


Aparicio Vasquez, chapel master of Prince Henry, the Navigator

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Summary

In this text we go through several references to Aparicio Vasquez, a clergyman that was the chapel master of the private chapel of Prince Henry, the Navigator, one of the most known royal figures of Portuguese history. As many fifteenth-century musicians, not much is known about Vasquez, since there are no known compositions by him nor has his name been included in general music histories of Portugal.

The fifteenth century is still less-known period in the Portuguese Music History, despite several recent efforts to cast some light in the music sources that have survived to this day, as well as some musical activity. There is no doubt that much has been done in the recent decades to contradict some outdated narratives that only in the sixteenth century and the recent digital resources have contributed decisively to a better understanding of “dark periods” in Portuguese Music History that, were very difficult to explore not too long ago.

One of several resources that have been developed and is gradually becoming an important tool when researching composers, musicians, and institutions is the impressive update work of the online catalogues of the District general archives, and, most notably, the National Archives at *Torre do Tombo*. What has been titled as a “digital transition” from inventories and catalogues most searchable in paper to digital and online formats has considerably speed up the time of researching data freeing more time to process the results and a thorough examination and crossing between sources.

That is mostly what happened with the musician presented in this text, which appeared among a series of search results regarding other subjects and time periods. As a curiosity, I checked if Aparicio Vasquez was present in music studies and was a known name among fifteenth century Portuguese music with no results thus his inclusion on the blog.

Vasquez appears in the documentation as chapel master of the chapel of Prince Henry, the Navigator. Henry was the fourth child of King D. João I (1357-1433) (who founded the House of Aviz), and brother to King D. Duarte (1433-1438). He is regarded as the main initiator of the Portuguese maritime expansion, also being responsible for the early development of Portuguese exploration and maritime trade with other continents. Henry was appointed as the governor of the Military Order of Christ on 25 May 1420, which had its headquarters in the village of Tomar. His household kept growing during his brother, King D. Duarte’s reign, with a series of *mercês* appointed to him. He was also a supporter of the regency of his brother Prince Peter, Duke of Coimbra, following D. Duarte’s death, during the minority of his son, the future King D. Afonso V.

Regarding the princes’ households, in a sixteenth-century copy of the *Livro dos Conselhos de El-Rei D. Duarte* (a sort of regiment of his household) of a document dating around 1437 we find the organization of the princes Ferdinand and Peter’s households. Their chapels had a head chaplain (*capelão-mor*), 13 chaplain-singers (*capelães-cantores*), one of which would be the chapel’s treasurer. There were also 8 choirboys, 4 *menestres de çharamelas*, and 4 *trombetas* (Dias, 1982, p. 179-180).



Image 1

Nuno Gonçalves, S. Vicente panels (*Infante* panel), figure thought to be Prince Henry, the Navigator.

As an example the Royal Chapel, at the time of King D. João I, comprised a head chaplain with another 14 people among chaplains and singers with 8 choirboys. Although chosen by the King, serving at the Royal Chapel didn't seem to result in its members ascending to higher ranks in the Church hierarchy. However, both chaplains and singers were granted several benefices or *mercês* under royal protection (Coelho, 2015, p. 87-88).

Musicologist Rui Vieira Nery cites this edition in his history of music in Portugal work (1991), when describing the Royal Chapel and the Princes' private chapels. He mentions that their chapels had a head chaplain, 13 chaplain-singers and 8 choirboys. However, he overlooked the 8 instrumentalists, although stating that during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries both the Queen and the princes had not only their own chapels as well as chamber musicians in variable number (Nery & Castro, 1991, p. 20).

In the introduction to his anthology of music in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, musicologist Manuel Pedro Ferreira (2008) (probably based on Nery's reference) repeats the organization of the Princes' chapels, stating that the lack of reference in the *Livro dos Conselhos de El-Rei D. Duarte* to Henry's chapel was due to him being the governor of the Order of Christ.

The brief study of Cunha & Pimenta (1984) on Prince Henry's household shows that, as is the case of the other princes, he also had a private chapel organized in the same way that his brothers' chapels. From the appendix of names provided at the end of the article, there are several head chaplains, such as the case of Martim Pais, who was Henry's main-chaplain around 1440. There are also mentioned other chaplains (without any reference if they were chaplain-singers or not) such as Fr. Pedro Tomé, Gonçalo Vaz, or Fernando Afonso. There were singers such as Gonçalo Lourenço. Choirboys were also present, such as João Viles, Pedro Afonso, Lopo de Alvelos, and Diogo Afonso, who was later promoted to squire (Cunha & Pimenta, 1984, p. 228-283).

Aparicio Vasquez also appears in this list although the authors transcribed his name to "Vaz" not maintaining the "Vasquez" that appears in the source documents. They also duplicated his name identifying him as two persons: a singer, and a chaplain, when, in fact, he is identified differently in two documents.

From the documentation found that refers Aparicio Vasquez, not much could be said of this musician besides several personal and family references. From a letter dating 18 January 1418 we know that he was the son of Vasco Gonçalves de Sortelha, a clergyman,

and Maria Antoninha, the document being a legitimisation of Vasquez as son of Sortelha. The letter also identifies Vasquez as “cantor do jffante dom Anrrique” (singer of Prince Henry) (ANTT, Chancelaria de D. João I, Livro 3, f. 157v). This means that by 1418 Aparicio Vasquez was a singer of the private chapel of Prince Henry. The legitimisation letter suggests that Vasquez was intending to gather documentation to follow a future ecclesiastical career, as further documents seem to point out.

One of the main benefices granted to officials of the royal chapels was the wiping of the illegitimate birth stain, obtained through letters of legitimisation such as that of Vasquez (Coelho, 2015, p. 92-93). This meant that he could inherit his father's estate.

On 14 March 1427, a letter from Prince Henry to his estate overseer Vasco Gonçalves mentions Aparicio Vasquez. This letter was directed to grant Martim de Goes, holding the *comenda* de Santa Maria de Pussos (a small parish, later part of the municipality of Alvaázare, near Tomar), the *tença* of the income and rights that the Prince had in the parish of Nossa Senhora da Graça of the nearby village of Maças de Caminho. Martim de Goes was a friar of the Order of Christ although we weren't able to find further details on his life (ANTT, Coleção Especial, cx. 72, mç 8, n.º 2). The letter finishes with the statement that the income and rights from the parish of Maças de Caminho that Martim de Goes was to receive should be done in the same way that Aparicio Vasquez had received. Here Vasquez was titled as “meestre da mjnha capella” (master of my chapel). This means that by 14 March 1427 Aparicio Vasquez was the chapel master of Prince Henry.

António Carvalho da Costa mentioned in his 1708 *Corografia portuguesa* (when describing the city of Viseu) that the Bishop D. Garcia de Meneses presented Aparicio Vasquez in Santa Maria de Sátão, a small parish of the Diocese of Viseu, in 1426 to the petition of Prince Henry, Duke of Viseu (Costa, 1708, p. 183). Confronting this reference with the letter of 1427, we assume that Vasquez would have left the benefices of Maças de Caminho for the nearby larger village of Sátão by 1426, although this reference by Costa, should be taken

In 1437, Vasquez appears again in a letter of legitimisation. In the document, dating from 16 May, King D. Duarte legitimised Cecília and Helena, both daughters of Aparicio Vasquez and Catarina Anes, a single woman. Here Vasquez is titled as Abbot of Sátão and chaplain of Prince Henry (ANTT, Chancelaria de D. Duarte, Livro 1, f. 227r).

In 1442, another letter, dated from 2 January, legitimised another two of his children: Mécia and Mendo also of Catarina Anes. Here he is again identified as Abbot of Sátão, although no connection to Prince Henry's chapel was mentioned (ANTT, Leitura Nova, Livro 57, f.125r). This seems to suggest that by 1442 Vasquez was no longer serving in Prince Henry's chapel and was living of his fruits, income and rights of his *comenda* at Sátão.

From what we were able to gather from this documentation, Aparicio Vasquez was a singer (or maybe already a chaplain-singer) of Prince Henry's chapel around 1418. He was still at the service of the chapel as chapel master in 1427 and had already held the *comenda* of Maças de Caminho by that year. Ten years later he is referred as chaplain of Prince Henry as well as *comendatário* of the village of Maças de Caminho and Abbot of Sátão. Vasquez, thus, followed the usual career path of the clergymen associated with the Portuguese royal chapels of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries securing several titles and sources of income in order to gradually transit from the intense liturgical-musical duties to a more retired-like situation. These references, although not rich on details, show some perspective of the music servants that gravitated around one of the leading figures in Portuguese History which is Prince Henry, the Navigator. Chaplains, singers, instrumentalists and, from what we gathered, also a chapel master were employed and contributed to the embellishment of the private liturgical services of the *Infante*.



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Cite this text: Henriques, L. (2025). Aparicio Vasques, chapel master of Prince Henry, the Navigator. *Canto Mensurable blog*, <https://cantomensurable.hcommons.org/vasquez-chapel-master/>