

## **A pioneer program of historic preservation – Portugal and the Colonies Heritage Monuments**

*Vera Mariz*

(Dr. Vera Mariz, Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa, Alameda da Universidade, 1600-214 Lisboa, Portugal, [verinhamariz@hotmail.com](mailto:verinhamariz@hotmail.com))

### **1 ABSTRACT**

“Estado Novo”, the Portuguese dictatorship (1933-1974), as a consequence of its nationalist and colonial ideology, understood the overseas monuments as triumphal testimonies of the national legitimacy in African and Asian colonies.

However, after the World War II (1939-1945) and the creation of the United Nations (1945), the Portuguese Empire slowly started to be criticized by the international community. Thus, the political regime began to develop an all-embracing program driven to the colonial monuments preservation and, consequently, to the political Empire maintenance.

This strategy was implemented in 1958, with a law that declared the Ministry of Overseas responsible for the historical buildings conservation, classification, inventory and restoration.

With this paper, by identifying action lines and agents, we aim to demonstrate how the overseas monuments restoration program was developed in innovative ways.

### **2 THE APPRECIATION OF THE PORTUGUESE OVERSEAS MONUMENTS BY A DICTATORIAL AND IMPERIAL REGIME**

The concept of the “Portuguese Empire” was, unequivocally, one of the Portuguese civil dictatorship (1933-1974) – commonly known as “Estado Novo” – guidelines. This point is clearly supported by the fact that 1930’s Colonial Law was included in 1933’s Constitution, and, more clearly, by the extreme extension of the Portuguese colonialism long after the military coup of April 25th, 1974, which defeated, permanently, the dictatorship.

Furthermore, regarding the “Estado Novo” guidelines, we cannot fail to list the Portuguese monuments restoration as a propaganda instrument of enormous power, whose purpose was to accentuate the nationalist and imperialist message that was intended to disclose. This purpose was proved, from 1929, by the activity of the government institution in charge of national architectural heritage: Direcção Geral dos Edifícios e Monumentos Nacionais (DGEMN).

Given the importance of this two ideas – imperialism and appreciation of monuments as historical evidence – would be expected, as has occurred in Mainland Portugal between the 30’s and 70’s of the twentieth century, that we had seen the planning and implementation of a complex program that aimed to protect significant architectural heritage. This because, after all, nothing materialized with as much rigor and impact, not even the 1931’s “Oporto Colonial Exhibition” or the 1940’s “Portuguese World Exhibition”, the majestic time of Portuguese Discoveries that was intended to recall and revive in a new era of excellence in the History of Portugal

However, due to the ignorance, oversized overseas domains, bureaucratic obstacles and financial issues, what happened was not expected and so little imitated what was happening in Mainland Portugal in terms of monuments restoration.

Regarding the organization and duties of the Ministry of Overseas Directorate-General of Public Works and Communications, equivalent institution to the Ministry of Public Works and Communications to which belong Direcção Geral dos Edifícios e Monumentos Nacionais (DGEMN), we come across a significant delay of the question under study.

Actually, by reviewing the 1936’s Ministry of Overseas’s Organic Law, we cannot find any reference to the monuments restoration, but the existing Division of Public Works, Harbors and Roads in the Directorate-General of Colonial Development [Ministério das Colónias, 1936].

Already in 1957, on further modification of the Ministry of Overseas's organization and staff, we find, then as a central service, the Directorate-General of Public Works and Communications, although without any regulation of its operation in relation to the issue currently addressed. [Ministério do Ultramar, 1957]. Moreover, we cannot deny the regime's concern with the overseas architecture and urbanism, dating from December 6th, 1944, the creation of the Colonial Urbanization Office within the Ministry of Overseas, which aims passed through the centralization, in Lisbon, of all architectural and urban projects for the African colonies [Milheiro, 2009].

However, to witness such action within the protection of overseas monuments it would be necessary to wait until 1958. Indeed, for the first time, with the Decree 41:787 of August 7th, the government, finally, placed the General-Directorate of Public Works and Communications of the Ministry of Overseas, responsible for the inventory, classification, conservation and restoration of overseas monuments [Ministério do Ultramar, 1958], filling a serious gap.

However, apart from the absence of the centrality of this issue, we must note the existence, at a local level, of offices with the needed powers for the inventory, classification, conservation and restoration of monuments under study.

Indeed, the Portuguese Government of India, with a pioneer legislative tradition, founded in 1895, with Ordinance No.591, a commission in charge of the Portuguese monuments.

Considerably later but with equal interest, and this time already in the African continent, was created, on May 24th, 1922, the provincial commission for Angola's monuments by the Decree No.161, whose duties concerned the classification, conservation and restoration of the architectural heritage [Governo Provincial de Angola, 1922].

The colony of Mozambique, prior to the Decree 41: 787, also had, since February 20th, 1943, and the Decree No.825, its Commission of Monuments and Historical Relics, which belonged to "investigate, classify, restore and conserve the monuments and relics of the colony, disclose their archaeological and historical knowledge and promote cultural and tourist advertising" [Governo Provincial de Moçambique, 1943].

Consider now, briefly, how the political situation of Portuguese imperialism influenced the development of this centralized program. In fact, if any work of art is contextually compromised, as it is commissioned, designed, created and displayed at a political, cultural, artistic, religious and economic given time, the same applies to restoration programs that focus on these monuments.

While is true that since the ministry of João Belo (1878-1928) all decisions began to be guided by the desire of a political union of the territories and increasing oversight of the colonies from the Mainland Portugal, the international trend was clearly reverse. This opposition intensified, obviously, after the end of World War II (1939-1945) and, particularly, after the creation of the United Nations (UN) in 1945, when, simultaneously, the general desire for independence was being strengthened.

The truth is that while the "Estado Novo" remained adamant in its refusal to recognize the legitimacy of the independence movements, justifying its presence through an alleged civilizing mission, or "colonial alibi" [Medina, 2006], Italy lost Libya in 1951 and Italian Somalia nine years later, Spain lost its protectorate in Morocco in 1956, France also lost the authority in Morocco and Tunisia in the same year, losing, in 1958 and 1962, respectively, the French Guinea and Algeria. These victories of African independence movements took place, as we have seen, due to the intensification of national sentiments, but also thanks to the international pressure, embodied in the resolution 1514 (XV) of December 14th, 1960, from the UN General Assembly, which declared illegal throughout the colonial practice. "Recognizing that the peoples of the world ardently desire the end of colonialism in all its manifestations" [United Nations, 1969], the UN by the resolution 1542 (XV), understood the overseas provinces administered by Portugal as non-autonomous, and, consequently, illegal.

Following these events and international positions, Portugal suffered the first major blow: after the discrete loss of S. João Baptista de Ajudá's Fort in 1960, Portuguese India was invaded in 1961 by the Indian Union.

Simultaneously, in the early 60's, the situation in Cape Verde became complicated, corresponding to the gradual emergence of strong political organizations clearly anti-colonial. Indeed, after the initial experiences of the Association of African Sports and Recreation and the Movement for National Independence of

Guinea, more organized and consistent movements were created, such as the Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde led by Amílcar Cabral (1924-1973).

Thereby, in response to the struggle for freedom in Cape Verde, Guinea, Angola, Mozambique, India and S. Tomé and Príncipe, the dictatorship, mainly from the 60's, strengthened its colonial politic, seeking to justify, through the restoration of the ancestral architectonic testimonials, its legitimacy.

### **3 THE ARCHITECTS WHO WORKED ON THE MONUMENTS RESTORATION**

In order to understand the philosophy and program of Portuguese monuments restoration in the former colonies, it is necessary to consider the work carried out by three compelling figures: Architects Fernando Batalha (1908-), Luís Benavente (1902-1993) and Pedro Quirino da Fonseca (1922-2001).

Fernando Batalha, centenary architect of contemporary Portuguese architecture panorama, met the Portuguese African colonies in 1935, year of the first students cruise to those territories.

Although having been invited, in 1938, by the Provincial Governor to settle in Luanda and develop, obviously, government works, both of ephemeral and permanent architecture, and urbanism – such as Angola's Exhibition-Fair, Palace of Trade, Benguela urbanization, “Grand Hotel and movie theatre in the same city [Batalha, 2008] – Fernando Batalha eventually chart a different path.

Indeed, after the initial contact with Angolan cities, and yet have developed architectural and urban work, both public and private, Fernando Batalha became interested, mainly, in existing monuments and, consequently, in its research, conservation and recovery.

Employed, since 1938, with the pre-existing National Commission for Monuments, Fernando Batalha developed a remarkable work at the level of inventory, restoration, classification and disclosure of Portuguese monuments existent in Angola. Besides the work done mainly in the 50's and 60's of the twentieth century, we must emphasize the architect's perception, who, throughout his career in Angola, blamed the desire of progress for the subversion of traditional environments [Batalha, 1963]. Simultaneously, the Portuguese architect, tireless researcher and protector of the national heritage, understood the potential of monuments as tourist points of interest, this being the reason for why they should be protected and valued by the Government [Batalha, 1963].

Despite de strong position taken by the architect Batalha, the truth is that the secular Portuguese heritage in Angola was, even then, highly dilapidated and abandoned, a situation that, regardless the National Commission for Monuments action since 1922, had deteriorated with the armed conflicts of the second half of the twentieth century.

The architect Luís Benavente, unlike Batalha and Quirino da Fonseca, had, since 1958, multiple areas of action, having developed projects of monuments inventory, classification and restoration, both in S. Tomé and Príncipe, Cape Verde, Guinea and India. Essentially, Luís Benavente devoted himself to the Portuguese architecture heritage in the colonies where there were no offices exclusively created for that purpose or where, in the case of India, the number of monuments was overwhelming.

Devoted to architectonic heritage since 1934, and with the privilege of contact with the compelling Italian knowledge between 1948 and 1951 [Mariz, 2011], Luís Benavente, after his early professionals years, was appointed Director of the Portuguese National Monuments in 1952.

Assuming this important professional position to which must be added, following the Decree 41:787, a temporary assignment that was successively renewed at the Ministry of Overseas, Luís Benavente began an extraordinary journey through the Portuguese colonies, aiming, clearly, to safeguard the secular Portuguese heritage.

In this regard, Luís Benavente developed until the end of the Portuguese dictatorship, several works which have undeniable interest. Having started in S. Tomé and Príncipe in 1958 with the study of two churches and two forts, Benavente was eventually commissioned by the Ministry of Overseas to execute the above mentioned Decree 41:787 from 1958, by giving a new dynamism to the classification and restoration of overseas monuments [Benavente, 1960].

However, in order to accomplish his mission, Luís Benavente considered necessary a complete inventory, reason why the architect sent to all the overseas colonies a questionnaire regarding the existing monuments. Nevertheless, Luís Benavente realized that “the submitted material does not constitute or has characteristics

that allow to create an archive” [Benavente, 1960]. Despite the disappointing results, not by the absence of monuments but by the unfamiliarity and indifference, the architect retained his ideas and objectives, having even secured in 1962, a fertile field of action: Cape Verde.

In conclusion, we must consider the action of Luís Benavente as the one that – because of its scope – was endowed with greater unifying and centralizing tendency within the protection and restoration of the overseas Portuguese heritage.

Finally, consider the contribution of architect Pedro Quirino da Fonseca in Mozambique.

Graduated from the Lisbon’s School of Fine Arts, Quirino da Fonseca went to Mozambique in 1962, having as his main goal the reactivation of the sluggish National Commission of Monuments and Historic Relics.

Thus, between 1962 and 1975, Quirino da Fonseca travelled Mozambique, inventorying and classifying monuments or relics, and carrying out interventions of restoration according to the precepts of the time. Simultaneously, dynamically and responsibly, the architect devoted himself to underwater archaeology, recovering objects that would later enrich the local museums, such as the Mozambique’s Island Naval Archaeological Museum; organization of exhibitions; and also creation, coordination and collaboration in the journal *Monumenta*, excellent vehicle of dissemination for cultural activities and studies concerning Mozambique’s heritage [Fonseca, 1991].

#### 4 CONCLUSION

In spite of the actual unawareness, the Portuguese program intended for the restoration of overseas monuments during “Estado Novo”, has as undeniable importance.

By being a reflection of a ditatorial, colonial and nationalist politic, this program was, clearly, developed with double meaning. This because, in the late 50’s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Portuguese dictatorship, when severely internationally criticized for its colonial principle, proved to understood the need to strengthen its position. Thereby, the regime that was concerned with the Portuguese overseas authority and legitimacy, found in the historical buildings the greatest testimonies of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries maritime discoveries.

However, as a consequence of the course of time, negligence and unawareness, those monuments, presumptuous symbols of a golden age, were, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in a severe state of physical preservation.

Thus, it was developed a government program that had a single, yet complex, purpose: to restore and/or strenghten the Portuguese authority in Cape Verde, Mozambique, Angola, S. Tomé and Príncipe, Guinea and India.

As a conclusion, it is necessary to highlight the fact that the Portuguese heritage overseas, despite centuries of neglect and carelessness, benefited not only from the, though late, Government’s activity, but especially from the will of several Portuguese architects that, mostly from the 50’s [Fernandes, 2009] left for overseas colonies, fleeing, thus, a ditatorial and oppressive regime, and getting to places where work opportunities were virtually endless.

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