

## **Inventing a Regional Tradition in Portugal: Memories and Truths**

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### **Abstract**

*The paper aims to explore the importance of the memory to justify the current existence of one Portuguese region and its projection in the national and in the European framework, through a process that involves tradition invention and reinvention. In this text, is analyzed the Leiria community, which is located in the north of Lisbon. The region's memory, written and spoken by local leaders, oscillates between alternative versions. While some leaders advocate the Arab tradition as a key element in the region's foundation, others argue that the community was established by the Christian re-conquest, in the twelfth century.*

**Keywords:** memory, truth, tradition, Leiria, Portugal, regionalism, Europe

### ***1. Portuguese Regions Reinvention and Tradition Rule***

In this text is intended to explain the tensions resulting from different visions of the past, which created several "truths" about regions and regionalism in Portugal. In this study I relief Pierre Bourdieu (1989), which researched the concept of region and the leader's role in its definition. In his book, *O Poder Simbólico*, the author analyzes the notion of region while division of the social world. This division is the result of an imposition by those who have divine, politics or scientific legitimacy, to classify. In this process is highlighted a new group or region from a whole which corresponds often to a national space. As quoted by the author, the effectiveness of the regionalist discourse [...] is proportional to the authority of the person who expresses it (Bourdieu, 1989: 117). The imposition of this discourse implies that the group whom he is directed recognize their unity. It is a factor that depends of the authority assigned to the leaderships, from which it is constructed and imposed the collective will.

Maurice Agulhon (1988) points out that the regional elites play a fundamental role in the production of the regionalist discourses. According to the author, the lack of regional dynamic bourgeoisie constituted one of the main obstacles to construction and affirmation of the French regions during the nineteenth century. He defines as main causes of the absence of strong regionalist leaderships, the seduction of the French elites by the dominant culture, based in Paris, or the expansion of a national education which imposed the French as the national language.

In Bourdieu's perspective, the elite's representations about their regions embody on the reality from the moment that they contribute effectively to the birth of new divisions, since the representations that the social actors have about reality divisions contribute to the reality of divisions. The author notes the regionalist discourse as a performance discourse, having a purpose to impose as legitimate a new definition of border, making known, at the same time, the region thus defined (Bourdieu, 1989: 116-120).

I interviewed five Portuguese leaders from the Leiria region. My aim was to understand and expose their thoughts about the region's affirmation on the Portuguese and European contexts. All of them argued that tradition and memory were crucial to understand the region's foundation and its present affirmation on the global stage.

According to some Portuguese leaders, the foundation of the Leiria region, located in Portugal, between Lisbon and Oporto, was due to the action of the first Portuguese King, Afonso Henriques, and the Christian re-conquest. The Christian King built the Leiria castle in the first half of the twelfth century. Other regional leader's however pointing out that the foundation of the region is due to the presence of Muslims who occupied the current Portuguese territory between the 714 and 1249 years.

Some Leiriense authors invoke the past and the ties that the inhabitants of the former province of Estremadura have built together throughout history, to legitimize the Leiria region. They argue that the existence of the present region is based on the ancient times memory, where the founder roots exist. Tomás Oliveira Dias, an ethnographer and regionalist, claims the memory, indicating the Leiria region as a historical reality where the Leiria region is integrated. It is 600 years old [...] [TOD]<sup>1</sup>.

The monuments, alive, witness the tradition of the region. The Leiria castle, medieval city and monasteries, are important references to the past. It's urgent to safeguard this memory [TOD]. The monuments are material memories; they are scrutinized by regional author's discourses. They are evocative of the past (Le Goff, 1982a), which should be preserved for future generations. In this sense, Tomás Oliveira Dias complains that there has been heritage destruction. This heritage is the regional memory. We must safeguard our references from the past. These references are not only present people, our families, but also the monuments surrounding us and which were built by our ancestors. The heritage must be preserved, protected [...]. Even without the cultural arguments, there are economic ones. A historic area, well-preserved, is a touristic attraction [...].

The Leiria Castle access is difficult and its conservation is not good. The city historical streets are bad. The houses, abandoned, broken down, are bad building imitations. Sometimes the reconstruction has been poorly done, while new buildings are not well fitted in place. There is an example in Leiria city: the "manuelino" Vila Real Marquis palace. It was located in the Rodrigues Lobo square entrance and it was destroyed nearly 100 years old [...]. The Vila Real Marquis were the "owners" of Leiria until 1640. We need to preserve, identify and expose the tangible and intangible heritage [TOD].

In sequence of the regionalization proposals currently under discussion, in Portugal, more questions are raised about the absence of regional traditions which could incorporate the proposed new regions: Norte, Centro, Lisboa, Alentejo, Algarve. Leiria should be located inside Centro region. Alfredo Marques, an ex-regional and political leader, says that there never was a region "Centro", because in Portugal we haven't got a regional tradition. I don't know if we will ever have cultural regions, despite the political desire to define new regions in Portugal [AM]<sup>2</sup>.

Alfredo Marques proposes the definition of the political regions, firstly, and after the establishment of cultural regions. These ideas can be found in other processes of regional or community imagination and creation, such as Galicia, in Spain (Medeiros, 2005) or European Union (Shore, 2000). Galicia and EU are examples where the political union overlapped the cultural one. According other regional leader such as António Carneiro, ex-president of the Lisbon region, the definition of cultural regions is essential to think about regions in Portugal. The author argues that the future regional areas should have cultural functions. Only in this way can we enable the development and cohesion of the cultural and political identity in accordance with each region. Starting from the regional heritage we encourage a regional debate [...] [AC]<sup>3</sup>.

If the national political leaders decide to regionalize the country based on five regions: Norte, Centro, Lisboa e Vale do Tejo, Alentejo e Algarve, will we see a new tradition invention? Or will we see the upgrading of existing ones?

## **2. Islam and Christianity**

In order to "embody" the region, these Political or cultural leaders are researching in the past events, in the memory, in the religion or even in the common language, ways to legitimate the existence of the community (transnational, national or regional). According to Cris Shore (2000) these elements were created and manipulated by the elites in order to build the European community identity. It is in this framework, of global competition, that European cities and regions seek to (re)activate their cultural resources.

<sup>1</sup>Tomás Oliveira Dias [TOD] was interviewed on 05/04/2006.

<sup>2</sup>Alfredo Marques [AM] was interviewed on 08/05/2006.

<sup>3</sup>AntónioCarneiro [AC] was interviewed on 08/03/2006.

They claim that the cultural diversity invents traditions and memories of the past. The cultural differentiation or the (re)invented tradition and memory which they advocate, allow them a new position in the regional European context. They become more visible, culturally more central, and acquire a place of prominence within a community of 500 million.

As Eva Blum refers, in the context of global and European competition, cities (and regions) have been developing a variety of cultural strategies, reactivating and inventing new traditions. They discover the heritage, the architecture, gastronomy and landscape, searching new position in the centre of the process of European integration (Blum, 2008: 1). What does cultural tradition means? How and why are so many oral and written leaders' speeches, claiming the historical tradition as the basis of a city or a regions' legitimating?

In this work context, regional Portuguese historians like Acácio Sousa, Orlando Cardoso or Saul António Gomes, and other Leiriense researchers like Tomás Oliveira Dias or even the ethnographer Travaços dos Santos, invoke the historical tradition to claim their belonging feelings to a territory coinciding with the former Portuguese province of Estremadura. It's an operation where the establishment of local traditions and the new social frameworks' construction of collective memory are processes through which the intellectual, political and economic authors make and impose representations about themselves and about their communities (Davault, 2004: 231).

Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1984) define the tradition as a set of practices, normally governed by rules tacitly or openly accepted; these ritual practices of a symbolic nature, are intended to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior through repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past (Hobsbawm e Ranger, 1984: 9), and the tradition, as a cultural achievement, cannot be looked at in an essentialist way. These are created cultural events and occur in a given space and defined time according to the society in which we are inserted (Hobsbawm e Ranger, 1984; Foster, 1991: 241).

According to Josep Ballart, tradition is a key element of social cohesion, allowing social stability through time. Tradition can be understood as the ideas, customs and beliefs process transmission (Ballart, 2002: 32) as well as all other human acts, whether oral or written.

Objects and other material or immaterial culture elements, are signals - recorded time - left for the future generations. The historical societies, aware of this passage, have been concerned not only to save some ancestors objects, as recorded - writing - other items of their culture, but also as a testimony for future generations (Ballart, 2002: 33). In illiterate societies, the historical time consciousness does not exist and, therefore, myth and history are confused. In these societies, the material object production is smaller, and despite complex systems of kinship or religious concerns, the production of objects or it's preservation as evidence of the past is not noticeable (Ballart, 2002: 33). There is a harmony with nature beings. The nature and culture separation, the secular and sacred, or past and present separation, does not exist anymore.

Regarding to the Leiria region, José Travaços dos Santos, an ethnographer, refers to an Arab tradition, often hidden, but which continues to define the leiriense inhabitant's behavior. The Arabic heritage can be seen in poetry, tales and stories, in civil architecture and national monuments located in Estremadura, a traditional Portuguese province, establishing continuity with a suitable historic past (Hobsbawm e Ranger, 1984: 9).

The Moorish occupation was for me, under the cultural perspective, one of the most important chapters in our history. We forgot all of the great Hispano-Arab poets and I think they should be studied, at least in the universities [...]. There were many Muslim poets, particularly from the ninth century to the thirteenth century, in the south of Portugal. The Arab influence is also reflected in our architecture. These houses are southern, Mediterranean, with a Moorish influence. The roofs are unwilling, the walls are white and the blue bar on them proves the Arabic influences. Even the Batalha monastery has a huge Moorish influence. This can be seen on the chapel's imperfect entrance; is a "Mudéjar" doorway [...]. The monastery reflects the Moorish art [...] in the arc format and structure. Thus is also available in the Duarte' King mot, which is reminiscent of the Al Koran placed along the walls.

That porch has nothing to do with the Portuguese discoveries or with anything at sea; is clearly Moorish, it's splendidous [...]. There was the Moorish influence in the art, but also the people and the language.

The "oxalá" term is of Arabic origin [JTS]<sup>4</sup>. Ernesto Korrodi (1870-1944), another regional leader referred to this Arab past when he edited *Studies for the Leiria Castle Reconstruction*, 1898. The author defended the Arab architectural influence in the castle building. It features an Arabic stamp, in a region where there are few examples [...] of the Moorish art combined with Christian. This Moorish art had influenced the carpentry civil art, mainly until the sixteenth century (Korrodi, 1898: 9).

Orlando Ribeiro, a prominent Portuguese geographer noted the Arab influence in the south of Portugal. In his view the Mozarabic were numerous in the southern lands: they were half the population of Lisbon, in the early twelfth century. The Arabs and the Mozarabic lived in cities and were craftsmen and merchants. The Berbers were mostly peasants. From these come the term "saloio", which were peasants working around Lisbon. "Saloio" it's a word with an "Arabic root which means "desert dweller", the field people, as opposed to the city". The same way that "saloios" and also the "bairrões" are heirs of Arab culture. The word comes from the Arabic literature and means "outside the walls" (Ribeiro, 1977: 91-92).

Moreover, according to historian Saul António Gomes, the Arab presence did not have an important role in the region foundation. The current region of Leiria was a "no one's land" during the Arab period, characterized by near absence of Muslim influences (Gomes, 2004). The foundation of the Leiria region was due, in their view, to the action of King Afonso Henriques and the Christian reconquest. As a consequence, the king built the Leiria castle in the first half of the twelfth century. The Muslim heritage, visible in the castle architecture, was due to the fact that the Mozarabic, having worked for the first Portuguese king, helped to build the castle and other buildings (Gomes, 2004: 31).

### ***3. Cistercian Tradition: Searching Another Origins***

If some authors had been searching in the Arab traditions for the roots of a Leiriense community, as did Ernesto Korrodi or even José Travaços dos Santos, nowadays, others opt to look for it in the Christian reconquer, like the historians Saul António Gomes or Acácio Sousa.

To Acácio Sousa, the establishment of the Cistercian monks in Alcobaça and the installation of the Dominicans in the Batalha monastery constituted very important elements of the genesis of the regional community. The activity of these monasteries was responsible for the emergence and development of the regional community.

The grandeur and aesthetic heritage of Alcobaça and Batalha also marked the region. Especially in Alcobaça, the brothers did a great job which marked and continues to define the region's economy. [...] For me, the economic activity performed by the monks led to a center of aggregation. Since then the region was centered in Alcobaça and Leiria [...]. The economic Matrix and monumental heritage allow us to understand the history and foundation of the region [...] [AS]<sup>5</sup>.

The establishment of the Cistercian Order in Alcobaça (1153) was crucial for the development of economic, social, political and cultural relations between the first inhabitants of the region. From there, people developed a common sense of belonging. According to Saul António Gomes, the Dominican and Cistercian territorial occupation, during the Christian re-conquest, explain the foundation and further development of the community. This event attracted people who settled and created wealth, contributing to those who had inhabited the region, in a collective effort to unite the community. This effort materialization ended in the construction of Alcobaça and Batalha monasteries. As the author said, the monasteries construction has brought a lot of labor-skilled for the region.

The establishment of religious orders in this area contributed to the emergence of new social dynamics, market supply and demand for labor. It was not a transitory phenomenon, but rather away to fix people, whose descendants have stayed here over several generations (Gomes, 2007: 51-52).

The outlook of many Leiriense authors shows a dynamic memory of the origins. In this process, memory reveals itself as flexible, versatile, soft and fragile, that collects, holds, shapes, and brings us back to reality and intimate sharing of our personal identity, collective and cultural in different truths (Le Goff, 1982a, 1982b; Cano, 2006). For this reason one can't say that the monuments were necessarily created to realize a sense belonging to a community.

<sup>4</sup> José Travaços dos Santos [JTS] was interviewed on 05/04/2006.

<sup>5</sup> Acácio Sousa [AS] was interviewed on 02/02/2006.

According to Jacques Le Goff (1982b), what survives is not the whole of what existed in the past, but a choice made partly by the forces operating in the temporal development of the world and humanity, both by those engaged in the science of the past, historians (Le Goff, 1982b: 103) and anthropologists.

#### **4. Leiria Castle: Region Foundation**

The Leiria castle, founded in the twelfth century (Costa, 1997: 156; Gomes, 2004: 34), represents the Leiriense people, their past and present lives (Cátedra; Tapia, 2007). The castle witnesses the history but also the regional and national culture. While a home, it can be perceived as a body on two levels: it is one's own body, having *sapropre personnalité, son apparence, ses ouvertures, son intimité* (Augé, 1989: 149) but it is also a social body. It is the expression of those who occupy the "guarded" space, expressing the Leiriense inhabitants' character in adjectives such as strength, bravery, courage and work.

According to historians like Saul Antonio Gomes, the castle needs to be understood from its integration in the area that extends to the municipalities of Ourém and Porto de Mós. The three forts formed a trilogy in the twelfth century that came to define a defense area against the Moors attacks. In the author's view, the defense line demarcation and definition of the space to be protected led to the Leiriense region.

The castle (Leiria) foundation was justified as a first act in the strategic defense of a new space that was intended for people and / or to colonize [...] constituting, with the Ourém castle, a significant hub in the organization of offensive military campaigns, directed at the Muslim south. Moreover, the castles were protection places, available to accommodate the population in case of attack (Gomes, 2004: 34).

The relation between the castle building, the Leiria city foundation, and the surrounding area suggest a major role of the origin myths: provide an antiquity to the city through the founding hero of the same, [...] a hero associated with the strength and courage, important values for the border societies (Cátedra e Tapia, 2007: 17). The castle was built by King Afonso Henriques, in the land border.

The fortification was considered a sacred structure since it separated the Christian territory from the Moors. The demarcation and protection of the territory issue has been a key element in the formation and symbolic representation of space and place systems of the human groups (Cátedra e Tapia, 2007: 19). King Afonso Henriques is considered one of the founding heroes of the region (Gomes, 2004), and the Catholic message bearer.

The grandeur of the castle, its Romanic and Gothic styles, giving a palace configuration (Costa, 1997; Gomes, 2004) and highlight the conquest importance. Since its construction, the castle space was inhabited by the nobility elites and oligarchies that ruled the city Concilium (Gomes, 2004: 13). This fact symbolized the central place occupied by the monument in the community.

The craftsmen and the rest of the population inhabited the lower part of the city, near the Liz River. This differentiated occupation of space is a common characteristic to other medieval towns. In the Spanish city of Avila, the social groups of high status lived inside the castle, while the rest of the population lived outside that area (Cátedra; Tapia, 2007: 17; Cátedra, 2007b).

The spatial orientation of the castle, built on a rocky elevation from which are extended its walls, confer particular characteristics to the entire city of Leiria. The monument is taken as an integrating factor of the region. In Leiria, as in other villages and medieval towns, Romanic walls of the old town, which were spread out along the hill of the castle [...] have, even today, a symbolic centripetal function [...]. They polarize the population of the entire surrounding area (50 to 60 km) [...], catalyzing towns and villages, boosting economic flows [...] concentrating resources from the executive, administrative and judicial powers and manifesting itself as a place of celebration and reception of cultural and religious practices that create identity (Gomes, 2004: 13).

From the twelfth to the sixteenth century the castle expressed the royal power over the area of the region, as well as its main urban center. With the Portuguese independence loss, in 1580, it fell into disrepair and ruin (Gomes, 2004). The castle was used by the romantic discourses in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, symbolizing, together with Alcobaça and Batalha, a Portuguese monumental region of Estremadura, and the Portuguese culture (Gomes, 2004). The castle ruins offered travelers a melancholic atmosphere and a picturesque landscape, inspiring the romantic thought (Cátedra, 2007a: 67; Costa, 1997).

The Spanish author Giner de Los Rios [1839-1915] who visited Leiria in 1888, left his impressions: el poema pétreo de Leiria reside en las ruinas de su formosocastillo. De todo ello, lo que à la simple vista se percibe en aquella silueta de ruinas son los restos de los siglos medios, algún elegante balcón morisco y la rica ornamentación del monarca afortunado que compartió el cetro con la hija de los Reys Católicos. La situación del castillo, por extremo romántica, le dan más aspecto que fortaleza, el de sonada mansión de leyendas amorosas ó de fantásticas tradiciones (F. G. H., 1888: 268).

In the nineteenth century, the ruined castle was overtaken by the liberal troops, who left a Gothic inscription in stone, alluding to his presence. They were celebrating D. Maria II as the Queen of Portugal, who was considered the liberator of the country's absolute monarchy (Gomes, 2004: 105). Since the nineteenth century, the castle is regarded as a memorial place of the Portuguese nation, evoked by national and foreign romantic poets and writers. Almeida Garrett (1828), a Portuguese author, refers to the ruins of the castle as a mysterious beauty. Ramalho Ortigão notes the castle as a building of a king who was the most important artist, poet and wisest of his time, one document, perhaps only in Europe, of the Roman Archeology and the life of the royal house in the Middle Ages (Ortigão, 1896: 66).

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries brought a renewed importance to the monument. According to Saul António Gomes (2004: 199), the castle began to be more valued as a historical source since 1880. This renewed interest was evident in the first ideas about the castle's reconstruction. The architect Ernesto Korrodi (Costa, 1997), a Swiss living in Portugal, working in the city of Leiria, developed recovery plans. The Portuguese republican regime, introduced in 1910, increased the monuments nationalization in the country.

The castle was classified in 1910 as a national monument, ending the reconstruction in the years 1956-1957. Ten years later, the castle hill was considered Special Protection Zone [ZEP].

The Leiriense fortress is a testimony of historical events. It is subject to multiple symbolic interpretations, according to space and time in which society moves. So we can say that the castle association with the past has a metaphorical relation with the early centuries' battles of Portugal's foundation (Costa, 1997). This monument includes references to historical time as well as a heroic past or a metaphorical time (Cátedra, 2007a: 66). Today, it symbolizes the birth of the city of Leiria and its region, the Arab influence on the Portuguese culture and the Estremadura Province contribution for the birth of the Portuguese kingdom (Costa, 1997). The history of the twentieth century represented to Leiria a further role, forcing scholars to rethink its regional identity. This was felt very strongly with the Diocese (ecclesiastical division) restoration, achieved in 1918, but also due to the Republicans' action proposing a new role for the region. Tito Larcher or Ernst Korrodi advocated the castle restoration and the foundation of the library, archive and museum in the region. At the end of the twentieth century, the debate about Leiriense regional identity began, again (Gomes, 2007: 57-59).

In the region's representation process, the castle has been appropriated by authors such as Saul António Gomes, who defined it as a place of national and regional memories. The fortress was a nation and region "cradle" (Gomes, 2004). We know that the foundation of these fortresses resulted from social and demographic pressure from the Coimbra (north) area. This pressure has forced part of this population to seek new places to live in south of Mondego. "Soure", "Ega" and "Redinha" areas developed as a result of this social, demographic and economic event. The need for protection of displaced populations, in the south, has forced the authorities to protect them and to organize them administratively and politically. It was necessary to build castles to protect the territory from attacks by Muslims [...]. The cities of Leiria and Óbidos, in the current District, were central to this historical course of the twelfth century (Gomes, 2007: 27).

The Leiria Castle, rebuilt in the 20th century, emerges as a powerful metaphor of the region. This monument was necessary for the Foundation of the region in the 12th century as well as for its maintenance throughout the medieval period. The castle was a defensive element, essential for the people establishment over the time, providing shelter and protection in troubled times. Firstly, it protected them from Muslims attacks, after, since the 12th century the castle protected these people from the Castilian offensive.

### **Conclusions**

Concluding, in this case study we observe the confrontation between several prospects about the Leiria community origins. In addition, the strategies of the region affirmation in Portugal and in Europe are made by the past recovery through material and immaterial testimonies.

Heritage confers particular features to the region, highlighting it in the national and international stages. Based on Pierre Bourdieu (1989), we interviewed several regional leaders. Our purpose was to understand how they manipulated useful but complex concepts, such as memory, tradition and heritage in the borders defining of their region. Cultural heritage, in their material and immaterial dimensions is used by these discourses seeking to construct narratives about the past and present of the Portuguese region of Leiria. The past is then resurrected by the discourses of the current regional leaders, who use their traces, marked on the heritage, to aim their arguments. According to the regional leaders, the foundation of the community is located between the Arab presence and the Christian Reconquest. The Muslims or the first Portuguese king, Afonso Henriques, are considered to be the founding fathers of the region.

On the other hand, the installation of medieval religious orders in the region, such as the Cistercian order, established in his monastery of Alcobaça or the Dominican order in the Batalha monastery of Batalha, are other key elements in the definition and assertion of the region throughout the history. The cultural heritage, from the music to the Leiria castle, monumental churches, monasteries and convents, some of the most important of Portugal, located in the Leiria community, constitute testimonies of region past occupation. From the perspective of the regional leaders these monuments are fundamental to formulate several versions and truths about the past, the present and the future of the community.

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