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Inane Reginæ nomen: Cultural Ambivalence Experiences of New Foreign Consorts within the Court (1490–1520)

Marcos Vinícius Marinho Fernandes

Introduction

In 1507, Louis XII of France (1462–1515) welcomed Ferdinand II of Aragon (1452–1516) to Savona, Italy. The two kings had been at war for years, driven by territorial disputes in both Italy and the Pyrenees. However, their conflict had come to an end the previous year when they sealed an alliance through marriage. Ferdinand had wed Germaine de Foix (1488–1536), daughter of Marie d'Orléans (1457–1493) and therefore the King's niece.[1] As the three crowned heads made their solemn march from the port to the city, Germaine served as the embodiment of the bond between her husband and her uncle. When he saw that Germaine was about to ride alongside them, her uncle instructed the King of Aragon to proceed a few steps ahead of the Queen, remarking that "the custom in France is not that women hold the rank of their husbands."[2] This was just one of many instances in which royal consorts encountered challenging cultural expectations at foreign courts, expectations that often clashed, as what was customary and acceptable in one kingdom could be entirely inappropriate in another.

The dual—and at times ambiguous—identity of foreign queens was clearly reflected in their coat of arms, which combined the insignia of both their birth family and the dynasty they married into.[3] Influential authors in royal courts

[1] Pascal Gandoulphe, "Quelques réflexions sur Germaine de Foix (1488–1536), dernière reine d'Aragon, et sa fortune historiographique," *Cahiers d'ětudes romanes* 42 (2021): 189–209.

[2] "Allez devant, car la costume de France n'est pas que les femmes tiennent le rang de leurs maris," said Louis XII to Ferdinand of Aragon. Jean d'Auton, *Chroniques de Louis XII*, vol. 4, trans. R. de Maulde la Clavière (Paris: Renouard, 1895), 345.

[3] In theory, royal consorts were expected to "forget their origins" and fully embrace their new country, particularly in times of war, as illustrated by Fanny Cosandey, *La reine de France* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), 65–6. However, this was not the case—even in France—at the beginning of the sixteenth century, as it was recently shown by Maxim Hoffman, "The Secret Face of Empire: Espionage, Governance and the Habsburg Archives under Charles V, 1525–1550," PhD diss., (Ghent University, 2025).

such as Christine de Pizan (1364–1430) supported the idea of wives acting as peacekeepers between two families, exerting influence through soft power, counsel and mediation.[4] This delicate role became particularly challenging when princesses were expected to act as mediators in an unfamiliar environment, often in a language or cultural context that was different than their own. Their education and personal charisma could aid their integration, yet their status at court remained intrinsically tied to a foreign power. This status was often ambiguous, as its perception varied among courtiers, depending on their political and diplomatic allegiances.

The diplomatic agency of queens has been extensively studied within the broader field of queenship studies. The specific role of foreign consorts as agents of cultural transfer was the focus of the three-year HERA-funded project "Marrying Cultures," which examined princesses from Sweden, Poland, Denmark, and Portugal. This research led to two significant collective publications in 2016. The volume edited by Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly and Adam Morton highlighted the role of queen consorts as "agents, instruments, or catalysts of cultural transfer," with a particular focus on Northern and Eastern European monarchies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[5] Another book, edited by Joan-Lluís Palos and Magdalena Sanchez, explored the circulation of culture through dynastic marriages, concentrating on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[6] In this work, Bethany Aram analyses how cultural differences between Castilians and Flemings created tensions at the heart of the royal marriage between Joanna (1479–1555) and Philip of Castile (1478–1506). She concludes that Habsburg men adapted more easily to displacement when a clear dynastic precedent for such a mobility already existed. As this study aims to demonstrate, a similar pattern—albeit with due consideration for differences—can be observed in the case of female consorts from the Spanish and Austrian dynasties between the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.

A book edited by Anne J. Cruz and Maria Galli Stampino, highlighting the important role that continuous and accumulating adaptation to foreign courts played in the success of the Habsburg dynasty, drew particular attention to

[4] Belle S. Tuten, *Daily Life of Women in Medieval Europe* (Santa Barbara: Bloomsbury, 2022), 92.

[5] Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly and Adam Morton, ed., *Queens Consort, Cultural Transfer and European Politics, c.1500-1800* (London: Routledge, 2016), 246.

[6] Joan-Lluis Palos and Magdalena Sanchez, ed., *Early Modern Dynastic Marriages and Cultural Transfer* (Farnham/Burlington: Ashgate, 2016).

the Habsburg women's transnationality.[7] More recently, Clara Kalogérakis has studied the last Trastámara infantas within the international scene, drawing attention to the specificity of a generation of women who were all married to foreign kings, in a time when not yet all princesses did the same.[8] This period is very appropriate for cultural analytical comparisons, especially considering the ties being built permanently between the Habsburgs and the Trastámaras at that time.

Patrik Pastrnak's study on the bridal journey has highlighted the significant political expectations tied to the pre-wedding period.[9] This article will focus on the first months or years of marriage—a crucial time for a consort to adapt to a new court, establish her authority, and represent her birth dynasty, while also demonstrating loyalty to her new house. The period between the bride's arrival and the birth of her first child also appears to be when her parents were most concerned about her well-being abroad. On this topic, Núria Silleras-Fernández's study on Princess Maria Manuela of Portugal (1527–1545) has explored how, even when the families' closeness might have made it easier for a consort to adjust to her new court, she would still experience unfamiliarity as she would take time to understand the specific mechanisms of personal politics.[10] Multiple responsibilities would befall them very quickly upon their arrival, and almost all of them would require elements of collaboration with other members of the court (influencing politics), with their own husband (producing an heir), as well as personal charisma and luck. Silleras-Fernández also points out the carefully written instruction letters sent to the new consort during her first years of marriage, demonstrating the relevance of getting things right from the start: it was the moment of her "self-fashioning."

By examining the experiences of princesses from the same generation and upbringing across different courtly cultures—namely those of Portugal, Burgundy, and Denmark—this study will compare the cases of foreign consorts born into the Trastámara and Habsburg dynasties, which were in the process

[7] Anne J. Cruz and Maria Galli Stampino, ed., *Early Modern Habsburg Women: Transnational Contexts, Cultural Conflicts, Dynastic Continuities* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 5.

[8] Clara Kalogérakis, "Henry VII Tudor et les infantes d'Aragon-Castille: les multiples ressorts de la promesse d'alliance dynastique," *Cahiers de Recherches Médiévales et Humanistes* 2, no. 48 (2024): 93–126. Her thesis studies the Spanish infantas on the international scene between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

[9] Patrik Pastrnak, *Dynasty in Motion: Wedding Journeys in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2024).

[10] Núria Silleras-Fernández, "Inside Perspectives: Catalina and João III of Portugal and a Speculum for a Queen-to-be", in *Self-Fashioning and Assumptions of Identity in Medieval and Early Modern Iberia,* ed. Laura Delbrugge (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2015), 226–7.

of merging during this period. It aims to demonstrate how varying cultural, material, and sensory conditions shaped their experiences and, to some extent, influenced their differing, sometimes sharply contrasting, perceptions of marriage abroad. It will first examine the consorts' 'naturalisation' upon their arrival at a foreign court, considering how differently it was experienced depending on the degree of familiarity with local customs. It will consequently address the varied ways in which they enacted their role in influencing or representing their parents' politics, especially through their household within a foreign court. Finally, it will offer a comparison of some markedly contrasted impressions of marriage abroad.

The naturalisation of a Foreign Consort

A freshly arrived consort needed to signal very clearly her adoption of the customs and practices of her new kingdom. Neglecting to do so could raise suspicions about her true loyalties. The bride's vulnerability would be overcome by settling in well, which meant building networks and producing an heir, which would decrease the likelihood of repudiation. Although modern concepts of nationality or citizenship would be anachronistic for this period, the notion of naturality does appear in certain decisions taken by Portuguese and Spanish monarchs when they faced the prospect of merging kingdoms between 1497 and 1500. For instance, Portuguese subjects demanded that if their king were to become king of Castile and Aragon, Portuguese royal offices should only be granted to Portuguese men.[11] In 1504, the Castilian Council required the Queen's Flemish consort to swear that he would only admit Castilians to places in councils, high courts, lordships, and government.[12] Those dynastic accidents, resulting in non-Spanish courtiers in Spain, might have contributed to what Jean-Pierre Dedieu describes as a slow association of the Spanish State with the 'nation,' as well as the progressive definition of foreigners.[13]

[11] Luis Suárez Fernández and Antonio de la Torre, *Documentos referentes a las relaciones con Portugal durante el reinado de los Reyes Catolicos,* vol. III (Valladolid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1963), 22.

[12] Antonio Rodríguez Villa, *La reina Juana la Loca: estudio histórico* (Madrid: Librería de Murillo, 1892), 97.

[13] Jean-Pierre Dedieu, "Comment l'État forge la nation," in *Le sentiment national dans l'Europe méridionale aux XVI^e^ et XVII^e^ siècles,* ed. Alain Tallon (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2007), 51–74.

The princesses' familiarisation with her future court's customs began as early as her future marriage was somewhat settled. Children could be sent abroad at a young age to receive cultural training, although this was not an absolute rule.[14] Moreover, this could be done in vain, as children's engagements were frequently broken. For instance, three-year-old Archduchess Margaret of Austria (1480–1530) went to France as the bride of the future Charles VIII (1470–1498), but finally came back unmarried to her father's court ten years later. Later, during negotiations for the marriage of a French princess to one of his grandsons, Ferdinand of Aragon asked Louis XII to send his young daughter, Renée (1510–1574), to be raised in Spain.[15] Behind such a request lies an ambiguity regarding the status of the bride, whose hostage-like situation was intended to deter violent hostilities or to ensure compliance with a treaty. Sometimes this 'hostage' status was rather explicit, as in the case of Infanta Isabella of Spain (1470–1498) and Prince Afonso of Portugal (1475–1491) living together at a young age in Moura, Portugal.[16] In this particular case, the decision concerning her residence there was driven more by politics than by cultural factors. This was one of the rare cases that actually led to a marriage.

Queen Isabella of Castille (1451–1504) and King Ferdinand of Aragon signed three consecutive matrimonial capitulations with the kings of Portugal: two for their eldest Infanta Isabella, and one for their fourth child, Infanta Mary. These contracts contained a clause of naturalisation of the bride that seems to be unique to the Portuguese marriages. As stated in Mary's marriage contract from 1500, the Queen would be "held as natural of the Kingdom of Portugal (…) as well as the men and women [who accompany the bride] despite being foreigners, shall be held as if they were truly natural [of Portugal], and they will have the privileges and liberties of naturals and foreigners."[17] The naturalisation does not seem to be a lifetime acquisition, since Infanta Isabella's second marriage contract from 1497 stipulates that she would be held

[14] They could also grow up alongside foreign children from high-ranking noble families from Europe, specially within the Habsburg multicultural empire. See Samuel Mareel, "The Habsburg Children's Household at the Court of Cambrai in Mechelen (1480–1530)", in *Renaissance Children: Art and Education at the Habsburg Court (1480–1530)*, ed. Samuel Mareel (Tielt: Lanoo, 2021), 18.

[15] José Doussinague, *El testamento político de Fernando el Católico* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, [1950]), 206.

[16] After the War of Castilian Succession against Portugal (1475–1479), the Treaty of Alcáçovas determined that the Portuguese heir, Alfonso, would marry Isabella. She was to live in Portugal, as a guarantee that her parents would obey the terms of the agreement. A middle ground was reached as the infanta was put under the same care as her future husband, under the tutorship of Beatriz, Duchess of Viseu (1430–1506), a cousin of her mother's.

[17] Suárez Fernández and de la Torre, *Documentos* III, 40.

as a natural of the Kingdom "as soon as she is espoused" by the Portuguese King, even though she had already enjoyed such a right during her first marriage to the Portuguese Prince in 1490.[18] The 1497 contract even introduces the principle of a double naturality, stating that Isabella would enjoy both the privileges, honours and liberties normally granted to the Queens of Portugal, as well as eventual privileges and liberties conferred only to foreigners, but not to naturals.

This naturality clause is not found in the other capitulations signed by the Catholic monarchs. Although Prince John (1478–1497) and Infanta Joanna's marriage contracts to the Habsburgs includes a reference to the integration of both families' "kingdoms, houses, countries, and dominions," no specific mention is made of naturality.[19] Similarly, Infanta Catherine's (1485–1536) English matrimonial contract from 1497 contains no such reference.[20] Although this might be merely a formality required by Portuguese customs, it attests to varying legal frameworks for foreign consorts across realms.

The Castilian brides, arriving within the Portuguese monarchy, also benefited from geographical complementarity, multiple dynastic alliances, and linguistic proximity. Not long after her arrival in Portugal in September 1497 as the wife of King Manuel (1469–1521), Isabella wrote to her parents that she was doing everything she could to "follow the customs of this land even in the smallest matters," for the profit and honour of her house.[21] She expressed that she gladly presented herself as a Portuguese woman, doing so with genuine goodwill and without forcing herself too much. She illustrated this by mentioning that, when visiting the dowager queen, she followed the "law of the horses," providing mules for her Castilian ladies and horses for the Portuguese ones, thus accommodating both customs and her husband's requests.[22]

Isabella's second marriage was also short-lived, as she died giving birth to her first and only child, Miguel (1498–1500). While he lived, the little prince was the common heir of both Portuguese and Spanish crowns. Even after his death, the union between Portugal and Spain remained a strategic priority for

[18] For the first contract, see Luis Suárez Fernández and Antonio de la Torre, *Documentos referentes a las relaciones con Portugal durante el reinado de los Reyes Catolicos,* vol. II (Valladolid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1960), II, 374. For the second, see Suárez Fernández and de la Torre, *Documentos*, III, 6.

[19] Luis Suarez Fernandez, *Política Internacional de Isabel la Catolica*, vol. IV (Valladolid: Univ. de Valladolid, 1971), 292.

[20] Luis Suarez Fernandez, *Política internacional de Isabel la Catolica*, vol. V (Valladolid: Univ. de Valladolid, 1972), 128.

[21] Suárez Fernández and de la Torre, *Documentos*, III, 20.

[22] Suárez Fernández and de la Torre, *Documentos*, III, 21.

both kingdoms, particularly as they vied to expand their naval exploits in the Americas and Asia.[23] To reinforce their alliance in this competitive context, King Manuel married infanta Mary, the sister of his first wife, in 1500.

Manuel and Mary's marriage lasted seventeen years, and they had a prolific progeny of seven sons and two daughters. The diplomatic documentation from the first years of her marriage, before the birth of her son John in 1502, is more extensive compared to what survives from the rest of her life.[24] This confirms the parental concern over the bride's successful adaptation in her first years abroad. Eager for information, they relied not solely on accredited ambassadors but also turned to trusted men within their daughter's household.

In 1501, reports from Spanish men at the Portuguese court are lengthy, full of details, and appear to have been written with little delay from each other. Although these agents had access to the royal court, there were clear limitations, as they could not always delve into the content of Mary's conversations with her husband or in-laws. Ochoa de Isasaga (c. 1470–1555), Queen Mary's treasurer, rushed to dispatch a letter to the Catholic kings about the Christmas feasts of 1501 on Christmas Day itself.[25] This indicates that they favoured frequent letters reporting events spanning only a few days, or even single days, over longer intervals with more comprehensive accounts. The continuous flow of information enabled them to intervene rapidly if needed.

Isasaga reports how Mary sought to demonstrate her value to her husband's court. For her first Christmas in Lisbon, she displayed such an impressive collection of silver plates in her chambers that they were said to outshine the king's, which were described as "mid-grade."[26] It was also noted that the king's musicians played somewhat poorly, while the queen's were praised as very good. Like the Queen herself, her treasures from Spain contributed to and enriched the Portuguese monarchy. However, the underlying sense of subtle comparison and competition was clearly present, highlighting the ambivalence of integrating foreignness.

The new Queen, realising after supper that "the house was not prepared as it should be for such a feast," promptly ordered it to be arranged; by nightfall,

[23] William D. Phillips, "Isabel of Castile's Portuguese Connections and the Opening of the Atlantic," in *Queen Isabel I of Castile: Power, Patronage, Persona*, ed. Barbara F. Weissberger (New York: Tamesis, 2008), 25–8.

[24] Isabel dos Guimarães Sá, *Rainhas consortes de D. Manuel I* (Lisbon: Círculo de Leitores, 2012), 138.

[25] Suárez Fernández and de la Torre, *Documentos*, III, 77.

[26] Guimarães Sá, *Rainhas*, 129.

the cloths and canopy were hung, and the sideboard set up.[27] Mary is congratulated for the banquet held during Christmas Eve: "For the night it was, the ceremony was royal and seemed very well received by all."[28] She is also held in high esteem by the most prominent women at court, especially members of the royal family, who visit her chambers to spend time with her, gift her with sweets, and request her support in courtly and matrimonial affairs. Her virtues demonstrate her ability to fulfil the role of court hostess, with the Portuguese approval of her taste.

Isabella and Mary appear to have successfully integrated into Portuguese court life, embracing their roles and adapting to a culture that was not so different from theirs. Their sister Joanna faced more challenges at the Burgundian court, however, struggling to navigate the disadvantages and establish herself in a foreign, considerably less friendly, environment.

In the context of a continental alliance against France, the Catholic monarchs orchestrated a double marriage of their children with those of Maximilian of Austria, King of the Romans (1459–1519). In 1496, Infanta Joanna was married to Philip, the Austrian heir who ruled over the Burgundian lands. Simultaneously, Prince John was wed to Margaret, Archduchess of Austria. Bethany Aram has already highlighted the cultural contrast between the Burgundian and Castilian courts, which played a significant role in the conflicts between the archducal couple. The "ostentatious, pleasure-seeking" atmosphere of Philip's court clashed with the sober, devout lifestyle to which Joanna had been accustomed in the Spanish court.[29] In this case, it might be worth noting that Joanna's personal traits (stubbornness, tendency to become confrontational when contradicted, bluntness, and intransigence) further hindered her ability to integrate into a court where many courtiers were hostile to her parents' anti-French policies.

The Archduke's submissiveness towards his council, which included many individuals who were sympathetic to Louis XII, threatened the very foundation of their union. This caused significant embarrassment when the Spanish delegation arrived in Middelburg, only to be received by Doña María Manuel de la Cerda, daughter of the Lord of Belmonte de Campos (1468–1500). The

[27] Suárez Fernández and de la Torre, *Documentos*, III, 77.

[28] "segund la noche que hera, la çerimonia fue real y paresçio muy bien a todos". Suárez Fernández and de la Torre, *Documentos*, III, 77.

[29] Bethany Aram, *Juana the Mad: Sovereignty and Dynasty in Renaissance Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 35.

Archduke's entourage in all probability attempted to delay the consummation of the marriage, further complicating an already strained situation.[30]

In an unusual arrangement, Joanna and Margaret's double marriages were conducted without the traditional exchange of dowries.[31] Instead, both sides were supposed to give each woman an allowance of 20,000 ducats per year. However, this created complications, as Joanna became reliant on the House of Accounts of Lille, which often failed to provide her with her due allowance.[32] Her parents had to step in to help her financially, and they only learned about the undignified state of her household after an ambassador sent them a report. Between 1496 and 1497, as most Castilians left Joanna's household and were replaced by Burgundians loyal to her husband, it became "the focal point for competition between the Castilian and Burgundian customs."[33]

Before the Spaniards' exodus from the Archduchess's household, their modest, frugal, and sober eating and dressing habits were often criticised by the Burgundians. Upon her arrival in the Burgundian lands, Joanna is said to have been dressed "in the Spanish fashion," and the same is noticed about the Spaniards in her retinue.[34] Once the Archduke's council had successfully replaced or assimilated the Spanish staff, they were able to impose their own customs and etiquette. The strict rules of Burgundian court behaviour further reinforced their control over Joanna's actions. Philibert de Veyré (d. 1512), a councilor aligned with the pro-French faction, forbade the Spaniards at court from communicating in Spanish with Joanna.[35] One of the few ways a foreign princess could retain elements of her native culture abroad, and thereby uphold her home country's influence within her new court, was to surround herself with trusted members of her own nation. These ladies and men, when loyal to her and capable of participating in court intrigues under her direction, would be crucial to her power. However, Joanna found herself in a difficult position—unable to use her own money for bribes, negotiations, or even to arrange marriages for her ladies, her influence and agency within the court were severely reduced.

[30] Raymond Fagel, "Joanna of Castile's First Residence in the Low Countries (1496-1501)," in Dagmar H. Eichberger, *A Spectacle for a Spanish Princess: The Festive Entry of Joanna of Castile into Brussels* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2023), 41.

[31] Archivo General de Simancas, Patronato Real, leg. 56, doc. 2, 1, f. 12r–12v.

[32] Aram, *Juana*, 47.

[33] Aram, *Juana*, 41.

[34] Fagel, "Joanna of Castile's First Residence," 42–3.

[35] Fagel, "Joanna of Castile's First Residence," 47.

Unlike her sister Mary, Joanna does not seem to have benefited from a good relationship with the women of her husband's family. In a letter to ambassador Gutierre Gómez de Fuensalida (c. 1450–c. 1534), Isabella and Ferdinand refer to rumours about some people's plan to set Archduchess Margaret of Austria as well as the Dowager Duchess, Margaret of York (1446–1503), against their daughter. They recommend that their daughter try to be in a good relationship with her sister-in-law, but mainly to not address this problem to anyone in court, avoiding any unnecessary explicit display of conflict with her new family.[36] It appears that she had, at least, the sympathy of her father-in-law. When talking to ambassador Sancho de Londoño (dates unknown) during a visit to Flanders, Maximilian affirms that "God had been a very good matchmaker" in forming such a couple, seeing how well suited they were for each other.[37] No matter how well-intentioned Joanna's father-in-law may have been, he did not remain with the couple for long, as he was settled in Austrian lands and was therefore not a part of the Burgundian court.

The infantas' faculties of integration into their host countries' cultures related directly to their degree of foreignness. While Portugal did not present a very challenging cultural difference, the Burgundian court exhibited much stronger contrasts. Beyond the process of naturalisation, consorts were also expected to exert political influence within the court.

Cultural Influence over Foreign Politics and Household Control

Although the naturalisation of the consort was meant to represent her adherence and loyalty to her husband's throne, to a certain extent, it was expected that she would try to influence court politics in favour of her dynastic—or, sometimes, personal—interests. Her scope for intervention would depend on the financial and human resources at her disposal.

Isabella decisively shaped Portuguese politics in religious matters. By the end of the fifteenth century, Castile, Aragon, and Portugal, as Iberian Christian monarchies, shared a common history of reconquering lands once held by the Muslim kingdoms following the fall of the Caliphate of Córdoba. This process was still ongoing when Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragon decided to marry their daughter Isabella to the Portuguese heir. Both monarchies were deeply Christian, but up until the conquest of Granada, their

[36] Gutierre Gómez de Fuensalida, *Correspondencia*, ed. Duque de Berwick y Alba (Madrid: n. p., 1907), 114.

[37] Fuensalida, *Correspondencia*, 107.

kingdoms had also been home to significant Muslim and Jewish communities, creating a mixed religious environment that had endured for centuries.[38] However, the establishment of the Inquisition in Castile exposed how the close relationship between Jews and conversos led some to continue practising Judaism in secret. In 1492, to avoid this counter-influence, the Catholic monarchs decreed the expulsion of the non-converted Jews. The Muslim communities in Castile and Aragon, however, would not face the obligation of conversion or exile until 1502.

Many Spanish Jews found refuge in the neighbouring kingdom of Portugal, allowing them to remain on the Iberian Peninsula. Not only was King John II (1455–1495) not opposed to their presence, but he also sought to profit from it, receiving monetary contributions from them.

After the short-term marriage of Princess Isabella to Afonso, lasting only from November 1490 to July 1491, she returned to her parents' court as a widow. It seems that she had no intention of remarrying, preferring instead to follow a religious vocation. However, after the death of her brother John in September 1497, she became the heiress to the Catholic monarchs. Strongly attached to her parents' politics of religious homogeneity, and unwilling to remarry, the presence of Spanish Jews in Portugal would be a point of contention for Isabella.

In Portugal, King John died without a direct heir, leading to the succession of Manuel I in 1495. As the ninth child of a ducal branch that had suffered severe penalties under the previous king, Manuel was eager to marry as soon as possible. He had welcomed Princess Isabella when she first arrived in Portugal in 1490 and insisted on marrying her, despite her parents' offer of one of their younger daughters. The marriage contract was signed in November 1496, making Isabella a queen immediately.

Although her first stay as an adult in Portugal lasted less than a year, Isabella was observant enough to recognise the presence of non-Christian populations there. Although her marriage contract had already been signed, the terms of her journey were still being negotiated. In this context, Isabella demanded—apparently by her own initiative—that she would not enter Portugal before her new husband had expelled "all the heretics from his kingdoms and lordships."[39] Isabella also believed that the sudden death of Afonso was a divine punishment for the tolerance of heretics in his kingdom, which she thought greatly offended God, and she feared the same fate could befall them again. For

[38] Joseph Pérez, *Isabelle et Ferdinand: Rois Catholiques d'Espagne* ([Paris]: Fayard, 1988), 356–64.

[39] Suárez Fernández and de la Torre, *Documentos*, III, 13. Original: Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, gaveta 17, maço 7, № 3.

this reason, she declared that she would rather face death than enter a kingdom with heretics. The condition was accepted. Ironically, the Catholic monarchs welcomed, for some time, the Moors expelled from Portugal into Castile.[40]

The cultural consequences of these policies were far-reaching. They altered a long-standing cohabitation of the three religions and introduced a unitary confessional policy that would later be verified through the inquisitorial tribunals. It is important to note that the Portuguese Inquisition was only instituted in 1536, during the reign of John III (1502–1557).[41] Before that, although he yielded to his bride's demand, King Manuel assured the newly-converts that they would not be prosecuted for crimes related to faith, which allowed for a degree of practical tolerance.

Although Isabella's adaptation to a foreign court might be presumed to have been easier on account of her mother's Portuguese lineage and her multiple residencies in Portugal, she nonetheless encountered significant challenges. Although the Portuguese court eventually became bilingual after a continuous succession of Castilian queens during the sixteenth century, this was not yet the case when Isabella arrived. Her predecessors, Leonor and Isabel of Coimbra (1432–1455), were both Portuguese.[42] In a letter to her parents, she acknowledged that it was expected of her to speak and intervene at court, but admitted she did not yet feel fully capable of doing so—not only because of the language barrier, but also because she barely knew, during her first marriage, many of the people she was expected to engage with. She recognised that she still had much to learn, as "things here are very different from things there, and I would make mistakes if I spoke too soon."[43] Her observations and prudent adaptation to Portuguese courtly culture enabled her to integrate and lay the foundations for a long-lasting union.

During her brief reign, Isabella earned a high level of recognition from her second husband. As it was customary for Portuguese queens at that point, she was responsible for administering the lands associated with the queen's dower, from which she would derive revenue and exercise some jurisdiction as

[40] Suárez Fernández and de la Torre, *Documentos*, III, 9. Original: Archivo General de Simancas, Patronato Real, número 2873, legajo 28-3.

[41] Ana Isabel Buescu, *Dom João III* (Lisbon: Círculo de Leitores, 2005), 303–10.

[42] One could argue that Joanna of Trastámara (1462–1530) was technically King Afonso V's (1432–1481) wife from 1475 to 1480, but she was not a typical royal consort living in court. Concerning the bilingualism of the Portuguese court, see Silleras-Fernández, "Inside Perspectives," 231.

[43] Suárez Fernández and de la Torre, *Documentos*, III, 21.

landlady.[44] The queen's patrimony endowed her with a stable source of income, and might be increased with new donations throughout her life.[45] They were also entrusted with royal rights locally, even if they did not seem to have exerted these powers. It is important to note that, despite royal charters giving the queens power to nominate magistrates and ecclesiastics, it appears that they did not always appoint men of their own household, but mostly from the king's or prince's household, which indicates that the queen worked rather as an extension of the royal court in accordance with her husband's. It could work both ways, as it appears that Isabella took on additional responsibilities from her husband, as indicated by an autograph letter to her parents from November 1497.[46] This was only one month after Isabella met her husband, and she says that the King entrusted her with certain affairs, possibly of state. This seems to reflect her conscious effort to adapt to the Portuguese court.

The experiences of the eldest daughters informed, and sometimes improved, how the youngest were treated. After all the problems faced by Joanna due to her lack of funds, the Catholic monarchs did not take the same risk in the early years of Mary's marriage, covering the costs of their newly-wed daughter's subsistence. Normally, she would derive her income from a specific set of lands, but some of those lands were still in the possession of Leonor of Viseu, Queen Dowager of Portugal (1458–1525). The Catholic monarchs' payment of their daughter's expenses also demonstrated their wealth and autonomy to their son-in-law, discouraging him from displeasing the monarchs politically or interfering in their wives' households against their will. It seems that Mary maintained strong control over her household, since some wives at court asked her to grant their husbands more free time.

Other evidence of Mary's financial independence, and therefore her capacity to exert influence, also comes from Isasaga, whose official position was her treasurer. The analysis by Olaia and Rodrigues of Isasaga's account books reveals that, despite the funds coming from unpredictable sources, Mary received the money she was entitled to and spent it wisely, with almost half

[44] Ana Maria S. A. Rodrigues and Manuela Santos Silva, "Private Properties, Seigniorial Tributes, and Jurisdictional Rents: the Income of the Queens of Portugal in the Late Middle Ages", in *Women and Wealth in Late Medieval Europe*, ed. Theresa Earenfight (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 211.

[45] Rodrigues and Silva, "Private Properties", 213.

[46] "El rey my señor me ha mandado entender en çyertos negoçyos". Suárez Fernández and de la Torre, *Documentos*, III, 20. Original document: Archivo General de Simancas, Patronato Real, número 4168, legajo 50, № 31.

allocated to salaries for members of her household.[47] She had positive year-end balances and established a *de facto* double-income household with funds coming from Portugal and Castile.

A notable aspect of a queenly household is its focus on religion and serving as a model of exemplary behaviour. Isasaga reports how exemplary Mary was in her spiritual practices, regularly going to confession, receiving communion, and attending Vespers. This contrasts with her sister Joanna, who is said to have refused multiple confessors upon the feast of the Assumption of 1498.[48] In January, she is reprimanded by Friar Tomas de Matienzo for having "a hard and callous heart without any piety;"[49] nevertheless, despite the fact that Joanna had no control over her household, he commended her for ensuring that it maintained as much religious discipline as a convent of strict observance. Daughters of a queen, who was said to be very rigorous in terms of religion, their piety reflects a primary aspect of their consort lives that was expected to transcend cultural differences. It was expected to be uniform, but ultimately varied to some extent based on their individual personalities.

Joanna's personality, combined with a politically disadvantageous situation in Burgundy, prevented her from exerting much influence. Lacking control over her household and any effective means to sway the council, she struggled to fulfil the expectations her parents had set for her. She was unable to prevent Philip from arranging the marriage of their son to Claude de France (1499–1524). As late as June 1501, five years after the marriage, Fuensalida was still negotiating with councilor François de Busleyden (1455–1502) for Joanna to gain control of her household and her estate, underlining that such authority was not automatically granted to her, but rather had to be bargained for in exchange for other concessions.[50] In Joanna's words, Busleyden was the one who effectively "governed the ship." There is no indication that their relationship was openly antagonistic, as she records his numerous promises to her. However, she came to regard him with increasing distrust, characterizing him as a man who aligned himself with whichever party offered the greatest sum—a game in which she was unable to compete successfully.

A successful career as a consort could extend into the years of widowhood, such as Leonor of Viseu, who continued to participate actively in politics

[47] Inês Olaia and Ana Maria S. A. Rodrigues, "Reginal Income and Expenditure: The Household Accounts of Maria of Castile and Aragon, Queen of Portugal, in 1501–1508," *Journal of Medieval History* 50, no. 5 (2024): 646–668.

[48] Suarez Fernandez, *Política*, V, 289.

[49] Suarez Fernandez, *Política*, V, 352.

[50] Fagel, "Joanna of Castile's First Residence," 50.

alongside her brother, King Manuel. We have already seen how Margaret of York was reputed to create difficulties for Joanna. Margaret of Austria, despite only two brief marriages, stands as a prime example of a widow who accomplished much for her dynasty.[51] She took responsibility for raising her brother's Burgundian children and effectively governed the Low Countries. She maintained extensive correspondence with the sovereigns of her time, and her diplomatic efforts played a significant role in securing Charles V's election as emperor. Isabella and Mary did not survive their spouses; Joanna did, but her widowhood was spent in retreat from political life.

Another degree of liberty appears to have been afforded to widowed queens, as in the case of Joanna following the death of her husband Philip in March 1507. King Ferdinand remarks that he does not yet know whether she wishes to remarry and, should she decide to do so, he believes she would be inclined toward another suitor, and that no one other than himself would be able to persuade her otherwise.[52] While such a statement may not necessarily reflect the truth, the argument was at least regarded at the time as a legitimate basis for declining a marriage proposal. This exchange did not take place directly between sovereigns but was instead mediated by Catherine, Princess of Wales, to whom we may assume Ferdinand would speak rather honestly as a father.[53] It is also noteworthy that, for once, Joanna may have had another suitor in mind for a second marriage, given that she has long been portrayed as an unmovable widow, profoundly devoted to the memory of her husband.

Married Life with a Foreign Prince

The distinctive advantage of an ideal royal marriage is the personal bond the consort is meant to cultivate with her husband, a connection that can become a powerful source of political influence. Isasaga notes how Mary was notably successful in securing private time with her husband, whether retiring together after midnight Mass, dining alone in her bedchamber after festivities, or spending afternoons in each other's company with only musicians

[51] Dagmar Eichberger, ed., *Women of Distinction: Margaret of York and Margaret of Austria* (Leuven: Davidsfonds, 2005). For another example, within Portugal, during the queenship of Joanna's youngest daughter Catherine, see Annemarie Jordan Gschwend, "Eine vergessene Infantin: Katharina von Osterreich, Königin von Portugal (1507–1578)," in *Frauen: Kunst und Macht*, ed. Sabine Haag, Dagmar Eichberger and Annemarie Jordan Gschwend (Vienna: KHM-Museumsverband, 2018), 51–63.

[52] Rodríguez Villa, *La reina Juana,* 473.

[53] Kalogérakis, "Henry VII Tudor et les infantes d'Aragon-Castille," 121.

present—gestures that underscored both intimacy and her growing influence within the marriage.

The happiness of her marriage is publicised by her husband's theatrical display of affection. At an evening feast, King Manuel disguised himself for a spectacle.[54] In an Ethiopian garden of the sacred tree, full of ladies dressed *à la française*, an empty seat was intended for the King. Manuel thought it would be improper, however, to sit amongst the ladies without the Queen by his side. This gesture signified an important mark of respect within their marriage, especially considering that the Queen was already present in the room.

The theme of the evening centred on the Queen granting her ladies the opportunity to meet their suitors more often, with the love between her and her husband having served as a model of affection at court. An envoy of Cupid presented the Queen with Leso, a giant, to aid her husband in his war against his enemies, asking only in return that she allow her ladies to meet their suitors. Even when demons made an appearance, bound by the King's men, to deliver a note stating that, in Hell, they were aware that her arrival in Portugal signalled their expulsion and destruction. This presents an approving commentary on the religious unification policies introduced through the Portuguese-Spanish marriages. The sequence continued with a sorceress who delivered a poem, foretelling that the Queen and her husband would reign over unknown realms, undiscovered lands, far beyond the Orient; islands and treasures awaiting their discovery, and Moors to be brought under their control.

Such enthusiasm with the conquests and victories represented by the Spaniards, and a desire to participate, was also expressed by Maximilian. When congratulating Philip and Joanna on their marriage, he is proud that his son married the daughter of the vanquishers of the Moors, and proposes that his armies and himself should join theirs in their future expeditions.[55]

In the early years of her marriage, while living as Archduchess and despite lacking control over her household, Joanna appears to have maintained a good relationship with her husband and even attempted to confide in him. Her efforts to persuade him were not thwarted by her husband's own opposition, which he never demonstrated, but by the fact that he was himself readily swayed by Busleyden. She believed that she enjoyed his 'goodwill' when they were alone, as she was convinced that he loved her.[56] The couple's happiness was weakened by Philip's infidelities, which Joanna refused to tolerate. As their marriage progressed, there are numerous references to her forceful

[54] Suárez Fernández and de la Torre, *Documentos*, III, 80.

[55] Fuensalida, *Correspondencia*, 107.

[56] Fuensalida, *Correspondencia*, 139.

confrontations with women at court who had—or whom she suspected of having—affairs with her husband.[57] This would be used against her politically during the succession crisis after the death of Isabella of Castille. A forged letter from Joanna to Philibert de Veyré explains her apparently erratic behaviour by her jealous feelings for her husband.[58] The doubtful conditions of production of this letter, however, also attest to a certain degree of control over the Queen's communications with her family within a foreign court. Joanna's father, King Ferdinand, was aware of this when he wrote to his ambassador in France, Jaime de Albión (dates unknown), that "he did not consent to the privation of liberty of the Queen, nor in depriving her of what belongs to her as heiress and proprietary of these realms."[59]

Philip and Joanna's marriage marked the introduction of the Habsburgs into Spain, which had far-reaching consequences for the future of the Iberian monarchies. Over the ten years of their union, they had six children, solidifying the political and dynastic alliance. However, the couple's personal relationship was marked by significant turmoil. Joanna's life became particularly constrained, and she became a prisoner within her own marriage. Many years later, Joanna's daughter Isabella (Queen of Denmark, 1501–1526) left behind a very exceptional testimony regarding her views on marriage, offering unique insight into the personal dynamics within the family.

Isabella was the third child of Philip and Joanna. She was born in Brussels in 1501 and grew up at the court of the Netherlands, raised by her aunt Margaret of Austria alongside her older sister Eleanor, Infanta of Castille and Archduchess of Austria (1498–1558) and the future Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V (1500–1558). In 1515, she married Christian II of Denmark (1481–1559), King of Denmark, Sweden, and Norway.[60]

Isabella's journey to Copenhagen for her marriage was disastrous, and upon her arrival at court, she found that there was already a mistress of the house. As of 1507, Christian had been in a long-standing relationship with a Dutch mistress, Dyveke Willoms (1490–1517), whose mother, Sigbrit Willoms (unknown–1532), held significant influence as the main royal councillor. Isabella had no children before Dyveke's death in 1517, which speaks volumes about the state of the relationship between the couple and how insecure her position was at court. News of this situation caused scandal in both the

[57] Jean-Marie Cauchies, *Philippe le Beau: le dernier duc de Bourgogne* (Turnout: Brepols, 2003), 232.

[58] Archivo General de Simancas, Libros generales de la Cámara, núm. 11, f. 17v.

[59] Rodríguez Villa, *La reina Juana,* 439.

[60] Manuel Lobos Cabrera, *Isabela de Austria: una reina sin ventura* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2019), 55.

Austrian and Spanish courts, prompting Maximilian, Margaret, and Charles to correspond about this "shameful and inconvenient way of life."[61]

In 1516, both Charles and his aunt Margaret sent an ambassador to the court of Copenhagen, demanding that Christian immediately end his extramarital affair. The Scandinavian sovereign did not take kindly to this interference and expressed his anger by expelling several members of the Queen's household who were known to support her, as well as the last of her Flemish ladies.

Unlike her mother, there is no information suggesting that Isabella confronted her husband about the affair. However, there is a particularly revealing transcription of a letter that she is believed to have sent to her older sister, Eleanor, who was involved in a secret matrimonial project with Frederick, Count Palatine of the Rhine (1482–1556).[62] While we cannot be entirely certain about the authenticity of the letter or its contents—since it was quoted in the biography written by Leodius about his master—it is worth noting that Frederick eventually married Dorotea of Denmark (1520-1580), Isabella's daughter. This, combined with the fact that Frederick was the very person involved in the secret project with Eleanor, lends some credibility to the letter's context. At least concerning the personal experience of the Queen of Denmark, there is no reason to doubt that it accurately reflects the reality she faced at court.

In the letter, believed to have been written between 1516 and 1517, Queen Isabella expresses that she had been informed of Eleanor's love for the Palatine. Rather than reproaching her for it, Isabella praised, approved, and congratulated her sister on the matter. She then laid out "the hardships that those married to great kings are forced to endure, namely, from the very start, under an ill-fated omen, to marry a man they have never seen, do not love, and whose character they do not know; to follow him someday to the ends of the earth, never to see her homeland or parents again. Empty is the title of Queen [*Inane Reginæ nomen*], which, if you examined deeply, you would flee from, abhor, and grow pale at."[63]

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[61] Cabrera, *Isabela de Austria*, 61.

[62] Marcos Marinho Fernandes, "Mésalliance d'amour. Le projet secret de Frédéric du Palatinat et Éléonore de Habsbourg (1515–1517)," *Cahiers de recherches médiévales et humanistes – Journal of Medieval and Humanistic Studies* 48, no. 2 (2024): 132–3.

[63] "Hunc ad fines terræ aliquando sequi, nunquam patriam, nunquam parentes reuisuræ. Inane Reginæ nomen, quod si penitus introspiceret, fugeret, abominaretur, et expallesceret, non secus, quam si nudis pedibus anguem compressisset", in Hubert Thomas Leodius, *Annales Palatini libris XIV. Continentes Vitam et Resgestas Serenissimi, et celsissimi principis ac domini Dn. Friderici II. Comitis Palatini Rheni, Ducis Bavariae, S. R. J. Archidapiferi et Principis Electoris Augustae memoriae* (Frankfurt: Casparem Waechtlervm, 1665), 54.

Testifying about her own experience, Isabella stated that "Queens are kept under guard at kings' courts, rarely going out, rarely appearing in public, lest frequent exposure to people diminish royal majesty; through frequent appearances, they might lose their allure."[64] On the contrary, the Kings enjoy their liberty: "Meanwhile, kings often stage hunts, journeys through their realms, and similar diversions, while pursuing their pleasures and indulging their whims."[65] There is no direct reference to his mistress, but it was generally known within the Habsburg courts. Their mother Joanna, who was also deeply unsatisfied with her husband's infidelities, might have been on her mind when writing that.[66]

She clearly stated that a natural love, such as the one between Eleanor and Frederick, could hardly flourish when marrying a foreign king. Reflecting on the elements that brought the loving couple together, she mentions that she already "knew him, his family, his homeland, and shared two common languages, French and Low German."[67] Isabella highlighted this obstacle to foreign marriages, noting "she would not be understood by him, nor he by her."[68] For Isabella, an obvious question arose: "How could love be formed when spouses must speak through an interpreter?"[69] This bold and comprehensive manifesto against foreign dynastic marriages directly challenges the rightfulness of the institution, contending that such unions rendered conjugal affection improbable and left the queen's position almost entirely devoid of political agency. While it is evident that her perspective does not reflect the experiences of all queens of the period, it is nonetheless significant that such a critique could be articulated and discussed among royal sisters.

The idea of marrying for love among royal women was not new. In 1515, Mary Tudor (1496–1533), widow of Louis XII of France, defied Henri VIII's (1491–1547) political strategy by marrying Charles Brandon, Duke

[64] "Apud Reges Reginas teneri custodia, raro egredi, raro prodire foras, ne quid de Maiestate Regia creber hominum aspectus detrahat, assiduitate vilescant", Leodius, *Annales Palatini*", 54.

[65] "Singere Reges saepe venationes, per regnum profectiones et huiusmodi pleraque dum voluptates suas sectantur et genio indulgent", Leodius, *Annales Palatini*, 54.

[66] Cauchies, *Dernier duc*, 232.

[67] "amaret Fridericum, nosset illum, parentes, patriam, commercium linguae Gallicae et Germanicae inferiores haberet", in Leodius, *Annales Palatini*, 54.

[68] "cum ipsa adducta marito ab eo non intelligeretur neque ille ab ipsa", in Leodius, *Annales Palatini*, 54.

[69] "Quomodo conciliari posset amor, vbi per interpretem coniuges loqui conuenit", in Leodius, *Annales Palatini*, 54.

of Suffolk (1484–1545).[70] This might very well have served as inspiration for Eleanor to follow suit, and it is clear that her sister Isabella supported her decision. It is no coincidence that in 1516, Erasmus of Rotterdam wrote to Charles, Isabella's brother, in a princely *Instruction*, that he disapproved of foreign diplomatic marriages, arguing that a prince would make a far better ruler if he married someone who shared his culture and language.[71] He also noted that many princesses had suffered in these marriages, with little political benefit to show for it. This point is repeated by humanist Juan Luis Vives (1493–1540) on *De institutione feminae christianae* (1523), for whom the main goal of marriage was indissoluble companionship.[72]

This perspective stands in marked contrast to the view expressed by Queen Mary around the same year Isabella would write her sorrowful letter. At the end of her life, Mary declared in her testament that her daughters were not to marry within their own kingdom, but rather to foreign kings or sons of kings.[73] In her judgment, marrying in their homeland would be the source of profound distress, and if they wished to stay, they were not to marry at all but instead be placed in a convent, even against their will. Drawing on her own positive experience of marrying a foreign king, as well as the unhappy years her sister-in-law endured despite marrying within her native kingdom, she reached a conclusion directly opposed to that of her niece Isabella.

Conclusion

The experience of being a foreign consort was profoundly shaped by three interrelated factors: the weight of cultural difference, the extent of financial independence, and the couple's relationship. Fluency in the country's languages, not merely linguistic, but also political, was crucial for the consort to move the pawns in her favour. The more profound the cultural difference, the more difficult the adjustment became. This could be either enhanced or undermined, depending on the extent of the resources the consort was able to access,

[70] Erin Sadlack, *The French Queen Letters: Mary Tudor Brandon and the Politics of Marriage in Sixteenth-Century Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

[71] Paula Sutter Fichtner, "Dynastic Marriage in Sixteenth-Century Habsburg Diplomacy and Statecraft: An Interdisciplinary Approach," *The American Historical Review* 81, no. 2 (April 1979).

[72] Silleras-Fernández, "Inside Perspectives," 231.

[73] *Gavetas da Torre do Tombo: edição digital,* vol. 6, (Lisbon: Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos, 1967), 108–117. Original: Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, Gav. 16, maço 2, № 1.

control, or strategically invest. The personal relationship between husband and wife, the ultimate asset of a matrimonial alliance, was in reality a delicate and precarious dynamic, capable of yielding both remarkable influence or devastating consequences, as Joanna herself experienced and as her sister Catherine would soon discover in 1533, with hers and Henry VIII's matrimonial crisis.

All the consorts analysed here married into foreign houses. Despite royal intermarriage motivated by diplomatic reasons being the dominant model of the time, there are multiple examples of marriages that did not adhere fully or even partially to this principle. For those whose experiences proved politically successful and personally fulfilling, we see the desire to reinforce a model of foreign princely marriage. For those who either experienced firsthand a problematic life as a foreign consort, or were exposed to accounts of such experiences through others, a critical view of dynastic marriage began to emerge—albeit one that would stand little chance against the dominant practice of marrying exclusively within royal houses for diplomatic purposes in the centuries that followed. In both cases, their cultural, material, and sensory experiences in foreign courts seem to have played a role in shaping their ideas about marriage and monarchy.

Abstract

Cross-cultural encounters were a hallmark of princely weddings in royal courts. The new royal consort was expected to uphold her family's interests while simultaneously aligning herself with her husband's policies. Despite their prominent diplomatic roles, princesses often faced significant challenges in asserting their authority within the intricate web of court politics, personal dynamics, and cultural differences. Through a comparative analysis of royal consorts newly introduced to the Portuguese, Burgundian, and Danish courts, this study aims to illuminate their multifaceted experiences, examining the delicate balance between duty, ambition, and identity. Their personal journeys not only shaped diplomatic relations but also influenced their perceptions of the matrimonial institution and its broader significance.

Keywords: royal consort; courtly culture; dynasty; marriage

Marcos Vinícius Marinho Fernandes
Marcos Vinícius Marinho Fernandes is a fifth year Ph.D. candidate in Modern History at the TELEMMe laboratory of the University of Aix-Marseille, where he also teaches as a graduate assistant in the Department of History. The subject of his research is the

matrimonial politics of the Aviz, Trastamára, Valois, and Habsburg dynasties between 1490 and 1521 as an element of diplomatic stabilisation. He has conducted thorough documentary research in different national archives and libraries in Rome, Paris, Lisbon, Madrid, Simancas, Brussels, Vienna, Toledo, Leiden, and The Hague. He has participated in multiple scientific events in Europe and America and has published papers on both continents as well.

Aix Marseille Univ, CNRS, TELEMME
Aix-en-Provence, France
marcos.marinho-fernandes@univ-amu.fr