

PORTUGUESE MEDIEVAL WALL PAINTINGS

MISSING PIECES FOR A LONG-AWAITED ARTISTIC INVENTORY

PATRÍCIA MONTEIRO

University of Lisbon, Faculty of Letters,
Centre for Lusophone and European Literatures and Cultures, Lisbon, Portugal,
patricia.monteiro@edu.ulisboa.pt

INTRODUCTION

This paper will discuss some of the oldest and most interesting mural painting collections that still exist in Portugal, covering a wide range of morphologies, functions, and subjects. Other countries' perceptions of the medieval period differ from the prevalent one in Portugal. Until the 16th century, and in some regions of Portugal until the 17th century, Gothic was the dominant style. This poses a challenge to some scientific fields of knowledge, such as Art History, which strives to categorize works of art according to a specific period.

Despite its peripheral location, Portugal has a long tradition of mural painting that stretches from north to south of the country and includes the islands of the Azores and Madeira. This tradition goes back as far as 21,000 BC with rock art complexes from the Neolithic period, and there are also collections of Roman mural paintings dating from the 2nd to the 4th centuries AD. However, there is then a large gap from the 7th to the 14th century with no mural paintings, which has led Portuguese art historians to wonder why the void from the Visigoth or Romanesque periods. It is difficult to provide a definitive answer to this question, nevertheless, we will discuss some hypotheses that could explain this gap, redefining the term “medieval” in Portuguese art. Although the North of the country has a greater number of wall paintings from the first decades of the 15th century, our focus will be on some examples from the Centre and South (Alentejo), where some rare specimens of medieval paintings can still be found, contradicting the claims that regional instability inhibited the production of mural paintings.

A FASCINATING FINDING: PORTUGUESE MURAL PAINTING

Art historian Vergílio Correia pioneered the scholarly study of Portuguese mural painting by performing documentary surveys and analysing its aesthetic affinities.¹ Following his trip to Italy in 1913, where he came into contact with fresco painting, he began to draw parallels between Portuguese and Italian paintings, which he considered a paradigm of excellence. As a result, many stylistic and technical misunderstandings emerged: not only do Portuguese mural paintings result from a combination of different techniques (fresco, oil, tempera), but they are also the product of other stylistic influences, both local and foreign. Before Correia, the subject of mural painting appears to have been overlooked, which was more of an ethnographic rather than a historic scope. Furthermore, public and private entities responsible for the management and preservation of Portugal's artistic heritage were unaware of heritage that only survived in extremely precarious conditions. Correia's main interest, however, was to identify paintings from the 16th century, considered the Golden Age of Portuguese painting. He was also the first author to propose that easel painters were possibly involved in the mural assemblages, a working hypothesis that is still difficult to prove for the earliest periods since written documents are scarce.²

In the 1930s and 1940s, the Portuguese government launched an intensive campaign of restoration interventions in mural paintings in the North of the country, where the oldest examples had been identified. The interventions followed a principle of stylistic unity, resulting in formal and material changes to many sites.³ On the other hand, in the South of the country (Alentejo and the Algarve), the practice of intensive whitewashing of the interior and exterior of buildings ultimately contributed to the survival of a significant number of medieval and early Renaissance mural paintings to the present day. This is most likely one of the reasons why no systematic research has been carried out on polychrome coatings in late medieval architecture.

At the turn of the 20th century, historical monuments had been regarded simply as a means of representing key moments or episodes in Portugal's history, with a special focus on the medieval period. Luís Keil (1881–1947) was one of the authors responsible for Portugal's artistic inventories. He wrote at a time when a value was placed on buildings that served as testimony to the nation's history, particularly castles and other monuments where, as the author stated, “[...] history took precedence over art [...]”⁴ As a result, anything that did not match the “authenticity” standard was erased, wiping out centuries of historical records and presenting a distorted image of late medieval architecture. Luís Keil did not ignore the existence of mural painting in historic buildings, however,

¹ CORREIA 1921.

² AFONSO 2002.

³ *Boletim da Direcção Geral dos Edifícios e Monumentos Nacionais*, 106, 1961, pp. 1–21.

⁴ KEIL 1943, p. LVII.

he added that “[...] unfortunately, the paintings that we see today are almost all more modern, having replaced the earlier ones, either by their deterioration or by the evolution of tastes and styles [...]”⁵ The author was also conscious of the fact that many of the changes which the paintings had undergone were the result of occasional repaints, many of them poorly executed.

By this time Portugal experienced a series of restoration interventions involving the detachment of mural painting ensembles, primarily for purist stylistic reasons. After the paintings were removed, the buildings were left in their “original” state, with the bare stone showing. Needless to say, a lot of mural paintings were destroyed during this experimental process.⁶

Michel Pastoureau had already addressed the problem of understanding colour, stating that “[...] it is society (rather than the artist or scholar) that makes colour, gives it definition and meaning, creates its codes and values, organizes its practices and determines its issues. [...]”⁷ This sentence points to changes in society’s perception of architecture, perfectly reflecting what happened in Portugal, at least until the late 1960s.

Túlio Espanca was another author who devoted a large portion of his work to the creation of an art inventory in Portugal. Between 1966 and 1978, he focused on the Alentejo region in all its variety, contributing significantly to the (re)discovery of regional wall painting.⁸

Nevertheless, it was not until the 1980s that the historiography of mural painting gained real momentum, thanks to a new, systematic approach by art historians. The new studies focused on the Late Gothic and early Renaissance, primarily in the North of the country, where previous studies had already indicated the existence of some of the oldest mural paintings. Teresa Cabrita Fernandes’ inventory, completed in 1982, was a pioneering work that paved the way for new historiographical work;⁹ this approach was then followed by other scholars, who built on her work. From 2001 onwards, studies by Catarina Valença, Luis Afonso, and Paula Bessa have adopted a broader perspective, suggesting authorship for many wall paintings, while at the same time identifying their main characteristics, models and sources of inspiration, from Hispano-Flemish to the Italian Renaissance.¹⁰ More recently Joaquim I. Caetano conducted an extensive survey of stencil models used in the decorative motifs of 15th and 16th-century mural paintings, identifying some workshops active during this period.¹¹

Portuguese mural painting scholars have focused their attention on two main artistic centres in the Alentejo region: first and foremost, the city of Évora in the geographic centre of the region

⁵ KEIL 1943, p. XXXVIII.

⁶ *Boletim da Direcção Geral dos Edifícios e Monumentos Nacionais*, 106, 1961, pp. 1–21.

⁷ PASTOUREAU 2000, p. 9 (free translation by the author).

⁸ ESPANCA 1973, pp. 94–112.

⁹ FERNANDES 1982.

¹⁰ GONÇALVES 2001; BESSA 2007; AFONSO 2009.

¹¹ CAETANO 2010.

because of its political and cultural importance between 1495 and 1557; and second, the city's neighbouring towns and villages which were, as a result, affected by its aesthetic currents.

It is important to stress, though, that the majority of these studies have focused on Renaissance, Mannerist and Baroque paintings, as the surviving works in these artistic styles are more abundant. Further, it must be noted that all the recent studies share an urgency to include these works in a comprehensive inventory of national mural painting, as an inventory is a necessary working tool which requires constant updating.¹²

INVENTORY CHALLENGES

Since the first half of the 20th century, the creation of an inventory of Portuguese heritage is a goal that has been shared by many institutions involved in cultural heritage preservation, with numerous initiatives being launched. Although they all agree on the basic point that an inventory is a crucial working tool, no coordinated effort has been made to put it into practice.

The first and most important is the *Artistic Inventory of Portugal* (Inventário Artístico de Portugal) created between 1943 and 1995 and comprising 17 volumes dedicated to different regions. The first volume, as noted above, was written by Luís Keil and focuses on the area north of Alentejo,¹³ however the most in-depth work on this region was undertaken by Túlio Espanca.¹⁴ Even today, Espanca's research is the foundation on which recent inventories and databases are based, including those available on digital platforms.

The overlapping inventories of Portuguese cultural heritage are a result of a long-standing lack of coordination between different government ministries, which dates back to the beginning of the 20th century as one of the immediate effects of the so-called *Separation Law of the State from the Church* (20 April 1911). This radical law primarily affected the Catholic Church, which is the dominant faith in Portugal, and stipulated that from that day on the Roman Catholic apostolic faith ceased to be the state religion. As an immediate consequence, the Catholic Church lost its legal personality and its assets were nationalized.¹⁵ This was the second moment in less than a century in which the State assumed a secular character, which in turn had an impact on the national historical-artistic heritage. The first was in 1834 when Religious Orders were dissolved and their assets confiscated. Republican anti-clericalism would reach a climax in 1911, right after the proclamation of the Republic (1910), with the new law also extending to the secular clergy's

¹² DIAS 2007, pp. 219–280.

¹³ KEIL 1943.

¹⁴ ESPANCA 1973, pp. 94–112; ESPANCA 1975; ESPANCA 1978.

¹⁵ CATROGA 1988.

immovable and movable property, which had escaped the law of 1834.¹⁶ Along with the Separation Law, the State established a management structure for the Church's vast and valuable heritage, incorporating it into the newly established national, regional and municipal museums, which had already been provided for in the 1911 law. At the same time, commissions comprising Church members and prominent civil society figures were appointed to conduct inventories of the country's places of worship and their assets.

Diplomatic relations between Portugal and the Holy See were re-established in 1918, but it was not until 1940 that they were normalized through the *Concordat*. This would also mark the beginning of the State's returning a limited portion of the Catholic Church's assets. At the same time, the State set itself a five year period (until 1945) to classify as national heritage the objects and buildings (churches, monasteries, chapels) which were not to be returned. As a result, various government ministries have shared monument-related competencies with the Church, which to this day has given rise to considerable difficulties in institutional management and coordination. One of the outcomes was the creation of multiple inventories, the majority of which were dedicated to movable objects (altarpieces, paintings, statues, jewellery, etc.). Inventories that are available online include the *National Secretariat for Cultural Assets of the Church*,¹⁷ the *Information System for Architectural Heritage*¹⁸ and *Matrix Net*, an online common catalogue of the 34 museums of the Portuguese Museum Network,¹⁹ the last two of which are the responsibility of the Portuguese General Directorate of Cultural Heritage. City councils have also invested in compiling local inventories, albeit with a strong emphasis on already known works. Other parts of Portugal's artistic heritage, such as tiles, stuccos, graffiti or mural paintings are only mentioned in connection to architecture and are never as standalone inventory entries. Although the importance of mural painting is often stressed, its preservation has never been considered to be a priority.

Another obstacle to maintaining an updated inventory is the lack of specific funding. Some of the existing inventories are the result of funded research projects which means that, when they come to an end, all the associated tasks cease. The problem is exacerbated in the case of buildings with mural paintings which lack legal protection, making them vulnerable to poorly executed interventions or even the destruction of the paintings. The current state of the inventory of Portuguese heritage is, therefore, something of a paradox. On the one hand, as we have seen, there is a diverse range of coexisting inventories with inevitable overlaps in scope, resulting in the duplication of work and wasted resources. On the other hand, the vast majority of these inventories are outdated and incomplete due to a lack of investment, which compromises their usefulness.

¹⁶ FERREIRA 2016.

¹⁷ The inventories made by the Catholic Church are also available in SIMÕES 2015. Cf. <https://www.bensculturais.com/areas-de-actuacao/inventario/588-inventario-on-line>.

¹⁸ Cf. http://www.monumentos.gov.pt/Site/APP_PagesUser/Default.aspx.

¹⁹ Cf. <http://www.matriznet.dgpc.pt/MatrizNet/Home.aspx?Lang=EN>.

THE INTRIGUING ABSENCE OF MEDIEVAL WALL PAINTING IN THE SOUTH OF PORTUGAL

Since the second half of the 20th century, mural painting scholars have attempted to identify the reasons for the apparent absence of early medieval wall painting, particularly in Alentejo, where, paradoxically, this medium (later) came to be longest practiced in both erudite and vernacular architecture. The abundance of local materials (limestone, pigments, lime) in the region has, for centuries, been a decisive factor in the success of the medium.²⁰

Some theories have attributed the absence of mural painting throughout the Early Middle Ages to the upheavals that the Iberian Peninsula experienced under Muslim rule between the 8th century and 1492, which ended in the Christian reconquest.²¹ During this period, the frontiers of Portugal's kingdom were being established, and the insecurity felt has been suggested as one of the main reasons for the lack of large constructions and mural decorations.

We must also not overlook the role of military orders (Christ, Santiago, Avis, Hospital) in shaping the South of the country during the 12th century. The vast territory of Alentejo and Algarve was owned by resp. divided up between the different orders, which, in some cases, established their headquarters there. The first to arrive was the Order of the Knights Templar (later renamed as the Order of Christ), in 1169.²² This early arrival was soon followed by the military Order of Santiago (1175), and the Order of Avis (1176).²³ It is not known when the Order of St John of the Hospital, founded in Jerusalem, came to Portugal, though this is thought to have happened at the beginning of the 12th century. According to historical records, the Order's knights fought alongside King Afonso Henriques in the reconquest of Lisbon from its Muslim rulers in 1147. However, they did not become established in Alentejo until the 13th century.²⁴ These orders lost their military vocation in the 16th century. Now that the threat of new Islamic invasions had receded and after the union of the Portuguese and Spanish crowns (1580), there was no longer such an urgent need to defend the national borders. Only when the insurgency against the Spanish broke out, resulting in the restoration of Portuguese independence in 1640, were military orders considered essential again, this time as members of the national armed forces rather than as separate militias.

Administrative documents from the orders of Christ and Santiago concerning the condition of their places of worship in Alentejo and Algarve help to give us a slightly better understanding of the extent of mural painting in these spaces in the early 16th century.²⁵ Individual depictions of saints within panels or frames, displayed along the aisles and in the main chapels, appear to

²⁰ MONTEIRO 2013, pp. 15–16.

²¹ COELHO 1963, p. 26.

²² FARIA 1995, p. 159.

²³ SANTOS 2009, p. 5.

²⁴ ALMEIDA 1967, p. 148.

²⁵ DIAS 1979, pp. 179–185; LAMEIRA, SANTOS 1988, pp. 40–43.



1. *St Bartholomew and St Margaret, around 1490–1520, Church of Santa Maria, Marvão (Photo: Patrícia Monteiro)*

have been the preferred compositions inside churches, chapels and hermitages. Unfortunately, the current state of conservation of the majority of these buildings does not reflect the decorative richness of the mural paintings described in late medieval documentary sources. In the church of Santa Maria in Marvão, it is still possible to observe an example of a well preserved mural painting of three saints (St Mary Magdalene, St Bartholomew, and St Margaret) standing side by side next to a tomb (1490–1520) (Fig. 1).²⁶

In Alentejo, it is not easy to find an example of mural painting earlier than the 16th century, with one important exception: the castle of Amieira do Tejo in Nisa. The castle was built in the 14th century to defend the northern territories of Alentejo next to the Spanish border. In one of its secondary towers several mural paintings were discovered, one of which represents a *Calvary* (Fig. 2). The presence of a religious painting in a military architectural context has no parallel in similar buildings in Portugal, and the work was attributed to soldiers who were defending this castle during periods of conflict with the Spanish troops. Luis Afonso has already noted the existence of similar works on the other side of the boarder, namely in the castles of Zafra and Villalba de los Barrios, in the neighbouring province of Badajoz (Extremadura).²⁷ The unusual nature of this painting, which was unrivalled in the region, drew the attention of the General Directorate

²⁶ AFONSO 2009, 2, p. 460.

²⁷ AFONSO 2009, 2, pp. 55–56.



2. Calvary, late 14th century–early 15th century,
Castle of Amieira do Tejo, Nisa (Photo: Patrícia Monteiro)



3. Siren, 1332, Olivenza Castle, Badajoz (Photo: Patrícia Monteiro)



4. *Monastery of Santa Maria da Vitória, 1386–1565, Batalha*
(Photo: Patrícia Monteiro)

of Culture to the importance of preserving this cultural heritage, encouraging further studies.²⁸ Furthermore, in the same tower traces of an inscription were discovered near the paintings, enabling them to be dated to the late 14th or early 15th century.²⁹

Older works of art, in the form of graffiti rather than mural paintings, have been left on the walls of another castle on the southeastern border with Spain. The castle is located in Olivenza, a small town of Alentejo which was annexed by Spain in the 19th century. The study of historical graffiti, which share some of the characteristics of mural painting, has yet to be undertaken. Olivenza's graffiti ranges from geometric (lines, stars, etc.) to figurative (a mermaid with a human head and a bird's body, warriors, boats) and heraldic (a coat of arms). According to a date found in the mortar, these graffiti can be dated to 1332 AD, and they also bear resemblance in several respects to similar drawings found in Amieira castle (Fig. 3).

Amieira castle is an exception, not only in Alentejo but in Portugal as a whole. When looking for older mural paintings, we must broaden our search to include other areas, in the centre of the country and closer to the capital Lisbon. Such is the case of Batalha, a small town with an important historic role because it was the site of a great military victory won by the Portuguese against the Spanish between 1383 and 1385. To celebrate this historic event, a monastery was built, symbolically dedicated to *Our Lady of the Victory* (Fig. 4).

²⁸ LOPES 2007.

²⁹ BOTTO 2007.



5. Ceiling of the monastery sacristy, 1402–1433, Batalha
(Photo: Patrícia Monteiro)

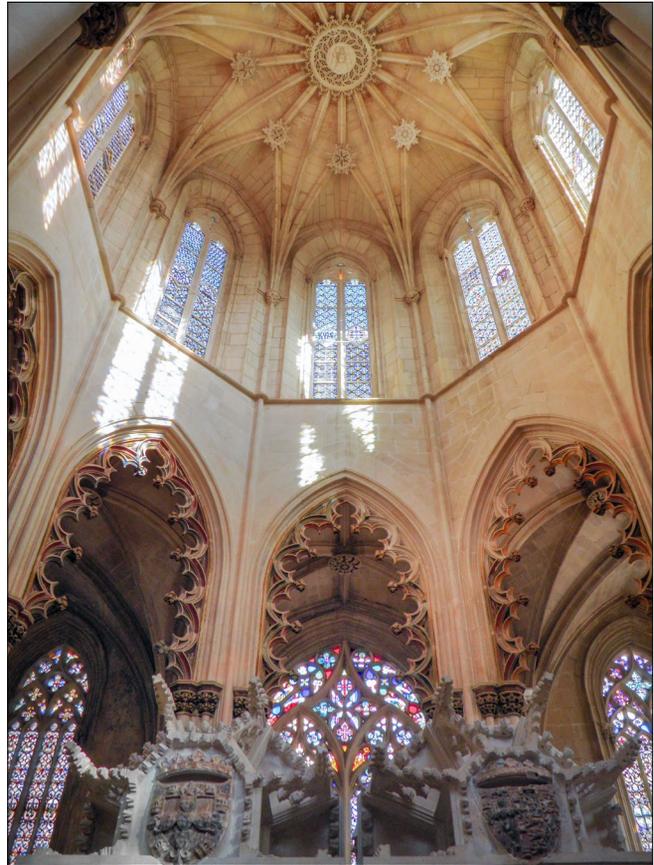


6. Angels' music (detail), 1402–1433, monastery sacristy, Batalha
(Photo: Patrícia Monteiro)

Different categories of mural painting are preserved inside (and outside) the building. The most important from an artistic standpoint are those covering the vault of the church sacristy, directly executed on the stone. The paintings are dated between the completion of the sacristy (1402) and the death of the patron, King John I (1433). There are life-size angels carrying the monarch's shields and playing musical instruments on the ceiling. The group was described as a "Celestial Court", an apologia for the new dynasty, and, at the same time, a celebration of its legitimacy obtained through victory over the Spanish (Figs. 5, 6).³⁰

Another location with polychrome coatings and gildings is the so-called "Founder's Chapel", which was completed between 1433 and 1434 as a pantheon for the tombs of King John I, his wife and their descendants, the Avis dynasty.

As noted at the beginning of this paper, the drastic restoration procedures carried out in the 19th and 20th centuries in some of Portugal's most iconic buildings resulted in the bare stone, which now also characterises the appearance of this chapel (Fig. 7). However, important interdisciplinary research work has recently revealed that the "Founder's Chapel" was originally painted and gilded, which points to a whole new aesthetic associated with medieval buildings until now ignored by national art historiography.³¹ It is important to emphasize, however, that when we refer to mural painting in this context, we are often referring to polychrome coatings with no narrative composition. Iconography is scarce and restricted to the heraldry of the princes



7. *The Founder's Chapel, around 1433–1434, Batalha (Photo: Patrícia Monteiro)*

³⁰ AFONSO 2009, 2, p. 107.

³¹ RODRIGUES 2018, p. 109.



8. Detail of one of the painted tombs, after 1434, the Founder's Chapel, Batalha
(Photo: Patrícia Monteiro)

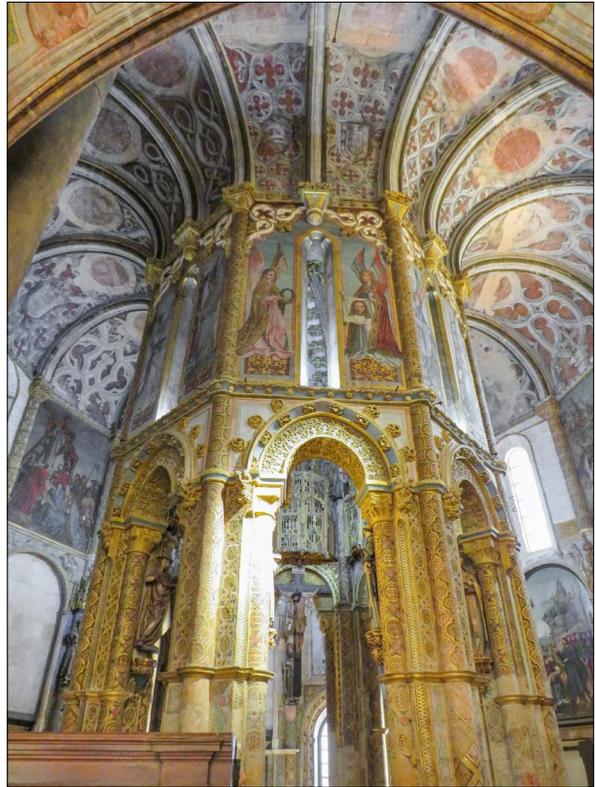


9. Graffiti (detail), Monastery of Santa Maria da Vitória, Batalha
(Photo: Patrícia Monteiro)

buried in sarcophagi around the chapel (Fig. 8). The only signs of polychrome and gilding were found in capitals, arches and the tombs themselves in the central area, where the king and queen's sarcophagi are located.³² The painting and gilding registered were directly executed on stone support, as in the sacristy, without a preparatory layer, which must have contributed to their fading over the centuries.

Furthermore, the Batalha monastery also features an intriguing collection of graffiti that completely cover the walls of one of its cloisters, as well as various locations on the outer walls. The drawings, made using charcoal and red pigment in a *fresco* technique, are figurative and geometric, also including small sentences and signatures. It is difficult to explain the purpose of this intriguing mural group, which stands out in plain sight, but its antiquity seems to be unquestionable (Fig. 9).³³

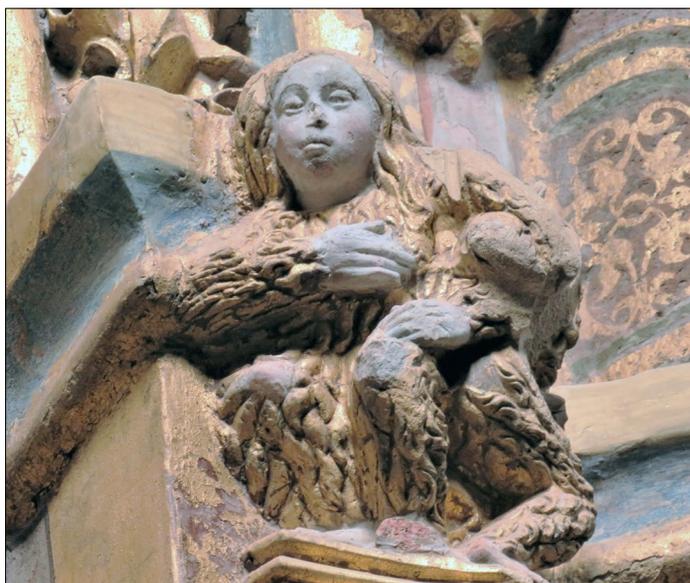
The efforts to glorify a new dynasty extended more evidently to Late-Gothic architecture. This is very clear in the case of the Convent of Christ in Tomar, built in the 12th century by the Knights Templar. This Romanesque building was originally composed of a round church, or rotunda which on the inside is an octagonal prism unfolding into sixteen sides (Fig. 10). Inside the citadel, the rotunda served as the knights' private oratory. Its typology is shared by byzantine churches, which adopted the Romanesque style following the Crusades. After the expulsion of the Templars, the castle and rotunda were occupied by the order of Christ, of which King Manuel I was the Grand Master (1484). The vault and ornamentation of the central structure were completed between 1510 and 1518. The king commissioned a decorative scheme that featured mural paintings both inside and outside the rotunda, with Mudejar motifs (nonfigurative, stars, etc.) combined with



10. Rotunda, 12th–16th century, Convent of Christ, Tomar
(Photo: Patrícia Monteiro)

³² RODRIGUES 2018, pp. 35–39.

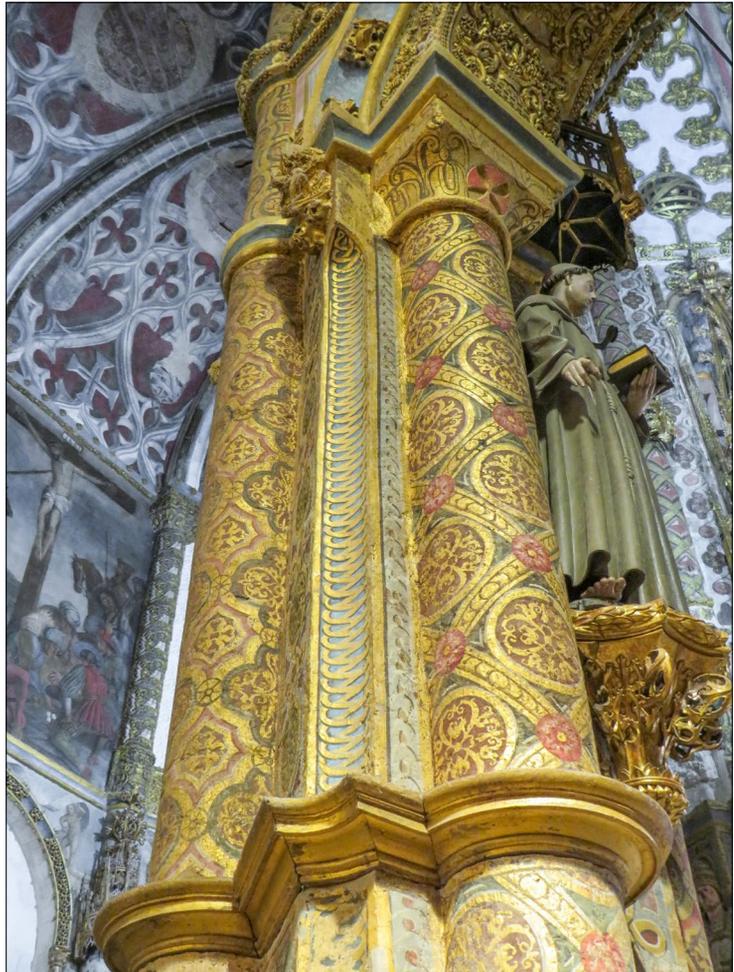
³³ ESTRELA 2010.



11. *Wild men and women*, early 16th century (detail), Convent of Christ, Tomar (Photo: Patrícia Monteiro)

heraldic ornaments and nautical elements inspired by Portuguese maritime discoveries. In 1510, the rotunda received a cycle of paintings depicting episodes from Christ's life, which covered most of its outer walls. This cycle was complemented in the late 1530s by easel paintings depicting the miracles and martyrdoms of several saints on the lower level of the ambulatory. The geometric paintings on the columns date from the late 16th and early 17th centuries, when the Portuguese crown was held by Spanish kings, and covered the Manueline paintings that were in the same location. Some of the most important national and foreign artists worked in this convent, adding to the mystical aura created by the king's iconography (armillary sphere, cross of Christ, royal coat of arms). The statues of saints, angels and prophets surrounding the rotunda were executed by the Flemish sculptor Olivier de Gand, who worked in Portugal between the late 15th and early 16th centuries. The high level of decoration in the interior of the rotunda is due to the coherent dialogue created between different arts in their relation to architecture. It is a foretaste of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* or "the global work of art" that would later prevail during the Baroque period. The emphasis on the use of gold in the rotunda turns it almost into a reliquary, where sacred elements are mixed with profane ornaments (acanthus leaves, dry branches, ropes, playing *putti*), royal iconography and fantastical elements like the "wild men and women" displayed in the chapters, a reference to the medieval imaginary, populated by beings in their most primitive state (Fig. 11).

The polychrome coatings and gildings extend from the ceiling to the columns, capitals, arches, and doors (Fig. 12). Various ornamental interventions took place in the rotunda over the ages, particularly in the 17th and 18th centuries, while maintaining the aesthetic coherence of the site. Between 2008 and 2009, conservation work carried out by the firm Nova Conservação concentrated

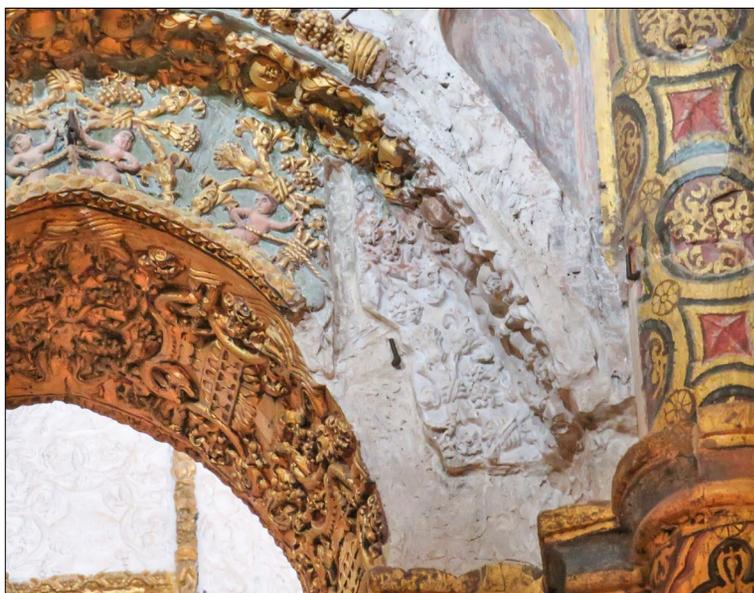


12. Painted columns of the rotunda, late 16th century, Convent of Christ, Tomar (Photo: Patrícia Monteiro)

on cleaning, repairing and consolidating the chromatic layer, as well as on occasionally removing the repainting that displayed significant chromatic and technical disharmony in comparison with the original.³⁴ The last significant intervention inside the rotunda took place in 2013.

It is also in the rotunda of the convent of Christ that we find some of the oldest gilded stuccos in Portugal from the early 16th century, with monstrous figures playing trumpets and men on horseback (Fig. 13). This artistic syncretism between the Late-Gothic naturalist tradition and a new decorative order, which included the Roman grotesques and ornaments inspired by the contact with other cultures during Portuguese overseas discoveries, slowly made their way into Portuguese Art, resulting in the *Manueline style*, as referring to king Manuel I, during the 16th century.

³⁴ Pinturas da Charola 2008, p. 29.



13. Gilded stuccos, early 16th century (detail), Convent of Christ, Tomar (Photo: Patrícia Monteiro)

It is possible that the intensive coating of architectural or sculptural elements with polychromies and gilding reflected a Portuguese medieval pictorial tradition before the massive use of figurative and narrative mural paintings. This theory requires further corroboration from yet-undiscovered documentary sources, however, it reminds us of the role of polychrome coatings which enhance the architecture: “[...] The wall becomes immaterial through polychromy, allowing the architectural domain to enter the pictorial domain. Thus, interior, exterior, and sculpture polychromies were discovered to be linked in a single plan: that of the image. Polychromy has undoubtedly served as a unifying factor [...]”³⁵

To speak of Portuguese medieval mural painting implies extending the boundaries of the very concept of “medieval”. Commonly, the term “late Gothic” is used for convenience, which allows the introduction of a broader range of pictorial groups of high artistic quality, extending from the late 14th to the first decades of the 16th century. To validate such a perspective, we conclude by recalling the case of the so-called *Painted Houses* in Évora, which are said to have been the former residence of Portuguese navigator Vasco da Gama. The frescoes are all displayed in the backyard of this manor house and were created between 1520 and 1530. Despite their date, the paintings reflect a direct inspiration from the medieval bestiary tradition, which was adopted in the literature of the Iberian Peninsula. The paintings represent both real and fictitious creatures, portraying vices and virtues as humanity’s moral mirror (Figs. 14, 15).

³⁵ VUILLEMARD-JENN 2013, p. 55 (free translation by the author).



14. Mermaid, around 1510–1534, Painted Houses of Vasco da Gama, Évora
(Photo: Patrícia Monteiro)



15. Hydra, around 1510–1534, Painted Houses of Vasco da Gama, Évora
(Photo: Patrícia Monteiro)

CONCLUSION

To conclude, there are several possible explanations for the apparent scarcity of Early Middle Ages mural painting in Portugal. First, there was a long period of the Christian reconquest of the Portuguese territory from the Moors, who had occupied the Iberian Peninsula since the 7th century, which in turn created an unstable climate for permanent construction on a large scale. Second, early medieval structures would have existed, but no records of them have survived because all of their components were reused in other structures during the Middle Ages. Third, polychrome coatings of architectural or sculptural elements may have been the only possible extent of early Christian mural painting. Finally, a fourth possible explanation: the continual reuse of the same buildings, together with the ready availability of resources in Portugal for the practice of mural painting (lime, limestone, sand, colours) encouraged repeated painting campaigns, some of which have destroyed the earlier ones.

Whatever the reason (or reasons), Gothic was the most enduring national style, lasting well into the 16th century. This compels us to reconsider the chronological boundaries of these aesthetic genres, which were not uniform in Western Europe. The inclusion of foreign aesthetic influences and their reinterpretation in light of local traditions distinguishes Portuguese mural art from that of other European traditions. Given this reality, a mural painting inventory is an essential tool that researchers currently lack. Only then would it be possible to take a diachronic look at wall painting from prehistory to the present. More mural paintings may, unfortunately, vanish before such time as a result of abandonment, vandalism, or ineffective conservation efforts.

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**SREDNJEVEŠKE STENSKÉ POSLIKAVE NA PORTUGALSKEM
MANJKAJOČI KOŠČKI ZA DOLGO PRIČAKOVANI UMETNOSTNI INVENTAR**

Povzetek

Inventarizacija portugalskih stenskih poslikav je že dolgo deziderat, vendar jo nacionalni umetnostni zgodovinarji vedno znova odlagajo. Odsotnost tega orodja je prispevala k zanemarjanju preučevanja portugalskega stenskega slikarstva in posledično k pomanjkanju strategij za njegovo ohranitev. Tako kot druge zahodnoevropske države ima tudi Portugalska dolgo tradicijo stenskega slikarstva, ki sega v rimsko obdobje. Kljub temu romansko stensko slikarstvo ni navzoče v nacionalni umetnostni panorami, kar ostaja ena največjih skrivnosti portugalske umetnostne zgodovine. Prispevek preučuje nekatere hipoteze, ki bi lahko pojasnile to anomalijo; ta je še očitnejša na jugu države, zlasti v pokrajini Alentejo, kjer je stensko slikarstvo prisotno že več kot tisočletje. Hkrati predstavlja pregled nekaterih najstarejših portugalskih stenskih kompozicij, kar izpodbija stališča nekaterih, ki trdijo, da srednjeveškega stenskega slikarstva na Portugalskem sploh ni bilo.