
Ana Cristina Araújo

This book is an erudite and well-documented study, which systematically displays the author’s extensive research into the Library of King Dom João V (1689-1750). In it, Angela Delaforce, a historian of the Portuguese Baroque, demonstrates her vast knowledge of the artistic patronage and culture of eighteenth-century Portugal.

The book deals with the bibliographic collections of the Royal Library and describes the spaces in which those collections were carefully displayed and arranged. As Delaforce explains, “the word library means both a collection of books and the architectural space in which they are housed” (65). João V’s “library-museum” contained manuscripts, rare editions, maps, a cabinet of prints and drawings, complemented by a cabinet of natural history, and a collection of scientific instruments, medals, and clocks. The history of the “library-museum” is filled with details of its different acquisition programs as well as descriptions of its various collections, its aesthetic inspiration, the symbolic roles of the books that it contained, and the cultural achievements of their readers.

The reconstruction of the “Lost Library of the King of Portugal” begins with a description of its formal features: bindings, illustrations, books and manuscripts, and the sumptuous decoration and furniture of the Torreão do Paço, built by Filipe II of Spain (I of Portugal), where the royal collection was stored.

The court library at the Paço da Ribeira, inherited by Dom João V, was installed on the third floor of the Torreão, located on the banks of the River Tagus. Its windows looked out over the estuary, offering views of the fleets setting sail and arriving from Brazil and India. Housed in this magical place, the Royal Library attracted the intellectual curiosity of both national and foreign authors and readers alike. The king began by expanding his collection of rare books and precious manuscripts in the early years of his reign and, until its end, he dedicated himself to the enrichment of his monumental Regis Bibliotheca.

---

1 Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Coimbra and CHSC – Centro de História da Sociedade e da Cultura, Universidade de Coimbra, Coimbra, Portugal. E-Mail: araujo.anacris@sapo.pt
Built to withstand the ravages of time and eternalize knowledge, this magnificent library disappeared on All Saints Day, 1 November 1755. A devastating earthquake followed by a tsunami razed João V’s palace to the ground, reducing it to a pile of rubble. The library suffered catastrophic damage. According to a contemporaneous account, its ceilings collapsed, and its interior was engulfed by water and flames which destroyed many of the thousands of books and manuscripts stored there, a unique collection that formed one of the largest libraries in Europe in the early eighteenth century.

No general catalog of the library has survived, therefore successfully reconstructing a detailed knowledge of the bibliographic content housed in the Royal Palace is little more than a pipedream. But, by studying the procedures that were followed in the ordering of books, the catalogs used in the acquisition of collections, the correspondence with national and foreign agents living in various European cities, and the direct or indirect references made to the king’s library, Delaforce has managed to produce a careful and extensive reconstruction of some of the most important collections of the king’s library. She explains in detail the complex and surprising network of contacts that lay behind the magnificent Royal Library collection. Her systematic study confirms and expands on previous surveys conducted by other historians.

The spirit of the collection can be glimpsed behind the political and intellectual concerns that shaped the concept of the book and the underlying vision of culture at that time. The creation of the library reflects João V’s profound interest in Portugal’s historical past, developed under the auspices of the Royal Academy of History, which was founded in 1720, and the library it is also the result of the cosmopolitan dimension of culture and the arts in the eighteenth century.

The focus on tradition obliged the author to explain how the earlier libraries had been formed at the Portuguese court, during the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries. She documents the cultural interests of the monarchs of the second Avis dynasty, especially those that were displayed at Manuel I’s court (1495-1521). The art of illumination, a combination of images and handwriting, was encouraged and sponsored by Manuel I, whose reign, celebrated as a glorious era of conquest and commercial expansion, coincided with the introduction of printing into Portugal. Manuel I’s library reflected the influence of Italian humanists, the interest in books about spirituality, and the delight that was taken in the binding and ornamentation of both printed works and manuscripts. The legacy of the Spanish Habsburg monarchs in Portugal brings to mind the library at the Royal Palace and some of its most striking acquisitions. The *Index dos Manuscritos do Rei de Portugal*, preserved
at the University Library in Coimbra and published as an appendix to this book, is an example of some of the important manuscripts that were linked to the period of 1580-1640, during the rule of the dual Iberian monarchy.

The royal collections of books and manuscripts continued to grow, as did the libraries of Portuguese noble families. The ethos of the nobility and the court culture helped to nurture this love of fine arts and letters, and libraries soon became a status symbol for many aristocratic houses. As Ana Isabel Buescu recently showed, the collection of the fifth Duke of Bragança, Theodósio I (1510-1563), one of the largest in Europe at that time, became one of the most famous features of the House of Bragança (A livraria renascentista de D. Teodósio de Bragança, 2016). After the independence of 1640, João IV (1604-1656) inaugurated the dynasty of Bragança and, since he himself was a lover of music and reading, transferred most of the library from the Ducal Palace at Vila Viçosa in the Alentejo to the Paço da Ribeira in Lisbon, continuing to acquire books through agents in Northern Europe. Some treasures also arrived at the Royal Library from Italy through the contacts maintained there by various agents and, above all, by the scholar and bibliophile Vicente Nogueira, who worked with the cardinals Francesco Barberini and Giulio Sacchetti. Until 1707, the year of João V’s accession to the throne, the separately catalogued libraries of the previous Bragança monarchs, namely João IV and Pedro II (1648-1706), were incorporated into João V’s magnificent library.

João V’s ambitious pursuit of universal knowledge was a clear expression of the power of the king and the wealth of the Portuguese overseas empire. Over four decades, the opulence of the Portuguese monarchy corresponded to the golden age of Brazil, whose wealth began to flow into the kingdom at the end of the seventeenth century and fed Portugal’s commercial networks and treasure, further enhancing the royal grandeur.

In enriching the bookcases of his library, the king took great pleasure in the beauty of ancient and modern books and was highly appreciative of the art of printing and binding. As Delaforce states, in the first half of the eighteenth century, the art of book illustration in Portugal “was gradually transformed by the artistic and technical skills of the Dutch and French engravers” (111). Pierre Massar Rochefort, François Laurent Debrie, and Jean de Villeneuve all collaborated on the most significant publications of the Royal Academy of History. Some manuscripts and rarities from the Royal Library were also consulted by members of the academy. The academic Martinho de Mendonça de Pina e Proença was even commissioned by the king to prepare the library catalog. The academy, in turn, was made responsible for the supervision of precious collections, including those of ancient coins and
medals, and for the conservation of ancient sites and artifacts. As far as the conservation of archaeological and documentary sources was concerned, some scholars and counselors relied on the expertise of the Italian Francesco Bianchini, appointed by Pope Clement XI as the superintendent of antiques. New elements have since been uncovered regarding this close collaboration. Delaforce dedicates an entire chapter to Francesco Bianchini and his relationship with the king of Portugal. She explains the influence of the intellectual circles surrounding the papal court and the development of the arts and sciences in the Joanine period. Bianchini, who was a mathematician, historian, antiquarian, astronomer, and man of letters, enjoyed a close relationship with the Jesuit astronomers Battista Carbonne and Domenico Cassini, who were responsible for the major boost given to astronomy in Portugal. The king’s dedicated interest in the “science of the sky” was inseparable from his love of scientific instruments, luxury objects, and books.

Diplomatic correspondence from that time reveals that royal requests were very demanding when it came to purchasing original works and prints. Selected lists and catalogs were used to order rare printed works and manuscripts, purchase entire libraries, and acquire important bibliographic sets. These missions were fulfilled by powerful agents and diplomatic envoys. In particular, by Dom Luís da Cunha (Paris, The Hague, Brussels), João Gomes da Silva, Count of Tarouca (The Hague, Vienna) Marco António de Azevedo Coutinho and Francisco Mendes Góis (Paris), António Galvão de Castelo Branco and António de Campos (London), and Manuel Pereira de Sampaio (Rome). Dom Luís da Cunha intermediated the purchase of the masterful Mariette collection. Among the many other important duties that he performed, he sent to the court of Lisbon a list of original documents transcribed from the library of Germain Louis de Chauvelin (1685-1762), president of the Paris Parliament. He also supervised the purchases made from the library of the statesman Cardinal Guillaume Dubois (1656-1723), the Archbishop of Cambrai. Another exemplary case reports the disputed purchase of the *Atlas Boendermaker* by Tarouca, in which the bibliophile Charles Spencer, the third Earl of Sunderland, was also interested. Delaforce devotes an entire chapter to the Bibliotheca Sunderlandiana, a collection of 20,000 printed books and manuscripts, including incunabula, Greek and Roman authors in *editio princeps*, and early printed Bibles in many languages. Great care was taken with the negotiations for the acquisition of the manuscripts of this valuable and fine collection.

The king was also determined to amass an exceptional collection of prints and engravings. In 1725, he requested every print made in Italy since the origins of printmaking. Among other valuable pieces, the royal print collection included prints of Rubens’s engraved
works, 150 volumes of French engravings organized by Mariette (father and son), 42 albums containing English prints with plates drawn and engraved by Dirk Stoop, 59 Federico Barocci prints, and other rare items. Delaforce admits that “the Cabinet of Prints and Drawings in the Royal Library constituted a remarkable comprehensive archive of the Italian and French decorative arts of the first half of the eighteenth century” (199).

In the collection of engravings assembled by Pierre-Jean Mariette for João V, between 1724 and 1728, there was a set dedicated to natural history. Botanical knowledge was an important support for the activity of the Cabinet of Natural History, founded at the Royal Palace in the early 1720s. The new cabinet, also sponsored by the king, seems to have been inspired by the Royal Garden of Medicinal Plants in Paris. “The new scientific spirit was introduced to Portugal through the French and other foreign scientists and naturalists who visited the Iberian Peninsula during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century in order to study its natural resources, in particular botany and mineralogy,” states Delaforce (129). The king and some nobles, who became known for their Cabinets of Natural History, were probably influenced by Charles-Frédéric Merveilleux, a Swiss naturalist, who had visited Portugal in 1723-1724 and 1726. The attraction for the “Raridades da Natureza,” the title of the book produced by Aucourt e Padilha (1759), also included mythical animals, monsters, fossils, and all kinds of shells. All these specimens were represented in the Royal Cabinet of Natural History and Curiosities. As mentioned, the emblematic “King of Portugal’s shell,” which the collector Albert Serba claims to have held in his hands, was described by other authors, and especially by Dézallier d’Argenville, in *La Conchynologie* (1780).

Although the library of the Royal Palace had a space devoted to rarities and mathematical instruments, its bibliographic collection shared common features with other sumptuous and rich libraries created under royal patronage, such as the library of the University of Coimbra, the library of the Palace Convent of Mafra, and the library of the Convento das Necessidades of the Oratorians. They all reflected the importance of the great cultural achievements resulting from the Crown’s policy for the enhancement of its prestige and its engagement with the cosmopolitanism of the Republic of Letters in the eighteenth century. The king’s attention was focused on building a monument to universal knowledge, and he and his agents enjoyed close contact with great collectors and men of letters in the eighteenth century. However, the alliance of the baroque spirit with the emerging culture of the enlightenment is not the central focus of Delaforce’s investigation. Some recent studies point in this direction and it would have been appropriate to confirm their findings in a work dedicated to books and reading. The evidence gathered together by the author also suggests
the need for a specific study of the Portuguese relationship with some of Europe’s most reputable academies, such as the Royal Society of London, the Académie Royale des Sciences in Paris, and the Academy of St Petersburg. Astronomy and cartography were some of the areas most notably covered by this scientific collaboration. In 1721, through the Académie Royale des Sciences, De L’Isle presented João V with the Recueil Complet des Cartes Geographiques. In order to protect Portuguese interests after the signing of the Treaty of Utrecht, the ambassador da Cunha gathered more maps together and sent them to the Lisbon court, giving the Portuguese a great advantage in the negotiations with the Spanish over the South American borders. This topic was recently addressed most masterfully by Júnia Furtado in Oráculos da Geografia Iluminista, Dom Luís da Cunha e Jean-Baptiste Bourguignon D’Anville na construção da cartografia do Brasil, published in 2012. Although this remarkable study was not used to enrich Delaforce’s book, there is no doubt about the importance of the French royal cartographer and his Carte de l’Amérique méridionale, which was completed in manuscript form in 1742 and published in 1748. Finally, it is also worth mentioning the painstaking research undertaken into the illustration by Bernard Picart and the writing by Dom Luís da Cunha of the Memórias da Paz de Utrecht. Regarding the fate of the volumes of this master work on history and diplomacy, which survived the great Lisbon earthquake, Delaforce describes the path followed by some of the books and manuscripts that may have belonged to the Royal Library. Some of them travelled across the South Atlantic—from Lisbon to Rio de Janeiro and back again—with the court of Dom João VI.

The lost library left a long and lasting history behind. The visual display of Delaforce’s exquisite book is also quite remarkable, and it would be even more accessible to any reader were it to contain a final index of illustrations. Delaforce’s research, resources, and insightful narrative provide us with new and decisive elements for the study of the history of the Court and culture in Portugal in the first half of the eighteenth century.