

THE TRANSMISSION OF MODEL  
BEHAVIOURS IN THE CORRESPONDENCE  
BETWEEN THE MARCHIONESS OF NISA  
AND HER DAUGHTER, THE COUNTESS OF  
PALMELA, AMBASSADRESS TO LONDON  
(1817-1819)\*

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**ABSTRACT:** Between 1817 and 1819, the Countess of Palmela accompanied her husband to the British court, as representatives of the Portuguese crown to that kingdom. During this period, her mother, the Marchioness of Nisa, wrote to her regularly. Besides the usual themes of family correspondence, the Marchioness transmitted a set of advice and warnings that would enable her daughter to better perform her position. This article, following study of this hitherto unpublished documentation, analyses the advice given by this mother to her daughter, thereby characterizing model behaviours and their motivations.

**KEYWORDS:** Correspondence, Gender, Aristocracy, Behavioural Literature, Ambassadors.

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LA TRANSMISIÓN DE MODELOS DE CONDUCTA EN LA CORRESPONDENCIA ENTRE LA MARQUESA DE NISA Y SU HIJA, LA CONDESA DE PALMELA, EMBAJADORA EN LONDRES (1817-1819)

**RESUMEN:** Entre 1817 y 1819, la condesa de Palmela acompañó a su marido a la corte británica, como representantes de la corona portuguesa en aquel reino. Durante este período, su madre, la marquesa de Nisa, le escribió regularmente. Además de los temas habituales de la correspondencia familiar, la marquesa transmitía un conjunto de consejos y advertencias que permitirían un mejor desempeño de su hija en su cargo. Este artículo pretende, a través del análisis de esta documentación inédita, analizar los consejos dados por esta madre a su hija, y establecer la caracterización de comportamientos modélicos y su motivación.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Correspondencia, Género, Aristocracia, Literatura Comportamental, Embajadoras.

### Behavioural literature

Baldassare Castiglione's *Il Libro del Cortegiano*, published in 1528, inaugurated the proliferation of works designated as the literature of social behaviour. Based on Christian morality, these works constituted true pedagogical manuals, transmitting codes of conduct, and modelling social behaviour and moral teachings (Ripe, 2017:155-179). Works of this nature were also published in Portugal, the first dedicated exclusively to this nature is that by Francisco Rodrigues Lobo, *A corte na Aldeia* (1619) (Santos, Mendes, 2015: 57-66), followed by *A Carta de Guia de Casados* (1651) by D. Francisco de Melo, purpose dedicated to the behaviour of married people (Fernandes, 2003: 345-353), the *Arte de Crear bem os filhos na idade de Puerícia* (1685) by Alexandre de Gusmão (Ripe, 2017:155-179) and the *Dicionário pueril para uso dos meninos, ou dos que principiam o ABC e a alletrar*, (1784), by Luís Álvares Pinto (Amaral, Ripe, 2016; 247-267), to name but a few examples. As regards exclusively

feminine education manuals, the examples display an equally diverse and long tradition in Portugal. Firstly, there was the *Livro das tres vertudes A Insinança das Damas*, a Portuguese translation commissioned by Queen Isabel of Coimbra, in around 1446-1455, of Christine de Pizan's work, *Livre des Trois Vertus ou Trésor de la Cité des Dames* (Dávila, 2021: 22-44). Others followed, such as João de Barros's *Espelho de Casados* (1540) and Rui Gonçalves' *Privilégios e prerrogativas que o género feminino tem por direito comum e ordenações do reino mais que o género masculino* (1539) (Mendes, 2011: 83-112). Already in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there was a proliferation of works of French origin, translated into Portuguese, such as *A Aia Vigilante* (1767), by Joana Rousseau de Villeneuve or *Thesouro de Meninas, ou Dialogos entre uma sabia aia e suas discípulas* (1774), followed by *Thesouro de adultas, ou Dialogos entre uma sabia mestra e suas discípulas*, (1795), both written by Madame Leprince de Beaumont and translated by Joaquim Inácio de Frias (Ripe, 2017: 155-179).

The development of court society, the social institution par excellence of the modern state, in the conception of Norbert Elias, who takes the French court as his model (Elias, 1987), implied the hierarchization both of the aristocracy and of social conventions as well as rigid self-control over the behaviours of those in attendance. Therefore, courtesan conduct should be based on learning and managing civility, making it possible to increase the prestige of the court (Fiadeiro, 2007: 38-41).

In this sense, and alongside the publication of these pedagogical works (Leal, 1995: 197-232) that recommended standards of behaviour and moral conduct (Amaral, Ripe, 2016: 247-257),<sup>1</sup> there are other literary typologies holding the same purposes, as systematized by Ana Silva Terra: aphorisms and proverbs, pamphlets of social criticism, censorship of fashions and customs, as well as letters from parents to children (Terra, 2000: 7).

This latter category, studied by José Adriano de Freitas Carvalho, is of particular interest for the present paper. Listing and editing a significant collection of instructions addressed by parents to their children, mostly unpublished, he has shown that this tradition, regular in Portugal

<sup>1</sup> Some of which also privileged the teaching of different knowledge.

and Spain between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, is rooted in the *Instrucción* that the Viceroy of Sicily, Juan de Vega, addressed to his eldest son in serve at the court of Charles V. It also features two cases of women authorship, specifically those of Catarina of Austria to her daughter infanta Maria Manuela, and Maria Francisca of Savoy to infanta Isabel. All these letters of instruction reflect the concern and duty of parents —kings, nobles— or close relatives when their children were going off to serve in arms or at court, with the aim of conveying the behaviours appropriate to these social spaces of power (Carvalho, 2009).

In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, these letters-instructions continued to be present in family correspondence. Vanda Anastácio has recently published the letters that João de Almeida Portugal, marquis of Alorna, wrote to his son Pedro (1764), his daughters Leonor and Maria Rita (1764) and his wife Leonor de Távora (1766). To the son, he shared a set of norms of conduct, resistance strategies and rules for the administration of the aristocratic household of which he would be heir; to the daughters, a body of advice concerning their instruction, moral formation, and behavioural norms. To his wife, he wrote a range of *Obrigações de uma mãe de família encarregada do governo da Casa de seu marido* (Portugal, Anastácio, 2022).

In fact, family correspondence, exchanged within the circle of family and close friends, provide for socialisation among absentees as well as the exchange of information of distinct kinds (Cardim, 2005: 99,106). Most of the themes reflected domestic issues specific to the family itself: the health of individuals, rites of passage - births, marriages, and deaths -, the daily life, taste, and affections of its members as well as personal matters and material needs (Samper Cortés, 2005: 19). However, those produced in the context of the aristocracy also reflect their social origins, dealing with themes related to court life and the events that took place there: the awarding of graces, the description of ceremonies, the pomp and ostentation of lavish consumption (Bouza, 2005: 144-147). By allowing family networks to be maintained, the charter fostered the cohesion of these ties and the sharing of common values (Escribano Paéz, 2014: 235, 240-241).

A significant number of studies have also focused on the letters exchange between mothers and daughters, highlighting the relationship established between the two, their values, decisions, and differences, but above all the self-representation of the author and the performativity of her role as a mother, with the aim of imposing to her daughter a personal or political agenda. The classic example, which to a certain extent became a canon for later production, was Madame de Sévigné's correspondence to her daughter, written in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and published in the following century (Payne, 2012. Moreland, 2012. Caine, 2015. Boucher, 2019).

Therefore, this represents the context in which we should consider the letters written by Eugénia Teles da Gama, Marchioness of Nisa, to her daughter Eugénia, Countess of Palmela, between 1817 and 1819<sup>2</sup>, when she was in London as the wife of the extraordinary envoy and plenipotentiary minister, Pedro de Sousa Holstein, Count of Palmela. In addition to the exchange of information between two absent relatives, transmitting news from Portugal and the family in Lisbon, throughout the Marchioness of Nisa's speech we find a set of advice addressed to her daughter, mainly related to her diplomatic activities at Saint James' Court, along with other, less expressive, advice on domestic economies, marital relations, and affective support in relation to the death of children, based in part on the Catholic religion.

When analysing this correspondence corpus, from the outset, we need to consider the importance of maternal care, especially in relation to the education of their children (Vaquinhas, 2000: 44),<sup>3</sup> as well as the role played by mothers in obtaining mercies for their offspring (Franganillo Álvarez, 2022: 115-133). This facet becomes even more symptomatic as the Marchioness of Nisa was widowed in 1803. This civil status entrusted widowed women with the management of the family estate as regards tutoring and raising the children as well as for administrative matters and the management of the aristocratic house estate (Franganillo Álvarez,

<sup>2</sup> Although her husband's diplomatic mission lasted until 1820, the latest date in this correspondence is 1819. Many of the letters make no reference to the year not only making their secure dating impossible but also the impossibility of concluding with any certainty over just how long the Countess of Palmela remained in London.

<sup>3</sup> The woman-mother as the primary educator.

2022: 115-133). On the other hand, the young age of the daughter —and her natural inexperience, may justify her mother's concern, especially given her position in representation of the Portuguese crown—. In fact, the Countess of Palmela, married at the age of twelve, was only nineteen on arriving in London to take up such high office. However, this was not the first time: soon after her marriage in June 1810, she had left for Cadiz as the wife of the Portuguese envoy and minister plenipotentiary to the Spanish government and remained until 1812 (Costa, 2013: 87-109).

We begin our analysis by presenting these two women since biographical information on both is scarce. This is followed by the indispensable characterization of this documental corpus (Hurel, 1994:125-126) before the actual analysis of the written recommendations handed down by the Marchioness of Nisa to her daughter, organized by themes and highlighting those of diplomatic representation.

### The Marchioness of Nisa and the Countess of Palmela

Eugénia Maria Josefa Xavier Teles de Castro da Gama (1776-1839) was born in the Beato parish of Lisbon.<sup>4</sup> She was daughter of Rodrigo Xavier Teles de Castro da Gama Ataíde Noronha Silveira e Sousa (1744-1784), sixth Marquis of Nisa, and Maria Ana Josefa Teles de Lima (1753-1818), daughter of 12<sup>th</sup> Viscount of Vila Nova da Cerveira and 1<sup>st</sup> Marquis of Ponte de Lima. An only child and orphaned at the age of eight, she inherited her father's goods and titles, becoming the 7<sup>th</sup> Marchioness of Nisa, 11<sup>th</sup> Countess of Vidigueira, 7<sup>th</sup> Countess of Unhão, and landlady of a considerable number of entails (Boquilobo, S. Mateus, S. Eutrópio, Foz and Castro d'Aire) and even the Admiralty of the Indian Ocean (Torres, 1838: 137-138; Alves, 1996: 7-41; Freire, 1903: 25-32). In the old parish of Pena, on November 21, 1790, Eugénia married her maternal uncle, Domingos José Xavier de Lima (1765-1802), both exempt from the degree of consanguinity.<sup>5</sup> Domingos, a volunteer in the Navy and student of the Royal Navy Academy, became a Major-General in the

<sup>4</sup> Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo, Paróquia do Beato, Baptismos, liv. B1, cx. 1, fol. 95v.

<sup>5</sup> Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo, Paróquia da Pena, Casamentos, liv. C18, cx. 21, fol. 65.

Navy and Inspector-General of the Royal Navy Brigade. He participated in several military campaigns, namely against Algerian and Berber piracy, against France in the Rossilhão campaign and in the naval blockade of the island of Malta (Silva, 2021: 75-113), and was appointed extraordinary ambassador to the coronation of Czar Alexander I, a ceremony he did not attend due to illness.<sup>6</sup>

Six children were born to this marriage: Francisca (1793-1833), Rodrigo (1795-?), Tomás (1796-1820), Eugénia (1798-1848), Maria Ana (1798-1816) and Ana Francisca (1801-1814). Widowed at the age of 27, and remaining so for almost forty years, she took charge of the household administration, as her successor, Tomás, was only seven years old, and attempted to convince the Prince Regent to reimburse the family for the sums spent by her husband as ambassador to the Russian court,<sup>7</sup> without great success as her will mentions the precarious economic position of her household.<sup>8</sup> A few years before she died, she would be awarded the Royal Order of Saint Isabel, on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1836.<sup>9</sup>

Based on the correspondence between the Marchioness of Nisa and her daughter Eugénia, we may trace a psychological profile of the author and highlight some characteristics of her personality, such as her remarkable empathy for the suffering of others (her daughter, her family and friends), her devotion to the Catholic religion, patent and transversal in all her letters and also in her will; and even her matriarchal profile, resulting from the leadership position in her own house which, naturally, translates into a posture of advisor on the responsibilities her daughter had assumed as an ambassadress - mainly due to her minority. In fact,

<sup>6</sup> The ceremony took place in Moscow, on September 27, and Domingos arrived there on October 2<sup>nd</sup>, having participated in the following festivities. Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo, Ministério dos Negócios Estrangeiros, cx. 848, n° 46.

<sup>7</sup> Biblioteca Nacional, Serviços Militares e Políticos do Marquês de Nisa [Manuscrito], cod. 521.

<sup>8</sup> Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo, Casa Palmela, mf. 5752, cx. 173, fol. 315-316 and 319.

<sup>9</sup> An honorific order instituted by the then Princess Carlota Joaquina in 1801. It was intended to reward ladies belonging to the nobility for their services, under the inspiration of Queen Saint Isabel. Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo, Ministério do Reino, liv. 926, fol. 10.



the Marchioness of Nisa appeared in the family context as an authority, consulted on important household issues. For example, regarding the marriage of one of her grandsons to the daughter of the Counts of Póvoa, her son-in-law firstly sought her opinion before leaving this decision to his wife<sup>10</sup>. Eugénia died on December 28<sup>th</sup>, 1839, at her palace in Beato parish<sup>11</sup> where, she had been tirelessly cared for by her daughter<sup>12</sup> over the previous year (Garrett, 1848: 32). In the will she left in her room in the Xabregas Palace, and despite the family's financial difficulties,<sup>13</sup> she prays that on the day of her death, alms be distributed to the poor of Lisbon and to her parish priest, the nuns of the Convent of Madre de Deus, the barefoot Augustinian nuns of the Convent of Beato, and the Grilas nuns.<sup>14</sup>

Eugénia Francisca Maria Ana Júlia Felizarda Apolónia Xavier Teles da Gama was born on April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1798, in the Beato parish of Lisbon. In 1810, at the age of 12, she married Pedro Maria de Sousa Holstein (1781-1850). He became the 1st Count (1812), 1st Marquis (1823) and 1<sup>st</sup> Duke of Palmela (1833)- He was a diplomat in Rome (1803-1805); Cadiz

<sup>10</sup> Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo, Casa Palmela, mf. 5809, cx. 235, fol. 1238.

<sup>11</sup> Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo, Paróquia do Beato, Óbitos, liv. O4, cx., 20, fol. 98.

<sup>12</sup> In her will, the Marchioness of Nisa expressly asks her only surviving daughter, the duchess of Palmela, that her dead body be decently dressed only by women. Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo, Casa Palmela, mf. 5752, cx. 173, fol. 302.

<sup>13</sup> I declare that the needs throughout time, and the greater expenses brought upon me by events whose memory will always be painful to me, such as the persecution I and my family experienced, the paralysis of rents due to the civil war, moving house during the siege of Lisbon, and the extraordinary sacrifices I made to meet the expenses of my grandson and daughter-in-law with their emigration and travelling, obliged me to pledge the Morgado's silver in the hands of João [illegible] de Mattos and António Joaquim Franco, which up until today I have been unable to carry out". "Declaro que as necessidades dos tempos, e as maiores despesas que me trouxeram acontecimentos cuja recordação sempre me será dolorosa como foi a perseguição que eu, e a minha família experimentámos, a paralisação das rendas pela guerra civil, a mudança de casa no cerco de Lisboa e os sacrifícios extraordinários para ocorrer às despesas do meu neto e da minha nora com a sua emigração e viagens me obrigaram a empenhar como empenho prata do Morgado nas mãos de João (?) de Mattos de António Joaquim Franco que até hoje não me foi possível desempenhar". Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo, Casa Palmela, mf. 5752, cx. 173, fol. 319.

<sup>14</sup> Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo, Casa Palmela, mf. 5752, cx. 173, fol. 304.

(1809-1812), at the Vienna Congress (1814-1815) and London (1816-1820; 1825-1827 and 1838). A supporter of constitutionalism and of the Queen's cause during the civil war, he held various political posts, ranging from counsellor of state, minister in various ministries, President of the Chamber of Peers and of the Council of Ministers. This marriage resulted in the birth of 15 children, 8 of whom survived her. Despite the young age at which she began her public activities at her husband's side, she always displayed qualities and skills that made her excel as an ambassador. During her lifetime, she lived in Spain, France and England and was fluent in English, French and Spanish, earning recognition as a woman of enormous culture and loftiness in all the foreign courts where she lived. However, and according to the panegyric dedicated to her by Almeida Garrett at the time of her death, the quality that most distinguished her was charity (Garrett, 1848: 31) which, just as her mother, she assumed as a Christian virtue, exercising the function of Inspector in the Association for the Homes for the Asylum of the First Destitute Childhood or helping to found the Institute of St. Vincent de Paul in Portugal (Urbano, 2008: 22). On 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1812, she was awarded the Royal Order of Saint Isabel.<sup>15</sup> She would later become an honorary lady-in-waiting of Queen Maria II. She died in 1848 and it is said her death caused an extraordinary upheaval in the city of Lisbon, affecting all social classes and especially those in close contact with her.

### The documental collection

The Counts of Póvoa collection, held in the custody of the National Archives, consists of 13 books acquired at auction in 2014, following the death of Manuel de Sousa e Holstein Beck (1932-211), the representative of that title. Of these books, four correspond to several bound clusters of correspondence addressed to the Countess of Palmela between the years 1817 and 1819.<sup>16</sup> The volume authored by the Marchioness of Nisa comprises 136 letters, dated between January 9, 1818, and February 19, 1819. However, there are undated letters and others

<sup>15</sup> Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo, Ministério do Reino, liv. 926, fol. 4.

<sup>16</sup> Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo, Condes da Póvoa, liv. 7.

with only the indication of the year 1817. They are in good condition, favoured by the undated binding, which would have made it easier to transport and consult. On average, each letter consists of three folios. The vast majority are written from Lisbon, some from Algés —outside the city limits at the time— and only 3 from Caldas da Rainha. The addressee's location is always unknown, apart from one letter to Paris and two to London. Of this set, there is a letter written entirely by Maria Ana Josefa Xavier de Lima (1753-1818), mother of the Marchioness of Nisa addressed to her granddaughter and some of the letters have double authorship. Besides the Marchioness herself, some passages are signed by her sister Francisca, Marchioness of Castelo-Melhor (1793-1833) or by some unidentified aunts.<sup>17</sup> The signature of the letters is variable, sometimes in abbreviated form, such as “E.”, or “Eug.a” and, more unusually, in complete form, as “Eugénia”.

### Recommendations, advice, and warnings

Eugénia's advice to her daughter mostly focus on how she should behave in public, especially important —and understandable— because of her position as ambassadress in London, despite her activities during this period being barely known<sup>18</sup>. It is not difficult to assume, however, that she tried to get close to Queen Charlotte and, especially after her death on 17 November 1818, to her daughters and daughters-in-law who were then living in London, as well as to other leading figures at the British court. In fact, more recent historiography has shown how noblewomen, whether they belonged to the Queens' household and therefore exercised official power, actively participated in political life, far beyond the functions of service and representation. In the case of ambassadors' wives, their duties involved approaching the queen consort or regent to create a network of information and influence useful to their husband's

<sup>17</sup> These letters were signed only with initials. The marchioness of Nisa had no brothers; they could be her husband's sisters or sisters-in-law. However, the treatment of aunt did not always necessarily indicate a blood tie.

<sup>18</sup> The memoirs of the Duke of Palmela and his published correspondence are practically silent on references to the countess of Palmela (Holstein, Bonifácio, 2010; Holstein, Vasconcelos, 1851).

diplomatic mission and exercising their representational responsibilities through social and ceremonial activities (Oliván Santaliestra, 2016: 95-118; 2017: 61-77. Borgognoni, 2020: 7-30. Do Paço, 2022: 640-662).

However, there are also other occasional recommendations for her daughter to be obedient to her on economic matters. In a letter sent on April 6<sup>th</sup>, in which she asks her daughter to send her a shawl while warning her that: “We don't want something good; we just want it to be decent; the silk size measure goes on that paper, we don't want it, but you'll have to tell us how much it cost, watch what you're doing and we want something cheap”.<sup>19</sup>

The same economic advice would again be the focus of concern but in relation to her son-in-law. On July 25<sup>th</sup>, Eugénia recommended her daughter not to bother her husband with unnecessary monetary expenses: “Also, take a look, don't spend too much, don't abuse the Count's generosity, have patience with me my child in telling you all this”<sup>20</sup>. However, it was not only her son-in-law's generosity that should not be abused but also his patience, as the letter written on October 11<sup>th</sup> conveys: “Concerning the jewels you speak to me about, as a mother I cannot help telling you to pay attention because you should not bother your man with unnecessary things caused by your desires”<sup>21</sup>. In fact, in these recommendations to her daughter, the Marchioness of Nisa defends the subordinate status of woman in relation to her husband, reinforcing the selfless and sacrificed female archetype for the sake of domestic peace (Vaquinhas, Guimarães, 2011: 196-201).

The care taken to express her opinion when advising her daughter, in asking for her patience, is also shown in the concern and empathy

<sup>19</sup> “não queremos cousa boa só q[ue] seja decente vai nesse papel a medida do tamanho de seda não queremos mas [h]ás-de dizer o q[ue] custou vê lá o q[ue] fazes e queremos cousa barata”. Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo, Condes da Póvoa, liv. 7.

<sup>20</sup> “também vê lá não gastes demasiado não abuses da generosidade do Conde tem paciência m[inh]a f[ilh]a em te dizer tudo isto”. Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo, Condes da Póvoa, liv. 7.

<sup>21</sup> “A respeito das jóias q[ue] me dizes como Mãe não posso deixar de te dizer q[ue] façás sentido porq[ue] não deves gastar o teu homem [com] cousas desnecessárias pelos teus apetites”. Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo, Condes da Póvoa, liv. 7.

shown on another occasion over her daughter's suffering. In a letter dated November 14<sup>th</sup>, during her mourning for her granddaughter Isabel, Eugénia advises her daughter as a mother who has also lost children, comforting her motherly:

I don't want to distress you but I was reminded of the 12<sup>th</sup> of this month, which was very different for me last year from this one, and I was and am very sorry for you, and I know that you would have missed your happy daughter on that day, but her happiness is what consoles us the most, and nature has a hard time accommodating herself, but we should all go where she is; everything else passes and this fortune lasts forever<sup>22</sup>.

In fact, what lies behind this letter are the religious principles and the Christian belief in life after death: earthly life is worth nothing, while true fortune lies in eternal life with God (Urbano, in press). Perhaps this maternal support and the religious education given by the Marchioness of Nisa to her daughter did have its benefits. Years later, on March 30<sup>th</sup>, 1830, in a letter to her husband and following the death of another son, the Countess of Palmela would write:

if we do not live for God, who can console us like him! and now I have seen that if my mother had not given me such a religious upbringing, I would never have been able to resist so many trials as I have had, and therefore you must always remember God and that He has helped you and will always help you, and I hope that He will hear the prayers of so many good people who implore Him on your behalf.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> “Não te quero afligir mas m[uit]o me lembrou o dia 12 deste mês bem diferente foi p[ar]a mim o ano passado de este e m[ui]to dó tive e tenho de ti q[ue] sei nesse dia havias de ter m[ui]t[a]s saudades da tua feliz f[ilh]a mas a sua felicidade é o q[ue] nos consola mais a natureza custa-lhe acomodar se mas o caso é irmos todos p[ar]a onde ela está tudo o mais passa e esta fortuna dura p[ar]a sempre”. Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo, Condes da Póvoa, liv. 7.

<sup>23</sup> “se nós não vivermos para Deus, quem é que nos pode consolar como ele! e agora tenho bem visto que se minha mãe me não tivesse dado uma criação tão religiosa, nunca poderia ter podido resistir a tantos trabalhos como tenho tido, e por [isso] tu te deves [ser] sempre lembrado de Deus e que ele te tem valido e há-de sempre acudir e espero que Ele há-de ouvir as orações de tantas pessoas boas que lhe pedem por ti”. Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo, Casa Palmela, mf. 5802, cx. 234, fol. 817.

Religion is not only a matter of consolation and relief from mourning. The presence of her daughter in a foreign kingdom, with a different creed to that she practiced, was also a cause for concern and, for such reason, Eugénia remembers to include a few lines about it, quite clearly in the letter of July 25<sup>th</sup>:

I cannot help giving my sermon as a mother; never forget the way in which you were taught and remember that you are in a place where religion is different and that they do not keep theirs very well and that they notice who does not keep theirs and that you, being a minister's wife, are all looking at you.<sup>24</sup>

By the very use of the word *sermon*, it is clear from the outset that this is, therefore, an evangelising and doctrinal discourse and that, as is implied, this would be part of her maternal functions.

However, the recommendations on court etiquette and ceremonial and other behaviours her daughter should adopt are those we focus on more extensively here as they also reflect the themes the Marchioness of Nisa returned to most often, even though they appear in letters written over a short period of time. Nevertheless, they reveal her concern over her daughter's education, especially as she is relatively inexperienced, separated from her mother when too young to marry and due to her own widowhood. However, they may also indicate some special fear of the Marchioness of Nisa as regards any attitude deviating from the norms of the time displayed by her daughter in London. This hypothesis is raised by the description of the episode reported by Almeida Garrett in which the countess, at a court feast in London when she could not find the seat designated for the wife of the representative of the Portuguese Crown, would simply have taken a chair and occupy her rightful place, receiving applause from all the people attending (Garrett, 1848: 7-8). This episode demonstrates, on the one hand, the maintenance of symbolic privileges in the 19<sup>th</sup> century courts, such as certain ladies, due to their social status

<sup>24</sup> “não posso deixar de fazer o meu sermão como Mãe não te esqueça nunca [o] modo porq[ue] fostes [sic] ensinada e lembrar-te q[ue] estás em uma parte aonde é diferente Religião e q[ue] eles a reservam p[ou]co bem a sua e q[ue] reparam em q[uem] não reserva a sua e q[ue] tu sendo mulher de ministro estão todos com o olhar em ti”. Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo, Condes da Póvoa, liv. 7.

or derived from the political roles of their husbands, being able to sit in the presence of the sovereigns, but also the *savoir-faire* demonstrated on this occasion by the Countess of Palmela herself. However, the veracity of this event is difficult to prove since Almeida Garrett is the only one to have written down this testimony. Although he lived in Great Britain twice, between 1823 and 1824 and between 1828 and 1831, this episode took place earlier. Eventually, he may have heard this story on that occasion or through his proximity to the Counts of Palmela themselves (Amorim, 1881: 481, Sousa, 2023: 176) but was not a witness in person. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that this episode is reported precisely in the *Memória Histórica* of the countess following her death and naturally laudatory of the aristocrat's life.

On the other hand, and due to the insistence of the Marchioness of Nisa's warnings about the care to be taken at official dinners and diplomatic parties - such as in her letters of October 23<sup>rd</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup>, in which she writes "don't forget all my recommendations especially at dinner parties and when you are in public"<sup>25</sup> or "but also remember what I told you to say at dinners and parties",<sup>26</sup> it may be the case that the Countess of Palmela had written requesting advice about these protocol ceremonies, triggered this need to give advice in her mother.

However, the most plausible explanation seems to be simply that the Marchioness of Nisa, as a mother, claimed the right to continue looking after her daughter's education and her daughter's interests, even though she was already married at the time:

I care very much about you because you are so deeply involved in the *grand monde*; remember that your actions are seen and known all over the world and that by the representation of your man you are very well known. I do not tell you this because I have heard something about you that gives me the slightest displeasure. On the contrary, thanks to God,

<sup>25</sup> "não te esqueças todas as m[inh]as recomendações especialm[en]te nos jantares e quando estás em público". Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo, Condes da Póvoa, liv. 7.

<sup>26</sup> "mas lembra-te do que eu te mandei dizer assim como nos jantares e festas". Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo, Condes da Póvoa, liv. 7.

I have always heard good things about you but, as a mother, I cannot and must not fail to warn you from time to time.<sup>27</sup>

In fact, this passage, dated August 4, may dismiss the hypothesis that the marchioness was displeased by some action of her daughter. On the contrary, she even expresses some pride in her daughter's conduct, which had not given her any cause for upset. However, another hypothesis is that the Marchioness is, in fact, disappointed with her daughter's behaviour, but uses her maternal performance through speech. In this sense, by praising her daughter, the Marchioness of Nisa shows her desire for how the Countess of Palmela should behave (Moreland, 2012: 98). Nonetheless, what is expressed in this letter is her concern over the prominence inherent to her daughter's position, as an ambassador's wife, within international high society. The Marchioness of Nisa's warnings and remarks result precisely from her role as mother, implying her responsibility for her daughter's education. While true that the wives of crown officials held competences of representation, which favoured their own reputation and that of the couple, which allowed for the affirmation of the aristocratic identity and prosperity of their household (Ferrer-Viaud, 2022: 39, 47), mothers had to look after the interests of their children. In doing so, the Marchioness of Nisa was also tending to the interests of her lineage and the household she managed; not only maintaining it but also enhancing it from the social and, above all, the symbolic perspective. This reveals the existence of a "diplomacy of motherhood", which mothers of ambassadors, themselves wives of ambassadors, exercised towards their children to influence their diplomatic behaviour (Oliván Santaliestra, 2017: 72).

The pride displayed regarding her daughter's conduct on past occasions is also recorded. A letter dated July 25<sup>th</sup> sets out the justifications behind these warnings:

<sup>27</sup> "m[uit]o cuidado tenho em ti porq[ue] estás m[uit]o metida no grande mundo lembra-te q[ue] as tuas acções são vistas e sabidas em todo o mundo e q[ue] pela representação do teu homem és m[uit]o conhecida eu não te digo isto porq[ue] soube nada de ti q[ue] me dê o mais pequeno desgosto antes pelo contrário graças a D[eus] tenho ouvido sempre bem mas como Mãe não posso nem devo deixar de te fazer de quando em quando alguma advertência". Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo, Condes da Póvoa, liv. 7.



you, who already know what a mother's love is, it seems to me that this love is missing in my writing to you and not giving you these warnings, since you are so involved in society, and to soften my longing for you in some way, which is very great, is to hear good things about you; I hope in God I will be happy to hear them, because you, being younger, did everything very well in Cadiz.<sup>28</sup>

It is precisely her being a mother and the resulting love that makes Eugénia worry about the countess and advise her also as hearing good things about her actions was a way of easing the yearning and feelings caused by their separation. The author also appealed here to her daughter's understanding as she too was a mother. She also justified herself with reference to the young age of the Countess of Palmela, an argument also raised in other letters.

The public projection resulting from her daughter's diplomatic representation led the Marchioness of Nisa to detail her recommendations. In a letter dated October 11<sup>th</sup>, she advises her daughter to always be careful about her actions and speeches at official dinners as her prominent position implies that she will always be at the centre of attention. Therefore, she advises her daughter not to forget the education she has always received and all the advice she will have heard from her mother throughout her life. By recovering these childhood memories of her daughter, the Marquise of Nisa was naturally manipulating her, infantilising her and reinforcing her own maternal authority (Moreland, 2012: 80):

now about these dinners, I want you to always make sense at them because that is why you are young and a minister's wife and everything you do and say is very much noticed and don't forget everything you have always listened to me saying and the way you were raised.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> “tu q[ue] já conheces o q[ue] é amor de Mãe parece-me falta dele escrever-te estando tu tanto no mundo e não te fazer estas advertências e p[ar]a me suavizar de algum modo as tuas saudades q[ue] são bem grandes é ouvir dizer bem de [ti] espero em D[eu]s me [h]á-de dar esse gosto porq[ue] tu sendo mais moça fizestes tudo m[ui]to bem em Cádiz”. Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo, Condes da Póvoa, liv. 7.

<sup>29</sup> “agora a respeito desses jantares q[ue] tomes sempre m[ui]to sentido porq[ue] por isso mesmo q[ue] és moça e Mulher de Ministro se repara m[ui]to em tudo o q[ue] fizeres e disseres e não te esqueças de tudo o q[ue] sempre me tens ouvido e o modo porq[ue]

On the other hand, as the wife of a Portuguese ambassador, the Countess of Palmela would also be warned not to be misled by friendships or people she might meet at social events, always maintaining a genteel but somewhat suspicious posture during such interactions. With this sense, the Marchioness of Nisa wrote on September 19<sup>th</sup>: “I'm glad you had fun but always consider that everyone has their eyes on you and you're right not to want close friends, which is a very risky thing to do with young people and even more so under your circumstances”.<sup>30</sup>

While advising caution in friendships, which the countess herself was already demonstrating, the Marchioness of Nisa also discusses sociability and how such might be developed. She twice insists on the maintenance of good manners, which she considers to be perfectly compatible both with authority and with the absence of trust. In her letter of July 25<sup>th</sup>, she mentions: “With regard to authority, don't forget that you have always heard me say that one can show good manners and at the same time great authority and seriousness”.<sup>31</sup> Thus, this reflects how life in society, and particularly according to court etiquette, was compatible with the exercising of authority - that is the respect and power derived from the privilege of her lineage and the office held by her husband.<sup>32</sup> However, still furthermore, there was the issue of trust as broached in the letter of October 11<sup>th</sup>:

You know that one can have very good manners, even without the slightest confidence. You see, young girls sometimes find themselves involved in things they don't know about. Ask Our Lady to take care

fostes criada”. Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo, Condes da Póvoa, liv. 7.

<sup>30</sup> “estimo q[ue] te tenhas divertido mas toma sempre sentido q[ue] todos estão com os olhos em ti e tens razão de não querer amigas íntimas q[ue] é cousa m[ui]to arriscada com gente moça e nas tuas circunstâncias ainda mais”. Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo, Condes da Póvoa, liv. 7.

<sup>31</sup> “A respeito de autoridade não te esqueça tudo o q[ue] me tens sempre ouvido q[ue] se pode ter m[ui]to bom modo e ao mesmo tempo m[ui]ta autoridade e m[ui]ta seriedade”. Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo, Condes da Póvoa, liv. 7.

<sup>32</sup> Bluteau's Dictionary, more common at the time, only registers the term “assertively” as a synonym of “affirmatively” (Bluteau, Silva, 1789: 153).

of you, and before you go, pray a Hail Mary to Our Lady, and entrust yourself to your Guardian Angel<sup>33</sup>.

These letters convey how diplomatic socialisation was to be guided by some self-restraint and avoiding developing overly intimate friendships. Such a precaution would never call into question the rules of etiquette but would protect the countess from any inappropriate situation that might either harm her personally or compromise her husband's diplomatic mission. Indeed, this advice points to the need for strict observance of court etiquette and constantly nurturing a good reputation, themes also found in other mother-to-child correspondence in France during the reign of Louis XIV (Ferrier-Viaud, 2022; 127). Naturally, within her own devotional and religious framework, the Marchioness of Nisa advises her daughter to take the necessary devotional precautions, suggesting worship and prayers to Our Lady and to her Guardian Angel.

The Marchioness of Nisa also provided recommendations on the clothes to wear on these occasions. In her letter of October 11<sup>th</sup>, Eugénia advises her daughter to dress decently, justifying herself on the grounds of her concern even in these minor matters:

Always dress decently, even if you think you're not very fashionable, but he who is a Christian is never ashamed to show it; be patient but being your mother, I can't help saying all this, because I never forget these little things and I'm always worried about you, and I miss you so very much<sup>34</sup>.

In fact, in aristocratic society and the context of diplomatic representation, this matter was not exactly a minor detail: the ambassador and his family were there to represent the Portuguese sovereign, with due

<sup>33</sup> “bem sabes que [se] pode ter m[ui]to bom modo sem se dar confiança nem a mais pequena; olha que quem é moça acha-se às vezes metida em cousas sem saber. Pede a N[ossa] S[enho]ra q[ue] te tome à sua conta e antes de ires reza a N[ossa] S[enho]ra uma Avé M[ari]a e entrega-te a teu Anjo da Guarda”. Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo, Condes da Póvoa, liv. 7.

<sup>34</sup> “vai sempre vestida com m[ui]ta decência não se te dê q[ue] te achas q[ue] vais pouco à moda mas quem é cristão nunca se envergonha de o mostrar, tem paciência mas como sou Mãe não posso deixar de ter dizer tudo isto porq[ue] nada destas miudezas me esqueçam e estou sempre com sentido em ti e com m[ui]tas saudades e m[ui]ta falta me fazes”. Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo, Condes da Póvoa, liv. 7.

pomp and luxury, before the foreign people, which would be revealed in the sumptuous decoration of their houses, the lavishness of their parties, the magnificence of their carriages and the richness of their court costumes, all of which were paid for by the ambassador himself (Cardim, 2004: 7-38; Santos, 2021: 747-777).

Although this was her daughter's new life, Eugénia found it hard to become accustomed to the reality. Although she was pleased to see her son-in-law's career recognised, in a letter dated September 19<sup>th</sup> she expressed her trust in God to guide him on his path and, in a certain way, she recognised how difficult it was for her daughter to escape this fate, once again urging her to remember the way she had been raised:

I love that the Count's merits are known and that he is very capable of doing everything very well, but it pains me greatly to have you both sent so far away; I have been frightened by this news for days, I have already told you about it and I hope in God that He will enlighten the Count to prevail, and you too, who are really entrapped in this world, but I hope in God that you will never forget the way you were brought up and what you have always heard from me<sup>35</sup>.

This passage indirectly alludes to this notion of couple, a unit in which the identity and interests of both husband and wife merge (Ferrier-Viaud, 2022: 265). In fact, the Marchioness of Nisa was not at all mistaken. The Counts of Palmela, apart from later diplomatic representations, would be forced to live abroad, in London and Paris, following Miguel's accession to the throne and the civil war that pitted absolutists against constitutionalists. However, at this distance, Eugénia could never have imagined the future trajectories of her daughter and son-in-law.

<sup>35</sup> “estimo m[ui]to que conheçam os merecimentos do Conde q[ue] m[uit]o capaz é de fazer tudo m[ui]to bem mas custa-me m[ui]to q[ue] o mandem p[ar]a tão longe e a ti eu já há dias q[ue] andava assustada com esta nova já te mandei falar nisto e espero em D[eu]s q[ue] lhe [h]á-de dar m[ui]tas luzes p[ar]a acertar e a ti também q[ue] na verdade estás bem entalada neste mundo mas espero em D[eus] não te [h]á-de esquecer nunca o modo porq[ue] fostes criada e o q[ue] me tens ouvido sempre”. Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo, Condes da Póvoa, liv. 7.

## Conclusion

Belonging to the historical aristocracy of the kingdom, heiress of her household, early widow of an ambassador, although she did not accompany her husband on that diplomatic mission, the Marchioness of Nisa, in the correspondence she exchanged with her daughter, ambassadress in London between 1817 and 1820, tried to ensure her authorial voice and maternal performance prevailed through a set of advice and warnings given to her daughter mainly relating to the diplomatic activity inherent to her marriage. Although these letters were private in nature, perhaps read in a family context, they might be considered behavioural literature. In fact, other Portuguese aristocrats had also sent letters to their children with recommendations on their behaviour before the marchioness. In this case, of course, this does not amount any proposition of a behavioural treatise per se as the actual advice is specific, though repeated, throughout the correspondence.

In fact, the motivations that led to the writing of the advice, rather than any dissemination of a set of ideas outside the family or intimate circle, first and foremost, reflect the concerns of a mother distanced from her daughter, and the desire to, if not to control, at least to guide her. On the other hand, this daughter, in addition to her young age, occupied a prominent position in British society, as she was the wife of the Portuguese ambassador to the court. Thus, much of this advice and warnings are based on the notion of civility and control of behaviour, whether regarding actions, speech, and decency, in the case of dress. In addition to prudence, Eugénia advises her daughter to be careful with friendships, so important in a court society where the influence networks were determinant for social and symbolic prominence. She also reinforces the idea that authority, inherent in her daughter's diplomatic function, may be achieved without giving up on any of her good manners. However, and in a more intimate perspective, she advises her daughter not to disturb her husband, in a perpetuation of the submissive role of the woman before the man, as well as bearing in mind religious teachings not only in her diplomatic conduct but also in more intimate situations, such as overcoming mourning.

By constantly reminding her daughter of the education she had received up until then, Eugénia wished for her success in her duties as ambassadress. This would naturally mean the success of the Palmela household, her son-in-law's, but also inherently enhancing the Nisa household of which she was the representative. In fact, the good education she had given her daughter and that she constantly reminded her of, would also be responsible for that success, which she unconsciously claimed for herself, in a clear example of maternity diplomacy.

In short, the correspondence of the Marchioness of Nisa to her daughter, besides perpetuating a set of instructions arising from their condition as women, aristocratic and catholic, typical of their social background, allow for understanding how diplomatic activities were meant to be undertaken in the first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, particularly the relevance of the role played by ambassadresses. In fact, by setting out the position and the concern shown by the Marchioness of Nisa, it becomes clear the role played by the ambassadresses was not confined to a mere secondary role to their husbands, as they were active participants in diplomatic relations where protocol issues played important roles.

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