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The first Duke of Bragança – a right royal bastard

Afonso, the first Duke of Bragança, began life as the illegitimate son of João, master of the knightly order of Aviz, who was himself the illegitimate son of D Pedro I, king of Portugal (1357-1367). In a sense, Afonso was then a double bastard. But after 1640, his descendants would supply 15 monarchs to Portugal.

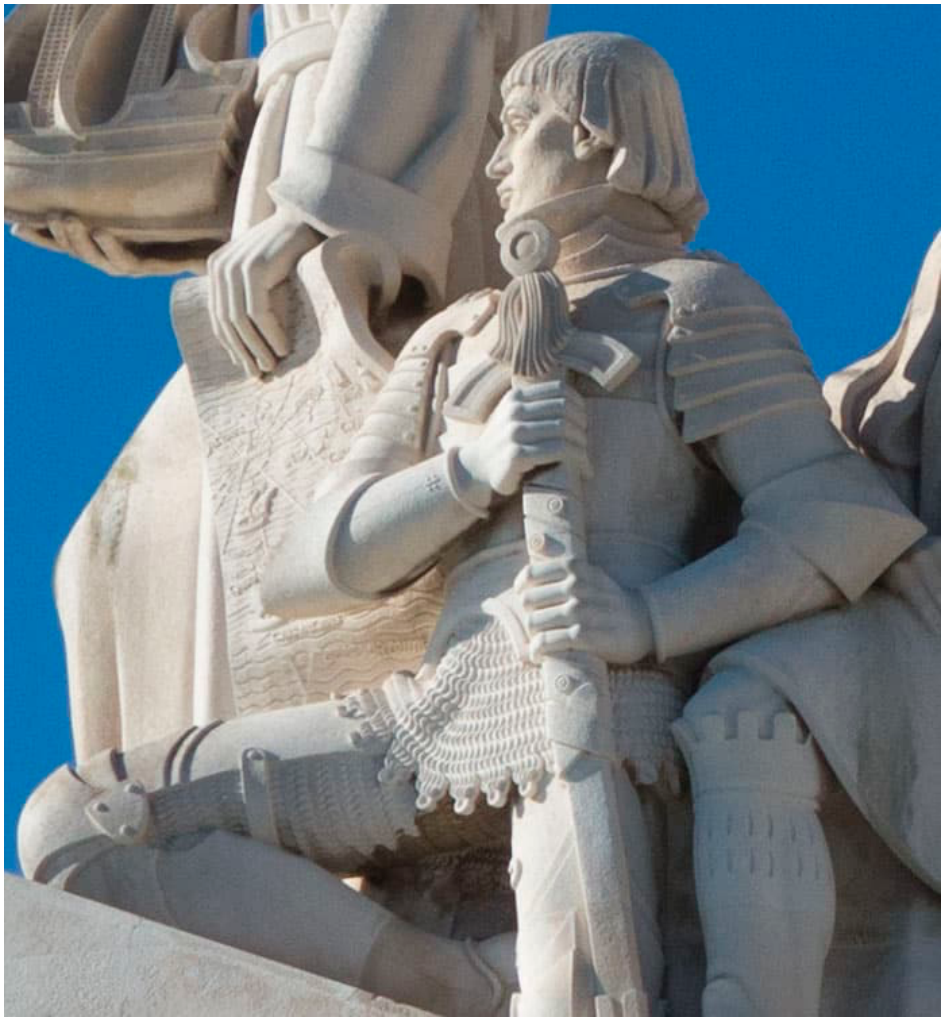


Image of D Afonso on Padrão dos Descobrimentos

Afonso was born when his father was 20 and he and two other daughters were the children of Inês Pires, daughter of a Pedro Esteves. Pedro felt the disgrace of his daughter's illicit union so badly that he refused to cut his beard and was then known as *O Barbadão* – the bearded one. Beatriz, the one daughter who survived into adulthood, went on to marry Thomas Fitzalan, the English Earl of Arundel.

The master of Aviz successfully contested the succession to the throne against his legitimate half-sister Beatriz and her husband, Juan, king of Castile. Being accepted by

the Portuguese people, he strengthened his position by marrying into the English royal family. With Queen Filipa, daughter of John of Gaunt, he founded the new Portuguese royal dynasty of Aviz. Together they had eight children, of whom six survived into adulthood.

This family is known in Portuguese history as the *Ínclita Geração* (the illustrious, or golden, generation), which gives some idea of the importance accorded to these children of the new Portuguese royal house.

Queen Filipa generously accepted the young Afonso into her family, although the fact of his illegitimacy was always there. Even though he was much older, and seemed equally talented, he was ever in the second rank. This perceived slight rankled with the boy, and his sense of grievance grew through the years. He was formally adopted by the king only in 1401, when he was 20 years old. In the same year, he married Beatriz, daughter of Nun'Álvares Pereira, the constable of Portugal, and by marriage became the eighth count of Barcelos, and the heir to a considerable fortune.



Image of Duke Pedro from the St Vincent Panels

When king João decided in 1415 to conduct an oversea war against Morocco, he took with him his three eldest legitimate sons, Duarte, Pedro and Henrique. Afonso also went as the commander of the king's ship. The successful conclusion of this war led to the

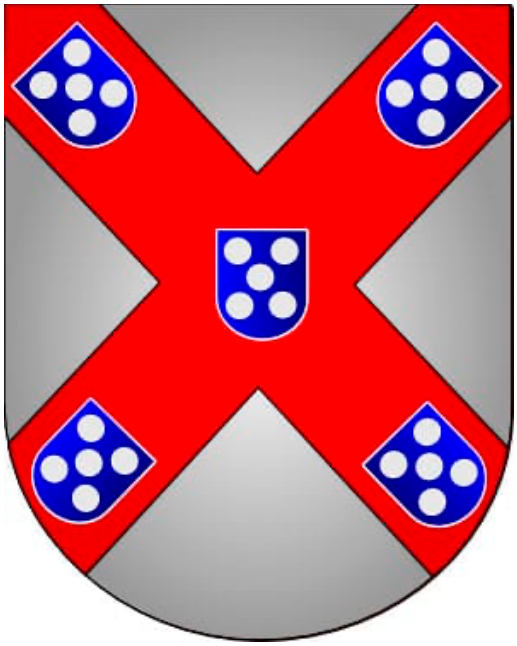
permanent occupation of Ceuta, where João knighted his four sons, including Afonso. On their return, in the Igreja Matriz at Tavira, Pedro and Henrique were created duke (of Coimbra and Viseu, respectively). Afonso was not similarly raised in rank, and his jealous heart grieved.

After the death of his father, in the 1430s, along with Duke Pedro and the Infante João, Afonso opposed the Tangier expedition promoted by his half-brother Duke Henrique, but on the order of King Duarte, he participated in the invasion of 1437. Under the command of Henrique, it was an unmitigated disaster, and Afonso's half-brother Infante Fernando was surrendered to the Moroccans as a hostage.

The unexpected death of Duarte in 1438 brought six-year-old king Afonso V to the throne. And it was now that Afonso's true jealous character emerged. First, he opposed the regency of Dowager Queen Leonor; and when she was substituted by Duke Pedro, his opposition to the regent became more open.

Pedro was well travelled and had friends in England and France and also in Burgundy, where he spent two years. He recommended his sister Isabel to Duke Philip of Burgundy, who sent Jan van Eyck to Portugal to paint truthful portraits, and Philip married her in 1430. Pedro wrote a scholarly book on the proper administration of the kingdoms, before returning to Portugal via Treviso, Rome and Aragon.

Selected by the Cortes (the Portuguese parliament) in 1439 as regent, Pedro contributed to the prosperity of the country. During a brief reconciliation with Afonso, in 1442 Pedro agreed to create the new title Duke of Bragança for his half-brother. This was the third dukedom to be founded in Portugal after those of Pedro himself and Henrique (also known as Henry the Navigator).



Ancient arms of the Portuguese House of Braganza

The 16-year-old King Afonso V came of age in 1448, and regent Pedro handed over power. Duke Afonso persuaded the boy to nullify all of Pedro's edicts, to banish him to his estates in Coimbra, and eventually to outlaw him. Pedro was in an impossible position, and he took the path which appeared to him most honourable.

With a force of 5,000 retainers, he marched towards Lisbon, hoping to achieve an interview and a reconciliation, but at the ensuing Battle of Alfarrobeira (1449), he was defeated and killed by the king and his henchman, Duke Afonso.

Alfarrobeira is noteworthy in English eyes, since it is the only battle in history in which knights of the Garter have opposed each other, as King Afonso V on one side, and on the other Duke Pedro and his friend and supporter Álvaro Vaz, had all been knighted by the English king.

The outrageous treatment of the accomplished and popular Duke Pedro scandalised the courts of Europe. His sister Isabel, Duchess of Burgundy, cut herself off from her Portuguese family, and accepted Pedro's children under her protection in Burgundy. She believed that if brother Henrique had exerted himself, he might have averted this tragic outcome.

Later, King João II (1481-1495), a great admirer of Duke Pedro, persecuted the Bragança family, even having the third Duke Fernando executed for treason.

It is ironic that the independence of Portugal itself would ultimately depend on the descendants of the first Duke of Bragança, the right royal bastard, and that the fourth royal dynasty would be named after him.

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Peter Booker

Peter Booker co-founded with his wife Lynne the Algarve History Association.
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