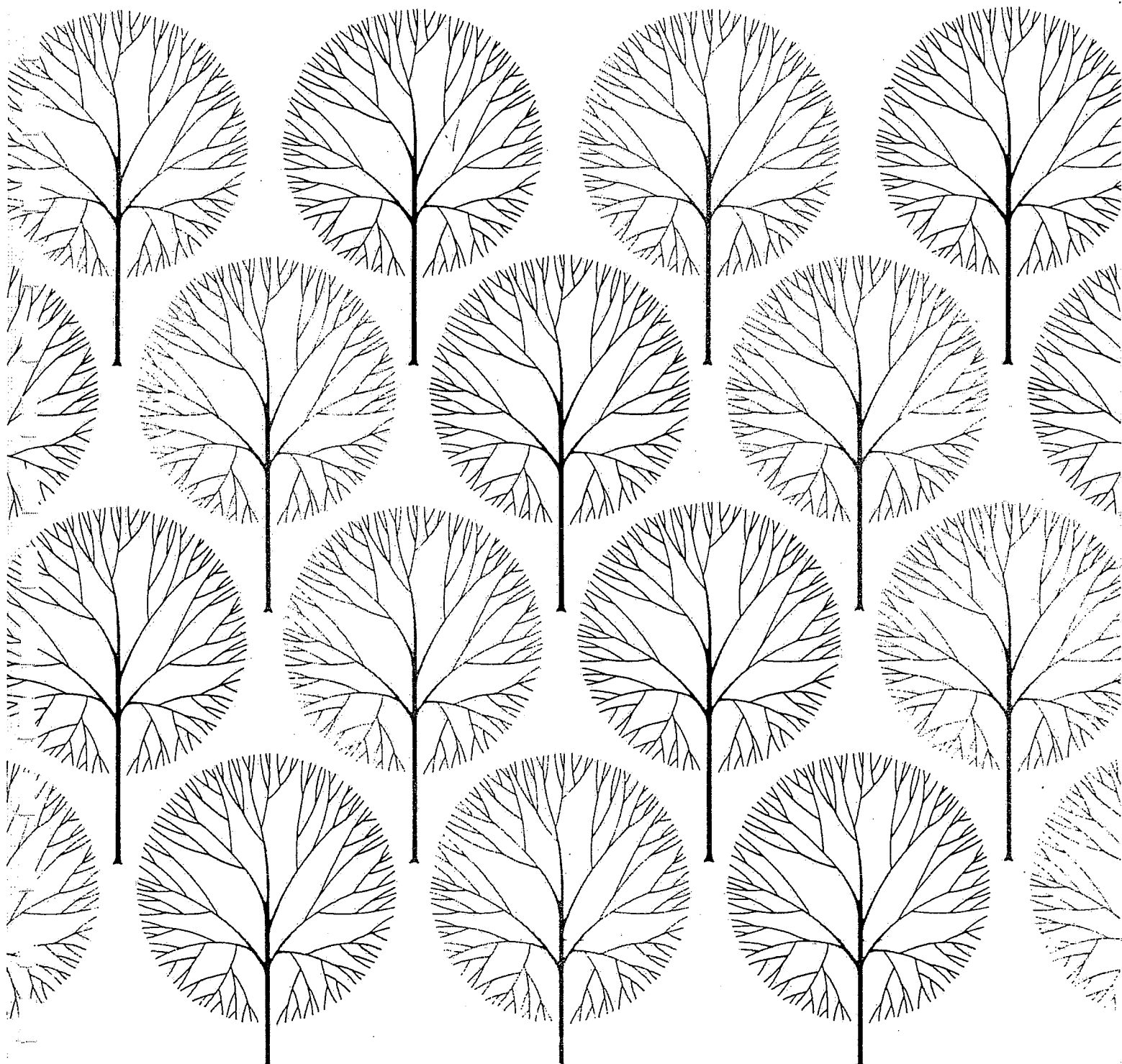


Basic Portuguese Paleography

English Edition

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Introduction

Every person's writing has unique and recognizable characteristics called style. Writing styles may vary from time period to time period, from country to country, and even from one type of document to another. The styles used in previous centuries may vary so much from those presently used that they are difficult to read. The study of writing styles and the science of interpreting and understanding ancient documents is called paleography.

The two major skills involved in reading and transcribing old handwriting are—

1. Identifying the abbreviations used in the record.
2. Transcribing the letters and numbers of the original document to a more familiar style.

A paleographer must also be able to (1) interpret the punctuation marks used, (2) separate or join words that are not separated or joined in the original

text, (3) read and transcribe numbers, (4) identify archaic spellings, (5) identify errors in the original text, and (6) determine the meaning of unfamiliar or archaic terms.

As an introduction to Portuguese paleography, this paper includes information on each of these skills. Study the material thoroughly, and you will be able to begin genealogical research in otherwise difficult-to-read records. The annotated bibliography at the end of this paper refers you to additional aids in learning to read ancient records. You should use this to continue your studies. However, the best way to become proficient in reading and transcribing old Portuguese documents is to practice. Use the practice texts included in this paper, and when you have mastered them, try other original texts. With practice, you will soon be able to read most ancient Portuguese documents.

Historical Notes

Origins of the Portuguese Language

Many groups have contributed to the formation of the Portuguese language. Originally the Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal) was inhabited by a group of people known as Celtic-Iberians. The Romans began their conquest of these people in the second century B.C. During and after the collapse of the Roman Empire in the fifth century A.D. came the Germanic tribes and, later, the Moors. All of these peoples left evidence of their rule in both the language and the culture of the Iberians, but it is mainly to the Romans that the Portuguese language owes its origin.

Record Keeping in Portugal

By the twelfth century the Portuguese had declared themselves a kingdom. By the thirteenth century they had ousted the Moors and extended Portugal's borders to its current boundaries.

Records have been kept since the very formation of the kingdom of Portugal. However, little written evidence remains of the early period. It was not until the sixteenth century that the parish priests of the Catholic church were asked to begin recording baptisms, marriages, and deaths. These are by far the most valuable genealogical records in Portugal and Brazil. During the sixteenth century, other types of records of genealogical value began to increase. For this reason, this paper will only deal with writing styles used in records of genealogical value after 1500.

Handwriting Styles

Since the beginning of paleography as a science, individual methods of writing have been grouped into styles. These styles include the Carolinian hand, the Gothic hand, the Court hand, the Secretary hand, the Chained Secretary hand, and the Italic hand. Classifying writing into different style groups is not easy, since some writing possesses characteristics that may qualify it for more than one group. As Eduardo Nunes explains, "The classification of handwriting is a sacred rite, but from which, at the present time, all paleographers would like to be able to escape;... Because, both the terminology (the basis of classification), as well as the methodology itself (the principles behind the terminology) find themselves in the midst of a reformation" (translated from *Album de Paleografia Portuguesa, Vol. 1*. [Lisbon, Portugal: Instituto de Alta Cultura, Universidade de Lisboa, 1969], p. 11).

Since this is the case and since most records of genealogical value in Brazil and Portugal exist only after 1500 (when one or two styles had already gained predominance over the others), this paper will not attempt to identify the style being used in each document. Instead, it will review the techniques and methods used in interpreting any style. Using these techniques, you can acquire the skills needed to read and transcribe the majority of records used in Portuguese genealogical research.

The Alphabet

Originally the Roman alphabet consisted of twenty-one letters: A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, K, L, M, N, O, P, Q, R, S, T, V, and X. The letter I was used for both the modern I and J. The letter V was used for both the modern U and V. In approximately 50 B.C., the letters Y and Z were added. Since that time there have been many changes in the Latin language; but the alphabet, with few exceptions, has remained unchanged. Once you have learned the unique characteristics of any one handwriting style (providing that you are familiar with the vocabulary and grammar used during the time of the writing), you should be able to read any document written in that style with only slightly more effort than it takes to read today's handwriting. Of course, you still have to deal with poor handwriting, faded ink, and missing information; but the key is being able to recognize the identifying features of the style used by the person who wrote the document.


Nearly all of the following sample letters have been taken directly from the practice texts used in this paper. There were, of course, many other personal styles used over the course of four or five centuries by thousands of scribes, and it would take a lifetime to learn them all. These examples should give you an idea of the many variations. Study them carefully, and refer to this section often as you work through the remainder of the paper. As you continue your study of paleography and as you begin your research in original records, you might add to this list new samples of letters that prove especially difficult for you. Practicing writing the letters that are difficult for you, especially as you encounter a combination of letters that is new or strange to you, will help you to better understand the scribe's style and to remember it longer.


Sample Letters

A 

a 

B 

b 

C 

c 

D @ 7 2 9

d 2 2 e d 2 e 2 2 2

E E E E

e e e e

F F F F F F F

f f f f f f

G G G

g g g g

H H H

h h h h h h

I I I

i i i i

J J J J J J

j j J j

K }
k } Generally used only in foreign words

L l L L

l l l l

M M M M

m m m m

N N N N

n n n n

O o O

o o o o

P P P P

P P P P

Q Q 2 G

q q 2 9 L

R R R R R

r r r r r r

S S S S S S

s s s s s s

T T T T

t t t t t t

U U

u u u u u

V V V V V

v v v v

W }
w }

Generally used only in foreign words

X *x* *x*

X *x* *x*

Y Basically the same as the lowercase y

y *y* *y* *y*

Z Basically the same as the lowercase z

Z *z* *z* *z* *z* *z*

Exercise

Using the preceding alphabet, see if you can correctly transcribe each of the following words. When

you have finished, compare your work to the answers given below.

WRITE YOUR TRANSCRIPTION HERE:

1. *Fra*
2. *Thomazia*
3. *Filha*
4. *Maria*
5. *dias*

FOLLOWING ARE THE TRANSCRIPTIONS OF THE WORDS ABOVE:

- | | | | |
|-------------|--------------------------------|----------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Frra. | (See practice text 1, line 5.) | 4. Maria | (See practice text 2, line 10.) |
| 2. Thomazia | (See practice text 1, line 7.) | 5. dias | (See practice text 3, line 1.) |
| 3. filha | (See practice text 2, line 8.) | | |