

Venality and Seigneuries in Seventeenth-Century Portugal: The Sale of the Town of Punhete to Secretary Diogo Soares as a Case Study¹

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Abstract

This article examines the sale of seigneuries in Portugal during the period of its incorporation into the Habsburgs' composite monarchy. It contributes to the historiographical debate on venality in that kingdom, in which numerous historians are now examining the sale of offices, privileges, and honours by the Crown, as in other European monarchies. The article focuses on the commercialisation of seigneuries, which also developed in Portugal, albeit to a lesser extent than in other European territories of the Spanish Monarchy such as Castile, Naples, or Sicily. To this end, it offers a case study of the sale of the town of Punhete (modern-day Constância) to Diogo Soares, Secretary of State of the Council of Portugal during the reign of Philip IV. The analysis first explores Soares's social background and career trajectory, before examining the process through which the

Resumo

Este artigo analisa a venda de senhorios em Portugal durante o período da sua integração na monarquia compósita dos Habsburgos. Contribui para o debate historiográfico sobre a venalidade nesse reino, no qual numerosos historiadores estão atualmente a analisar a venda de cargos, privilégios e honras pela Coroa, tal como noutras monarquias europeias. O artigo centra-se na comercialização dos senhorios, fenómeno que também se desenvolveu em Portugal, embora em menor medida do que noutros territórios europeus da Monarquia Espanhola, como Castela, Nápoles ou a Sicília. Para esse efeito, é realizado um estudo de caso sobre a venda de Punhete (atualmente conhecido como Constância) a Diogo Soares, que foi secretário de Estado do Conselho de Portugal durante o reinado de Filipe IV. A análise começa por abordar a origem social e a trajetória de Soares,

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seignury was sold and an entail (*morgado*) established—both understood as strategies of social advancement within the estate-based society of the Ancien Régime.

passando depois ao exame do processo de venda do senhorio e da fundação de um morgado, entendidos como estratégias de ascensão social no Antigo Regime.

Keywords: venality; seignuries; entails; social mobility; Portugal.

Palavras-chave: venalidade; senhorios; morgados; mobilidade social; Portugal.

Las Mercedes que recibió de la Real grandeza de su Majestad no pudieron causar nota de ambición, ni dar materia de embidia al más vil pecho, mayormente a la vista de las que han recibido de los señores Reyes todos los que han ocupado las Secretarías de Estado en el Reyno de Portugal [...]².

Introduction

Throughout the early modern period, several western European states developed policies of selling privileges and honours. These venal concessions served a dual purpose: to attract extraordinary revenue to the royal treasury and to satisfy the social ambitions of individuals who served the monarchies. At the forefront stood the Habsburg and Bourbon Spanish Monarchy, which sold countless titles in Castile, Aragon, Naples, Sicily, and the Indies, among other territories³. The

² BNE, VE/59/14, p. 5r.

³ For general studies and state-of-the-art surveys on venality in the Spanish Monarchy, see Alberto Marcos Martín, “Enajenaciones por precio del patrimonio regio en los siglos XVI y XVII. Balance historiográfico y perspectivas de análisis” in Domingo L. González Lopo and Roberto J. López López (ed.), *Balance de la historiografía modernista, 1973-2001. Actas del VI Coloquio de Metodología Histórica Aplicada*, Santiago de Compostela, Xunta de Galicia, 2003, p. 419-443; Francisco Andújar Castillo, *Necesidad y venalidad: España e Indias, 1704-1711*, Madrid, Instituto de Estudios Políticos y Constitucionales, 2008; “Venalidad de oficios y honores. Metodología de investigación” in Roberta Stumpf and Nandini Chaturvedula (ed.), *Cargos e ofícios nas monarquias ibéricas: provimento, controlo e venalidade (séculos XVII-XVIII)*, Lisboa, Centro de Historia de Além-Mar; Universidade de Lisboa; Universidade dos Açores, 2012, p. 175-198; Antonio Jiménez Estrella, “Poder, dinero y ventas de oficios y honores en la España del Antiguo Régimen: un estado de la cuestión”, *Cuadernos de Historia Moderna*, 37 (2012), p. 259-272; Pilar Ponce Leiva and Francisco Andújar Castillo (ed.), *Mérito, venalidad y corrupción en España y América: siglos XVII y XVIII*, Valencia, Albatros, 2016; Alberto Marcos Martín, “Retórica, política y economía. Los discursos legitimadores de la venalidad en los siglos XVI y XVII” in Juan Francisco Pardo Molero and José Javier Ruiz Ibáñez, *Los mundos ibéricos como horizonte metodológico: homenaje a Isabel Aguirre Landa*, Valencia, Tirant lo Blanch, 2022, p. 241-288.

Spanish Crown was not alone in employing such practices; they were also well established, for example, in Valois France⁴.

In Portugal, too, these venal practices took place during the period of the “Iberian Union” (1580-1640)⁵. Portuguese jurists of the time argued the opposite, maintaining that in their kingdom neither offices nor seigneuries were sold; when they did acknowledge that some sales had taken place, they did so only to criticise the “Philips”⁶. Contemporary Portuguese historiography, however, is revising this assumption. Recent research has identified numerous titles and privileges granted by the Crown in exchange for money, both within the kingdom and across its Atlantic empire. Leading this line of inquiry are historians such as António M. Hespanha, Francisco Ribeiro da Silva, Fernanda Olival, and Mafalda Soares da Cunha, who have shown that noble titles, seigneuries, rents, offices, and habits of the military orders were indeed sold in Portugal⁷. Nevertheless, venality developed on a far smaller scale than in

⁴ On the venality of offices in France, see Roland Mousnier, *La vénalité des offices sous Henri IV et Louis XIII*, Rouen, Kaugard, 1946; William Doyle, *Venality. The sale of offices in Eighteenth-Century France*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1996; Jean Nagle, *Un orgueil français. La vénalité des offices sous l’Ancien Régime*, Paris, Odile Jacob, 2008; Nicolas Pinsard, “Paving the Way towards Financialisation: The French Case of State Venality of Offices (Century 15th–17th)” in David Bourghelle, Roland Pérez and Philippe Rozin (ed.), *Rethinking Finance in the Face of New Challenges*, Bingley, Emerald Publishing, 2021, p. 99-114.

⁵ Recent historiography rejects the term “Iberian Union” to refer to the period of Portugal’s incorporation into the Spanish Monarchy, arguing that this “union” in fact consisted of the kingdom’s aggregation into the Habsburgs’ composite monarchy. For this reason, we use the term in quotation marks and only in a rhetorical sense. Pedro Cardim, *Portugal y la Monarquía Hispánica (ca. 1550-ca. 1715)*, Madrid, Marcial Pons Historia, 2017, specifically the chapter “El estatus político de Portugal en la Monarquía Hispánica”, p. 43-77.

⁶ Antonio Manuel Hespanha, *Como os Juristas Viam o Mundo, 1550-1750*, Lisboa, Author’s own edition, 2015.

⁷ António Manuel Hespanha, *História das instituições: épocas medieval e moderna*, Coimbra, Almedina, 1982; Francisco Ribeiro da Silva, “Venalidade e hereditariedade dos ofícios públicos em Portugal no séculos XVI e XVII. Alguns aspectos”, *Revista de História*, 8 (1988), p. 203-214; Fernanda Olival, *Ordens Militares e o Estado Moderno: honra, mercê e venalidade em Portugal (1641-1789)*, Lisboa, Estar, 2001; “Mercado de hábitos e serviços em Portugal (séculos XVII-XVIII)”. *Análise Social*, 38, 168 (2003), p. 743-769; “Economía de la merced y venalidad en Portugal (siglos XVII-XVIII)” in Francisco Andújar Castillo and María del Mar Felices de la Fuente (ed.), *El poder del dinero. Ventas de cargos y honores en el Antiguo Régimen*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nueva, 2011, p. 345-357; Mafalda Soares da Cunha, “O provimento de ofícios menores nas terras senhoriais. A Casa de Bragança nos séculos XVI-XVII” in Roberta Stumpf and Nandini Chaturvedula (eds.), *Cargos e ofícios nas monarquias ibéricas: provimento, controlo e venalidade (séculos XVII e XVIII)*, Lisboa, Centro de Historia de Além-Mar, Universidade de Lisboa, Universidade dos Açores, 2012, p. 15-37; José M. Santos Pérez, “Ventas disimuladas de ofícios, granjerías y corruptelas en el Estado de Brasil a inicios del siglo XVII. Prácticas sociales

other territories of the Spanish Monarchy. Its presence was also less visible, as both the Crown and purchasers often managed to disguise these transactions as rewards granted by the monarchy to those who had rendered it service⁸. Even so—and pending more exhaustive research—it is clear that venality did exist in Portugal and played a role in structuring the dynamics of social mobility in the kingdom during the Ancien Régime.

Focusing on the venality of seigneuries—the subject of this article—António M. Hespanha, in *Vésperas de Leviathan*, identified several individuals who rose through the royal bureaucracy and purchased towns and villages over which to exercise lordship in Portugal, before, during, and after the union with the Spanish Monarchy⁹. Fernanda Olival has also identified cases of individuals who purchased seigneuries in Portugal¹⁰. One such figure was Diogo Soares, Secretary of State of the Council of Portugal in Madrid under Philip IV, widely regarded as the “right hand”¹¹ of the Count-Duke of Olivares in the governance of that kingdom. At the height of his influence, in January 1640, Soares purchased the jurisdiction of the town of Punhete—present-day Constância, located in the centre-west of the country—thus acquiring the title of Lord of Vassals (*senhor de vassalos*). In both Spain and Portugal during the early modern period, this constituted a significant step towards a noble title. However, the Portuguese Restoration a few months later brought about his downfall, together with the expropriation of this seignury by the new authorities at the Lisbon court.

These features make this an exceptional case study—one of the few documented examples of venality of seigneuries in Portugal during the period of Portugal’s incorporation into the Catholic Monarchy. The article therefore examines the sale of the town of Punhete to Secretary Diogo Soares as a case study. We begin with an analysis of Soares’s family background and courtly career,

y límites del poder real”, *Pedralbes*, 41 (2021), p. 219-253; Mafalda Soares da Cunha, “Las noblezas del reino de Portugal durante el periodo de los Felipes” in Antonio Álvarez Ossorio-Alvariño, Roberto Quirós Rosado and Cristina Bravo Lozano (ed.), *Las noblezas de la monarquía de España (1556-1725)*, Madrid, Marcial Pons Historia, 2024, p. 343-361.

⁸ Mafalda Soares da Cunha, “Las noblezas del reino de Portugal...”, cit., p. 359.

⁹ Antonio Manuel Hespanha, *Vísperas del Leviatán. Instituciones y poder político (Portugal, siglo XVII)*, Barcelona, Taurus, 1989, p. 339.

¹⁰ For example, Diogo de Castro do Rio purchased the town of Barbacena in the 16th Century. Fernanda Olival, “Juristas e mercadores à conquista das honras: quatro processos de nobilitação quinhentistas”, *Revista de História Económica e Social*, 2, 4 (2002), p. 25.

¹¹ “Diogo Soares devient, en quelque sorte, un favori portugais du favori hispanique [...]”. Jean-Frédéric Schaub, “La vice-royauté castillane au Portugal au temps du comte-duc d’Olivares, 1620-1640: le conflit de juridiction comme exercice de la politique”, *Les Cahiers du Centre de Recherches Historiques*, 14-15 (1995), 18 (<http://journals.openedition.org/ccrh/2684>).

as well as those of his forebears, before turning to the purchase of the seignury, understood as a strategy of social advancement that enabled him to position himself within the estate-based society of the Ancien Régime. Moreover—and this is the most innovative aspect—we compare this case with sales of jurisdictions in other territories of the Spanish Monarchy, such as the Crown of Castile and the viceroyalties of Naples and Sicily, thereby offering a comparative framework through which to situate the case within a broader context¹².

To carry out this research, we consulted documentation from Portuguese and Spanish archives and libraries, including the National Archive of Torre do Tombo (ANTT), the National Historical Archive of Spain (AHN), the Historical Archive of Notarial Protocols of Madrid (AHPM), the National Library of Portugal (BNP), and the National Library of Spain (BNE). We applied a qualitative methodology to these primary sources, focusing on the discourses recorded in the documents in order to understand how this sale of a seignury unfolded in seventeenth-century Portugal and how it related to other processes involving the sale of jurisdictions in European territories of the Spanish Monarchy.

1. Diogo Soares: The Political Career of a Portuguese Secretary in the Habsburg Court

Diogo Soares was one of many individuals within the Habsburg royal bureaucracy who benefitted from the opportunities for social advancement offered by the system. He was born in Lisbon in the late sixteenth century into a family that had been connected for generations to the political service of the Portuguese and Spanish crowns¹³. His father, João Alvares Soares, was a commander of the Order of Christ who had served as a soldier in the Indies during the reign of Sebastião I. Thanks to these military services, he was appointed *veedor* general of the Treasury in the Indies, became a member of the Council of Portugal in Madrid, and later served as Secretary of the Council

¹² For an initial comparative approach to the sale of jurisdictions in the Spanish Monarchy, see Francisco Javier Illana López, “La venta de jurisdicciones en la Monarquía Hispánica. Un estudio comprado entre el sureste castellano y el *mezzogiorno* italiano (ss. XVI-XVII)”, *Mediterranea – ricerche storiche*, 60 (2024), p. 55-96.

¹³ The genealogy has been reconstructed on the basis of an anonymous memorial published during the Restoration War to defend Diogo Soares and his brother-in-law Miguel de Vasconcelos from the accusations made by the Portuguese rebels. The document is preserved in BNE, VE/59/14.

of Finance in Lisbon. His paternal grandfather, Cristoforo Lagarto, was a commander of the Order of Avis and also a soldier in the Indies, although little else is known about him. His maternal grandmother was Leonor Soares, daughter of João Alvares Soares—another knight of the Order of Christ—and sister of the powerful Don André Soares, Secretary to João III.

His maternal ancestry is more ambiguous. Diogo claimed to be the son of Paula da Silva, “de lo más acendrado de este apellido”¹⁴. She was the daughter of Mateo Pérez de Silva, also a commander of the Order of Christ, who served as Secretary of State in the Indies under King Sebastião, later as Secretary of State of the Council of Portugal in Madrid, and finally as Secretary of the Council of Finance in Lisbon. However, other sources state that “la madre de Diego Suarez fue mantequera, hija de un piloto y de una sardinera”¹⁵, which raises the possibility that Soares was, in fact, an illegitimate son born outside wedlock. In any case, it is clear that—whether through his paternal line or his presumed maternal line—Soares belonged to a genuine “dynasty” of royal servants under the Portuguese Crown. This family successfully adapted to the new political reality following the dynastic union and continued its trajectory in the service of the Spanish Monarchy. Moreover, he was the son and grandson of knights of the Order of Christ, a circumstance that facilitated his own investiture with the habit of the order. This position also enabled him to contract a favourable marriage with Doña Antonia de Melo, sister of Don Luis de Melo, Dean of Braga¹⁶.

Soares’s career followed a trajectory similar to that of his predecessors in royal service throughout the reigns of Philip III and Philip IV of Spain¹⁷. In 1609 he was appointed Secretary of the Council of Finance in Lisbon, succeeding his father, who had died that same year. He held this office for more than two decades, until 1631, during which time he gained considerable political power and influence thanks to his proximity to the viceroys and governors of Portugal—particularly Archbishop Miguel de Castro and the Marquis of Alenquer¹⁸. These figures granted him increasing prominence in the boards

¹⁴ Idem, f. 2r.

¹⁵ Idem, marginal note.

¹⁶ On this individual, see Ana Isabel López-Salazar Codes, “Puderão mais os inquisidores que o rey. Las relaciones entre el Santo Oficio y la Corona en el Portugal de la Restauración (1640-1668)”, *Cuadernos de Historia Moderna*, 39 (2014), p. 140.

¹⁷ Jean-Frédéric Schaub, “Diogo Soares” in *Diccionario Biográfico Español*, Madrid, Real Academia de la Historia (<https://historia-hispanica.rah.es/biografias/41983-diogo-soares>).

¹⁸ Diogo Ramanda Curto, “A Restauração de 1640: nomes e pessoas”, *Península. Revista de Estudos Ibéricos*, 0, 2003, p. 325-326.

established to address financial matters: “acudiendo a sus obligaciones con todo cuydado, asistió en todas las juntas que se hizieron en su tiempo en presencia de los Virreyes y Gouernadores, y en otras particulares de grande confiança”¹⁹.

According to historians such as Fernando Bouza and Jean-Frédéric Schaub, the decisive factor in Soares’s political rise was his successful financial reform programme aimed at restoring the Portuguese Treasury in the Indies. Between 1624 and 1626, he was tasked with drafting the ordinances of the *Casa da Índia* and securing provisions and munitions for overseas troops. Shortly thereafter he carried out what, up to that point, was the most accomplished achievement of his career. In collaboration with Don Manuel de Moura, Marquis of Castelo Rodrigo, he managed to finance two fleets to relieve Portuguese strongholds in the West Indies in 1628 and in Pernambuco in 1630 in response to Anglo-Dutch attacks:

como por los del Consejo de la Corte, que la Real hazienda no tenía con que poder aprestar vna carauela, en tal forma asistió a esta comisión, que dentro de seis meses se aprestaron seis galeones con artillerías, municiones, bastimentos y gente [...] ²⁰.

Remarkably, he achieved this without introducing new taxes. Rather, his strategy relied on clearing arrears and updating the collection of existing economic contributions owed by the kingdom, enforcing stringent measures against smuggling with the Indies, and imposing severe penalties on *judeoconverso* bankers who speculated in trade²¹.

In this context, Diogo Soares was called to Madrid in 1631 as Secretary of State of the Council of Portugal. From the moment he arrived at court, he won the favour of the Count-Duke of Olivares, who regarded him as the ideal person to implement his fiscal policy in Portugal. Indeed, the position to which Soares was appointed was far from minor; following Schaub, the secretaryship of the Council of Portugal became the most politically significant office in the kingdom during the Portuguese Habsburg period, even more so than that of the viceroy²². Its primary function was to transmit the decisions of the *juntas* and of the royal

¹⁹ BNE, VE/59/14, f. 2r.

²⁰ Idem, f. 3r.

²¹ Fernando Bouza Álvarez, “1640 perante o Estatuto de Tomar. Memória e Juízo do Portugal dos Filipes”, *Penélope*, 9-10, 1993, p. 26; Jean-Frédéric Schaub, *Le Portugal au temps du comte-duc d’Olivares (1621-1640). Le conflit de juridictions comme exercice de la politique*, Madrid, Casa de Velázquez, 2001, p. 150-151.

²² Jean-Frédéric Schaub, *Le Portugal au temps du comte-duc...*, cit., p. 23.

favourite to Lisbon and to ensure their enforcement. Ultimately, its role was to serve as the essential link between the central court and the peripheral one.

Once in Madrid, and enjoying the full confidence of the Count-Duke, Soares's major project for reforming Portuguese administration was the creation of the *Junta da Fazenda* in Lisbon, a board designed to govern independently of both the viceroy and the Portuguese Council of Finance. Its objective was to reorganise the treasury and fiscal system of the Portuguese kingdom through measures such as the introduction of new taxes—including the much-hated salt tax—soldier levies, the promotion of venality of offices, a review of rents that had been unlawfully alienated into noble hands, and even an attempt to confiscate certain ecclesiastical goods²³. These measures essentially amounted to the implementation of Olivares's *Unión de Armas* in Portugal.

Oliveira describes this *junta* as a mechanism for governing without opposition and overcoming noble resistance, and accordingly it was composed of individuals outside the traditional councils who were trusted by Soares and the Count-Duke. Thus, the Count of Castelo Novo—"persona muy aficionada a Castilla y muy distante de las austeridades de Portugal"²⁴—was appointed its president, and Miguel de Vasconcelos, Soares's brother-in-law, was appointed its secretary. The functioning of the two secretaryships—Soares in Madrid and Vasconcelos in Lisbon—created a fundamental axis of communication between the two cities, enabling them to establish a network of influence unparalleled since the union of Portugal with the Spanish Monarchy in 1580²⁵. This represented a "Castilian-style" model of governance, based on a system of boards designed to operate beyond the reach of Portuguese institutions. This system rested on three pillars: first, the placement of members of Soares's and Vasconcelos's client networks in all institutions of the Crown of Portugal; second, the monopolisation of office sales in their hands; and third, an exhaustive investigation into rents alienated to the old nobility as a means of keeping that group under control²⁶. Unsurprisingly, the system soon aroused suspicion among the Portuguese nobility and the Council of Finance in Lisbon, who objected to the continued financing of Olivares's fiscal policy. As Valladares notes, "Madrid needed money, and Portugal refused to give it under the embarrassing

²³ Rafael Valladares, *La rebelión de Portugal. Guerra, conflictos y poderes en la monarquía hispánica*, Valladolid, Junta de Castilla y León, 1998, p. 22-24.

²⁴ Antonio de Oliveira, *Poder e oposição política em Portugal no período filipino (1580-1640)*, Lisboa, Difusao Editorial, 1990, p. 136.

²⁵ Jean-Frédéric Schaub, "La vice-royauté castillane au Portugal...", cit., 18.

²⁶ Jean-Frédéric Schaub, "Diogo Soares...", cit.

accusation that it was being squandered in Flanders or Italy instead of being devoted to the recovery of Brazil²⁷.

During the viceroyalty of Diogo de Castro (1633–1634), the first major clash took place between the *Junta*—which favoured increasing taxation in Portugal—and the viceroy, who opposed it. Diogo Soares, Miguel de Vasconcelos, and, of course, the Count-Duke of Olivares supported the former position, believing that the recovery of the territories lost in Brazil could only be achieved through the implementation of a fixed tax²⁸. For this reason, Castro was dismissed in 1634 and Margaret of Mantua, the king's first cousin, was appointed vicereine, with the aim of strengthening Madrid's authority over Portugal. It has been said that she was appointed precisely to be vicereine, but not to govern, remaining under the direction of Olivares, Soares, Vasconcelos, and their Castilian and Portuguese client networks²⁹. By the end of 1634, Soares's power over the government of Portugal was almost absolute.

This situation fuelled growing opposition among the Portuguese nobility to the governmental structure forged between Olivares and the Soares–Vasconcelos partnership. At the forefront of this opposition was Cid de Almeida, President of the Council of Portugal. Unable to exert sufficient influence over the vicereine to draw her out of their orbit, Soares's opponents orchestrated a political investigation against him between 1637 and 1638. One of the most severe accusations made by the conspirators was that he had promoted the venality of offices and governmental posts in Portugal, a practice widely rejected within the kingdom. In his defence, Soares denied responsibility for the sale of judicial offices, although he acknowledged supporting such practices and affirmed the monarch's right to sell magistracies in times of financial necessity:

No es de nuestro assumpto el defender lo que su Magestad licitamente puede en la venta de los oficios, que las acciones de su Magestad con ser suyas se justifican [...], y si el premiar seruicios de vn vassallo es causa justa para concederle licencia de vender oficio público, más justificada será la de vna necesidad pública, a que es preciso el Socorro por este medio³⁰.

In any case, he received unwavering protection from the Count-Duke, and his success in overcoming this political conspiracy further confirmed his privileged position at court by the end of 1639. So much so that Olivares declared that

²⁷ Rafael Valladares, *La rebelión de Portugal...*, cit., p. 26.

²⁸ Antonio de Oliveira, *Poder e oposição política em Portugal...*, cit., p. 144–145.

²⁹ Jean-Frédéric Schaub, *Le Portugal au temps du comte-duc...*, cit., p. 84–85.

³⁰ BNE VE/59/14, p. 10r.

those who had accused Soares were “todos los desleales, y que causaron el lebantamiento pasado [...]”³¹, a reference to the Évora uprising of 1637.

The political downfall of Diogo Soares occurred only a few months later, in December 1640, with the outbreak of the Portuguese Restoration. During the Lisbon uprising, his brother-in-law and closest collaborator, Miguel de Vasconcelos, was assassinated³²; Soares, who at the time was residing at the Madrid court, managed to avoid the same fate. Portuguese exiles in Madrid, together with Spaniards expelled from Lisbon by João IV and returned to Castile—led by Don Pedro de la Mota³³—unanimously blamed Soares and Vasconcelos for the independence of Portugal, accusing them of authoritarian and highly personalised governance that disregarded Portuguese institutions and traditions. As a result, a political investigation was launched against Soares, concluding in 1643, in which numerous witnesses attributed responsibility to the two secretaries and to the Count-Duke himself³⁴. The political downfall of Olivares that same year deprived Soares of his principal protector and led to his definitive marginalisation from the court. Stripped of power and influence, and exiled from his native Lisbon, Diogo Soares died in Madrid in 1649.

2. The Purchase of the Seignury of Punhete: A Strategy for Social Advancement

Having outlined the political career of Diogo Soares, we now turn to a lesser-known aspect of his life: the purchase of the seignury of Punhete in 1640 and the subsequent establishment of an entail in 1649. This topic has received little attention in the historiography, as most researchers have focused exclusively on his political career, overlooking the fact that, at the height of that career, Soares sought to style himself Lord of Vassals as a strategy of social advancement in early modern Portugal³⁵. Only António Hespanha said that

³¹ AHN, Estado, Book 699; cit. Antonio de Oliveira, *Poder e oposição política em Portugal...*, cit., p. 229-230.

³² Antonio de Oliveira, “O atentado contra Miguel de Vaconcelos em 1634”, *O Insituto*, 140-141 (1984), p. 7-41.

³³ This Castilian figure and his statements against Soares and against the Count-Duke are discussed in Rafael Valladares, *La rebelión de Portugal...*, cit., p. 46-49.

³⁴ Jean-Frédéric Schaub, “La visita de Diogo Soares: un procès politique en Castille au 17e siècle” in Johannes-Michael Scholz (dir.), *Fallstudien zur spanischen und portugiesischen Justiz 15. bis 20. Jahrhundert*, Frankfurt-am-Main, Vittorio Klostermann, 1994, p. 3-31.

³⁵ The dynamics of social reproduction or social advancement in Portugal during the early modern period have attracted considerable scholarly attention in recent years. Among many

“solo algunos validos de la corte –como, por ejemplo, el secretario de Felipe IV, Diogo Soares– intentan consolidar su (precaria) posición áulico-burocrática con (más estables) privilegios de naturaleza señorial”³⁶. After all, seigneuries constituted the social foundation upon which noble power rested in Portugal during the Ancien Régime³⁷. For this reason, as with so many other members of the royal bureaucracy of the Spanish Monarchy, Soares also aspired to join the ranks of the titled nobility by taking advantage of the Habsburg policy of selling seigneuries and fiefs³⁸.

others, see Nuno Gonçalo Monteiro, “Elites locais e mobilidade social em Portugal nos finais do Antigo Regime”, *Análise social*, 32, 141 (1996), p. 335-368; Mafalda Soares da Cunha, “Casas senhoriais, elites políticas coloniais, mobilidade social, dinâmicas sociais (séculos XV-XVII)” in José Jobson Arruda, Luís Adão da Fonseca (dir.), *Brasil-Portugal: História, agenda para o milénio*, Bauru; S. Paulo, Editora da Universidade do Sagrado Coração, 2001, p. 313-342; Antonio Manuel Hespanha, “Las estructuras del imaginario de la movilidad social en la sociedad del Antiguo Régimen” in Francisco Chacón Jiménez, Nuno Gonçalo Monteiro (dir.), *Poder y movilidad social: cortesanos, religiosos y oligarquías en la península Ibérica (siglos XV- XIX)*, Madrid, CSIC, 2006, p. 21-42; José Antonio Guillén Berrendero, *La edad de la nobleza: identidad nobiliaria en Castilla y Portugal (1556-1621)*, Madrid, Polifemo, 2012; José Damião Rodrigues, “Nobrezas, casa e reprodução social: a vinculação nos Açores (séculos XV-XVIII)” in David Bernabé Gil, María Carmen Irles Vicente, José Damião Rodrigues (ed.), *Actores e instrumentos del poder en las monarquías ibéricas*, Coimbra, Almedina, 2022, p. 299-345; Mafalda Soares da Cunha, “Las noblezas del reino de Portugal...”, cit.; Nuno Gonçalo Monteiro, “La reproducción social de la aristocracia portuguesa. Mutaciones decimonónicas” in Raul Molina Recio (dir.), *Élites en transición: Cambios y permanencias en las sociedades ibéricas entre la Edad Moderna y la Contemporánea (siglos XVIII-XIX)*, Madrid, Marcial Pons Historia, 2025, p. 25-40; Cristina Hernández Casado, “Trade, Credit, and Marriage: The Mobility of Portuguese Conversa Merchants and Financiers” in Anne J. Cruz and Alejandra Franganillo Álvarez (ed.), *Early Modern Women’s Mobility, Authority, and Agency Across the Spanish Empire*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2024, p. 121-138. Regarding the figure examined here, only Guillén Berrendero has focused specifically on Soares in the context of social mobility.

³⁶ António Manuel Hespanha, *Vísperas del Leviatán...*, cit., p. 310.

³⁷ Mafalda Soares da Cunha, *Casa de Bragança (1560-1640). Práticas senhoriais e redes clientelares*, Lisboa, Estampa, 2000; “Las noblezas del reino de Portugal...”, cit.

³⁸ For the sale of seigneuries and social ascent in early modern Castile, see Antonio Domínguez Ortiz, “Ventas y exenciones de lugares durante el reinado de Felipe IV”, *Anuario de historia del derecho español*, (1964), p. 163-207; Enrique Soria Mesa, *La venta de señoríos en el reino de Granada bajo los Austrias*, Granada, Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Granada, 1995; María Ángeles Faya Díaz, “La venta de señoríos eclesiásticos de Castilla y León en el siglo XVI”, *Hispania*, 58, 200 (1998), p. 1045-1096; Francisco Jabier Lorenzo Pinar and José Ignacio Izquierdo Misiego, “Ventas jurisdiccionales abulenses en tiempos de Felipe III y Felipe IV”, *Studia historica, Historia Moderna*, 23 (2001), p. 199-231; Alberto Marcos Martín, “Desde la hoja del monte hasta la piedra del río... La venta al Duque de Lerma de las once villas de Behetría de Castilla la Vieja”, *Publicaciones de la Institución Tello Téllez de Meneses*, 74 (2003), p. 49-113; Francisco Javier Illana López, *Señorío y vasallaje. La venta de jurisdicciones en el reino*

In January 1640, only a few months before the Portuguese Restoration and his consequent fall from grace, Soares petitioned the Crown to purchase the town of Punhete. This settlement belonged to the former Portuguese region of Estremadura, located in the centre-west of the kingdom on the middle course of the Tagus River³⁹. It was an ecclesiastical seignury under the military orders, and its jurisdiction lay with the Order of Christ, within the *ouvidoria*, or judicial district, of the city of Tomar. However, its jurisdictional dependence on the Order of Christ did not imply absolute control by the Order and its commanders. Punhete had held the title of *vila* since 1571, granted by a royal charter of King Sebastian I, which entitled its inhabitants to establish the municipal council and exercise all other functions of municipal government—something that would, of course, change with the sale of the seignury⁴⁰. It was, moreover, one of the domains of the Order in Portuguese Estremadura. Crucially, the Order of Christ was the institution in which Soares himself held the knightly habit—just as his father and maternal grandfather had done—an element that proved decisive in facilitating this purchase.

The process of sale is known in detail and follows the standard pattern of grants made in exchange for payment in other territories of the Spanish

de Jaén durante la Edad Moderna (1537-1804), Jaén, Universidad de Jaén, UJA Editorial, 2025; among others. On the same phenomenon in other territories of the Spanish Monarchy, such as the viceroyalties of Naples and Sicily, see Rosario Villari, “Note sulla rifeudalizzazione del Regno di Napoli allà vigilia della rivoluzione di Masaniello”, *Studi Storici*, 4 (1963), p. 637-662; Orazio Cancila, *Baroni e popolo nella Sicilia del grano*, Palermo, Palumbo, 1983, p. 149-164; Giuseppe Cirillo, *Spazi contesi. Camera della Sommaria, baronaggio, città e costruzione dell'apparato territoriale del Regno di Napoli (secc. XV-XVIII)*, Guerini e Associati, Milano, 2011, p. 279 and consecutive; Rossella Cancila, “Nobiltà nuove di Sicilia tra fedeltà, finanza e speculazione (secoli XVI-XVII)” in Carmen Sanz Ayán, Santiago Martínez Hernández, Marcella Aglietti and Daniele Edigati (dir.), *Identità nobiliare tra Monarchia Ispanica e Italia. Linaggi, potere e istituzioni (secoli XVI-XVIII)*, Roma, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2019; Paolo Militello, “Misterbianco nel Seicento: vendita e rifondazione di un paese siciliano”, *Storia Urbana*, 168 (2021), p. 5-30; Francisco Javier Illana López, “Monarquía, venalidad y feudalismo. La venta de jurisdicciones en el reino de Nápoles (siglos XVI-XVII)” in José María Imízcoz Beunza, Javier Esteban Ochoa de Eribe and Andoni Artola Renedo (ed.), *Los entramados políticos y sociales en la España moderna*, Madrid; Vitoria-Gasteiz, Fundación Española de Historia Moderna, 2023, p. 287-301.

³⁹ The present-day municipality of Constância is located in the district of Santarém. For its status in the early modern period, see Antonio Carvalho da Costa *Corografia portuguesa, e descripçam topografica do famoso reyno de Portugal*, Lisboa, Na Officina Real Deslandesiana, 1712, p. 182-183. See also the geographical mapping of Portuguese seignuries in Antonio Manuel Hespanha, *Vísperas del Leviatán...*, cit., p. 352-353.

⁴⁰ Pedro de Azevedo, *Cartas de vila, de mudança de nome e do título de notável das povoações da Estremadura*, Coimbra, Imprensa da Universidade de Coimbra, 1921; António Matias Coelho, *Carta Régia de Punhete. 1571*, Constância, Ayuntamiento de Constância, 2007.

Monarchy under the Habsburgs⁴¹. In January 1640, the secretary formally requested from the Crown the purchase of the jurisdiction of this Portuguese town. To that end, he turned to the *Chancelaria*, the tribunal responsible for awarding privileges and honours in Portugal. This mirrored practices in other viceregal territories of the Spanish Monarchy, where royal tribunals oversaw venality—for example, the Collateral Council in Naples or the Tribunal of the Royal Patrimony in Sicily⁴²—and contrasted with Castile, where responsibility for selling royal patrimony lay with the Council of Finance⁴³.

Soares presented himself before the *Chancelaria* as *alcaide mayor* of the town of Punhete, thereby justifying a pre-existing authority over it—an authority that would be further strengthened through the purchase of the seignury: “e Diogo Soares, do meu Consello e meu secretario de Estado, me representou que por ser alcaide mor da ditto villa de Punhete queria comprar a ditto jurisdicção [...]”⁴⁴. This argument was accompanied by the sum of 4,000 cruzados that Soares offered the Crown to meet the needs of its Royal Treasury. In theory, this money was intended to finance the reconquest of the Portuguese stronghold of Pernambuco, which had been taken by the Dutch some years earlier. In this way, precisely what his political opponents had accused him of was enacted: the use of venality to fund the recovery of Portuguese territories lost in the Atlantic empire. This was made explicit in the grant of the seignury issued by Philip IV:

E por quanto eu faço esta venda para se acudir a restauração de Pernambuco, se declarara na carta que por este aluara se ha de passar a elle Diogo Soares incorporandose nella o conhesimento em forma da entrega que fazer ao thezoureiro mor dos ditos quatro mil cruzados que elle Diogo Soares da pella dita villa, senhorio, jurisdicção [...]”⁴⁵.

This justification was by no means accidental. On the contrary, it echoed the rhetoric commonly used by the Crown to legitimise venality, in which the

⁴¹ The sale process is known from the grant issued by the Portuguese *Chancelaria* to Diogo Soares, preserved in ANTT, Chancelaria de Filipe III, book 1.33, p. 266-269; and from a later printed copy in BNP, RES. 4063 V.

⁴² Davide Maffi, “Tiempos de Calamidades. Las haciendas de Milán, Nápoles y Sicilia frente a la crisis (1630-1660)”, *Studia historica. Historia Moderna*, 41, 1 (2019), p. 29-63.

⁴³ Alberto Marcos Martín, “Dinámicas imperiales y prácticas de venalidad. Las ventas de jurisdicciones y vasallos en Castilla durante el siglo XVII”, *Magallánica. Revista de Historia Moderna*, 9, 17 (2022), p. 40-85.

⁴⁴ ANTT, Chancelaria de Filipe III, book. 1.33, p. 266v.

⁴⁵ Idem, p. 267v.

sovereign asserted that the revenue obtained from the sale of seigneuries and royal patrimony would be devoted to the preservation of the empire⁴⁶. Just as the sale of the town of Punhete to Diogo Soares was justified by the need for funds to recover Pernambuco, so too in Castile or Sicily it was claimed that the proceeds of selling seigneuries or fiefs would be used to defend the Iberian and Italian coasts against Ottoman piracy, or to finance war against heretics in the Holy Roman Empire or in the Netherlands⁴⁷.

Soares, who at that time was residing at the Madrid court, entrusted his brother-in-law Don Luis de Melo, Dean of Braga, with paying the 4,000 cruzados to the kingdom's *tesorero mayor*, Antonio da Silva. The deed of sale specified that no *media anata* tax would be levied—a paradox, given that one of the fiscal reforms Soares sought to introduce through the *Junta da Fazenda* was precisely the implementation of this tax in Portugal⁴⁸. On 3 February 1640, the money was deposited in the *Cancellaria* before the treasurer Manuel da Silva—brother of the *tesorero mayor*, who happened to be absent. One month later, the Crown issued the privilege granting jurisdiction, seignury, and vassalage over the town of Punhete to Diogo Soares, signed in Lisbon by the secretary Manuel Gomes on 8 March of that year.

It is worth asking what this privilege actually entailed, or which seignorial prerogatives Soares acquired over the town of Punhete: “toda a jurisdição, senhorio, correição, alçada, superioridade e data de todos os officios, de tabaliaes, denotas e escriuaes do publico judicial [...]”⁴⁹. In Portugal, the jurisdictional powers granted through donations of towns during this period were not identical but varied considerably according to the status of the beneficiary and the specific terms of the charter of donation. In some cases, the Crown could make “exuberant” donations, which entailed broader prerogatives and, consequently, less autonomy for the municipal councils. However, these extensive powers were reserved for members of the high nobility. By contrast, in cases such as the present one, the granting of more limited powers was the norm. These included the appointment of judges to administer justice at first instance, the direct appointment of certain officials (such as the seignorial governor and the notaries), and the “presentation” of offices. The latter consisted in the lord merely proposing all or some of the members of the municipal council, who

⁴⁶ Alberto Marcos Martín, “Retórica, política y economía...”, cit..

⁴⁷ Francisco Javier Illana López, “La venta de jurisdicciones en la Monarquía Hispánica...”, cit., p. 58-59.

⁴⁸ Rafael Valladares, *La rebelión de Portugal...*, cit., p. 23.

⁴⁹ ANTT, Chancelaria de Filipe III, book. 1.33, p. 270r.

then had to be ratified by the assembly rather than being appointed directly⁵⁰. Essentially, these were similar powers granted to individuals who purchased seigneuries in Castile, or to the *baroni* who acquired fiefs in Milan, Naples, or Sicily under the Habsburgs⁵¹. This reinforces our argument that the Crown applied to this secretary the same mechanisms being used by emerging elites throughout its European territories.

In the case of Diogo Soares, the lord first received first-instance jurisdiction over the town of Punhete. This meant that he and his successors were responsible for appointing the ordinary judges tasked with administering justice over their vassals, although their decisions could always be appealed before the royal tribunals. Second, the lord would participate in the composition of the municipal council—a privilege that, in seigneurial towns, allowed him to propose candidates for offices such as seigneurial governor, town clerk, accountant, and other municipal posts⁵². These magistrates could be renewed every three years or appointed in perpetuity, entirely at the lord's discretion:

E o Diogo Soares poder apresentar os ditos ofícios, ou em vida apresentados ou cada tres annos, como elle mais quizer, e os apresentados nos papeis e escripturas e autos em que asinarem se chamoraõ por elle, e fara as apresentações [...], sem maes ser neçesario tirarem cartas de confirmação minhas nem dos meus dezembargadores do Paço. E elle dito Diogo Soares e seus sucessores, lles daraõ os regimentos por onde haõ de servir os dittos officios conforme a os que se daõ na minha Chancellaria [...]⁵³.

Lastly, he also received the right to appoint the vicar of Punhete's main church, just as the commanders of the Order of Christ had previously done:

E por quanto na dita villa ha hũa Igreja matris, em que eu a prezento a vigairaria e ao apresentado paga ò commendador quarenta mil reis cada anno,

⁵⁰ Mafalda Soares da Cunha, "Relações de poder, patricínio e conflictualidade Senhorios e municípios (século XVI-1640)" in Mafalda Soares da Cunha, Teresa Fonseca (ed.), *Os Municípios no Portugal Moderno. Dos Forais Manuelinos às Reformas Liberais*, Évora, Publicações do CIDEHUS; Edições Colibri, 2005, <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.cidehus.1099>.

⁵¹ Rossella Cancila, "Merum et mixtum imperium nella Sicilia feudale", *Mediterranea – Ricerche storiche*, 14 (2008), p. 469-504.

⁵² Mafalda Soares da Cunha, "O provimento de officios menores nas terras senhoriais. A Casa de Bragança nos séculos XVI-XVII", in Roberta Stumpf, Nandini Chaturvedula (eds.), *Cargos e officios nas monarquias ibéricas: provimento, controlo e venalidade (séculos XVII e XVIII)*, Lisboa, Centro de Historia de Além-Mar; Universidade de Lisboa; Universidade dos Açores, 2012, p. 15-37.

⁵³ ANTT, Chancelaria de Filipe III, book. 1. 33, p. 270r.

hey outrosi por vem que por esta venda que lhe faço passe a apresentação da dita vigairaria a elle Diogo Soares, para que elle e seus successores atenhaõ e façaõ a dita apresentação para sempre na forma que haõ de tener na dita villa o senhorio e jurisdicção della, o que lhe concedo como gouernador e perpetuo administrador que sou das ordeñs melitares⁵⁴.

Taken together, these statements make clear that the jurisdictional prerogatives sold to Soares were greater to those previously held by the Order of Christ over this town. Thus, the sale represented more than just a change in the type of lordship: Punhete ceased to be an ecclesiastical seignury and became a noble one, and its administration shifted from the Order to become the personal patrimony of Soares and his successors. After all, Punhete had held had held the status of a *vila* since the late sixteenth century, which meant that the commanders of the Order of Christ did not interfere in the town's public life to the same extent as the lords would do in later years⁵⁵. This mirrors developments in numerous towns formerly belonging to the Orders of Santiago, Calatrava, or Alcántara sold in Castile under the Habsburgs⁵⁶.

Diogo Soares took possession of the seignury of the town of Punhete on 26 March 1640, a few weeks after the issue of the royal grant⁵⁷. This act of taking possession was standard practice in the concession of seigneuries and consisted of a ceremony laden with symbolism, described by García Hernán as a mechanism for displaying and perpetuating seignorial power⁵⁸. Soares, who resided at court, did not attend the ceremony; instead, he authorised the procurator Domingos Serrao, a resident of Punhete, to take possession

⁵⁴ Idem, p. 270v.

⁵⁵ Pedro de Azevedo, *Cartas de vila...*, cit.; António Matias Coelho, *Carta Régia de Punhete...*, cit..

⁵⁶ Alberto Marcos Martín, "Sobre desmembraciones, incorporaciones y ventas de señoríos eclesiásticos y de órdenes militares en Castilla durante el siglo XVI" in Salustiano de Dios de Dios, Javier Infante Miguel-Motta, Ricardo Robledo Hernández and Eugenia Torijano Pérez (ed.), *Historia de la propiedad: la expropiación*, Salamanca, Ediciones de la Universidad de Salamanca y Colegio de Registradores de Madrid, 2012, p. 51-82; Francisco Fernández Izquierdo, "Los pueblos de la Tierra de Zorita. De vasallos de Calatrava a los nuevos señoríos concedidos por la Corona" in José Antonio Guillén Berrendero, Juan Hernández Franco and Esther Alegre Carvajal (ed.), *Ruy Gómez de Silva, príncipe de Eboli. Su tiempo y su contexto*, Madrid, Iberoamericana Vervuert, 2018, p. 213-256.

⁵⁷ We know how the symbolic ceremony of taking possession unfolded thanks to the printed memorial preserved in BNP, RES. 4063 V, ff. 3-4.

⁵⁸ David García Hernán, "El gobierno municipal en las villas de señorío" in José Manuel de Bernardo Ares and Enrique Martínez Ruiz (ed.), *El municipio en la España moderna*, Córdoba, Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Córdoba, 1996, p. 197.

of the jurisdiction on his behalf. This too was common practice: new lords did not always travel to their jurisdictional towns to receive their seigneuries symbolically, but rather appointed local representatives to act in their name⁵⁹.

The ceremony followed the customary pattern for such events. First, doctor Antonio Mergulhaõ Borges, knight of the Order of Christ and *corregidor* of the city of Tomar—on which the town of Punhete was administratively dependent—summoned the members of the municipal council. They gathered together with the aforementioned Domingos Serraõ, representing the lord, Soares, to whom the *corregidor* formally delivered the jurisdiction of the town on the king's behalf: “*elle corregedor investio ao dito Domigo Serraõ da breu en nome do dito Diogo Soares na posse da dita villa e sua jurisdicção, sentandose na Camara e meyo della em búa cadeira com os sobreditos officiaes [...]*”⁶⁰. Next, the new lord dismissed all the members of the *conselho* from their posts, only to reappoint them immediately afterwards. This action carried significant symbolic weight: until that moment, the magistrates of the town had exercised their offices as delegates of the king, but henceforth they would do so as appointees of the lord. Lastly, the group proceeded solemnly to the main church, where the keys of the church were handed to the lord, Diogo Soares—represented by Domingos Serraõ—and he was likewise granted the authority to appoint the vicar:

E logo, no dito dia, mes e anno a sima escrito, 26 dias do mes de Março de 640 annos, nesta villa de Punhete, em a Igreja matris della, cuia invocação he de S. Iuliaõ, a donde foi o Doutor Antonio Mergulhaõ Borges, corregedor, e Domingos Serraõ de Abreu, procurador do dito Diogo Soares, secretario de Estado, e tomou posse em nome de seu constituinte do dito patroado, e reverendo vigairo, o padre Francisco Leaõ, para esse effeito entregou as chaves da dita Igreja, e logo o dito corregedor o investiò na dita posse, e elle abrio e fechou as portas, e se acentou na capella mor, no acento em que se costumaõ acentar os padroeyros⁶¹.

Thus, Diogo Soares—the powerful Secretary of State of the Council of Portugal and the right hand of the Count-Duke of Olivares in governing that kingdom—achieved the title of Lord of Punhete. In both Castile and Portugal during the early modern period, the purchase of jurisdiction over a town meant far more than the mere right to administer justice over its inhabitants; it was, ultimately, a stepping stone towards a noble title. And Soares found himself at

⁵⁹ Francisco Javier Illana López, *Señorio y vasallaje. La venta de jurisdicciones...*, cit., p. 107-108.

⁶⁰ BNP, RES. 4063 V, p. 4r.

⁶¹ Idem, p. 4v.

the ideal moment to secure one, having emerged victorious from the political proceedings plotted by his adversaries in 1639, which reaffirmed him as the favourite of the royal *valido*⁶². He would likely have attained the title of Count or Marquis of Punhete in short order, had it not been for the Portuguese Restoration of December 1640, which precipitated his political downfall. At the outset of the uprising, João IV stripped Soares of the seignury and of the other royal grants he had received in Portugal throughout his career: “o qual foi despojado ao tempo que se rompeo a guerra como pareasse por a certificação de Oiaão Pinheiro de Martos, escrivão do tomho dos bens confiscados a os auzentes em Castella”⁶³. We may therefore say that, just as his political career collapsed, his seignorial ambitions were simultaneously brought to an end.

3. The Entail as an Instrument of Perpetuation

In his will, executed in Madrid on 22 August 1649, Diogo Soares established an entailed estate with all his possessions⁶⁴. The Castilian *mayorazgo*, very similar to the Portuguese *morgado*, was a legal and social institution of the Ancien Régime whose purpose was to bind the family patrimony to a son (usually the eldest, although not invariably), ensuring that it could neither be alienated nor divided and thus guaranteeing the continuity of the estate within the lineage⁶⁵. It was, therefore, another identifying element of the nobility, although not exclusive to that group. Soares appointed his eldest son, Lucas Soares, as heir to the entail; should Lucas die, his second son, Antonio Soares de Melo, would inherit. Three days later, on 25 August of the same year, Soares issued a codicil naming his brother-in-law, Don Luis de Melo, Dean of Braga, and his

⁶² Jean-Frédéric Schaub, *Le Portugal au temps du comte-duc...*, cit., p. 64-65.

⁶³ BNP, RES. 4063 V, p. 9.

⁶⁴ The inventory and division of all the property of Diogo Soares is preserved in AHPM, Protocolo 6.026, pp. 890r-1103r; the economic valuation of his assets is preserved in AHPM, Protocolo 6.353, p. 337r. The dispositions relating to his *morgado* are again found in BNP, RES. 4063 V.

⁶⁵ On the *morgado* and entailed property in early modern Portugal, see Maria Lurdes Rosa, *O Morgadio em Portugal, sécs. XIV-XV. Modelos e práticas de comportamento linhagístico*, Lisboa, Editorial Estampa, 1995; Ana Rita Rocha, *Power: Entailment, status, and social mobility (14th-17th centuries)*, Coimbra, Imprensa da Universidade de Coimbra, 2024; as well as the wider historiographical production generated by the VINCULUM ERC project at the Universidade Nova de Lisboa, available at <https://www.vinculum.fcsh.unl.pt>. For understanding the nature of the *mayorazgo* in early modern Castile, see Bartolomé Clavero, *Mayorazgo. Propiedad feudal en Castilla, 1369- 1836*, Madrid, Siglo Veintiuno de España Editores, 1974; Isabel María Melero Muñoz, *El mayorazgo y las élites nobiliarias de la España Moderna. De los hombres y de las palabras*, Paris, Éditions Hispaniques, 2022.

wife, Doña Antonia de Melo, as guardians of his children and administrators of the entail until Lucas and Antonio reached the age of majority.

The first patrimonial asset that Soares bound to the entail was the town of Punhete, with all its jurisdiction, seignury, vassalage, rents, and offices, which would pass to his son Lucas after his death: “quero, e he minha vontade, que a Villa de Punhete, coma sua Alcaidariamor, e padroado, sique ao dito meu filho Lucas Soares, e a os que lhe succederem no dito morgado na conformidade que no dito meu testamento declaro”⁶⁶. This was entirely customary, for the seignury and the entail were the two principal identifying features of the Castilian and Portuguese nobility in the early modern period, and anyone who purchased a seignury almost invariably went on to establish an entail⁶⁷.

What is most striking, however, is that Soares bound the town of Punhete to his entail even though he had been dispossessed of the seignury nine years earlier, during the Portuguese Restoration. This indicates that he never accepted the expropriation and continued to style himself Lord of Punhete. Likewise, he did not recognise the loss of the other grants confiscated by the Portuguese Crown. Nor did he accept the separation of Portugal from the Spanish Monarchy, as is evident in his will, where he not only bequeathed this seigneurial patrimony to his children but also stated explicitly that he hoped Spanish dominion would be restored over the Portuguese kingdom:

E por quanto os maes dos beñs em qu fundo os meus morgados a mayor parte delles tenho no Reino de Portugal e muitos saõ da Coroa e ordeñs, [...] como de prezente estaõ as cousas neste reyno, em que me acho cõ as discençoès, e guerras, como reino de Portugal, na conformidade que he notorio, e naõ se sabe o tempo que duraram nem o fim que teram, declaro por micha ultima vontade, na melhor forma que em direito haja lugar, que minha tençaõ e vontade de nomear nos ditos beñs da Coroa, e ordens que tenho no dito reino de Portugal conforme as merces que delles tenho de S. Magestade aquelles successores dos ditos morgados, que fundò nos ditos meus filhos Lucas Soares e Antonio Soares, que se acharem viuos no tempo que ouverem de entrar de posse nos ditos meus beñs da Coroa, e ordeñs, para que no primeiro successor delles comesse esta successaõ e vidas conforme as faculdades e merces que S. Magestad me tem feito delles⁶⁸.

⁶⁶ BNP, RES. 4063 V, p. 8-9.

⁶⁷ Nuno Gonçalo Monteiro, “La reproducción social de la aristocracia portuguesa...”, cit.; Luis Salas Almela, “La nobleza castellana en la Edad Moderna (1556-1725)” in Antonio Álvarez-Ossorio Alvarino, Roberto Quirós Rosado y Cristina Bravo Lozano (eds.), *Las noblezas de la Monarquía de España (1556-1725)*, Madrid, Marcial Pons Historia, 2024, p. 48.

⁶⁸ BNP, RES. 4063 V, p. 7.

After his death, Soares's sons continued to claim the seignury of Punhete, as well as all the other grants their father had accumulated during decades of service to the Spanish Monarchy. Following the early death of the eldest son, Lucas, it was his brother Antonio Soares de Melo who inherited the entail. Although the entail held little patrimony in Portugal—since most of the rents derived from that kingdom had been confiscated—it did include numerous assets in Castile, among them countless *juros* distributed across towns and cities throughout the realm, as recorded in an appraisal and division of assets drawn up in Madrid in 1650 at the request of his widow⁶⁹.

Despite this, Antonio Soares de Melo spent the rest of his life petitioning for the restitution of the seignury of Punhete, yet the town was never again incorporated into his family's estate.

Conclusions

In this article, we present a case study of the sale of seigneuries in the kingdom of Portugal during the period of Portugal's aggregation to the Monarchy of Spain (1580–1640). Although the sale of privileges and honours as a means of obtaining extraordinary revenue for the Royal Treasury was not as widespread in the Portuguese kingdom as in other Habsburg territories, this practice was nonetheless present in Portugal, as recent decades of historiographical research have shown. For this reason, an increasing number of researchers are now examining these processes and identifying a growing cohort of individuals who acquired offices, habits of the military orders, or seigneuries in Portugal in order to attain a higher status within the estate-based society of the Ancien Régime. It is within this historiographical context that the present study should be understood.

Our research has centred on the sale of the town of Punhete to Secretary Diogo Soares, one of the most influential Portuguese figures at the court of Philip IV and described as the “right hand” of the Count-Duke of Olivares. To this end, we began with an analysis of his family background and personal trajectory, which revealed that, as heir to a dynasty of secretaries who had long served the Portuguese and Spanish crowns, he demonstrated his political capability first as Secretary of the Council of Finance in Lisbon and later as Secretary of State of the Council of Portugal in Madrid. His entry into the circle of Olivares and his rigorous enforcement of the *valido*'s fiscal policy in Portugal earned

⁶⁹ AHPM, Protocolo 6.353, pp. 337r-338r.

him the hostility of the Portuguese nobility, leading ultimately to his political downfall during the Restoration War in 1640.

Nevertheless, the focus of our study has not been his political career per se, but rather his aspirations for social advancement, which he pursued through venality. At the height of his power, in late 1639, Soares petitioned the Crown to purchase the town of Punhete with the intention of styling himself Lord of Vassals, a preliminary step towards obtaining a noble title. We may therefore argue that he had become so “Castilianised” that he sought to benefit from a practice widely established in Castile, though rare in Portugal: the purchase of seigneuries from the Crown. This makes the case an exceptional example of venality of royal patrimony in Portugal under the Habsburgs, and hence particularly suitable for the case-study approach adopted in this article.

The process by which the jurisdiction was sold follows the same pattern observed in other sales of seigneuries in seventeenth-century Castile, and even in sales of fiefs carried out in the viceroyalties of Naples and Sicily during the same period. First, the secretary submitted a request for purchase to the *Chancelaria*, the tribunal responsible for granting privileges and honours in the kingdom. Second, a price of 4,000 cruzados was agreed in exchange for the jurisdiction, a sum that the buyer paid to the Crown to finance its ongoing military campaigns—in this case, the recovery of the Portuguese stronghold of Pernambuco. Third, the Crown issued the privilege granting jurisdiction over the town. Fourth and finally, the seignury was bestowed upon the new lord, who, in the full ceremonial pomp of the feudal tradition, received both the civil and ecclesiastical powers over the town and proceeded to appoint the magistrates who would make up its municipal government. This is how Secretary Diogo Soares obtained the title of Lord of Punhete, acquiring through money the social status he had not received by birth. Yet, as noted, this seigneurial title was effective only for a matter of months, for the Restoration of Portugal in December 1640 precipitated his political downfall, along with the expropriation of this seignury and all the other rents and grants he had received from the Spanish Crown.

Finally, the other strategy of social advancement we observed in Diogo Soares was the establishment of an entail (*mayorazgo*) at the end of his life, in 1649, when already exiled in Madrid. Ultimately, the possession of a seignury and an entail were two fundamental elements required of anyone aspiring to enter the titled nobility. Soares tied to this entail all the privileges and grants he believed himself to possess, including the seignury of Punhete—even though it had been confiscated from him years earlier. This clearly demonstrates that the ageing secretary refused to resign himself to the loss of the seigneurial title

he had achieved through political service and, above all, through the money he had paid to the Crown. The entail passed successively to his sons Lucas and Antonio Soares de Melo, who continued throughout their lives to petition for the restitution of the seignery of Punhete, repeatedly invoking the considerable sum their father had paid to the Royal Treasury to purchase that jurisdiction.

In conclusion, although the seignery analysed in this article was short-lived due to the political misfortunes of its purchaser, we have demonstrated that the sale of jurisdictions was indeed practised in Portugal under the Habsburgs. The example of Punhete is not an isolated one, and only the examination of additional cases of seigneurial sales will allow a fuller understanding of the dynamics of venality of seigneuries in early modern Portugal.