

Introduction

The search for the wilderness as a space and possibility of a more radical religious experience accompanies and marks the development of Western culture, with multiple declinations, from voluntary seclusion or eremitical life to solitary life in more communitarian forms. The search for solitude and eremitism remained and marked the main moments of crisis and renewal in the Western world throughout the Middle Ages and the Early Modernity. All these experiences influenced and accompanied both the development of the city and the peri-urban landscape, with a particular importance in the transformation of territorially more isolated or peripheral areas. At the same time, the seek for solitude and seclusion, either through monastic or hermitic experiences, also flourished in other cultures and religious traditions, from Buddhism to Islam, giving interesting perspectives on the understanding of such religious phenomena in larger terms.

This volume takes his title from the Third International Seminar “Architectures of the Soul”, that took place (virtually) in 2020. The seminar intended to promote the study and discussion around the architecture and the landscape associated to spiritual practices linked to the search of solitude and seclusion from the world, in its various forms, within spiritual or religious traditions or in more secularized forms, and the way it gets into relation and transforms or creates a particular landscape.

The seminar originated from the convergence of the two coordinators, Rolando Volzone, as a researcher of Dinâmia’CET-Iscte and Professor at the Department of Architecture and Urbanism of ISCTE-University Institute of Lisbon, and João Luís Inglês Fontes, a researcher of the Institute of Medieval Studies and Professor at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of Nova University. Starting from different perspectives – Architecture and History –, they converged in a similar desire to better understand the importance of eremitism in the context of late-medieval Portugal, either in those men of poor life whose communities spread in the south of Portugal during the 14th and 15th centuries, either in other kind of religious experiences having in common the same seek for solitude, within or outside approved religious orders.

Building up on similar studies conducted across the Mediterranean, the seminar promoted the scientific study and discussion around the architecture and landscape associated with religious and spiritual practices grounded in the experience of seclusion and solitude. The scientific meetings established a platform for a multidisciplinary approach of the subject, by combining History, Architecture, Landscape Architecture, Cultural Heritage, Digital Humanities, Computing Science, in order to allow a more integrated and comparative comprehension of these religious practices and their spiritual and material dimensions.

This multidisciplinaryity also reflected in the collaboration between the four research centres that, from the very beginning, supported these Seminars: DINÂMIA'CET-Iscte, Centre for Socioeconomic and Territorial Studies (ISCTE-Universitary Institute of Lisbon); IEM-Institute of Medieval Studies (Nova University of Lisbon); CHAIA-Centre for Art History and Artistic Research (University of Évora); and CEHR-Centre for the Study of Religious History (Portuguese Catholic University).

This book is organized around the four axis that structured the seminar, including 22 texts and 32 authors, enclosing transdisciplinary and transnational contributions, in a diachronic perspective.

The first section, entitled “History of Eremitical/Monastic Life”, opens with a stimulating reflection on the history of the Franciscan order, with focus on the Portuguese territory, from the first foundations to the late-medieval observant movement, carried out by Filomena Andrade and João Luís Fontes.

Remaining in Portugal, the spaces of seclusion are explored. The monasteries and convents themselves consecrate spaces particularly suited to the experience of solitude, silence, recollection, contemplation: from cloisters to fences, from small chapels to cells. Paula Almeida Mendes puts in evidence the importance of the monastic cell, through hagiographic literature and the exemplary lives produced in Portugal from the 16th to the 18th centuries, presenting what was included in such space and how it emerges as a place fit for solitude and a poor and penitent life. The other two contributions intend to question the relationships between the space of the monastic enclosure and the outside world in medieval Cistercian communities. Paulo Lopes studies, in particular, the abbot’s lodging in Alcobaça, and how this space fulfilled multiple tasks, including receiving many secular authorities and people from outside the monastery, and this was lived and integrated in a larger project of reformation of the monastic community; and Catarina Barreira uses the liturgical books of the Cistercian nunnery of Lorvão to enlighten how liturgy, including processions and other rituals, were performed by the community, its relation with the monastic spaces

and its agreement with or divergence from the determinations of the General Chapter of the Order and its policy of liturgical uniformity.

Within the section “Landscapes of the Soul”, the complex relationships between this search for solitude and the surrounding landscape is explored, be it the wild and mountainous places, the fields and rural areas or the urban world, where monasteries and churches are inscribed. A relationship of adaptation but also capable of transforming the surrounding landscape, whether in the multiplication of places and structures destined for solitary life, in the cultivation and settlement of the surrounding areas, in the attraction of people who live around the convents and monasteries, or even in the economic and social life that develops and animates them.

Maria Soler Sala opens this section with an overview on the mapping of monastic settlements in the Iberian Peninsula during the Middle Ages, using GIS resources and the research developed by international projects (Claustra, Spiritual Landscapes, Monastic Landscapes, F-Atlas), to evidence the relationship that these religious communities established with their immediate and more distant surroundings and the importance of such mapping as a tool for research, knowledge and the promotion of the monastic heritage. More specific cases are studied by the following articles: the Capuchin architecture in Puglia (Italy), equated in its relation both to the deployment strategies developed and to the specific practices of its community life; the continuities of the Franciscan landscapes between Portugal and Brazil during the modern period; and the eremitic architecture of Amalfi Coast (Southern Italy), its relation with the surrounding landscape and the current issues in terms of conservation of its cultural and natural heritage.

“The Materiality of Eremitical/Monastic Experiences” (section) includes five case studies on monastic and conventual architecture, from Europe and South America. It starts with a study on the Sacred Mountains built all over Europe since the last decades of the 15th century, bringing to the faithful replicas of the Holy Places and promoting, through them, an intellectual and emotional identification to the mysteries of Christian redemption. Andréa Caselli Gomes recovers the representations of religious architecture of Norwegian folk tales, while Maria Grazia Turco studies the presence of Benedictines in Rome and their influence on the design of Transtevere district, and Inês Gato de Pinho presents her research on the foundation of the Jesuit College of Saint Francis Xavier, in Beja, and its architectural particularities. The section ends with an interesting analysis on the backyards and fences of Franciscan convents in Lima (Peru) and Salvador (Brazil), their evolution and their role in the pursuit of solitude and seclusion.

A fourth nucleus, “Solitude and Contemporary Readings”, is devoted to the contemporary architecture and its seek for new aesthetic languages, in order to promote the experience of silence, solitude or seclusion. Many of them are also marked by particular readings of former and more ancient religious or monastic buildings. That is the case of the architecture of Giovanni Michelucci, studied by Andrea Crudeli in its relation with medieval Tuscan churches, or the Portuguese projects of architects Luiz Cunha for the Church of Santa Joana Princesa (Lisbon) and Nuno Teotónio Pereira for the Benedictine Monastery of Santa Maria do Mar (Sassoeiros, near Lisbon). Nicolò Sardo analysis some important experiences of the photographic representation of the architecture of convent buildings, putting in evidence “the particular approach of the photographers who, by dialoguing with the artwork, become able to capture the spirit of the places and confront themselves with the specificity of religious architecture and the life that takes place inside”.

Finally, a fifth section on “Digital documentation of religious heritage” gathers five studies on churches or monastic settlements, with the results of digital surveys and other documentation, assuming their importance in the inventory, preservation and appreciation of the cultural heritage, and for the definition of renewed cultural policies. The cases go from the church of Saint Mary in Leusë (Albania), to the Cloister of the Fathers of the Charterhouse of Pisa or the convents related to Franciscan Observance in Italy (La Verna, in Arezzo, Eremo delle Carceri in Assisi and San Bartolomeo in Foligno) and Portugal (Santa Maria de Mosteiró). These last two, as well as other authors with contributions on this book (João Luís Fontes and Filomena Andrade or Maria Soler), are linked to the European project “Franciscan Landscapes: the Observance between Italy, Portugal and Spain (F-ATLAS)”, devoted to the study of cultural heritage of Franciscan Observance in Italy, Portugal and Spain. Most of these texts are somehow linked to the University of Florence, and the important role it has assumed, under the guidance of Stefano Bertocci, in the promotion of digital survey for the study and preservation of cultural heritage, from well preserved buildings to more ruined ones, sometimes with few material remains, of difficult interpretation and register.

We will end thanking, once again, to the four Research Centres that supported not only the organisation of the Seminars but also the publication of this book, allowing such a large number of contributions to reach a larger public and to stimulate scientific discussion and new researches. Only then this book will have achieved its purpose.

Rolando Volzone
João Luís Fontes

PART I
*History of Eremitical/
Monastic Life*