

## **A Painted Bookbinding for a Controversial Devotion: The Cult of the Immaculate Conception in the Dominican Convent of Jesus of Aveiro (15th–17th centuries)**

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### **Abstract**

The Museum of Aveiro/Santa Joana, in Aveiro, northern Portugal, has, among the liturgical books that once belonged to the Dominican Convent of Jesus in that city, a fifteenth-century antiphonary whose binding was replaced in the early seventeenth century and decorated with what I argue is a representation of the Immaculate Conception of Mary. Although the presence of such a theme on the cover of a Dominican liturgical book would be striking, since the Dominicans were opposed to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, an analysis of the liturgical texts of the convent and other elements of material culture that testify to the religious practice of this community show that, despite the controversy surrounding the immaculist doctrine among the Dominicans, devotion to the Immaculate Conception was deeply rooted in the history of Jesus of

Aveiro, and local traditions could sometimes prevail over the doctrine of the order, even in Observant communities.

**Keywords:** Dominican nuns; Immaculate Conception; Dominican Order; Monastic codices; Material culture; Convent Culture; Female monasticism.

## 1. Introduction

The Dominican quest for liturgical uniformity began in the early years of the order, and Humbert of Romans issued a definitive version of the Dominican liturgy in the mid-thirteenth century. Although this standardisation process was generally effective, it faced challenges since its implementation.<sup>1</sup> This was exacerbated by the division of the order into the Roman and Avignon Obediences during the Western Schism (1378–1417), as each faction was able to legislate differently.<sup>2</sup> Efforts to standardise the Dominican liturgy were boosted by the reform movements that grew amid the reunification of the Church in the early fifteenth century. Known as the “Observant reforms”, these movements aimed to reform the Church as a whole. They had a significant impact on religious orders, fostering the establishment and reform of numerous convents, and seeking to enforce adherence to religious rules, constitutions and a uniform liturgical practice.<sup>3</sup> However, as this analysis will demonstrate, local traditions and devotions persisted amid a reform aimed at uniformity, even when they contradicted the order’s doctrine.<sup>4</sup> This was the case at the Portuguese Dominican convent of Jesus in Aveiro, where evidence shows that the cult of the Immaculate Conception — a doctrine rejected by the Dominicans — was one

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<sup>1</sup> Eleanor Giraud, “Totum officium bene correctum habeatur in domo: uniformity in the Dominican liturgy,” in *Making and Breaking the Rules: Discussions, Implementation and Consequences of Dominican Legislation*, ed. Cornelia Linde (Oxford: 2018), 153–154.

<sup>2</sup> William Raymond Bonniwell, *A History of the Dominican Liturgy* (New York: 1945), 212.

<sup>3</sup> The Observance gained the support of the papacy and the local authorities resulting in the creation of new and reformed religious communities, see: Bert Roest, “Observant Reform in Religious Orders,” in *Christianity in Western Europe c.1100-c.1500*, ed. Miri Rubin and Walter Simons (New York: 2009), 446–57. For a general overview of the Observant reforms, see: Cristina Andenna, Marina Benedetti, Sylvie Duval, Haude Morvan, and Ludovic Viallet, eds, *Les réformes de l’Observance en Europe (XIVe-XVIe siècle)*, (Rome: 2025) and James Mixson and Bert Roest, eds, *A Companion to Observant Reform in the Late Middle Ages and Beyond*, (Leiden: 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Recent studies have called into question the notion of a uniform Dominican liturgy, particularly within women’s communities. See, for instance: Clare Taylor Jones, *Fixing the Liturgy: Friars, Sisters, and the Dominican Rite, 1256-1516* (Philadelphia, PA: 2024). For the particular case of the Iberian Peninsula, see: Mercedes Pérez Vidal, “Uniformitas vs diversitas en los monasterios femeninos de la Orden de Predicadores en Castilla (siglos XIII-XV),” *Territorio, Sociedad y Poder* 8, (2014), 133–152; Paula Cardoso, “Religious Women and Liturgy in a Fifteenth-Century Portuguese Codex: Gendering the Reception and Profession Ceremonies in the Dominican Convents,” *Journal of Early Modern Christianity*, (2025) (online).

of the convent's main devotions since the fifteenth century. The nuns' efforts to enrich the cult, which I argue included a rare and expensive painted bookbinding, demonstrate this. This is particularly significant given that the Convent of Jesus was founded within the reformed Dominican faction, and played a central role in establishing Observance in Portugal, as the convent sent its nuns to found and reform other Observant convents, while probably contributing to the expansion of the Immaculist cult.

## 2. “Pulchra ut luna, electa ut sol”: Depicting the Immaculate Conception?

The feast of the Immaculate Conception, based on the fact that Mary was conceived without sin, is documented in the Byzantine Empire from the eighth century and made its way to the Western Church in the eleventh century, when it was documented in England. Its spread to the Continent met with opposition from those who found it difficult to understand the sanctification of Mary before her very existence. Among those who opposed the immaculate theory were St Peter Damian, Bernard of Clairvaux, Peter Lombard, St Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, the feast continued to spread throughout the Western Church and the immaculist doctrine was generally accepted by the fourteenth century.<sup>6</sup> In 1477, Sixtus IV formally approved the feast.<sup>7</sup>

The Dominicans, however, resisted because of their opposition to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, which was strongly opposed by Thomas Aquinas. From 1279, all members of the Dominican order were to follow and teach the doctrine of Thomas Aquinas, even if they had a different opinion.<sup>8</sup> This included his opposition to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary. In the Dominican General Chapter of 1388, the Avignon Obedience introduced the feast of the Sanctification of the Virgin on 8 December, which followed Thomas Aquinas' view, claiming that Mary was not conceived without sin but was sanctified eight days after her conception, after her soul

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<sup>5</sup> Bonniwell, *A History of the Dominican Liturgy*, 213.

<sup>6</sup> Despite the initial denial of figures such as St Bonaventure, the Franciscans played a decisive role in the acceptance of the immaculist doctrine in the late Middle Ages. This gradual transition occurred in the fourteenth century, thanks to the arguments of Duns Scotus (c. 1266–1308) and Peter Auriol (c. 1280–1322), which helped to shift the opinion of theologians. About this see: Ignatius Brady, “The Development of the Doctrine on the Immaculate Conception in the Fourteenth Century after Aurioli,” *Franciscan Studies* 15 (1955), 175–202.

<sup>7</sup> Bonniwell, *A History of the Dominican Liturgy*, 240.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

had been infused into her body.<sup>9</sup> The Roman obedience followed Avignon and introduced the feast of the Sanctification in 1391.<sup>10</sup>

The general acceptance of the theory of the Immaculate Conception in the late fifteenth century, reinforced by the approval of the feast by Sixtus IV in 1447, deprived the Dominicans of labelling the feast as heresy and led to a movement towards the acceptance of the Immaculate Conception within the order. This led to the institution of the feast in the General Chapter of 1481 and the replacement of the feast of the Sanctification with the feast of the Conception in the order's calendar. However, the strong Thomistic tendency of the order, rooted in the fact that all members were obliged to adhere to the doctrine of Thomas Aquinas, led to the revocation of the decision of 1481 in 1484.<sup>11</sup> The Dominicans thus reverted to the former name of the feast – Sanctification – and maintained their position against the immaculist theory for years to come. This would not change until near 1854, when Pope Pius IX gave the dogmatic definition of the Immaculate Conception.<sup>12</sup>

Situated in northern Portugal, the Convent of Jesus of Aveiro, grew out of a group of religious laywomen who lived under the protection of the Observant Dominicans of Santa Maria da Misericórdia in the same city. The group was founded around 1458 by Beatriz Leitoa (d. 1480), who chose a life of seclusion with her two young daughters.<sup>13</sup> Other women soon joined her, and in 1461 they received permission from Pius II to found an Observant Dominican convent for six nuns.<sup>14</sup> After collecting rents for the nuns' subsistence and building a convent, they held the claustration ceremony in December 1464.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 215. The question of the Immaculate Conception of Mary sparked an intense theological dispute among the Franciscans and the Dominicans in the late Middle Ages, see: Pawel Krupa, *Une grave querelle. L'université de Paris, les mendiants et la conception immaculée de la Vierge (1387-1390)*, (Warchaw: 2013).

<sup>11</sup> Bonniwell, *A History of the Dominican Liturgy*, 240–241.

<sup>12</sup> For more information on the evolution of the Dominican position on the Immaculate Conception, see: Thomas M. Izbicki, "The Immaculate Conception and Ecclesiastical Politics from the Council of Basel to the Council of Trent: The Dominicans and their Foes," *Archiv für Reformationgeschichte* 96, no. 1 (2005), 145–70.

<sup>13</sup> Beatriz was the widow of Diogo de Ataíde, nobleman of Pedro of Portugal (1391-1449), first Duke of Coimbra.

<sup>14</sup> Aveiro, Arquivo do Distrito de Aveiro, *Pia Deo et ecclesiae desideria*, n.º 130.

<sup>15</sup> The convent was closed in 1874 and is now the Museum of Aveiro/Santa Joana.

Among the codices left by the community of Jesus of Aveiro is an antiphonary (antiphonary 24) whose upper cover was decorated with an image of the Virgin, painted on the leather that covers the wooden boards of the codex's binding.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Aveiro, Museu de Aveiro/Santa Joana (MA), PT/MA/ANTF 24.



Figure 1 Upper cover of antiphonary 24. Aveiro, Museu de Aveiro/Santa Joana, photo by Paula Cardoso

Maria de Ataíde (d. 1525), the third prioress of the convent, copied the antiphonary between 1482 and 1500. This is suggested by the book's colophon, which identifies Maria de Ataíde as the prioress of the convent, a position she assumed in 1482, and by the filigree decoration of the volume, which points to a period near the end of the fifteenth century.<sup>17</sup> The binding is not original and appears to date from the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century, as suggested by the golden horizontal title on the spine of the book, a feature that appears in late sixteenth-century France and is thus characteristic of modern bindings.<sup>18</sup> The raised bands on the spine, however, suggest that this binding predates the 1700s.<sup>19</sup> The book was probably rebound because of the poor condition of the previous binding – choir-books, used daily by religious communities for choral singing, were expensive, highly prized objects that were expected to last for centuries. These large volumes were carefully cared for by the cantors and chantresses in charge of the choir and had to be repaired from time to time to ensure their longevity.<sup>20</sup>

The new binding was lavishly decorated with a painting of the Virgin surrounded by golden foliage. Although some of the bindings that have come down to us from this convent are decorated with gold tooling, this is the only one with a painted scene.<sup>21</sup> The unique nature of this painted leather binding extends beyond the Convent of Jesus, as this type of decorative binding appears to be extremely rare, and this is the only known example in Portugal. Painted scenes were common in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Sienese wooden panel bindings and in sixteenth-century vellum bindings, but are very rare in leather.<sup>22</sup> In addition, with the advent of the printing press, book bindings evolved to use less expensive materials and less decoration, and leather-decorated bindings became a luxury product reserved for wealthy patrons. Although choir-books continued to be handmade and richly decorated after the advent of the printing press, because of their large size and liturgical function, the bindings of the volumes used at Jesus of Aveiro

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<sup>17</sup> Paula Cardoso, *Art, Reform and Female Agency in the Portuguese Dominican Nunneries: Nuns as Producers and Patrons of Illuminated Manuscripts (c. 1460–1560)* (Ph.D. diss., Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 2019), 192–197.

<sup>18</sup> Graham Pollard, "Changes in the Style of Bookbinding, 1550–1830," *The Library* s5-XI/2 (1956), 71–94, there 83.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>20</sup> Johannes Meyer, *Das Amptbuch*, ed. by Sarah Glenn DeMaris (Rome: 2015), 400.

<sup>21</sup> See, for instance, the following choir-books: Aveiro, MA, PT/MA/ANTF 23; Aveiro, MA, PT/MA/ANTF 29.

<sup>22</sup> In the Netherlands in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, public account books and records were sometimes decorated with heraldic paintings on the cover (William Salt Brassington, ed., *A History of the Art of Bookbinding. With Some Account of the Books of the Ancients* (London: Elliott Stock, 1894), 102; Julia Miller, *Books Will Speak Plain: A Handbook for Identifying and Describing Historical Bindings* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: 2010), 262.

were generally decorated with vegetal and geometric patterns in blind or gilded tooling. Thus, the uniqueness of this binding within Aveiro's liturgical book corpus suggests that the theme it represents held a special place in the community's devotion, as painted leather covers were both rare and expensive.

The image shows a young Mary, with her golden hair down, dressed in a pale pink tunic and blue cloak, surrounded by the sun and standing on a crescent moon with a serpent. It is accompanied by the inscription "electa ut sol" (fair as the sun), which is complemented by the words "pulchra ut luna" (bright as the moon), inscribed within the full moon depicted on the back cover of the codex.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Taken from the *Song of Songs*, 6:9 ("pulchra ut luna, electa ut sol").



Figure 2 Back cover of antiphonary 24. Aveiro, Museu de Aveiro/Santa Joana, Photo by Paula Cardoso

Despite being used to represent the glorification of Mary since the late Middle Ages, this theme, inspired by the so-called Apocalyptic Woman, and later referred as the Virgin “Tota Pulchra”, became the standard way of representing the Immaculate Conception in the early seventeenth century.<sup>24</sup> The iconography of this Marian mystery was not abundant and varied considerably until the Church began to consistently promote its cult at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Until then, the immaculists had borrowed existing themes, such as St Joachim embracing St Anne, St Anne with the Virgin and Christ, the Annunciation and the Apocalyptic Woman, and associated them with the Immaculate Conception using symbols and inscriptions with Marian titles taken from Old Testament texts.<sup>25</sup> Despite the Dominicans’ rejection of the immaculist doctrine, after an analysis of the history, liturgical books and other elements of material culture from the Convent of Jesus of Aveiro that contextualise the commission of this binding within the community’s immaculist devotion, it will become clear, that the image on the cover of the antiphonary 24 is probably an early example of the use of the theme of the Virgin “Tota Pulchra” to represent the Immaculate Conception. Alongside other evidence of the presence and importance of the immaculist cult in the Convent of Jesus and other Portuguese Dominican convents, this analysis will demonstrate how local devotions influenced the formation of each community’s religious identity despite the ongoing reform.

### **3. The Immaculate Conception in the Convent of Jesus of Aveiro**

#### **3.1. *Making Liturgical Books in an Observant Community***

The Convent of Jesus of Aveiro was founded at a time when several religious communities were being reformed or founded throughout central and southern Europe as part of the Observant reforms (c. 1370–1500). The Dominican Observance arrived in Portugal in the 1390s with the foundation of the friary of São Domingos de Benfica by friar Vicente de Lisboa (d. 1401) in 1399. The Convent of Jesus of Aveiro was the fifth

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<sup>24</sup> Thomas Buffer and Bruce Horner, “The Art of the Immaculate Conception,” *Marian Studies* 55 (2004), 184–211, there 193–196; The iconography of the “Tota Pulchra” was influenced by the guidelines suggested by Francisco Pacheco (d. 1654) for the depiction of the Immaculate Conception of Mary in his *Arte de la pintura*, in 1649 (Francisco Pacheco, *Arte de la pintura, su antigüedad y grandezas* (Seville: Simon Faxardo, 1649), 481–484).

<sup>25</sup> See: Thomas Buffer and Bruce Horner, “The Art of the Immaculate Conception,” *Marian Studies* 55 (2004), 184–211, there 186–192.

Observant Dominican community in Portugal, and its foundation in 1461 was linked to the Observant Dominican friary of Misericórdia, founded in Aveiro in 1423. These friars took Beatriz Leitoa and her small community under their protection. The bad reputation of non-vowed forms of religious life in the fifteenth century contributed to the integration of these women into a religious order.<sup>26</sup>

Jesus of Aveiro was thus founded as an Observant community, an identity that, according to the chronicle of the convent, the nuns proudly embraced. The text is full of references to the exemplary Observant life of the community, giving examples of their strict cloistering and their diligence in observing the rule and constitutions.<sup>27</sup> Although we know that this type of text served a propagandistic purpose and should therefore be used with caution, other records attest to the nuns' strict enclosure. This is the case of a 1512 papal decree authorising the prioress to send two of the most senior nuns to the convent church to decorate and furnish the altars, which shows that the sisters were not allowed to enter the church.<sup>28</sup> The nuns accessed the Eucharist and other ceremonies held

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<sup>26</sup> *Crónica da fundação do Mosteiro de Jesus de Aveiro e memorial da Infanta Santa Joana* [Chronicle of the foundation of the Monastery of Jesus of Aveiro and memorial of Infanta Saint Joana], ed. Domingos Maurício dos Santos in *O Mosteiro de Jesus de Aveiro* [The Monastery of Jesus of Aveiro], 6 vols. (Lisbon: 1963–1967), 2–2: 189. This text was produced by an anonymous nun between 1513 and 1525. See the original document: Aveiro, MA, PT/MA/COD 9. In the fifteenth century, the growing popularity of the Observant reformist environment, and consequently professed religious life, paved the way for the tumultuous incorporation of numerous lay religious communities into the Observant factions of religious orders. While the Observants supported some of these experiments, which were well integrated into their urban communities, as seen in the case of Jesus of Aveiro, they still had to promote and protect their status as professed religious, see: James Mixson, “Observant Reform’s Conceptual Frameworks between Principle and Practice,” in James Mixson and Bert Roest, eds, *A Companion to Observant Reform in the Late Middle Ages and Beyond*, (Leiden: 2015), 60–84, there 80. On these dynamics of incorporation, see also: Alison More, “Dynamics of Regulation, Innovation, and Invention,” James Mixson and Bert Roest, eds, *A Companion to Observant Reform in the Late Middle Ages and Beyond*, (Leiden: 2015), 85–110. For the particular case of Portugal, see: Paula Cardoso, “Unveiling Female Observance: Reform, Regulation and the Rise of Dominican Nunneries in Late Medieval Portugal,” *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 12-3 (2020), 365–382; João Luís Fontes, Maria Filomena Andrade, “As fundações dominicanas femininas durante a Idade Média: Linhas de força, problemáticas e silêncios [Female Dominican Foundations during the Middle Ages: Main Currents, Issues, and Silences],” in Cristina Costa Gomes and others, eds, *Rastos dominicanos de Portugal para o mundo* [Dominican Traces from Portugal to the World] (Lisbon: 2022).

<sup>27</sup> The discursive strategies used in the chronicle of Jesus of Aveiro to depict this convent as a model Observant community have been analysed in Gilberto Moiteiro, “Texto e experiência religiosa feminina: Estratégias discursivas hagiográficas no seio da Observância Dominicana Portuguesa [Text and Female Religious Experience: Hagiographic Discursive Strategies within Portuguese Dominican Observance],” João Luís Fontes, Maria Filomena Andrade and Tiago Marques, eds, *Vozes da Vida Religiosa Feminina: Experiências, Textualidades de Silêncios (séculos xv-xxi)* [Voices of Female Religious Life: Experiences, Textualities of Silences (15<sup>th</sup>–21<sup>st</sup> Centuries)], (Lisbon: 2015), 31–48.

<sup>28</sup> Coimbra, Arquivo da Universidade de Coimbra, Convento de Jesus de Aveiro, tom. 51, fol. 522r. The enclosure of nuns is, however, a complex topic, as its implementation faced several challenges in the Middle Ages and beyond, see: Elizabeth Makowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered Women: Periculoso and Its Commentators, 1298-1545*, (Washington, D.C., 1999); Sylvie Duval, “Mulieres religiosae and Sorores clausae: The Dominican Observant movement and the diffusion of strict enclosure in Italy from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century,” in Veerle Fraeters and Imke de Gier, eds, *Mulieres Religiosae: Shaping Female Spiritual Authority in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods*, 193–218. (Turnhout: 2014).

in the convent church through the double choir at the west end of the nave, separated from this space by a grille.<sup>29</sup>

The chronicler also describes the nuns' diligence in performing the Divine Office and their desire to have liturgical texts to sing in the choir. The Rule of St Augustine, the rule followed by the Dominicans, states that only what is prescribed should be sung, which makes liturgical books containing the chants and instructions for the various celebrations of the Order an essential tool.<sup>30</sup> The chronicler notes that the founder and first prioress, Beatriz Leitoa, was very demanding about the liturgical performance of the nuns, making sure that their service to God was faultless.<sup>31</sup> This included a concern with having the order's liturgical texts in order to perform the ceremonies accordingly, as evidenced by the sisters' commitment to producing their own liturgical books from the earliest days of the community. The effort to learn to copy and illuminate books appears to have started before the sisters began their cloistered life as Dominican nuns, when in 1463 the daughters of the founder, Beatriz Leitoa, began learning to copy books with the neighbouring friars of Misericórdia.<sup>32</sup> Besides Maria and Catarina de Ataíde (d. 1466), three other scribe nuns are documented to have worked in the convent's book production from the late fifteenth to early sixteenth centuries: Isabel Luís (d. 1545), Leonor de Meneses (d. 1482) and Margarida Pinheira (b. 1461).<sup>33</sup>

Dominican liturgical books were to follow the prototype defined by Humbert of Romans in 1256. They were usually copied from a revised model to ensure conformity with the official liturgy of the order. The liturgical books that have come down to us from the Convent of Jesus of Aveiro generally follow the Dominican prototype, so much so

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<sup>29</sup> The impact of enclosure on the Aveiro nuns' religious practices has been explored in: Cardoso, "Religious Women and Liturgy in a Fifteenth-Century Portuguese Codex".

<sup>30</sup> "Nolite cantare, nisi quod legitis esse cantandum" (Luc Verheijen, *La règle de Saint Augustin*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1967), 1:421).

<sup>31</sup> *Crónica da fundação*, 205.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 194. About the production and use of liturgical books in the Convent of Jesus, see: Paula Cardoso, "Beyond the Colophon: Assessing Roles in Manuscript Production and Acquisition in the Observant Dominican Nunneries of Early-Modern Portugal," *Pecia. Le livre et l'écrit: Outils et pratiques des artisans du livre au Moyen Âge*, 19 (2017), 59–85; Cardoso, "Art, Reform and Female Agency in the Portuguese Dominican Nunneries". Recently, the liturgical books of Jesus of Aveiro have also been examined from a musicological perspective, see: Kristin Hoefener, "Female Chant Repertoire in Aveiro's Dominican Convent of Jesus during the Observant Reform (15th Century)," in Pietro Delcorno and Bert Roest, eds, *Observant Reforms and Cultural Production in Europe: Learning, Liturgy and Spiritual Practice* (Nijmegen: 2023), 157–183. As with liturgical books, the nuns also made efforts to obtain the order's normative texts, see: Gilberto Moiteiro, "Clarifying the Rules: A Normative System for the Observant Dominican Nuns (Portugal, Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries)," in *Making and Breaking the Rules: Discussions, Implementation and Consequences of Dominican Legislation*, ed. Cornelia Linde (Oxford: 2018), 273–298.

<sup>33</sup> To know more about the scribe nuns of Jesus of Aveiro, see: Cardoso, "Art, Reform and Female Agency in the Portuguese Dominican Nunneries," 103-107 and 194-220.

that they often contain rubrics, or liturgical instructions, written in the masculine form.<sup>34</sup> However, some of the liturgical books written by the nuns in the fifteenth century contradict this tendency by including the feast of the Immaculate Conception.<sup>35</sup> The presence of the Conception feast in the liturgical books of the convent shows that the cult of the Immaculate Conception was present in the Convent of Jesus from the late fifteenth century, despite the community's commitment to a strictly observant life, faithful to the customs and norms of the order.

### ***3.2. A Reflection of Local Devotion? The Feast of the Conception in the Liturgical Books of Jesus of Aveiro***

One of these books is antiphony 27, copied and notated by the prioress Maria de Ataíde between 1482 and 1490, which contains the chants for the feasts of the saints from November to May. These include the chants for the feast of the “conceptionis beatissime virginis marie”, to be celebrated on 8 December. This shows that, contrary to the official Dominican liturgy, the community of Jesus of Aveiro did not celebrate the feast of the Sanctification of Mary on that date, but instead celebrated the Conception, the doctrine of which was denied by the order. Two other fifteenth-century books from the convent show the use of the term “conception” instead of “sanctification” to refer to the feast of 8 December: a missal written by Isabel Luís in 1481 refers to the feast as “conceptione beate virginis” and a breviary, whose handwriting suggests that it was also copied by Isabel Luís, refers to the feast as “conceptione beate marie virginis”.<sup>36</sup>

Not knowing the missal or the breviary, the musicologist Solange Corbin attributed the presence of the feast of the Conception in the antiphony 27 to the period when the Dominicans authorised the celebration of the Immaculate Conception in the order, from June 1481 to 1484.<sup>37</sup> However, the fact that the missal of Isabel Luís, completed in February 1481, already refers to this feast as “conceptione” shows that the decision of the General Chapter of 1481, held in June, is not the reason for the presence of this feast in the liturgical books of Aveiro. It appears instead that the immaculist cult

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<sup>34</sup> This is discussed in: Cardoso, “Religious Women and Liturgy in a Fifteenth-Century Portuguese Codex”.

<sup>35</sup> PT/MA/ANTF 27, fol. 14r.; Aveiro, MA, PT/MA/ANTF 3, fol. 93r.; Évora, Biblioteca Pública de Évora (BPE), Cod. Manizola 115, fol. 137r.

<sup>36</sup> Manizola 115, fol. 137r.; PT/MA/ANTF 3, fol. 93r.

<sup>37</sup> Solange Corbin, “L’office de la Conception de la Vierge : À propos d’un manuscrit du XVème siècle, du monastère Dominicain d’Aveiro, Portugal,” *Bulletin des études Portugaises* (1949), 1–52, there 53.

had older roots in the Convent of Jesus. This is also suggested by the fact that the chronicle of the convent, written in the early sixteenth century, records that Leonor de Meneses took her vows on the feast of the Immaculate Conception in 1472.<sup>38</sup> However, there may have been a time when the Dominican nuns of Aveiro celebrated the Sanctification instead, as a fifteenth-century gradual, probably copied in Isabel Luís' handwriting, lists the feast of the *Sanctificatio*.<sup>39</sup> This codex was probably copied before 1472, as this is the date of the oldest evidence of the cult of the Immaculate Conception in the Convent of Jesus, and evidence of the cult can be found in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The peculiarity of the presence of the cult of the Immaculate Conception in the Convent of Jesus of Aveiro lies not only in the fact that the Dominicans did not approve of this feast, but also in the liturgical office used to celebrate it. Both antiphonary 27 and the breviary present the office *Exultet plebs fidelium* for the celebration of this feast.<sup>40</sup> This office, considered unique by Solange Corbin, also appears in a 1527 antiphonary from the Dominican Observant Convent of Paraíso in Évora, founded in 1516 and linked to Jesus of Aveiro.<sup>41</sup> As Corbin notes, Portuguese liturgical books tend to contain instead the office *Gaude mater Ecclesia*, which is used throughout Europe for the feast of the Immaculate Conception.<sup>42</sup> However, Arménio da Costa Júnior noted that the text of the *Exultet plebs fidelium* does not use the word “conception”, unlike other liturgical offices used for this feast.<sup>43</sup> This may reflect a certain caution on the part of the creators of this office, who, while composing an office for the celebration of the Immaculate Conception, were aware of the official position of the order against this Marian mystery.

The office used in the Convent of Jesus in Aveiro appears to have been a local production that migrated to the Convent of Paraíso in Évora. The Évora copy appears in an antiphonary written by friar Thomas de Toledo in 1527. It is therefore possible that the office was also used in some Dominican friaries, such as the Observants of São Domingos of Évora, the community with the *cura monialium* of Paraíso. The lack of surviving liturgical books from the São Domingos friary prevents us from testing this hypothesis.

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<sup>38</sup> *Crónica da fundação*, 242.

<sup>39</sup> Aveiro, MA, PT/MA/ANTF 28, fol. IIIr.

<sup>40</sup> PT/MA/ANTF 27, fol. 14r.; PT/MA/ANTF 3, fol. 93r.

<sup>41</sup> Corbin, “L’office de la Conception,” 44. Avelino da Costa Júnior found this office in the antiphonary LC 140 from Paraíso’s convent (Avelino da Costa Júnior, *Mosteiro de Jesus de Aveiro: Tesouros Musicais [Monastery of Jesus of Aveiro: Musical treasures]* (MA Diss., Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 1996), 147–149); Lisbon, Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal (BNP), LC 140, fol. 30v.

<sup>42</sup> Corbin, “L’office de la Conception,” 49–51; Guido Maria Dreves, *Analecta hymnica medii aevi* (Leipzig: Fues’s Verlag, 1886), V: 47.

<sup>43</sup> Júnior, “Mosteiro de Jesus de Aveiro,” 135–136.

For the same reason, we do not know whether the Dominicans of Misericórdia, who trained and supervised the liturgical practice of Jesus of Aveiro, celebrated the Conception or used this office.

The transfer of this office to Paraíso of Évora could also have been the result of a transmission network between Observant nunneries. Paraíso was founded in 1516, when several Dominican convents of this type were founded in Portugal. The Convent of Jesus of Aveiro became the mother house of the female Dominican Observance in Portugal, sending its nuns to found and reform Observant convents throughout the kingdom from the 1490s to the 1580s.<sup>44</sup> This circulation of reformer nuns may have facilitated the transmission of liturgical traditions between the Observant Dominican convents founded and reformed during this period.<sup>45</sup> Although the Convent of Paraíso of Évora did not receive reformer nuns to direct its foundation, we know that its nuns turned to the Observant nuns of the neighbouring town of Montemor-o-Novo for support during the foundation process. An account of the foundation of Paraíso of Évora, written in the 1530s, records that, when the convent was founded, the new Observant nuns borrowed a volume of the General Constitutions for Dominican nuns (1259) from the convent of Saudação in Montemor-o-Novo.<sup>46</sup> It is thus possible that liturgical texts also circulated between the two communities. The foundation of the convent of Saudação was led by a group of nuns who came from the Observant Dominican convent of Santa Ana in Leiria, a community whose foundation was supervised by the reformer nuns sent by Jesus of Aveiro in 1498. Unfortunately, the scarcity of liturgical books that have survived from both Saudação and Santa Ana once again prevents us from knowing whether the feast of the Conception or the office *Exultet plebs fidelium* were celebrated in these convents.

The Conception was also celebrated in the Dominican Convent of Anunciada of Lisbon, an Observant house founded in 1518/9 with the help of a group of reformer nuns sent by Jesus of Aveiro.<sup>47</sup> The nuns of Anunciada celebrated this feast from at least 1524, the date on which a gradual containing of the feast was completed. However, it appears that the nuns of Anunciada did not adopt the liturgical office used at Jesus of Aveiro, as an antiphony written for the convent around 1550 contains the more common office

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<sup>44</sup> On this, see: Cardoso, “Unveiling Female Observance,” 375–378.

<sup>45</sup> This is documented in the German Dominican convents. See: Gisela Muschiol, “Migrating Nuns – Migrating Liturgy: The Context of Reform in Female Convents of the Late Middle Ages,” in *Liturgy in Migration: From the Upper Room to Cyberspace*, ed. Teresa Berger (Collegeville, MN: 2012), 90–92.

<sup>46</sup> Évora, BPE, Convento do Paraíso de Évora, Livro 1, fol. 99v.

<sup>47</sup> Lisbon, BNP, LC 112, fol. 6r.

*Gaude mater Ecclesia*.<sup>48</sup> This shows that the tradition of celebrating the Conception in Anunciada did not come from Aveiro and that two different liturgical traditions coexisted among the Portuguese Dominicans in the mid-sixteenth century.

The existence of two different traditions regarding the choice of the office for the celebration of the Conception in the above-mentioned convents suggests that the immaculist cult was not limited to them and was probably present in other Dominican houses.<sup>49</sup> This was probably linked to the popularity that the Immaculate Conception gained in Portugal in the late Middle Ages. The celebration of this feast is documented in the Benedictine monastery of Santa Maria de Pombeiro, in northern Portugal, in the early thirteenth century.<sup>50</sup> In 1320, Raimundo Evrard, Bishop of Coimbra, introduced the feast in the diocese of Coimbra. This was followed by the introduction of the feast in the diocese of Braga in the middle of the fourteenth century.<sup>51</sup>

The Chapel of the Immaculate Conception, commissioned by Queen Elizabeth of Portugal (d. 1336) for the church of the Convent of the Santíssima Trindade in Lisbon, also dates from this period. The chapel was adorned with an image of the Virgin, which was much venerated by the Queen, and was probably the first image of Mary to be dedicated to the Immaculate Conception in Portugal.<sup>52</sup> Nuno Álvares Pereira (d. 1431), constable of Portugal, who played a key role in resolving the Portuguese succession crisis of 1383-1385, commissioned several Marian side chapels for the Church of Carmo in Lisbon, one of which was dedicated to the Immaculate Conception. He was also behind the construction of a temple dedicated to this Marian mystery in Vila Viçosa, in southern Portugal, in 1385, after playing a decisive role in the Portuguese victory over Castile at Aljubarrota.<sup>53</sup>

The Franciscans, the main defenders of the doctrine of immaculacy, played an important role in the establishment of the cult of the Conception in Portugal in the late Middle Ages, especially among the social elite. King Duarte I (r. 1433–1438) defended the doctrine of immaculacy in his *Leal Conselheiro* (1438), probably influenced by his

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<sup>48</sup> Lisbon, BNP, LC 130, fol. 23r.

<sup>49</sup> The celebration of the feast is also documented among the Dominican nuns of Bologna who also used an original office (Stefania Roncroffi, *Psallite sapienter. Codici musicali delle Domenicane bolognesi* (Firenze: 2009), 136–137). In addition, Solange Corbin found three Dominican breviaries containing the feast of the Conception in Parisian libraries (Corbin, “L’office de la Conception,” 44–45).

<sup>50</sup> Carlos Moreira de Azevedo, ed., *História religiosa de Portugal* [Portuguese religious history], 3 vols. (Lisbon, 2000), 2: 629.

<sup>51</sup> Alberto Pimentel, *História do culto de Nossa Senhora em Portugal* [History of the cult of the Virgin Mary in Portugal] (Lisbon: Guimarães, Libânio & C<sup>a</sup>, 1899), 74.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 106–108.

Franciscan confessor, friar Gil Lobo, and Beatriz of Portugal (d. 1506), Duchess of Beja and Viseu, founded a Clarissan Observant convent under the invocation of the Immaculate Conception in Beja in 1459.<sup>54</sup> In the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the feast of the Immaculate Conception was also celebrated by other religious orders, such as the Cistercians, as is apparent in the liturgical books of the convents of Santa Maria de Lorvão and São Dinis de Odivelas.<sup>55</sup>

### 3.3. “*In altare conceptionis*”

Evidence of the cult of the Immaculate Conception in the Convent of Jesus in the fifteenth century can also be found in a *rituale* completed by Isabel Luís in 1491. This *rituale*, a liturgical book containing the *ordines*, or liturgical instructions, for various ceremonies celebrated in the convent, includes in the last folios the collects to be said by the priest during the Maundy Thursday altar washing ceremony.<sup>56</sup> In this ceremony, religious communities would go to each altar in their church to cleanse and anoint it in praise of the saint to whom it was dedicated. These collects, which were said by the priest at each of the church altars, were therefore personal to each of them and can therefore be a valuable source for reconstructing the distribution and invocations of the altars of a given church in a given period. The *rituale* of the Convent of Jesus includes a collect to be said “in altare conceptionis”, suggesting that, in this convent, one of the church altars was dedicated to the Immaculate Conception in 1491.<sup>57</sup> Isabel Luís’s missal, however, contains only the collects to be said in the altar of St Augustine and the altar dedicated to the saints of the order, including St Peter Martir, St Thomas Aquinas, St Vincent Ferrer and St Catherine of Siena. This suggests that the Conception altar was built between February 1481, when this book was completed, and June 1491, when Isabel Luís finished the *rituale*.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Dom Duarte, *Leal Conselheiro* [Loyal Counselor], ed. Joseph M. Piel (Lisbon: 1942), 137; Maria de Lurdes Rosa, “A fundação do Mosteiro da Conceição de Beja pela Duquesa Dona Beatriz” [The foundation of the Monastery of the Conception of Beja by Duchess Dona Beatriz]. in *O tempo de Vasco da Gama*, ed. Diogo Ramada Curto (Lisbon, 1998), 265–270.

<sup>55</sup> Lisbon, Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo (ANTT), Ordem de Cister, Mosteiro de Lorvão, códice 27; Lisbon, BNP, LC 161.

<sup>56</sup> Aveiro, MA, PT/MA/ COD 15, fols. 96v.–97v. Although presented after the colophon, these prayers were also written by Isabel Luís, as can be seen from the handwriting.

<sup>57</sup> PT/MA/ COD 15, fols. 96v.–97r.

<sup>58</sup> Manizola 115, fol. 72r.

So far, no other records have emerged of the invocations of the church altars in Jesus of Aveiro in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to confirm the information suggested by the instructions noted in the *rituale*. It may appear strange that a Dominican church should have an altar dedicated to the Immaculate Conception, although these altars were already documented in Portugal at the time, as evidenced by the chapels promoted by Elizabeth of Portugal and Nuno Álvares Pereira. However, such a public affirmation of the immaculist cult in a Dominican convent would mean that the Portuguese Dominican authorities, if not in favour, were at least tolerant of the nuns' devotion. The presence of the feast in the liturgical books of Anunciada and Paraíso suggests that the cult of the Conception, although not officially accepted, was tolerated by the Portuguese Dominicans and practised by some.

Located inside the church, this altar would have been inaccessible to the nuns, who could not enter the space because of the enclosure to which they were subjected.<sup>59</sup> They could only see the altars from the double choir at the west end of the church. In contrast to what happened to the friars, in some cases, enclosure prevented the nuns from taking part in ceremonies that took place in the church, such as the Maundy Thursday altar washing ritual. Instead, during this ceremony, the nuns stood stationary in the choir and watched as the ritual was performed by male clergy in the church.<sup>60</sup> They would, however, join in the chants and prayers, praising from afar the saints to whom the altars were dedicated. This was also the case with the Adoration of the Cross on Holy Friday, when religious communities would venerate a cross on the high altar of the church. In the convent of Jesus of Aveiro, the nuns venerated the cross from the choir, where they accompanied the chants and prayers, sometimes helped by the images that inhabited the enclosure and their choir-books.<sup>61</sup> However, as there is no record of any representations of the Immaculate Conception in the convent prior to the seventeenth century, it is difficult to know whether the nuns used the same kind of visual compensation in the

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<sup>59</sup> As mentioned, in 1512 the community was given permission to prepare and adorn the church altars but the privilege was restricted to two of the most senior nuns (Convento de Jesus de Aveiro, tom. 51, fol. 522r.). The *ordines* for the reception of novices and the profession, which are included in the *rituale* also show that the Aveiro nuns did not enter the convent church, see: Cardoso, "Religious Women and Liturgy in a Fifteenth-Century Portuguese Codex".

<sup>60</sup> For more on the performance of the altar-washing ritual in cloistered communities, see: Eleanor J. Giraud, "Observant Dominican Nuns' Processionals in Fifteenth-Century Germany: Evidence from Manuscripts of the Beinecke Library," *Yale Journal of Music & Religion* 8/2 (2022), 38–59.

<sup>61</sup> On the Adoration of the Cross in the Convent of Jesus of Aveiro, see: Paula Cardoso, "Illuminating the Passion: Book Production, Visual Culture, and the Liturgy of Holy Week in the Dominican Convent of Aveiro" in Sylvie Duval, ed., *Medieval Women's Writing. Cases and Sources on Women's Writing Practices during the Middle Ages* (Turnhout, forthcoming).

Immaculist cult. This absence may be linked to the fact that the iconography of the Immaculate Conception had not yet been consolidated at this time.<sup>62</sup>

### 3.4. *In Search of an Iconography*

Nevertheless, some registers suggest that, as in other cases, the nuns of Jesus of Aveiro may have used the iconography of the Annunciation to visually represent the Immaculate Conception of Mary. This is the case for a letter written by the prioress Maria de Ataíde to a royal officer in Madeira in 1512, in which the nun asks to be informed about the state of a commission for an altar frontal decorated with the Annunciation, which she had made through him in Flanders.<sup>63</sup> She wrote that the frontal should show Mary in full grace, greeting the angel, adding that the nuns could not wait to receive the work. Such a work was certainly intended for a Marian altar, but no record exists of an altar dedicated to the Annunciation in the convent. Apart from the altar of the Conception, only one other Marian altar is documented in the convent before the seventeenth century. This altar, one of the first in the convent, was dedicated to the Assumption of Mary and was located in the chapter-house.<sup>64</sup> In view of this, it is plausible that the Annunciation altar frontal was commissioned for the Conception altar. Furthermore, the text of the collect recited by the priest during the washing of the Conception altar evokes the Annunciation: “Deus qui virginalem aulam beatae Mariae in qua habitares eligere dignatus es”.<sup>65</sup>

As mentioned, the Annunciation was one of the themes borrowed by the immaculists to visually represent the Immaculate Conception in the late Middle Ages. This theme was chosen because it represented the divine incarnation of Christ, conceived without sin, and functioned as a parallel to the Immaculate Conception of Mary.<sup>66</sup> A few

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<sup>62</sup> Buffer and Horner, “The Art of the Immaculate Conception,” 193–196. The first known representation of the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception as the Virgin “Tota Pulchra” in Portugal dates from the second half of the sixteenth century and was made for the Clarissan Convent of the Immaculate Conception, founded in Beja in 1459. The image follows the vision of the Portuguese noblewoman Beatriz da Silva (d. 1492), who claimed to have seen the Immaculate Virgin in 1447, holding the Child, crowned and dressed in a white tunic and blue cloak, surrounded by stars and standing in a crescent moon. The scene appears in a fragment of an altar frontal, today kept in the National Museum of Ancient Art in Lisbon (612 Tec). Beatriz vision would influence Pacheco’s definition of the iconography of the Virgin “Tota Pulchra” in 1649 (Pacheco, *Arte de la pintura*, 481–484).

<sup>63</sup> Lisbon, ANTT, Corpo Cronológico II, Maço 6, doc. 138, nº suc. 769.

<sup>64</sup> Domingos Maurício dos Santos, *O Mosteiro de Jesus de Aveiro*, 6 vols. (Lisbon: 1963–1967), 2–1: 16–17.

<sup>65</sup> PT/MA/ COD 15, fols. 96v.–97r.

<sup>66</sup> Mirella Levi D’Ancona, *The Iconography of the Immaculate Conception in the Middle Ages and Early Renaissance* (New York: 1957), 37.

examples of the appropriation of the iconography of the Annunciation by the immaculists have survived from the late Middle Ages.<sup>67</sup> This is the case for the thirteenth-century Fécamp missal, which illustrates the Mass of the Conception with an image of the Annunciation.<sup>68</sup> This theme is also linked to the Immaculate Conception in a sixteenth-century painting by Piero di Cosimo, in which the Immaculate Virgin is depicted on a podium decorated with the Annunciation.<sup>69</sup> The same is apparent in a sixteenth-century painting depicting the Annunciation, accompanied by inscriptions with Marian titles and, in the background, prophets and patriarchs discussing the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception.<sup>70</sup>

Not until the seventeenth century was a representation of the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception documented in Jesus of Aveiro, when Prioress Maria das Chagas (p. 1640–1652) commissioned the construction of a chapel dedicated to this Marian invocation in the chamber that gave access to the nuns' upper choir.<sup>71</sup> The gilded wooden altar contained a carved image of the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception, dressed in white and blue, and was complemented by a series of painted panels, framed in gilded wood, depicting scenes from the life of the Virgin.<sup>72</sup> Unlike with the church's altar, the nuns had direct access to the chapel and its images, which probably boosted the long-standing immaculist cult in the convent.<sup>73</sup> Arguably created during the same period, the painted cover of antiphonary 24 was probably the product of the same devotional environment that led to the construction of this chapel. Coupled with the long tradition of the cult at the Convent of Jesus, this lends weight to the interpretation of the image on the antiphonary cover as the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception.

The flourishing of the immaculist cult in the early seventeenth century contributed to the consolidation of the iconography of the Virgin Immaculate. Alongside the cult's growing popularity in Portugal, this paved the way for the construction of the chapel and

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Rouen, Bibliothèque municipale et patrimoniale Villon, ms 295 (A 398), fol. 243r.

<sup>69</sup> Today at the Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence. D'Ancona, *The Iconography of the Immaculate Conception*, 37.

<sup>70</sup> *Sales catalogue: Robinson Fisher and Co.* (London: 1927), no. 190, referenced in D'Ancona, *The Iconography of the Immaculate Conception*, 37.

<sup>71</sup> Santos, *O Mosteiro de Jesus de Aveiro*, 2–1: 20. This room can still be seen in the Museum of Aveiro/Santa Joana.

<sup>72</sup> Which are now lost (Santos, *O Mosteiro de Jesus de Aveiro*, 2–1: 20).

<sup>73</sup> The creation of this chapel in the enclosure probably led to the replacement of the altar of the Conception in the church with the altar of the Virgin of the Rosary, which was added to the church during the renovations that took place in this space at the end of the seventeenth century (Santos, *O Mosteiro de Jesus de Aveiro*, 2–1: 20).

its carved image, and possibly the painted cover, in Jesus of Aveiro. Although the Church was still reluctant to define the Immaculate Conception as a dogma, in the early seventeenth century it worked to silence its opponents: in 1617, Pope Paul V forbade the public defence of the anti-immaculate thesis, and, in 1622, Gregory XV reinforced this prohibition by forbidding the defence of this theory in public or private.<sup>74</sup> In Portugal, the immaculist doctrine benefited from the general acceptance of the clergy and the devotion of Philip II of Spain, who actively collaborated with Iberian theologians to promote its dogmatic definition in Rome.<sup>75</sup> The cult was greatly strengthened in Portugal after 1640, partly thanks to the Franciscan friar João de São Bernardino, who helped to link the restoration of Portuguese independence, after sixty years under Spanish rule, to the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception.<sup>76</sup> The result was the proclamation of this Marian invocation as the patron saint of Portugal by King João IV in 1646. This contributed to the proliferation of images of the Immaculate Virgin in the kingdom, fostering the environment for the creation of both the Aveiro images. A panel made between 1640 and 1650 for the cathedral of Guarda in central Portugal resembles the painting on the cover of antiphonary 24.<sup>77</sup>

Meanwhile, the Portuguese Dominicans remained opposed to the immaculist doctrine, at least academically. After the proclamation of the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception as the patron saint of Portugal, the Franciscans proposed that students of the University of Coimbra should promise to defend the Immaculate Conception as part of their graduation oath, as happened in Salamanca.<sup>78</sup> This proposal was rejected by the Rector, in part because of the Dominican lecturers who remained opposed to the immaculist doctrine. Out of respect for the Dominicans, the University of Coimbra had until then maintained a neutral position on the defence or denial of the Immaculate Conception.<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless, in 1646, King João IV ordered that the oath requested by the

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<sup>74</sup> António de Vasconcelos, *O mysterio da Immaculada Conceição e a Universidade de Coimbra* [The mystery of the Immaculate Conception and the University of Coimbra] (Coimbra: 1904), 32.

<sup>75</sup> Azevedo, ed., *História religiosa*, 629.

<sup>76</sup> On 8 December 1640, one week after Portugal's independence was restored, Friar João de São Bernardino delivered a sermon in the Royal Chapel in which he associated the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception with Portugal's success in its dispute with Spain: João de São Bernardino, *Ao muito alto, e muito poderoso Rey... Sermão da Immaculada Conceição da Mãe de Deos...* [To the Most High and Most Powerful King... Sermon on the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God...] (Lisbon: by Antonio Alvarez, 1641).

<sup>77</sup> Guarda, Museu da Guarda, N<sup>o</sup> de Inventário: 315.

<sup>78</sup> Fernando Taveira da Fonseca, "Uma questão política: a exclusão dos lentes dominicanos das cátedras universitárias de Coimbra," [A political issue: the exclusion of Dominican lecturers from university chairs of Coimbra] *Revista Portuguesa de História* XXXVI (2003), 423–444, there 435.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 434–435.

Franciscans be taken.<sup>80</sup> In July of the same year, the oath was taken as the king had requested, but without the presence of the Dominicans, who refused to defend the Immaculate Conception. This led the king to threaten to remove the Dominican lecturers from Coimbra if they continued to refuse to defend the immaculist doctrine. The irreducibility of the Dominicans led the king to remove them from the chair of theology in 1648.<sup>81</sup> This shows that the official position of the Portuguese Dominican province on the immaculist doctrine remained unchanged, despite the strong position of the kingdom in favour of it and the practice of the cult of the Immaculate Conception in some Dominican religious houses since the late Middle Ages.

#### 4. Final Remarks

When placed in the context of its production, the interpretation of the Marian image on the cover of antiphony 24 as representing the Immaculate Conception is not as controversial as it initially seems, since this image was created in the context of a long tradition of celebrating the Immaculate Conception both in the Convent of Jesus in Aveiro and throughout Portugal.

As can be seen above, the official position of the Dominican Order and its Portuguese representatives against the immaculist doctrine does not seem to have impeded the development of the cult in the Observant convents of Jesus of Aveiro, Paraíso of Évora and Anunciada of Lisbon. In fact, the existence of two different liturgical offices for the celebration of the feast of the Immaculate Conception in these convents suggests that the Aveiro convent was not the only point of transmission of this cult within the Portuguese Province. If so, the Immaculist cult may have been more deeply ingrained among the Portuguese Dominicans than it seems, spreading to convents created amid efforts to standardise the order's liturgical practice. Such a scenario would certainly have had the tolerance, if not the active support, of the Portuguese Dominican authorities, despite their official opposition to the cult, as demonstrated by the case of Coimbra. That the Portuguese Province tolerated the immaculist cult in some of its convents is also suggested by the existence of an altar dedicated to the Immaculate Conception in the church of the Convent of Jesus in the late fifteenth century and through the presence of

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 435.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 442–443.

the feast in a gradual copied by a Dominican friar for the Convent of Paraíso in Évora in the sixteenth century.

The cult's deep roots in Portugal since the early fourteenth century, within local dioceses and other religious orders, may have influenced the development of the immaculist cult in certain Portuguese Dominican convents. In addition, as has been noted, this cult had the support of the social elites, on whose patronage these convents depended, and from whose ranks many of the nuns came. The fact that these elites were the main engine behind the creation of Observant convents in Portugal in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries might also help to explain the persistence of this cult in reformed convents.<sup>82</sup> This demonstrates the importance of local traditions and personal devotions in shaping the religious identities of the convents and suggests that the religious orders were willing to accommodate them, even within their Observant factions.

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<sup>82</sup> Take, for instance, Beatriz of Portugal, who founded an Observant Clarissan convent under the invocation of the Immaculate Conception in 1459. Beatriz was a great supporter of the Observants, supporting several other reformed convents in Portugal. Her daughter, Queen Leonor of Viseu (1458-1525), did the same, supporting not only the Franciscans but also the Dominicans (see: Rosa, “A fundação do Mosteiro da Conceição de Beja”).