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INVESTIGATING AND WRITING ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY:  
SUBJECTS, METHODOLOGIES AND FRONTIERS

Papers from the Third EAHN International Meeting

Edited by Michela Rosso

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Michela Rosso (ed.)

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# Contents

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**Preface**, Michela Rosso

15

## 1. EARLY MODERN

### **1.1. Fortified Palaces in Early Modern Europe, 1400–1700,**

33

*Pieter Martens, Konrad Ottenheim, Nuno Senos*

1.1.1 Fortified Palaces in Early Modern Sicily: Models, Image Strategy  
Functions, *Emanuela Garofalo, Fulvia Scaduto*

35

1.1.2 The *Castrum Sanctae Crucis* in Cremona: From Fortified Castle  
to Courtly Residence, *Jessica Gritti, Valeria Fortunato*

48

1.1.3 From Old to New: The Transformation of the Castle of Porto de  
Mós, *Luís Serrão Gil*

62

1.1.4 Symphony in Brick: Moscow Kremlin at the Time of Ivan III,  
*Elena Kashina*

72

1.1.5 Seventeenth-Century Fortified Villas in the County of Gorizia, with  
Residences Modelled on the Type of a Venetian Palace with Corner Towers,  
*Helena Seražin*

81

### **1.2. Piedmontese Baroque Architecture Studies Fifty Years On,**

92

*Susan Klaiber*

1.2.1 The Exchange of Architectural Models between Rome and Turin  
before Guarini's Arrival, *Marisa Tabarrini*

94

1.2.2 Guarino Guarini: The First 'Baroque' Architect, *Marion Riggs*

102

1.2.3 The Multifaceted Uses of Guarini's Architettura Civile in 1968,  
*Martijn van Beek*

109

1.2.4 Idealism and Realism: Augusto Cavallari Murat, *Elena Gianasso*

115

1.2.5 A Regional Artistic Identity? Three Exhibitions in Comparison,  
*Giuseppe Dardanella*

121

1.2.6 Wittkower's 'Gothic' Baroque: Piedmontese Buildings as Seen  
Around 1960, *Cornelia Jöchner*

122

<b>1.3. On the Way to Early Modern: Issues of Memory, Identity and Practice, Open Session, Valérie Nègre</b>	130	<b>2.3. Layers of Meanings: Narratives and Imageries of Architecture, Open Session, Cànâ Bilsel</b>	259
1.3.1 Quadrature and Drawing in Early Modern Architecture, <i>Lydia M. Soo</i>	131	2.3.1 The Plan as <i>Eidos</i> : Bramante's Half-Drawing and Durand's <i>marche</i> , <i>Alejandra Celedon Forster</i>	260
1.3.2 Some Observations on Andrea Palladio, Silvio Belli and the Theory of Proportion, <i>Maria Cristina Loi</i>	132	2.3.2 'What do Pictures Really Want'? Photography, Blight and Renewal in Chicago, <i>Wesley Aelbrecht</i>	271
1.3.3 Moralizing Money through Space in Early Modernity, <i>Lauren Jacobi</i>	144	2.3.3 Content, Form and Class Nature of Architecture in the 1950s-China, <i>Ying Wang, Kai Wang</i>	272
1.3.4 Staging War in Maghreb: Architecture as a Weapon by the 1500s, <i>Jorge Correia</i>	152	<b>2.4. Architecture, Art, and Design in Italian Modernism: Strategies of Synthesis 1925-60, Daniel Sherer</b>	283
<b>1.4. Architects, Craftsmen and Interior Ornament, 1400-1800, Christine Casey, Conor Lucey</b>	153	2.4.1 'Fantasia degli Italiani' as Participatory Utopia: Costantino Nivola's Way to the Synthesis of the Arts, <i>Giuliana Altea</i>	285
1.4.1 Architecture Before the Architects: Building S. Theodore's Chapel of S. Mark's Basilica in Venice, 1486-93, <i>Maria Bergamo</i>	154	2.4.2 Carlo Mollino's Enchanted Rooms: Face-to-Face with Art in a Company Town, 1930-60, <i>Michela Comba</i>	296
1.4.2 Decoration in Religious Architecture of the Eighteenth Century in the South Eastern Part of Central Europe, <i>Dubravka Botica</i>	163	2.4.3 The Logics of <i>arredamento</i> : Art and Civilization 1928-36, <i>Ignacio González Galán</i>	307
1.4.3 Architects of the Islamic Work and Phrasing Concepts in Geometry, <i>Mohammad Gharipour, Hooman Koliji</i>	174	2.4.4 The Synthesis of the Arts as a Critical Instrument for Modern Architecture. The Role of Ernesto Nathan Rogers: 1944-49, <i>Luca Molinari</i>	308
1.4.4 Architects, Craftsmen and Marble Decoration in Eighteenth-Century Piedmont, <i>Roberto Caterino, Elena di Majo</i>	183	2.4.5 Gio Ponti's <i>Stile</i> , <i>Cecilia Rostagni</i>	316
<b>2. REPRESENTATION AND COMMUNICATION</b>		<b>2.5. The Medium is the Message: The Role of Exhibitions and Periodicals in Critically Shaping Postmodern Architecture, Veronique Patteeuw, Léa Catherine Szacka</b>	326
<b>2.1. Public Opinion, Censorship and Architecture in the Eighteenth Century, Carlo Mambriani, Susanna Pasquali</b>	195	2.5.1 Charles Moore's <i>Perspecta</i> : Essays and Postmodern Eclecticism, <i>Patricia A. Morton</i>	328
2.1.1 Public Opinion in Amsterdam: Building the Society Felix Meritis, <i>Freek Schmidt</i>	197	2.5.2 Between Language and Form: Exhibitions by Reima Pietilä, 1961-74, <i>Eeva-Liisa Pelkonen</i>	329
2.1.2 An Architect's Reputation: Libel and Public Opinion in Britain, <i>Timothy Hyde</i>	208	2.5.3 <i>Bau Magazine</i> and the Architecture of Media, <i>Eva Branscome</i>	330
2.1.3 Theater Acoustics in the Late Eighteenth-Century Press, <i>Joseph Clarke</i>	218	2.5.4 Entertaining the Masses: IAUS's Economy of Cultural Production, <i>Kim Förster</i>	331
<b>2.2. The Published Building in Word and Image, Anne Hultzsch, Catalina Mejia Moreno</b>	229	2.5.5 Image, Medium, Artifact: Heinrich Klotz and Postmodernism, <i>Daniela Fabricius</i>	332
2.2.1 Catalogues and Cablegrams, <i>Mari Lending</i>	231	<b>3. QUESTIONS OF METHODOLOGY</b>	
2.2.2 Illustrated Picturesquely and Architecturally in Photography – William Stillman and the Acropolis in Word and Image, <i>Dervla MacManus, Hugh Campbell</i>	232	<b>3.1. Producing Non-Simultaneity: Construction Sites as Places of Progressiveness and Continuity, Eike-Christian Heine, Christian Rauhut</b>	335
2.2.3 Lost for Words: How the Architectural Image Became a Public Spectacle on Its Own, <i>Patrick Leitner</i>	233	3.1.1 Mixing Time: Ancient-Modern Intersections along the Western Anatolian Railways, <i>Elvan Cobb</i>	336
2.2.4 <i>In Wort und Bild</i> : Sigfried Giedion, Walter Gropius and the Fagus Factory, <i>Jasmine Benyamin</i>	242	3.1.2 Steel as Medium. Constructing WGC, a Tallish Building in Postwar Sweden, <i>Frida Rosenberg</i>	347
2.2.5 Juxtapositions and Semantic Collisions of Text and Image in Architectural Magazines of the 1920s and 1930s, <i>Hélène Jannièrè</i>	247		

3.1.3 Between Technological Effectiveness and Artisanal Inventiveness: Concreting Torres Blancas (1964–69), <i>Marisol Vidal</i>	355	3.5.3 Architecture's Red Tape: Governmental Building in Sweden 1964-72, <i>Erik Sigge</i>	539
3.1.4 The Global Construction Site and the Labour of Complex Geometry, <i>Roy Kozlovsky</i>	366	3.5.4 Provisional Permanence: the NATO Headquarters in Brussels, <i>Sven Sterken</i>	549
<b>3.2. The Historiography of the Present, <i>Andrew Leach</i></b>	376	3.5.5 The Jewish Agency for Israel - the Constructions of a Civic Frontier in Tel Aviv (1955-66), <i>Martin Hershenzon</i>	559
3.2.1 Proclaiming the End of Postmodernism in Architecture, <i>Valéry Didelon</i>	378	<b>3.6. Revolutionizing Familiar Terrain: The Cutting Edge of Research in Classical Architecture and Town-planning, Round Table, <i>Daniel Millette, Samantha Martin-McAuliffe</i></b>	573
3.2.2 Architectural Discourse and the Rise of Cultural Studies, <i>Antony Moulis</i>	387	3.6.1 Residency Patterns and Urban Stability: A Theory for Republican Rome, <i>Lisa Marie Mignone</i>	574
3.2.3 After Nature: Architectural History and Environmental Culture, <i>Daniel Barber</i>	395	3.6.2 The Pompeii Quadriporticus Project 2013: New Technologies and New Implications, <i>Eric Poehler</i>	581
3.2.4 Looking Back, Looking Now: Architecture's Construction of History, <i>Inbal Ben-Asher Gittler, Naomi Meiri-Dann</i>	406	3.6.3 Reconstructing Rhythm: Digital Modelling and Light at the Parthenon, <i>Paul Christesen, Aurora Mc Clain</i>	587
3.2.5 Radical Histories and Future Realities – NOW, <i>Lara Schrijver</i>	416	3.6.4 The Urban Development of Late Hellenistic Delos, <i>Mantha Zarmakoupi</i>	593
<b>3.3. On Foot: Architecture and Movement, <i>David Karmon, Christie Anderson</i></b>	424	3.6.5 Classical Architecture, Town Planning and Digital Mapping of Cities: Rome AD 320, <i>Lynda Mulvin</i>	599
3.3.1 Porticoes and Privation: Walking to Meet the Virgin, <i>Paul Davies</i>	426	3.6.6 Digital Modelling in the Sanctuary of the Great Gods on Samothrace, <i>Bonna D. Wescoat</i>	607
3.3.2 Defining the Boundaries of London: Perambulation and the City in the Long Eighteenth Century, <i>Elizabeth McKellar</i>	437	<b>4. THEORETICAL AND CRITICAL ISSUES</b>	
3.3.3 Walking through the Pain: Healing and Ambulation at Pergamon Asklepieion, <i>Ece Okay</i>	448	<b>4.1. Histories of Environmental Consciousness, <i>Panayiota Pyla</i></b>	617
3.3.4 Raymond Unwin Tramping the Taskscape, <i>Brian Ward</i>	460	4.1.1 Environmental Counter Narratives in India c. 1960, <i>Ateya Khorakiwala</i>	619
<b>3.4. 'Bread &amp; Butter and Architecture': Accommodating the Everyday, <i>Ricardo Agarez, Nelson Mota</i></b>	477	4.1.2 We Want to Change Ourselves to Make Things Different, <i>Caroline Maniaque Benton</i>	629
3.4.1 Humdrum Tasks of the Salaried-Men: Edwin Williams, a LCC Architect at War, <i>Nick Beech</i>	479	4.1.3 Zoo Landscapes and the Construction of Nature, <i>Christina Katharina May</i>	640
3.4.2 Third Text: Albert Kahn and the Architecture of Bureaucracy, <i>Claire Zimmerman</i>	492	4.1.4 Experiments on Thermal Comfort and Modern Architecture: The Contributions of André Missenard and Le Corbusier, <i>Ignacio Requena Ruiz, Daniel Siret</i>	651
3.4.3 The Architect, the Planner and the Bishop: the Shapers of 'Ordinary' Dublin, 1940-70, <i>Ellen Rowley</i>	493	4.1.5 The United Nations Headquarters and the Global Environment, <i>Alexandra Quantrill</i>	663
3.4.4 Layers of Invisibility: Portuguese State Furniture Design 1940-74, <i>João Paulo Martins, Sofia Diniz</i>	501	<b>4.2. Architecture and conflict, c. 300 – c. 1600, <i>Lex Bosman</i></b>	664
3.4.5 Bureaucratic Avant-Garde: Norm-Making as Architectural Production, <i>Anna-Maria Meister</i>	514	4.2.1 The Palace Hall of Chrysotriklinos as an Example of Emulation and Contestation in the Early Byzantine Period, <i>Nigel Westbrook</i>	666
<b>3.5. The Architecture of State Bureaucracy: Reassessing the Built Production of (Colonial) Governments, <i>Rika Devos, Johan Lagae</i></b>	515	4.2.2 Building Identity and Community in the Post-Crusade Greece: The Architecture of Interaction in the Thirteenth-Century Peloponnesos, <i>Heather E. Grossman</i>	683
3.5.1 SOM, 1939-46: From 'Engineered Dwelling' to the Manhattan Project, <i>Hyun-Tae Jung</i>	517		
3.5.2 Unmonumental Buildings, Monumental Scale: Santiago Civic District, <i>Daniel Opazo</i>	527		

4.2.3 Sieneſe Fortifications in the Age of the Guelph Commune, <i>Max Grossman</i>	684
4.2.4 'Faciendo sette et ſedicion': Architecture and Conflict in Sixteenth-century Verona, <i>Wouter Wagemakers</i>	697
4.2.5 Political Power through Architectural Wonder. Parma, Teatro Farnese, <i>Susanna Piscicella</i>	706
<b>4.3. How It All Begun: Primitivism and the Legitimacy of Architecture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries</b> , <i>Maarten Delbeke, Linda Bleijenberg, Sigrid de Jong</i> ; Respondent: <i>Caroline van Eck</i>	715
4.3.1 On the Colonial Origins of Architecture: Building the 'Maison Rustique' in Cayenne, French Guiana, <i>Erika Naginski, Eldra D. Walker</i>	717
4.3.2 Out of the Earth: Primitive Monuments between Prehistoric and Gothic Ambitions, <i>Jennifer Ferng</i>	718
4.3.3 Viel de Saint-Maux and the Symbolism of Primitive Architecture, <i>Cosmin C. Ungureanu</i>	727
4.3.4 Primitivism's Return: Theories of Ornament and Their Debt to Eighteenth-century Antiquarianism, <i>Ralph Ghoche</i>	728
4.3.5 Cultural Transformations and Their Analysis in Art and Science: Anthropological and Curatorial Concepts Stimulated by the Great Exhibition of 1851, <i>Claudio Leoni</i>	729
<b>4.4. Socialist Postmodernism: Architecture and Society under Late Socialism</b> , <i>Vladimir Kulić</i>	730
4.4.1 A Dialectic of Negation: Modernism and Postmodernism in the USSR, <i>Richard Anderson</i>	732
4.4.2 When Tomorrow Was Cancelled: Critique of Modernism in the 1970s, <i>Daria Bocharnikova, Andres Kurg</i>	733
4.4.3 The Friedrichstadt Palace, <i>Florian Urban</i>	734
4.4.4 Neither Style, nor Subversion: Postmodern Architecture in Poland, Lidia Klein, <i>Alicja Gzowska</i>	735
4.4.5 Sources of Postmodern Architecture in Late Socialist Belgrade, <i>Ljiljana Blagojević</i>	736
<b>4.5. Histories and Theories of Anarchist Urbanism</b> , <i>Nader Vossoughian</i>	747
4.5.1 The Legacy of the Anti-urban Ideology in Bruno Taut's Architectural Practice in Ankara (1936-8), <i>Giorgio Gasco, Meltem Gürel</i>	748
4.5.2 Henri Lefebvre's Vers une architecture de la jouissance (1973): Architectural Imagination after May 1968, <i>Łukasz Stanek</i>	760
4.5.3 City of Individual Sovereigns: Josiah Warren's Geometric Utopia, <i>Irene Cheng</i>	761
4.5.4 Architectural Aporia of the Revolutionary City, <i>Peter Minosh</i>	771
4.5.5 'Housing Before Street': Geddes' 1925 Anarchist Plan For Tel Aviv, <i>Yael Allweil</i>	780

## 5. TWENTIETH CENTURY

<b>5.1. In-Between Avant-Garde Discourse and Daily Building Practices: The Development of the Shopping Centre in Post-War Europe</b> , <i>Tom Avermaete, Janina Gosseye</i>	795
5.1.1 Shopping à l'américaine in the French New Towns, <i>Kenny Cupers</i>	797
5.1.2 From Million Program to Mall: Consumerism in the Swedish Town Centre, 1968-84, <i>Jennifer Mack</i>	798
5.1.3 Reinventing the Department Store in Rotterdam: Breuer's Bijenkorf 1953-57, <i>Evangelia Tsilika</i>	799
5.1.4 Chilean Commercial Snail Buildings: Typology, Shopping and the City, <i>Mario Marchant</i>	812
5.1.5 Building European Taste in Broader Communities: The Role of the David Jones Stores in the Promotion of Design and Architecture in Australia, <i>Silvia Micheli</i>	824
<b>5.2. Ideological Equality: Women Architects in Socialist Europe</b> , <i>Mary Pepchinski, Mariann Simon</i>	833
5.2.1 GDR Women Architects between Emancipation and Professional Obstinacy, <i>Harald Engler</i>	835
5.2.2 Women in Hungarian Industrial Architecture between 1945 and 1970, <i>Péter Haba</i>	846
5.2.3 Famous or Forgotten: Women Architects in Communist Poland, <i>Piotr Marciniak</i>	855
5.2.4 Emancipated, but Still Accompanied, <i>Henrieta Moravčíková</i>	867
5.2.5 Female Students of Jože Plečnik between Tradition and Modernism, <i>Tina Potočnik</i>	876
<b>5.3. Missing Histories: Artistic Dislocations of Architecture in Socialist Regimes</b> , <i>Srdjan Jovanovic Weiss, Carmen Popescu</i>	885
5.3.1 Scene(s) for New Heritage?, <i>Dubravka Sekulić</i>	887
5.3.2 Radical Space for Radical Time: The Intersections of Architecture and Performance Art in Estonia, 1986-91, <i>Ingrid Ruudi</i>	888
5.3.3 Appropriation, Commemoration, and Resistance: A Shifting Discourse on Political Space in Socialist China, <i>Yan Geng</i>	898
5.3.4 'Our House': The Socialist Block of Flats as Artistic Subject-Matter, <i>Juliana Maxim</i>	908
<b>5.4. The Third Life of Cities: Rediscovering the Post-Industrial City Centre, Round Table</b> , <i>Davide Cutolo, Sergio Pace</i>	910
5.4.1 When Turin Lost Its Myths, <i>Cristina Accornero</i>	912
5.4.2 The Case of Paris, <i>Joseph Heathcott</i>	916



5.4.3 Prague – Buildings, Spaces and People in its Re-discovered Centre, <i>Petr Kratochvíl</i>	920	6.2.3 Foundations of Renaissance Architecture and Treatises in Quentin Massys' S. Anne Altarpiece (1509), Jochen Ketels, Maximiliaan Martens,	1072
5.4.4 Turin to Naples, Stopping in Milan: Urban Transformations between Heritage and Theme Parks, <i>Guido Montanari</i>	925	6.2.4 An Invented Order: Francesco di Giorgio's Architectural Treatise and Quattrocento Practice, <i>Ageliki Pollali</i>	1084
5.4.5 Rediscovering a Port-City: Genoa's New Waterfront, <i>Luca Orlandi</i>	932	6.2.5 Donami tempo che ti do vita – Francesco Laparelli (1521-70). Envisioning the New 'City of the Order', Valletta, <i>Conrad Thake</i>	1085
5.4.6 A Return to Growth, <i>Ted Sandstra</i>	940		
<b>5.5. Strategies and Politics of Architecture and Urbanism after WWII, Open Session, <i>Adrian J. Forty</i></b>	941	<b>6.3 European Architecture and the Tropics, <i>Jiat-Hwee Chang</i></b>	1095
5.5.1 From Visual Planning to Outrage: Townscape and the Art of Environment, <i>Mathew Aitchison</i>	942	6.3.1 The Afro-Brazilian Portuguese Style in Lagos, <i>Ola Uduku</i>	1097
5.5.2 Germany's 'Grey Architecture' and its Forgotten Protagonists, <i>Benedikt Boucsein</i>	953	6.3.2 Tectonics of Paranoia: The Matshed System within the First Fabrication of Hong Kong, <i>Christopher Cowell</i>	1098
5.5.3 Process Above All: Shadrach Woods' NonSchool of Villefranche, <i>Federica Doglio</i>	964	6.3.3 Architecture of Sun and Soil. European Architecture in Tropical Australia, <i>Deborah van der Plaats</i>	1119
5.5.4 Sacred Buildings in Italy after World War II: The Case of Turin, <i>Carla Zito</i>	976	6.3.4 Health, Hygiene and Sanitation in Colonial India, <i>Iain Jackson</i>	1131
5.5.5 Architecture Resisting Political Regime: The Case of Novi Zagreb, <i>Dubravka Vranic</i>	986	6.3.5 Climate, Disaster, Shelter: Architecture, Humanitarianism and the Problem of the Tropics, <i>Anooradha Iyer Siddiqi</i>	1141
		<b>6.4 Lost (and Found) in Translation: The Many Faces of Brutalism, <i>Réjean Legault</i></b>	1142
<b>6. CIRCULATION OF ARCHITECTURAL CULTURE AND PRACTICES</b>		6.4.1 When Communism Meets Brutalism: The AUA's Critique of Production, <i>Vanessa Grossman</i>	1144
<b>6.1. Afterlife of Byzantine Architecture in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century, <i>Aleksandar Ignjatovic</i></b>	1007	6.4.2 Gravitas and Optimism: The Paradox of Brutalism in Skopje, <i>Mirjana Lozanovska</i>	1145
6.1.1 Suburban Byzantine: Tradition and Modernity in the British Catholic Church, <i>Robert Proctor</i>	1009	6.4.3 Bringing it All Home: Australia's Embrace of 'Brutalism' 1955-75, <i>Philip Goad</i>	1146
6.1.2 To Find the Right Style: Byzantine Revival Synagogues in America, <i>Michael B. Rabens</i>	1010	6.4.4 African Ethic, Brutalist Aesthetic: Vieira da Costa in Huambo, <i>Ana Tostões, Margarida Quintã</i>	1158
6.1.3 France-Byzantium: The Authority of the Sacré-Cœur, <i>Jessica Basciano</i>	1019	6.4.5 Hard Cases: Bricks and Bruts from North to South, <i>Ruth Verde Zein</i>	1159
6.1.4 Architectural Explorations of Byzantine Revival in 1920s Greece, <i>Kalliopi Amygdalou</i>	1031		
<b>6.2. Building by the Book? Theory as Practice in Renaissance Architecture, <i>Francesco Benelli, Sara Galletti</i></b>	1042	<b>6.5 Southern Crossings: Iberia and Latin America in Architectural Translation, <i>Marta Caldeira, Maria González Pendás</i></b>	1160
6.2.1 'Restaurenti e Restituzioni di Case'. Book VII on Architecture by Serlio and the Dissemination of Classical Order in the Language of Monumental Architecture and Basic Building in Ferrara, <i>Alessandro Ippoliti, Veronica Balboni</i>	1044	6.5.1 Southern Readings: Lucio Costa on Modern Architecture, <i>Carlo Eduardo Comas</i>	1162
6.2.2 'Libri tre nei quali si scuopre in quanti modi si può edificare vn Monast. sý la Chiesa': Architectural Treatise of Capuchin Friar Antonio da Pordenone, <i>Tanja Martelanc</i>	1058	6.5.2 Avant-Garde Crossings between Italy, Argentina and Spain: From Gropius and Argan to <i>Nueva Visión</i> and <i>Arte Normativo</i> , <i>Paula Barreiro López</i>	1174
		6.5.3 Shells Across Continents, <i>Juan Ignacio del Cueto Ruiz-Funes</i>	1175
		6.5.4 Emili Blanch Roig and Modern Architecture: Catalonia and Mexico, <i>Gemma Domènech Casadevall</i>	1180
		6.5.5 Re-entry: Antonio Bonet's Return to Spain, <i>Ana Maria León</i>	1186

## **7.1 Architectural History in Italian Doctoral Programs: Issues of Theory**

### **and Criticism, PhD Round Table, Mary McLeod, Maristella Casciato**

- 7.1.1 Meyer and Paulsson on Monumentality: The Beginning of a Debate, 1198  
1911-40, *Giacomo Leone Beccaria*
- 7.1.2 A relational issue: towards an international debate on habitat from the 9th Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne, *Giovanni Comoglio* 1200
- 7.1.3 The Urban Landscape as Cultural Heritage. The Contemporary Debate in France and Italy, *Elena Greco* 1203
- 7.1.4 'A Home': Östberg's search for the total artwork, *Chiara Monterumisi* 1205
- 7.1.5 Order and Proportion: Dom Hans van der Laan and the Expressiveness of the Architectonic Space, *Tiziana Proietti* 1207
- 7.1.6 The Use of the Convenzioni Urbanistiche in the Historic Centre of Milan: Negotiation and Planning Instruments in the Second Post-War Period, *Nicole De Togni* 1209

## **7.2 Architectural History in Italian Doctoral Programs: Histories of**

### **Buildings, Architects and Practices, PhD Round Table, Mari Hvattum**

- 7.2.1 Ahmedabad. Workshop of Modern Architecture: The National Institute of Design, *Elisa Alessandrini* 1213
- 7.2.2 Transformations of Public Space in Paris. From Infrastructure to Forme urbaine, *Daniele Campobenedetto* 1215
- 7.2.3 Layers of Narration: The Architecture of Piero Bottoni in Ferrara, *Matteo Cassani Simonetti* 1217
- 7.2.4 Architecture that Teaches. Swiss School Buildings During the 1950s and 1960s, *Marco Di Nallo* 1219
- 7.2.5 Star-Shaped Rib Vaulting in the Church of San Domenico, Cagliari, *Federico M. Giannusso* 1221
- 7.2.6 The Evolution of Domestic Space in Southern Italy and Sicily, *Serena Guidone* 1223
- 7.2.7 From the South. Ernesto Basile's Routes and Destinations, *Eleonora Marrone* 1225
- 7.2.8 The Wilhelm Lehmbruck Museum, Paradigm of Modern Architecture in Postwar Germany, *Benedetta Stoppioni* 1227
- 7.2.9 *Magnificentia*. Devotion and Civic Piety in the Renaissance Venetian Republic, *Emanuela Vai* 1229

## INVESTIGATING AND WRITING ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY: SUBJECTS, METHODOLOGIES AND FRONTIERS



### 1.1.3 From Old to New: The Transformation of the Castle of Porto de Mós

LUÍS SERRÃO GIL

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#### ABSTRACT

Articulated with the neighbouring villages of Ourém and Pombal, Porto de Mós played a strategic role in the defence of the important cities of Leiria and Coimbra since medieval times. In the thirteenth century, under King Dinis, the castle acquired its relatively regular shape with four towers, which was the basis of subsequent reforms, such as the fourteenth-century addition of a fifth tower, by King Fernando. The last major construction campaign that added a palace to the castle took place in the mid-years of the fifteenth century and is due to Afonso, fourth Count of Ourém and putative heir to the duke of Braganza. While the exact date of Afonso's campaign is not known, most of the works must have taken place after the count's return to Portugal from his second trip to Italy, in 1452, since they included innovations of an experimental character that originate there. On the one hand, they introduced new military features to the castle including openings for firearms. On the other hand, they increased the available liveable space as well the residential character of the castle through the addition of tiled roofs rising above the battlements and new (as well as novel) loggias. The interior of the building was subdivided and much altered, maintaining a small distribution patio followed by the main courtyard around which a series of new chambers is organized. New features reflecting increasingly sophisticated notions of comfort were also added such as fireplaces, and large windows and loggias providing striking views over the surrounding landscape. In order to understand the resulting fortified palace, one must take into account Afonso's cosmopolitan life and his long voyages in Europe, especially in Italy. After the works due to him, the palace of Porto de Mós reflected the most advanced European innovations in both military and residential architecture of its time and could not be rivalled by any of its other Portuguese counterparts.

#### KEYWORDS

**Porto de Mós, Count of Ourém, castel, palace, architecture, comfort**

#### THE CASTLE

The castle of Porto de Mós is located in the Portuguese region of Estremadura and was built on a hillock, 176 m high, to make optimal use of the topography of the land.<sup>1</sup> Its foundation in the twelfth century fits within the general context of the Christian 'Reconquest' and the maintenance of new territories. Together with the castles of Ourém and Pombal, it had an important strategic role in the defence of the cities of Leiria and Coimbra.<sup>2</sup> However, it was only in the early thirteenth century, during the reign of King Dinis, that the castle acquired its main layout, possibly reusing built structures of previous reigns. The original plan of the castle was adapted to its geographic location. The small size of the hillock hindering the use of a large area, the castle adopted instead a small and irregular pentagonal form. As was customary, it was organized around a small courtyard that could accommodate a small military garrison and some supporting infrastructures, allowing for a maximization of the castle's defensive capabilities.<sup>3</sup> The castle was defended by four towers erected on the four corners of the structure<sup>4</sup> and protruding outwards from the wall, which allowed defending the base of each tower from the top of the next one.<sup>5</sup> Possibly, these works were made after King Dinis donated Porto de Mós to Queen Elizabeth of Aragon, in order to provide the fortress with better facilities for its new status.

In subsequent years, we find once again an information gap on the architecture of this castle until the reign of Fernando I, in the fourteenth century. The new king, according to the chronicler Fernão Lopes, after the funeral ceremonies of his father Pedro I, retired to the castle of Porto de Mós and made his first decisions as king there,<sup>6</sup> including a major reconstruction programme of Portugal's fortifications. This reference is important, as it acknowledges that the castle of Porto de Mós already had physical conditions to house a monarch. Thus, it is not surprising that in 1387 it could be called a 'paço', a palace.<sup>7</sup> It was possibly in the course of these actions that a fifth tower was built in the north wall, which was thus reinforced at the pentagon's edge. This hypothesis fits within the political and social context and is reinforced by the analysis of the wall in question, which seems to present a small rupture to fit the new structure. In any case, all of the architectural elements mentioned so far fit within the building paradigm of the 'Gothic castle'.<sup>8</sup> After these works and still during the reign of King Fernando, the building suffered some damage from the wars with Castile<sup>9</sup> and during the crisis of 1383-5, and it seems that this damage was only repaired in the mid-fifteenth century, when the fourth Count of Ourém decided to intervene in the old defensive structure.<sup>10</sup>

## FROM CASTLE TO PALACE

The starting date of the great enterprise undertaken by Afonso, Count of Ourém, is unknown. However, the renovations of the castle were perhaps carried out after the works which the count commissioned at his other palace of Ourém,<sup>11</sup> and possibly after the battle of Alfarrobeira in 1449, extending through the following decades.<sup>12</sup> Among his many journeys, the Count of Ourém had travelled to Italy in late 1451 where he remained during the first half of the following year. Much of the work was probably done after his return.<sup>13</sup>

Contrary to what he did in Ourém, in Porto de Mós the count did not order the construction of a new palace, but instead decided to change the existing building. This decision may be connected to the impossibility of building a new structure given the available area and to the fact that the extant structure already presented some features of habitability and comfort. Nevertheless, its reconstruction was quite extensive and altered the face of the enclosure in order to provide the old fort with residential conditions worthy of its new owner. The reconstruction programme improved the existing structure's organisation, proportion and balance, in a very ingenious project that ultimately did nothing more than fill and reorganise the available indoor space and, on the outside, compose the facades,<sup>14</sup> in a way that corresponded to



**Figure 1.** The Castle of Porto de Mós in its present appearance. *Source:* Photographic archives of the Porto de Mós city council library.

the 'educated forms' of the Italian Renaissance that were influential all over Europe during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.<sup>15</sup>

Throughout the fifteenth century, Porto de Mós no longer endured any effective military threat. Nonetheless, it continued to be an important marker in the landscape and a symbol of an emerging and dominant 'lordly' power. This village can be considered the birthplace of the House of Ourém, since it was in this castle that the troops of Nuno Álvares Pereira (Afonso's grandfather) were stationed before the battle of 1385 after which he was honoured with countless lands, including the village of Porto de Mós.

In addition to a strong symbolic dimension, surely felt by Afonso, these lands were also an important element of luxury, status and socio-political assertion by the new House of Ourém, whose head aspired to being regarded as the new Constable of the Kingdom and to achieve 'visibility' within the royal circles. This could explain why the military function of the castle was side-lined, though not neglected. Alongside this fact there is the episode of intrigue with the infante Pedro<sup>16</sup> in which the Count of Ourém watched over the castles of Porto de Mós and Ourém against the infante Pedro, in his retreat in the ducal lands of Coimbra.<sup>17</sup>

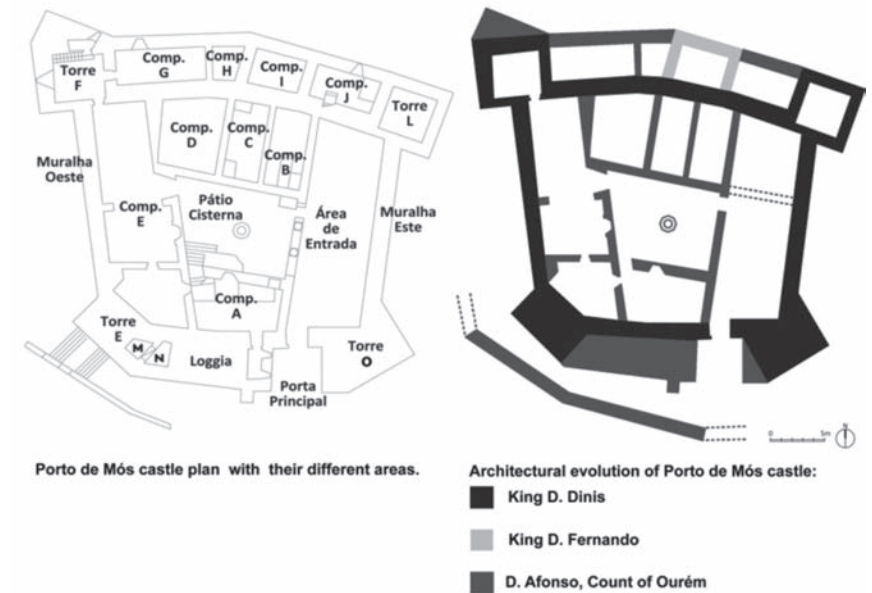
The mid-fifteenth-century reconstruction works provided the pre-existing structures with some innovative elements of military architecture, albeit in a somewhat experimental way. The wall-walk was kept on all towers and walls, supported by a set of very long pyramidal corbels,<sup>18</sup> elements that, like merlons, can be seen as a symbol of nobility.<sup>19</sup> In addition, a new defence system was adopted for the main entrance, which was protected from above by two machicolations and laterally by two very basic embrasures,<sup>20</sup> simple conical openings, accommodating artillery.<sup>21</sup> Embrasures were also added to the north-east corners of the towers E and F, to protect the vulnerable castle-front facing the river; here the slope was less steep and easier to climb, and it was indeed from this side that the castle had been assaulted at its first conquest in 1148.

Porto de Mós' main gate, facing the village, was protected, during the fourteenth century, solely by two towers, framing the gate. The door itself was further reinforced by several mechanisms, including its bolting with two wooden bars at mid height and a vertical shutter closing it from the inside. This structure was possibly remade by Afonso, as shown by the mason's marks.<sup>22</sup> On the outside of the fort, a small part of a barbican could still be seen in the 1940s. Barbicans, which functioned as the first obstacles to be encountered by the enemy, became widespread in Portugal after the middle of the fourteenth century and throughout the fifteenth century, and this solution was also applied, it seems, in Porto de Mós under the supervision of Afonso. However, whether this was an extensive barbican surrounding the

whole fortress, as was the most common formula,<sup>23</sup> cannot be confirmed. Construction works included a strong consolidation of the pre-existent structure; almost all towers had their corners reinforced through the incorporation of well-carved cornerstones in limestone, which possibly means that parts of the towers were rebuilt in this period. This is also suggested by the distribution of the different mason's marks. There are 39 identified mason's marks, most of them attributed to the period of Afonso, scattered throughout the entire fortress.

Although aristocratic residences in the late Middle Ages sought a certain visible prominence through the incorporation of military elements, they also sought to make their spaces increasingly more comfortable.<sup>24</sup> For this purpose, very broad changes were made to the existing building. Prominent among these was the addition of two great structures, one in the south front (between towers E and O) and the other in the north front (between towers F and I and I to L), thereby increasing the available living area so as to improve the residential potential of the fortress. In each of these areas new compartments were created, opening onto a loggia. The one facing south, towards the village, is organized in four bays with rib vaults and heraldic keystones, supported by corbels with vegetal decoration, a model which, according to José Vieira da Silva, had first been introduced in Portugal by master Huguet in Batalha. This loggia connects the inner space to the outer landscape through finely decorated windows with four countercurved arches resting on thin octagonal columns.<sup>25</sup> Flanking the loggia are two balconies, the one to the west supported by six staggered modillions, the one to the east by four. They both look as if designed to protect the large span created by the loggia.<sup>26</sup> For the same purpose a new body was also added to tower F, creating a triangular edge, which is repeated in towers E and O (the latter absorbed by the south loggia). It creates a constructive pattern that is repeated throughout the building and in the organisation of the indoor space of the towers.

The inside of the building was also subdivided and extensively modified through the maintenance of an entrance area<sup>27</sup> and the construction of new compartments (A, B, C, D, and E) around the courtyard<sup>28</sup> which, like the classic house model, appears to organise the circulation, providing access to the new quarters of the ground and upper floors.<sup>29</sup> To access the latter, there was possibly a stairway, located roughly in the same place as the current one, starting next to the door of compartment A, where there is a massive block of stone, and turning south separating compartment A from E. This structure would be supported by the visible discharge arc inside these compartments. However, this central area probably underwent reconstruction as well, since in the previous centuries there must have



**Figure 2.** Plan of the Castle of Porto de Mós, showing its spatial distribution and architectural evolution. *Source:* Adapted from architectural surveys made by DGEMN.

been compartments here, some of which were destroyed or integrated in the new structure.

The spaces of the upper floors are currently undocumented. However, we do know that the nobler areas were heightened when compared with some tower floors, as can be seen in the loggias and in the window of the west wall. Most of the stairways were possibly built in stone. On the other hand, all these spaces, in line with the classical decoration of the patio, from which the columns and fluted pilasters with Ionic capitals remain, probably presented different decorative architectural elements. This is confirmed by the fragments of the frieze with geometric decoration that were found during the restoration works of DGEMN<sup>30</sup> and by later archaeological interventions. These compartments (A, B, C, D, and E) seem to belong to the Count of Ourém's campaigns, not only because of the architectural features that unify them, such as the vaulted ceilings supported by corbels and the design of the doorframes similar to those found in the palace of Ourém, but also because they all present shallow foundations and thin walls. Furthermore, within compartment B, the remains of a silo filled with spoils from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries have been discovered; the upper part of the old silo was undoubtedly destroyed when the Count built the new compartment.

The castle's roofing is an interesting result of this fifteenth-century campaign. Different kinds of roof were used to cover the building. The towers were probably crowned by spires<sup>31</sup> covered with scaled tiles,<sup>32</sup> similar to the present state of the south-west and south-east towers (the result of restoration works in the 1940s). These roof tiles are glazed in green, the colour of the house of Ourém.<sup>33</sup> The shape of these roof structures is unknown, but domestic and foreign parallels, namely French,<sup>34</sup> suggest they may have been conical<sup>35</sup> or quadrilateral.<sup>36</sup>

As stated by Alexandra Barradas, by the end of the fifteenth century the castle of Porto de Mós could compete with the state-of-the-art in Europe. It had been updated through the introduction of military technical novelties and an Italianizing taste, resulting from the Count's many travels,<sup>37</sup> including the use of the courtyard for organising the space, the jagged lintels on the doors,<sup>38</sup> the columns and the pilasters, and the machicolations crowning the towers and walls.<sup>39</sup> As for the cistern courtyard, analysis of the stone work and its decorative elements seems to confirm the hypothesis of Rafael Moreira, who suggested that the fourth Count of Ourém may have hired an Italian craftsman – a *scalpellino* or *marmorano* – for their execution. This exogenous taste was wisely combined with forms of the late Gothic and with distinctively 'national' features, as exemplified by the castle of Leiria, the convent of Tomar and the monastery of Batalha. With the latter, aside from the undeniable stylistic influences, there was possibly a shared use of craftsmen; perhaps officers and craftsmen working in Batalha also intervened in the Porto de Mós building site.<sup>40</sup> This hypothesis is supported by the fact that similar mason's marks are found on both buildings. Another common element is the stone used in both buildings, since the quarries of Porto de Mós are known to have supplied the construction site of Batalha. Surely Afonso, lord of the region, ensured for his own work the same raw material that was supplied for the royal enterprise.<sup>41</sup>

The collected data does not allow to determine with certainty the functionality of the different compartments of the castle and its final form before the interventions of DGEMN. But the remaining documentation informs us that a prison was located inside the castle. The enhancement of the residential function of the castle is also apparent by the introduction of new elements, concerned with the comfort of the space.<sup>42</sup> In Porto de Mós, in addition to the loggias, large windows of noble appearance were opened, with their pointed arches providing light and ventilation. Moreover, seated in their 'conversadeiras' (stone window seats) facing the outside of the building, those who lived in the castle could enjoy the outdoor scenery. This feature present in the remodelling works of Afonso, is found in the west wall and in the top floor of each tower, where large windows emerge facing the outside, organ-

ised in a rhythmic and harmonious way. Another important element found in this castle, that once again suggests the notion of convenience, is the existence of a brick chimney and the attending fireplace framed in stone on the third floor of tower F. This not only provided greater comfort by keeping the room warm, but was also a symbol of social status.<sup>43</sup>

Reflecting a growing concern in palatial buildings of this period, the castle also includes features related to water and hygiene. There was a cistern, for instance, which provided autonomous water supply. Considering its architectural features, the cistern dates from the fifteenth century, and was possibly also introduced by the Count of Ourém. This is not surprising if we add the important and exquisite piping system that spreads throughout the building and interconnects with the new constructions. Finally there are also two compartments that can be considered dumps or evacuation sites (M and N). These two structures possibly received waste from different areas of the castle, channelling them by gravity beyond the barbican, a steeper area, distant from the castle, since there is not a flowing water line that could do it. However, the water intake and conveying system would be much more complex.

In sum, the castle of Porto de Mós under the aegis of D. Afonso was given new defensive systems, but also elements that enhanced the comfort and luxury that the residential building needed to house its new lord. Its appearance would have been quite elegant and sophisticated as the Count of Ourém brought to this building the knowledge and the taste of his cosmopolitan life and long stays in European countries, especially in Italy, which he wisely managed to combine with the best made in Portugal. As written by A. de Almeida Fernandes: 'The good repute of the house was that of its owner.'<sup>44</sup>



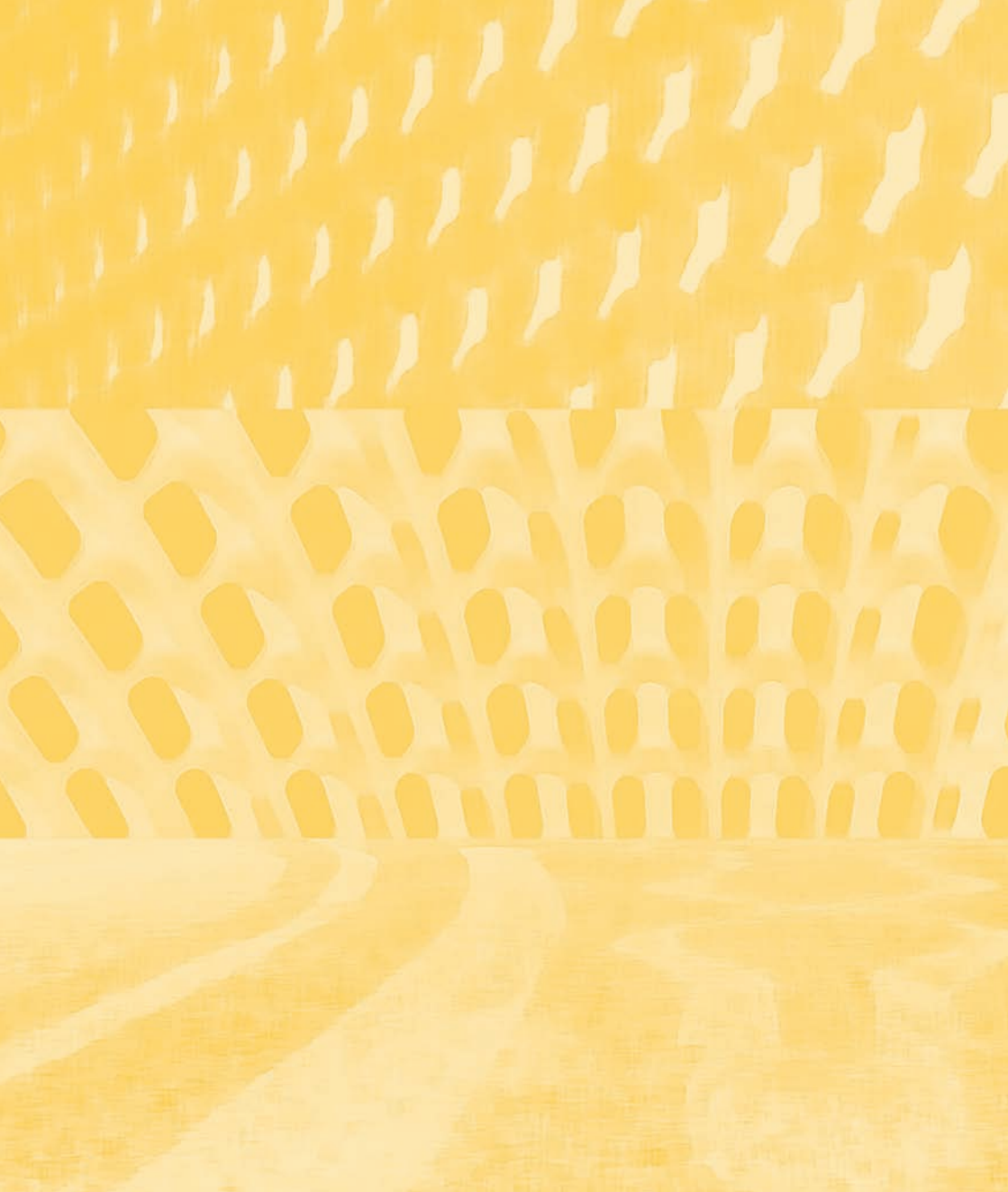
- 1 Orlando Ribeiro, *Opúsculos Geográficos*, vol. VI (Lisbon: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1995), 187-8.
- 2 Saúl Gomes, *Introdução à História do Castelo de Leiria* (Leiria: Câmara Municipal de Leiria, 1995), 65-77.
- 3 Mário Barroca, "Arquitetura militar," in *Nova História Militar de Portugal*, vol. I (Lisbon: Circulo de Leitores, 2003), 112.
- 4 Compare with the castles of Amieira do Tejo (Tânia Falcão and Heloísa Santos, "Castelo de Amieira: diálogos entre a arqueologia, a arquitectura e uma certa arqueologia sentimental," *Património. Estudos* 10 (2007), 148-54) and Nisa (Duarte de Armas, *Livro das Fortalezas* (Lisbon: INAPA, 2006), f.125v).
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- 6 Saúl Gomes, *Porto de Mós. Colectânea Histórica e Documental, séculos XII a XIX* (Porto de Mós: Câmara Municipal de Porto de Mós, 2005), 42.
- 7 Gomes, *Porto de Mós*, 42.
- 8 José Silva, "Séculos XIV a XV," *História das Fortificações Portuguesas no Mundo* (Lisbon: Edições Alfa, 1989), 55.
- 9 Gustavo Sequeira, *Inventário Artístico de Portugal. Distrito de Leiria*, vol. V. (Lisbon: Academia Nacional de Belas Artes, 1955), 117.
- 10 Alexandra Barradas, *Durém e Porto de Mós. A obra mecenática de D. Afonso, 4.º conde de Ourém* (Lisbon: Edições Colibri,

2006), 274.

- 11 José Silva, *Paços Medievais Portugueses* (Lisbon: IPPAR, 2002), 154.
- 12 Silva, *Paços*, 275.
- 13 Barradas, *Ourém e Porto de Mós*, 279.
- 14 Silva, *Paços*, 276.
- 15 José Fernandes, "*Cidades e casas da Macaronésia – Evolução do território e da arquitectura doméstica nas ilhas atlânticas sob influência portuguesa, quadro histórico, do séc. XV ao séc. XVIII* (PhD diss., Universidade Técnica de Lisboa, 1992), 170.
- 16 Son of King João I and regent of Portugal between 1439 and 1448.
- 17 Saúl Gomes, "D. Afonso V," in *Colecção os reis de Portugal* (Lisbon: Circulo de Leitores, 2006), 68.
- 18 Barradas, *Ourém e Porto de Mós*, 277.
- 19 Mário Barroca, *Em torno da residência senhorial fortificada. Quatro torres medievais na região de Amares* (Porto: Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto, 1989), 23.
- 20 'Estamos convictos de que só numa cronologia próxima dos finais do terceiro quartel de Quatrocentos os castelos portugueses terão começado a exhibir os primeiros sinais objectivos de adaptação às novas armas; foram eles, antes de mais, o rasgar de troneiras (orifícios circulares adaptados às bocas de trons ou bombardas) nos panos das muralhas e das torres das velhas fortalezas, em cuja capacidade de resistência aos ataques dos sitiadores se continuou, portanto, a acreditar até muito tarde'. João Monteiro, "*Castelos e armamento*,"

- in *Nova História Militar de Portugal*, vol. I (Lisbon: Circulo de Leitores, 2003), 167.
- 21 Mário Barroca, "Tempos de resistência e de inovação: a arquitectura militar portuguesa no reinado de D. Manuel I (1495-1521)," in *Portugália*, Nova Série, vol. XXIV (Porto: Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto, 2003), 97.
- 22 The mason's marks in question are attributed to the time of Afonso since they are mostly found in those parts of the castle (such as the south front) that can securely be dated to Afonso's time.
- 23 Barroca, "Uma Paisagem," 120.
- 24 Manuel Conde and Marina Vieira, "A habitação e a arquitectura corrente do Norte Transmontano em finais da Idade Média," in Iria Gonçalves (ed.), *Paisagens rurais e urbanas. Fontes, metodologias e problemáticas, Actas da primeiras jornadas* (Lisbon: Centro de Estudos Históricos da Universidade de Lisboa, 2005), 85.
- 25 Silva, *Paços*, 154.
- 26 Ibidem, 155.
- 27 Barradas, *Ourém e Porto de Mós*, 296.
- 28 'An element that confirms the presence of a house and not a military structure.' Barradas, *Ourém e Porto de Mós*, 278.
- 29 To access the latter, there was possibly a stairway, located roughly in the same place as the current one, which started next to the door of compartment A, where there is a massive block of stone, and turning south, separating compartment A from E by a visible discharge arc that would support the stairway.
- 30 Direcção Geral de Edifícios e Monumentos Nacionais, a state-run institution that conducted conservation work in heritage buildings in the twentieth century.
- 31 As suggested by textual sources such as this one: 'from the four [towers] that remained, the spires fell from two of them

- during the earthquake'. Gomes, *Porto de Mós*, 928.
- 32 During the archaeological excavations fragments of scaled tiles attributable to the fifteenth century have been found.
- 33 Barradas, *Ourém e Porto de Mós*, 296.
- 34 Ibidem, 296.
- 35 Similar to the castle of Santa Maria da Feira.
- 36 See the numerous representations of quadrilateral or even hexagonal roofs (Oliveira) made by Duarte de Armas.
- 37 Afonso visited several European places: London, Flanders (Bruges, Ghent), Burgundy, Iberian Kingdoms (Toledo, Valencia, Barcelona), Italy (Pisa, Florence, Bologna, Milan, Siena, Rome), Basel, Strasbourg, Cologne and Bonn, the Middle East (Jerusalem, Cairo and Damascus), North Africa, among others. Barradas, *Ourém e Porto de Mós*, 133-4, 139-40.
- 38 The same as the ones found in the castle of Ourém.
- 39 Some authors believe that these machicolations originally supported arches in brickwork, as in the castle of Ourém, but the iconographic and archaeological evidence indicate that this was probably not the case.
- 40 Barradas, *Ourém e Porto de Mós*, 280.
- 41 Ibidem, 281.
- 42 Conde and Vieira, "A habitação," 91.
- 43 Danièle Alexandre-Bidon, "Le confort dans la maison médiévale une synthèse des données," in Danièle Alexandre-Bidon, Françoise Piponnier and Jean-Michel Poisson (eds.), *Cadre de vie et manières d'habiter (XIIe-XVIIe siècle)* (Paris: CRAHM, 2006), 133.
- 44 A. Fernandes, *A Nobreza na época Vimarano-Portugalense, parte I Problemata* (Guimarães: 1981), 120-1.



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