

A good queen cares for her image: the sumptuous wardrobe of Leonor of Portugal, Queen of Aragon (1328-1348)

Adriana Almeida (PhD student, ICS)

This presentation is part of an ongoing research addressing the image of the medieval queen, and taking as a case-study Leonor of Portugal, queen of Aragon. Born in 1328, Leonor was the last child of Alphonse IV of Portugal (King 1325-1357) and his Queen, Beatrice of Castile¹. Little is known about her until around her nineteenth birthday when her hand was asked for by Peter IV, *the Ceremonious* of Aragon (King 1336-1387). In April 1347 this king had lost his wife giving birth to a boy that died shortly after, and was in desperate need of a male heir because he had only girls, and the crown of Aragon could not rest upon the head of a woman. He therefore decided to marry a young and hopefully fertile princess of a friendly kingdom. His proposal was pushed forward at the Portuguese court in May, by his cousin Constanza Manuel, wife of the Crown Prince of Portugal, her father Juan Manuel, and Maria Ximenes Coronel, an Aragonese lady married to the count of Barcelos². When Peter's ambassadors arrived at the beginning of June, the matter had already been extensively discussed and the matrimonial contract was signed within a week³.

Despite all this rush, the princess did not leave the kingdom with her suite and all her belongings before October 29, 1347⁴. She arrived at Barcelona, by boat, in mid-November, the very same day prince James, the king's brother, died presumably of the Black Death; because of this unfortunate event, the matrimonial feast was sober and

¹ António Caetano de Sousa, *História Genealógica da Casa Real Portuguesa*, ed. fac-similée de l'édition de 1735-1748, Lisbonne, QuidNovi/Público – Academia Portuguesa da História, 2007, vol. I, p. 219.

² Jerónimo Zurita, *Anales de la Corona de Aragón*, T. 2, Zaragoza, 1610, fol. 191.

³ A. C. Sousa, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

⁴ Ana Maria S. A. Rodrigues, «Un destin interrompu: Aliénor du Portugal, brève reine d'Aragon», *Études Roussillonnaises*, 2010, in the press.

quiet⁵. For a year, Leonor reigned with her husband in very difficult conditions: the pestilence was decimating the population, production and commerce were almost paralysed and aristocratic «unions» were formed against the king. The queen herself eventually fell ill and died from the Plague on October 30, 1348 without having given Peter IV the male heir he so much needed. Within a few months, the king took a third wife, Leonor of Sicily.

Having left no children, Leonor of Portugal could use all her wealth to secure the preservation of her memory and the salvation of her immortal soul. In her last will and testament, dated September 13, 1348⁶, she left a few of her jewels and silver plate to members of her family, and clothes and money to her ladies in waiting, officials, and servants. She also made alms to the poor, sent her body with a generous gift to the monastery of Poblet to be buried there, and founded ten chaplaincies in four different royal palaces, each of which with a priest and a few schoolboys who would pray along with the royal chaplains for the sake of her soul. To pay for all this, she asked the executors of her will to sell all her personal belongings and to collect the rents that King Peter IV had entrusted her to secure the restitution of her dowry⁷.

Four account books still keep all the transactions made in 1348 and 1349⁸. They describe extensively the Queen's personal objects, state their value and reveal to whom they were sold. These books are not equivalent in size, the first two being considerably larger than the remaining ones. As this is an ongoing investigation, still in an initial phase, so far only one of them has been thoroughly scoured. It is this book we will be addressing today. For this paper we chose to focus on an aspect that is necessarily related to our main concern: the queen's clothing.

This book contains three kinds of entries: rents collected from the lands or communities that were part of Leonor's dowry, money paid to religious houses for masses sung for the salvation of her soul, and an assortment of goods from her personal treasury sold to raise the amounts of money necessary to fulfil her last will

⁵ Jerónimo Zurita, *Anales de [...] Aragón*, T. 2, fol. 208 v.

⁶ Archivo de la Corona de Aragón (ACA), reg. 2256, fols. 1-4v.

⁷ António Caetano de Sousa, *Provas da História Genealógica da Casa Real Portuguesa*, 2ª ed., T. I, L. II, Coimbra, 1946, pp. 383-401.

⁸ ACA, reg. 2256, 2257, 2258, 2259.

and testament. In this last category there are 350 entries, corresponding to well over this number in actual objects. Besides clothing, which we will discuss today, we found wardrobe accessories, shoes, religious objects, jewels, riding paraphernalia, houseware, tapestries, tableware, bed hangings, sheets and coverlets, books, and personal toiletry articles, such as combs, mirrors, tweezers or pomade. There is also a fair amount of objects whose purpose or even whose nature we were not yet able to ascertain.

Having started by looking at the amount of goods as making up a *personal* treasury of Queen Leonor, we were soon led to question this assumption by two factors in particular: the proportion of hoods in the total number of garments and the listing of two hoods "for men". Out of 56 pieces of clothing, 31 are hoods, in a fairly wide range of prices (2 s.b. to 83 s.b.) and, to a degree, of quality. The explanation for this might be that some were intended to be distributed amid the Queen's retinue, as part-payment for their services,⁹ but we have not so far found any evidence that confirms this notion. The two hoods for men are the closest thing to a clue in that direction, were it not for a suspicion that the Queen may indeed have used them herself, based on evidence regarding a later Portuguese princess.¹⁰ At this point, we have no means of establishing if any of the garments was destined for other than Leonor; however, considering the general opulence of the clothes and the values they achieved, we suggest that the garments listed so far were probably for the use of the Queen.

We approached this document looking for clues concerning the image of Queen Leonor. Was there a conscious construction by the Queen of her self image? If so, how was it done and by what means? What part did the Queen's treasure play in its erection and display? What kinds of objects composed her treasure and how did this allotment relate to the intended image?

⁹ See Luís Vicente Díaz Martín and Roberto Ruiz Capellán, "El Ajuar de Doña Blanca de Borbón, Mujer de Pedro I de Castilla, en las Cuentas de Étienne de La Fontaine", *Boletín de la Real Academia de la Historia*, 197, Cuaderno 2, 2000, p. 282-84; Stella Mary Newton, *Fashion in the Age of the Black Prince: A study of the years 1340-1365*. Woodbridge: Boydell, 2002 (1st edition, 1980), p. 65.

¹⁰ Jean Paviot Portugal et Bourgogne au XVe siècle. Paris: Centre Culturel Calouste Gulbenkian, 1995. Appendice 2, pp. 511-513.

Looking for the Queen's image in her clothing seemed to be the first obvious step. In the Middle Ages, clothing was perhaps the most immediate and flagrant form of identification anyone could display. It would vary according to the person's status, rank, profession, religion, gender, wealth... Many were the reasons for this. For a start, fabrics and dyes were generally expensive, and many were affordable only to a few. Practical considerations, legal prescriptions and tradition were responsible for the distinguishable dress of some social groups, both professional, such as physicians, prostitutes, clerks or butchers, and religious, like Moors and Jews.¹¹ And finally, at least since the mid-thirteenth century, with Alfonso X of Castile, sumptuary laws determined for instance who was entitled to wear which materials and colours, and what kind and quantity of ornaments they could put on their clothing.¹² In a broad overview, all over Europe, silks, velvets, scarlets and fine furs like ermine or marten were reserved for royalty and high ranking nobility, and so too were some bright and dark colours, especially scarlet, and variably pink, yellow, dark green, and black.¹³

Through her apparel, a queen would be able to convey the image that best fulfilled her purposes. It could mirror devout piety, opulent wealth, her origins, her alliances or her rank, and this would eventually reflect on her husband and her family.¹⁴ What ends does this queen's wardrobe suggest? And what expedients were used to attain them? If in this case there was indeed an intentional construction of the royal image as we are assuming, we should be able to see it reflected in the fabrics chosen, the decoration of the garments, the display or not of heraldic devices, in the choice of exhibiting the latest fashions or rather holding on to a regional trend, and any such options as can be identified.

¹¹ See for instance, José Rivair Macedo, 'Os sinais da infâmia e o vestuário dos mouros em Portugal nos séculos XIV e XV', in *Le moyen âge vu d'ailleurs*, ed. by Flávio de Campos and Eliana Magnani Soares Cristen. São Paulo: Instituto de Estudos Avançados da Universidade de São Paulo, 2003, pp. 1-24.

¹² See, for instance, Juan Torres Fontes, 'Ordenanza Suntuaria Murciana en el Reinado de Alfonso XI', *Miscelánea Medieval Murciana*, 6, 1980, esp. pp. 113-119; The President and Fellows of Harvard College, 'A Thirteenth-Century Castilian Sumptuary Law', *The Business History Review*, Vol. 37, No. 1/2, Special Illustrated Fashion Issue, Spring-Summer, 1963, pp. 98-100.

¹³ The President and Fellows of Harvard College, 'A Thirteenth-Century Castilian Sumptuary Law', p. 99-100. John H. Munro, 'The Anti-Red Shift – To the Dark Side: Colour Changes in Flemish Luxury Woollens, 1300-1550', in *Medieval Clothing and Textiles*, ed. by Robin Netherton and Gale R. Owen-Crocker. Vol. 3, Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007, p. 56-7;

¹⁴ Rachel C. Gibbons, 'The Queen as 'social mannequin': Consumerism and Expenditure at the Court of Isabeau de Bavaria, 1393-1422', *Journal of Medieval History*, Vol. 26, No. 4, 2000, p. 372-3.

The vast majority of the garments found in this book were made of rich fabrics, especially silks, velvets (also made of silk) and scarlets. Three items of clothing were made of the luxurious cloth of gold, which is generally believed to be composed of silk and gold thread.¹⁵ There are mentions to fabrics we could not so far identify, such as "pañó de Granada", "pañó alquenado", or "melmas", but the amounts fetched by the corresponding pieces indicate they too must have been precious. The most part of the garments were lined with taffeta (16), again a silk fabric. Only three pieces – a *pellote*, a hood and a mantle – and the sleeves of two other *pellotes*, are lined in fur. There are two fur linings sold separately: one used to be in a mantle and the other in a hood. On the whole, rather few pelts compared with other royal wardrobes known to us today, such as that of Blanche de Bourbon, a contemporary princess from the Royal House of France who came to the Peninsula to marry Pedro I of Castile in 1352.

The French royal accounts contain a listing of the materials acquired for Blanche's dower and what they were made into. Very usefully, it discriminates the items destined to the Queen from those meant for the people of her house, revealing that in addition to the woollen *marbré* that her ladies in waiting also wore, Queen Blanche was entitled to silks, scarlets and cloth of gold, the same as our Queen Leonor. We also learn that while cendal was bought to line the clothes of her ladies in waiting, nearly all the garments made for Blanche were lined in fur.¹⁶

However, the apparent disparity between the two wardrobes does not discredit our view that the most part of the garments were for the Queen's use, nor does it lead us to believe her clothing in any way poorer than that of her French counterpart. Considering that the dower of Queen Blanche was planned and gathered in Paris, and that Leonor's goods were most probably acquired from the Iberian Peninsula, we believe the differences in climate in the two regions must have played a part in the

¹⁵ Patrimonio Nacional, *Vestiduras Ricas: El Monasterio de las Huelgas e su Época, 1170-1340*. Madrid: Patrimonio Nacional, 2005. p. 104 ISBN: 84-7120-383-9; Alexandria Abarria, 'Cloth of Gold', *Medieval Textiles*, 31, March 2002, pp. 8-10. ISSN 1530-762X.

¹⁶ According to Stella Mary Newton, in *Fashion in the Age of the Black Prince*, p. 23, *cendal* or *sendal* 'was, at this particular date, a light-weight silk of plain weave used as a rule for linings and facings in both countries [i.e., England and France]'.

For Queen Blanche's dowry, see Luís Vicente Díaz Martín and Roberto Ruiz Capellán, "El Ajuar de Doña Blanca de Borbón...", p. 282. The accounts state the ordering of 33 pieces of clothing, not counting the "riding set" and an unspecified number of hoods. Of the 33, only two garments – a cote and a cotehardie – are not lined in fur, p. 282-3.

choice of lining, as they probably did in other matters concerning dressing options. Then there is the fact that furs would likely be more readily available in Central and Northern Europe, while the Iberian kingdoms had the thriving silk industry of al-Andalus at hand, not to mention some production inside their own borders.¹⁷ But the argument that most strongly contends for our position is the lavish decoration of many of the garments.

The descriptions we hold present four manners by which garments could be made more sumptuous, all of which seem to make the best of contrasting colours and of the metallic glimmer of gold and silver. The most frequent of the three is the use of ornate cloths, with patterns weaved into the fabric. At least three different patterns were identified: waves, chequers and stripes. The majority of the fabrics both in the outer shell and in the lining of garments were described as *viados*, *barreados*, *listados*, or *con vetas*, all of which can be translate as striped, even though they could have identified varieties of the design. Alternatively to introducing the pattern in the weave, a similar effect would have been achieved by the *viado por fuerça*, which consisted of the application of bands of a different material probably onto the original stuff of the garment, or perhaps added to, or intersected in the fabric, as in patchwork technique.¹⁸ The streaks and bands are always in hues that contrast with the main fabric or colour – an effect also sought when choosing the lining – and sometimes in gold thread. Careful observation of miniatures from all over Europe suggest that the

¹⁷ See Sharon Kinoshita, "Almería Silk and the French Feudal Imaginary: Toward a Material History of the Medieval Mediterranean", in *Medieval Fabrications: Dress, Textiles, Clothwork, and Other Cultural Imaginings*, ed. by Jane Burns. Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, p. 168-9; Juan F. Utrilla Utrilla, "Los orígenes de la industria textil en Huesca: La construcción de los primeros molinos traperos (c. 1180-1190) y la creación de la cofradía de los tejedores oscenses (1239)", *Homenage a Don Antonio Durán Gudiol*. Instituto de Estudios Altoaragoneses, 1995, p. 814, n.58. As to furs, even though she notes that in the Middle Ages Western Europe still had an abundance of woods and wild life, Françoise Pipponier points to Northern and Eastern Europe as the origins of a prolific fur trade with France. On the other hand, Stella Mary Newton identifies the area of origin of individual kinds of fur used by the English royal household in the mid-fourteenth century, placing many of them in countries around the Mediterranean. Françoise Piponnier and Perrine Mane, *Dress in the Middle Ages* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997. 1st edition, Paris: Société Nouvelle Adam Biro, 1995), p. 24; Stella Mary Newton, *Fashion in the Age of the Black Prince*, p. 66.

¹⁸ The expression *viado por fuerça* is used but not explained or specified in Leonor's books, but in the sumptuary legislation edited by Juan Torres Fontes, there is an interdiction to certain people to use fabrics "viados por fuerça dotro paño", that is, streaked by force with another cloth. Juan Torres Fontes, "Ordenanza Suntuaria Murciana en el reinado de Alfonso XI", p. 122.

combination of contrasting colours was a popular trend throughout, and one that probably lasted the whole period. Stripes, however, were not.

The well known work by Michel Pastoureau about the use of stripes in history clearly narrows its usage, during the Middle Ages, to marginal groups, like prostitutes, and, especially in German territories, to specific classes of servants, such as falconers or heralds.¹⁹ He bases his analysis on legislation, iconography and, to a great extent, on literature, where stripes in clothing or coats of arms always appear to identify suspicious or clearly infamous characters. However, as so often happens in French, British or North-American historiography, the Iberian Peninsula seems to have been generally left out of Pastoureau's 'Medieval Europe'. The wider use of stripes testified by Leonor's account books is further borne out by iconographic sources, and some archaeological evidence, particularly relevant for the present case, as are the garments found in the royal pantheon of Santa Maria la Real de Las Huelgas, in Burgos, Spain. In the first case stripes appear more often worn in specific situations (such as mourning) or by particular groups, as the musicians in the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* by Alfonso X²⁰. However, it is equally exhibited by biblical characters, and people from every rank of society. The surviving textiles from the 12th and 13th century, currently exhibited at the Museo de Telas Reales, in Burgos, leave little margin for doubt concerning the familiarity of the Iberian Christian world, and especially its royalty, both with striped fabrics and the Muslim silk industry, and it is possible that the two are connected. If any doubts subsisted concerning the Muslim provenance of most of Leonor's silks, the numerous references in the descriptions should be reassuring enough: one of the Queen's hoods had heads of Moors embroidered in gold and silk; there are garments made of 'Moorish cloth of gold' and of 'cloth of Granada'; three garments, at least were adorned with 'Moorish letters', and others with 'Moorish signs'.²¹

¹⁹ Michel Pastoureau, *The Devil's Cloth: A History of Stripes and Striped Fabric*, trans. by Jody Gladding. New York: Columbia University Press (original edition, Paris: Seuil, 1991), p. 12-16, 37.

²⁰ As seemed to be elsewhere in Europe: see, for instance, in the Manesse Codex. Heidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. Palat. Germ. 848, the folio 13r, where three of the four musicians are wearing stripes.

²¹ In one of the cases – in an *almexia* – they are specified to be embroidered, but in the other examples they could as well be woven into the fabric, as in the case of the clothes of Berenguela of Castile, in *Ricas Telas...*

Embroidery was another cherished but very expensive ornament. Many of the garments in Queen Leonor's wardrobe had needlework in gold thread, silver or silk, in a variety of motifs: besides the mentioned Moorish heads, and possibly the letters, there were trees, birds, stags, trout, centaurs, griffins, lions, and, most often repeated, the coats of arms of the royal houses of Portugal and Aragon.

The ostentation of the heraldic devices of both her families, identifying in one go her rank, her perceived origins, and her political connections, not only was fashionable, but must also have made an impressive sight to behold. Two of the garments thus fashioned were a set of *pellote* and matching cape, the first *mi-parti*, with one half in blue velvet and cloth of gold, and the other half in white with the royal insignia of Portugal embroidered. The arms of the crown of Aragon were worked onto the sleeves, which were lined in ermine. The short cape was white and had embroidered in gold and dark thread the coats of arms of both royal houses.

Sometimes in this book, the word *viado*, above rendered as 'striped', is employed in relation to trimming, causing some confusion. Perhaps a striped effect was achieved by its use, permitting the same term to be applied indiscriminately. These trims, present in quite a few of the garments, are called *cintas doro* (i.e., "belts of gold"), and appear to be textile in nature, probably being made of thread of gold by means of fingerloop braiding, tablet weaving or similar techniques.²² Notwithstanding, the trimmings could have a vellum base, ornamented by painting, incisions, embroidery or metal applications, all of which we have found amid the Queen's goods.

The fourth and most costly form of dress embellishment was the employment of silver, gold, pearls, precious stones and coloured glass. They turn up lining the edges (sometimes on a vellum base), sewn onto the body of the clothes, or used as buttons, especially in the handful of garments fashioned to the new trend from France, in which buttons were used in plenty both adjusting the sleeves and in the front of the dress. The presence of these ornaments on the garments, especially gold and pearls raised by much the value of the clothes, in comparison to those of similar fabrics and cut which

²² Crowfoot, Elisabeth, Frances Pritchard, and Kay Staniland, *Textiles and Clothing 1150-1450, Medieval Finds from Excavations in London* (London: Museum of London, 2001. 1st ed., 1992), p. 24-25, 130 ff..

do not have such luxuries. This also explains why we have found a significant quantity of pearls, buttons, and small adornments in silver and gold that used to belong to garments, being sold separately.

The information collected so far appears to support our initial view that the Queen's wardrobe was carefully chosen, designed to construct and display an image of royal dignity, exuberant wealth, and fashionable prestige. It presents some particular features, such as the extensive use of silks and of stripes, which denote the intense cultural and commercial relations with their Muslim neighbours and subjects. The Moorish silks that dominate the Queen's wardrobe were very appreciated all throughout Europe for their workmanship, value and beauty.²³ Nevertheless, its extensive use by the royalty of the Iberian kingdoms, where governance meant endeavouring a fragile balance between political and territorial aspirations and commercial and economical interests, between the pressures of the clerical stratum and safeguarding their Muslim subjects, could also have been imbued with a political statement, symbolising the determination of being the sovereign of the whole of the territory, cultural and religious divergences notwithstanding.

²³ See Sharon Kinoshita, 'Almerian Silk and the French Feudal Imaginary: Toward a Material History of the Medieval Mediterranean', in Jane Burns, *Medieval Fabrications: Dress, Textiles, Clothwork, and Other Cultural Imaginings* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), esp. p. 167 ff.