

IN PORTUGUESE... AND SPANISH, ENGLISH, DUTCH, FRENCH... SINGULARITIES OF PORTUGUESE AZULEJOS WITHIN EUROPEAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

EM PORTUGUÊS... E EM ESPANHOL,
INGLÊS, HOLANDÊS, FRANCÊS...
A IDENTIDADE DO AZULEJO PORTUGUÊS NO
CONTEXTO DA HISTORIOGRAFIA EUROPEIA

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ABSTRACT

The link between Portuguese tile decorations and the notion of identity(ies) is rooted today in a very wide context, leading to the extensive use of *azulejos* as cultural and narrative symbols with very different aims. The purpose of the present article is go back in time, to the mid 19th century, and to debate the role played by European historiography in the emergence of the azulejo as an “identitarian” art form, considering its unique characteristics and the main moments and agents that have contributed to the creation and consolidation of this phenomenon.

KEYWORDS

Tiles | Historiography | Identity | Differentiating aspects

RESUMO

A associação da azulejaria portuguesa a uma noção de identidade(s) encontra-se hoje enraizada num contexto muito alargado, conduzindo à utilização massiva do azulejo como signo de uma cultura e servindo de narrativa para os mais diversos fins.

Este artigo pretende recuar no tempo, até aos meados do século XIX, discutindo qual o papel da historiografia europeia na construção da ideia do azulejo como “arte portuguesa”, considerando sobretudo os aspectos distintivos que foram sendo apontados ao longo dos anos, e observando os principais momentos e agentes que contribuíram para a criação e consolidação deste fenómeno.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Azulejo | Historiografia | Identidade | Aspectos diferenciadores

INTRODUCTION

The debate around identity issues in Portuguese art dates from the nineteenth century. Today, Nuno Rosmaninho has clearly defined different cycles directly related to the political and cultural backgrounds, which, according to the author, are: 1) art's association with the nation (1810-1840); 2) romantic nationalism (1841-1890); 3) triumph of rurality and characterology (1891-1920); 4) an era of extremes (1921-1940); 5) hyperbolic serenity (1941-1970); indifference and nostalgia (post-*Estado Novo*) (Rosmaninho, 2016: 331-332). The *azulejo* is a part of all these phases and resonates in the narratives of identity that characterise each of the periods mentioned, as rightfully stated in the article published by Nuno Rosmaninho in this volume.

Bearing in mind, on the one hand, identity as a discourse within which surface the unique characteristics that constitute one of the several elements of narratives of identity; and, on the other hand, the importance these differentiating factors have had in the historiographical context and how they have, in fact, grown with renewed strength in the last couple of years, becoming one of the cornerstones that support the *azulejo*'s hypothetical application to world heritage, this article has one main goal: to analyse the European historiographical production from mid-nineteenth century onwards. Our aim is to understand what aspects support this sense of originality in the authors under study while, at the same time, question the consequences these narratives have had in the current assessment of the *azulejo* in Portugal and its study perspectives.

We left out the direct or indirect testimonies of Portuguese authors or foreign travellers to whom the *azulejo* was culturally unique, but whose texts do not provide a scientifically based critical analysis, like the one started by Athanasz Raczynski (1788-1874) at an international level, or by Joaquim de Vasconcelos (1849-1936) in the Portuguese Art History. Among the many examples we could mention, we would like to highlight Cosme de Médicis' intervention who, in 1669, in his visit to Portugal, claimed, "The *azulejo* is a part of Portugal's landscape"¹ (Simões, 1959: 23). This idea was emphasized decades later by Merveilleux Merveilleux who, in 1726, referred to the "glazed tile fashion"² he had seen in the country (Carvalho, : 152). Other authors, like Cyrillo Volkmar Machado (1748-1823), seem to deliberately ignore the *azulejo*'s role within the national artistic production, thus placing this art in an inferior position when compared to painting, sculpture or architecture (Mangucci, 2016). The *azulejo* would only definitely recover from this positioning with João Miguel dos Santos Simões (Monteiro, 2007).

Since it is not possible to address all the literature available on this subject, we decided to select historians whose work had a greater impact on the area of study this article is inserted in. Perspectives linked to the *azulejo*'s appreciation through restoration or tile reapplication, as usually done by Raul Lino, among others, were left out. The same applies to official exhibitions and representations of Portugal that convey a political discourse, or even the ones that were organised by the *Azulejo* Museum – called National *Azulejo* Museum from 1980 onwards – since its creation in 1965.

THE FIRST FOREIGN CONTRIBUTIONS

Considering the genesis of art historiography in Portugal, Count Athanasz Raczynski (1788-1874) was more than a "traveller-writer", as he did not merely draft "impressions" and raise awareness to the most repre-

sentative examples of the Portuguese artistic heritage, instead he established a methodology to substantiate the history of Portuguese art (Rodrigues, 2011: 264). In addition, because he acknowledged the *azulejo*'s

1. In the source text: "O azulejo faz parte da paisagem de Portugal". From henceforth, all in-text translations are provided by the authors.

2. In the source text, "à moda dos azulejos".

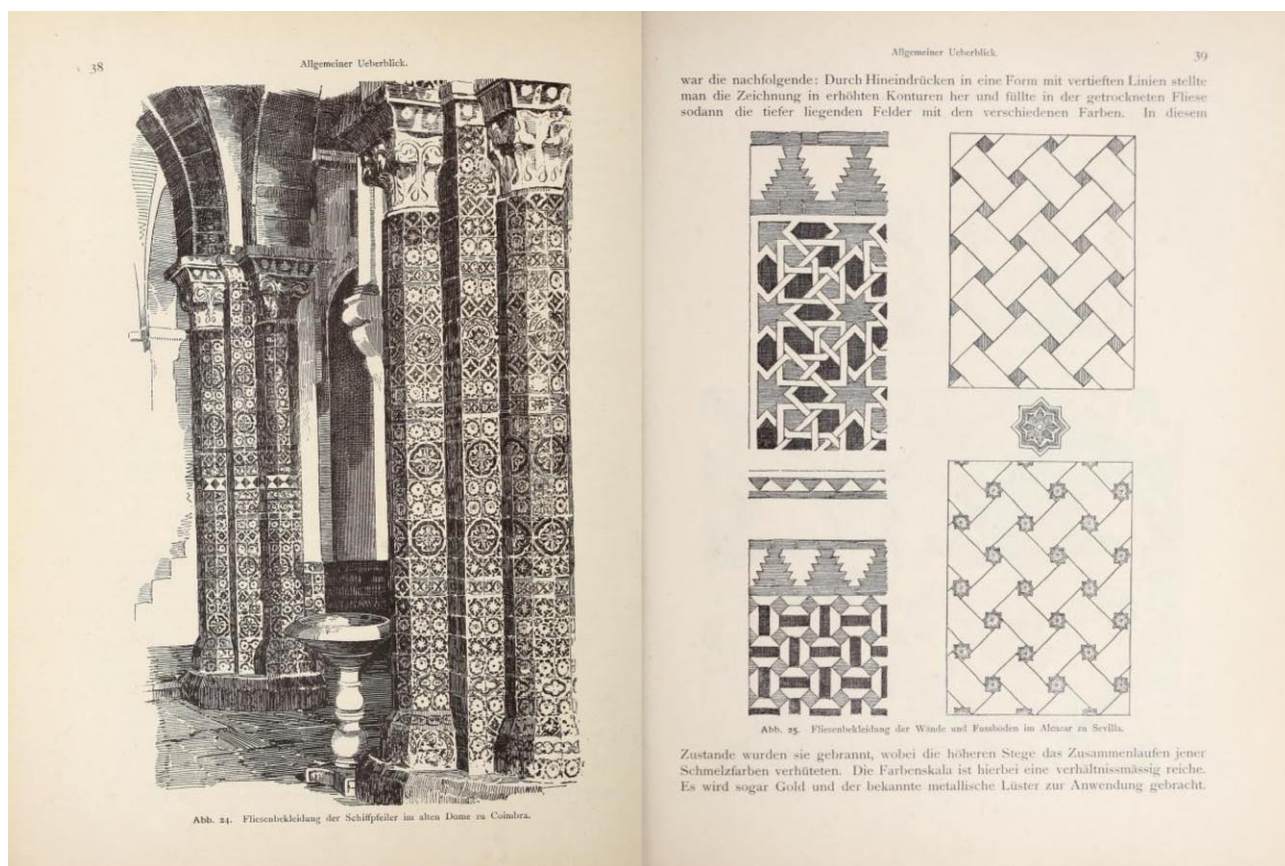


Fig. 01 - Coimbra, Old Cathedral. In Albrecht Haupt, *Die Baukunst der Renaissance in Portugal : von den Zeiten Emmanuel's des Glücklichen bis zu dem Schlusse der spanischen Herrschaft*. Frankfurt a. M.: Heinrich Keller, 1890.

importance as a Portuguese artistic expression with unprecedented and unique specificity – “Azulejos are a part of Portugal’s physiognomy”³ (Raczynski, 1846: 427-434) – Raczynski is regarded as a pioneer in understanding the glazed tile as an art linked to identity and a document of Portuguese culture, having, therefore, established a long historiographic legacy.

In the work *Histoire de la Céramique*, edited in 1873, the first great historian in the field of ceramic studies, Albert Jacquemart (1808-1875), signalled the importance of Portuguese tiles, describing the generalised use of this art in public and private buildings: “That country is so to speak the new world of ceramics (...)

More importantly everyone talks about the *azulejos* which in that part of the Peninsula are treated with no less success than in Spain. Since 1850 the *Magasin pittoresque* signal the general employment of this form of decoration on public buildings and private houses that, sometimes, are coated with glazed tiles from top to bottom; they represent hunts, sacred or historical subjects, landscapes, vases filled with flowers, arabesques, etc.”⁴ (Jacquemart, 1873: 600-601).

Soon after, the French historian Henri Martin (1810-1883), who was visiting Portugal for the 1880 Anthropological Congress, highlighted the colourful character of the Portuguese people and the *azulejo* as

3. In the source text, “Les azulejos constituent en partie la physionomie du Portugal”.
 4. In the source text, «Ce pays est en quelque sorte le nouveau monde de la céramique () Mais avant, tout, parlons des azulejos qui, dans cette partie de la péninsule, ont été traités avec non moins de succès qu’en Espagne. Dès 1850, le *Magasin pittoresque* signalait l’emploi général de cette décoration dans les édifices publics et les maisons particulières qui, parfois, sont recouvertes de carreaux émaillés de la base jusqu’au toit; ils représentent des chasses, des sujets sacrés ou historiques, des paysages, des vases remplis de fleurs, des arabesques, etc.».

a component of the picturesque appearance of their houses (Braga 1995 [1885]: 137), a view which was in line with a nationalistic devotion and spirit as well as a vital attention to all that is Portuguese.

Following the on-going acknowledgment of the *azulejo's* decorative merit by the international academia, in the next decade, the German architect Karl Albrecht Haupt (1852-1932) travelled across Portuguese land, drawing, studying and collecting countless data on national monuments, aiming to study Portuguese architecture during the "Renaissance period". His work *Die Baukunst der Renaissance in Portugal (Renaissance Architecture in Portugal)*, published in 1890, favoured the graphical records of monuments, a task that was completed in the course of his trips and includes drawings of some *azulejos*, like the ones in the pillars of the Old Cathedral in Coimbra, which would disappear, or in the Chapel of Santo Amaro, in Lisbon. When discussing Moorish influences, whether in the Mudejar architecture or in the *azulejo* coatings and interlaced geometrical drawings, Karl Albrecht Haupt underscored the glazed tile's use as a characteristic feature of the national architecture: "A typical characteristic of Portuguese architecture was and is the practice of covering surfaces with Moorish tiles (called *azulejos* because of their predominant blue colour); this coating was very appreciated both on internal and external walls, so it is used in entire church façades, towers, houses' façades, patios, domes, corridor walls, stairwells, salons and bedrooms"⁵ (Haupt, 1890: 37).

In 1895, Theodore Rogge published *Keramik und Decoration in Portugal (Ceramic and Decoration in Portugal)* where he refers that the *azulejo* is used so frequently in Portugal that it becomes characteristic, complementing the decorative sense of its placement – "Isolated *azulejos* (...) can only provide a very imperfect idea of the magnificent harmony and of how they were so brilliantly used for decoration in those days"⁶ (Rasteiro, 1895: 108).

Right at the beginning of the twentieth century (1908), the Scottish architect Walter Crum Watson acknowledged the *azulejo's* great decorative importance in the history of Portuguese architecture, since it is placed on buildings from the north to the south of the country, from Paço de Sintra to Quinta da Bacalhôa, among many others: "Indeed it may be said that tilework is the most characteristic feature of Portuguese buildings, and that to it, many a church, otherwise poor and even mean, owes whatever interest or beauty it possesses. Without tiles, rooms like the Sala das Sereias or the Sala dos Arabes would be plain whitewashed featureless apartments, with them they have a charm and a romance not easy to find anywhere but in the East" (Watson, 1908: 28).

It is, therefore, clear the *azulejo* was paid great attention by the "gaze" of foreign historians, who favoured its decorative purpose. Nevertheless, in Portugal, it was Joaquim de Vasconcelos who introduced a scientific outlook on this area of study.

THE AZULEJO IN PORTUGUESE

The first researchers who dedicated themselves to studying the *azulejo* had a difficult task. Since there was a lack of studies in the field, a lot of the information on ceramics was not available and, as it was absolutely imperative to be aware of the national context, Joaquim de Vasconcelos (1849-1936), José Queiroz (1856-

1920) and Vergílio Correia (1888-1944) adopted and perfected methodologies related to inventory and registration of dated and signed sets of *azulejos*. The latter, in the first edition of *Azulejos Datados (Dated Azulejos)*, praised the work of his predecessor, José Queiroz, who in turn had already been mentored and

5. In the source text, "Bem característico da arquitectura portuguesa foi e é o uso de revestir à mourisca as paredes com azulejos (chamados azulejos por causa da cor predominantemente do azul), este revestimento era muito apreciado tanto em paredes internas como externas, usando-se em fachadas inteiras de igrejas, torres, fachadas de casas, pátios, abóbodas, paredes de corredores, de vãos de escada, de salões e de quartos".

6. In the source text, "Azulejos isolados (...) não podem dar senão uma ideia muito imperfeita da magnífica harmonia e da arte genial com que os azulejos naqueles tempos foram aproveitados para a decoração".



Fig. 02. Almoester, Church of the Convento of Almoester, 17th century (photo by Jorge Guerra Maio)

preceded by Joaquim de Vasconcelos. All of them, as well as Gabriel Pereira (1886), Liberato Teles (1896)⁷ and Sousa Viterbo (1903), aimed at establishing a history of the Portuguese glazed tiles and collected signatures and dates to that purpose, making an effort to obtain a global understanding of these partial reports. As a result, their texts have few significant

remarks on the aspects that make Portuguese glazed tiles stand out when compared to its counterparts.

Having learnt a scientific methodology in Germany, Joaquim de Vasconcelos was a central and founding figure in the field of Portuguese Art History, which was regarded as an area dedicated to specific items and

7. The researcher cites an article by Conceição Gomes where it is mentioned that the use of glazed tiles in Portugal and Spain differs from that on any other place (Teles, 1896: 215) and refers that foreigners are actually the ones who most value the art we possess (Teles, 1896: 223). However, Teles makes no allusion to the *azulejo* as an art form linked to identity.

methodologies from then onwards (France, 1966: 118-119). The *azulejo* was one of the many art forms that fascinated Vasconcelos and to which he dedicated special attention from the 1880s onwards; thus, he is also considered by Santos Simões “the founder of ceramic studies in Portugal”⁸ (Simões, 1990: 24).

Joaquim de Vasconcelos’ analysis is characterised by the appreciation of pattern *azulejos*, polychrome, when compared to the white and blue narrative painting (Vasconcelos, 1884: 20-21), but he also mentions a connection to themes related to the history, customs, traditions and legends of “our people”⁹ (Vasconcelos, 1884: 17). In fact, “between 1841 and 1890 there is a hopeful beginning of a new cultural pattern rooted on popular and scholarly displays”¹⁰ (Rosmaninho, 2016: 331), of which Vasconcelos was one of the main advocates. Furthermore, it should be underscored that Vasconcelos strongly criticised those who belittled the *azulejo* as an art with a *foreign touch* (Vasconcelos, 1884: VI).

In 1882, Sousa Viterbo’s notes written for the catalogue of the *Exposição de Arte Ornamental (Ornamental Art Exhibition)* take up the idea that Portugal is the country of *azulejos*. Later, the author developed his ideas on the importance of this artistic expression which he admits was “(...) the most considerable ornamental element used in Portugal; its application can only be compared to woodcarving or sculpted wood (...)”¹¹ (Viterbo, 1903: 36). Applied on the most diverse locations, the *azulejo*’s importance is measured for artistic or social reasons; it is “(...) a characteristic specialty that deserves to be studied with care and attention, not only separately, but also in comparison with the other branches of painting”¹² (Viterbo, 1903: 36).

The appreciation of the *azulejo*’s artistic and decorative richness, therefore, seems to gain greater strength. An example of this can be found in 1903 when, concerning the Pena National Palace, Sabugosa Count referred that, “Of all the forms of Portuguese ceramics, the most beautiful, the most characteristic and the most varied is without a doubt the *azulejo*”, since it is “the most beautiful ornament of monumental architecture and the most picturesque in the decoration of private houses. It is a document for art history and a record of glorious deeds”¹³ (Sabugosa, 1903: 205-206).

In turn, when José Queiroz (1856-1920) describes – with flattering adjectives – the main moments of the history of the Portuguese glazed tiles, he is mirroring the republican propaganda, which emphasizes a discourse on the character of the Portuguese nation (Braga 1995) that promotes the need of a collective cultural conscience. This propaganda enhanced the love “for all that is Portuguese”, including in this perspective the *azulejo*. Like Sabugosa Count, who in 1903 claimed the *azulejo*, “(...) is an expression of the Portuguese soul”¹⁴ (Sabugosa, 1903: 206), Queiroz also defends that it “is a characteristic manifestation of our nationality, a jovial symbol of our people”¹⁵ (Queiroz, 1907: 231).

Vergílio Correia (1888-1944) does not refrain from reiterating this line of thought, highlighting, as those before him, the extension of the ceramic applications in Portugal and advocating that *azulejos* express the “unique character of the Portuguese constructions that, on account of them, began to distinguish themselves from the Spanish ones in the 17th century”¹⁶ (Correia 1922: 5). As he continued to claim Portugal was “the country of *azulejos*” and that “(...) if they

8. In the source text, “o fundador dos estudos ceramológicos em Portugal”.

9. In the source text, “do nosso povo”.

10. In the source text, “entre 1841 e 1890, assiste-se ao arranque esperançoso de um novo padrão cultural assente nas manifestações populares e eruditas”.

11. In the source text, “(...) o mais considerável elemento de ornamentação que se tem usado em Portugal, podendo apenas competir com ele a talha ou a madeira esculpida (...)”.

12. In the source text, “(...) uma especialidade característica, que bem merece ser estudada com atenção e carinho, não só isoladamente, mas em comparação com os outros ramos da pintura”.

13. In the source text, “De entre todas as manifestações da cerâmica portuguesa, a mais bela, mais característica, e mais variada é sem dúvida o *azulejo*”; “o ornato mais belo da arquitectura monumental, e o mais pitoresco na decoração das habitações particulares. É documento para a história da arte, e registo de feitos gloriosos”.

14. In the source text, “(...) uma expressão da alma portuguesa”.

15. In the source text, “é a expressão característica da nossa nacionalidade, o símbolo jovial do nosso povo”.

16. In the source text, “carácter próprio às construções portuguesas, que só por isso no século XVII se começam a distinguir das espanholas”.

do not fully reveal *la physionomie du Portugal* as Raczyński Count wished, the *azulejos* at least reveal a brilliant part of the Lusitanian artistic expression”, Vergílio Correia compared national production to the foreign one. While he acknowledged the importance of other regions, in particular Spain, the Netherlands and northwest France, Vergílio Correia still highlighted that, “(...) all the *azulejo* produced in foreign shops does not represent even a fourth of what is produced and still exists in our country”¹⁷ (Correia, 2018: 3, 6) – a perspective he applies to the city of Lisbon as well (Correia, 1919).

After reading the aforementioned texts, we can identify some singular aspects that, though more or less dispersed, are mentioned by the various authors and must be systematised as of now:

- The extension of the production, which is clear due

- to the great number of tile coatings preserved *in situ*;
- The ornamental component of its application;
- The recognition of the *azulejo* as an important patrimonial document:

“After a long period of oblivion and even repulsion, for the last two decades the Portuguese *azulejo* has been regarded by scholars and educated people under its true nature: a precious record of the industrial art of our forefathers and an ornamental element of irreplaceable use”¹⁸ (Correia, 2018: 7).

Other authors, like Gustavo de Matos Sequeira, maintain this viewpoint, perceiving the *azulejo* as “a decorative element connected to «the national constructive style»”¹⁹ (Sequeira, 1933: 55), that is, they highlight the decorative nature of the *azulejo* as its main differentiating factor.

A SYSTEMATISED DIFFERENTIATION

Considering the authors that we have been tracking, João Miguel dos Santos Simões (1907-1972) systematically proceeded with inventory and classification work, including in his analysis *azulejos* produced in other countries but placed in Portugal (Monteiro, 2007). His oldest texts were written in the 1940s and from then on, the discourse concerning the originality of the Portuguese glazed tiles, which regards the dispersed aspects formerly identified but systematises them, was strengthened. This in turn allows greater objectivity, which is also the result of the development of studies focused on the *azulejo*. These factors were listed by Santos Simões and are as follows:²⁰

- a) the *azulejo*’s incorporation in buildings’ architecture, thus adding value to the different spaces (Simões, 2001 [1944]: 53-54), “marrying architecture itself”²¹ (Simões, 2001 [1957]: 173), and adjusting to its scale and characteristics. To Santos Simões, “Along with woodcarving, the *azulejo* bestows on Portuguese temples that unmistakable ecological character and, in its perfect alliance with architecture, it “makes it Portuguese”, even when the architecture’s formal and technical canons are inspired by foreign trends”²² (Simões, 2001 [1960]: 219);

17. In the source text, “o país dos azulejos”; “(...) se eles não revelam inteiramente *la physionomie du Portugal* como queria o Conde de Raczyński, patenteiam pelo menos um aspecto brilhante do facies artístico Lusitano”; “(...) todo o *azulejo* produzido nas oficinas estrangeiras não representará talvez a quarta parte do que se fabricou e existe ainda no nosso país”.

18. In the source text, “Depois de um largo período de esquecimento e até de repulsa, o *azulejo* português vem, desde há dois decénios, sendo considerado pelos estudiosos e pela gente culta sob o seu verdadeiro aspecto de documento precioso da arte industrial dos nossos antepassados, e de elemento ornamental de insubstituível aplicação”.

19. In the source text, “como elemento decorativo ligado ao «estilo construtivo nacional»”.

20. Although these characteristics are a part of his first texts, it was only in 1961 that Santos Simões listed them in a summary fashion in an article published in the journal *Insulana* (Simões, 2001: 253-254): monumentality; modernity (adaptability to different times); versatility of its employment; complement of/integration in the architecture.

21. In the source text, “casando-se com a própria arquitectura”.

22. In the source text, “Com a talha de madeira, o *azulejo* confere aos templos portugueses esse carácter inconfundivelmente ecológico, e na sua aliança perfeita com a arquitectura, “portugaliza-a”, mesmo quando os cânones formais e técnicos desta, são de inspiração estrangeira”.



Fig. 03· Lisbon, Church of Nossa Senhora do Socorro, sacristy Master P.M.P., ascribed (photo by Rosário Salema de Carvalho)



Fig. 04· Lisbon, Hospital of São José, 18th century (photo by Az Infinitum – Azulejo Indexation and Referencing System)

- b) the *azulejo*'s unlimited use (Simões, 2001 [1944]: 53);
- c) the decorative sense that regards the genuine originality of Portuguese tiles and has led Santos Simões "to claim to Portugal the indisputable primacy that ceramic decoration is entitled to in the area of decorative arts"²³ (Simões, 2001 [1943-1945]: 35), highlighting the production of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in particular (Simões, 2001 [1944]: 53). Right in the text *Alguns azulejos de Évora* (*Some azulejos from Évora*), in the second paragraph, the author underscores that glazed tiles are "the most characteristic display

of the Portuguese decorative art"²⁴ (Simões, 2001 [1943-1945]: 17) and continues arguing that the only matchless element that can be argued in favour of this art in Portugal is its ornamental employment and its "rather Portuguese" use. To this researcher, there is no doubt that Portugal holds the most extensive *azulejo* collection in the world (Simões, 2001 [1948]: 149): "Portugal is a vast and unique museum of *azulejos* that are full of life"²⁵ (Simões, 2001 [1956]: 168). He further adds that glazed tiles are "(...) the only artistic activity that can be claimed to be both traditional and typically Portuguese"²⁶ (Simões, 2001 [1956]: 172);

23. In the source text, "a reivindicar para Portugal a incontestável primazia a que a decoração cerâmica tem direito no quadro das artes decorativas".

24. In the source text, "a mais característica manifestação de arte decorativa portuguesa".

25. In the source text, "Portugal é um vasto e único museu de azulejos cheios de vida".

26. In the source text, "(...) a única actividade artística que pode ser reclamada como sendo tradicional e tipicamente portuguesa".



Fig. 05· Vila Viçosa, Church of Nossa Senhora da Conceição, 17th century (photo by Rosário Salema de Carvalho)

- d) the preservation of a specific preference that crosses generations (Simões, 2001 [1943-1945]: 18);
- e) the distinctive use of *azulejos* even if they are imported; an example is Coimbra's Old Cathedral that does not copy Andalusia's models, where the *azulejos* employed originated from (Simões, 2001 [1956]: 168);
- f) modernisation of the people's taste (Simões, 2001 [1944]);
- g) the monumentality, which is directly connected to the *azulejo* from the seventeenth century onwards (Simões, 1947);
- h) the range of motives.

Although Santos Simões' project for a study dedicated to the *Arte do Azulejo em Portugal* (*Azulejo*

Art in Portugal) dates from 1957, the edition of the volume that was in fact the first history of the Portuguese *azulejo* appeared on that very same year but authored by Reynaldo dos Santos (1880-1979). The latter's approach reveals an understanding of glazed tiles as a national art integrated into "(...) an aesthetic and identitarian system developed (...)"²⁷ by Santos Simões and by José de Figueiredo (Rosmaninho, 2016 :343).

In the first phase of the work *O Azulejo em Portugal* (*The Azulejo in Portugal*), Reynaldo dos Santos starts by praising the *azulejo* – "In the history of decorative arts in Portugal, the *azulejo's* importance and originality is indisputable" – considering that "(...) the *azulejo* is quintessentially our decorative art, the most unique

27. In the source text, "(...) um sistema estético e identitário desenvolvido (...)".

(...)”²⁸ (Santos, 1957: 7). The author proceeds, underscoring its worth as a decorative art and, hence, continuing a narrative that keeps the focus on the previously listed aspects: “(...) a variety of specimens, the broadness of its employment and the permanent charms of its colours and glaze”²⁹ (Santos, 1957: 7). Against those who voice a critical opinion concerning the *azulejo*’s uniqueness, due to its exterior influences, he argues that, “(...) the unprecedented nature of its creations rests on the ornamental concept that inspires and renews itself”³⁰. Other criteria for the *azulejo*’s singular nature are: “(...) a monumental approach regarding its employment, even when the *azulejos* are imported (...)” along with the “(...) ornamental concept that presides its placement and the unprecedented effect it has”³¹ (Santos, 1957: 7-8). When discussing the evolution of the Portuguese glazed tiles and their ability to renew themselves, Reynaldo dos Santos claims, “Hence, one of the characteristics of the Portuguese *azulejo*’s uniqueness is that it followed, from the sixteenth century onwards, its own evolution; its unity lies not on the immutability of a traditional conception but in the variety of the inventions inspired by an adaptation to the style and spirit of each age”³² (Santos, 1957: 8).

His defence of the *azulejo* continues; comparing it to other countries, Reynaldo dos Santos values not the picturesque character of its compositions, but its decorative nature, “Under that point-of-view, in the West, we were the ones who gave the glazed tile decoration a range and diffusion no other country, not even Spain, did”³³ (Santos, 1957: 8). In fact, he underlines that, “(...) it is legitimate to claim that the *azulejo* is one of the most unique decorative means that the baroque

art conceived in western Europe and that it was Portugal the country which made a more fruitful and pleasurable use of it”³⁴ (Santos, 1957: 9) since “Not even Italy, neither Spain nor Holland granted the *azulejo* of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the variety of features, evolutionary renovation and ample ornamental vision that in Portugal led to the development of an unparalleled decorative art”³⁵ (Santos, 1957: 10).

The crucial work done by João Miguel dos Santos Simões, which rests on a demanding effort to develop an inventory, strengthens the belief in the special preponderance and uniqueness of the employment of the *azulejo* in Portugal and its territories abroad (Simões 1963, 1965, 1969, 1971, 1979) without ever losing sight of the dialogue it established with the international ceramic production. The 1st International Tile Symposium, in 1971, gathered researchers from several countries in Lisbon and is an example of this openness and the concerns regarding the *azulejo*’s characteristics, its influences and expansion or repercussion (Mântua, 2007: 133).

In addition, still on the international setting, the North-American historian Robert Chester Smith (1912-1975) must be mentioned as he dedicated several important studies to very specific tile coatings (São Victor Church in Braga, *azulejos* in Cascais, in Extremoz, among others). Indeed, he acknowledged the importance of the *azulejo* as a unique national art, unparalleled in the whole world. On the *azulejos* in Cascais, for instance, Smith starts his text claiming that the “walls covered with painted tiles are as typical of Portugal as codfish or Port wine. (...) these *azulejos* are an important aspect of Portuguese painting and an essential element of the

28. In the source text, “A importância e originalidade do azulejo, na história das artes decorativas em Portugal, é incontestável”; “(...) o azulejo é a nossa arte decorativa por excelência, a mais original (...)”.

29. In the source text, “(...) variedade dos espécimes, continuidade da evolução, amplitude do seu emprego e sempre o encanto das suas cores e esmalte”.

30. In the source text, “(...) o inédito das suas criações reside no conceito ornamental que a inspira e renova”.

31. In the source text, “(...) uma visão monumental da sua aplicação, mesmo dos azulejos importados (...)”; “(...) concepção ornamental que preside ao seu emprego e no efeito inédito alcançado”.

32. In the source text, “Assim, uma das características da originalidade do azulejo português é ter seguido desde o século XVI a sua própria evolução, cuja unidade residiu, não na imutabilidade duma concepção tradicional, mas na variedade de invenção inspirada na adaptação ao estilo e espírito das épocas”.

33. In the source text, “Sob esse ponto de vista, no Ocidente, fomos nós que demos à decoração azulejada uma amplitude e difusão que nenhum outro país, nem mesmo a Espanha, lhe deu”.

34. In the source text, “(...) é legítimo afirmar que o azulejo constituiu um dos meios de decoração mais originais que a arte barroca criou no ocidente da Europa, e que foi Portugal o país que com mais fecundidade e gosto se soube servir dele”.

35. In the source text, “Nem a Itália, nem a Espanha, nem a Holanda, deram ao azulejo dos séculos XVII e XVIII a variedade de aspectos, a renovação evolutiva e a ampla visão ornamental que em Portugal gerou uma arte decorativa sem par”.

great decorative ensembles that characterize much of the art of Portugal" (Smith, 1968: 1). What is more, in the work *The Art of Portugal*, in the chapter dedicated to ceramics and particularly to *azulejos*, Smith is more assertive when he refers that, "decorative tiles were made all over Europe in the period between 1500

and 1800, but nowhere were they used on such a scale, for such a variety of purposes or in so many different patterns as in Portugal, where they represent, along with gilt woodcarving, a truly national form of decoration" (Smith, 1968: 229).

FINAL OVERVIEW

From the works studied within the scope of this article, and no matter the analysis perspective one may have, a common narrative comes into light from which surfaces the idea that the Portuguese *azulejo* is an art form with specific and differentiating traits when compared to its other counterparts.

If at first the differentiating aspects of the Portuguese tiles were characterised by national authors in a somewhat scattered manner, as they agreed with foreign outlooks on the decorative sense and near omnipresent nature of this art in Portugal, in time the studies elaborated by the Portuguese grew and gained more strength. The systematisation of what is actually considered distinctive acquired a new, more definite form through the work developed by João Miguel dos Santos Simões.

A wide survey to the bibliography produced following this author's work would now be fundamental to accurately understand the discourse conveyed since the 1970s. Even though that analysis no longer fits the pages of this article, that line of future enquiry is to be bore in mind, focusing on how the idea of the *azulejo*, as a differentiating and characteristic Portuguese art, influenced or determined study approaches over the last sixty years.

Generally speaking, it will not be far from the truth to state that the argument which rests on the *azulejo*'s difference has been continued, even if at certain times some authors favoured one aspect over another. In fact,

that conception of the Portuguese *azulejo* was common to national and foreign researchers. José Meco, for instance, claims that, "amongst all the European countries, it was in Portugal that the *azulejo* was more greatly developed and had its most unique and functional forms of usage in a fundamentally architectonic performance; it was never passive or neutral, instead it widely exceeds a mere decorative purpose"³⁶ (Meco, 1985: 5). In the words of Hans van Lemmen, "Portuguese tiles, or *azulejos* as they are commonly known, are a remarkable feature of the history of Portuguese architecture and design and are still used with exuberance and on a scale that is matched nowhere else in Europe" (van Lemmen, 2013: 126).

Only more recently have some started to react, questioning not so much the *azulejo*'s actual difference, which is acknowledged, but mainly the preservation of an "isolationist" discourse in the analyses used. In this framework, simply as examples, we would like to point out the exhibition entitled *O Brilho das Cidades. A Rota do Azulejo (The Glaze of the Cities. The Azulejo's Route)*, which took place at the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in 2013 and was commissioned by Alfonso Pleguezuelo and João Castel-Branco Pereira. The exhibition drew attention to the *azulejo* as a key element in the widespread dissemination of ideas and forms at a global scale. In addition, there is Céline Ventura Teixeira's PhD thesis (2014), which proposes a combined reading of the glazed tile production in the Iberian Peninsula during the reign of the Philips, or Celso Mangucci's articles (2015) that questioned the

36. In the source text, "de entre todos os países europeus, foi em Portugal que o azulejo manifestou maior desenvolvimento e as formas mais originais e funcionais de utilização, numa actuação primordialmente arquitectónica, nunca passiva nem neutra, que ultrapassa largamente uma mera função decorativa".

relevance of stressing the differentiating aspects over the common ones.

In Portugal the *azulejo's* decorative goal and its use on a monumental scale, integrated and articulated with other arts, among other aspects we may consider differentiating, is indeed indisputable. Yet, we cannot but agree with Céline Ventura Teixeira who states that "New methodological approaches need to be applied so as to renew the analysis of that ornamental

practice under a more dialectical and critical angle"³⁷ (Teixeira, 2014: 16). Since the premises pointed out by historiography are, without a doubt, compelling, the breakthroughs in knowledge as well as the methodological doubt that characterizes science allow us to use our critical sense to rethink the true dimension of these differentiating aspects in a broad sense, correlating the national and international production even if not throughout the whole history of the glazed tile, at least to some periods.

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