

Nuno Gonçalo Monteiro (org.), José Mattoso (dir.). *História da vida privada em Portugal. A Idade Moderna*. Lisbon: Círculo de Leitores, 2011. ISBN: 9789896441487.

From the private to the concealed

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The second volume of the collection published by *Círculo de Leitores* has as an inevitable reference the pioneering 1986 French edition. However, since it was written at a different historiographic moment and is about the more strictly delineated context of Portugal in the modern era, the book, organized by Nuno Monteiro under the direction of José Mattoso, avoids using the paradigms of the justice system and a financially expert state, as well as that of the modern family, to explain the emergence of a private sphere in Portugal as opposed to the public one. In the introduction, Monteiro warns about the distinction that is frequently made between the two spheres, and which has only come to be established in contemporary times. Aware of the relative anachronism of the proposal that is made for such a period, the authors do their best to approach subjects that are considered today as belonging to the private sphere, and which were considered differently in the Portugal of the modern era: mainly, the domestic space and the house of a noble family. Therefore, the volume compares the models proposed by Habermas, Elias and Ariès with the results of recent research undertaken in Portuguese historiography. The theologism inherent in the idea of modernization is challenged, as is the use of a French-based chronology in describing the history of Portugal, in which the affirmation of the monarchy was not linear in its development and the spread of reading and writing was strictly limited to the period studied. The authors are thus able to consider the subject by first of all questioning its source. This is in fact a distinct feature of the book: the constant crisscrossing of theory and empiricism that characterizes the historian's good work. While, in the modern era, the Portuguese did not travel so much to other European kingdoms, they nonetheless traveled throughout Spain in the period when the two crowns were united, and across overseas lands, constructing their own private sphere linked to the colonial world, especially to Portuguese America. The authors also tried not to write a history of everyday life or of material culture, although the dividing line between these aspects and

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“private life” is a thin one. This can be clearly seen in this book and in the companion version of the history of private life in Brazil, published in 1997.

The volume being reviewed here is divided into five parts. The first one deals with the normalizing powers of the monarchy and the Church—especially the post-Tridentine one—exercised in conjunction with the local authorities. Consisting of two chapters, one by António Manuel Hespanha and another by Joaquim Ramos de Carvalho, this part reveals a remarkable discrepancy in the two authors’ approaches. Hespanha adopts macro-analysis to explain the importance of the order and self-control of the Iberian world in a society that kept itself under surveillance. He also describes the class of judges, the beneficiaries of a specialized knowledge and the holders of important positions in royal circles, as a social group that remained above the plurality of powers. Forming family dynasties, judges had their own written culture in line with a world dominated by Latin Law—an almost sacred language. Their abstract and hermetic discourse was a means of ensuring both social distinction and legal efficiency. In turn, Ramos de Carvalho assesses individuals and territories in a much more concrete way, filled with a great wealth of facts, and references to behaviors in which the private sphere was identified with illicit or concealed practices, including pastoral visits, official inquiries, indictments, and penalties. Within this sphere, the Tridentine rulings did not meet with any significant opposition from the royal power in Portugal, unlike in other European countries. A society was thus built, in which the links between the private and the public spheres were marked by the concepts of salvation and sin.

In the second part, which deals with the relations between individuals and families, Isabel dos Guimarães Sá considers the distinct treatment given by parents to children in comparison with youths, at a time when the child mortality rate finally began to be reduced. Thus, young Portuguese people did not have much room for decision-making: first-born children were given little education due to the *morgadio* (entail) system, trips within Europe rarely took place, and manuals of etiquette and civility were seldom seen either, although they were abundant in the rest of Europe. As to the underprivileged, those from the lowest social strata were breastfed by their biological mothers, and the ever-greater spread of the abandonment of children gave rise to the foundling wheel system in 1783. In many of the topics she discusses, the author relativizes the ideas proposed by Ariès regarding childhood and the modern family, since, with respect to children, the sphere of the family was brought more and more under public control by the Church or the Crown. In turn, Ramos de Carvalho approaches sexuality from the viewpoint of the “European marriage standard,”

as applied to Portugal, noting that people tended to marry later in life, as well as the large number of unmarried persons. In keeping with this logic, the interesting testimony of an older, orphan woman, living in Soure at the beginning of the eighteenth century, makes perfect sense, when she says that she had sexual intercourse before marriage in order to catch an improbable husband. In this case, as in others, sexual life was based on the control of instincts through late marriages, contraception and Church pressure. However, the efficacy of the system gave rise to conflicts and hesitations regarding illegitimate sexuality. The theme of the family sphere acting as a hindrance to the private sphere is once again discussed in Gonalo Monteiro’s chapter on the noble house—which is seen as being very different from the notion of the “modern family” and is considered by the author to be a central feature of the society that he studied. Countering the idea that nobles were in tune with the social and psychological changes taking place in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Monteiro observes the greater control exercised over marriages by the Portuguese monarchy in the period, with the strengthening of the system of primogeniture and the transmission of nobility through either paternity or maternity—a situation that was different from the one found in other European countries. But this difference was not regarded as a sign of backwardness or peripherality, as, in the sixteenth century, the Iberian Peninsula was seen as the frame of reference, the center from which standards emanated.

Part 3 is the longest section in the book, giving accounts of experiences of the private sphere in many different contexts. Pedro Cardim studies the Royal court with clear reference to Norbert Elias, including providing a treatment of the different relations between an individual and society. One may wonder to what extent this French model fitted the reality of Portugal, where there was no court nobility until the mid-sixteenth century and the austerity practiced by the first kings from the House of Bragana resulted in a court of very little sophistication in the seventeenth century. Therefore, he assumes that the affirmation of the court as a social archetype was a more gradual process in Portugal than in other European countries. Nonetheless, the author analyzes some letters from courtesans, kings and queens, devoting his attention to such topics as reserved areas in the palace, family life in the court, and, lastly, “private” ministers or Royal favorites, with special attention being paid to the Count of Castelo Melhor and to the Marquis of Pombal. Following on from this, Mafalda Soares da Cunha and Nuno Monteiro return to the topic of the “great houses,” analyzing them as an environment that was particularly propitious to the development of a private sphere. In Portugal, the great noble houses originated from royal grace and favor, and mingled with the nobles who were summoned to the meetings

of the court. In the seventeenth century, the most important Portuguese noblemen moved to Lisbon. Though they were not particularly sophisticated, these great houses had many storeys and large numbers of people living in them: lords, heirs (even married ones), brothers, uncles, and servants. The number of servants—mostly male but also including male and female slaves—was related to the importance of the house owner, as was the case in Madrid, although the situation was different in England and France. The authors wonder if the large number of servants might explain the widespread violence that occurred in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Lisbon. As far as the distribution of the internal spaces is concerned, there was an increase in the size of both corridors and the “private” area; although the kitchen also remained very large. There was no notable attachment to the arts and there were few (but significant) noblemen who were affiliated to literary academies. The analysis of libraries and private collections was impaired by the 1755 earthquake.

Also in Part 3, Fernanda Olival deals with the place of the private sphere among the lower and intermediate classes. Faced with the difficult task of studying such heterogeneous social groups, the prospect of finding “many people in one single house” is detailed by the author based on parish and city council records from many parts of the country. However, the people aggregated in this way were not only blood relatives: apprentices lived with their masters; travelling salesmen lived with merchants. In any case, the average size of a family would be similar to the European average of four to seven people. Inside households, privacy in relation to the street was limited by the existence of unglazed windows, and, in relation to neighbors, by gaps in the walls. Internal divisions varied, and these differences are also assessed here in terms of Portuguese geographical regions, with the results being shown in tables, even though it is known that the accuracy of these was restricted by the different social levels. Olival writes about the use of mattresses, mats, beds, bed frames, oratories, and toilets—flirting with the material culture. In the field of personal hygiene, she uses French examples to underline its precarious existence in Portugal, investigating the Portuguese case with the help of inventories and city records. Briefly, the house of the lower and intermediate classes was more of a shelter than an intimate haven, while “privacy” was associated with the forbidden or the hidden. Even the spouse of a crypto-Jew could conceal the tendencies of his or her partner.

Isabel de Sá’s other chapter deals with environments that changed the identity of those who lived in them. In the case of female convents, inhabited either by Poor Clares or Discalced Carmelites, the author writes about the former group’s dependency on alms, as

well as about their relationship with secular affairs, devout worship, and the principles of joining a religious order. She then writes about the wearing of sackcloth, about discipline at the convent, and about the wheel and perforated partitions as the means of communication with the outside, as well as about the fashion for becoming a nun in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Indeed, many nuns were educated women, who were attractive to men. But convent writings tended to talk about mystical experiences and the risks of inquisitorial persecution, especially in the case of New Christians. What is missing in this book is a reference to life in male monasteries. The author's consultation of the works of Francisco Manuel de Melo and Rafael Bluteau enables her to discuss the asylums offering women the chance for temporary shelter, as well as the Houses of Mercy, their distribution of marriage dowries and the secret assistance they provided to the "new poor"—a class of people that was quite different from those who exhibited their extreme poverty in hospitals. There were also houses that offered support to prisoners, since, in Portuguese prisons, segregation was not complete. However, the conditions of hygiene in prisons were dreadful, crime and disease were rampant there, and they were also used to house the mentally ill.

Portugal was one of the first colonial powers to resort to punishment by exile, with a hierarchy of places to which people were sent according to the severity of the crime, ranging from internal exile to Brazil for more minor offences to the islands of São Tomé and Príncipe and Africa for more serious offences. Part 3 also gives us the opportunity to travel to Portuguese America when Laura de Mello e Souza recounts aspects of the private life of its governors in the eighteenth century. Until the mid-1900s, for these men, occupying such a position meant being kept apart from family life, seeking to overcome their loneliness through work. They lived in fear of the unknown, the climate, uprisings, and expeditions. The author explores the diet of these men in the course of their adventures in the hinterland, living on the food they obtained from the forest and suffering from a lack of resources. As to the houses of these governors, only very euphemistically could they be referred to as "palaces". In the discussion of this topic, it is a pity that the author does not explore the relationship with domestic slavery. In their correspondence, politicians showed their solidarity towards their peers living in isolation in the Brazilian hinterland, or towards those who were in transit in Brazil, coming from either Africa or India. Their distance from the metropolis and the strangeness of the land where they lived made them equal with one another. Personal relationships were developed in this way: the letters of the Marquis of Lavradio, the viceroy in Rio de Janeiro, show how he would rather

write to the governors of other regions, to whom he felt closer, than to his friends from the court. The public sphere became the private sphere.

In Part 4, which consists of just one chapter, João Luís Lisboa and Tiago C. P. dos Reis Miranda deal with the uses of reading and writing. In an original way, they compare the differences between manuscripts and printed material. But it was the latter, more than manuscripts, that led to the book entering into private spaces. They analyze the new forms of sociability centered around writing, while reading became an individualized and silent act. Yet, they also take into account the high levels of illiteracy in Portugal within the southern European context, clearly distinguishing the fact of knowing how to sign one's name from the act of writing and reading. All the same, partly due to the clerical reforms that were to have an impact on education, the reading public was a vast one. With more schools, people were able to learn new professions, and young ladies began to write more frequently. Literary tastes then began to emerge: books on law, history, politics and management were a prevalent feature of the libraries of legal professionals; noblemen were more eclectic in their tastes; while merchants tended to prefer novels. The importance of owning books became evident from the inscriptions that could be found in some of them, threatening those who lost them. Attention is then given to the use of correspondence, to the concern about the styles of letter-writing that were characteristic of court life, family life or the sociability between friends, based on the models of Erasmus and Justus Lipsius. Therefore, the publication of some letters is contrasted with the fact that others needed to remain secret. This was the case, for example, with the Távora affair.

The last part contrasts the old and the new relationship between private life and political life. Mafalda Cunha and Nuno Monteiro study the mobilization of noblemen and communities. Fond of the paradigm of jurisdictional plurality, they establish a paradoxical context displaying both persistence and novelty in relation to medieval times: political conflicts remained scattered, but demands were then preferentially addressed to the royal courts of justice – and not to the noble courts anymore. Concealment was acceptable to some, since it was seen as a way of safeguarding opportunity, a sign of the virtue of prudence. Consequently, there was a great deal of social competition, which was inseparable from “microconflictuality.” The very schematic exposition made at the beginning of the chapter becomes more alive with the presentation of different cases. We thus enter the world of disputes between the lords, their servants and customers in 17th and 18th-century Lisbon, which may help to explain the relative absence of duels and major riots in Portugal at that time. Lastly, Maria Alexandra Lousada deals with the public

space in seventeenth-century Portugal in view of the new forms of cultural sociability, chiefly academies, ballrooms and cafés—“informal” spaces that were different from the circles of the court and the government. She justifies the fact that she does not deal with the masonries in this chapter, by saying that these were seen as formal groups. The argument seems rather a weak one, as Portuguese academies kept close ties with the royal power, and the masonries were secret societies. Nonetheless, the many references to Habermas make more sense in this last text when the author seeks to explain his definitions of “public” and “bourgeois.” She sets in motion the historiographic debate, with unequal interpretations being made about cultural life in Portugal at the end of the Ancien Regime. The cosmopolitanism of the Portuguese Enlightenment was very book-dependent, with many foreign works being smuggled into the country. While the works on literary academies are well known, Lousada’s analysis of social gatherings is remarkable (these were more mundane and less literary than the salons), as is her discussion of the “*outeiros poéticos*”—recitals of music and poetry held outside the gates of female convents. We finally arrive at the cafés of the late eighteenth century, when Bocage and Lisbon’s literary bohemia were kept under close surveillance by the police intendant Pina Manique. Although Portuguese cafés did not give rise to the formation of clubs, as in London or Paris, they represented a “semi-public” space that was beyond the reach of academic or aristocratic influences. It was here that the government’s performance was discussed.

Technically speaking, greater care should have been taken to standardize the use of upper- or lower-case letters in the names of institutions, epochs, etc, throughout the book, as well as the use of the new spelling agreement by the publisher, which would benefit the whole Portuguese-speaking world. Despite the thematic gaps found in the course of the book, some of which are justified by a lack of sources, with others revealing a mere adaptation to the area of the authors’ expertise, the volume organized by Nuno Monteiro on the private sphere in modern Portugal has great merit, as it is able to transpose to the Portuguese specificity of those times concepts that had not been designed for this purpose, discussing and problematizing them. It enables us to see a Portuguese private world that was held hostage by the forced conversion of the people to Catholicism and the provisions issued by the Council of Trent, as well as the opulence of some noble houses, which was particularly suffocating in this context. Such ingenuity is due in part to the research skills of many of the authors and to their high level of erudition. However, the shifting of approaches between abstract and concrete is at times rather abrupt, and sometimes there is a lack of harmony within the same chapter. Nonetheless, we praise the diligence of the

authors – generally more prone to spotting the signs of the alterity of the Ancien Regime than to discussing the progressive etiquette of the “Modern Era” that forms the framework for this work—in skillfully handling this conceptual shift even in the dynamics of historical diachronic and synchronic approaches. Whether contemporary French historiography is capable of producing a different volume from that of 1986, from Renaissance to the Enlightenment, or whether the pioneering models still remain strong enough to inspire such interesting works is something that we have yet to discover.