

Literary History and Architectural Traditionalism in Portugal and Brazil

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This article outlines the formation of architectural theory in Portugal and Brazil during the nineteenth century, arguing that such theory was initially contained within the social circle and methodological scope of literary history. It makes this case by following the architectural discourses of writers, literary critics, and ethnographers. This investigation reveals an evolving set of architectural references and methods with which to approach the built environment, while also raising challenges for the cross-disciplinary appropriation of architectural theories.

The critique of architectural character in Portugal and Brazil from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries derives much of its motivation and methodology from literary history and criticism. Moreover, it plays out to a great extent within literary circles, even as a Portuguese-language architectural press was emerging during the Belle Époque. I seek to show here how traditionalist architecture in Portugal and Brazil has a longer historical background and clearer theoretical roots than some scholarship on the topic tends to assume.

Portuguese-speaking architects and architectural critics appropriated the goals and perspectives of literary historians, formulated long before the rise of traditionalist architectural styles. This appropriation could be seen in an implicit dialogue between Belle Époque architectural traditionalism and ethnographic portrayals of national character construed throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. The traditionalist movement's claim to authority thus rested on a double reach for the past. First, it required "traditional architecture" to preexist its turn-of-the-century reconstruction in Portugal and Brazil, exhibiting stability through space and time. Second, to prove this claim, it reached for the respectable apparatus of literary and historical criticism, crafted throughout the nineteenth century. This process, spurred by nationalist Romanticism in the 1840s and 50s, peaked in the ethnographic and biographical writings produced by the "generation of 1870."¹ And by the turn of the century, this literary buildup of approaches to art history and national character had irrupted into texts that dealt specifically with architecture.

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This last stage has been profusely studied in recent scholarship, exposing the social and professional networks that supported traditionalist architects such as Ricardo Severo and Raul Lino, as well as the beginnings of historic preservation.² Conversely, the historical and literary discourses of nationalist Romanticists (1840s–50s) and of the 1870 generation (up to the turn of the century) have long been a staple subject in the history of ideas during the age of constitutional monarchies in Portugal and Brazil.³ Such works have shown how specifically Brazilian concerns regarding the creation of a national identity through historiography in the mid-nineteenth century resonated with contemporary Portuguese nationalist writers.⁴ They also have shed light on *fin-de-siècle* debates on the causal relationships among race, language, and cultural identity.⁵ Going beyond the expected affirmation of national identity in each country, these debates further reveal today the workings of a transatlantic *republic of letters* that bridged the conceptual and ideological divide caused by Brazilian independence (FIG. 1).⁶

LITERARY CULTURE AND THE BEAUX-ARTS TRADITION

In the late-Ancien Régime Portuguese empire, artistic culture and theory was something for the “learned enjoyment” of well-to-do men (seldom women) of letters. This was the target audience, for example, for João Pacheco’s 1734 compendium of cultural and scientific trivia, a staple of aristocratic libraries for a long time thereafter.⁷ As late as 1823, a posthumous work by the Portuguese court architect Cyrillo Volkmar Machado (1748–1823) also recommended Giorgi Vasari’s celebrated sixteenth-century study of Renaissance artists (*The Lives of the*

Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects) to “polite” and “learned” men — that is, to well-born dilettantes.⁸

Mastering the methodological apparatus of historical and literary criticism thus became a crucial skill for would-be Beaux-Arts architectural practitioners. Indeed, a young Manuel de Araújo Porto-Alegre, eager to prove his credentials, read a report containing one of the earliest studies on Brazilian art before the Institut Historique in Paris in 1834. The account of colonial architecture (of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) that he concocted at that time provided a commendable Renaissance genealogy that “evidence[d] . . . the taste of the new Roman school of Bramante and Buonarroti,” and which could even be seen in one church, he claimed, “as if a distant reflection of the admirable frescos of the Vatican.”⁹ Yet, comparing the predominantly late-Baroque monumental architecture of Rio de Janeiro to the Italian high Renaissance might not be as far-fetched as it first appears (FIG. 2). In fact, he leveraged to his own advantage a French Beaux-Arts narrative that bypassed the undesirable debt owed to the Italian Baroque in favor of a claim of privileged, spiritual access to Renaissance principles.¹⁰

In this view, the past served as a collection of sources the Beaux-Arts tradition could freely appropriate or renege on according to the values of the present. Accordingly, Araújo Porto-Alegre shifted the burden of constituting a Brazilian artistic “school” toward the future and onto the education provided by the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts (AIBA). As its director from 1854 to 1857, he commanded a comprehensive reform program that put at its center the Romanticist principle of fostering creative originality rather than academic conformity to a traditional body of knowledge.¹¹ In his articles for the journal of the Brazilian Historic and Geographic Institute (IHGB), Araújo Porto-Alegre therefore followed the Vasarian biograph-



FIGURE 1. Map of places and regions mentioned in this article. Drawing by author, not to scale.



FIGURE 2. José Custódio de Sá e Faria, *Santa Cruz dos Militares Church*, Rio de Janeiro, 1780–1811. Glass photograph by Marc Ferrez. Public domain/Instituto Moreira Salles Collection.

ic scheme also prevalent in Portugal.¹² He thus described the artistic developments in the Brazilian capital as the accumulated contributions of each individual artist's genius.¹³ As late as 1855, he also carried on the prospective ideal of art history as a storehouse of sources to be freely appropriated by spiritual and technical inspiration: "My attempt targeted a national thought, namely that of using these examples to make other [ideas] of higher value bear fruit in the young minds."¹⁴

Araújo Porto-Alegre's effort at creating national art reached its culmination under a *fin-de-siècle* generation of artists and theoreticians affiliated with the Beaux-Arts mindset. At its forefront stood the novelist and art critic Luís Gonzaga Duque Estrada (1863–1911). Due to this focus on creative originality as a precondition for an authentic national style, Gonzaga Duque was chiefly interested in the social and cultural conditions surrounding the production of art and architecture, rather than in architectural forms strictly speaking.¹⁵ Therefore, his anticlerical opinions led him, in his early history of Brazilian art, to dismiss the mannerist style of early Jesuitic architecture as "evidently lacking in taste."¹⁶ That one of the few opinions on architecture to come out of Araújo Porto-Alegre's "spiritual lineage" should be such a curt judgment on the subject was also evidence of the low value ascribed to primary documentation in this critical circle. To the Beaux-

Arts critic, a national artistic school was not a description of historical facts, but a prescriptive label to be fashioned out of the means provided by history — or, as Gonzaga Duque argued late in his life, out of those yet to be provided by the future development of national culture.¹⁷

The *fin-de-siècle* apex of Romantic eclecticism in Brazil under Gonzaga Duque and his protégé artists may well have been one of the reasons why the traditionalist movement of the 1900s and 1910s has appeared, to architectural historians, as a sudden and unexpected break with the Beaux-Arts lineage.¹⁸ Nonetheless, a competing strain of nationalist Romanticism was developing in Portugal following the end of the liberal civil war (1832–1834). And in contrast to the emphasis on personal originality within Brazilian academic circles, the Portuguese writers João Baptista da Silva Leitão de Almeida Garrett (1799–1854) and Alexandre Herculano (1810–1877) promoted the documentation of popular traditions as the proper foundation for national art.¹⁹

NATIONAL ARTISTS AND COLLECTIVE SPIRIT

Almeida Garrett dedicated much of his early work, compiled in his 1843 *Romanceiro geral*, to reinterpretations of popular poetry.²⁰ His 1844 poem *Miragaia* (described in the foreword as "a true reconstruction of an ancient monument"²¹) was illustrated with compelling etchings of medieval architecture by Manuel Bordallo Pinheiro (1815–1880). The first chapter heading featured an evocative illustration that combined an Almohad door and a Gothic window, evidence of an interest in crafting a historical ambiance that ranged from the purported authenticity of the text to its pictorial decoration (FIG. 3). The architectural setting, reminiscent of the twelfth century, was, however, anachronistic with respect to the tale,

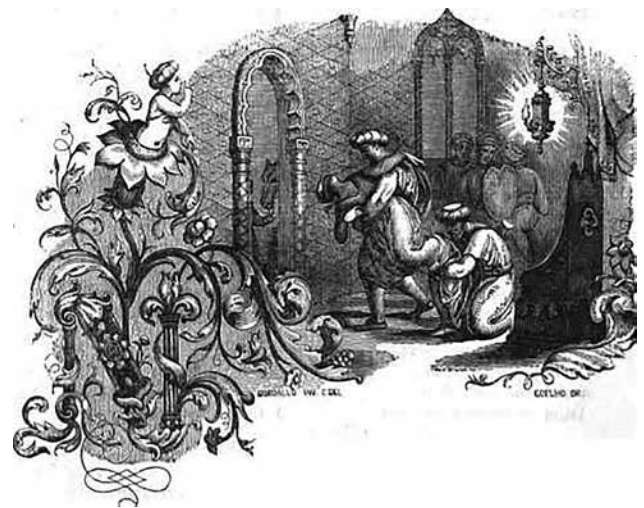


FIGURE 3. Manuel Bordallo Pinheiro, title image for the first chapter of the first edition of Almeida Garrett's *Miragaia*, 1844.

which was predicated on the tenth-century position of the border between Christian and Islamic kingdoms. This carelessness highlighted a sharp distinction between the concept of historical time in the “modern” world and a sort of eternal present projected upon ancient times, where all traditional styles could overlap.

This emerging tension between what were then seen as modern and traditional modes of relating to the passage of time, and to artistic originality, was singled out in an architectural complex that stood precisely at the perceived hinge between tradition and modernity: the Hieronymite monastery at Belém, near Lisbon, begun in 1497 (FIG. 4). The Brazilian military engineer and historian Francisco Adolfo de Varnhagen (1816–1878), an occasional collaborator of Herculano’s, wrote a detailed description of this monastery that was published in Herculano’s *Panorama* magazine in 1842. However, Varnhagen began his account with a somewhat unrelated anecdote in which he chastised the Spanish-born Renaissance architect João de Castilho (1470–1552) for introducing Classical compositions to the Gothic Batalha monastery, departing from the building’s dominant character.²² Varnhagen went on to enlist Victor Hugo’s support in criticizing modern attempts to “correct” the asymmetry of medieval buildings.²³ Overall, he attributed a sense of primeval “chaos” to that transition from the impersonal and static character of Gothic craftsmanship to the creative impulses of singular Renaissance artists, as if the birth of History itself were visible in the monastery’s built fabric.²⁴

The conflict between these two camps within Romanticism played out in the Brazilian process of literary and scientific nation-building during the mid-nineteenth century, and

nowhere was this more clear than in the work of a man in Almeida Garrett’s and Herculano’s social and cultural circle. The Brazilian-born poet Antonio Gonçalves Dias (1823–1864) was a scion of the landed oligarchy that the historian José Murilo de Carvalho has called the “island of men of letters.” After completing his studies in Portugal, Gonçalves Dias returned to Brazil thoroughly imbued with the nationalist emphasis on documentation promoted by Almeida Garrett and Herculano. In 1859 he was entrusted with the “ethnography and narrative section” of the Scientific Commission of Exploration, an expedition to the northeast Brazilian province of Ceará that sought to document various social and natural features of that region. The commission had been established under the aegis of the Brazilian Historic and Geographic Institute (IHGB), a government-funded organization entrusted with providing Brazil with a proper “national” history. Such a project worked backwards from the Micheletian ideal: instead of starting from the concept of nation as a transcendental and preexisting reality, the IHGB endeavored to fashion a nation out of the writing of its history.²⁵ This would ultimately expose the conflicts inherent to the framing of national identity as something to be both *documented* and *created* in a single literary or artistic process.

On both shores of the Atlantic, political and infrastructural modernization, along with the political crisis of the late nineteenth century, would become a catalyst for a renewed interest in national identity — this time around, in the form of longing for the lost roots of cultural identity. The historian of Portuguese anthropology João Leal has suggested this interest derived from Portugal’s increasingly peripheral status among European powers, which pushed nationalist

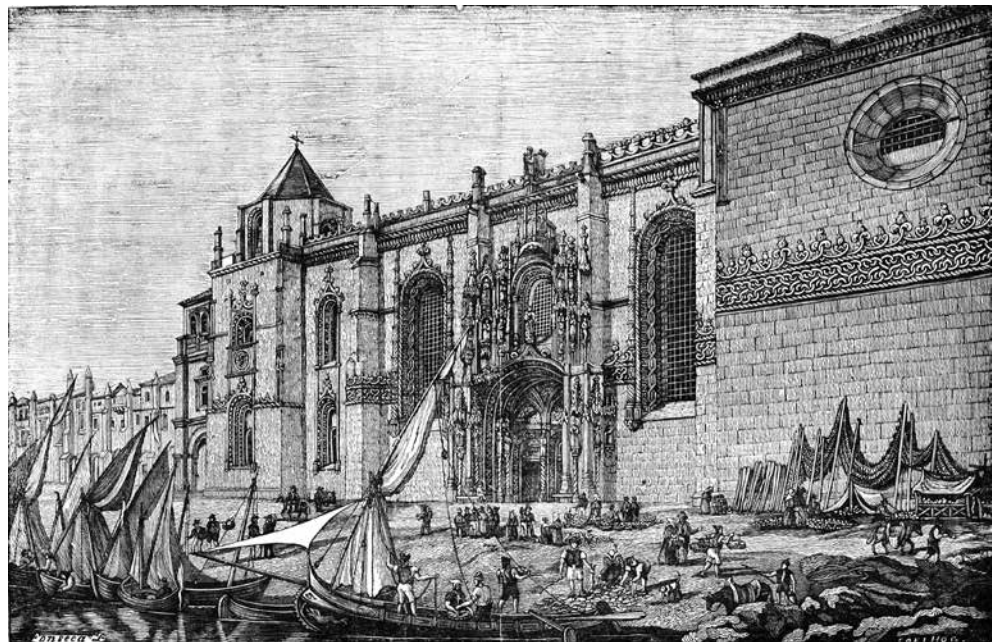


FIGURE 4. Hieronymite monastery of S. Maria, Belém, begun 1501. Print accompanying Varnhagen’s article in A. Herculano, ed., *O Panorama: semanario de litteratura e instrucção*, Vol.1 Ser.2 (1842).

thinkers to contend with “a ‘classic national problem’ . . . that not only favors the study of local folk traditions, but also conducted that study as part of a search for Portuguese national identity.”²⁶ This “anthropology of nation-building” was therefore akin to that of a newly independent country, such as Brazil.²⁷ As an operation of anthropological nation-building, it required as much the making of a conceptual scaffold as it needed the primary research to fill it with content. Therefore, both in Portugal and in Brazil, initial efforts at documentation proved somewhat superficial compared to the crafting of basic narrative structures for this documentation to tie into.

INTERLUDE: ARTISTS’ BIOGRAPHIES

The conflict between the two contradictory Romanticist strands — informed originality and traditional authority — resolved, at first, into a renewed interest in artists’ biographies. Though quite similar in form to *The Lives of the Artists*, by Vasarian, these biographies, especially around the 1860s, were produced in a literary environment that valued the artist’s connections to the social conditions of his craft, and that were beginning to break free of attachment to the conventional cradles of “high art” — the capitals and major coastal cities in Portugal and Brazil.

In this spirit, Rodrigo José Ferreira Brettas (1815–1866), a public official and politician in the Brazilian hinterland province of Minas Gerais, wrote a biography in 1858 of the local Rococo architect Antonio Francisco Lisboa (ca. 1738–1814), known as “Aleijadinho.” The text was quite conservative in its rhetorical devices.²⁸ Indeed, it relied heavily on the well-established, by then, Romanticist trope of the tormented prodigy whose single-minded obsession with art led him to financial hardship and even physical decay.²⁹ What was novel in Brettas’s work was his repeated highlighting of the fact that the protagonist of such a semi-mythical story should be an obscurely trained craftsman, black and thus of low social standing in hinterland society, rather than a socially respectable and well-traveled (for education) artist from Rio or Bahia, as were Araújo Porto-Alegre’s favored characters.³⁰

Likewise, the 1869 biographical notice on Valentim da Fonseca e Silva (1744–1813), a Neoclassical architect from Rio, by Manuel Duarte Moreira de Azevedo (1832–1903), drew heavily on Araújo Porto-Alegre’s earlier account of the same artist.³¹ Yet it introduced a few significant details, which had to do, chiefly, with the subject’s character and material hardship. When confronted with Brettas’s biography of the Aleijadinho, these passages seem oddly formulaic. Missing from Moreira de Azevedo’s narrative were Araújo Porto-Alegre’s specific commentaries on Valentim’s mastery of sculptural modeling and on the exemplary nature of his work for modern students. Instead, Moreira de Azevedo’s note began with a passionate patriotic digression:

In colonial times, when Brazil was not yet a nation, neither having an existence of her own, nor enjoying liberty or fundamental rights, there appeared some remarkable artists, who were their own masters, enlightening and ennobling the homeland, and who began to nationalize art, endowing their works with a type, a character, a local and particular tone.³²

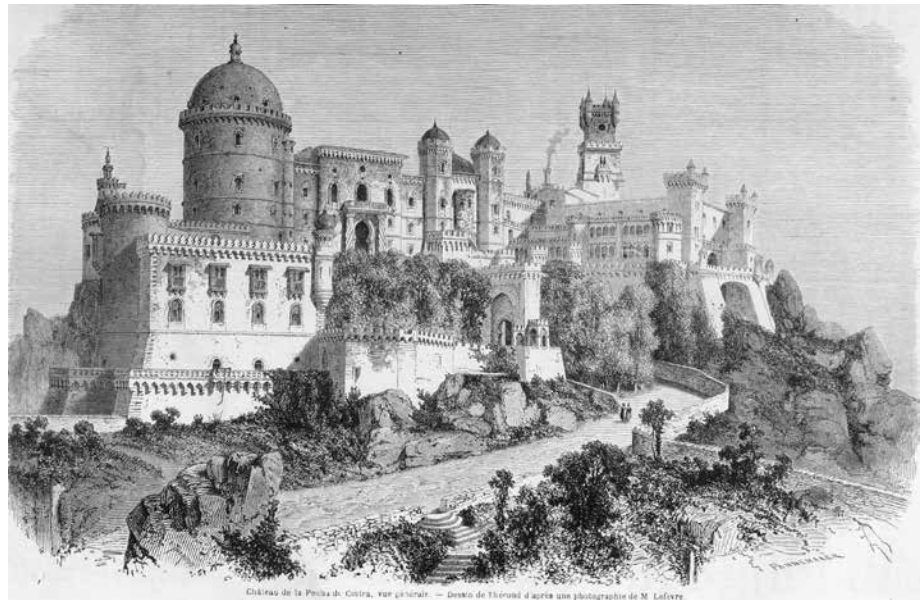
These opening lines set the tone for the remainder of the biography. This presented Valentim not as an individual and inspiring artist according to the Vasarian formula, nor as a Romantic, inimitable genius, but rather as a special case of the “type” of patriotic artist who prefigured political independence through artistic “nationalization.” His personal achievements were therefore recorded not so much for their own sake as to illustrate the general spirit of Brazilian art. Seen in this light, even the statement on colonial domination was less a specific attack on Portugal than a standard rhetorical device intended to contrast the initial naked ground with the later sprouting of national spirit.

For all these moves toward the portrayal of the individual architect as a hypostasis of national character, though, the biographical genre in the late 1860s still clung to its anecdotal medium in order to convey a general message. Starting in the 1870s this genre would, however, split into two different research techniques: strict philological and historiographic research on individual people and sources on the one hand, and ethnographic documentation and interpretation of populations as a whole and their traditions on the other.

TRADITIONALIST AIMS AND ETHNOGRAPHIC METHODS

Even as the artist biography was being developed as a way for architectural writers to explore the relationship between particular and national characters, the documentation of historical styles of architecture in Portugal was becoming a legitimate endeavor both as a support for revivalist design and as one among many sources of ethnographic research. At first, the capacity and demand for revivalist buildings both in Medieval and Classical styles was concentrated among foreign designers and patrons. Among the former was the Austrian baron and industrialist Wilhelm von Eschwege (1777–1855), who traveled extensively through Brazil and Portugal before drawing up the plans for Ferdinand II’s Pena summer palace (FIG. 5). Among the latter was the British-dominated Oporto Commercial Association (incorporated 1834).³³ By the 1860s, however, domestic demand grew for neo-Medieval and neo-Islamic buildings, as well as for the restoration of existing monuments.³⁴ This new trend drove the operative need for the systematic study of historic Portuguese architecture. And among its first concerns were where to look for this historic architecture, and how to look at it.

FIGURE 5. *Pena palace, after 1838.*
 Print by Pannemaker from Édouard
 Charton, *Le tour du monde* (Paris:
 Hachette, 1860).



The Beaux-Arts architectural method had been well established by the second half of the nineteenth century in the Portuguese-speaking world.³⁵ This provided a practical foundation to the second question (how to document historic buildings) — if one accessible only to a small elite of formally educated architects. Nevertheless, this practical method did not afford guidance for selecting, interpreting, evaluating and transfiguring the meanings of a body of national heritage that had yet to be grasped in a systematic way.³⁶ Conversely, the intent of nineteenth-century literary studies — to construct an overarching ethnographic narrative of national identity cutting across all forms of literary and material culture — required, among other specialties, an understanding of architectural principles. Over the last quarter of the century these complementary features of architecture and ethnography would once again bring the two disciplines closer together under the umbrella of anthropological nation-building.

Around 1870 literary and philological studies stood at the methodological fulcrum of ethnography in the Portuguese-speaking world. The consolidation of Brazilian independence and the maturing work of the IHGB obviated the need for anti-Portuguese sentiment among Brazilian elites.³⁷ At the same time, a number of issues ranging from positivist philosophy to national infrastructure and ethnographic methods drew young Portuguese and Brazilian intellectuals closer together in one last glimmer of the transatlantic republic of letters before the end of the century.

Two books published in 1870 set the tone for debates that would remain active until the early twentieth century. One was Theophilo Braga's *History of Portuguese Literature: An Introduction*, a book so influential it would be revised and reedited several times in the following decades.³⁸ It was also among the most controversial works on ethnological theories and

methods. Braga (1843–1924), formally educated in philosophy, was concerned with establishing a positivistic methodological synthesis of his earlier research, relating Portuguese-language literature to the ethnic makeup and historical evolution of the Portuguese people.³⁹ The other influential book was Augusto Filipe Simões's *Relics of Romano-Byzantine Architecture in Portugal*.⁴⁰ This provided a propaedeutics of sorts to the contemporary rush to document, interpret and appropriate Romanesque ornament harkening back to the very origins of the Portuguese state. Simões (1835–1884), a librarian at the venerable University of Coimbra, produced, at its core, an interpretation of the architectural heritage of his hometown, though one that was firmly grounded in prior scholarship as well as in archaeological and formal analysis.⁴¹ Although these two books had quite opposite starting points and methodological principles, they would signal the dominant trends in architectural discourse for the remainder of the nineteenth century. And, as far as traditionalist movements were concerned, these trends would extend well into the twentieth century.

The common point between Braga's broad ethnic brush and Simões's detailed archaeological account was a reversal of the conventional hierarchies of high art and popular culture. The paradigm of "great men" and "great works" that had guided earlier writings, from Araújo Porto-Alegre to Varnhagen, was replaced by an ultimately collective cultural heritage. "The people," wrote Braga, "is the anonymous one in every great work of humanity."⁴² Even Almeida Garrett's transfiguration of popular poetry at the hands of the Romantic genius sounded conservative and elitist by Braga's standards. Though working, as his predecessors, from the standpoint of a search for national identity, he was chiefly interested, according to João Leal, in "evaluating high literature in the light of its greater or lesser fidelity to the traditional [i.e., vernacular] ele-

ment.⁴³ Furthermore, this fidelity would be the “touchstone” of a “regeneration of contemporary literature, in the sense of strengthening in it the traditional and national element.”⁴⁴ These tropes will, of course, sound familiar to the student of the traditionalist manifestos in architecture that would take hold in Portugal a few decades later, at the turn of the century.

Braga’s search for this “traditional and national element” led him to the formulation of one of his most controversial claims about the ethnic origins of the Portuguese people: the “theory of *mozarabism*.” After acknowledging from the start the common linguistic and philological knowledge of the early nineteenth century (that Portuguese-language popular literature can be traced back, in its earliest discernible form, to the far north of Portugal in the twelfth century⁴⁵), he juxtaposed it to a lesser claim found in Herculano’s nationalist *History of Portugal*, and made it into a central tenet of his ethnic theory. This claim concerned the existence of a *mozarabic race*, made up of the descendants of Wisigothic peasants assimilated into the dominant Arab society of the eighth to thirteenth centuries.⁴⁶ However, this dual origin of Portuguese culture — on the one hand, strictly genealogical, linguistic, aristocratic, and northern; on the other, miscegenated, material, popular, and reminiscent of a pan-Mediterranean ideal — was so schematic and dubiously structured that it could not withstand confrontation with the complexity of actual literary traditions or historical processes. And this weakness was exploited by several of Braga’s often ill-intentioned detractors, among them the Brazilian literary historian and white-supremacist Sylvio Romero (1851–1914).⁴⁷

Romero’s rejection of *mozarabism* hinged on the Brazilian author’s insistence on a single strand of national evolution reaching back from the origins of Portuguese ethnicity to modern Brazilian culture. Thus, their opposition clouded deeper similarities: specifically, Romero was of the same opinion as Braga regarding the primacy of popular “traditions” over “decadent” elitism.⁴⁸ Yet, because national unity through tradition was Romero’s chief concern — not to mention his beliefs on racial evolutionism — he found it impossible to accept a theory that posited two distinct “spirits” of Portuguese-language literature. The factual and theoretical fragility of Braga’s theory of *mozarabism* thus became, thanks in part to his detractors’ nervous refutations, a source of adaptability.⁴⁹ Despite the fact that Braga himself eventually reneged on the original formulation of his theory, it thus proved to be a rather powerful and flexible concept, supporting parallel strands of architectural traditionalism in Portugal and Brazil.

The transition from literary debates that implied issues relative to architecture and material culture to architectural discourses framed by a disciplinary background in architecture, art history, or archaeology took place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Simões’s account of Romanesque architecture, in particular, provided a counterpoint to the sharply ideological and polarizing work of Braga. Simões’s book was a true work of art history in the modern

disciplinary sense. Combining a rigorous critique of written sources with sharp visual analysis of the built fabric, it also did not shy away from making sweeping, though at times unwarranted, generalizations out of this critique and analysis (FIG. 6). Such generalizations never went as far as Braga’s, however, and Simões’s book left readers mainly with archaeological support for the northern origins of Portuguese culture — even if those origins were attributable simply to the circumstances of state formation in the Iberian peninsula, not some transcendental ethnic scheme.

Despite its analytical merits, Simões’s work is better understood today as part of a general development of philological and archaeological art history. This is perhaps even better represented by the work of Joaquim de Vasconcellos, which culminated in his ambitious *Artistic Ethnography*.⁵⁰ A number of architects and engineers gravitated, starting in the late 1870s, toward this kind of archaeological scholarship — among them the illustrious academician and teacher Pos-

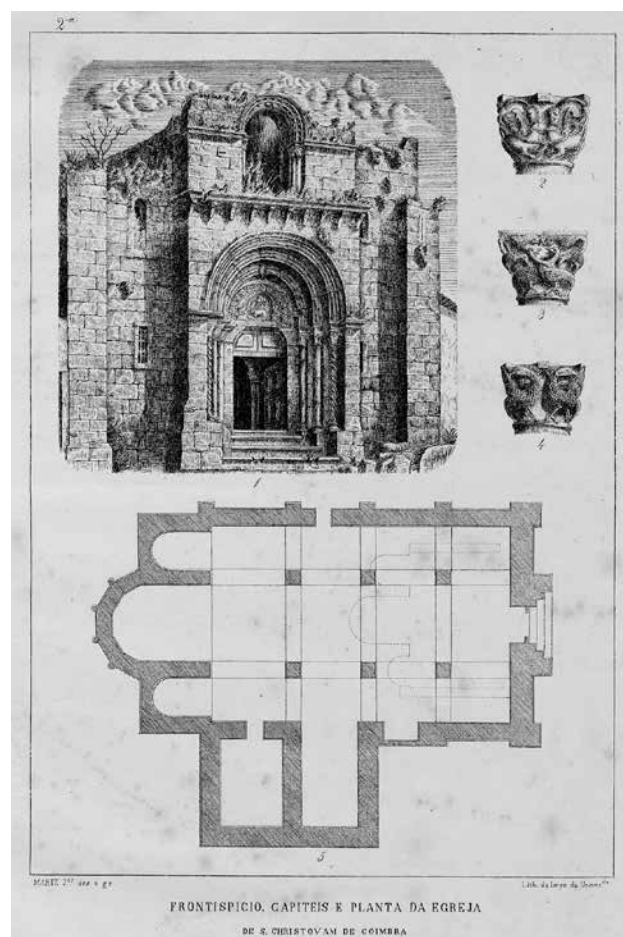


FIGURE 6. São Cristóvão Church in Coimbra. Jorge Mariz, in Augusto Filipe Simões, *Relíquias da architectura romano-byzantina em Portugal . . .* (1870), plate 2.

sidónio Narciso, who in his ripe old age put forth a synthetic textbook on the history of Western European architecture.⁵¹ It would not be until the final decade of the nineteenth century, however, that a clear architectural formulation of literary traditionalism would emerge.

The architectural manifestation of traditionalism implied moving away from the learned appropriation of historical and global styles. It thus established a crucial distinction between the theoretical recognition of Braga's theory of *mozarabism* as a parochial principle of Portuguese identity and the figurative application of Islamic styles within a cosmopolitan spirit in works of monumental architecture such as the Pena palace or the Oporto Commercial Association Building. As the prestige and economic standing of the aristocracy and of the wealthy industrialists were shaken during the financial crises of the 1870s to 80s, that cosmopolitan spirit decisively gave way to the parochial leanings of traditionalism and regionalism. The focus therefore shifted, of necessity, from monumental architecture to dwellings. Though technically anonymous, the builders of Simões's Romanesque churches were anything but popular as far as the nineteenth-century acknowledgment of their achievements was concerned. Moreover, the pan-European genealogy of architectural styles within which Portuguese Romanesque was inserted clearly spoke of Braga's aristocratic strand rather than of the "traditional" culture.⁵²

Traditionalist architecture usually was not a direct transposition of the literary and ethnographic methods, however, since its built expression was still not obvious in the late nineteenth century. Oftentimes, rather than emulating the basic methods of data collection performed by ethnographers and literary historians, architectural theories would build upon the higher-order interpretations and even upon the general conclusions laid out in this scholarship. Moreover, at the turn of the century, architectural theory was still more often than not a discourse that attempted to *persuade* the architect, rather than a discourse produced by the professional architect. "After all," Michel Toussaint has suggested, "the architects' job was to design as artists, . . . not to reflect. This was someone else's job: art historians, aesthetic theorists, or even engineers."⁵³ This discourse was then, at any rate, somewhat derivative of the literary theories and histories. Thus, the early built work by Raul Lino (1879–1974) constituted an essentially formal reinterpretation of the medieval architectural elements codified in publications such as Simões's.⁵⁴

PROFESSIONAL DISCOURSE AND THE TOPOGRAPHY OF TRADITION

The Romanticist ethnography of Gonçalves Dias's and Almeida Garrett's generation was *procedural* in nature, stressing the reinterpretation of tradition into new works of art. The ethnographic traditionalism of the late nineteenth century,

on the other hand, was eminently *documental* and *iconographic*.⁵⁵ It purported to classify and reproduce, at first, the works it documented, rather than reinterpret them into an evolving tradition. It had to be so, first because it required constructing an "Other" within one's own nation as a primeval and authentic source *separate* from the corrupting influence of the architect's own formal education, and second because that authentic vernacular was devoid of a canonical method, of the kind Beaux-Arts classicism provided. It could therefore only be approached in the form of a survey of its expressions.

Such a survey was demanded by Enrique Casanova (1850–1913), a Spanish painter settled in Lisbon since 1880, and tentatively undertaken by the engineer-turned-archaeologist Ricardo Severo (1869–1940), first in his native Portugal, then in Brazil. The similarity between these two men went beyond their architectural interests into the realm of politics, and both were eventually forced into political exile. The two were likewise representative of a project of cultural secularization, which led them to shun Church and royal built heritage in favor of popular dwellings.⁵⁶ Traditionalist regionalism, an eminently political movement with roots in the Catalan autonomic movement and its Gothic revival, as well as in French "right-wing socialism," was therefore a privileged arena for the expression of anti-establishment opinions.⁵⁷

A significant outcome of this dislocation of literary discourse into politics had to do with the geographic locus of tradition. Braga's legacy was that of a latent tension between the nationalist search for a hierarchical genealogy of traditional architecture and the emerging regionalist argument for a constellation of popular traditions, irreconcilable to a single point of origin. This tension burst out onto a debate around the topic of the "Portuguese house," which was contemporary with other traditionalist movements throughout Europe but particularly close to Spanish *andalucismo* and *mudejarismo*.⁵⁸ In late nineteenth-century Portugal there thus emerged, according to Regina Anacleto, an ideological argument as to "the persistence of a grammar . . . with *mudéjar* roots."⁵⁹ This was distinct from the "facile 'Alhambriism' and . . . gudgeon Orientalism, more visual than formal," of high-art eclecticism.⁶⁰

Several years before the more famous manifestos by Raul Lino, a number of short notices and journal articles tackled the matter with seemingly cursory commentaries on the character of certain vernacular dwellings in particular regions of Portugal. Enrique Casanova played a decisive part in this process, publishing two articles in the short-lived 1895 magazine *Arte Portuguesa*, which he coedited with Gabriel Pereira (1847–1911). The article published in the first issue began with the verbatim quotation of a now-famous footnote in Henrique das Neves's 1893 book *A cava de Viriato*.⁶¹ Neves nonchalantly mentioned there that "there seems to be a Portuguese type of housing" in Trás-os-Montes, the far northwestern region of Portugal, but he left it at that.⁶² The first short piece in *Arte Portuguesa*, written by Pereira with drawings by Casanova, however, expanded this comment into

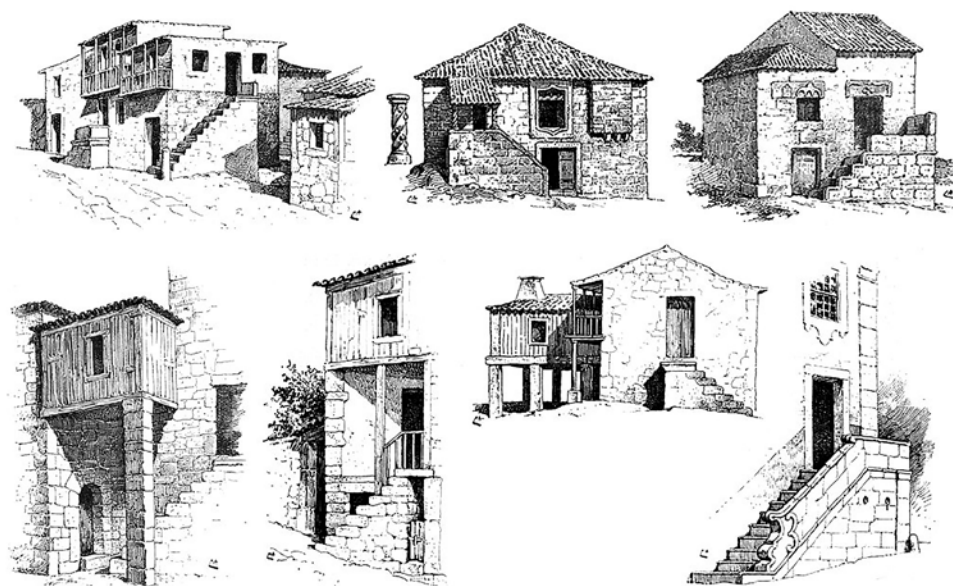


FIGURE 7. Enrique Casanova, drawings for the “Casa portuguesa” article series. *Arte portuguesa*, Vol. I No. 1 and No. 6 (1895).

a complete description of the main characteristics of such a “Portuguese house,” which they held to also be prevalent further south, in the Beira Alta region (FIG. 7).⁶³

What the article described was essentially a rural building type with only a few urban derivatives. Two drawings accompanying the first article and another five with its follow-up accurately illustrated the written descriptions.⁶⁴ In keeping with the prevailing geographical determinism that underpinned regionalist politics and, to some degree, even the literary history of the time, the first article argued that “the house with balcony or veranda is much more pleasant and appropriate to our changing climate than many other private houses seen around here, which are expensive to maintain.”⁶⁵ But it ended with a note of caution regarding generalization:

*The house varies, adapting to the climate, as well as to the inhabitant’s uses. When studying the Portuguese house, we should distinguish the rural from the urban one. The [house] from Minho, with its eido [court], differs from the Alentejo casal [house cluster], with its backyard or its quinchoso [lightwell]: they differ in their aspect, in their hearth and chimney, in the lack or abundance of whitewashing, in the verandas, which in the South are like terraces.*⁶⁶

The terms emphasized in the quotation above were unusual, archaic even, in their Portuguese original. Indeed, the choice to use them evinced a conscious attempt to relate a writing style to the object described, tributary of the naturalistic fiction of its time. By using this device, the text highlighted the conceptual as well as geographic distance between the traditional rural or small-town house and the reader, who was presumed to be an educated and cosmopolitan urbanite. The tension between nationalist unity and regionalist diversity in

turn played out in the architectural and anthropological contrast between Portuguese and Brazilian regions. In Portugal, this was seen to concern the opposition in climate and geography between the country’s north and south. In Brazil, it was evident in how an older contrast between Rio de Janeiro and Bahia (as traditional centers of high culture) and the remainder of the country was being superseded by a new discourse on cultural history. At the beginning of twentieth century, this posited São Paulo both as the historic colonial frontier, preserving a repository of traditional rural houses, and as the frontier of modernity where this mythical history could be reinterpreted to renew the professional architect’s links to tradition.

The literary, political, and archaeological aspects of traditionalist theory all came together in explicitly architectural form as a series of lectures that the Portuguese architect Ricardo Severo gave in São Paulo, his home in exile, from 1911 to 1915. By then, Severo was already an acclaimed designer and archaeologist, having edited and contributed his own research to the 1899–1908 ethnographic journal *Portugalia*.⁶⁷ His own house in Porto, completed in 1904, had also been featured prominently in the magazine *Construção Moderna* (FIG. 8).

Severo had left his hometown in 1908, during the economic crisis that preceded the fall of the Portuguese monarchy, and settled in São Paulo, a city where he had previously lived as a republican refugee.⁶⁸ And the lectures were his attempt to gain access to the notoriously exclusive and, to some degree, hereditary circles of Paulista patrician society — perhaps both out of a yearning for scholarly recognition and as a way to network with potential clients. He was, therefore, speaking to a class of educated men and women who styled themselves as sophisticated patrons of the arts. Some of them were even successful writers in their own right who would go on to produce much of what is now regarded as the canon of Brazilian modernist literature.⁶⁹

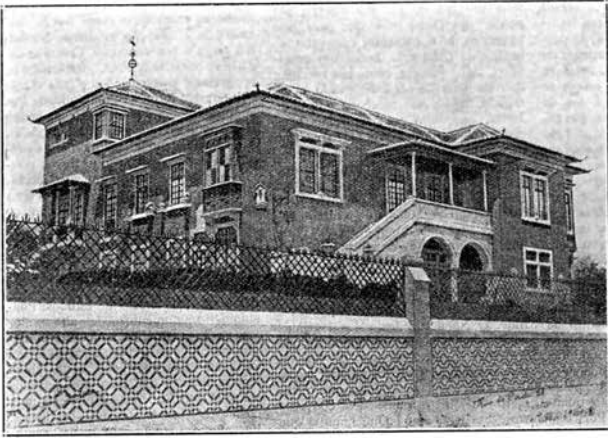


FIGURE 8. Ricardo Severo, house at Rua do Conde, Oporto, 1904. From “Casa Portuguesa,” *Revista de Turismo*, No.13, (Jan. 5, 1917), p.104.

Severo’s lectures were, therefore, a carefully crafted crescendo of concepts leading his dilettante audience step by step into the specifics of architectural theory. The first lecture, “Origins of the Portuguese Nation,” was delivered in 1911 and published (in Portugal) the following year. In it, he posited a “homogeneous” Portuguese people that “remains an ethnic formula [sic] with a distinct constitution.”⁷⁰ This condition was largely determined by the geographic features and seclusion of the land.⁷¹ There followed a series of two lectures generally titled *Traditional Art in Brazil*, delivered in 1914 and 1915, but published as two separate articles. The 1914 lecture bore the suggestive subtitle “The House and the Temple,” and defended the view that, since Brazil had descended, in her linguistic and “moral being,” from Portugal, so, too, must her architecture express that descent.⁷²

The general tone of Severo’s writing was more reminiscent of Almeida Garrett’s transfiguration of traditional poetry into the modern writer’s creation, though, than of Braga’s collection of raw popular sources. The 1914 and 1915 lectures were similar in spirit, with the latter substituting photographs of specific historic buildings in São Paulo and environs for most of the generic, typological sketches that illustrated the former.⁷³ This explicit reliance on a built heritage that was more immediately familiar to Severo’s audience had the secondary effect of exposing rising conflicts in the configuration and appropriation of national character in early republican Brazil.

ALTERNATE AVENUES OF KNOWLEDGE

The domain of architectural theory in the nineteenth century was a notoriously inconstant landscape. In between the dislocation of Neoclassical normative theory and the consolidation of Modernist hegemony, the disciplinary field was pulled

around from many directions. Thus philosophers, writers, visual artists, engineers and politicians all invested the concept of architecture with their own worldviews, interests, and operative methods. Among these several perspectives, this article has picked the literary appropriation of architecture as a guiding thread to follow this landscape through most of the century.

The view from the vantage of literary history is quite different from that obtained from the standpoint of professional practice, or even from a study centered around built objects. Even as architects became social scientists and grappled with technological development throughout the nineteenth century, the delimitation of their disciplinary field moved constantly. In peripheral Western nations, the succession of artistic movements, the remaking of professional hierarchies, and the shrinking distance between town and country all came together to produce unexpected developments.

In the framing of architectural thought, the ascendancy of literary history and ethnology over professional discourse was one such unexpected development in the Portuguese-speaking world. It resulted in a cultural condition where the particular interests, methods, and frames of knowledge of literary historians and ethnologists superseded in many ways conventional critical frameworks in the discipline of architecture, such as style or technique. Conversely, however, concepts such as identity and tradition were brought to the forefront. The simple educational and professional genealogies of practitioners, a long-established narrative device in art history, also had to give way to networks of like minds cutting across disciplinary boundaries. Through the nineteenth century, the concept of tradition thus was transformed. At first understood under the Beaux-Arts system as an ongoing construct created by qualified aesthetic debate, it increasingly came to be taken for a preexisting, mostly static, substratum capable of conditioning architectural practice and its repertoire of possible solutions. This latter normative understanding of tradition drew its theoretical framework from literary and historiographic nation-building efforts carried out during the mid-nineteenth century.

The process of replacing a disciplinary expertise handed down across generations with a constant disquiet about the broader cultural legitimacy of the discipline was, in fact, something that took place in the field of architectural theory at the very same time it was being conceived as a problem of collective identity. As the nineteenth century drew to a close, it might well have seemed that architectural practitioners were regaining the upper hand, so to speak, in the theorization of their own field, appropriating internally the scholarly methods and world-views that had previously been applied on their discipline from the outside. But it was more likely the case that the whole of the architectural discipline was being subsumed into the conceptual scheme of literary methods.

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