

The homology between the heavenly and the earthly kingdoms in late medieval Portugal

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The purpose of this paper is to study the homology between the heavenly and the earthly kingdoms in late medieval Portugal. The analysis that follows, is based both on large-scale public iconographic programmes, namely mural paintings and architectonic sculpture, and on small-scale media, namely miniatures, coins and tomb sculpture. It will be shown that there is a symbiotic relationship and a deep homology between the two kingdoms, namely in what concerns the rules of plastic depiction and the attributes of royal status. It will also be demonstrated that the homologies between the two kingdoms supported the idea of a perfect and perennial hierarchy on earth, modelled upon the one in heaven.

1. Introduction

Ernst Kantorowicz (1957, 1965), Percy Ernst Schramm (1954-55, 1968-71), André Grabar (1979), Otto von Simson (1984) and others have studied the system of visual similitudes between the heavenly and the earthly kingdoms during the Middle Ages. It has become clear that not only the earthly powers frequently drew their legitimacy, authority and structure on the heavenly power, but also that the heavenly power was imagined after the earthly realities. In this paper, some of the visual homologies between the heavenly and the earthly kingdoms, which were produced in late medieval Portugal, will be reviewed.

During the period under study (but not exclusively), material images of the heavenly kingdom offered basic elements upon which man's imagination and vision of the supernatural could be based¹. This is not to say that material images of Heaven mechanically influenced the mental or oneiric images of the supernatural, but that these two types of images interact in a bi-directional process influencing each other². In fact, images, as "schematas",

possess a semantic value not always clear or necessarily conscious to the artist or person who orders a new work of art. Indeed, this semantic value can be borrowed and used for different realities, as in the case of early Christian iconography³ or as in the case of the iconography of both earthly and heavenly kingdoms. Furthermore, as Sir Ernst Gombrich (1995) has emphasized, both the artist and the visionary use the familiar to represent the unknown through the use of common "schematas"⁴.

As an example of the influence that heavenly kingdom material images have on man's imagination one needs only to recall how the visions of St. Stephan influenced the first representations of the Holy Trinity⁵, or how the visions of St. Catherine of Siena helped (or originated?) to spread the iconography of God, the Father, wearing a papal tiara⁶.

Indeed, it is impressive how some traditional images were interpreted in one particular context before they are re-employed, as a "schemata", in a very different context. For instance, a copy of the *vera icona* made by Jan van Eyck around 1438 (Figure 1) depicts a

traditional representation of this kind of image: that is, a young man with long dark hair, with a small rebel beard, with a long thin nose, with a small closed mouth and with both eyes looking directly at us.

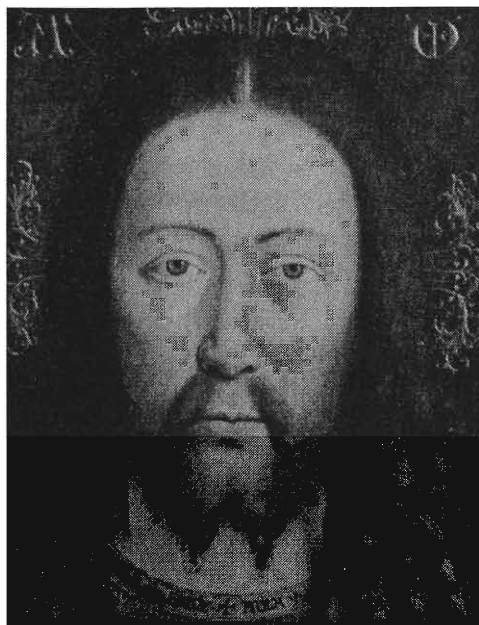


Figure 1.

Copy of Jan van Eyck's, *Vera Icona*, 15th century (Alte Pinakothek, Munich).

In 1500, when Albrecht Durer made one of his famous self-portraits, at the age of twenty-nine (Figure 2), he certainly had in mind the similitude between his self-portrait and what was considered to be the most faithful portraits of Christ: the *vera icona*. Keith Moxey (1994), Jean-Claude Schmitt (1996) and others, have accurately interpreted this resemblance as an expression of the emerging status of the Renaissance artist, particularly in what concerns the new role of artistic creation. All this through the use of a similar visual “schemata”.

2. Homology and analogy

Before commencing with this topic, a brief clarification needs to be made about the relationship between the heavenly and the earthly kingdoms. Here, the term “homology” should

perhaps be used rather than “analogy”, since it seems to better translate the semantic value of the images under review. In fact, “analogy” implies a similarity between two realities, which are comparable but only to a certain extent. “Homology” goes deeper than that, since it implies a stronger relationship between these two realities: Heaven and Earth. In fact, they are more than comparable or similar because they are correspondent in structure and position, as if one was the sacred archetype and the other the best possible copy that could exist on earth.

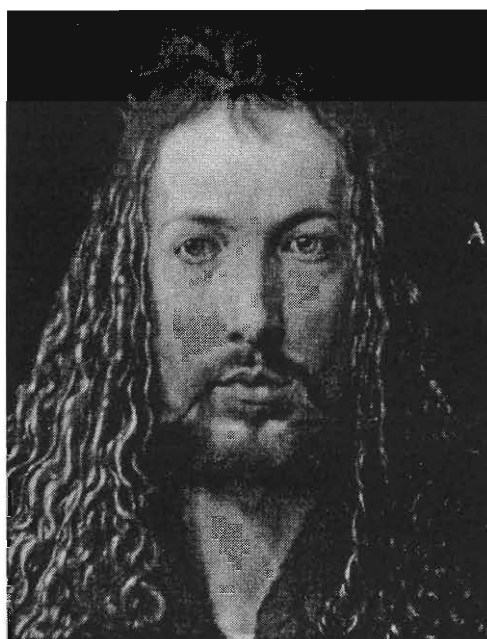


Figure 2.

Albrecht Dürer, *Self-portrait*, c. 1500 (Alte Pinakothek, Munich).

Therefore, particularly in popular culture, the heavenly reality is better understandable when it is presented and imagined in terms of its resemblance to its earthly counterpart.

Naturally, this correspondence between Heaven and Earth did not always lie easy with the theologians. However, for political power and the sacred status of royalty, its structure and legitimacy were better defended and justified having a direct correspondence with the formal attributes and sociological structure of the heavenly

society. Actually, this homology between the heavenly and the earthly kingdoms mutually reinforces their political and sociological dimensions, as this concerns the ideas of **hierarchy, order, authority, justice and perpetuity**. Indeed, Iberian written sources from the thirteenth century, such as the *Fuero Real* and the *Siete Partidas* from the wise Spanish King Alfonso X (1221-1284), have shown the legal and political implications of this homology⁷.

One example of this relationship concerns D. Pedro, king of Portugal from 1357 to 1367, popularly known as the *Justiceiro* (that is, the executor of justice) due to his obsession with the enforcement of justice, ordered two of the most lavish tombs of Portuguese sculpture from the fourteenth century.

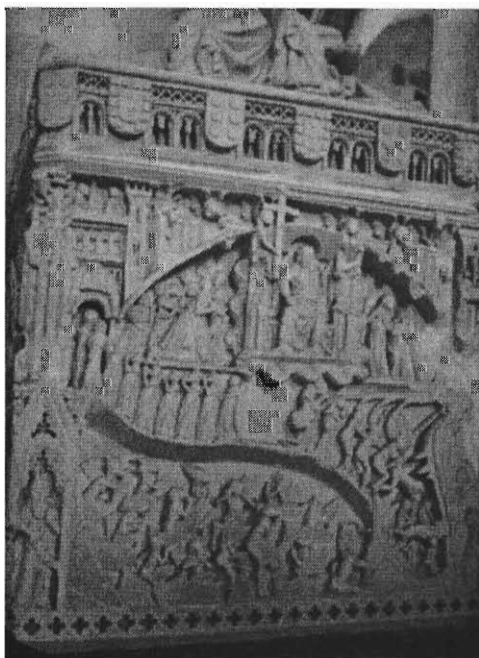


Figure 3.
Last Judgement panel of Inês de Castro's tomb, c.1361 (Alcobaça abbey).

The first was ordered around 1361 to receive the body of her beloved Inês de Castro, murdered by command of King Afonso IV (1325-1357), who was D. Pedro's father. Inês de Castro (c.1320-1355) was a noble female from Castile who was a chambermaid of the legitimate wife of D. Pedro (named D.

Constança) and with whom he claimed to have married in secrecy c. seven years earlier. The iconography of this funerary ark presents the Youth and the Passion of Christ in the major panels and the themes of Calvary and Last Judgment in the minor panels. Attention is drawn to the panel of the Last Judgement (Figure 3), where one recognizes a common iconography for the events surrounding the Day of the Judgment. Also common are the compositional antithetic binaries in use, namely the double differentiation between high and low and left and right, corresponding to good and evil, saved and convicted.



Figure 4.
Christ as Judge. From the Last Judgement panel of Inês de Castro's tomb.

For the purposes of this article, it will be necessary to take a closer look at the figure of Christ as Judge, who occupies the top area of the panel's axis (Figure 4). Here can be seen an enthroned Christ wearing a crown, exposing his wound in his chest and presenting his bare feet. Due to the partial destruction of the figure, it is unclear what he was originally carrying in his left hand. Yet, in his right hand he still presents the straight guard of the sword with which he commands all the

events taking place, reinforcing the authority and inexorability of his judgement of who should join the Heavenly Jerusalem or who should be committed to Hell's Mouth.

As a typical presentation of royalty, the image of Christ (King of Heaven) presents the main attributes that can be found in the representation of an earthly king. For instance, on a golden *Dobra Pé Terra* (Figure 5), minted around 1370 during the reign of D. Fernando (1367-1383), who was D. Pedro's son, the same *regalia* is found as can be seen in the representation of Christ as Judge: the crown, the sword in his right hand, a micro-architectonic framing resembling the throne of Christ, and the coat of arms supported by the king's left hand (in the earlier case, the *arma Christi* are supported by the angels – namely the cross, the nails, the whip and so on).

The second tomb ordered by D. Pedro was his own funerary monument, which was made between 1361-66. On the minor side of the ark, under the king's head, there is one of the most extraordinary iconographic representations of Portuguese fourteenth century sculpture (Figure 6), which was remarkably studied by Ferreira de Almeida (1991) and Serafim Moralejo



Figure 5.
Dobra Pé Terra, c. 1370. Gold coin from D. Fernando (Bank of Portugal Museum).

(1993). In this panel, a *rota aetatum* (Wheel of Life) presented in the external circle of the rose is combined with a *rota fortunae* in the inner circle. Here, the focus is placed on the figure at the axis top on the external rose, which is enthroned and pointing down to the *rota fortunae* with the left hand (Figure 7). Even though the figure is extremely damaged, its axial position in the panel and the representations' theme in the different niches make us easily recognize it as a royal figure, namely as the image of King D. Pedro.

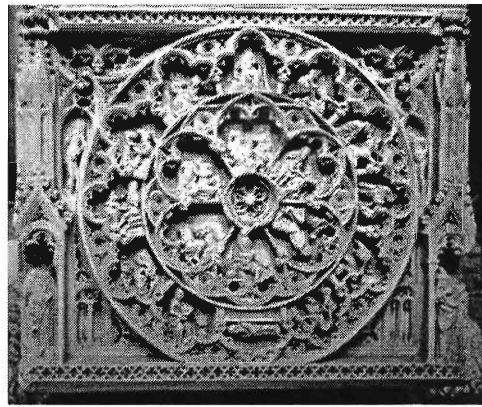


Figure 6.
D. Pedro's tomb, c. 1361-1366. Panel with "Wheel of Life/Wheel of Fortune". Alcobaça abbey.

It seems obvious, that a relationship, or homology, exists between D. Pedro's representation on this tomb and the representation of Christ as Judge on D. Inês de Castro's tomb. This resemblance is further emphasized by the plastic modelling of the figures, namely the "V" drapery descending from the lap of both figures, and by their axial disposition on both panels. Furthermore, the position of D. Pedro's right arm indicates that he probably was also holding a sword, just as Christ does on D. Inês de Castro's tomb. Hence, the figures clearly resemble each other. In fact, as is well known, the use of common *regalia* in heavenly and earthly kingdoms was a normal event. Nevertheless, a closer look can draw more implications than it seems. Indeed, D. Pedro's obsession

with the application of Justice (no matter the social status of the criminals) and his cruelty to the guilty was legendary as confirmed by Fernão Lopes, the early fifteenth century royal chronicler. In his biographical narrative of D. Pedro's life, the number of accounts in which the king is described practicing justice directly is legendary. Also impressive were the cruel punishments he often devised for criminals, reinforcing the fame of the king as a "blind" and cruel Judge. The Justice of Talion (that is, the retaliation principle) is sometimes a euphemism for the cruelty of his exemplary punishments, which often shocked his own contemporaries as the chronicler Fernão Lopes (1977) tells us. Probably, the most famous of those punishments was the brutal execution of the killers of his beloved Inês de Castro, which was made by ripping out their hearts while they were still alive.



Figure 7.
Detail of D. Pedro's "Wheel of Life/Wheel of Fortune", c. 1361-1366.

Actually, these are approximately the same attributes that characterize the Supreme Judge as he carries out his mission, separating good from evil, enforcing justice and punishing the wicked even harder than the king, despite the supplications of the resurrected and of his own mother. Here it is possible to treat the "Christ as

Judge" image as a "reflection" of D. Pedro's behaviour. By the same token, it is possible to say that D. Pedro imagined himself as the earthly representative of Christ, not in what concerns religious matters, but in what concerns his supreme authority and his divine duty to enforce Justice.

3. Justice

Justice is indeed one of the areas where the homology between Heaven and Earth is more strongly stressed. Around 1490, during the reign of King João II (1485-1495), the tribunal of Monsaraz (in southern Portugal) received a pictorial campaign in which a Justice painting was made on the back wall of the audience room (Figure 8). In this painting, recently studied by Dagoberto Markl (1999) and also by the author (Afonso, 2002), it is possible to see the homology between Heaven and Earth in what concerns the practice of divine and earthly justice. On the higher level of the painting, in Heaven, the Apocalyptic Christ presents his wounds and blood to the onlookers. Christ is enthroned on the apocalyptic rainbow with his feet over the *orbis terrarum* (represented by means of an O-T map inscribed with a still legible inscription : "Uropa") and is surrounded by two prophets holding the Alpha and Omega letters in the reverse order. Around him two angels wake up the dead with their trumpets for the Last Judgment. Yet, compared to the Christ as Judge of Alcobaça, made more than one century earlier, this is clearly a less terrifying Christ. On the lower area of the painting, on Earth, two Judges on a Courthouse replicate the action and pose of the Christ as Judge on the higher level. On the right-hand side of the painting, the Good Judge seated on his *cathedra* is presented in close resemblance to the Christ above, with whom he shares some of his physical and compositional attributes: they are both bearded men with long hair, they are enthroned, and above all they are

presented in a frontal and hieratic manner, just as Virtues were traditionally represented.

On the left-hand side of the painting, the Bad Judge clearly diverges from the previous model. Even though he is enthroned, presenting a hieratic posture and wearing the same robes as the Good Judge, he has some distinguishing features. Firstly, he literally has two faces. Secondly, and consequently, the hieratic posture of his body is contradicted by the turning of his head, thus deviating from the frontal position associated with Virtue. Third, there is a clear chromatic differentiation between their robes and hats: the Bad Judge wears a yellow sleeveless surplice and a red hat while the Good Judge wears a soft pink sleeveless surplice and a black hat.



Figure 8.
Justice painting of Monsaraz (southern Portugal, c. 1485-1520).

Furthermore, the attributes of the two Judges are clearly differentiated. For instance, while the Good Judge is crowned by two angels, the Bad Judge listens to the whispers of the Devil. While the Good Judge holds his rod of Justice with the right hand close to the chest, the Bad Judge has a broken rod which he is not holding, to allow him to reach out his

hands and take the bribes of the corrupt, namely two gold coins from the man on his left and two partridges from the man on his right. Moreover, although their *cathedrae* are similar, the one from the Good Judge presents a small detail, which is absent from the one belonging to the Bad Judge, that is, the small spiral columns on the sides of the chair, which may be a reference to the Solomonic columns of the Temple of Jerusalem. Thus, the attributes of Solomon, a permanent model of Justice, are invested in this Judge, which is also presented as an earthly replica of the Christ as Judge above. Finally, since the Judge was acting in the name of the king, he can also be seen as a replica of the king himself. Indeed, as Dagoberto Markl (1999: 10-11) has pointed out, this painting's resemblance with a group of engravings from the *Ordenações Manuelinas* – a legislation corpus compiled by King Manuel (1495-1521) around 1514, clearly reinforces this interpretation.

4. *Regalia and schemata*

Two aspects need to be focussed on next, which are used in combination to present the homology between Heaven and Earth. Firstly, the use of the insignia of medieval royalty, the *regalia* (namely the throne, crown, sceptre, sword, mantles, etc), which were thoroughly studied by Percy Ernst Shramm almost fifty years ago. Secondly, the compositional “schemata” of these figures, playing with specific subjects from the iconographic tradition as well as with more general iconographic rules such as the binaries mentioned earlier: high-low, left-right, proximal-distant, axial-marginal, seated-unseated, frontal-not frontal, and so on.

Starting with the *regalia*, one of the common elements of heavenly and earthly royalty is the throne, as seen in Monsaraz, the golden coin of D. Fernando, and also in Alcobaça's tombs. In fact, a royal chair from c.1470

(Figure 9), which belonged to King Afonso V (1438-1485), now at the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, presents an ornamentation remarkably similar to the chairs of Monsaraz and their heavenly counterparts.



Figure 9.
Royal throne of King D. Afonso V. Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, c. 1470.

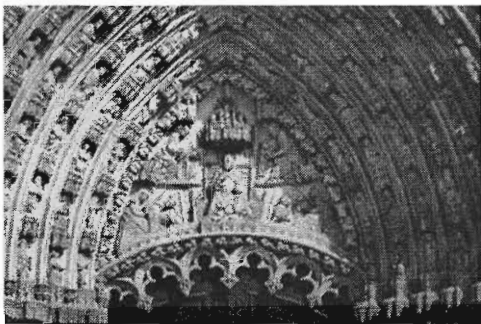


Figure 10.
Batalha's monastery church tympanum (c.1400-c.1415).

But a peculiar example of a Heavenly throne is depicted in the tympanum of the main porch of Batalha's monastery (Figure 10), in which God, the Father, holds the globe on his left hand and gives the

benediction with the right hand. Also, the combination of vegetable forms with exquisite micro-architectonic canopies in this image clearly express the idea of the "Heavenly Jerusalem".

Yet, the most striking in this sculptural programme ordered by King John I (1385-1433) is the presentation of the throne of God as the façade of the same church were the tympanum is carved (Figure 11). Indeed, the arms of the chair correspond to the side naves, the back of the throne corresponds to the main nave and the decoration of the throne is equal to the decoration of the main façade. This merging is also present in other less noted parts of the façade, namely the molding of the thin buttresses under the Apostles, which formally correspond to the real buttresses of the church. In other words, these elements clearly support the allegorical idea of Eusebius according to which the church buildings are the Heavenly Jerusalem⁸. Therefore, in this case, the church of Batalha is literally the throne of God, thus associating heavenly monarchy with earthly monarchy.

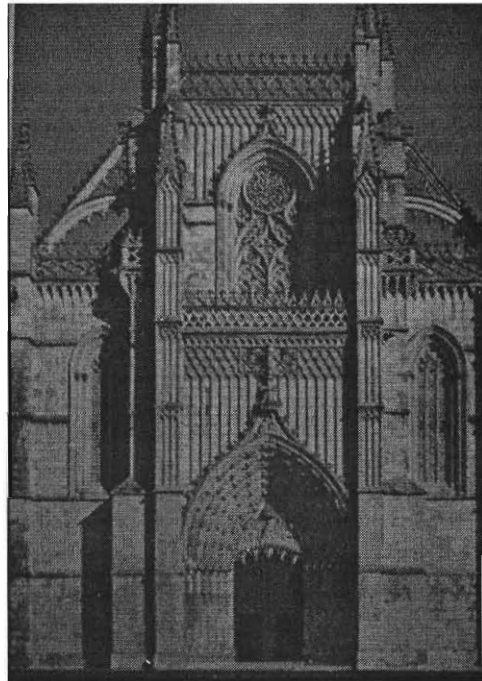


Figure 11.
Batalha's monastery main façade (c.1390-c.1415)

The complexity of this association is better understood if one bears in mind the context of those days. In fact, around 1400, King John I supported several building activities with clear propagandistic intentions, trying to legitimize his devious access to the throne. One of his most important acts was precisely the patronage of the monastery of Batalha, started in 1388, which was built near the battlefield where he won a decisive battle against the King of Castile. In this regard, this monastery was a votive construction in honour of the Virgin of the Assumption, since that battle took place in the preceding day of her feast (the 15th of August). However, perhaps more importantly, this building and its iconographic programme was also an act of legitimization for this King and his lineage. Indeed, the main porch presents the spectator with a complex iconographic programme where the ideas of royalty and hierarchy are associated with the heavenly support of the new dynasty.

In order to express that association,



Figure 12.
Heraldic angel. Vault of Batalha's monastery Sacristy (c.1415).

the sculptors used several compositional schemata to express the hierarchic distribution of the Heavenly Court. This was done by the differentiation of scales and by the relationship between the centre and the periphery. Obviously, here God is the centre, surrounded in the tympanum by the Evangelists. In the six archivolt of the portal the Heavenly society is differentiated by the category of the figures represented: seraphim in the inner archivolt; musician angels in the second; Prophets in the third; Kings from the Old Testament in the fourth; male saints in the fifth; and female virgin martyrs in the sixth. Below this are found the Disciples providing the basis for accessing this Heavenly Court.

The connection between the ideas of monarchy and court and the homology between heavenly and earthly hierarchy are further emphasized with propagandistic intentions by the Coronation of the Virgin at the apex of the portal, and also by the use of the heraldry of the royal couple in different parts of the monument, namely at the main and south porches and also at the vaults of the Sacristy (Figure 12). Produced around 1400-10, these figures represent large-scale angels and archangels with some of them holding the shields of the new royal couple, as if the heavenly monarchy was literally sustaining the new earthly monarchy and dynasty.

Figure 13.

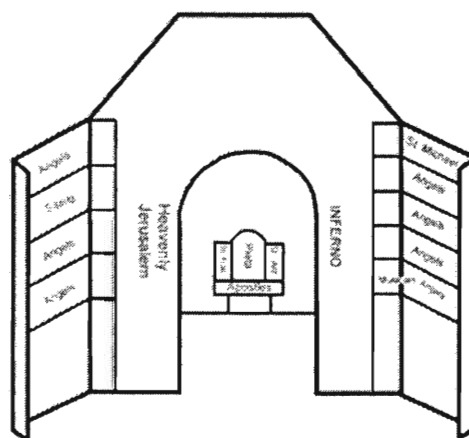


Diagram of St. Francis of Leiria's mural paintings on the main arch area (c.1490-1510).

The same hierarchic principle was used in the triumphal arch murals of the Franciscan church of Leiria, which were painted around 1490-1510 (Figure 13)⁹. These paintings represent the Heavenly Hierarchy in a scatological context, presenting a fragment of the Heavenly Jerusalem on the right-hand side of the triumphal arch and a fragment of the Inferno on the left-hand side. On the adjacent walls of the first chapels are depicted repetitive images representing the sociological composition of the heavenly society. For instance, on the right-hand side of the church, there are four different levels representing angelic figures and saints on different rows. The only figures that can be identified here are the saints on the third register, because all the others are representations of angelic creatures from the Celestial Choirs. On the left-hand side of the church, can be seen the battle between the Archangel Michael and the Devil, repeated six times in the higher register, and other angelic creatures (namely musician angels) in the lower rows. Thus, contrary to the centre-periphery relation of Batalha's main porch, the compositional binaries used in Leiria are the high-low relation, added to the left-right principle.

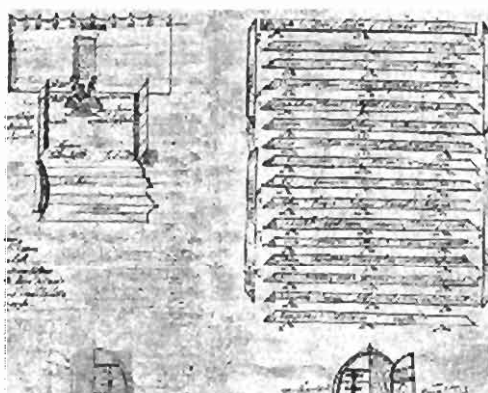


Figure 14.

Plant of parliamentary places distribution during the 1481-82 *Cortes* of Évora-Viana (18th century copy).

The idea that even in Heaven there is a hierarchy and sociological order to be respected is particularly followed on

the protocols of Earthly society. One of the best examples of this situation is the distribution of places on the royal parliament, called *Cortes* in medieval Portugal¹⁰.

On an eighteenth century copy of an earlier original, is found the representation of the distribution of places for the opening session of the Cortes of Évora and Viana, which took place during 1481-1482 (Figure 14). It is clear that the distribution of the representatives of different Portuguese cities and villages followed a strict protocol based on hierarchic principles, since these representatives are more close or apart from the king according to their political and economical importance. In a way, this earthly hierarchy resembles the heavenly hierarchy, which were presented in Batalha and Leiria.

5. Conclusion

It must be carefully stressed that the homologies emphasized in this article do not mean an equality between the two dimensions or the two kingdoms. In fact, the earthly kingdom looks for its legitimacy in the heavenly kingdom, as depicted by the heraldic angels supporting the arms of Portugal, which were depicted, for instance, in the vaults of Batalha's Sacristy around 1415, or which were carved on the main porch of the Varatojo Franciscan convent, shortly after 1470.

Furthermore, the earthly kingdom's filiation to the Heavenly Kingdom seems to be based upon two main ideas. First, through the participation of earthly royalty in the key moments of the history of Christianity (namely *Calvary*, *Nativity* and so on). Second, which is much more daring, through the inclusion of the Portuguese Kings on the lineage of Christ, an idea which gained a great emphasis under the reign of the "Pepper King" D. Manuel around 1500, due to his role in spreading Christianity to America, Africa and Asia.

Indeed, King Manuel not only presented himself under the guise of David (Figure 15), but he also dared to present his own heraldic symbols at the end of an oak tree, which framed the west window of Tomar's new church, and whose roots were attached to Jesse's back.



Figure 15.
King Manuel I (1495-1521) as David.
Miniature from c.1518-20 (Biblioteca Pública Municipal do Porto).

Thus, even if there isn't a total equality between Heaven and Earth, it is clear that a homology between these two realities is a major ideological construct, which helps to support the sociological structure and order of the earthly society. Indeed, through some important public visual media, Portuguese earthly society was presented as a mirror of the perfect heavenly society.

Notes

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1 Similarly the role of material images, namely images of devotion, in visionary experiences is widely recognized by historians. On this topic see Schmitt (1994) and Hamburger (1998).

2 For a critique on mechanical explanations about this topic see Jean-Claude Schmitt's (1994) analysis of visions of Sainte Foy of Conques. In this analysis, Schmitt stresses that this saint appears normally as a young maiden and not in the figure of a royal person, as she is presented in the golden reliquary preserved at the monastery.

3 The process of creation of Christian iconography during the 4th century is one of the most extraordinary examples of iconographic metamorphosis. On this topic see Grabar (1979).

4 This book by Ernst Gombrich (1995) is full of references to the importance of «schemata» in artistic creation and individual perception. Nevertheless, see particularly pages 65-73.

5 On this topic see François Boespflug (1992).

6 On this topic see François Boespflug (1991: 186).

7 For an approach on the spiritual foundations of the royal power in medieval Portugal see Mattoso (1993), especially pages 269-275.

8 The intellectual tradition of the Church concerning the relations between the heavenly and the earthly kingdoms was studied by Bianca Kühnel (1987). I quote Eusebius' idea after this study (p. 87).

9 Nowadays only a fragmentary area is visible, but the remaining signs are enough to understand that the original programme was much more developed. On this paintings see my study (Afonso, 2001).

10 This institution, which dates back from 1211, was neither permanent nor sedentary. Indeed, it could be convoked every two years as it could be not convoked for large periods of ten or twenty years. For instance, between 1211 and 1323 the *Cortes* have met twelve times. On this topic see Mattoso, 1993.

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