



Chronicle of King Peter I [Prologue] | Chronica del Rey D. Pedro [Prologo]

Text Information

Author | Fernão Lopez

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Transcription, translation and introduction by Leonardo Grao Velloso.

Introduction to the Text

Written by Fernão Lopes (c. 1380-1460), the first Royal Chronicler of the kingdom of Portugal, the *Crônica de D. Pedro I* (*Chronicle of Peter I*) was probably composed in the first half of the fifteenth century. It belongs to the earlier tradition of late medieval royal chronicles (c. 13th and 14th centuries), histories that narrated important events in the lives of kings, aristocrats, and kingdoms. Common in France, Portugal, Castile, and Aragon, such histories often combined a very positive account of the king's life—as a means of simultaneously praising him and recording his actions—with lessons on how to rule a kingdom, drawn from the king's achievements and mistakes.

The events described in the *Chronicle of Peter I* took place between the years 1357 and 1367. Those years were important for the Portuguese kingdom, because they preceded a change in its ruling family in 1383-1385, when the family of Avis replaced Peter I's family, the kings of Bourgogne. The first king of the Avis family, John I, was Peter I of Bourgogne's illegitimate son. In a way, writing the history of Peter I's reign of Portugal meant narrating the beginnings of John I's ascension to the Portuguese crown.

It was under John I, in 1418, that Fernão Lopes was appointed the Royal Keeper of the Archives (*Guarda-Mor*). Lopes was responsible for keeping the official records of the kingdom of Portugal, such as royal decrees and treaties. After holding that position for 26 years, Lopes was appointed as the first Royal Chronicler (*Cronista-Mor*) in 1434, by King Edward I, John I's son. Lopes was then assigned the task of writing the official history of the kings of Portugal, in addition to his role as the Royal Keeper. It was probably after he was appointed as the Royal Chronicler that Lopes started writing the *Chronicle of Peter I*. In the prologue presented here, we see how Lopes' two positions influenced his writing. He attempts to balance a faithful record of past events, as expected from a royal archivist, and a trustworthy praise of Peter I, as expected from the royal chronicler.

This double role partly explains why the *Chronicle of Peter I* is unique among late medieval chronicles. First, Lopes' interest in historical accuracy distinguishes his work. He explained his vision of historical writing in the prologue to another work, the *Crônica Del Rey D. João I* (*Chronicle of King John I*). There he claimed that chronicles often showed too much "affectionate bias" (*mundanall afeição*) in favor of the king, which ended up obscuring the truth about the events.

A second distinctive feature of Lopes' *Chronicle* is how he focuses on people other than the king. Late medieval chronicles tended to concentrate mostly on the person of the king and those closest to him, his aristocracy. As this prologue illustrates, however, the chronicle's main subject is not Peter I's person, but his importance for both the laws of the kingdom and the life of its people. The *Chronicle of Peter I* is made up of a prologue and 46 chapters. The prologue presents Lopes' interpretation of Peter I's reign, while the chapters focus on specific events, covering topics such as internal policy (justice, monetary policy), Portuguese maritime exploration, the relationships with the kingdoms of Castile and England, Portugal's involvement in the fight against the Muslim kingdoms, Peter's forbidden love affair with Inês de Castro, and others.



The *Chronicle of Peter I* was well received in late medieval Portugal. It helped other chroniclers frame the kingdom's official history, a frame which emphasized how the life of the king and the life of the kingdom were inseparable. After Lopes' *Chronicle of Peter I*, telling the readers how they should interpret the facts narrated in a chronicle became as important as getting the facts right. Lopes' achievement in the prologue of the *Chronicle of Peter I*—namely an innovative way of relating events in the king's life to what happened to both the people and the kingdom—had a long afterlife, influencing other official chronicles until at least the end of the sixteenth century.

This work is paramount for those who wish to understand how Portuguese state-sponsored chronicles helped shape the kingdom as a collective entity.

Introduction to the Source

The National Library of Portugal (BNL) holds the manuscript from which the Prologue was transcribed and translated. The BNL catalogue dates the manuscript to 1475-1525. (The online catalogue entry can be viewed online [here](#).) Before this manuscript arrived at the BNL, it was in the possession of a Jesuit College in Évora, Portugal, the College of the Holy Spirit.

This manuscript comprises two chronicles by Fernão Lopes, the *Chronicle of Peter I* and the *Chronicle of Ferdinand I*, both written with the same hand. Unfortunately, no surviving copy from the time of its production (c. 1440) remains, but there are a few other copies made in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, between the years of 1525 and 1600. The presence of these early modern manuscripts, written with different hands, indicates that manuscript versions of the *Chronicle of Peter I* still circulated in the 15th and 16th centuries.



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Prologo

[D]Eixados os modos e diffinções da justiça que per desvairadas guisas muitos em seus livros escrevem, soamente daquela pera que o real poderio foy estabelecido, que he por serem os maos castigados e os booms viverem em paz, he nossa entemção neeste prologo muito curtamente fallar, nom come buscador de novas razões per propria invenção achadas, mas come ajuntador, em hum breve moolho, dos ditos dalguns que nos prouguerom. A huma por espertar os que ouvirem que entendam parte do que falla a estoria, a outra por seguirmos inteiramente a hordem do nosso razoado; no primeiro prologo ja tangida.

E por quanto elRey dom pedro, cujo regnado se segue, husou da justiça, de que a deos mais praz que cousa boa, que o Rey possa fazer segumdo os santos escrevem, e alguuns desejam saber que virtude he esta, e pois he neçessaria ao Rey, se o he assi ao povoo: nos naquele stillo que o simpresmente apanhamos: o podees ler per esta maneira.

Justiça he huuma virtude que he chamada toda a virtude. assy que, quallquer que he justo, este compre toda a virtude, Porque a justiça, assi como lei de deos, defende que no fornigues, nem sejas gargantom. E isto guardamdo, se compre a virtude da castidade e da temperança, e assi podees entender dos outros viços e virtudes. Esta virtude he muy neçessaria ao Rey e isso meesmo aos seus sogeitos. Porque avemdo no Rey virtude de justiça, fara leis per que todos vivam dereitamente e em paz, e os seus sogeitos seemdo justos, compriram as leis que el poser. e comprindoas, nom faram cousa injusta contra nehum. e tal virtude como esta pode cada hum ganhar por obra de boom entendimento. e aas vezes naçem alguuns viços sejam emclinados.

Prologue

Having left aside the types and definitions of justice,¹ which many write about in unreasonable ways,² it is our intention to speak very briefly of justice alone, which is the reason why royal power exists, namely to punish the evil people and to allow the good ones to live in peace. We wish to speak about justice not as seekers of new ways of understanding, which are found using personal creativity, but as collectors of sayings from writers who have contented us.³ We write this history this way, on the one hand, to edify those who will hear it, so that they may understand part of what it is about, and on the other hand, to strictly follow the order of our own plan, which we have already touched upon in the first prologue.⁴

And given that the king, Lord Peter, whose reign is narrated in the following chronicle, ruled with justice—an act more pleasing to God than anything else that a king might do, according to the writings of the saints—, and given that some wish to know what kind of virtue justice is, because it is necessary for both the king and the people, we have simply collected examples from his reign in this writing, as we have pointed out,⁵ so that you may read about his use of justice in this way.

Justice is the one virtue which is called the mother of all virtues. Thus, anyone who is just simultaneously performs all virtues, because justice itself commands that *thou shalt not fornicate, neither wilt thou be a glutton*, just like the Laws of God command.⁶ And in keeping those commands, one performs the virtues of chastity and temperance, and through performing them one may understand the vices and virtues of others. The virtue of justice is very necessary for the king, as well as for his subjects. For when the virtue of justice exists within the king, he will make laws so that all subjects may live correctly and in peace with each other, and if his subjects are just, they will respect any laws that he might impose upon them. Thus, by respecting the laws, his subjects will not commit any unjust act against anyone. And each one can attain this virtue through the use of good reason. Sometimes some are born with a natural disposition to being just, thus carrying it out with great zeal, even though they might be inclined to some other vices.



A rrazam por que esta virtude he neçessaria nos sobditos, he por comprirem as leis do príncipe, que sempre devem de seer ordenadas pera todo bem. e quem taaes leis cumprir sempre bem obrara, ca as leis som regra do que os sogeitos am de fazer. e som chamadas príncipe nom animado e o Rey he príncipe animado, por que ellas representam com vozes mortas o que o Rey diz per sua voz viva. e porem a justiça he muito neçessaria assi no poboo como no Rey, por que sem ella nenhuma cidade, nem Reino, pode estar em assesego. Assi que o Reino onde todo o poboo he maa nom se pode soportar muito tempo, Por que como a alma soporta o corpo e partindosse delle o corpo se perde, assy a justiça suporta os Reinos, e partindosse deles perecem de todo.

Hora se a virtude da justiça he neçessaria ao poboo muito mais o he ao Rei. Por que sse a lei he regra do que se ha de fazer, muito mais o deve de seer o Rei que a põe, e o juiz que a ha dencaminhar. Por que a lei he príncipe sem alma como dissemos, e o príncipe he lei e regra da justiça com alma. Pois quanto a cousa com alma tem melhoria sobre outra sem alma, tanto o Rei deve teer exçellença sobre as leis, Ca o Rei deve de seer de tanta justiça e de-reito que compridamente de as leis a execucom. Doutra guisa mostrarsehia seu Regno cheo de boas leis e maaos costumes, que era torpe cousa de ver, Pois duvidar se o Rei a de seer justo nom he outra cousa senam duvidar se a regra há de seer direita, a qual se em direitura desfaleçe, nenhuma cousa direita se pode per ella fazer.

Outra razom por que a justiça he muito neçessaria ao Rei assi he por que a justiça nom tan soamente afremossenta os Reis de virtude corporal mas ainda spiritual. Pois quanto a fremosura do spritu tem vantagem da do corpo: tanta a justiça em no Rei he mais neçessaria que outra fremosura. A terceira razom se mostra da perfeiçom da bondade; por que em tom dizemos alguma cousa seer perfeita, quando fazer pode alguma semelhante a si, E por tanto se chama huuma cousa boa: quanto sua bondade se pode estender a outros, ao menos se quer per exemplo. e entom se mostra per pratica quanto cada huum he boom, quando he posto em senhorio.

The reason why the virtue of justice is needed among the subjects is because they must respect the laws of the prince, laws which must be imposed for the general good. And whoever respects such laws will always act for the good, for those laws are the rule by which subjects will measure their acts. Laws are called the inanimate prince, whereas the king is the animate prince, because laws represent with dead voices that which the king says through his live voice. And so justice is very necessary both for the people and for the king, because without justice, neither city nor kingdom may be at ease. And justice is so necessary for the people and the king that, a kingdom whose entire people is evil cannot subsist for long. Just as the soul gives life to the body, and when the soul moves way, the body dies, so does justice give life to kingdoms, and when justice leaves them, they perish completely.

Now, if the virtue of justice is necessary for the people, it is much more needed in the king. For if laws are the rules by which one measures one's own acts, even more just must be the king who sets them, and the judge who must carry them out. And that is the case because laws are the prince without a soul, as we have said, which means that the prince is the rule of justice with a soul. Just as that which has a soul is better than that which does not have one, so the king must be better than the laws he sets, because the king must be so just and righteous in order to thoroughly carry out the laws. Otherwise, his kingdom would be filled with good laws and bad habits, which would be horrible to see, for even suspecting that the king is unjust is no different than suspecting that the rule of law is carried out unjustly. And when the rule of law fails in regards to righteousness, it cannot be used for any righteous acts.

Another reason why justice is very necessary for the king is that justice not only embellishes kings with bodily virtue, but even more so with spiritual virtue. Just as the beauty of the spirit is better than that of the body, so is justice more necessary in a king than any other beauty. The third reason comes from the perfection of goodness, because we may rightfully call something perfect when it can make something in its own likeness.⁷ And so something may be called good when its goodness can extend to others, or at least when it presents itself as an example to others. Thus, it is through one's own acts that one shows how good one is, especially when one is ruling.



Desta virtude da justiça, que poucos acha que a queiram por ospeda posto que Rainha, e senhora seja das outras virtudes segundo diz tulio: husou muito elRey Dom Pedro, segundo veer podem os que desejam de o saber, leemdo parte de sua estoria.

The king, Lord Peter, made vast use of this virtue of justice, a virtue that not too many people want as a guest within them, given that justice is the queen and ruler of all other virtues as Tully has said,⁸ as whosoever may wish to know will see by reading this account of his history.

E pois que elle com boom desejo por natural enclinaçam, refreou os males regendo bem seu Reino, ainda que outras mingoas per el passassem de que peendença podia fazer: de cuidar he que ouve ho galardom da justiça, cuja folha e fruto he, honrrada fama neste mundo, e perdurável folgança no outro.

And since he, voluntarily and because of his natural inclination, checked the advance of evil by ruling his Kingdom well, even though some other imperfections came to pass in the kingdom, whose account we could provide, we must consider that there was in his time the gift of justice, whose laurel and fruit is honorable fame in this world, and lasting happiness in the other.

Critical Notes

- 1 Scholars say that this strange beginning, referencing another text in which Lopes would have already presented a discussion about the definitions of justice, points to the existence of another prologue, possibly a prologue to a lost chronicle that he might have written before writing the *Chronicle of Peter I*, or another prologue to this same chronicle.
- 2 The Portuguese original, *desvairadas guisas*, implies a sense that the writings are disorganized and unreasonable for not having a logic. *Desvairada/o* means “that which lost its way.” This way of writing anticipates the next argument, against invention as a proper way of explaining justice. Fernão Lopes promises to tread paths already taken by previous writers, but in a more systematic way than the ones he criticizes.
- 3 The argument behind this image is very illuminating, as Fernão Lopes frames his work as a writer who collects *ditos* (sayings) from other writers, as opposed to framing himself as an inventor of a new concept or way of explaining justice. Arguments that ascribe authority to previous writers were very common in late medieval historical writing.
- 4 See first note.
- 5 This statement seems to paraphrase the Ten Commandments (see Exodus 20:1-17), but, in fact, neither of these commands are included among the ten.
- 6 This argument about perfection as the attribute of that which can make something in its own likeness recalls Neo-Platonic theology about the idea of God as beautiful and good. Just as God can make beautiful and good things because he is perfect, so does the goodness of the king extend to his subjects because goodness itself is perfect.
- 7 Marcus Tully Cicero (106 B.C.E – 43 B.C.E), Roman statesman, orator, consul, and philosopher.