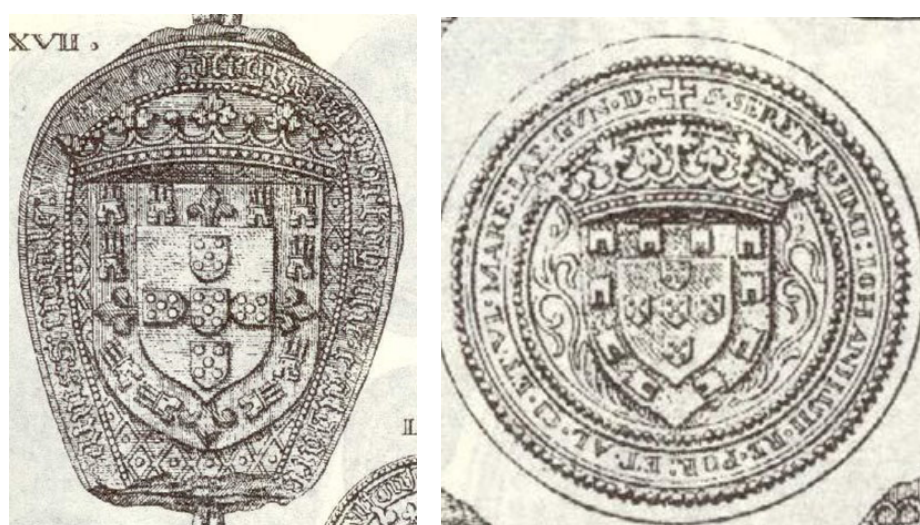


Figure 17. Wax and plomb seals of João II (1481-1495).

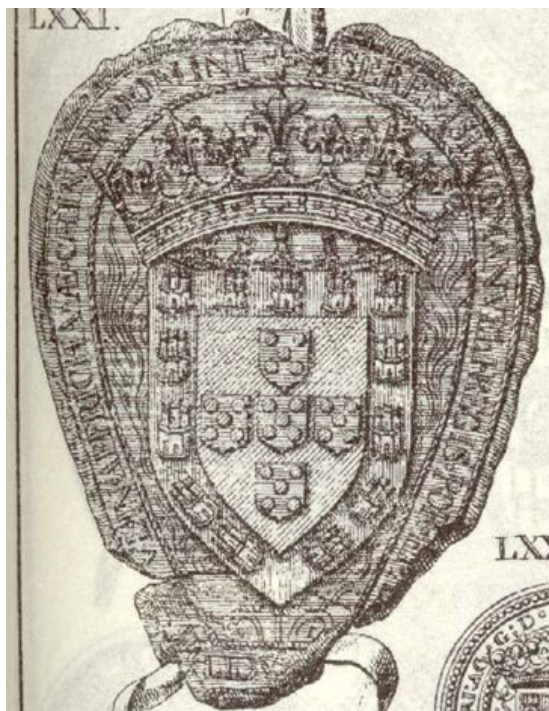


Figure 18. Seal of Manuel I (1500).



Figure 19. Seals of wax and plomb of Manuel I.

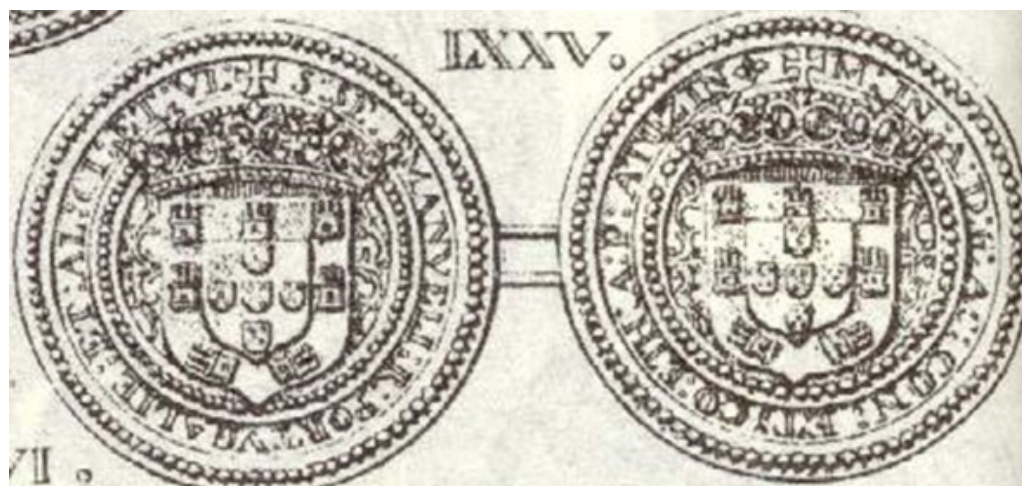
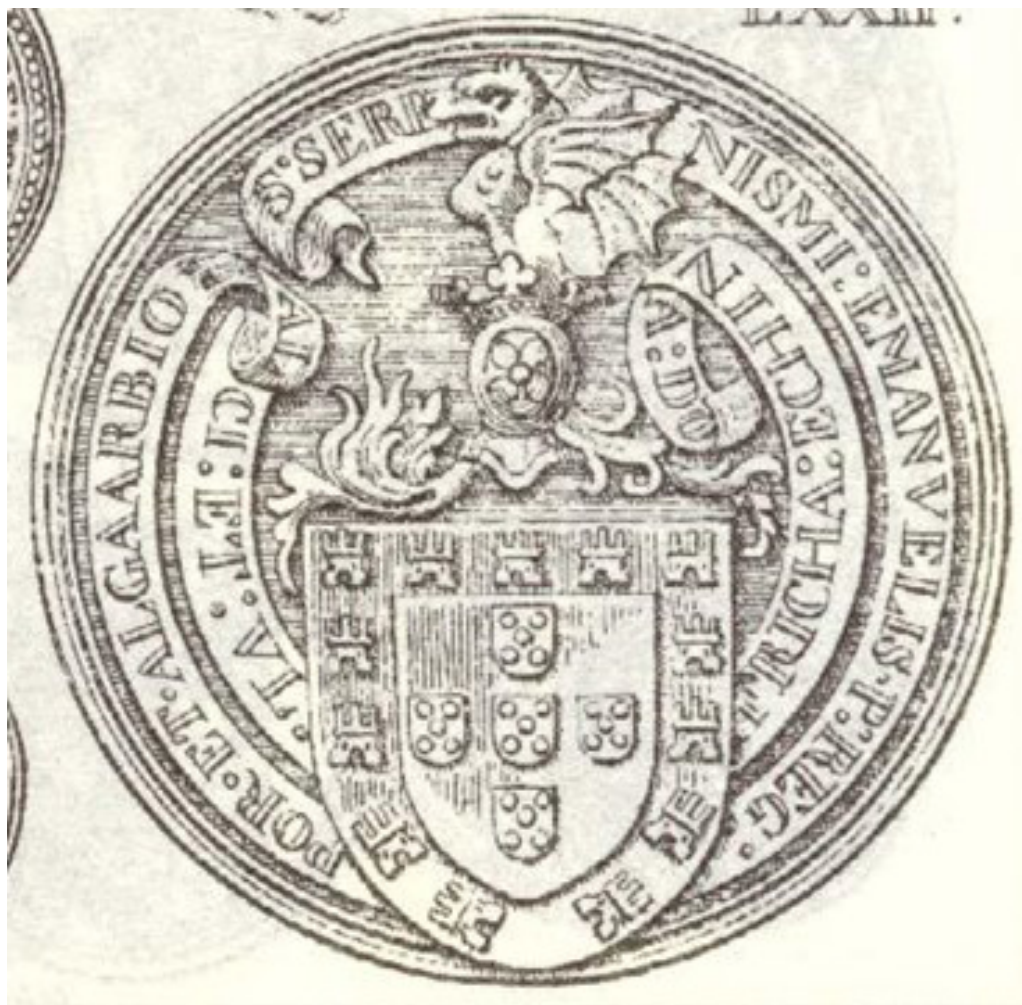


Figure 20. Some wax seals of Manuel I (1495-1521); Plomb seal of Manuel I (1495-1521).

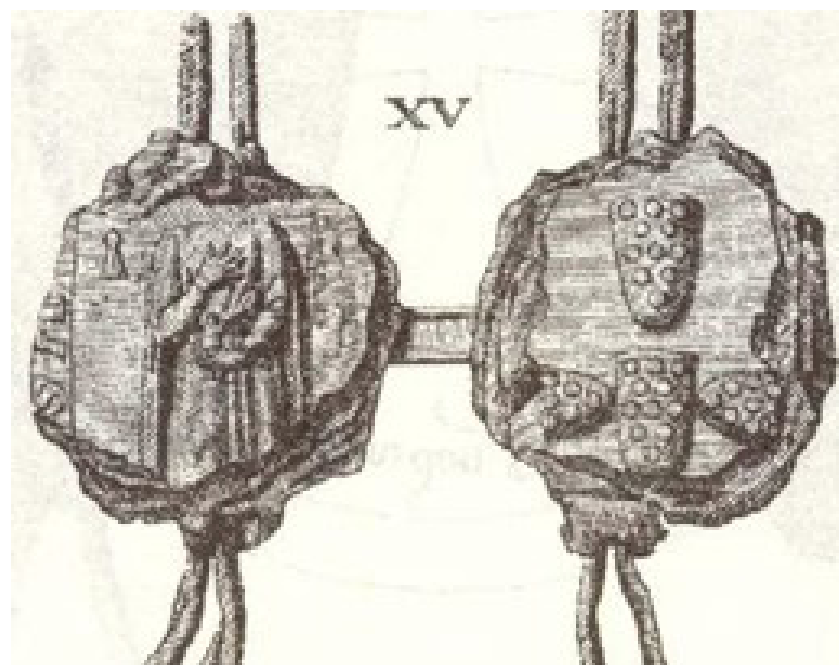
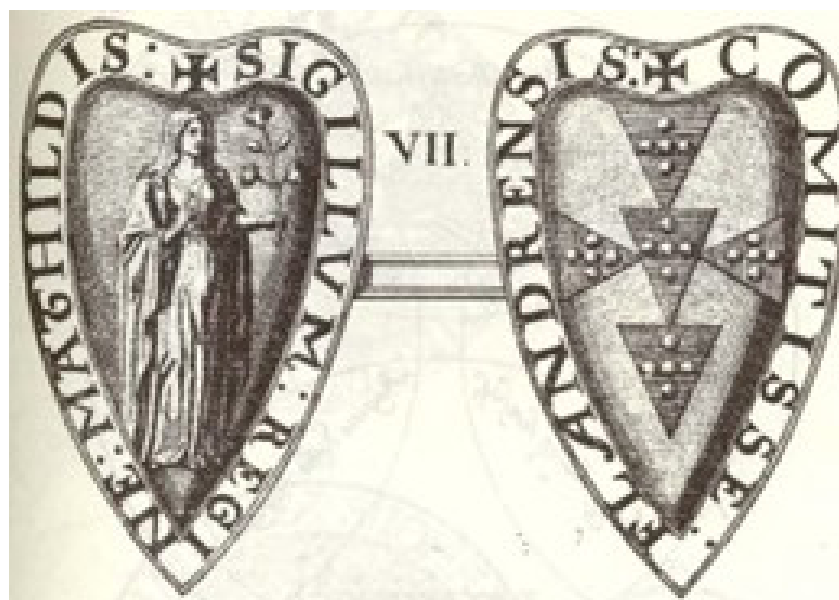


Figure 21. Some examples of seals of Portuguese queens or “infantas” (13th century).

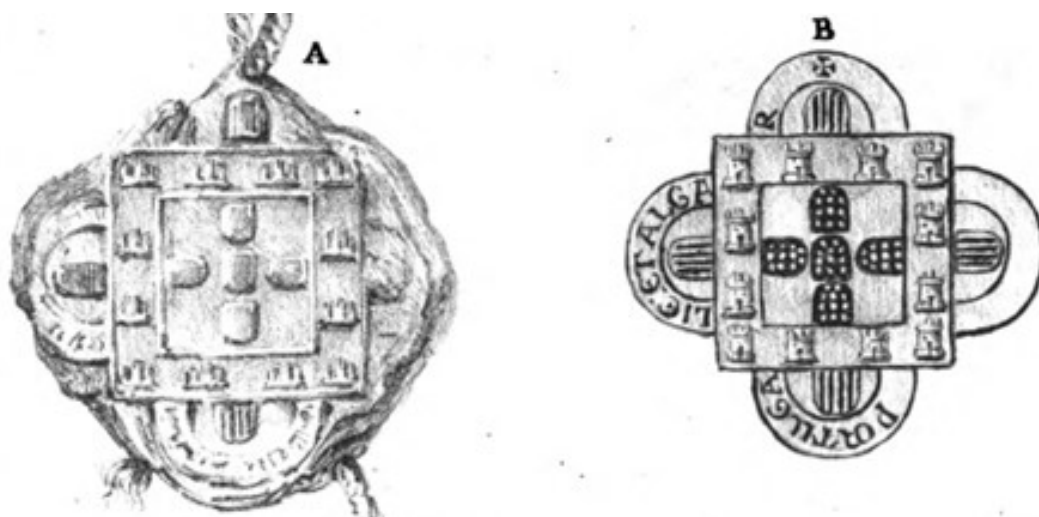
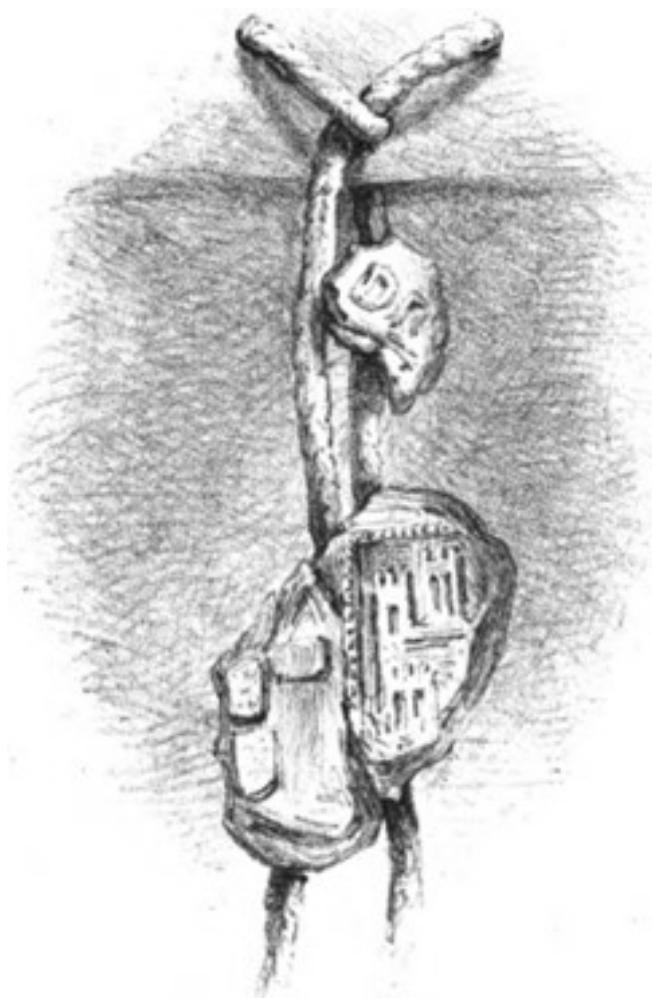


Figure 22. Seals of Isabel of Aragão, queen of Portugal (1281-1325 [+1336]).

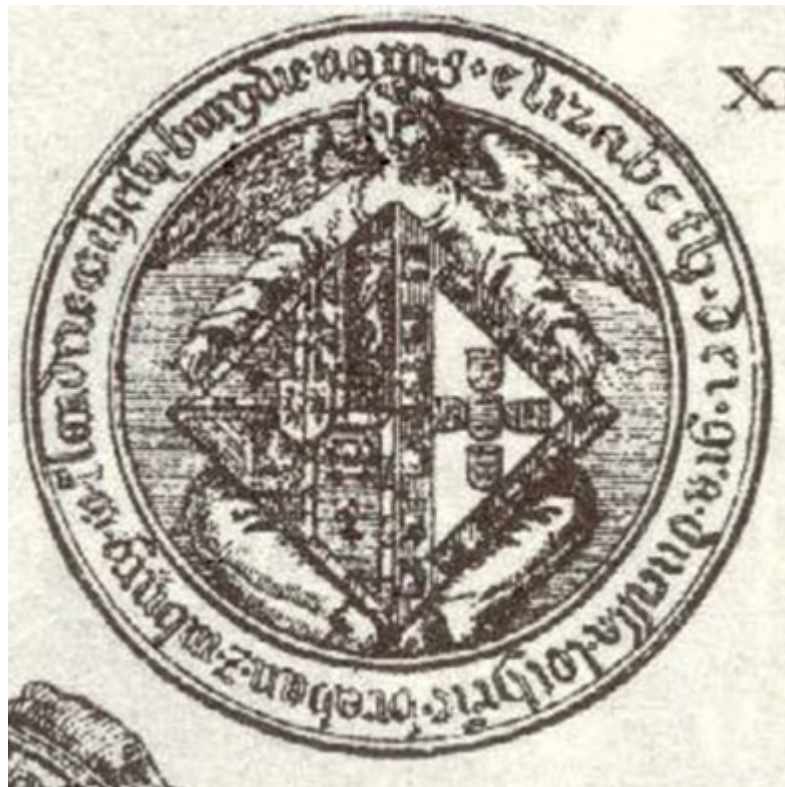


Figure 23. Seal of Isabel of Lencastre, queen of Portugal (1448-1455).