EVERYDAY LIFE IN MEDIEVAL PORTUGAL. A HISTORIOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW

MARTA HELENA DA CRUZ COELHO
UNIVERSIDADE DO COIMBRA
PORTUGAL

Date of receipt: 16th of September, 2013
Final date of acceptance: 17th of February, 2014

ABSTRACT

The historiographic overview presented begins with a very early book written in the 1960s by Antonio Henrique de Oliveira Marques, A Sociedade Medieval Portuguesa. Aspectos da Vida Quotidiana (Portuguese Medieval Society. Aspects of Everyday Life) and ends with the collective work published in 2012, História da Vida Privada em Portugal (A History of Private Life in Portugal), the first volume of which focuses on the Middle Ages. We seek to chart a course between these two milestones, setting out developments in studies of economic, social, religious and cultural history and the history of mentalities that have dealt with aspects of everyday life: the home, the dining table and other forms of conviviality, in more rural or urban environments; work days and festive occasions; devotions, religiosity and death; and family, women and children.

KEYWORDS

Medieval Society, Medieval Everyday Life, Medieval Historiography.

CAPITALIA VERBA

Societas Mediaevalis, Quotidiana Medii Aevi Vita, Historiographia Medievalis.
We begin this historiographic study by presenting a work from the 1960s and end with another from this decade of the 21st century. The former deals with everyday life in the Middle Ages and the latter with private life. Since the two concepts are not identical but do intersect, this of course allows us to present some conceptual points regarding them.

These works, separated by five decades, serve as beacons marking the historiographic journey followed in Portugal in this subject.

Studies of rural and urban history are analysed. These subjects were dealt with in the revitalised Portuguese economic and social history from the 1980s onwards. We have also analysed studies of religious history and the history of the nobility and social groups, seeking references to the everyday lives of men and women in different institutional and social contexts and in spatial and power frameworks.

As we move on towards the end of the 20th century, monographs, articles and chapters in synthesis studies set out many themes in everyday public and private life: women and childrearing, work, homes, diet, clothing, care, death, the body and sexuality, belief and spirituality, cultures, celebrations and games. They sought to make these subjects known through the conceptual and methodological deepening and broadening they provide and through new ground-breaking fields, many of which are still in development.


As we are well aware, everyday life and private life are not exactly the same thing but they are very closely-related concepts. One striking aspect is, of course, the very long period of time (more than half a century) between the two works, which makes us very much aware of the slow maturing of these issues in Portuguese historiography. However, before we go further into this historiographic development, let us look at the first work.

Oliveira Marques’s study, which has now gone through six editions in Portuguese (published in 1964, 1971, 1975, 1981, 1987 and 2012, respectively), and two in English, contains ten chapters dealing with the dining table, clothing, the home, hygiene and health, affections, work, childrearing, culture, entertainment and death.

---

1. The first five by Sá da Costa Editora and the last by Esfera dos Livros in a posthumous edition.
It thus deals with certain subjects that are material in nature, which have economic and social implications, as well as others that reveal behaviour, cultural aspects and mentalities. The author appears to have been fascinated by certain passages written by Costa Lobo in his study *História da Sociedade em Portugal* (History of Society in Portugal), but had very few Portuguese historiographic references in support of it. There were eminent geographers, ethnologists and historians at the Faculty of Arts in Lisbon (one cannot overlook Virgínia Rau’s important contribution here) who set him off on the path towards this innovative, ground-breaking work.3

That did not prevent the author from stating, in the preface to the first edition, that this was “a pioneering work with all of the disadvantages trailblazing always brings with it, such as inexperience and indecision in the face of unforeseen difficulties”.4 But he also confirms that there is less originality in the chapters on affection and belief and that the part on culture is a synthesis of works written on the subject.

Oliveira Marques explains the work’s structure with all the clarity of his methodical and pragmatic spirit, “Selection of the chapters was guided by life and the needs of every human being. Above all, humans need food, clothing and shelter. Avoiding death requires certain hygiene habits and an effort to maintain one’s health. Then comes love, work, prayer, education and fun. And finally death and burial”.5 He also mentions why certain issues were left out; either because they would make the work a lot longer or due to lack of research to form their basis; and he explains why the time period covered by the study runs from the 12th to the 15th centuries.

This work had very little historiographic impact in the 1960s and even in the 1970s. As I have written previously,6 it was actually only in the 1980s, after some more in-depth work on the clergy and the nobility, that all the ins and outs of the various strata in Portuguese medieval society were brought to the fore and the everyday aspects of living, feeling and dying were considered.

*A Sociedade Medieval Portuguesa* by Oliveira Marques then practically became “a Bible”. No-one considered the roles and rhythms of work for medieval people, their conditions of habitation, hygiene and health, the external manifestations of clothing and dining, their afflictions and beliefs, their cultural values or forms of entertainment or the way in which they faced death without reference to this fundamental work. And there they also found the identifying feature of that author’s entire scholarly

---


output: clear and systematic exposition of each subject, presented with clarity and objectivity, using explicitly detailed technical and scientific vocabulary, based on broad, systematic research of sources, which are always provided and fully identified. I expect that all researchers who have felt the need to turn to this work found in it some suggestion, bibliographical information or documentary clue that ended up being useful to them. As themes of everyday life, conviviality, feelings and religiosity became part of the circuit of teaching and learning, both in university and at other levels of education, this book was then read and reread and became an essential reference work. Its text and illustrations have in fact been used by many teachers and students as the basis for reconstructing past times today: for dressing characters, decorating medieval fairs, festivals, games, tournaments and theatres, or putting on ambassadorial processions or royal entrances.

Let us move on to the first volume of the second work, coordinated by Bernardo Vasconcelos e Sousa, *História da Vida Privada em Portugal*, edited by José Mattoso. It is made up of three parts, starting with places and spaces, then focussing on the body and finally reaching the soul. The first part distinguishes between urban and rural spaces, setting out the different room structures in palaces and houses. Structures of kinship, marriages and names used to describe family relationships are explained. Festival and convivial settings, and marks of exclusion and marginality, are revealed. The body is identified by the individual names, food used as sustenance, specific details concerning women and children, with attention given to sexuality, health and disease. Soul and spirit are revealed in the devotions and spirituality of men and women, the representation of death rituals and vision of the afterlife, and in mechanisms used to perpetuate the memory of individuals and lineages.

In general, the work is modelled on *História da Vida Privada* (A History of Private Life), published in 1983, which was outlined by Philippe Ariès with specific details filled in essentially by Georges Duby (and a group of contributors) after the former’s death.

Right at the beginning of this book, its managing editor, José Mattoso, explains the presuppositions and doubts expressed by Georges Duby. He raised problematic questions such as the dichotomy between public and private life and the no less thorny issue of the border between private life and everyday life as well as the concept of individual and individualism.

However, the book also contains a specific introduction by its editor and coordinator, who sets out the specific difficulties of a history of private life in medieval times. He of course includes the scarcity of sources, further reinforces the issue regarding the clerical texts that have come down to us, which are imbued with a normative strategy that conceals details of private life, while accentuating the late acquisition of individual consciousness of sin and the morality of human actions, and stresses the tricky border between public and private, especially in medieval times. Regarding the last point he writes, “we must underline, firstly, that the use

of the concept of private life for societies prior to the establishment of the Modern State must go hand-in-hand with precautions that relativise its meaning and scope; secondly, unlike in the Modern Age, the opposition between public and private may not be exclusive, in other words there are domains in which it is meaningless and there are even those that, either public or private.\textsuperscript{8}

The work was written with the participation of fourteen contributors, who were responsible for the various analysed subjects. The subjects are consistent within and among themselves and are largely the fruit of research and studies produced from the 1980s to 2010. This updated synthesis would not have been possible without them, just as historiographic development conditioned the structure of the collective work. Examination of this work can also be an exercise in the history of Portuguese medieval history.\textsuperscript{9}

\section*{2}

Many assessments of Portuguese medieval studies have already stressed how, in the 1980s, two major areas of study appeared: rural history and urban history.\textsuperscript{10} Five doctoral theses on rural history in that decade (by Robert Durand,\textsuperscript{11} Maria Helena Coelho,\textsuperscript{12} Iria Gonçalves,\textsuperscript{13} Pedro Barbosa\textsuperscript{14} and Rosa Marreiros\textsuperscript{15}) opened up the path to knowledge concerning aspects such as colonisation processes, land clearing and cultivation, production, prices and consumption, ways in which landlords operated, landlords’ rents and incomes, interaction of powers and rights over land

\textsuperscript{8} Mattoso, José, dir.; Sousa, Bernardo Vasconcelos e. Historia da Vida Privada em Portugal...: 21.


\textsuperscript{15} Marreiros, Maria Rosa Ferreira. Propriedade fundiária e rendas da coroa no reinado de D. Dinis: Guimarães. Coimbra: Universidade do Coimbra (PhD Dissertation), 1990.
possession, rural aristocracies, those who worked the land (from peasants to wage-earners), work rhythms and festival times, village solidarity, ways of life, peasant behaviour and mentalities. Studies of agrarian and rural history extended well into the 1990s and the following decades but as time went by there was somewhat of a slowdown in them.16

Oliveira Marques was the model and motivation behind many of these studies with the 1962 publication of his work, *Introdução à História da Agricultura em Portugal* (Introduction to the History of Agriculture in Portugal). He also raised the question of cereals (in the 1980s) at the Faculty of Social and Human Science at Universidade Nova de Lisboa. He was a master of urban history who was extraordinarily fertile in producing monographs on the main towns and cities from the north to the south of Portugal.17 Since then medieval urban planning has been made known with its streets, neighbourhoods, houses, prestigious religious or secular public buildings and infrastructure for urban storage, supply and transformation. This revealed household and family units, social stratification and economic activities from means of production to commerce and services, as well as religiosity, urban coexistence and sociability in the form of parish, fraternal and welfare networks. We can see the profiles of lineages and elites of power and governance and how they behaved as a power group or groups, translated into hierarchies, symbols, rituals and urban ceremonies.18 At the

point where rural and city studies intersect deeper knowledge has been gained of relationships between urban centres at tense or peaceful times, village boundaries, and the mentalities and behaviour of people from the countryside and the city.19

There is another historian whose contributions are fundamental to the historiographic subject we are dealing with and whose presence marks the 1950s and 1960s, opening up new research fields. He is obviously José Mattoso who, in 1962, published his study L’Abbaye de Pendorada des origines à 1160 and, in 1968, his doctoral thesis Les monastères du diocese de Porto de l’an mille à 1200.

Since then, studies of male and female monastic houses under different rules and forms of observance, from Benedictines and Cistercians to Canons Regular of St. Augustine, Dominicans, Franciscans, the Clarisses and, more recently, hermits, followed.20 While the work began with knowledge of male monasteries, from the 1980s and 1990s, under the influence of openness to studying the role of women, female institutions had a great attraction to researchers. And while most of these studies were limited to knowledge of the institution’s organisational and administrative structure, as well as its wealth and income, some of them also reveal aspects of the religious community’s life, as guided by its superiors, in their everyday prayer, liturgical offices and work and in their internal coexistence. They also unveil the family origins of their members and links of affection, complicity and power established with relatives and lineage both inside and outside of the monastic institution.

As has often been verified, sisters, aunts, nieces and cousins actually lived together in monastic houses for women. Some of those women even experienced a form of “artificial maternity” and actual “heredity” by bequeathing positions and goods to their descendants. For example, the position of abbess passing from an aunt to a niece. These related nuns protected, helped and supported one another through the religious institution and the influential power of their family, protecting it and enhancing its prestige in a material, spiritual, symbolic and cultural sense. Noblewomen thus ceased to be merely a source of fertile


wealth for lineages through marriage and also became fertile wealth for religion, especially through the power some of them managed to exercise by rising to the position of abbess.\textsuperscript{21}

Another area of research on which José Mattoso embarked, the analysis of nobility, also contributed to these latter approaches. Following the meticulous, insightful and useful critical edition of \textit{Livros Velhos de Linhagens} (Old Books of Lineages) and \textit{Livro de Linhagens} (Book of Lineages) by Conde D. Pedro, which he issued with Joseph Piel in 1980, this specialist gave us works such as \textit{A Nobreza Medieval Portuguesa. A Família e o Poder} (Portuguese Medieval Nobility. The Family and Power), published in 1981,\textsuperscript{22} and \textit{Ricos-Homens, Infanções e Cavaleiros. A nobreza medieval portuguesa nos séculos XI e XII} (Ricos-Homens, Infanções and Cavaleiros. The Medieval Portuguese Nobility in the 11th and 12th centuries) published the following year.\textsuperscript{23}

These works revealed the hierarchy established among the most ancient county nobility in their times of ascendance and decadence and the rise of some families of \textit{infanções}, the intermediate category of nobility, to \textit{ricos-homens}, the highest level of social standing and power. This has shown us kinship and family structures, marriage policies, power strategies, cultural environments, alliances between Court and Church, and mechanisms for consolidating and perpetuating the memory of individuals and lineages.

This area of nobility studies, which seduced many young researchers in the country, from Luís Krus in Lisbon\textsuperscript{24} to Leontina Ventura\textsuperscript{25} and António Resende\textsuperscript{26} in Coimbra and José Augusto Pizarro\textsuperscript{27} in Oporto, to mention just a few of the first ones, has had an extensive impact on our ability to comprehend medieval society and the composition of social groups. Names, families, kinship,\textsuperscript{28} women,
Everyday life in Medieval Portugal

33

marriage, poetry, chivalry, palaces, vassals, officials, lordly and courtly life and homes, power and memory, death and burial became emerging subjects that took on a new dimension in light of other concepts and methodologies of anthropology and sociology, which opened up interdisciplinary paths and cut across approaches and knowledge areas. Various noble houses became known, such as Bragança, Vila Real and the home of Infante D. Henrique, together with various lineages, such as the Coutinhos, Melos, Meneses and Pimentéis29 and their family histories and intrigues, as well as their political journeys and strategies.30

At the same time, many aspects of the everyday lives of other social groups were clarified. That was the case for the Jews, about whom Maria José Ferro Tavares wrote two essential works, one on the 14th century and the other on the 15th.31 These told us about their family structure, housing context and relationships among Jews and between Jews and Christians. The poor, the sick and those on the margins of society32 were studied by the same historian33 as well as by Baquero Moreno, who analysed those on society’s margins, pack-


30. A balance of these studies on nobility is in Mattoso, José; Ventura, Leontina; Pizarro, José Augusto de Sotto Mayor; Sousa, Bernardo Vasconcelos: “The Medieval Portuguese Nobility”, The historiography of medieval Portugal c. 1950-2010, José Mattoso, dir., Maria de Lurdes Rosa, Bernardo Vasconcelos e Sousa, Maria João Branco, eds. Lisbon: Instituto de Estudos Medievais, 2011: 401-423.


animal drivers, travellers and pilgrims, as well as issues of marriage and disease.\textsuperscript{34} Researchers also did not overlook the perception of welfare solidarity.\textsuperscript{35}

Two synthesis studies on the history of Portugal, which came out in the 1980s, were thus able to consider some of these historiographic contributions.\textsuperscript{36} In the book \textit{Identificação de um país} (Identification of a country), José Mattoso, seeking to understand how “people saw the world and organised themselves in an attempt to dominate reality”, presents us with the framework in which work was performed for the lord or manor, the workers, the framework of power and the powerful, people’s kinship and family structures and their mentality, culture, imaginations and systems of representation and memory. In turn, Oliveira Marques, following his tastes and paths, wrote a chapter in \textit{Portugal na Crise dos Séculos XIV e XV} (Portugal in the Crisis of the 14\textsuperscript{th} and 15\textsuperscript{th} Centuries)\textsuperscript{37} on everyday life, dealing with food, clothing, housing, health and hygiene, entertainment and affections in the late middle ages.

However, during the fertile decades of the 1980s and 1990s, Portuguese historiography also received influences from abroad. We have previously mentioned the refreshing impact of the 5 volumes of the \textit{Histoire de la vie Privé} edited by Philipe Ariès and Georges Duby and published between 1985 and 1987. This work was soon translated into Portuguese between 1989 and 1991, with a scholarly revision by Armando Luís de Carvalho Homem. Shortly afterwards, came the 1991-1992 publication of the 5 volumes of \textit{Storia delle Donne}, edited by Georges Duby and Michelle Perrot, which were translated into Portuguese between 1993 and 1995,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{35} Among others Coelho, Maria Helena da Cruz. “As confrarias medievais portuguesas: espaços de solidariedades na vida e na morte”, \textit{Actas da XIX Semana de Estudos Medievales de Estella. Confradias, gremios, solidaridades en la Europa Medieval}. Estella: Gobierno de Navarra, 1993: 149-183.
  \item \textsuperscript{36} Mattoso, José. \textit{Identificação de um país. Ensaios sobre as origens de Portugal}. 1096-1325. Lisbon: Editorial Estampa, 1985.
\end{itemize}
with a scholarly revision by Maria Helena da Cruz Coelho, Irene Maria Vaquinhas, Leontina Ventura and Guilhermina Mota.

Nevertheless, it must be said that Portuguese historians were attentive to the subject of women and their past, which the April Revolution challenged and committed them to do. The Institute of Economic and Social History at the Faculty of Arts in Coimbra held a conference on Women in Portuguese Society (Historic Overview and Current Prospects) on 20 to 22 March 1985. The two volumes of the conference proceedings were published the following year. 38 In his opening speech, the Chairman of the Organising Committee, Dr António de Oliveira, said,

O historiador é filho do seu tempo e o tempo coevo é de mutação e de confronto ideológico. A historiografia contemporânea não podia, por isso, manter-se à margem das reivindicações das mulheres, assumindo uma atitude de silêncio. Nem tão-pouco podia deixar de atentar num dos resultados da nova história social, a qual já havia descoberto a mulher, mas não propriamente a condição feminina, pela via interdisciplinar de outras ciências humanas e sociais.

In this context, he called for a convergence of Historical Demographics, Historical Sociology and Social Anthropology so that, através de novos conceitos operatórios, o protagonismo das mulheres no devir histórico deixe (asse) de permanecer oculto e invisível pela eloquência do silêncio. 39 And, in fact, after these internal and external alarms, studies of the history of women multiplied, followed by the history of gender throughout all eras, albeit with greater importance given to the contemporary era. The individual roles they played as queens, princesses, suzerains, diplomats, noblewomen and those from other social strata, women in secular or religious life, anonymous women who worked in the fields or in the cities, women who were wives, mothers and daughters, women legitimated by marriage or living as concubines or in unmarried cohabitation, women with good and bad reputations, were rescued from medieval times. 40

38. Published in Coimbra, Instituto de História Económica e Social-Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Coimbra, 1986. Here there are studies for medieval times by José Mattoso, Maria Helena da Cruz Coelho, Leontina Ventura, Maria Ângela V. da Rocha Beirante, Amélia Aguilar Andrade, Irene Freire Nunes, António Resende de Oliveira, José Geraldes Freire, Maria Alegria Fernandes Marques, Isaías da Rosa Pereira, Salvador Dias Arnaut and Humberto Baquero Moreno.

39. “Historians are children of their time and the current time is one of change and ideological confrontation. Therefore, contemporary historiography cannot stand on the sidelines in the face of women’s claims and adopt an attitude of silence. Nor can it neglect the results of the new social history, which has discovered women, though not the female condition as such, through interdisciplinarity with other human and social sciences”; “through new operating concepts, the role of women in history may no longer be left hidden and invisible by the eloquence of silence”. Oliveira, António de. “A apresentação”, A Mulher na Sociedade Portuguesa: visão histórica e perspectivas actuais, Coimbra: Instituto de História Económica e Social-Faculdade de letras da Universidade de Coimbra, 1986: 10, 11.

These studies, mixed with our historiographic contributions, finally brought us to a doctoral thesis defended in 2004 and published three years later on: *A criança na sociedade medieval portuguesa* (Childrearing in medieval Portuguese society). This was very suggestively structured into chapters titled Birth, Growing Up, Learning, Protecting, Falling Ill, Dying and Loving. As mentioned above, this restores to us frameworks of time and space that show us the joys of children being born and the bitter pain of losing them, the natural setting of children growing and being brought up, rituals of baptism and other sacraments that protected them, feelings of love and family affections, and, on a darker note, the diseases that struck them and so often snatched them away from this earthly life. It is easy to see how this work is a culmination and confluence of many different studies on everyday life and private life.

As in the case of women, current historiography has continued to expand our knowledge of the composition of medieval society with new nuances. In her doctoral thesis, Maria Filomena Barros conducted an in-depth examination of the Muslim minority from the 12th to 15th centuries, covering its evolutionary process, its population structure and behaviour, its communes, its property and economic activity, and its social hierarchy and vectors of socialisation. She studied the times and spaces of the Moors, taking an anthropological approach, considering identity and otherness, ethnicity and acculturation across this social group. The central thread running through her work is the desire to know whether the cultural connotations of the Muslims diverged from or, by contrast, converged with the rest of medieval Portuguese society.

In Oporto, Sérgio Ferreira’s master’s degree thesis dealt with the equation between the prices of many goods and raw materials and the wages of the rural and urban population of artisans and small traders, providing clues regarding consumption...
levels and living standards. More recently, Arnaldo de Melo focused on trades and artisans in the urban context of Oporto, clarifying the forms and means of professional, fraternal, welfare and political association among this social group.

In his major work on justice and criminality, Luís Miguel Duarte studied justice and the law, crime and disorder, punishment and pardon, and provided a solid portrayal of the shadows of society in individual and group acts of violence and their perpetrators, agitation and disturbances, enabling us to see the fears of wrongdoers, those who lived on society’s margins and gangs, who disturbed the everyday lives of medieval people.

We cannot overlook the significant advance and renewed methodological and interpretive questioning of military history, which has revealed to us, in contexts of everyday life in wartime, not only questions such as recruitment, equipping and collection of extra taxes but also problems with quartering and provisioning of armies, hunger and sieges, the scenario of destruction of fields and cities in the wake of war and even beliefs and religious devotion, military ethics, and the behaviour, bravery or fear of men in military operations.

It is also necessary to take into account the development of other subjects within the scope of the historiography of everyday and private life.

One of the most studied subjects is the history of death. Hermínia Vilar presented *A vivência da morte no Portugal medieval. A Estremadura Portuguesa (1300 a 1500)* (The Experience of Death in Medieval Portugal. Portuguese Estremadura (1300 to 1500)) as a master’s dissertation, which was published in 1995. Following on from pioneering works such as those by Vovelle, Philipe Ariès, Jacques Chifolleau and Marie-Thérèse Lorcin, she carried out an in-depth study of the wills of some men and women in Coimbra, Santarém and Torres Vedras. Using the wills as a primary source, she sought to unveil how concern with individual salvation translated into

49. About this theme a notable early work is Martins, Mário: *Introdução histórica à vivência do tempo e da morte*. Braga: Livraria Cruz, 1969.
51. Read the historiographical context in which the author situates their work (Vilar, Hermínia. *A vivência da morte no Portugal medieval...*: 21-33).
rites of passage, glimpsing the afterlife of medieval people, and the care taken with burial and the perpetuation of memory. She also focussed on the division of wealth by testators and sought to discover their material and spiritual solidarity with family members, friends, clients and servants, the poor and sick, and houses of mercy or other religious institutions.

One year on, in *O reino dos Mortos na Idade Média Peninsular* (The Kingdom of the Dead in the Iberian Middle Ages), 52 José Mattoso drew together work written by him and other young researchers, which went deeper into medieval eschatological thought and the rituals and imagination of death, examining a variety of other sources ranging from synods and monastic rules to chronicles, poetry and patristics.

In the 21st century, Maria de Lurdes Rosa returned to this area in her doctoral thesis on the founding of funeral chapels and the affirmation that the soul was a legal subject53. Furthermore, on the path of knowledge crossover, archaeologists’ contributions to graves and rites of cremation or burial and anthropologists’ contributions concerning palaeobiology have revealed many different pathologies that are signs of work, diet, age and life events, as well as funereal rites and beliefs in the afterlife.54

In her doctoral thesis, Mário Barroca studies the relationship between epigraphy and death in epitaphs, which are likewise public and, through writing and art, reveal the faith many Christians had in another life after death and also their desire for perpetuation in the earthly world.55

Accordingly, many works by art historians, of greater or lesser extent, on tombs suggest appealing propositions for reading the artistic grammar of commemorative arches and plaques. Decoding the iconography of sculptures, paintings, heraldry, symbols and signs found in them gives us a more in-depth understanding of the eschatological thought of medieval people, the marks that identified them and individualised their lives and families and their desire to overcome annihilation by

---

death through remembrance of the individual and the lineage by generations to come and down the centuries.56

Knowledge of spirituality and the medieval religious behaviour of the clergy and, hitherto less-known, the laity, have been largely expanded and ideals of saintliness for men and women have been studied, showing us how religious mentalities have evolved over the centuries. These spiritual and devotional experiences of medieval society were set out in the first volume of the collective work *História Religiosa de Portugal* (Religious History of Portugal) published in 2000 and in *Dicionário de História Religiosa de Portugal* (Dictionary of the Religious History of Portugal).57

As a counterpoint, there were important developments in some facets of the everyday material life of medieval people through interdisciplinary contributions involving the methodology and scientific advances of various social and human sciences and, in particular, greater emphasis on medieval archaeology.

One major subject was diet and the medieval dining table. Following on from Salvador Dias Arnaut’s pioneering work, historians such as Iria Gonçalves, Maria José Santos and Maria Helena Coelho,58 together with many other academics, have written on food from bread to wine, from meat to fish, from vegetables to fruit and the medieval diet, cooking and meal preparation, culinary tastes and fashions, recipes and dieting books, the running of the kitchen, and rural or urban frameworks for the diet of social groups. The dining table has been unveiled and serving sets and servers have been made known together with dining ceremony, etiquette and ritual. Everyday meals and festive banquets have been considered as well as the art of dining in literature and art. This enabled the publication, during the current decade, of the collective work *A mesa dos Reis de Portugal* (The Table of the Kings of Portugal),59 which covers medieval and modern times and deals with topics such as *Casa e ofícios da mesa* (“The home and trades of the table”), *A mesa dos reis. Espaços, Objectos e utências* (“The table of kings. Spaces, objects and usages”), *Os reis à

56. There are many books and articles on the tumularia. A summary can be obtained from some chapters devoted to the subject in: Pereira, Paulo, dir., *História de Arte Portuguesa*. Lisbon: Temas e Debates, 1995: I, II.
mesa: cerimónias e etiquetas (“Kings at table: ceremonies and etiquette”), *Os alimentos* (“Food”), and *Imagens e representações da mesa* (“Images and representations of the table”). Great emphasis has also been placed on the interplay between dietary habits and religions, with careful examination of the dietary precepts of certain monastic rules or ‘fat’ and ‘thin’ days, meat or fish, fasting and abstinence for all Christians, together with the dietary rules of Muslim and Jewish believers.60

Our ancestors’ living space has also become better understood by historians with the support of architects and archaeologists. Maria da Conceição Falcão, Sílvio Conde and Maria Luísa Trindade61 have provided us with studies that focus on current construction, especially in urban environments, and the materials used, sizes, compartmentalisation and their material value and prestige. José Custódio Vieira da Silva, an art historian, looked deeper into the subject of royal and noble palaces62 and Mário Barroca focused on lordly residences, many of which were fortified, with very significant archaeological contributions.63 Based on these works we can better understand how the simplest folk lived in a single room, dominated by the fireplace, providing both heat and light, where they ate and slept, while the wealthiest lived in roomy houses or even palaces with other refinements such as separate kitchens which even had chimneys, dining rooms and private bedrooms as well as rooms for other domestic tasks and even spaces specifically for hygiene.

Alongside food and the home, clothing has continued to be studied, based on knowledge of fabrics, firstly through study of written sources and nowadays also through conservation and restoration techniques and sciences and detailed reconstruction of clothing from literature and painting.64

60. For the table and food in the 12th to the 16th centuries, see the studies by Rita Costa Gomes, Ana Maria S. A. Rodrigues, Isabel dos Guimarães Sá, Iria Gonçalves, Ana Isabel Buescu, Maria José Palla, Maria Adelaida Miranda and Luís Correia de Sousa.


Important contributions from literary and artistic studies, especially iconography, have also given rise to new progress in the history of the body, sexuality, gestures, cultures and mentalities in medieval times. José Mattoso himself has given seminars and directed postgraduate studies of these areas.

While Mário Martins was very early in his study of satire, laughter, parody, allegories and symbols in medieval literature, just as he had even earlier examined pilgrimage routes and miracles, Luís Krus and others continued to explore sexual satire, the cult of relics, the experience of time and the representation of space. The participants in the conference on the body and gesture in medieval civilization also narrowed down the approaches to these subjects, covering bodies and gestures seen in names, novels, treatises and tapestries, observing the sacredness of gestures or ritual aspects of the body in music and dance; and capturing body language, allegories and symbols, gestures, smiles and taunts in lyrical poetry and doctrinal works in medieval times.

In the same way, following on from António José Saraiva’s outstanding História da Cultura em Portugal (History of Culture in Portugal), research has diversified into subjects such as troubadour poetry, chronicles, chivalric romances, hagiographies and books of miracles, books of hours and confession manuals, making it possible to reconstruct palace and courtly cultural settings together with teachings from doctrine that reached the community of believers through clerical preaching.


imposing models and codes of belief, devotion and morality, which moulded social and religious behaviour.71

Studies have also been carried out (and we will list the topics so as not to be over-extensive) on male and female names, broken down into personal names, patronyms and nicknames, and names of country and city folk. Notable among these are the studies by Iria Gonçalves.72 There have also been studies of games, entertainment, festivals and conviviality.73

Echoing these focuses once again, several studies were brought together in 2004 in *Estudos Medievais. Quotidiano Medieval: Imaginário, Representação e Práticas* (Medieval Studies. Every Medieval Life: the Imagination, Representation and Practices).74 These used many different sources (chansonniers, lyrical poetry in praise of the Virgin


Everyday Life in Medieval Portugal

Mary, isolated documents, recipes, illuminated manuscripts, pottery toys and human skeletons) and a range of the latest methodologies to illuminate specific aspects of everyday life or the ideological suppositions behind them. As the author of the preface wrote, what we learn from them is

O ser humano, dividido entre o corpo e o espírito, entre o sagrado e o profano, entre a norma e o desvio, entre a representação e a realidade. Aspectos fundamentais como a sexualidade e o erotismo, a alimentação e o lazer, a doença, a devoção religiosa são elucidados, mas sempre tendo presente que estavam condicionados, nas suas formas e interpretações, pela hierarquia social predominante e pelas concepções em vigor sobre a natureza, o homem e Deus. 75

The confluence of Portuguese studies of everyday and private subjects brings us, in the present day, to the study of biographies. Biographies of kings, queens, princes and princesses, together with reconstructions of royal courts in various medieval times. While biographies of all and any man or woman famous in society, for whatever reason, are now in fashion, the fact is that biography, as a historiographic genre, only began on solid scientific foundations in our country at the beginning of the 21st century, as a result of the momentum and drawing together of various strands of history from the end of the previous century. Biography, telling the story of a man or a women, whether individually or collectively and in society, is a subject of choice for converging analyses of everyday life or unique and unrepeatable events, shared or extraordinary times of celebration and grief, and also for perceiving intimate and private settings and relationships or public roles and spaces.

In her thesis, A Corte dos reis de Portugal no final da Idade Média (The Court of the Kings of Portugal at the end of the Middle Ages), which Rita Costa Gomes defended in 1994,76 she not only gave us knowledge of courtly people, spaces and services, but also brought to life everyday court usages and ceremonies, large-scale ceremonies and occasional rituals. In their study of the first three kings of Portugal, Maria Alegria Fernandes Marques and João Soalheiro77 paid attention to their family members and servants, while travelling and in residence in palaces but they particularly set out the framework for the king’s table as well as court fashion, entertainment and culture.

In the same way, all the historians who wrote biographies of the first and second dynasty of Portuguese kings published by Círculo de Leitores,78 in addition to

75. “the human being, divided between body and spirit, between sacred and profane, between the right and wrong path, between representation and reality. Fundamental aspects such as sexuality and eroticism, food and leisure, disease and religious devotion are elucidated but always bearing in mind that their forms and interpretations were conditioned by the predominant social hierarchy and by current conceptions of nature, mankind and God.” Andrade, Amélia Aguiar. “Nota Liminar”, Estudos Medievais. Quotidiano Medieval...: 10.
showing them in the family and court context, sought to unveil ties of affection with close or more distant relatives, find out about legitimate or illegitimate feelings of love, discover signs of complicity and friendship with faithful vassals, officials and servants, or hatred and vengeance towards those who opposed them and their enemies. Many of them also illustrated aspects of their itinerant or sedentary everyday lives in palaces, castles or monasteries, examining service in the chamber, at table and in the chapel, discovering court tastes, fashions, entertainment and culture, and revealing ceremonies and more festive days on which military and political feats were commemorated, or the royal family’s births, marriages or deaths, royal entries and processions, acts and mechanisms of propaganda and legitimisation of royalty. They all examined the kings’ deaths and some focused on their physical or psychological diseases, as well as their wills, graves and their desire and actions taken to perpetuate their memory.

The same collection also published biographies of the queens and some princesses, which went into greater depth on the matter of sentiments. The authors revealed the roles of such women as daughters, wives and mothers together with their duty to act as the head and model for damsels and ladies at court, as ladies and suzerains, as agents of influence and diplomacy in domestic and foreign affairs, as promoters of social work and the common good through works of charity and protection of the destitute and supporting fraternal, welfare and religious institutions.

Echoes of the everyday and private lives of their subjects are also repeatedly found in the two briefest collections of biographies of kings, queens and princesses sponsored by the Portuguese Academy of History.


In this second decade of the 21st century, we have now arrived at a culmination of studies of everyday and private life arising from the development of several subjects of medieval Portuguese historiography. It can clearly be seen that these lesser-known or less visible facets of the past of men and women in medieval times have been revealed by the multiplicity and cross-referencing of sources (written, documentary or literary sources, archaeological and artistic sources) and by deepening knowledge and expanding horizons through interdisciplinary studies that cut across knowledge areas and call upon various social and human sciences as well as the aforementioned exact sciences.

We do not think the subject has been exhausted.

While in Portugal exploration of written and artistic sources has been more intense, other viewpoints, questions and approaches could still be pursued in analysing them and there will be no end to the new and surprising knowledge produced by medieval archaeology.

Perhaps it is now time for Portuguese historians to reflect on the ways and means of representing and making these historic subjects known through textbooks and manuals for various levels of education; scientific debates on historic recreations; or questioning of its message and adapting it for different audiences and media.

The settings and contents of the everyday life of medieval people are subjects that appeal to and challenge the curiosity of present-day people. We therefore call for further, lively debate, with all due pertinence and intensity, and a broad and inevitable questioning of the writing of history and the writing of historical fiction.

---