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Quinta Nova
Carcavelos
2777-601 PAREDE

www.bhsportugal.org

THE PERPLEXING PANELS:

Malcolm Howe

Professor Harold Livermore's lucid identification of the principal figures depicted on the famous Panels painted by Nuno Gonçalves was published in the previous 34th Annual report and review 2007. I am obliged to his scholarship and for his agreement with my identification published in 2001. However, since my booklet 'Portugal's Perplexing Panels' was printed and a copy of it given to each member of the British Historical Society at that time, there have been important scientific developments. In 2003 dendrochronological tests on the wood of the Panels were conducted by the University of Hamburg and established that the trees were cut no later than 1440. Allowing for the timber to season, the Panels would therefore have been painted between 1442 and 1448.

Dendrochronology is the science of dating events by studying the sequence of the rings of growth of trees in aged wood. Previously most art historians had dated the panels as being painted between 1467 and 1470, which led both Professor Livermore and myself to conclude that some of the principal figures were depicted posthumously. Furthermore palaeontographers, who had studied medieval writing, claimed that the date 1445 could be deciphered in the gilt decoration of the boot of the boy featured in the panels.

Clearly the boy could be the King himself, D. Afonso V, during his minority. He was born in 1432, reached his legal majority at fourteen in January 1446, implored his uncle D. Pedro to continue to be his Regent and in 1447 married D. Isabel, who was the same age and the daughter of his uncle, the Regent. In

1445 he would have been thirteen which fits the likeness and may well already have been betrothed to D. Isabel who faces him. The elderly lady behind her is probably the Infanta D. Isabel, Duchess of Burgundy, who was born in 1397, widowed in 1457, depicted with her surviving brothers D. Pedro and Prince Henry the Navigator. Hence the Regent is the figure in a fine rich dark green and gold velvet tunic, kneeling in front of the boy King. In 1445 D. Pedro would have been at the height of his powers, before he was dismissed in 1466 due to baseless rumours spread by his jealous half-brother, the Duke of Braganza, that he had been responsible for the death by poison of his two brothers, the King D. Duarte I, the Infante D. João and Queen Leonor, when in fact they had both died from natural causes.

It was D. Pedro, as Regent, who created his illegitimate half-brother D. Afonso, the first Duke of Braganza in 1442 and it is likely that it is he who is portrayed, wearing the insignia of the Order of Christ on a chain, kneeling at the foot of the Braganza Panel. Behind him therefore are his two sons. : the elder also called D. Afonso, who was created Count of Ourém in 1422, Marquess of Valença in 1451, the first creation of a marquisate in Portugal and died in 1460, before his father; he is shown wearing a gold collar with the relic associated with him of the calcified milk of Our Lady, encapsulated in glass; the younger D. Fernando (1403-78), wearing red, was created Marquess of Vila Viçosa in 1455 and in 1461 succeeded his father as second Duke of Braganza.

The *Infante Santo*, D. Fernando, the youngest of the *Ínclita Geração*/Renowned Generation had died at Pentecost 1443 in Fez, Morocco in appalling captivity. In the same year the Regent's fifteen-year-old son, also called Pedro, was appointed

Constable. which was the cause of considerable strife. The figure in armour kneeling before the reincarnation of the *Infante Santo* looks far too old to represent Pedro the Constable; however the figure behind wearing a red hat could be the youthful Constable and the figure in armour the actual commander of the Portuguese army in his stead.

Our worthy chairman, Dr Paulo Lowndes Marques told me about the *Casa de Vinte e Quatro* after my book was published. The said twenty-four were the powerful guilds of Lisbon that governed the city until 1834. Their leaders had the right of direct access to the sovereign at any time of night or day. It was said that D. Afonso V was so disconcerted on being awoken that he offered to join them to end the practice. Their reply was that would make us twenty-five when we can be only twenty-four! It is quite remarkable that the back row of the panels shows in line just twenty-four lay figures before the clergy are depicted.

None of this contradicts the principal purpose of the Panels which was to proclaim to the Portuguese that the mortal remains of the martyr D. Fernando were to be redeemed and that. The entire support of the whole nation was needed for the conquest of the Moors. Nuno Gonçalves immortalised the Portuguese magnates who dominated Afonso V's reign, including his half-English uncles of the Renowned Generation who played such a vital part in the enrichment of Portugal.