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ABSTRACT: The Inquisition was established in Portugal in 1536. From the beginning, the pope authorized the Portuguese king to choose the General Inquisitor, who was granted authority by the pope to pursue and punish crimes of heresy. This article investigates the Portuguese General Inquisitors during the seventeenth century in order to establish their social background, politics, ecclesiastical careers, and links with the Crown. The aim is to discover the relationships they had with the Crown and to understand how far they managed to preserve the autonomy of the Inquisition in relation to the Crown and the Holy See.

KEYWORDS: Portugal, Inquisition, General Inquisitor, Holy See, Hispanic Monarchy, House of Braganza, House of Habsburg, seventeenth century

INTRODUCTION

Few institutions have produced more controversy than the Inquisition or, to be more accurate, the Inquisitions. In Spain, the flood of conversions of Jews to Christianity during the Late Middle Ages caused a new religious problem: the Crypto-Judaism of the recently converted Jews. To persecute and punish the new heresy, Catholic rulers Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon obtained permission from the pope to establish the Inquisition in Castile in 1478. A few years later, the jurisdiction of the tribunal was extended to the Crown of Aragon. And finally, the same monarchs, Isabella and Ferdinand, ordered the banishment of the Jews from Spain in 1492. Many Jews decided not to convert to Christianity and looked for refuge in the neighboring kingdom of Portugal, where there was
already an important Jewish community. But in 1496, King Emmanuel I of Portugal ordered the expulsion of all Jews and Muslims who refused to convert to Christianity. For various reasons, a large number of Jews could not leave the kingdom and were forced to accept baptism. This caused, in Portugal, the same problem that already existed in the other kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula: the emergence of a secret Judaism, practiced by many New Christians and their descendants. For this reason, King John III of Portugal (r. 1521–57) decided to introduce the Inquisition into Portugal just as it existed in Spain. Founded in 1536, the Portuguese Inquisition survived for three centuries, until it was abolished in 1821 as a result of the Liberal Revolution. During that time, the Inquisition adapted itself to different political and social contexts. Thus in the eighteenth century, as repressive activity was decreasing, the Holy Office became an institution used by some members of the bourgeoisie in order to advance their social promotion.

There has been considerable development of research about the Portuguese Inquisition since the 1980s. In fact, 1987 was a milestone year, with the meeting of the first Luso-Brazilian conference on the Inquisition. Since then, there has been remarkable growth of research on various issues, such as socioreligious minorities (especially the New Christians), repressive activities, the heresies pursued, the district tribunals, the territorial control in the kingdom and in the empire, and the relationships between the Inquisition and the secular or religious authorities. Without a doubt, the publication in 1994 of the História das Inquisições: Portugal, Espanha, Itália, by Francisco Bethencourt, not only marked a turning point, but also opened new perspectives of analysis. Finally, in 2013, Giuseppe Marcocci and José Pedro Paiva published their História da Inquisição Portuguesa. This book filled a gap because there was no global history of the Portuguese Inquisition as there was in the Spanish and Italian cases.

Study of the institutional structures of the Portuguese Inquisition has given way to analysis of its members, such as the deputies of the General Council of the Holy Office, the inquisitors of the district courts, the comissários (clerics who carried out some tasks for the Holy Office at the local level), as well as the familiares (lay assistants). Nevertheless, General Inquisitors have been studied less. For this reason, our goal here is to focus on the people who held the post of General Inquisitor in the seventeenth century, by looking at their social origins, political and ecclesiastic careers, as well as family and client connections. We want to explore the relationships between the General Inquisitors and the Crown in order to understand to what extent the General Inquisitors were able to maintain the autonomy and the independence of the institution that they ruled.

The seventeenth century is a particularly interesting time to study the relationships between the Inquisition and the Crown in Portugal. After the death
of King Sebastian while fighting in Morocco in 1578, his elderly great-uncle D. Henrique, who was both cardinal and General Inquisitor, came to the throne. He was the last king of the House of Aviz, and his death in January of 1580 sparked a succession crisis in Portugal, which was resolved when the Habsburg monarch, King Philip II of Spain, took control of the kingdom. The Iberian Union between Spain and Portugal under the Habsburgs lasted for sixty years, from 1580 to 1640. But increasing Portuguese discontent with Spanish rule led to a coup d’etat in December of 1640, as a result of which John, duke of Braganza, assumed the throne. This uprising began the Restoration War between Spain and Portugal (1640–68) that ended with the Treaty of Lisbon, in which the Spanish Habsburgs recognized the House of Braganza as Portugal’s new ruling dynasty. Thus, by looking at the seventeenth century, we can investigate the ties between the General Inquisitors and the two royal houses that ruled the Portuguese kingdom: that of Austria (or Habsburg) and that of Braganza.

THE GENERAL INQUISITOR IN PORTUGAL: ORIGINS OF THE POST AND POWERS

On May 23, 1536, and in the context of a bitter conflict between the Portuguese Crown and the Jewish converts to Christianity that would drag on until 1547, Pope Paul III ordered the creation of the Tribunal of the Holy Office (Inquisition) in Portugal at the request of King John III. Despite this great triumph for John III, the bull determined that, in the first three years, civil procedures would be followed and that the names of the accusers would be provided to the accused, as long as these were not powerful people. Furthermore, for ten years the Inquisition would not issue sentences of property confiscation.

Concerning the post of General Inquisitor, the bull of 1536 stated that the pope would appoint three General Inquisitors, namely, the bishops of Coimbra, Lamego and Ceuta, while a fourth would be selected by the king. In practice, however, there was only one General Inquisitor (or Grand Inquisitor). Of the three bishops appointed by the pope, only one, the bishop of Ceuta and Royal Confessor, Fr. Diogo da Silva, accepted the position. Silva carried out his mission until 1539, when he renounced his post under pressure from the king. John III then named his brother, the infant D. Henrique, archbishop of Braga, as General Inquisitor. This appointment was done in accordance with the power granted to the Portuguese kings by the bull of 1536, which allowed them to appoint one of the Inquisitors in the kingdom.

From 1539 onward, the Portuguese General Inquisitor was always named by the king, who, after selecting the candidate, then asked the pope to confirm him.
During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, these papal confirmations were made through papal briefs directed at the new General Inquisitors. The formula *motu proprio* (by the pope’s own motion) was retained in the briefs, however, without making any reference to the royal selection.\(^7\)

The General Inquisitor had the jurisdictional power, received from the pope, to judge crimes of heresy, a power that he then delegated to the district inquisitors. Concerning issues of governance, the General Inquisitor appointed all the ministers and officials of the Holy Office. Furthermore, he also appointed the deputies for the General Council (the Portuguese *Conselho Geral do Santo Ofício*). In this regard, the power and independence of the Portuguese General Inquisitor was greater than that of the Spanish General Inquisitor. The latter had to give the king a list of three candidates for each opening available in the Council of Inquisition (the Spanish *Consejo de la Suprema*), from which the king then would select one. In Portugal, however, the General Inquisitor only had to tell the king that he had selected a certain clergyman for the vacant General Council seat, and the king then simply confirmed him.\(^8\) Last, the General Inquisitor in Portugal had control of the administration of confiscated properties from those convicted of heresy, which, by law, belonged to the Crown. This power proved to be a source of conflict between the Holy Office and the Monarchy, especially during the Iberian Union (1580–1640) and the Restoration War.

**THE GENERAL INQUISITORS IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY**

*Ecclesiastical Careers*

According to the bull establishing the Holy Office, the General Inquisitor had to be a clergyman, a bishop, or a regular or secular cleric. Nevertheless, from the beginning, it became the rule to appoint a bishop or bishop-elect, probably in order to provide greater prestige to the post of General Inquisitor, and also because bishops had always been invested with the power to punish heresy.

Between 1578, when the General Inquisitor Henrique renounced his post, and 1705, with the death of Fr. José de Lencastre, eleven clergymen were appointed General Inquisitor:\(^9\) (1) D. Jorge de Almeida (1578–85), (2) Archduke Albert of Austria (1586–96), (3) D. António Matos de Noronha (1596–1600), (4) D. Jorge de Ataíde (1600), (5) D. Alexandre de Braganza (1602–3), (6) D. Pedro de Castilho (1604–15), (7) D. Fernão Martins Mascarenhas (1616–28), (8) D. Francisco de Castro (1630–53), (9) D. Pedro de Lencastre (1671–73), (10) D. Veríssimo de Lencastre (1676–92), and (11) D. Fr. José de Lencastre (1693–1705).\(^10\)
At the time of their appointments, two were consecrated archbishops (D. Jorge de Almeida, of Lisbon, and D. Veríssimo de Lencastre, of Braga), two more were elected archbishops (archduke Albert of Austria, of Toledo, and D. Alexandre de Braganza, of Évora), and five were bishops. D. Jorge de Ataíde was bishop emeritus of Viseu, although he did not accept the brief appointing him to the post of General Inquisitor. Last, D. Pedro de Lencastre was nominated as General Inquisitor and also as archbishop of Side, Turkey, as a prelate in partibus (i.e., in a non-Christian country). The reason for his dual appointment is clear. During the Restoration War, D. Pedro de Lencastre had been, in succession, bishop-elect of Guarda, Braga, and Évora, but he had never been confirmed by the Pope, because of the absence of diplomatic relations between Portugal and the Holy See. For this reason, he had not been consecrated. If the idea was to keep the post of General Inquisitor in the hands of a bishop, as was the custom, D. Pedro de Lencastre would have to receive a miter, and, on account of the residence requirements for prelates, it could only be a bishopric in partibus.

In 1599, there was a fundamental change in the office of the General Inquisitor. Up to that time, the General Inquisitor was a prelate who kept his church while serving as General Inquisitor. This was the case with cardinal Henrique, archbishop of Braga, Évora, and Lisbon, with D. Jorge de Almeida, archbishop of Lisbon, and with D. António Matos de Noronha, bishop of Elvas. But in 1599, through a petition sent by King Philip III himself, Pope Clement VIII annulled all the privileges granted to bishops on the Iberian peninsula that had allowed them to live outside of their dioceses. As a consequence, D. António Matos de Noronha and D. Pedro de Portocarrero had to step down as General Inquisitors of Portugal and Spain, respectively. In my opinion, religion was the main reason for this change, since Philip III was a firm believer that prelates should carry out their residential obligations in their respective dioceses.

Because of this new policy, 1599 saw the beginning of a period of crisis in the post of General Inquisitor that was not resolved until 1604, when D. Pedro de Castilho, bishop of Leiria, took the post. Castilho and all of his successors had to renounce their bishoprics in order to become General Inquisitors. This led to a fundamental change in the institutionalization process of the post, since it was granted a fixed salary and the General Inquisitor, freed from his obligations as a prelate, became responsible only for his new post.

Although, as we have stated, the General Inquisitors were always bishops, only a few of them had prior experience within the Holy Office. Of the eleven clergymen we have mentioned, only two came from within the ranks of the Inquisition: D. António Matos de Noronha and D. Veríssimo de Lencastre. The former started out as inquisitor in several district tribunals in Spain, from where he rose to the
Council of the Spanish Inquisition (Consejo de la Suprema). From there, he became bishop of Elvas and in 1593 was appointed president of the Portuguese General Council (Conselho Geral). D. Veríssimo de Lencastre had a similar career. He had been inquisitor of Évora and Lisbon and deputy of the General Council before rising to the primacy of Braga. With the exception of these two clergymen, the remainder of the General Inquisitors in the seventeenth century rose directly to the post from their bishoprics, without having any sort of previous experience in the Holy Office.

Last, let us point out that the only two archbishops who became General Inquisitors (Jorge de Almeida and Veríssimo de Lencastre) were nominated before and after the Dynastic Union, a time when there was a predominance of prelates from the lower to medium ranked sees in the kingdom, like Elvas, Leiria, and Guarda. While D. Jorge de Almeida, archbishop of Lisbon and General Inquisitor from 1578, kept his archbishopric along with his position in the Holy Office, D. Veríssimo de Lencastre, nominated General Inquisitor in 1676, had to renounce the bishopric of Braga in order to assume his new post. In exchange, however, he became a cardinal in 1686.

There also seem to have been at least two clergymen who preferred to keep their churches rather than to renounce them in order to become General Inquisitors. Thus, D. Diogo de Sousa e Castro, archbishop of Évora (1671–78) and former deputy of the General Council, refused to accept the appointment as General Inquisitor made by the regent D. Pedro. Similarly, D. José de Meneses also refused the appointment because he wanted to keep his archbishopric in Braga (where he was prelate 1690–96).

**Political Careers**

As mentioned above, the General Inquisitor was selected by the king, which explains the fact that, in every instance, those chosen were clergymen with close personal and family links to the Crown, be it the House of Austria (Habsburg) or that of Braganza.

During the Iberian Union, all of the General Inquisitors, with the exception of D. Francisco de Castro, were those who had established close personal ties with the Habsburgs in the succession crisis that followed the death of King Sebastian in August 1578. In 1579, D. António Matos de Noronha, then inquisitor of the Toledo tribunal in Spain, volunteered to travel to Portugal in order to gain followers for the cause of King Philip II. In 1580, cardinal Gaspar de Quiroga, General Inquisitor of Spain, appointed de Noronha as counselor of the Council
of the Inquisition (Consejo de la Suprema). Similarly, D. Pedro de Castilho, bishop of Angra, had supported Philip II during the dynastic crisis of 1578 and had organized the resistance of the followers of the House of Austria against those of D. António, Prior of Crato, in the Azores. In 1587, the king appointed him president of the Supreme Court (Desembargo do Paço), from where he gained the trust of Philip II and, later, of Philip III.20

The family of D. Fernão Martins Mascarenhas had also supported the Habsburgs during the crisis. His brother, D. João Mascarenhas, high steward (mordomo-mor) of King Henrique (r. 1578–80) and member of the Council of State, had been the confidant of the Spanish ambassador D. Cristóbal de Moura.21 He was also one of the three governors who, after the death of the Cardinal-King D. Henrique, signed the Declaration of Castro Marim. This document declared the Spanish monarch (i.e., King Philip II) to be the legitimate king of Portugal.22

The case of D. Francisco de Castro was different. His family had not supported the aggregation of Portugal to the Spanish Monarchy, but his brother, D. Fernão Álvares de Castro, was, in the decade of 1620, closely linked to the Count-Duke of Olivares, the court favorite of Philip IV.23

With the end of the Restoration War the Portuguese House of Braganza was officially recognized by the Spanish Hapsburgs as Portugal’s new ruling dynasty; diplomatic relations between Portugal and the Holy See were also reestablished at this time. The General Inquisitors selected by D. Pedro of Braganza, first as regent and later as king of Portugal, had supported and served the Braganza family during the conflict. For example, D. Pedro de Lencastre had been a member of the Council of State since 1648, and president of the Supreme Court (Desembargo do Paço) starting in 1651. In 1659 he decided to remain in Portugal in the service of the House of Braganza, while his nephew, the Duke of Aveiro, chose to move to Spain and place himself under the protection of the Spanish Habsburg monarch, Philip IV.24 D. Veríssimo and Fr. José de Lencastre had also both held offices in the house of D. Pedro. The former became his sommelier (sumiller da cortina) while he was prince, and the latter was his head chaplain (capelão-mor) when he rose to the throne.25

SOCIAL ORIGINS

The first General Inquisitor nominated by the House of Habsburg was the arch-duke Albert of Austria, nephew of Philip II and son of the emperor Maximilian II and Maria. His nomination maintained continuity with the previous period,
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when the Holy Office was led by cardinal Henrique. Like him, Archduke Albert united in his person the role of cardinal and the post of legatus a latere (the pope’s representative) in Portugal.

With the exception of cardinal Albert and D. Alexandre de Braganza (whose governance leading the Holy Office was very short) the General Inquisitors nominated during the period of the Philippine Dynasty did not belonged to the titled aristocracy. Furthermore, at least during the reign of Philip II and the beginning of the reign of Philip III, the General Inquisitors were appointed not on account of their family connections, but on account of their quick adhesion to the Habsburgs during the dynastic crisis. This explains how a person like D. Pedro de Castilho, who belonged to a family of architects, could become General Inquisitor in 1604. The last two General Inquisitors nominated under the Habsburg Dynasty did belong to the fidalguia (high nobility), although not to the titled nobility.26 As an example, D. Fernão Martins de Mascarenhas belonged to the house of the alcaides-mores of Montemor-o-Novo and Alcácer do Sal and the commanders (comendadores) of Mértola of the Order of Santiago.27 And D. Francisco de Castro was the son of D. Álvaro de Castro, commander (comendador) of Redinha of the Order of Christ and member of the Council of State of King Sebastian.28

Beginning with the Treaty of Lisbon in 1668, however, the General Inquisitors nominated by D. Pedro came from the highest nobility. D. Pedro de Lencastre, the first General Inquisitor after the peace, was the fifth Duke of Aveiro, son of the third Duke D. Álvaro and the Duchess D. Juliana de Lencastre and heir of the duchy of Aveiro when his nephew D. Raimundo de Lencaster went to Castile. And D. Veríssimo and Fr. José de Lencastre were sons of the main commander (comendador-mor) of Aviz.

THE GENERAL INQUISITORS AND THE PORTUGUESE CROWN:  
A DIFFICULT BALANCE

As we have seen, the General Inquisitor was selected by the king and confirmed by the pope. Thus, once the General Inquisitor took office, he had to maintain a complex balance among his service to the king, the requirements of the Holy See, and the need to safeguard the institution’s autonomy in relation to both of these powerful influences. This balance was not always easy, especially when the pontiff or the king decided to intervene in the issue of the New Christians. Such interventions occurred notably at the beginning of the seventeenth century, at the start of Philip IV’s reign (r. 1621–40), during the time of King John IV (r. 1640–56), and during the decade of the 1670s.29
For example, in 1604 the new General Inquisitor, D. Pedro de Castilho, had to accept the general pardon brief granted by Pope Clement VIII to the New Christians through the intercession of Philip III. The king received, in turn, a considerable quantity of money from the converted community. And, in 1627, the General Inquisitor D. Fernão Martins Mascarenhas was forced to grant the New Christians an Edict of Grace on account of pressure from Philip IV. The monarch needed the converted bankers to keep the government’s financial infrastructure in place. In both cases, the General Inquisitors had to abide by the king’s wishes. However, they also managed to keep the autonomy of the Holy Office, which, at least in the years that preceded the general pardon of 1604, was seriously threatened.

During periods when the royal power was weak, as was the case during the regency of Luisa de Gusmão (1656–62), the ability of the Holy Office to resist royal pressures was much greater. Such a royal weakness explains the Inquisition’s determined opposition to the decree of 1649, in which John IV exempted the New Christians from the penalty of confiscation of property for crimes of heresy. The Holy Office opposed the 1649 decree from the beginning. Nevertheless, it was after the death of John IV in 1656—a time of pronounced weakness of royal power due to the minority of Afonso VI—that the General Council dared to publish its well-known edict of condemnation and excommunication of all who had supported the exemption from confiscation of those guilty of Judaism.30

But the Holy Office also knew how to take advantage of the protection of the Crown in order to stand firm against papal pressures. For example, in 1602 the Inquisition required the support of Philip III to fight against Pope Clement VIII’s attempts to bring under his jurisdiction the case of Ana de Milão, incarcerated in the Inquisition jails.31 And during the government of the Braganza regent D. Pedro (1668–83), the Holy Office was also able to count on royal support when Pope Innocent XI decided to suspend the tribunal’s jurisdiction between 1679 and 1681.32

CONCLUSION

Appointed by kings and with close ties to the Crown, the Portuguese General Inquisitors managed to maintain the autonomy of the institution that they ruled, at least during the seventeenth century. While it is true that conflicts arose between the General Inquisitors and the monarchy, on most occasions these conflicts were limited to individual differences on specific issues, usually economic in nature. No confrontation between the Crown and the Inquisition questioned the existence
and continuity of the Holy Office. Indeed, for more than 150 years—between the appointment of D. Henrique (1539) and the death of Fr. Jose de Lencastre (1705)—there was only one forced resignation from the office of Grand Inquisitor, that of D. António Matos de Noronha. Noronha’s forced resignation was probably the result of his disagreement with the general pardon that the Crown was negotiating with the New Christians. Noronha’s resignation is really the exception that proves the rule of the long-standing agreement between the Crown and the Holy Office, and the support that the Tribunal had from all of the Portuguese kings, whether they were from the House of Aviz, Habsburg, or Braganza. As we have said, this agreement was due to the nature of the Inquisition, created and supported by the Crown, and of the post of General Inquisitor, selected by the kings themselves.

NOTES

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4. After this article was submitted to *Mediterranean Studies*, the *Dizionario storico dell’ Inquisizione* (Pisa, 2010) was published under the direction of Adriano Prosperi. There you can find entries by Giuseppe Marcocci, Federico Palomo, José Pedro Paiva, and Ana Isabel López-Salazar concerning the Portuguese General Inquisitors of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.


9. Eleven clergymen were appointed General Inquisitor, but only ten took over the post, because one (D. Jorge de Aitaide) did not accept the position.


15. Pedro de Castilho was *deputado* (deputy) in the district tribunal of Coimbra for only three years. However, he did not continue his inquisitorial career, and he was not inquisitor or deputy of the General Council.


18. ANTT, CGSO, liv. 258, fol. 14r.


30. The edict was issued on January 18, 1657. José Justino de Andrade e Silva, *Collecção Chronologica da Legislação Portuguesa* (Lisbon, 1857), tomo IX, 230–33.


33. The renunciation of D. Alexandre de Bragança was due not only to his opposition to the general pardon but, above all, due to his wish to keep the profitable archbishopric of Évora.