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Article abstract

This article focuses on the life of Juana, the Excelente Senhora (excellent lady), between 1479 and 1506. Juana, widely known as La Beltraneja, was recognized by King Enrique IV of Castile (1454–74) as his legitimate daughter and successor despite claims that she had been conceived in an adulterous relationship between her mother Joana of Portugal and Beltrán de la Cueva. Although Juana lived in exile in Portugal from 1476 onward, her young age and unmarried status made her a powerful diplomatic weapon during the reign of the Portuguese king João II (1481–95). While she had professed as a nun and was nominally attached to the monastery of Santa Clara in Coimbra, her degree of seclusion waived with the vicissitudes of Portugal's foreign policy. Until 1522, she herself maintained the position that she was the rightful heir to the throne of Castile.

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This article focuses on the life of Juana, the Excelente Senhora (excellent lady), between 1479 and 1506. Juana, widely known as La Beltraneja, was recognized by King Enrique IV of Castile (1454–74) as his legitimate daughter and successor despite claims that she had been conceived in an adulterous relationship between her mother Joana of Portugal and Beltrán de la Cueva. Although Juana lived in exile in Portugal from 1476 onward, her young age and unmarried status made her a powerful diplomatic weapon during the reign of the Portuguese king João II (1481–95). While she had professed as a nun and was nominally attached to the monastery of Santa Clara in Coimbra, her degree of seclusion waived with the vicissitudes of Portugal’s foreign policy. Until 1522, she herself maintained the position that she was the rightful heir to the throne of Castile.

Cet article porte sur la vie de Jeanne, « Excelente Senhora » (l’excellente dame), entre 1479 et 1504. Connue sous le nom de La Beltraneja, elle fut reconnue par le roi Henri IV de Castille (1454–1474) comme son héritière légitime malgré les allégations selon lesquelles elle était la fille de Beltrán de la Cueva. Bien que Jeanne vécut en exil au Portugal à partir de 1476, son jeune âge et son statut de célibataire firent d’elle une menace diplomatique pendant le règne du roi portugais Jean II (1481–1495). Même si elle avait pris le voile et qu’elle était affiliée au monastère de Santa Clara à Coimbra, son degré de réclusion fluctua en fonction de la politique étrangère portugaise. Jusqu’en 1522, elle affirma être l’héritière légitime du trône de Castille.

Introduction

On 18 March 1479, the dowager Duchess of Viseu, the Infanta Beatriz, met with her niece Queen Isabel I of Castile (1474–1504) in the old Roman town of Alcántara, Spain.¹ The War of the Castilian Succession (1475–79) had been long and expensive, and both Portugal and Castile were growing weary. At the time of their meeting, Isabel I had secured widespread recognition as queen of Castile. The Portuguese crown, having lost its advantage after the Battle of Toro in 1476, had invested all hopes in the Infanta Beatriz to negotiate a favourable settlement. Key to this peace was the future of the seventeen-year-old daughter

1. Rui de Pina, “Crónica de D. Afonso V,” in *Crónicas de Rui de Pina*, ed. M. Lopes de Almeida (Porto: Lello & Irmão, 1977), 577–881, 867–68.

of Enrique IV of Castile (1454–74), known to contemporaries and to history as Juana la Beltraneja.² Although the Treaty of Alcáçovas-Toledo was later etched out by diplomats and political strategists, the terms that mattered were negotiated by the duchess and the queen. Peace between Castile and Portugal was predicated on eliminating Juana's prospects for marriage and motherhood. Equally, it was threatened by kinship ties that crossed borders and by allegiances that were forged in the nursery.

Juana la Beltraneja, whose long life spanned from 1462 to 1530, was dubbed the *Excelente Senhora* (excellent lady) by the Portuguese crown as a way of acknowledging her special status without acknowledging her claims to the Castilian throne. Although the question of her paternity and legitimacy has made her a well-studied historical figure, there has been surprisingly little inquiry into her influence on the diplomatic relations between Portugal and Spain during her later life. Part of this oversight stems from an assumption that when she professed her vows in 1480, she relinquished her claims to the throne. However, diplomatic correspondence implies that Juana's future in the cloisters was far from assured. This article argues that Juana, the *Excelente Senhora* remained a significant threat to Castilian stability until 1506 and throughout the full length of her childbearing years.

Although the history of political diplomacy in the early modern period has been approached from the standpoint of treaties and ambassadors, most alliances were built through marriage. The importance of marriage came from the fact that monarchy in this period was both personal and dynastic. Rulers waged war and pledged military support to safeguard the interests of their children, siblings, nieces, and nephews. Marriage alliances were not merely ceremonies that celebrated friendship. They were attempts to create a union of the blood, achieved through procreation. Thus, a betrothal, often referred to as a marriage "in words of the future," was far less important than a marriage that was performed "in words of the present." Once consummated, a marriage might immediately produce heirs whose diplomatic connections and dynastic interests would ripple through the generations. To understand the vicissitudes of foreign relations in this period, one must look beyond official agreements and correspondence and consider some of the basic and even crude details of

2. "La Beltraneja" was a spurious reference to claims that she had been fathered by Beltrán de la Cueva, the 1st Duke of Albuquerque.

the human lifecycle: estimated ages of fertility and menopause and the legal age at which young heirs could marry.³

Over the past decade there has been a surge in research on medieval queenship that has changed our understanding of the roles wielded by queens and female members of the royal family. Building on the research of Janet Nelson and Pauline Stafford, numerous scholars have demonstrated that noble women were able to tap into multiple bases of power, using maternity and marriage as well as property bequests to pursue a political agenda.⁴ Theresa Earenfight's research on queenship and, in particular, the role of consorts in Iberia has led to an expanded definition of political power in the Middle Ages. Her work has shown that royal women exercised agency in important ways: from the patronage of artists and convents to intercessions on behalf of family members and other affiliates.⁵ Her observations are applicable to aristocratic women in Portugal who left the royal court and lived their remaining years in convents. Like Juana, their association with a religious house did not mean that they eschewed political activity or connections to the royal court.

Juana's formative years in Castile have provided the backdrop to the many biographies of Isabel I.⁶ Óscar Villarroel González has examined the claims of illegitimacy launched against her while Marsilio Cassotti explored the life and alleged adultery of her mother, Joana of Portugal (1439–75).⁷

3. Darrel W. Amundsen and Carol Jean Diers, "The Age of Menarche in Medieval Europe," *Human Biology* 45.3 (1973): 363–69.

4. Janet. L. Nelson, "Women at the Court of Charlemagne: A Case of Monstrous Regiment?" in *Medieval Queenship*, ed. John Carmi Parsons (Stroud: Sutton, 1994), 43–61; Pauline Stafford, "Women and the Norman Conquest," *TRHS*, 6th ser., 4 (1994): 221–49, dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-08859-8_4.

5. Theresa Earenfight, *Queenship in Medieval Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 24–27.

6. Biographies of Isabel I include Tarsicio de Azcona, *Isabel La Católica, Vida e Reinado* (Madrid: La Esfera de Los Libros, 2014); John Edwards, *Ferdinand and Isabella* (New York: Pearson, 2005); Manuel Fernández Álvarez, *Isabel la Católica* (Madrid: Espasa Forum, 2003); Peggy Liss, *Isabel the Queen* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Joseph Pérez, *Isabelle la Catholique: Un modèle de chrétienté?* (Paris: Payot, 2004); María Ángeles Pérez-Samper, *Isabel la Católica* (Barcelona: Plaza & Janés, 2004); Luis Suárez, *Los reyes católicos* (Barcelona: Ariel, 2004); María Isabel del Val Valdivieso, *Isabel la Católica, princesa (1468–1474)* (Valladolid, Spain: Instituto "Isabel la Católica" de Historia Eclesiástica, 1974).

7. Óscar Villarroel González, *Juana la Beltraneja: la construcción de una ilegitimidad* (Madrid: Silex Ediciones, 2014). See also Marsilio Cassotti, *A Rainha Adultera: Joana de Portugal e o enigma da Excelente Senhora* (Lisbon: A Esfera dos Livros, 2012).

Fewer works have examined Juana's long life in Portugal; a notable exception is the detailed account of Juana's life, which extends to the treatment of her death in 1530, undertaken by Tarsicio de Azcona in 1989 and revised in 2007. Appended to his analysis are transcriptions of forty-five documents gleaned from archives and libraries around Spain and Portugal.⁸ Complementing this magisterial work is a short essay by Paulo Drumond Braga, published in 1989, which summarized the extant documentation relevant to Juana's life that could be found in Portuguese archives. In this preliminary overview, he astutely noted that Juana's position in Portugal fluctuated according to the diplomatic strategies deployed by the various kings of Portugal: Afonso V (1438–81), João II (1481–95), Manuel I (1495–1521), and João III (1521–57).⁹ In addition, a biography of Juana, aimed at a popular audience, was written in 2011 by Isabel de Vaz Freitas, a scholar of the court of Afonso V.¹⁰

Forming the backbone of narrative sources relevant to Juana's life in Portugal are Rui de Pina's chronicles of the reigns of Afonso V and João II.¹¹ Although these valuable histories were not published until 1504, Pina was an eyewitness to many of the events that he described. His personal involvement in events strengthens these chronicles as primary sources of information, but also renders them problematic. Any historian using them must remember that Pina was a professional diplomat as well as a historian and thus liable to suppress information that could bring harm or embarrassment to a reigning monarch.¹² Even if he had been privy to marriage negotiations conducted in secret, Pina was unlikely to have revealed such diplomatically sensitive information to his readers. Moreover, it must be remembered that normative ideology in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries frowned upon the overt political involvement

8. Tarsicio de Azcona, *Juana de Castilla, mal llamada La Beltraneja* (Madrid: La Esfera de los Libros, 2007), 301–466.

9. Paulo Drumond Braga, "A 'Excelente Senhora,' D. Joana, em Portugal (1479–1530). Dados para um estudo," *Revista de Ciências Históricas* 4 (Porto: Universidade Portucalense Infante D. Henrique, 1989), 247–54.

10. Isabel Vaz de Freitas, *D. Joana, A Excelente Senhora 1462–1530* (Vila do Conde: Quidnovi, 2011); see also Isabel Vaz de Freitas, "D. Joana: Uma Mulher entre Portugal e Castela," in *En la Europa medieval, mujeres con historia, mujeres de leyenda Siglos XIII–XVI*, ed. Manuel García Fernández (Seville: Universidad de Sevilla, 2019).

11. Pina, "Crónica de D. Afonso V."

12. Susannah Humble Ferreira, *The Crown, the Court and the Casa da Índia: Political Centralization in Portugal 1479–1521* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 30–37, dx.doi.org/10.1163/9789004298194.

of women. Thus, chroniclers such as Pina understated the political agency of all royal women, including those such as the Infanta Beatriz and Leonor of Viseu, who were known to have been politically active. Official records, like Pina's chronicles, provide an uneven coverage of Juana's life, especially during the years in which she was meant to be cloistered. But supplementary information can be gathered by a limited examination of her personal connections and affinities. Here, some of the older genealogies and memoirs can be re-read with a twenty-first-century understanding of the ways in which female aristocrats might exercise power.¹³

Apart from elucidating details of Juana's fascinating life, research can better re-evaluate Portugal's diplomatic circumstances at the beginning of the sixteenth century. The generalized assertion of Jorge Borges de Macedo and Pedro Soares Martinez that Portugal remained strictly neutral in the Habsburg-Valois wars, so that it might concentrate its efforts overseas, might be true from a long-term perspective.¹⁴ But as Portugal and Castile emerged from the war of the Castilian Succession, this lasting peace was frequently punctuated by threats and overtures towards war. As Juana was the chief rival of Isabel I, her prospects for marriage reveal the friction between Portugal and Aragon-Castile during an important period in their histories. An understanding of the fears and priorities of these rulers, who were simultaneously constructing overseas empires, better exposes their process of decision making. This article examines the serious consideration that the rulers of Spain and Portugal gave to Juana la Beltraneja, the *Excelente Senhora*. The dynastic threat that she posed to Isabel I, especially during her child-bearing years, was tacit, latent, and ever-present. Her movements in and out of religious houses, the size of her retinue, her political affinities, and her opportunities to marry into royalty indicate the level of danger that she presented to Spain.

Caught amid the competing interests of the crowns of Spain and Portugal, the question could well be asked: what did Juana want for herself? Was she a pawn in a game of chess, played by kings and nobles? Or was she the head

13. António Caetano de Sousa, *História genealógica da casa real portuguesa*, 12 vols. (Coimbra: Atlântida, 1946); Anselmo Braamcamp Freire and Luiz de Bivar Guerra, *Brasões da Sala de Sintra*, 3 vols. (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, 1996).

14. Jorge Borges de Macedo, *História diplomática portuguesa. Constantes e linhas de força* (Lisbon: Instituto da Defesa Nacional, 1987), 58–93; Pedro Soares Martinez, "A Neutralidade Portuguesa desde o século XVI," *Coloquio sobre Portugal e Paz* (Lisbon: Academia das Ciências, 1989), 81–96.

of a faction that opposed Isabel I's rule in Castile? The answer is complicated and human, because Juana was both at different times in her life. Raised as the daughter of Enrique IV of Castile, she had been groomed for the throne, expecting to rule as either queen-regnant or consort. As Ana Echevarria describes in her examination of Catalina of Lancaster, royal women were, from a very young age, prepared for a life as queen-consort.¹⁵ Such training, fuelled by pressure from guardians, servants, and other affiliates who might gain from Juana's accession to the throne, suggests that personal ambition and wider collective interests could be one and the same.

Matters of succession

Since there is no way to prove Juana's biological relationship to Enrique IV, the truth of his paternity will never be known.¹⁶ However, accusations of illegitimacy were first levelled by chroniclers under the patronage of Isabel I. When Juana was born on 28 February 1462, there were no rumours of her mother's infidelity or her father's impotence.¹⁷ These details first surfaced in the *Gesta Hispaniensi ex annalibus suorum diebus colligentis*, begun by Alfonso Fernández de Palencia in 1474 as conflict over the succession was just breaking out. In the scheme of Palencia's official history, the story of Juana's supposed illegitimacy, and her mother's alleged affair with Beltrán de la Cueva, justified Isabel I's usurpation.¹⁸

Conflict over the kingship of Castile had begun long before Juana's birth. In a situation paralleled in many European kingdoms in the fifteenth century, factions of nobles both dominated and opposed its ruling Trastámara dynasty. In 1465, a league of nobles deposed Enrique IV in effigy and proclaimed his young half-brother to be King Alfonso VIII. Following this event, dubbed

15. Ana Echevarria, "Catalina of Lancaster," in *Medieval Spain: Culture, Conflict and Coexistence*, ed. Roger Collins and Anthony Goodman (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2002), 79–122, dx.doi.org/10.1057/9781403919779.

16. Juana's body was interred in a chapel in the monastery of Santa Clara de Lisboa. See Azcona, *Juana de Castilla*, 280–81. The monastery was destroyed in the Lisbon earthquake of 1755.

17. William Phillips, *Enrique IV and the Crisis of Fifteenth-Century Castile* (Cambridge: Medieval Academy of America, 1978), 68.

18. Richard Kagan, *Clio and the Crown: The Politics of History in Medieval and Early Modern Spain* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 37–46.

“the Farce of Avila,” Castile descended into a period of civil war that only ended with the death of Alfonso on 5 July 1468.¹⁹ Later, in September at the subsequent Treaty of Toros de Guisando, Alfonso’s sister, the future Isabel of Castile, negotiated a settlement with Enrique IV. If the king agreed to remove his daughter, Juana, from the line of succession in favour of Isabel, then Isabel would marry according to Enrique IV’s wishes. The king legally ratified the agreement by naming Isabel as successor, with the title of Princess of Asturias, at the Cortes of Ocaña in 1469.

Yet, in October 1469 Isabel reneged on her promise and secretly married Ferdinand, the crown prince of Aragon. Attempting to reassert Juana’s position in 1470, Enrique IV offered her hand in marriage to the Duke of Berry, the brother of Louis XI of France (1461–83). However, by 1472 he was convinced by the Marquis of Villena to marry Juana to her maternal uncle, Afonso V of Portugal (1438–81). The surviving letter of agreement, which details preparations for war, reveals a tacit understanding that Ferdinand and Isabel would dispute the marriage.²⁰ When Enrique IV died on 11 December 1474, Juana was in the custody of the Marquis of Villena, who wrote to Afonso V asking him to marry Juana and defend her interests. Since Juana had now turned twelve, the minimum age at which women could marry according to canon law, Afonso V crossed into Castile and met her at Plasencia.²¹ In doing so, the kingdom of Portugal declared war on Isabel I.

The Terçarias da Moura, 1479–83

The War of the Castilian Succession lasted four years and was marked by battles both on the Iberian Peninsula and overseas. By March 1479, when the Infanta Beatriz and Isabel I met in Alcántara, enthusiasm for the war had dwindled alongside the war chests of both kingdoms. In the capitulations of peace, enshrined in the Treaty of Alcáçovas-Toledo (1479–80), the future of Juana remained a key issue. At seventeen years of age, Juana had clearly come into her child-bearing years. From the perspective of the Castilians, if Juana were permitted to marry and bear children, she and her descendants could threaten the stability of Castile

19. Phillips, 79.

20. “Capitulações dos reis de Castela para o contrato de casamento de D. Afonso V (1470–1472),” trans. Diana Martins, *Fragmenta Histórica – História, Paleografia e Diplomática* 6 (2018), 153–55.

21. Freitas, *A Excelente Senhora*, 63.

for generations as rival claimants. To neutralize Juana's dynastic threat, Ferdinand and Isabel would have to either marry Juana to their only son or have her take an oath of celibacy. Isabel I's preference was the betrothal between Juana and Juan, Prince of Asturias, who was still in his infancy. An agreement was struck that if Juana agreed to marry the young prince, then she was to remain in the custody of her aunt, the Infanta Beatriz, in the town of Moura. When the prince turned seven, a marriage would be contracted "in words of the future" and when the prince turned fourteen (the same year that Juana turned thirty), the marriage would be contracted "in words of the present." It was agreed that if Juana reneged on the marriage, then the king of Portugal was to forfeit 100,000 gold *dobras* or the towns of Alandroal and Castelo de Veiros.²² The condition was part of the arrangement known as the *Terçarias da Moura*: a complex series of betrothals, pledges, and conditions of wardship negotiated by the Infanta Beatriz and Isabel I. Under its terms, both Isabel I and João II arranged a marriage between their young children and placed them in the custody of the Infanta Beatriz in Moura. In return, the Infanta Beatriz sent her own son, Diogo, Duke of Viseu, as a pledge to the court of Isabel I.

But marriage, according to canonical rules, had to be undertaken freely, and Juana did not give her consent.²³ Her refusal to agree to a marriage with Ferdinand and Isabel's son is evidence of her agency and, ostensibly, her intention to pursue her claims to the throne of Castile. The alternative arrangement, set out in the Treaty of Alcáçovas-Toledo, was for Juana to enter one of five convents: Nossa Senhora de Conceição of Beja, the Convento de Jesus of Aveiro, São Salvador of Lisbon, Santa Clara of Santarém, and Santa Clara of Coimbra. Ferdinand and Isabel demanded that she take up the habit within twelve days of entering the convent, that she be prohibited from receiving or sending messengers, and that she be prevented from discussing all subjects relating to the succession of the Castilian throne and from leaving the

22. Antonio de la Torre y del Cerro and Luis Suárez Fernández, eds., *Documentos referentes a las relaciones con Portugal durante el reinado de los Reyes Católicos* (Valladolid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Patronato Menéndez Pelayo, 1958), 1:296–97.

23. For the contrast between Christian and aristocratic cultures of marriage, see Georges Duby, *Medieval Marriage: Two Models from Twelfth-Century France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 17–18.

monastery. Only if the nearby towns were struck by plague could she leave for one of the other four sanctioned convents.²⁴

The choice of religious houses that was afforded to Juana is indicative of a political world of aristocratic women who operated outside the royal court. Each of the convents listed in the agreement (apart from Santa Clara de Santarém, of which little is known) housed influential noblewomen connected to court. The convent of Nossa Senhora da Conceição in Beja had been founded by the Infanta Beatriz and had close ties to the household of the dukes of Viséu.²⁵ In 1479, the convent of Jesus de Aveiro housed the former regent of Portugal, known as Princess Santa Joana (1452–90), Afonso V's eldest daughter. The monastery of San Salvador of Lisbon was famous for its connection to Juana's grandmother, Queen Leonor of Aragon. Her maternal aunt, the Infanta Catarina, had been cloistered there and was buried there in 1463.²⁶

The early movements of Juana la Beltraneja suggest that her confinement to a monastery did not divorce her from politics. In 1479, Juana chose to enter the convent of Santa Clara de Santarém, a monastery near the strongholds of the counts of Abrantes. Lopo de Almeida, the 1st Count of Abrantes, and his wife, Beatriz da Silva, had been selected as Juana's guardians even before her marriage to Afonso V. The countess, a lady-in-waiting, had been named Juana's governess, or *aia*, and chief lady of the chamber, or *camareira mor*, on 11 April 1475.²⁷ And shortly before he was dubbed the 1st Count of Abrantes, Lopo de Almeida had been named as Juana's chief steward, or *mordomo mor*.²⁸ Between the time she returned to Portugal and up until the point that she entered Santa Clara de Santarém, Juana appears to have been living in their household in Abrantes.²⁹ Santarém, and the neighbouring hunting lodge of Almeirim, lay just seventy kilometres from the town of Abrantes, often frequented by the court. However, within the year, Juana had left Santa Clara de Santarém and followed a circuitous route to the monastery of Santa Clara de Évora (instead

24. Freitas, *A Excelente Senhora*, 70–72.

25. Caetano de Sousa, *História genealógica da casa real portuguesa*, 11:33–36.

26. Maria do Baptista, *Livro da fundação do Mosteiro do Salvador da cidade de Lisboa, e de alguns casos dignos de memoria, que nelle acontecerão* (Lisbon: Pedro Crasbeeck, 1618).

27. Braamcamp Freire and Bivar Guerra, *Brasões da Sala de Sintra*, 2:353, 3:319.

28. Instituto dos Arquivos Nacionais, Torre do Tombo (IANTT), Chancelarias D. João II, liv. 6, f. 115.

29. Pina, "Cronica de D. Afonso V," ch. 193, pp. 850–51.

of one of the sanctioned houses), through to Vimieiro and on to the monastery of Santa Clara de Coimbra. Pina claimed that the route taken was to avoid the plague that had descended on Portugal in this period. But the road also took Juana through Abrantes, the stronghold of her guardians.³⁰

The placement of Juana at Santa Clara de Coimbra is a topic that invites more investigation. The abbess of Santa Clara de Coimbra was the forty-year-old noblewoman, Margarida de Meneses (1439–1520), who had clear connections to both Joana of Portugal and the court of Afonso V. Margarida de Meneses was the youngest daughter of Aires Gomes da Silva, a prominent member of the king's household. Her mother, Beatriz de Meneses, was the *aia* of Afonso V's first wife, Isabel of Coimbra, and her children, João II and Princess Santa Joana. Since Margarida was the same age as Joana of Portugal, the two women were probably known to one another before Margarida left for Santa Clara de Coimbra.³¹ Not coincidentally, Margarida was also the first cousin of the Countess of Abrantes, a factor that might have made Santa Clara de Coimbra an appealing choice.³² Moreover, in 1482, circumstances allowed Jorge de Almeida, a younger son of the Count of Abrantes, to be appointed bishop of Coimbra, a move that gave him direct oversight over the monastery and control over Juana.³³

Though Juana may have chosen to enter monastic life to secure her independence, the prospect of claustral life was a bitter pill to swallow for a young woman groomed for the crown of Castile. Pina described the contrast in a passage that depicted Juana reluctantly cutting her hair and trading in her magnificent dresses for the coarse black habit of the Poor Clares.³⁴ But even in Juana's difficult situation, where she was being pressured by the monarchs of two different kingdoms, she maintained a limited degree of agency. Although Ferdinand and Isabel, concerned that she might be married in secret to a Portuguese noble or foreign ruler, had pressured Pope Sixtus IV to allow her to

30. Pina, "Crónica de D. Afonso V," ch. 208, p. 873.

31. Joana of Portugal was the godmother and namesake of Isabel of Coimbra's daughter, Princess Santa Joana. See Marsilio Cassotti, 79–80. For discussion of D. Beatriz da Silva and D. Margarida de Meneses, see Braamcamp Freire and Bivar Guerra, *Brasões da Sala de Sintra*, 2:53–54.

32. The Countess of Abrantes's mother, Isabel Gomes da Silva, was the sister of Aires Gomes da Silva. Braamcamp Freire and Bivar Guerra, *Brasões da Sala de Sintra*, 2:351–53.

33. Braamcamp Freire and Bivar Guerra, *Brasões da Sala de Sintra*, 2:353.

34. Pina, "Crónica de D. Afonso V," ch. 207, p. 871.

profess her vows as soon as possible, the pope had remained adamant that Juana complete her novitiate.³⁵ This period was presumably to ensure that Juana was prepared to make a spiritual commitment. Juana's trepidation was illustrated by Pina, who described the eve of her profession of her vows:

On the eve on which it was ordered that the Lady should profess her vows, there came from the monastery such weeping from her servants and companions that it seemed as if her burial was taking place. And amid all the commotion, she changed her mind and resolved not to profess the next day. But the Prince [João] came to her side and soothed her with hopes for the future and with words so gentle and wise that she finally agreed with weighted heart to profess her vows, which were made in the said monastery on the fifteenth of November of the year 1480.³⁶

Also captured in the passage is the reluctance of Juana's household and ladies-in-waiting to embrace her future in the cloisters. A list of official witnesses of her vows at Santa Clara de Coimbra, reported Pina, indicates that she had at least nine female companions with her.³⁷ While few details are known about the women and men who comprised Juana's entourage, it is a fair assumption that, owing to the nature of their position, most of them would be connected to influential aristocratic families in Portugal. Their futures, fortunes, and political status would fluctuate according to the degree of influence held by their mistress. The shift in Juana's position from Afonso V's consort and pretender

35. Freitas, *A Excelente Senhora*, 75.

36. "E na bespora do dia em que foy ordenando a dita Senhora fazer Profyssam, foy no Moeesteiro tamanho pranto de seus criados e criadas que ally ocorreram, como se a ouveram de soterrar. E com isto em alguma maneira foy de seu proposityo revolta pera nom fazer Profyssam, a que o Pryncepe acodio, e assy a soube tempera com esperancas de futuro e bem, e com pallavras brandas e prudentes, que de todo a confirmou em despejadamente fazer a dita proffysma, a qual fez dentro no ditto moesteiro, a quinze dias do mes Novembro do ditto ano de mil e quatrocentos e oitenta." Pina, "Crónica de D. Afonso V," ch. 207, p. 874. All translations from the original Portuguese to English are mine.

37. Witnesses were D. Joana de Vilhena, Ines de Ataide, Beatriz de Beca, Violante da Silva, Filipa de Azevedo, Mecia Pereira, Ines Berredo, Isabel de Meneses, and Briolanja de Sousa. Other witnesses included Fr. Andres "da Ordem S. Jeronimo," Cristoval da Concha, former chaplain of Isabel [of Coimbra], Rodrigo Velez, Joao Vaca, Fernando Daça, notary of the Catholic kings, bishop of Coimbra, D. João Galvão, the Count of Abrantes, Rui de Sousa, João Teixeira, Pedro Botelho, and Fr. António de Elvas; see Freitas, *A Excelente Senhora*, 76.

to the throne of Castile, to a nun in a Poor Clare monastery, would have been a great disappointment. The impact on the Count and Countess of Abrantes and members of their immediate family would also have been considerable.

Juana's reluctance to take up the habit and the ostensible pressure placed on the crown by her affiliates lead to questions about her degree of seclusion from the court and political society, as well as the permanence of her position in Santa Clara de Coimbra. On 21 October 1480, only three weeks before she professed her vows, the king wrote to her, conferring upon her all the honours and privileges that were enjoyed by the infantas of Portugal. Addressing her as his niece, rather than his spouse, the letter tacitly acknowledges an annulment of their marriage.³⁸ Given Juana's age at the time of their marriage and the short period of time that the couple spent together, the annulment likely came on the grounds that the marriage had not been consummated.³⁹ But the timing of the letter is also important, because the provision of an enormous *assentamento* or allowance just before the profession of her vows indicates that Afonso V expected Juana to maintain a core of affiliates (*criados*) and retainers, even if they did not serve her directly. That she maintained a retinue and partial household while she was supposedly cloistered at Santa Clara de Coimbra is supported by the fact that the Countess of Abrantes was confirmed as her *aia* and *camareira mor*, on 18 April 1482.⁴⁰

Although the nuns of the Poor Clares swore oaths of poverty (as well as of chastity and obedience), there is evidence to refute the assumption that aristocratic women who entered the cloisters were cut off from political activity. In fact, by the time that Juana had entered Santa Clara of Coimbra, the Poor Clares had enjoyed a long history of involving themselves in the political

38. Freitas, *A Excelente Senhora*, 80.

39. On this matter: contemporary concerns about procreation and the health of adolescent girls were presented by the ambassador Pedro de Ayala to Ferdinand and Isabel in his relation of marriage arrangements between James IV and Margaret Tudor; see "Spain: July 1498, 21–31," in *Calendar of State Papers, Spain*, 1:1485–1509, ed. G. A. Bergenroth (London, 1862), 176. The twelfth-century mystic Hildegarde von Bingen in *Causae et Curae* claimed that pregnancy was safer in women as they approached age twenty; see Amundsen and Diers, 365. In addition, Afonso V expressed his distaste at the prospect of marrying his sister's young daughter prior to their marriage in a letter to the Marquis of Villena dated 10 March 1474, less than two weeks after Juana turned twelve. See Appendix, Doc. 29, in Azcona, *Juana de Castilla*, 425–26.

40. Braamcamp Freire and Bivar Guerra, *Brasões da Sala de Sintra*, 3:319.

affairs of the Iberian Peninsula. As an example, the convent of Poor Clares at Tordesillas had been established close to the onset of the Castilian Civil War (1366–69). Amid the political crisis, its nuns performed intercessory works on behalf of Pedro I of Castile (1351–69) and his controversial mistress, María de Padilla. Later, Juan I (1379–90) appears to have lobbied the papacy to issue reforms that would return the convent to its former observance as a means of limiting its political interference.⁴¹ The case of the Poor Clares of Tordesillas suggests that convents could be involved in matters of national importance. In Portugal, too, there are signs that such convents could be too politically involved. Between 1469 and 1482, the convent of Nossa Senhora da Conceição became a centre of a conflict where the Observant Franciscans withheld their backing because the nuns were thought to be too closely connected to the household of the Infanta Beatriz.⁴² It is thus possible that, even within the confines of the monastery of Santa Clara de Coimbra, Juana might have been able to rally support if needed.

Moreover, the profession of vows by royal women did not necessarily preclude the possibility of marriage. Although Princess Santa Joana entered the convent de Jésus de Aveiro in 1475, João II negotiated her marriage to Richard III of England in the spring of 1485.⁴³ His death at the Battle of Bosworth that summer prevented the marriage from taking place. João II's maternal aunt, Filípa (1435–97), had a flexible position within the Cistercian monastery of Odivelas. During the War of the Castilian Succession, she secured permission from the pope to live within the walls of the monastery but did not profess vows. As an important advisor to João II, she remained politically active for most of her life.⁴⁴ These examples are likely what prompted Ferdinand and Isabel to lobby the Holy See to ensure that Juana adhered to her vows during the 1480s.

41. Bert Roest, "The Poor Clares during the Era of Observant Reforms: Attempts at a Typology," *Franciscan Studies* 69 (2012): 343–46, dx.doi.org/10.1353/frc.2012.0003.

42. Ivo Carneiro da Sousa, *A Rainha D. Leonor (1458–1525): Poder, Misericórdia, Religiosidade e Espiritualidade no Portugal* (Lisbon: Caloust Gulbenkian, 2002), 468–69.

43. No date is given, but the meeting must have taken place after the death of Anne Neville on 16 March 1485. Richard III died at Bosworth on 22 August 1485 when Joao II was in Alcobaça. See Alvaro Lopes de Chaves et al., *Livro de apontamentos (1438–1489): códice 443 da Coleção Pombalina da B.N.L* (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional Casa da Moeda, 1983), 254–57.

44. Pep Mayolas, *La Princesa La Exili, Felipa de Coimbra I de Urgell (1435–497)* (Barcelona: Llibres de L'Index, 2011), 92.

Threats of marriage

Relations between Castile and Portugal began to cool in 1482 and there is some evidence that João II was considering the marriage of Juana to a foreign power. The chronicler Pina reported that in early 1482, João II sent an embassy to Edward IV of England to rekindle the friendship between the two kingdoms. It was a sign that Portugal was starting to look at strengthening its alliances with foreign powers.⁴⁵ It is in this context that the king began to consider a marriage between twenty-year-old Juana and Francis Phoebus, the king of Navarre who had only just reached the age of fourteen.⁴⁶ At this time, the regency of Navarre was in the hands of Magdalena of Valois, a sister of Louis XI of France, but still under intense pressure from the crown of Aragon. A marriage between Juana and Francis Phoebus stoked the potential for an alliance between Portugal and Navarre, which would be supported by France and bolstered by the noble factions in Castile that still supported Juana. An undated minute from a meeting of the royal council of João II mentions plans for this marriage: “at this same time, [the council] agreed to a wedding of King Phoebus of Navarre, son of the count of Foix and the sister of King Louis of France with the lady who is in Santa Clara de Santarém.”⁴⁷ However, the sudden and suspicious death of Francis Phoebus on 7 January 1483 thwarted the plan. The Castilians caught wind of the arrangements and, on 1 March 1483, João II was asked to swear an oath to ambassadors of Isabel I that he would not permit Juana of Castile to contract marriage, leave Portugal, or abandon monastic life.⁴⁸

The fact that João II had attempted to marry Juana to the king of Navarre, and in so doing breached the terms of the *Terçarias da Moura*, adds important context to the trial and execution of the Duke of Bragança that took place in the late spring of 1483. In his chronicle, Pina claimed that the *Terçarias da Moura* were called off because João II feared for the health of Prince Afonso

45. Pina, “Crónica de D. Afonso V,” ch. 7, p. 905.

46. Pina, “Crónica de D. João II,” ch. 8, pp. 905–09.

47. “nesto mesmo tempo, se mouja casamento delRej Febus de Navarra filho do Conde de Foces e de huua irmãa del Rej Luis de França com a senhora que estáa em Sancta Crara da Santarém”; see Alvaro Lopes de Chaves et al., *Livro de apontamentos (1438–1489): códice 443 da Coleção Pombalina da B.N.L.*, ed. Anastásia Mestrinho Salgado e Abílio José Salgado (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional Casa da Moeda, 1983), 257.

48. Torre y del Cerro and Suárez Fernández, eds., 2:259–61.

in the midst of the plague.⁴⁹ Thus the arrangement was ended on 15 May 1483, and Hernando de Talavera, the Prior of Prado, was dispatched to take Princess Isabel into custody and return her to Castile.⁵⁰ But within five days, the Duke of Bragança, one of Portugal's leading magnates, was arrested for relaying sensitive information to Ferdinand and Isabel. A month after his arrest, the Duke of Bragança was executed and numerous magnates, including the duke's brothers and young sons, went into exile in Castile.⁵¹

The extreme action taken by João II, which led to numerous confiscations and political disruption, can be better understood in relation to a wider plot of the Portuguese crown to destabilize Castile. Even before the end of the Terçarias, João II had granted large sums of money to the Count and Countess of Abrantes, ostensibly to remove Juana from Santa Clara de Coimbra and provide her with a large household.⁵² The only conceivable reason as to why the king would jeopardize peace with Spain by recalling Juana from the cloisters was that he hoped to strike an alliance with a foreign prince through her marriage. After the death of the young king of Navarre in January 1483, the most plausible and dangerous marriage partner was perhaps the future Charles VIII of France (1483–98), who would turn fourteen in June 1484. Although Charles was betrothed to the three-year-old Margaret of Austria, Louis XI's interests in Navarre may have tempted him to consider a match between his son and Juana. However, Louis XI's own death on 30 August 1483 likely cut these plans short.

In the meantime, it appears that Ferdinand and Isabel took the threat of Juana's marriage seriously. In order to mitigate it, they sent a letter to Pope Sixtus IV on 3 June 1483, asking him to issue a bull that would prevent her from leaving the convent. Accordingly, on 1 March 1484, the pope sent a bull, copied to Cardinal Mendoza, commanding Juana to observe monastic life.⁵³ At the time, the cardinal thought it prudent to translate and circulate the bull alongside several other documents, in order to be read aloud in public. Among

49. Pina, "Crónica de D. João II", ch. 8, pp. 905–06.

50. Pina, "Crónica de D. João II", ch. 14, p. 924.

51. Pina, "Crónica de D. João II", ch. 11, p. 913; ch. 14, pp. 917–24.

52. The Count of Abrantes received 102,864 reis from Juana's *assentamento* to be used for her household: IANTT, *Chancelarias, D. João II*, liv. 22, f. 86v. At the same time, the Countess also received 81,142 reis: IANTT, *Chancelarias, D. João II*, liv. 6, f. 115.

53. Torre y del Cerro and Suárez Fernández, eds., 2:285–88.

them was a copy of the vows that Juana had taken at Santa Clara de Coimbra, four years earlier.⁵⁴ Such efforts indicate that a broad sector of the populace still viewed Juana, now aged twenty-two, as the rightful queen of Castile.

Ferdinand and Isabel continued to appeal to Pope Innocent VIII as part of a concerted effort to keep Juana cloistered until 1488. This timing suggests that, up until this point, João II may have been considering a marriage between Juana and his son, Prince Afonso. Although the age difference between Juana and Afonso was thirteen years, it was less extreme than other matches that had been proposed. When the prince turned fourteen in May 1489, Juana would be only twenty-seven and likely able to bear children. Clearly such a marriage would bring Portugal and Castile to the brink of war, but João II evidently made some preparations accordingly, including the already mentioned attempt to renew Portugal's alliance with England. But the death of Richard III left João II in a difficult position and an alliance between England and Spain seems to have been largely concluded by April of 1488.⁵⁵

The eventual marriage of Prince Afonso to the Infanta Isabel in 1490 exemplifies the priority that the Spanish monarchs placed on securing the prince's marital future. When marriage negotiations had first begun, João II had craftily sought a union between his son and Ferdinand and Isabel's second daughter. This match would be delayed until the end of 1491 when the Infanta Juana would reach the age of twelve. But Ferdinand and Isabel instead insisted upon a marriage between Prince Afonso and their eldest daughter, the Infanta Isabel, despite the fact that she was higher in the order of succession and therefore more diplomatically valuable. At twenty, the Infanta Isabel could marry immediately, and the terms of the marriage were negotiated by Rui de Sande when the prince turned fourteen in May 1489. The couple were married by proxy on Easter Sunday the following year, and the Infanta Isabel arrived in Portugal at the end of the summer of 1490.

However, in an unexpected turn of events, the sixteen-year-old prince fell from his horse in a riding accident in the late summer of 1491. His premature death as a result of the injuries led to controversy in the matter of succession. The death of Princess Santa Joana in 1490 had left Manuel, Duke of Beja (son of the Infanta Beatriz), as the king's closest legitimate male relative. But for

54. Torre y del Cerro and Suárez Fernández, eds., 2:313–15.

55. "Spain: 1488," in *Calendar of State Papers, Spain*, 1:3–19.

João II, this arrangement was disagreeable. The accession of the Duke of Beja would bring greater influence to his estranged wife, Queen Leonor (who was the duke's sister), and their mother, the Infanta Beatriz. These women were the head of a coalition of nobles who sought to restore titles and property to the House of Bragança and other families who had been exiled in the wake of the conspiracies of 1483 and 1484. This coalition was opposed by the rival faction, headed by the Count of Abrantes. Although the 1st count, Lopo de Almeida, had died in 1484, the Countess of Abrantes lived until 1500.⁵⁶ Three of her sons—João, 2nd Count of Abrantes; Diogo Fernandes de Almeida, prior of Crato; and Pedro da Silva, commander of the Order of Avis—had become highly influential members of the royal council.⁵⁷

Thus, in 1491, the succession of Manuel, Duke of Beja threatened the political order. Hoping to avoid the restoration of the dukes of Bragança, João II sought an alternative: to name his natural son, Dom Jorge, as his successor. In the summer of 1494, the king dispatched Pedro da Silva to Pope Alexander VI to seek dispensation to legitimize Dom Jorge and place him in the line of succession. But the pope, who was Aragonese by birth and under intense diplomatic pressure from Ferdinand and Isabel, refused to grant dispensation. He ruled that to name an illegitimate heir to the throne was to degrade the office of kingship. Intermediaries from the courts of Castile and Aragon also came to Portugal to relay their objections and entreated João II to try to conceive more children with his wife, the thirty-six-year-old Leonor of Viseu.⁵⁸ Still, there is no evidence that João II was prepared to back down. In the autumn of 1495, even after João II had become seriously ill, there was still a dangerous ambiguity surrounding the succession. Although the king named Manuel, Duke of Beja as successor in his final will and testament of September 29, he left a reserve clause that might allow him to change his decision at the final moment. In anticipation that there might be an armed struggle, troops sent by Isabel I amassed at the border.⁵⁹

56. Braamcamp Freire and Bivar Guerra, *Brasões da Sala de Sintra*, 2:351.

57. Caetano de Sousa, *Provas de História Genealógica da Casa Real Portuguesa*, 3:217–24. See also Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Career and Legend of Vasco da Gama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 49.

58. Jean Aubin, "D. João II devant sa succession," *Arquivos do Centro Cultural Português* 27 (1991): 115.

59. António Francisco Barata, "Últimos cinco annos do viver de D. João II," *Archivo Histórico Portuguez* 3 (1905): 365–71.

Ferdinand and Isabel's willingness to intervene in the issue of Manuel I's succession hints that the family of the Count of Abrantes may have planned to marry Dom Jorge to Juana. Although a marriage between Dom Jorge and Juana would have brought Portugal to war with Castile, the House of Abrantes may have preferred war to the restoration of the House of Bragança. Ana de Mendonça, Dom Jorge's mother, may also have viewed the marriage as protection for her son. Having served Juana as a lady-in-waiting for twenty years, Ana de Mendonça was a well-trusted companion. Her connections were long-standing and her appointment to Juana's entourage in 1475 was likely secured through her aunt, Violante de Nogueira, who had been the *aia* of Joana of Portugal.⁶⁰ In 1476, Ana de Mendonça had accompanied Juana from Castile to Abrantes and appears to have resided with the countess until Juana entered the cloisters.⁶¹ In fact, Dom Jorge had been born at Abrantes in 1481, nine months after Juana professed her vows at Santa Clara de Coimbra.

While inconvenient, owing to the age difference, a marriage between Juana and Dom Jorge, the natural son of João II, would have served multiple interests. For Ana de Mendonça, the death of Prince Afonso left Dom Jorge's future uncertain. Whereas Dom Jorge's status might have been protected through ties to his half-brother Prince Afonso, he had no such connection to the Duke of Beja. For Juana, a marriage to the son of (and potentially the successor to) João II would have been a favourable match and would have placed her in a better position from which to reclaim the throne of Castile. Although there was no clear sign of a foreign power who might ally with the Portuguese against Aragon and Castile, Ferdinand and Isabel now faced opposition from the tens of thousands of Jews who had been expelled from their kingdoms in 1492. Although the scope of this opposition is hard to determine, many of these families were wealthy and held powerful connections to aristocratic families on both sides of the border. The idea of supporting a rebellion against Ferdinand and Isabel on behalf of Juana might well have appealed to exiled Jewish families seeking a regime change in Castile.

60. Braamcamp Freire and Bivar Guerra, *Brasões da Sala de Sintra*, 3:172.

61. Although her name is not on the lists of witnesses at Juana's profession at Santa Clara de Coimbra, it is almost certain that she was there in the company of Prince João. Dom Jorge was born on 21 August 1481, exactly forty weeks from the date of Juana's profession on 15 November 1480 at Santa Clara de Coimbra.

But in the end, the risks of war with Castile outweighed the benefits and João II adhered to his decision to name Manuel, Duke of Beja as his successor.⁶² Upon his accession as Manuel I, the new king wrested Dom Jorge's wardship from the House of Abrantes and kept him at court under heavy guard.⁶³ With the death of João II, Juana's threat as pretender to the Castilian throne was effectively neutralized, as Manuel I set out to forge a lasting peace with Ferdinand and Isabel and restore the House of Bragança. In 1496, he authorized the return of the exiles and negotiated marriage to the Infanta Isabel, widow of Prince Afonso. At the same time, the new king, counselled by his mother and sisters, chose to appease his rivals. His generosity extended to Juana as well as to many partisans of João II. And it appears to be at this juncture that there was a permanent shift in Juana's title, from Excelente Freira (excellent sister) to Excelente Senhora (excellent lady).⁶⁴ In 1498, Juana was provided with a new household governed by Rui Gomes de Grã, a senior official at the royal court.⁶⁵ His wife, Maria de Meneses, was appointed as her *camareira mor*, replacing the aged dowager, the Countess of Abrantes. Her annual income, with which she supported her household, ranged between 1.5 million reais and 2 million reais and was drawn largely from *sisas*, or sales tax revenues from around Lisbon.⁶⁶ This sum made her one of the most highly paid members of the Portuguese aristocracy during the reign of Manuel I.

While Juana, the Excelente Senhora's prospects for marriage and motherhood had waned by the turn of the sixteenth century, they were not yet over. On 26 November 1504, Isabel I died, leaving the succession of Castile uncertain. The official heir to the throne was Juana of Castile (1504–55), Ferdinand and Isabel's second daughter. By the time of her mother's death, she

62. Rui de Pina, "Testamento de D. João II," in *Crónica de D. João II*, ed. Alberto Martins de Carvalho (Coimbra: Atlântida, 1950), 264–66.

63. "[...] dalli por diante enquanto er leri nam casou trouxe sempre dom George em sua casa e dormia com elle na cama ho em tudo quomo a filho." Damião de Góis, *Crónica do felicissimo rei D. Manuel* (Coimbra: Acta Universitatis Conimbrigensis, 1949–1955), 1:18.

64. Azcona, *Juana de Castilla*, 207–10.

65. IANTT, *Chancelaria de D. Manuel I*, liv. 31, 148. In 1496, prior to his appointment, Gomes de Grã is mentioned as a licentiate and member of the *desembargo do paço*. IANTT, *Chancelaria de D. Manuel I*, liv. 31, 148 liv. 26, 104v. He was also the principal judge at the trial of the Duke of Bragança in 1483. Pina, "Crónica de D. João II," ch. 14, pp. 917–24.

66. Drumond Braga, 251–52.

had been married to Philip the Fair, Duke of Burgundy, for eight years. The succession of Juana I and Philip I caused a new set of problems for the widowed Ferdinand of Aragon, for it implied a closer relationship between the monarchs of Castile and the Holy Roman emperor, Maximilian I of Austria. Accordingly, Ferdinand of Aragon sought ways to undercut the claims of his daughter and retain the close alliance between the crowns of Aragon and Castile.

A wheel came full circle as Ferdinand of Aragon himself contemplated a marriage to Juana, the *Excelente Senhora*. On 22 December 1504, less than a month after the death of Isabel I, the Spanish ambassador of Flanders wrote to Ferdinand urging him to make haste to have himself sworn in as governor of Castile. A great matter, the ambassador stated, was the king's marriage and he urged him to consider "that lady who lives in Portugal and is titled the Queen of Castile. And that the King might take her for his wife and with her title, could rule the kingdom."⁶⁷ At that time, Juana was forty-two years old, and although there was little likelihood of her conceiving a child, it nonetheless remained a possibility. There is evidence that Juana saw this marriage as her final opportunity to reclaim the throne of Castile. However, the marriage plan was ill-received by Manuel I, who moved her to the royal court and placed her under heavy guard, claiming that he wanted to remain on friendly terms with Philip I.⁶⁸ Portugal had nothing to gain by having Ferdinand placed securely on the throne of Castile. In the end, Ferdinand married Louis XII's niece, Germaine de Foix on 22 March 1506, in a union that paved his way for the conquest of Navarre.

Conclusion

In the years that followed, Juana's threat to the dynastic stability of Castile lessened considerably. New tensions between Ferdinand and his daughter, Juana I, were at the forefront of Castilian affairs and Ferdinand became embroiled in new conflicts on the Mediterranean. In 1512, Juana, the *Excelente Senhora*, turned fifty, the age at which female fertility was thought to end. But

67. "[...] aquella señora que está en Portugal, que se llama Reina de Castilla, y que el Rey podrá tomarla por muger, y con el título de aquella, poseer el reyno." Duque de Berwick y de Alba, *Correspondencia de Gutierre Gómez de Fuensalida* (Madrid: 1907), 317–18, transcribed by Azcona, *Juana de Castilla*, 241.

68. J. Garcia Mercadal, *Viajes de extranjeros por España y Portugal...*, Madrid: 1952, in Azcona, *Juana de Castilla*, 242–43.

though unable to produce a rival dynasty, she nonetheless remained a thorn in the side of the Spanish crown. In May of 1522, the Spanish ambassador to Portugal wrote to Ferdinand's successor, Charles V (1516–55), to report on the movements of any fugitives who had escaped to Portugal in the wake of the Comunero Revolt. He was looking for any interaction that the rebels might have had with Juana, the Excelente Senhora.⁶⁹

The threat of her position as another rival, and a further complication to the unfettered rule of Charles V, may have contributed to her decision, a few months later, to relinquish her title as queen of Castile. But rather than concede her title to Juana I or to Charles V, she offered the crown to the king of Portugal, João III (1521–57). In her letter of abdication, she expressed the reasons behind her decision: her age and the fact she could no longer produce an heir. Still, in the document she maintained the dignity of her position. Signing her letter "I, the Queen," as was her custom throughout her life, Juana, the Excelente Senhora reiterated that she, and not Juana I or Charles V, was the legitimate sovereign of Castile.⁷⁰ She vehemently expressed her hopes that João III would use the strength of his position to oppose Charles V, who had dangerously been elected Holy Roman emperor. She must have been disappointed when, three years later, João III betrayed this trust by sealing a peaceful alliance with Charles V in a marriage agreement of his own.⁷¹

Further research into Juana's networks of affinity will better elucidate her skill in drawing on her connections at the Portuguese court. It may also better illustrate the pressures that were exerted on her by affiliates such as the counts of Abrantes. But the case of Juana reveals that marriage "in the words of the present" was a far more powerful threat than marriage "in the words of the future" because the ability to produce dynastic heirs could be imminent. Moreover, matters of age, fertility, consummation, and canonical rules surrounding a marriage were central (rather than peripheral) concerns of the agents who navigated the waters of early modern diplomacy.

In many ways, Juana la Beltraneja, the Excelente Senhora can be seen as a pawn on the chess board of the kings of Portugal. She was ushered into the cloisters of Santa Clara de Coimbra, when peace between Portugal and Castile became desirable. She was pressured to emerge from monastic life as diplomatic

69. "Juan de Zúñiga to Charles V," 17 May 1522, transcribed by Azcona, *Juana de Castilla*, 460–62.

70. Azcona, *Juana de Castilla*, 300.

71. Caetano de Sousa, *Provas do História Genealógica da Casa Real Portuguesa*, vol. 2, part 1, pp. 86–92.

waters surged and became rough. Her initial marriage to her uncle Afonso V, and the subsequent schemes to marry her to the kings of Navarre and Aragon (and possibly to the king of France, the Prince of Portugal, and the Duke of Coimbra), were diplomatic manoeuvres designed to better position Portugal as it vacillated between war and peace with its only neighbour.

But Juana also exercised a degree of agency. Marriage required consent, and when faced with a marriage to the Prince of Asturias, Juana withheld it. Equally, the decision to profess her vows was ultimately a decision made by her. For Juana, the opportunity to pursue her legitimate title to the crown of Castile outweighed any reluctance to marry a middle-aged relative or a much younger prince. Throughout her life in Portugal, she received an astonishing income and enjoyed a life of relative luxury, despite being attached to a Franciscan convent. The fact that she was kept under heavy guard after the death of Isabel I suggests that by the time she reached her forties, she was more than capable of trying to act on her wishes. Most telling was the fact that, up until 1522, she steadfastly maintained that she was the rightful queen of Castile. Juana, the *Excelente Senhora*, may have been a pawn. But she was a pawn who, on several occasions, threatened to cross the board to be queened.