

Heresy and Martyrdom in the *Life and Tragic Death of Mary Stuart* by Francisco de Sousa da Silva Alcoforado Rebelo (1737)

Heresia e martírio em *Vida, e Morte Trágica de Maria Stuart* de Francisco de Sousa da Silva Alcoforado Rebelo (1737)

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ABSTRACT

Substantial interest in British queens on the part of Portuguese men of letters does not seem to have abounded in Portugal during the Early Modern Period, at least as far as printed sources are concerned. This article focuses on a book that stands in a category of its own, as presumably the only sustained biography of a British monarch – male or female, for that matter – penned by a Portuguese author for several centuries. My purpose is to make a short presentation of a work that has been neglected but deserves to be noticed in the context of British-Portuguese cultural exchanges.

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The article accordingly offers information about the author, Francisco de Sousa da Silva Alcoforado Rebelo, and an analysis of the historiographic methods, style, and intentions underlying *Vida e Morte Tragica de Maria Stuart, Rainha de França, e Escocia, e Pertendente da Coroa de Inglaterra*, published in Lisbon in 1737. Rebelo's biography of Mary Queen of Scots will be placed in the tradition of commending Mary as a Catholic martyr which underlines Mary's Christian virtues as well as her innocence of the charges brought upon her and which led to her execution. Rebelo's work will be read as a character study which sets Elizabeth I against Mary, the latter standing as the consummate example of constancy and piousness, well deserving of a crown of grace. Other aspects of the work deserving of mention are the effective dismissal of Protestants, and especially of Calvinists, as a perfidious religious and political group, and the depiction of Scotland as a kingdom rife with rivalry, strife and betrayal.

RESUMO

Não aparenta ter abundado o interesse por rainhas britânicas, da parte dos homens de Letras portugueses, ao longo do Período Moderno, pelo menos no que respeita a fontes impressas. O presente artigo debruça-se sobre um livro ao qual se pode reconhecer um estatuto singular, na medida em que é, presumivelmente, a única biografia desenvolvida de uma figura real britânica – trate-se de reis, trate-se de rainhas – escrita por um autor português no espaço de vários séculos. O objectivo reside em efectuar uma breve apresentação de uma obra que tem permanecido ignorada mas que merece ser conhecida no contexto dos intercâmbios culturais luso-britânicos.

Em conformidade, o artigo oferece informes acerca do autor, Francisco de Sousa da Silva Alcoforado Rebelo, e uma análise dos métodos historiográficos, do estilo e das intenções subjacentes a *Vida e Morte Tragica de Maria Stuart, Rainha de França, e Escocia, e Pertendente da Coroa de Inglaterra*, obra publicada em Lisboa no ano de 1737. Esta biografia de Maria, Rainha dos Escoceses será situada na tradição de louvor de Maria como mártir do Catolicismo, tradição essa que sublinha as virtudes cristãs da monarca assim como a sua inocência no que concerne às acusações que enfrentou e que conduziram à sua execução. Ler-se-á o trabalho de Rebelo como um estudo de caracteres que contrapõe Isabel I a Maria, figurando esta última como exemplo consumado de constância e de piedade, merecedor de uma coroa de graça. Outros aspectos da obra que justificam menção são a crítica aos protestantes, e em especial aos calvinistas, como grupo político-religioso caracterizado pela perfídia e a descrição da Escócia como reino acometido de rivalidades, conflitos e traições.



Substantial interest in British queens on the part of Portuguese men of letters does not seem to have abounded during the Early Modern Period, at least as far as printed sources are concerned. It is well known to scholars of the age that the distinguished humanist and bishop of Silves, D. Jerónimo Osório, sometimes praised as the 'Portuguese Cicero', published a long letter to Elizabeth I in 1562, in Lisbon, urging her to relinquish the errors of the Reformation and return to the fold of Catholicism.¹ Written in Latin, the prelate's letter had considerable impact across Europe, and gave rise to a polemics with the royal commissioner Walter Haddon that lasted for several years.² As a second significant episode, it comes as no surprise that one century later a number of pamphlets were published in Lisbon (either in Portuguese or Spanish) giving extensive accounts of how Charles II announced his betrothal to Catherine of Braganza (D. Catarina de Bragança), and of the celebrations surrounding her departure from Lisbon and arrival in London.³ My present object of study, which appears not to have so far received the attention of researchers,⁴ stands very much in a category of its own, as presumably the only sustained biography of a British monarch – male or female, for that matter – penned by a Portuguese author for several centuries. My purpose in this article is to make a short presentation of a work that has been neglected but deserves to be noticed in the context of British-Portuguese cultural exchanges.

The title page of the volume reads like this:

*Vida, e Morte Tragica de Maria Stuart, Rainha de França, e Escocia, e Per-
tendente da Coroa de Inglaterra, que compoz, e dedica à milagorisissima
Imagem de Nossa Senhora da Invocaçam da Abadia Francisco de Sousa
da Sylva Alcoforado Rebello. Lisboa Occidental. Na Officina de Antonio
Correa Lemos. Anno M. DCCXXXVII. Com todas as licenças necessarias.*

[*Life and Tragic Death of Mary Stuart, Queen of France and Scotland, and Pretender to the Crown of England, written and dedicated to the most miraculous image of Our Lady of the Invocation of the Abbey by Francisco de Sousa da Sylva Alcoforado Rebello*. West Lisbon. At the Press of Antonio Correa Lemos. Year M. DCCXXXVII. With all the necessary licences.]⁵

Not much is known about the author, Francisco de Sousa da Silva Alcoforado Rebelo. According to the bibliographers Diogo Barbosa Machado and Inocêncio Francisco da Silva,⁶ he was born in 1697 in Barcelos, and died in 1772. He owned an estate in Lordelo, just outside of (and now part of) Porto, and was a gentleman of the royal household. He studied Latin, Philosophy, Theology, and History. In a text dated 1730, Anselmo Caetano M. de A. G. Castello Branco, who knew him personally, while dedicating a book to Rebelo mentioned the fact that he was working on a biography of Mary Stuart, and describes him as versed in Latin, French, Spanish and Italian from his youth – to which Barbosa Machado adds English.⁷ Apart from the life of Mary Queen of Scots, Rebelo published the biography of a nun, and a ‘political manual’ for the courtier (the latter work under the pseudonym Luiz Florencio da Sylva, modern spelling Luís Florêncio da Silva). He left a life of the Athenian general Alcibiades in manuscript. Inocêncio testifies to the fact that such writings are on the whole held in low esteem, and himself derides their quality in point of style.

Rebelo’s style may, indeed, give cause for reservation. Passages can be somewhat belaboured, and the author’s penchant for the pathetic may occasionally prove to be out of tune with contemporary taste, but in light of Rebelo’s intentions this proclivity answers a purpose. From the outset, in fact from the reference to Mary’s death as ‘tragic’ in the title itself, it becomes clear that there is a quasi-hagiographic quality to the biography which is all too understandable, given the already well established tradition of commending Mary as a Catho-

lic martyr. By dedicating his work to a particular Marian invocation Rebelo reinforces the devotional purport of his writing,⁸ and the piety is further made clear by the licenses from the Inquisition and the court censors (the Desembargo do Paço), which underline Mary's Christian virtues together with her innocence of the charges brought upon her and majesty of character.⁹

Accordingly, the biographer's approach is coloured throughout with a factor of adulation regarding Mary and of outrage at the injustice, the perfidiousness even, of her oppressors, with special emphasis on Elizabeth I, who is described as the epitome of hypocrisy, jealousy and tyranny. To a certain extent, the work may be read as a character study which sets Elizabeth against Mary, the latter standing as the consummate example of constancy and piousness, well deserving of a crown of grace. It is moreover interesting to observe that allusions to Mary's beauty are frequent. She is 'the most perfect comeliness admired by Europe' ('a formosura mais perfeita, que admirava Europa'). A papal legate exhorts the Scots to stand by her, claiming that, 'just as you defend a nobler and more comely Helen than the Trojans, so shall your name be more famous in the memory of men' ('assim como defendeis mais nobre, e formosa Elena, que os Troyanos; assim o vosso nome será mais famigerado na memoria dos homens').¹⁰ Conversely, Elizabeth's beauty, which was much lauded by her subjects (obviously, either out of conviction or as a matter of convention and convenience), is never mentioned by Rebelo, who thereby omits from the story a potential factor of empathy that might have worked for the benefit of the English monarch.

But, obviously, this life of Mary Stuart has more to offer. In addition to his heroine's character and that of her nemesis, Rebelo focuses on the political events of the period, highlighting a world of feuds and rivalry among the nobility, rife with court intrigue, violence and deceit, where much is at stake and nothing can be taken for granted in the fields of diplomacy, war and personal allegiance. Scotland

and England are very much at the centre of the narrative, as is to be expected, with France and Spain playing supporting but important roles, and the occasional glimpse at the Papacy. The account is punctuated by transcriptions from assorted documents, namely letters and speeches, and comprises opinionated maxims about human nature and conduct, especially regarding the relationship between princes and courtiers.¹¹ Historiographic and documentary sources are regrettably not specified in the course of the historical narrative, apart from scattered references to George Buchanan and William Camden, even if a list of names may be found in the Prologue, where Rebelo declares he has read authors both Catholic and 'heretic' in order to establish the factual truth, and mentions John Lesley, Adam Blackwood, Michel de Castelnau and Antonio Herrera, among others.¹² To be more precise, Rebelo is keen to refute Buchanan for his imputation that Mary was involved in the assassination of her second husband, Lord Darnley,¹³ and submits that Camden could not but betray the falsity of the charges rendered against Mary for allegedly being involved in Anthony Babington's plot to assassinate Elizabeth, such is the power of truth even over 'an impassioned writer' ('hum Escritor apaixonado').¹⁴

This tendency to gloss over the opposite side of the political and religious divide and present it as merely vicious and treacherous is of course served by the label of heresy with which Protestants are branded wholesale (moreover, the word 'heretic' often being coupled with the term 'rebel'),¹⁵ and is perhaps nowhere more palpable than in the historian's refusal to grant them a fair hearing. Nothing is said about what Protestants stood for, except that it amounted to faction, treason and 'erroneous dogmas' ('errados dogmas').¹⁶ No theological doctrines are imparted to the reader, and no ideas about the establishment and the government of the church. The great figure of the Scottish Reformation, John Knox himself, is mentioned only in passing (twice in the main text, and once in the index), and inciden-

tally with a different spelling each time,¹⁷ as having argued for the necessity of Mary's deposition and death. As is widely acknowledged, Knox's *History of the Reformation in Scotland* is a crucial testimony to his confrontations with Mary and to the ways in which Knox was instrumental in shaping the queen's destiny by forcing her into exile in England. However, it is not among Rebelo's stated sources, and the biography does not reflect its reading. This is symptomatic. Being denied a proper voice, Protestants are effectively elided as a group capable of making its own claims. The rendition is so simplistic that Rebelo fails to recognize the diversity of the branches of Christianity within Protestantism, ascribing the Calvinist faith to Edward VI and Elizabeth I,¹⁸ and calling the English 'Puritans' instead of 'Anglicans'.¹⁹ For his part, Henry VIII is unsurprisingly anathematized as 'a schismatic king' ('hum Rey scismatico')²⁰ who was blinded by lust to marry Anne Boleyn and deny obedience to the Pope.

It is at the intersection of Protestantism and Catholicism that a third major character sketch emerges in the narrative, that of Lord James Stuart, the bastard son of James V. Mary's half-brother is at first the Prior of St Andrews, and then leaves the clergy to become the earl of Moray (or Murray, Rebelo's preferred spelling) and later viceroy, while embracing an ambiguous religious stance. As explained by Rebelo, this shift is due to political expediency, since the majority of the people of Scotland in the meantime turned to Protestantism, as well as to Elizabeth's enticements promising James the Scottish throne.²¹ Moray is depicted as a Machiavellian character (matching Elizabeth in this respect) who is eventually assassinated – and well-deservedly so, although, of course, not on Mary's initiative, rather as the natural outcome of his many wrongdoings, or, to put it another way, as an instance of divine justice.

James Stuart exemplifies the manner in which outside pressure bears upon Scotland alongside internal strife of several kinds. This is a double topic that runs through the narrative as a thread that con-

nects the scheme of uniting the two kingdoms of Great Britain (an ambition cherished by both Henry VIII and Elizabeth), the irreconcilable differences between Protestants and Catholics, and of course the personal and public contingencies of Mary's exiles in France and England, her successive marriages to Francis II, Lord Darnley and the earl of Bothwell, and the attendant tensions with her courtiers and grandees, members of Parliament, and Church dignitaries and theologians.

On balance, Rebelo's biography maintains Mary's blameless conduct in regard not only to the murder of Lord Darnley but also to her subsequent marriage to Bothwell, the latter forced upon her by an act of abduction and threats to her life, its disgraceful nature thus being disproved. If anything, her only fault was political naiveté, utterly excusable in a young woman who was innocent in the ways of the world and had to rely on poor or disloyal counsellors. The author asserts Mary's helplessness against the ruthlessness of those around her, and tries to engage the reader's empathy by resorting to pathos and melodrama. This is evinced in several episodes. One relates the moment when the queen's secretary, David Rizzio, was stabbed to death in her private chambers in the Palace of Holyroodhouse. Rizzio died clinging to the queen's garments, staining her hands with 'innocent blood' ('innocente sangue'), while Mary was prevented at gunpoint from interfering. She was pregnant with the future James VI at the time.²² A second tableau describes how the Calvinists dragged the captive queen to Edinburgh and then Lochleven Castle, exposing her to the most ignominious treatment from the mob as in a public triumph:

Hia a Rainha a cavallo em hum animal tam indecente, que he o de menos preço na republica dos brutos, quasi sem mais adorno que o da natureza; porque huma roupa velha, que acaso acháram, era toda a galla, que vestia; e tam indigna, que para juntar o desprezo,

e a indecencia, lhe nam passava dos joelhos. Diante della hia uma bandeira, em que estava pintado o marido morto, e seu filho Jacobo a seus pés postrado pedindo vingança. Servia-lhe a grandeza de Magestade, com que nacéra, de aumento à confusam, em que se via; (...) nas vozes, e expressoens a insultavam pelo caminho os condutores, tam atrevidos no desacato, como protervos na malicia.²³

[The queen was made to ride on such an indecent horse that it was the least valued in the republic of brutes. She rode almost entirely deprived of adornments other than those of nature; for some old clothes found by chance were all the pomp she wore; and they were so undignified, in order to give additional contempt and indecency, that they did not reach lower than her knees. Before her there was a flag, on which her dead husband was painted, and her son James at his feet asking for revenge. Her native greatness of majesty increased her distraction; (...) by means of callings and expressions her guard insulted her on the way, being as injurious in their mischief as they were insidious in their malice.]

The pathos in this passage puts one in mind of the predicament of Marie Antoinette as poignantly described on the pages of Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* half a century later. And a third episode details in a particularly graphic manner how Mary was intimidated in order to sign the terms of abdicating the throne in favour of her infant son. The Calvinists, we are told, took her to a lake and threatened her with a dagger, saying the water would be her grave and the blade was the tool with which they would extract the blood for the signing of the document if she refused to do it by her own hand.²⁴

Needless to say, this general exoneration of Mary's conduct while in Scotland is matched by the attestation of her innocence regarding Catholic plots in England, and is in keeping with her upbringing,

temper, and frame of mind. From her childhood, not only was Mary a good scholar, proving that women were not incapable of cultivating the sciences and the liberal arts, but she also showed an admirable combination of prudence, gravity and kindness.²⁵ Such traits culminated in her attitude towards her final ordeal of trial and execution after two decades of captivity. The biographer expatiates on how Mary endured her unfair treatment with an appropriate mixture of humility and majestic pride, and on how she surrendered herself to the designs of providence, intent on the crown of glory reserved for the martyr. Her spiritual fervour gave her an aura of sainthood, and her most signal preoccupation, on the imminence of the beheading, was to assert her unswerving fidelity to the Catholic Church – and that there would be witnesses to testify to the fact that she never apostatized. She was mindful of her future in the afterlife as well as of her legacy to the world she was leaving behind. To this much boils down, in Rebelo's words, 'the execution of the most lamentable tragedy represented in Europe for many centuries' ('a execuçam da mais lamentável tragedia, que representou Europa ha muitos seculos').²⁶

Endnotes

- 1 Osório, J. *Carta à Rainha de Inglaterra*, ed. J. V. P. Martins and S. de Pinho, Lisboa, 1981.
- 2 Now hardly remembered, Haddon was a Cambridge University man, civil lawyer, Member of Parliament, and trusted servant of the queen in various Church matters. See the entry by Gerald Bray in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison, Oxford, 2004, XXIV, 414-415.
- 3 See, namely, the anonymous pamphlets *Relaçam da Forma com que a Magestade delRey da Graõ Bretanha, manifestou a seus Reynos, tinha ajustado seu casamento, com a Serenissima Infante de Portugal...*, Lisboa, 1661; *Relacion de las Fiestas que se hizieron en Lisboa, com la nueva del casamento de la Serenissima Infanta de Portugal...*, Lisboa, 1662; *Relaçam Diaria, da Jornada, que a Serenissima Rainha da Gram Bretanha D. Catherina fez de Lisboa a Londres, indo já desposada...*, Lisboa, 1662.
- 4 Neither studies of the history of Portuguese historiography nor anthologies of historiographical texts contain references to Rebelo. This springs from the fact that such works are mainly interested in the historiography that focuses on Portugal and, secondarily, on Portugal's role in the world. See Marques, A. H. de O. *Antologia da Historiografia Portuguesa. I – Das Origens a Herculano*, n.p., 1974; Pereira, J. F. *Historiografia*. In Pereira, J. C., ed. *Dicionário Enciclopédico da História de Portugal*, n.p., 1991, I, 312-14; Quadros, A. And Gomes P., eds. *A Teoria da História em Portugal*, n.p., n.d., 2 vols.; Rebelo, L. de S. *Historiografia*. In *Biblos*,

- Lisboa, 1995-2005, II, cols. 1063-1072; Serrão, J. V. *A Historiografia Portuguesa: Doutrina e Crítica*, Lisboa, 1972-1974, 3 vols.; idem, *História Breve da Historiografia Portuguesa*, Lisboa, 1962; Soveral, C. E. *Historiografia Moderna. Em Portugal*. In Coelho, J. do P., ed. *Dicionário de Literatura*, 3rd ed., Porto, n.d., II, 404-418; Torgal, L. R., Mendes, J. M. A., and Catroga, F., *História da História em Portugal. Sécs. XIX-XX*, n.p., 1996.
- 5 Translations are mine throughout.
- 6 Machado, D. B. *Bibliotheca Lusitana Historica, Crítica, e Cronologica...*, Lisboa, 1741-1759 (4 vols.), II, 270; Silva, I. F. *Diccionario Bibliographico Portuguez*, Lisboa, 1858-1923 (22 vols.), III, 70-71.
- 7 Castello Branco, A. C. M. de A. G., *Ennæa [sic], ou Applicação do Entendimento sobre a Pedra Philosophal...*, Lisboa Occidental, 1732-33 (2 vols.), II, [ix].
- 8 Rebelo refers to the Church of the Lady of the Abbey (Igreja da Senhora da Abadia), in the municipality of Amares, in the region and archdiocese of Braga. See Leal, A. S. A. B. P., *Portugal Antigo e Moderno*, Lisboa, 1873-1886 (12 vols.), I, 428-431.
- 9 Rebelo, F. de S. da S. A. *Vida, e Morte Tragica de Maria Stuart, Rainha de França, e Escocia, e Pertendente da Coroa de Inglaterra...*, Lisboa Occidental, 1737, [xii-xvii].
- 10 Rebelo, 1737, 121, 30.
- 11 See, e.g., Rebelo, 1737, 38, 124, 166, 199.
- 12 Rebelo, 1737, [vii-viii].
- 13 Rebelo, 1737, 134-135, 149, 157.
- 14 Rebelo, 1737, 197.
- 15 See, e.g., Rebelo, 1737, 174.
- 16 Rebelo, 1737, 21.
- 17 Rebelo, 1737, 130, 133, 253-254.
- 18 Rebelo, 1737, 37, 75.
- 19 Rebelo, 1737, 180. Among other more or less significant inaccuracies there is the notion that Elizabeth succeeded in uniting the two Crowns, and appointed a governor or viceroy to rule over Scotland – in a passage which virtually conflates the late Tudor period with the Union of 1707 (see Rebelo, 1737, 3). This is perhaps a misunderstanding of the terms the Treaty of Berwick of 1560, the clauses of which were effectively revoked by of the Treaty of Edinburgh later that same year and which in any case was never ratified by the queen and Parliament.
- 20 Rebelo, 1737, 4.
- 21 To a degree, Moray's character mirrors that of the Scottish people. Rebelo's indictment of the Scots on the grounds of their having apostatized Catholicism equates with the imputation that, having lived in the French court, it was painful for Mary to return to the mother country, where her vassals were uncouth and the land was uncultivated (Rebelo, 1737, 66). In turn, the earl of Bothwell exemplifies the paradoxes of the Scottish temperament: 'One could find in the person of this earl the vices and virtues which are generally ascribed to the Scots; for he was possessed of a shrewd spirit, perseverance in labour, and the necessary strength to execute any action; but together with this there were also a haughtiness and a freedom that degenerated into insolence' ('Achavam-se na pessoa deste Conde os vícios, e virtudes, que geralmente se atribuem aos Escoceses; porque possuía animo sagaz, perseverança no trabalho, e forças necessarias para executar qualquer acçã; mas junto com isto se encontravam tambem nelle a soberba, e a liberdade, que degenerava em insolencia', Rebelo, 1737, 119-120).
- 22 Rebelo, 1737, 109.
- 23 Rebelo, 1737, 129-130.
- 24 Rebelo, 1737, 132.
- 25 Rebelo, 1737, 40, 42.
- 26 Rebelo, 1737, 224.

