

Writing in the urban world

A escrita no mundo urban



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Abstract: After presenting and describing the cities, we analyze a number of aspects related to the writing that was produced by an urban center. We focus on the writing produced by the urban bodies and powers, and not on its use by the inhabitants of the city. We also focus on the materials involved in the writing, the agents of the act of writing, and above all, the written documents themselves. We investigate the documents in greater depth, pointing out some isolated documents, written on parchment or paper, and their typological diversity. In particular, we emphasize the strategies used by the urban authorities that rely on more elaborate processes of writing, such as the composition of books and property records, true mini-archives; the management of lists and inventories, in which a serial writing is formed, that enabled them to control people and goods; their concern with filing the documents, as a basis for memory, legitimation and exercise of power; and the articulation with orality, in a society where most of the population were illiterate, to promulgate their orders and see them carried out; as well as the requirement to circulate documents, notices and messages with other superior authorities, or parallel authorities. The aim of this study is to give well-based evidence for the use of writing as a means, a product, and an end of the exercise of governance, and as a testimony of the demarcation of urban powers.

Keywords: the city and the act of writing; the city and the written documents; writing and urban power.

Resumo: Após uma apresentação caracterizadora das cidades, analisamos neste estudo vários aspectos que se relacionam com a escrita de um centro urbano. Fixamo-nos, porém, na escrita ao serviço dos órgãos e poderes urbanos e não na sua utilização pelos moradores da cidade. Atenta-se, então, nos materiais envolvidos na escrita, nos agentes do acto de escrever e, sobretudo, nos documentos escritos. Detemo-nos nestes com maior profundidade, dando a conhecer os documentos isolados, em pergaminho ou papel, e a sua diversidade tipológica. Mas enfatizamos, em particular, as estratégias das autoridades urbanas que recorrem a processos mais elaborados de escrita, como a composição de livros e tomos, verdadeiros míni-arquivos; o manejo de róis e arrolamentos, em que se plasma uma escrita serial, que lhes permitia controlar homens e bens; a sua preocupação com a arquivagem dos documentos, fundamentos da sua memória, legitimação e exercício do poder; a articulação com a oralidade, numa sociedade maioritariamente de gente iletrada, para dar a conhecer e ver executadas as suas ordens; bem com a exigência de circulação de documentos, notícias e mensagens com outros poderes superiores ou paralelos. Com este estudo pretende-se

evidenciar, de forma fundamentada, o uso da escrita como um meio, um produto e um fim do exercício da governança e como um testemunho da demarcação dos poderes urbanos.

Palavras-chave: a cidade e o acto de escrever; a cidade e os documentos escritos; escrita e poder urbano.

In the density and polymorphism of the networks of medieval settlements, the city becomes a center of concentration and a centripetal force. It can be distinguished in the landscape usually by the castle and walls that protect it or by some other dominant building, be it a Monastery or a Church, around which an urban settlement has developed. It is known for its population concentration, its more organic or linear urban layout, and its monumental and prestigious architecture. It offers multiple activities, from crafts and trade to monetary and credit operations. It exerts an attraction and dominion over the periurban and rural areas around it, channeling the agricultural production from these surroundings to the domestic and external markets, providing security and various services to its inhabitants, but also dominating them and burdening them with taxes and services. In the religious sphere, it is distinguished by the large number of parishes, by the mother churches, some of them even cathedral or collegiate churches, and by the monasteries of various orders, namely the mendicant ones, from the thirteenth century on. For all of the above reasons, the city attracts merchants, travellers and pilgrims, but also the poor, vagabonds and criminals. The urban center offers its residents, or passing travellers, social or welfare institutions, including shelters, hospitals, leper hospitals, mercy houses or fraternities. In addition to all this, the city becomes a center of powers and services. Within the city, central power, in the form of delegated officials of the royal power, acting in various regional districts, intersects the local authority of the urban elite and elected officials. These powers unfold into a number of spheres of action and services, including legal, administrative, tax, and military ones.¹

This intertwined economic and social network that is an urban center, especially the powers that flow through it, required writing and writings.

In fact, knowing that the majority of the urban population were illiterate, although the literate proportion of the population was increasing among the elite classes at the end of the Middle Ages (COELHO, 2004, p. 328-333; COELHO, 2005, p. 49-74), we easily understand that writing must be connected, in an intrinsic way, to the power or powers of governance and control.

It is in this dual role of writing, both as a power and a service to the powers, that we develop the text that follows. We focus, nevertheless, on a specific time period – the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries – during which the explosion of writing and the agents thereof was already occurring at a significant rate.

The written message overcomes the linearity and volatility of oral communication and discourse, enabling the establishment of an elaborate and rational text that is likely to last a long time and become part of the memory, as Jacques Le Goff (1984, p. 24-33) points out. The mastering of writing is, in itself, an instrument of power. That is why writing, and the agents of writing, are linked to the highest powers of the religious or secular spheres. The growing accessibility of writing, over the centuries, did not untie it from this original characteristic, although the spectrum of powers that claimed and controlled it was extended, in line with the increasing number of those who mastered the skills, the knowledge and the art of writing. Even so, writing remained, for a long time, a technique mastered by only a small number of experts, at the service of various elites, always few in number, as it is intrinsic to the very definition of any segment of elites.

Due to the need to circumscribe the theme of this study, we shall reflect only on writing at the service the ruling elites in urban centers, and on the writings that defined their various powers. We will not address, as was our original intention, the use of writing by the citizens through the agents of writing, or the production of deeds that originated from this. Such deeds give us a broad notion of the individual multifunctionality of writings and the permeability of men to the value of writing in the most public events of their lives, relationships and work, or their most private personal or family moments. Those will be the subjects of another text that we propose to write on another occasion.

As a major premise, already enunciated, we shall restrict our report to the centuries in which there was a significant explosion of written documentation. This corresponds to a larger number of documents, which was already increasing in the urban world of the 12th and 13th centuries, but which grew exponentially in the 14th and 15th centuries. Simultaneously, the types of documents also diversified, along with the powers from which they emanated.² But, in particular, in the words of Attilio Langeli (2004, p. 93-102), there was a “documentary revolution” in which an “elementary” support of these documents became a “complex” one. There is an evolution from letters, isolated documents, to documents in the form of books, with serial records. This evolution took place alongside a process of political reorganization.

During the construction of the political unity of the kingdoms, it was not only imperative to broaden the territory, but to reinforce the royal power, in terms of coordination and subordination of the fiefdoms, the extension of legal sovereign power, and the reinforcement of central and peripheral government bodies, seeking to strengthen financial resources and use law as a unitary and regulating principle of collective relationships. The increasing value attributed to writing, and the expansion of written documents, sought to fully rationalize and control political, patrimonial, legal and tax relations, among others. The records of the royal chancelleries emerged almost simultaneously in France, with Felipe Augusto (1180-1223), and in Portugal, with D. Afonso II.³

Local government also made use of these kinds of documentary records and books, which allowed it to easily manage a large volume of accumulated information in a relatively confined space, building true mini-archives, and at the same time, allowing for the full rationalization of government practices and for the management and control of individual and collective situations. We shall return to our topic.

1. But before we come to the documents, we ask the question: who wrote them and how were they written?

In reality, the municipalities, which had been legally legitimized since the eleventh century, through charter letters, were an administrative institution that had a chancellery,⁴ which produced their documents.⁵

1.1 At the beginning of their political life, particularly in the 11th and 12th centuries, the councils inevitably had to ask for the help from the ecclesiastics, members of the regular or secular clergy who held both the knowledge of and monopoly over writing.⁶ In fact, as we well know, the chancellery of the county itself, and later on the royal chancellery, recruited these religious experts and scholars to write and validate public acts for a long period of time (COSTA, 1975). It was only after mid-13th century, with the definitive institution of notaries,⁷ that the councils were able to use these agents, who wrote the documents, and certified them by affixing their seal.

But while the councils, in the beginning, did not have specific writing officials, they did have their own seals that validated their authority. More than twenty municipal seals from the thirteenth century have survived up to this day, but many more were undoubtedly lost by the vicissitudes of time and the action of men. We know several documents that refer to the affixing of the council seals, and in others we still find traces of where they were hung, and sometimes, just the holes that were made to hang them.

And in these seals, by word and iconography, meanings and signifiers, the identifying values and collective memories of each municipality were recorded. The words of the caption were almost invariably: *Sigillum concilii de [...]*. The images were rich and varied, depicting the military might of the city, with drawings of castles, city walls, arms or horsemen; or their strategic geographical position, depicted in boats and bridges; or their economic, agricultural or trading wealth, as suggested by trees, vineyards, water and ships. In other cases, symbolic animals such as eagles and pelicans, or the figure of women, carried messages of aggression and power, hospitality and good fortune, fertility and fecundity. Others recorded the legend of the patron saint that testified to the sacred protection of the area of land within the boundaries of the council and the faith and devotion that its residents dedicated to their holy protector.⁸

A specialist in writing, specifically linked to the council, therefore a scribe of the council, would have emerged associated to the treasurer, meaning that this position was required by the financial bureaucracy. The scribe, then, would assist this official and record the municipal revenues, expenses, loans and debts.

After the “*regimento dos corregedores*” – rules for the chief magistrates of judicial districts –, in 1340, a clerk of the chamber was also instituted, in most cases differentiated from the scribe of the council, gradually demarcating the separation between legal and administrative writing.⁹

And with the explosion of writing in the urban world of the 14th and 15th centuries, writing professionals would become increasingly segmented, with the emergence in the municipalities of scribes of the *almotaçaria* (inspection of weights and measures) (ACTAS, 2004, p. 38-40), the scribes of the orphans (DOCUMENTOS, 1980, p. 215, 380, 392, 419), scribes of the city hospitals¹⁰ or the scribes of lodgement,¹¹ in a huge demonstration of writing specialization and a complete body of chancellery officials who accompanied the various officials and functionalities of the municipal government.

We see, through the municipal decrees of the city of Porto, that as specific situations emerged in the life of the city, men are chosen to execute those decrees, as well as scribes to assist them, whenever necessary. Thus, we find references to a scribe of the city wall, who certainly would have the responsibility of registering the accounts of that construction site. Curiously, we know that at a certain point in time, maybe at the end of his life, he was poor and blind – his profession is believed to have influenced his disability – therefore the council gave him a small amount of money (DOCUMENTOS, 1980, p. 50). There was also a scribe assigned to the Matosinhos bridge, assistant to the master of the works, to record the revenues and expenses of the project (DOCUMENTOS, 1980, p. 237). Notice that this man was a butcher, which brings us to the skill of some tradesmen in terms of commercial accounting, which would have been very useful in their professions. We also read of a scribe of the inspector and treasurer responsible for the project of Rua Nova (DOCUMENTOS, 1985, p. 64), which was being opened in the city of Porto,¹² and of a scribe of the stock exchange, created by merchants of Porto to pay the costs of a letter of royal privilege that a citizen had brought from England.¹³ It is also noted that there was a scribe of the *taracenas* (harbour warehouses) who was most certainly responsible for the registration of tax duties collected by the municipality from the ships coming in (DOCUMENTOS, [s/d], p. 65).

But we should also bear in mind that, especially in the larger trading centers of local power, alongside the local officials, whether continuously or sporadically, there were delegated officers of the Crown, who acted mostly in the peripheries, many of them even having their own scribes. Thus, we find in Porto, among other cities, the “*escrivão dos resíduos*” - registrar of the remnants of last wills - (DOCUMENTOS, 1985, p. 62), the scribe of accounts (DOCUMENTOS, 1985, p. 273,

289, 356, 371, 422), the “*escrivão da correição*” – assisting the judicial chief magistrate in his inspections - (DOCUMENTOS, [s/d], p. 242; DOCUMENTOS, 1985, p. 135), the scribe of Ceuta (DOCUMENTOS, 1985, p. 59 and 62) and the scribe of customs (DOCUMENTOS, 1980, p. 54, 58, 61, 324, 350, 362, 374, 375, 400, 402, 474; DOCUMENTOS, 1985, p. 39). It is often difficult to tell whether these scribes were municipal or royal officials, since the appointments to certain offices were hotly contested between the royal and local authorities. For example, we know that Heitor de Teives managed to obtain a royal letter appointing him as scribe of orphans, Jews and *sisas* (sales taxes). This letter was honored by the city, but with one proviso: that upon the death of the office holder, his duties would revert back to the city (DOCUMENTOS, 1980, p. 392).

The same specialization and permeability of urban writing is clear in the Algarvian center of Loulé where, along with the scribes of the council and clerks of the chamber, there emerged scribes of the *almotacé* (inspector of weights and measures) (ACTAS, 2004, p. 38-40), scribes of the orphans (ACTAS, 2004, p. 88 and 97), scribes of the fraternities (ACTAS, 2004, p. 189), scribes of the *sisas* (sales taxes) (ACTAS, 1999-2000, p. 225-227), scribes for income assessment of the local residents¹⁴ and, notably, a scribe for the construction works of the church of S. Clemente (ACTAS, 1999-2000, p. 153 and 158).

The 14th century also saw the emergence, in the municipalities, of the position of chancellor, who safeguarded and applied the seal of the councils. The position already existed in Porto in 1324, and remained throughout the 14th and 15th centuries, as the records of proceedings show. (COELHO, 2009, p. 170-171).

1.2 Documents issued by the councils required, for their production, not only agents but also writing materials such as parchment, paper, ink, pens, and any supporting furniture for the act of writing.¹⁵

The books of revenues and expenses of the councils often show the amounts spent on these materials, adding references of greater interest.

We know, for example, that Montemor-o-Novo, in the year 1422-1423, purchased three quires (a quire is about 25 sheets) of paper for books and letters, for 56 *reais*, one parchment skin for binding two books, for 7 *reais*, one wooden inkwell, for 80 *reais*, three pints of writing ink, for 30 *reais*, wax for seals, for 60 *reais*, and two desks, costing 210 and 68 *reais*.¹⁶

The dynamic trading city of Porto **spent**, in the year 1450-1451, on one ream of paper for three books, 180 *reais*, and¹⁷ some parchment skins for covering the books, 24 *reais*.¹⁸ It also purchased another three quires of paper for 90 *reais*,¹⁹ and another six parchment skins for binding and one for writing permits, for a total of 50 *reais*.²⁰

The expenditure on writing materials, in the year 1461-1462, was even greater, consisting of 101 *reais* to buy six quires of paper for books, two parchment skins to cover them, and also for their production.²¹ For the registration of emphyteutic properties, three parchment skins were acquired for 27 *reais*²² and 140 *reais* more were spent on 11 quires of paper,²³ with unit prices of 11, 12 and 15.5 *reais*. It is also known that a *canada* of writing ink was purchased, for 40 *reais*.²⁴

In the year 1474-1475, a ream of paper, which was to be used for writing the town council books, agreements and income and expenses, as well as to specifically be used by the officials, cost the council 300 *reais*,²⁵ and three parchment skins for binding the books further increased the costs by 36 *reais*.²⁶ Other six quires of paper for writing were also acquired in that council year, amounting to 85 *reais*.²⁷ And, in the following council years, the acquisition of writing materials remained a constant.²⁸

Thus, the world of writing, and of the written texts, was revealed in the municipalities.

Paper was bought to write council books, revenue and expense books, agreements, and various letters. Parchment skin was acquired to give them strong covers, so that the relatively perishable material, i.e. paper, would not be damaged. But skins were also bought to write registers of emphyteutic properties, whose information was meant to be long-lasting, as proof of assets and income. And as this was a costly material, parchment previously written on was even erased, so that it could be reused.²⁹

Inkwells were purchased, and at the same time, obviously, the ink, which in the urban world was bought ready-made. And to facilitate the act of writing, desks were purchased, an asset so coveted that they were sometimes even stolen.³⁰

2. The council scribes and notaries, called by the chamber officials, laboriously wrote ad-hoc documents of all kinds – powers of attorney, inquiries, confirmations, notes, libels, appeals, prisoner reports, permits, and copies of sentences – but also books.

In the complex municipal writing of the 14th and 15th centuries, not only were isolated acts written, to facilitate the administrative, financial or judicial functions of the council, but also records, serial documents, and books that constitute true mini-archives.³¹ The governors shaped the various powers through these written acts, which gave form to their government orders and control over citizens.³² Recorded memory becomes imperative for a government that has to manage multiple functionalities, impose internal order, articulate various social bodies, regulate conflicting economic interests, resolve conflicts, or suppress violence.

At the beginning of each council year, as we see in Porto, paper was purchased to write the registration book of the minutes of the chamber, the revenues and expenditure of the year, and the local agreements, as the cost of parchment for this everyday, serial, voluminous writing was

unaffordable. However, they wrote in books, not on loose sheets of paper, the longevity of which was reinforced by binding, to ensure the possibility of using them as the basis and proof of good governance, allowing for the possibility of appealing to them as a source and memory on governance duties.

The council books also contain series of information that reflect a new way of governing based on lists. From the beginning, names, patronymics, and sometimes even nicknames and professions of magistrates, officers and councilors who were present at the sessions were written down, thus making known the ruling elite. It is known that in the municipalities, at least since 1391, with the introduction of the “*lei dos pelouros*”, regulating municipal elections, there are lists of the urban patriciate that were considered to be capable of performing the main municipal offices of judges, councilors, attorneys or chancellors. The names of the twenty-four annual inspectors of weights and measures (almotacés),³³ as well as urban militia members, are also recorded.³⁴ The restricted, closed, aristocratic group of the governance *optimates* was encoded in writing, and was very inflexible to openings or social permeability, causing frequent internal rivalries.³⁵

In addition, this elite of the landowners, merchants and gentry, who never wanted to open up to artisans, far less to farmers, in order to be able to levy taxes on the price of food and products, controlled the other social bodies by listing them.

Thus, they did not hesitate to call to the council butchers (DOCUMENTOS, 1985, p. 126-129) and shoemakers (DOCUMENTOS, 1980, p. 13-15, 28-29), to fix the price of meat or various types of footwear, and list their names. In the same way, female bakers had to be recognized by the municipal authorities as honorable women of good repute, and their names were recorded (DOCUMENTOS, 1980, p. 192-193).³⁶ Other lists of producers were also recorded, such as the wine producers (DOCUMENTOS, 1980, p. 192-193). From that time on, their names began to be recorded, one after the other, and with these written lists of professionals, it became possible for the town council to quickly check whether orders were being fulfilled, or who the transgressors were. Power was transformed into an effective command, executed and liable to penalties if not complied with, and it became easier to find out and fine the transgressors. These inventories, this vertical writing, as Anna Airò terms it, which was opposed to the radial writing of the books, and which reveals the true “genome of place” (AIRÒ, 2008, p. 33 and 36), became a means of fiscal, military, administrative and political control, dominated by all the powers, from the royal to the ecclesiastical, from the manorial to the municipal.

However, if the governors, beyond the writing of a current administration, needed a more lasting memory to ensure the rights and duties, they resorted to other mechanisms and did not hesitate to spend more money. They bought, then, parchment to write, for example, a record of emphyteutic contracts that guaranteed, in the present and for the future, the registration of the

council's properties and of the income generated from their exploitation (ARQUIVO, [s/d]b, fls. 69 and 242v). But, regardless of the supporting material, new property records are elaborated or older ones are copied, establishing a permanent memory of the council's assets and of its privileges and freedoms, so that these books became true written mini-archives of the council documentation.

So, for their preservation, and to make them easier to handle, these writings are kept in chests, which were the main items of furniture of several medieval institutions, from the *Estudo Geral* (the university) to the municipalities.

In the chest of the council of Montemor-o-Novo in 1443, for example, there was a book of assets, a book of property taxes, a book of fines, 14 books of revenues and expenses and 13 council books, 2 books of attorneys which contained together council decisions and income and expenses, two sealed letters with resolutions of the Cortes, 67 sealed documents with wax and lead seals in a cloth bag, a royal permit, a charter, and 46 hospital books (FONSECA, 1998, p. 109-112).

In the town of Elvas, in the year 1432-1433, the attorney of the previous year handed over to his successor a large chest with two locks, and a small chest, also with two locks and a key, which contained; the *pelouros* (small wax balls used in the election) and as such, the list of eligible councilors (ARQUIVO, [s/d]a, fls. 3-5v).³⁷ Then followed a detailed list of the documentation – certainly stored in the large chest – which essentially consisted of royal letters received, although their provenance is not always specified. These letters would be summarized in a way that enabled them to be identified, making them readily available, and demonstrating their usefulness in the municipal governance, serving as proof and memory of privileges, exemptions, sentences, regulations, rules and provisions. A no less important aspect of these letters is that they testified the maturity of the municipal chancellery in the 14th century, as an issuing and receiving body, and as an archive in its own right, safeguarding the documents, which were carefully stored in cloth bags, accessible for consultation and identifiable through abstracting and archiving systems.

Altogether, there are about 78 texts, one designated as a testament, most of them letters, some agreements, and few relating to privileges. It is detailed that some are in Latin, which would be proof of their antiquity, and one of them is described as “old”. Some royal letters are indicated as validated with their seals, whether the royal seal of red wax, or the lead seal, affixed in a book of chapters and privileges of D. Afonso.

The summaries of the documentation essentially report the subject matter, although in rare cases, they may also allude to the author – King, Infante, lord or council.

As for the kings, D. Afonso is the only one mentioned, but without chronology, we cannot individualize. The royal letters deal with multiple issues – some are privileges, some general and others more specific, of an economic, military or fiscal nature; a few relate to the activities of official delegates of royal power in the peripheries, curtailing abuses and specifying regulations;

letters involving *corregedores*, justice ministers, *alcaldes* (military governors), *juízes dos resíduos* (judges dealing with last will matters), *anadéis* (commanders of crossbowmen) or collectors of *sisas*; many of them contain judicial decisions, settling legal disputes involving lay or ecclesiastical lords, or council disputes; some of them establish superior regulations relating to the activities of inspection of weights and measures, chapels, hunting grounds, criminals, land problems, farmers and labourers, or merchants; a specific section separated from the others, reports on the chapters of Cortes, which consisted of documents from the royal chancery that, as we know, included the requests of the municipalities as well as the responses of the king; one in particular relates the pledge of allegiance to the king, demonstrating the ceremonial and symbolic importance of the Cortes.

But as we mentioned before, letters were also found emanating from the councils – of Beja, Arronches, Monforte and Vila Viçosa – or issued by lords, such as Rui Gonçalves de Abreu, or the six letters from Martim Afonso de Melo.

As documents produced in the municipal chancellery were also kept chapters of Cortes sent to the Infantes, certain letters on the measures of grain, wine and oil, 18 books and notebooks of past attorneys, and a “boracho” book, whose meaning is unknown,³⁸ but to which much importance was attributed, given that it was secured by a thin iron chain.³⁹ As we know, in the monasteries and churches, there were *libri catenati* that is to say rare codices that were bound and so consulted preventing undue appropriation. What secrets could this manuscript contain? We also add that together with these manuscripts and letters were preserved in the chest a big lock and a key, chains for prisoners, and an “old flag of *cendall* (a thin transparent cloth), an ensign that was assumed to be one of the symbols of identity and representation of the council, together with its seal and the *pelourinho* (a stone pillar symbolizing the judicial power of the municipality). In fact, the chests were furniture that guarded the treasures, whether written treasures or certain assets, or even the treasury of coins, which were also kept in another council chest.⁴⁰

These chests containing books and letters, usually locked with several keys that certain local council officers kept in their protection,⁴¹ were the county’s memory, the archives of its uses and customs, of its individuality and administration. They were its *locus credibilis*, granting all the strength and absolute legitimacy to the acts of the institution and its respective governors. The perpetuity of writing offered them durability over time. In those times, however, they served to demarcate powers, to supervise and inspect, ensuring a power in exercise, capable of basing itself on records of administrative and judicial acts, registration of land and incomes, lists of men and women, or legislation, regulations and norms of various origins and natures.

It should be kept in mind, however, that alongside the important documents that were preserved and archived, the municipal chancellery also received and produced a much more

abundant day-to-day documentation, which would be destroyed within a few years after it was no longer valid, and was considered as having no practical effects. The municipal writings, today invisible and only perceptible, would have formed a much more voluminous mass of documents than those available for us today, both in its content and in its denomination.

Rough drafts of notes and minutes were made, which were unnecessary after the definitive document had been written. Several permits were written, establishing orders with a certain expiry date, which were destroyed after that period had elapsed. The same was true for powers of attorney, which were passed to officials of municipalities or other persons to act on behalf of the municipality in a given situation. The inquiries, statements of witnesses, interlocutory instruments, libels, records, or many other acts of any judicial litigation would be of little use after the final sentence had been pronounced. The grievances also lost their usefulness, having been drawn up in the council to be taken to the Cortes, as the documents of the royal chancellery contained their content, and the response of the king.

Moreover, there were also documents written in the municipal chancellery, but sent to different recipients. This was the case of letters sent to the king, lords, or other councils. Let us not forget that in the same way, these powers sent written texts to the councils, often to give them orders that should be promptly obeyed, and these texts would have been destroyed after their execution.

3. This theme brings us to the internal and external mobility of the written acts, and to the vast network of municipal communications, whether directed upwards, outwards, or downwards.

An upward vertical communication channeled the documents to higher powers, first the king and the royal officers, and then the lords and clergymen, such as archbishops, bishops, superiors of monasteries or of military orders, or even the Roman Curia.⁴² When writing to the king, as was demonstrated, the councilors looked for a writing professional who best knew “the art of writing well”, given that the document was, at the same time, a material act and a symbolic act of power of those that issued it (FONSECA, 1998, p. 177).

In line with the above, the political network claimed horizontal communications with other powers, whether under the authority of nobles, clerics or councils. Communications between councils, like those that occurred among the other lords, were intensified in times of war, but even in common daily life, the pressing requirements of supply, or the crucial trade movements, required no less exchanges of correspondence (COELHO, 2000, p. 85-89).

Depending on the interest of the message, in terms of its content and its rapid resolution, the councils chose simple carriers, such as walkers, cart drivers, mule drivers, horse riders and boatmen, or accredited messengers, between officials and experienced men, those who knew the intricacies of

bureaucracy and knew how to orally defend what was written in the texts (COELHO, 2000, p.76-81).

In a third aspect of communication, it is necessary to bear in mind that the council deliberated, establishing, in writing, local ordinances that had to be divulged from the top down, and followed by neighbors, in a relationship that reveals the dialectic between writing and orality. Even an author like Jack Goody, who analyzed the oppositions between the verbal statement and the text, between the oral and the written, between the wild and the tamed, revealed that in all societies “literate people communicate with a public who can’t read” (GOODY, 1988, p. 169). Likewise, Roland Barthes and Eric Marty alert us to the specificity, but also the inter-recurrence, between the oral, the written, communication and power (BARTHES; MARTY, 1987, p. 33-57).

Naturally, most people in those days, even in the urban centers, were illiterate, even though a certain degree of literacy – even if that meant simply writing their names or mastering rudimentary accounting and writing – through to studies of the liberal arts, was increasing in the 14th and 15th centuries.⁴³ In fact, the working masses communicated mostly orally. And mediators were needed, between the mandates of the municipal authorities, established in writing in the form of ordinances, and those who had to comply with them. These were the *pregoeiros*, criers or heralds who announced the council’s orders, in a loud voice, from atop the city walls or in the public squares.⁴⁴ They announced the council meetings, especially those concerning elections, or those requiring the presence of some neighbors in particular. They auctioned assets or rights that the council wanted to lease or yield by auction. They announced local ordinances related to administrative, economic, policing, hygiene and public health matters, and the respective fines for those who broke the law. But they could also give voice to royal orders or orders from the delegated officials of the central power, such as the *corregedores* (COELHO, 2000, p. 68-72). Thus, they publicized and made accessible, by voice and by gesture, the encoded signs and signals of the written text.

Conclusion

The history of the technique and the art of writing in service to the municipal authority has ably demonstrated how it became an instrument of power, and a means of effectively exercising that power. The ruling elites, in their administration, used records and serial writing of lists and inventories, which allowed them to establish decisions, orders, income and payments, facilitating an effective control over men, through a knowledge of their names, their professions, and their compliance or non-compliance with the council regulations. At the same time they ordered books to register property, revenues or rights that guaranteed for them a lasting memory of their assets and

income. They were also concerned with archiving the documents issued and received, duly classified and identified, so that they could be used as the basis of their freedoms and privileges, and as a link for transmitting continuity in the municipal management. They knew how to articulate writing with orality, in order to implement their legislation and systems.

In the 14th and 15th centuries it became clear that municipal authorities, like the other authorities, integrated writing and the writings into the objectives and means of their government policies.

And while this was true in the kingdom of Portugal, in the chain of transpositions and adaptabilities of Portuguese institutions to the New World, it was also true in other places, such as Brazil.

The theme of writing and writings, as a vehicle and expression of urban and municipal power, is still open and should invite the scholars on either side of the Atlantic to exchange dialog.

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Notes

¹ A descriptive summary of the city can be found in a study by Miguel Ángel Ladero Quesada (2010).

² For Portugal, the types of royal letters, notary acts, or municipal documentation are presented, in the studies of Armando Luís de Carvalho Homem (1990, p. 63-91); Maria Helena da Cruz Coelho (2001, p. 131-137); José Marques, Maria Helena da Cruz Coelho and Armando Luís de Carvalho Homem (2000, p. 289-301), respectively.

³ A first book was composed between 1217 and 1221, and a second between 1222 and 1223 (AZEVEDO, 1967, p. 35-73; COSTA, 1975, p. 143-169).

⁴ We clarify that we use this term according to the *Vocabulaire International de la Diplomatie* (1997, p. 69), which defines it as a service that was tasked with drafting, writing and validating the acts that were ordered by the authority on which it depended. We should add that the term is also used herein as a service that did not initially have a chancellor.

⁵ The main evolutionary traits are presented in the study of Maria Helena da Cruz Coelho (2009, p. 165-172). See also Saul António Gomes (2005, p. 435-501).

⁶ A master's degree thesis about writing in the three main cities of the kingdom, from the 12th twelfth century to the beginning of the 14th century, is presented by Ana Filipa Firmino Sequeira Pinto Roldão (2006).

⁷ The public notaries were created during the rule of D. Afonso II, but only appeared systemically with D. Afonso III see Nogueira (2008).

⁸ On the municipal sigillography, see: TÁVORA, 1983; MATTOSO, 1985, p. 379-380; COELHO, 1996, p. 583-585; SAMEIRO, 1986, p. 77-117; GOMES, 2005, p. 466-475.

⁹ Thus, there was a scribe of the council in Lisbon in 1339, and a clerk of the chamber in 1356, a scribe of the council in Alenquer in 1368, a clerk of the chamber in Évora in 1383, a scribe of the council in Loulé in 1385 and an clerk of the chamber in Porto in 1390. See Coelho (2009, p. 168). A recent master's degree thesis by João Maio Romão (2013), Table 1, shows that many notaries were indeed given specific functions within the chambers – thus, in 1469, Fernão Garcia, notary of the council chamber of Santarém and also of the *homiziados* (fugitive convicts) (n. 128); in 1483, Jorge de Contreiras, notary before the judges, council and councilors of Tavira (n. 273); in 1466, Josepe Cofem, notary of the chamber of the city of Lisbon (n. 274); in 1472, Judas Barrocas, notary of the chamber of the city of Évora (n. 276); in 1445, Lourenço Afonso de Beja, notary and scribe of the chamber of Santiago do Cacém (n. 295); and in 1481, Salamão Belhamim, notary of the chamber of the city of Évora (n. 437).

¹⁰ Thus, we have the scribes of the D. Maria de Aboim Hospital, in Lisbon: Gonçalo Esteves, Afonso Bacias, Afonso Anes; and of the Hospital do Conde D. Pedro: João Afonso de Óbidos; or the scribe of the Casa de S. Lázaro: Gonçalo Rodrigues (SANTOS; VIEGAS, 1996, p. 46, 47, 50, 55).

¹¹ In 1464, João Braga was the scribe of the treasurer and of lodgement and in 1468, he is said to have been the only scribe of lodgement (SANTOS; VIEGAS, 1996, p. 55-56).

¹² A study of the payment of this street is owed to Luís Carlos Amaral and Luís Miguel Duarte (1993).

¹³ This scribe was assistant to a treasurer, appointed for the same purpose (DOCUMENTOS, 1985, p. 87).

¹⁴ It is noted that this scribe, chosen by the council in 1385, was also a notary (ACTAS, 1999-2000, p. 35).

¹⁵ For more about this context, see Jacques Stiennon (1973, p. 7-18, 137-163), among many other classical works.

¹⁶ FONSECA, 1998, p. 156 (2 quires of paper for 36 *reais*), p. 173 (one quire of for 20 *reais*); p. 156 (parchment); p. 171 (inkwell); p. 174 (ink); p. 174 (wax); p. 173 and 179 (desks).

¹⁷ “Entry for payment of batch of paper from which three books were made, one for the agreements of the council another for the revenue and expenses of the city, and another to register his accounts, and whatever is left to the scribes of the chamber, which cost CLXXX *reais*” (ARQUIVO, [s/d]b, fl. 25). We thank Diogo Faria, who transcribed these previously unpublished books of revenues and expenses of the city of Porto, for these indications.

¹⁸ “Entry for payment of three parchment skins for these books, costing eight *reais* each, making a total of XXVIII *reais*” (ARQUIVO, [s/d]b, fl. 25).

¹⁹ “Entry on September IX by the said Joham Santos [...] for payment of [...] quires of paper purchased from the day of Saint John until the present day, for which he paid thirty *reais*” (ARQUIVO, [s/d]b, fl. 25v); “Entry for six quires of paper for the books of [...] sixty *reais*” (ARQUIVO, [s/d]b, fl. 34).

²⁰ “Entry for six parchment skins for covering said books, forty two *reais*” (ARQUIVO, [s/d]b, fl. 34) – refers to the books for which six paper quires were bought; “Item paid for parchment skin for permits to guard the gates for the

passage of loads, BIII *reais*” (ARQUIVO, [s/d]b, fl. 25v). One book of revenues in the same year, of the Algarvian council of Loulé, also noted significant spending of 150 *reais* on paper, 46 *reais* on wax and other ingredients for making the seal, and 30 *reais* for ink (BOTÃO, 2009, p. 335, 336, 337, 342).

²¹ “Entry for BI quires of paper for the books of income and expenditure, and two parchment skins for these and the cost of their production, ~~for~~ one hundred and one *reais*” (ARQUIVO, [s/d]b, fl. 68).

²² “Entry for three parchment skins to make a registration book of the city’s emphyteutic properties, XXBII *reais*” (ARQUIVO, [s/d]b, fl. 69).

²³ “Entry for the councilmen four quires of paper, one for the registrar and another for the attorney, costing LXBI *reais*” (ARQUIVO, [s/d]b, fl. 69v); “entry for paper for the enquiries of the city and its district, for four quires of paper, sixty-two *reais*” (ARQUIVO, [s/d]b, fl. 78); “Entry for one quire of paper to recording the bread and chicken and [...] XII *reais*” (ARQUIVO, [s/d]b, fl. 80).

²⁴ “Another entry gave to the scribe one *canada* of ink, forty *reais*” (ARQUIVO, [s/d]b, fl. 89v).

²⁵ “Entry for purchase by said attorney; one ream of paper for the books of income and expenses and for the book of agreements, and for the expenses of the scribe and to give to the officials, i.e. judges and councilors, each one quire, costing a total of three hundred *reais*” (ARQUIVO, [s/d]b, fl. 145).

²⁶ “Entry for purchase for three parchment skins to cover the books XII *reais* each, XXXBI *reais*” (ARQUIVO, [s/d]b, fl. 145).

²⁷ “Entry [...] for five quires of paper bought for [*black spot*] for the chamber registrar LXX *reais*” (ARQUIVO, [s/d]b, fl. 152V); “Item gave for purchase of one quire of paper for the registrar of the chamber XB *reais*” (ARQUIVO, [s/d]b, fl. 156v). This time, the unit cost of one quire of paper was between 14 and 15 *reais*.

²⁸ In the year 1482-83, 7 quires of paper were purchased for 140 *reais* (ARQUIVO, [s/d]b, fl. 199). In the year 1485-86, a ream of paper was purchased for the regular annual books of the council, 300 *reais* (ARQUIVO, [s/d]b, fl. 239), a parchment skin to cover them, 22 *reais* (ARQUIVO, [s/d]b, fl. 253) 8 parchment skins for the city’s property register, and a book, 220 *reais* (ARQUIVO, [s/d]b, fl. 242v).

²⁹ In the year 1485-1486, the Porto council spent, on this operation of “respansar” (recycling) the parchment, 23 *reais*: “Given to Joham for erasing three skins in order to make a property register – BIII *reais*” (ARQUIVO, [s/d]b, fl. 253); “Given to said Joham [...] for erasing B parchment skins for said book, XB *reais*” (ARQUIVO, [s/d]b, fl. 253v).

³⁰ In fact, a desk was stolen from the City Chamber in Montemor-o-Novo (FONSECA, 1998, p. 179).

³¹ For the Italian cities, Beatrice Pasciuta, after acknowledging the evolution of urban power in Messina and Palermo, the model for so many other cities of the island, focuses on the study of judicial and administrative documentation of the city of Palermo, specifying the typological diversity produced in various urban centers of power (PASCUTA, 2008).

³² The doctoral thesis of Ana Filipa Firmino Sequeira Pinto Roldão (2011) is developed around this written urban memory.

³³ As an example (DOCUMENTOS, 1980, p. 471-472).

³⁴ As an example (DOCUMENTOS, 1980, p. 310-312).

³⁵ For a discussion of the definition and social composition of these elites in various European countries, see, among other authors, Philippe Braunstein (1997, p. 29-38); Alain Derville (1997, p. 119-200); Philippe Jansen (1997, p. 201-223); Francisco Javier Goicolea Julián (1999, p. 87-112); Maria Isabel del Val Valdavieso (2001, p. 71-89). For the Portuguese case, see Maria Helena da Cruz Coelho (1995, p. 51-56; 1999, p. 269-292); Adelaide Lopes Pereira Millan da Costa (1993; 2001, p. 63-70); Maria Ângela Rocha Beirante (1995, p. 563-568); Rita Costa Gomes (1988, p. 229-237); Miguel Gomes Martins (1997-1998, p. 35-93; 2001, p. 67-74; 2002, p. 10-43); Luís Miguel Duarte (2001, p. 91-106); and Mário Sérgio da Silva Farelo (2008).

³⁶ Other listings are referred to in the study by Maria Helena da Cruz Coelho (1990, p. 44).

³⁷ We owe this information to the kind concession of the transcription of the source by Joana Sequeira and Sérgio Ferreira, to whom we are indebted for providing these references. Also in Loulé, at the session held on May 1, 1495, after the council elections, the wax balls with the names of the officers were placed in a linen bag, which, in turn, was placed in a safe that was closed by *corregedor*, who kept the keys, after the documents had been placed in the council’s chest (ACTA, 2004, p. 200).

³⁸ We only find a plausible allusion to “borracho” as a cake made of flour and eggs, kneaded with wine, which is made in Alentejo. But, it is unlikely that a book containing one (or perhaps several) recipes would have been so well guarded.

³⁹ “A thin iron chain to keep the Borracho book secured” (ARQUIVO, [s/d]a, fl. 5v).

⁴⁰ In the city council deliberations, there are references to taking money or paying certain amounts to the “county chest” (ACTAS, 2004, p. 91 and 117).

⁴¹ And we know that great care was taken to keep the locks in good condition, because an expense is itemized in the Book of Revenues and Expenses of Porto, for the year 1460-1461: “Entry states that a lock from the chest of documents was repaired – BI *reais*” (ARQUIVO, [s/d]b, fl. 69).

⁴² For the development of this topic, we cite the study of Maria Helena Cruz Coelho (2000, p. 80-85).

⁴³ For this, we cannot forget that an *Estudo Geral* (university) was created in Portugal between 1288-1290. (On the medieval period of the University, studied under several aspects, see HISTÓRIA, 1997).

⁴⁴ As examples, see ACTAS, 2004, p. 104-112.

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