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

**KEYWORDS**
Tiles | Historiography | Identity | Differentiating aspects

A associação da azulejaria portuguesa a uma noção de identidade(s) encontra-se hoje enraizada num contexto muito alargado, conduzindo à utilização massiva do azulejo como signo de uma cultura e servindo de narrativa para os mais diversos fins. Este artigo pretende recuar no tempo, até aos meados do século XIX, discutindo qual o papel da historiografia europeia na construção da ideia do azulejo como “arte portuguesa”, considerando sobretudo os aspectos distintivos que foram sendo apontados ao longo dos anos, e observando os principais momentos e agentes que contribuíram para a criação e consolidação deste fenômeno.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE**
Azulejo | Historiografia | Identidade | Aspectos diferenciadores
INTRODUCTION

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

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

We left out the direct or indirect testimonies of Portuguese authors or foreign travellers to whom the azulejo was culturally unique, but whose texts do not provide a scientifically based critical analysis, like the one started by Athanasy Raczynski (1788-1874) at an international level, or by Joaquim de Vasconcelos (1849-1936) in the Portuguese Art History. Among the many examples we could mention, we would like to highlight Cosme de Médicis’ intervention who, in 1669, in his visit to Portugal, claimed, “The azulejo is a part of Portugal’s landscape” (Simões, 1959: 23). This idea was emphasized decades later by Merveilleux who, in 1726, referred to the glazed tile fashion he had seen in the country (Carvalho, 1960: 152). Other authors, like Cyrillo Volkmar Machado (1748-1823), seem to deliberately ignore the azulejo’s role within the national artistic production, thus placing this art in an inferior position when compared to painting, sculpture or architecture (Mangucci, 2016). The azulejo would only definitely recover from this positioning with João Miguel dos Santos Simões (Monteiro, 2007).

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

THE FIRST FOREIGN CONTRIBUTIONS

Considering the genesis of art historiography in Portugal, Count Athanasy Raczynski (1788-1874) was more than a “traveller-writer”, as he did not merely draft “impressions” and raise awareness to the most representative examples of the Portuguese artistic heritage, instead he established a methodology to substantiate the history of Portuguese art (Rodrigues, 2011: 264). In addition, because he acknowledged

1. In the source texto: “O azulejo faz parte da paisagem de Portugal”. From henceforth, all in-text translations are provided by the authors.
the azulejo's importance as a Portuguese artistic expression with unprecedented and unique specificity – “Azulejos are a part of Portugal’s physiognomy”

(Raczynski, 1846: 427-434) – Raczynski is regarded as a pioneer in understanding the glazed tile as an art linked to identity and a document of Portuguese culture, having, therefore, established a long historiographic legacy.

In the work Histoire de la Céramique, edited in 1873, the first great historian in the field of ceramic studies, Albert Jacquemart (1808-1875), signalled the importance of Portuguese tiles, describing the generalised use of this art in public and private buildings: “That country is so to speak the new world of ceramics (...) More importantly everyone talks about the azulejos which in that part of the Peninsula are treated with no less success than in Spain. Since 1850 the Magasin pittoresque signal the general employment of this form of decoration on public buildings and private houses that, sometimes, are coated with glazed tiles from top to bottom; they represent hunts, sacred or historical subjects, landscapes, vases filled with flowers, arabesques, etc.”

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

2. In the source text, “Les azulejos constituent en partie la physionomie du Portugal”.
3. In the source text, “Ce pays est en quelque sorte le nouveau monde de la céramique (...) Mais avant, tout, parlons des azulejos qui, dans cette partie de la péninsule, ont été traités avec non moins de succès qu’en Espagne. Dès 1850, le Magasin pittoresque signalait l’emploi général de cette décoration dans les édifices publics et les maisons particulières qui, parfois, sont recouvertes de carreaux émaillés de la base jusqu’au toit; ils représentent des chasses, des sujets sacrés ou historiques, des paysages, des vases remplis de fleurs, des arabesques, etc.”
houses (Braga 1995 [1885]: 137), a view which was in line with a nationalistic devotion and spirit as well as a vital attention to all that is Portuguese.

Following the on-going acknowledgment of the azulejo’s decorative merit by the international academia, in the next decade, the German architect Karl Albrecht Haupt (1852-1932) travelled across Portuguese land, drawing, studying and collecting countless data on national monuments, aiming to study Portuguese architecture during the “Renaissance period”. His work Die Baukunst der Renaissance in Portugal (Renaissance Architecture in Portugal), published in 1890, favoured the graphical records of monuments, a task that was completed in the course of his trips and includes drawings of some azulejos, like the ones in the pillars of the Old Cathedral in Coimbra, which would disappear, or in the Chapel of Santo Amaro, in Lisbon. When discussing Moorish influences, whether in the Mudejar architecture or in the azulejo coatings and interlaced geometrical drawings, Karl Albrecht Haupt underscored the glazed tile’s use as a characteristic feature of the national architecture: “A typical characteristic of Portuguese architecture was and is the practice of covering surfaces with Moorish tiles (called azulejos because of their predominant blue colour); this coating was very appreciated both on internal and external walls, so it is used in entire church façades, towers, houses’ façades, patios, domes, corridor walls, stairwells, salons and bedrooms”4 (Haupt, 1890: 37).

In 1895, Theodore Rogge published Keramik und Decoration in Portugal (Ceramic and Decoration in Portugal) where he refers that the azulejo is used so frequently in Portugal that it becomes characteristic, complementing the decorative sense of its placement – “Isolated azulejos (…) can only provide a very imperfect idea of the magnificent harmony and of how they were so brilliantly used for decoration in those days”5 (Rasteiro, 1895: 108).

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

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

THE AZULEJO IN PORTUGESE

The first researchers who dedicated themselves to studying the azulejo had a difficult task. Since there was a lack of studies in the field, a lot of the information on ceramics was not available and, as it was absolutely imperative to be aware of the national context, Joaquim de Vasconcelos (1849-1936), José Queiroz (1856-1920) and Vergílio Correia (1888-1944) adopted and perfected methodologies related to inventory and registration of dated and signed sets of azulejos. The latter, in the first edition of Azulejos Datados (Dated Azulejos), praised the work of his predecessor, José Queiroz,

---

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

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

who in turn had already been mentored and preceded by Joaquim de Vasconcelos. All of them, as well as Gabriel Pereira (1886), Liberato Teles (1896) and Sousa Viterbo (1903), aimed at establishing a history of the Portuguese glazed tiles and collected signatures and dates to that purpose, making an effort to obtain a global understanding of these partial reports. As a result, their texts have few significant remarks on the aspects that make Portuguese glazed tiles stand out when compared to its counterparts.

Having learnt a scientific methodology in Germany, Joaquim de Vasconcelos was a central and founding figure in the field of Portuguese Art History, which

---

6. The researcher cites an article by Conceição Gomes where it is mentioned that the use of glazed tiles in Portugal and Spain differs from that on any other place (Teles, 1896: 215) and refers that foreigners are actually the ones who most value the art we possess (Teles, 1896: 223). However, Teles makes no allusion to the azulejo as an art form linked to identity.
was regarded as an area dedicated to specific items and methodologies from then onwards (França, 1966: 118-119). The azulejo was one of the many art forms that fascinated Vasconcelos and to which he dedicated special attention from the 1880s onwards; thus, he is also considered by Santos Simões “the founder of ceramic studies in Portugal”\(^7\) (Simões, 1990: 24).

Joaquim de Vasconcelos’ analysis is characterised by the appreciation of pattern azulejos, polychrome, when compared to the white and blue narrative painting (Vasconcelos, 1884: 20-21), but he also mentions a connection to themes related to the history, customs, traditions and legends of “our people”\(^8\) (Vasconcelos, 1884: 17). In fact, “between 1841 and 1890 there is a hopeful beginning of a new cultural pattern rooted on popular and scholarly displays”\(^9\) (Rosmaninho, 2016: 331), of which Vasconcelos was one of the main advocates. Furthermore, it should be underscored that Vasconcelos strongly criticised those who belittled the azulejo as an art with a foreign touch (Vasconcelos, 1884: VI).

In 1882, Sousa Viterbo’s notes written for the catalogue of the Exposição de Arte Ornamental (Ornamental Art Exhibition) take up the idea that Portugal is the country of azulejos. Later, the author developed his ideas on the importance of this artistic expression which he admits was “(...) the most considerable ornamental element used in Portugal; its application can only be compared to woodcarving or sculpted wood (...)”\(^10\) (Viterbo, 1903: 36). Applied on the most diverse locations, the azulejo’s importance is measured for artistic or social reasons; it is “(...) a characteristic specialty that deserves to be studied with care and attention, not only separately, but also in comparison with the other branches of painting”\(^11\) (Viterbo, 1903: 36).

In turn, when José Queiroz (1856-1920) describes – with flattering adjectives – the main moments of the history of the Portuguese glazed tiles, he is mirroring the republican propaganda, which emphasizes a discourse on the character of the Portuguese nation (Braga 1995) that promotes the need of a collective cultural conscience. This propaganda enhanced the love “for all that is Portuguese”, including in this perspective the azulejo. Like Sabugosa Count, who in 1903 claimed the azulejo, “(...) is an expression of the Portuguese soul”\(^13\) (Sabugosa, 1903: 206), Queiroz also defends that it “is a characteristic manifestation of our nationality, a jovial symbol of our people”\(^14\) (Queiroz, 1907: 231).

Vergílio Correia (1888-1944) does not refrain from reiterating this line of thought, highlighting, as those before him, the extension of the ceramic applications in Portugal and advocating that azulejos express the “unique character of the Portuguese constructions that, on account of them, began to distinguish themselves from the Spanish ones in the 17th century”\(^15\) (Correia 1922: 5). As he continued to claim Portugal was “the country of azulejos” and that “(...) if they do not fully reveal la physionomie du Portugal as Raczynski Count wished, the azulejos at least reveal a brilliant...
part of the Lusitanian artistic expression”, Vergílio Correia compared national production to the foreign one. While he acknowledged the importance of other regions, in particular Spain, the Netherlands and northwest France, Vergílio Correia still highlighted that, “(...) all the azulejo produced in foreign shops does not represent even a fourth of what is produced and still exists in our country”\(^{16}\) (Correia, 2018: 3, 6) – a perspective he applies to the city of Lisbon as well (Correia, 1919).

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

- The extension of the production, which is clear due to the great number of tile coatings preserved in situ;
- The ornamental component of its application;
- The recognition of the azulejo as an important patrimonial document: “After a long period of oblivion and even repulsion, for the last two decades the Portuguese azulejo has been regarded by scholars and educated people under its true nature: a precious record of the industrial art of our forefathers and an ornamental element of irreplaceable use”\(^{17}\) (Correia, 2018: 7).

Other authors, like Gustavo de Matos Sequeira, maintain this viewpoint, perceiving the azulejo as “a decorative element connected to «the national constructive styles»”\(^{18}\) (Sequeira, 1933: 55), that is, they highlight the decorative nature of the azulejo as its main differentiating factor.

A SYSTEMATISED DIFFERENTIATION

Considering the authors that we have been tracking, João Miguel dos Santos Simões (1907-1972) systematically proceeded with inventory and classification work, including in his analysis azulejos produced in other countries but placed in Portugal (Monteiro, 2007). His oldest texts were written in the 1940s and from then on, the discourse concerning the originality of the Portuguese glazed tiles, which regards the dispersed aspects formerly identified but systematises them, was strengthened. This in turn allows greater objectivity, which is also the result of the development of studies focused on the azulejo. These factors were listed by Santos Simões and are as follows:\(^{19}\)

**a) the azulejo’s incorporation in buildings’ architecture, thus adding value to the different spaces (Simões, 2001 [1944]: 53-54), “marrying architecture itself”\(^{20}\) (Simões, 2001 [1957]: 173), and adjusting to its scale and characteristics.**

To Santos Simões, “Along with woodcarving, the azulejo bestows on Portuguese temples that unmistakable ecological character and, in its perfect alliance with architecture, it “makes it Portuguese”, even when the architecture’s formal and technical canons are inspired by foreign trends”\(^{21}\) (Simões, 2001 [1960]: 219);

---

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

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

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

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

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

21. In the source text, “Com a talha de madeira, o azulejo confere aos templos portugueses esse carácter inconfundivelmente ecológico, e na sua aliança perfeita com a arquitectura, “portugaliza-a”, mesmo quando os cânones formais e técnicos desta, são de inspiração estrangeira”.
b) the azulejo’s unlimited use (Simões, 2001 [1944]: 53);

c) the decorative sense that regards the genuine originality of Portuguese tiles and has led Santos Simões “to claim to Portugal the indisputable primacy that ceramic decoration is entitled to in the area of decorative arts” (Simões, 2001 [1943-1945]: 35), highlighting the production of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in particular (Simões, 2001 [1944]: 53). Right in the text Alguns azulejos de Évora (Some azulejos from Évora), in the second paragraph, the author underscores that glazed tiles are “the most characteristic display of the Portuguese decorative art” (Simões, 2001 [1943-1945]: 17) and continues arguing that the only matchless element that can be argued in favour of this art in Portugal is its ornamental employment and its “rather Portuguese” use. To this researcher, there is no doubt that Portugal holds the most extensive azulejo collection in the world (Simões, 2001 [1948]: 149): “Portugal is a vast and unique museum of azulejos that are full of life” (Simões, 2001 [1956]: 168). He further adds that glazed tiles are “(…) the only artistic activity that can be claimed to be both traditional and typically Portuguese” (Simões, 2001 [1956]: 172);

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

Although Santos Simões’ project for a study dedicated to the Arte do Azulejo em Portugal (Azulejo Art in Portugal) dates from 1957, the edition of the volume that was in fact the first history of the Portuguese azulejo appeared on that very same year but authored by Reynaldo dos Santos (1880-1970). The latter’s approach reveals an understanding of glazed tiles as a national art integrated into “(…) an aesthetic and identitarian system developed (…)”26 by Santos Simões and by José de Figueiredo (Rosmaninho, 2016 :343).

In the first phase of the work O Azulejo em Portugal (The Azulejo in Portugal), Reynaldo dos Santos starts by praising the azulejo – “In the history of decorative arts in Portugal, the azulejo’s importance and originality is indisputable” – considering that “[…] the azulejo is quintessentially our decorative art, the most unique […]”27 (Santos, 1957: 7). The author proceeds, underscoring its worth as a decorative art and, hence,

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

His defence of the azulejo continues; comparing it to other countries, Reynaldo dos Santos values not the picturesque character of its compositions, but its decorative nature, “Under that point-of-view, in the West, we were the ones who gave the glazed tile decoration a range and diffusion no other country, not even Spain, did” (Santos, 1957: 8). In fact, he underlines that, “(...) it is legitimate to claim that the azulejo is one of the most unique decorative means that the baroque art conceived in western Europe and that it was Portugal the country which made a more fruitful and pleasurable use of it” (Santos, 1957: 9) since “Not even Italy, neither Spain nor Holland granted the azulejo of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the variety of features, evolutionary renovation and ample ornamental vision that in Portugal led to the development of an unparalleled decorative art” (Santos, 1957: 10).

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

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

27. In the source text, “A importância e originalidade do azulejo, na história das artes decorativas em Portugal, é incontestável”; “(...) o azulejo é a nossa arte decorativa por excelência, a mais original (...)”.
28. In the source text, “[...] variedade dos espécimes, continuidade da evolução, amplitude do seu emprego e sempre o encontro das suas cores e esmalte”.
29. In the source text, “[...] o inédito das suas criações reside no conceito ornamental que a inspira e renova”.
30. In the source text, “[...] uma visão monumental da sua aplicação, mesmo dos azulejos importados [...]”; “[...] concepção ornamental que preside ao seu emprego e no efeito inédito alcançado”.
31. In the source text, “Assim, uma das características da originalidade do azulejo português é ter seguido desde o século XVI a sua própria evolução, cuja unidade residui, não na imutabilidade duma concepção tradicional, mas na variedade de invenção inspirada na adaptação ao estilo e espírito das épocas”.
32. In the source text, “Sob esse ponto de vista, no Ocidente, fomos nós que demos à decoração azulejada uma amplitude e difusão que nenhum outro país, nem mesmo a Espanha, lhe deu”.
33. In the source text, “[...] é legítimo afirmar que o azulejo constituiu um dos meios de decoração mais originais que a arte barroca criou no ocidente da Europa, e que foi Portugal o país que com mais fecundidade e gosto se soube servir dele”.
34. In the source text, “Nem a Itália, nem a Espanha, nem a Holanda, deram ao azulejo dos séculos XVII e XVIII a variedade de aspectos, a renovação evolutiva e a ampla visão ornamental que em Portugal gerou uma arte decorativa sem par”.
the art of Portugal” (Smith, 1968: 1). What is more, in
the work The Art of Portugal, in the chapter dedicated
to ceramics and particularly to azulejos, Smith is more
assertive when he refers that, “decorative tiles were
made all over Europe in the period between 1500
and 1800, but nowhere were they used on such a
scale, for such a variety of purposes or in so many
different patterns as in Portugal, where they represent,
along with gilt woodcarving, a truly national form of
decoration” (Smith, 1968: 229).

FINAL OVERVIEW

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

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

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

Generally speaking, it will not be far from the truth to
state that the argument which rests on the azulejo’s
difference has been continued, even if at certain times
some authors favoured one aspect over another. In
fact, that conception of the Portuguese azulejo was
common to national and foreign researchers. José
Meco, for instance, claims that, “amongst all the
European countries, it was in Portugal that the azulejo
was more greatly developed and had its most unique
and functional forms of usage in a fundamentally
architectonic performance; it was never passive or
neutral, instead it widely exceeds a mere decorative
purpose”35 (Meco, 1985: 5). In the words of Hans
van Lemmen, “Portuguese tiles, or azulejos as they
are commonly known, are a remarkable feature of
the history of Portuguese architecture and design and
are still used with exuberance and on a scale that
is matched nowhere else in Europe” (van Lemmen,
2013: 126).

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

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

In Portugal the azulejo’s decorative goal and its use on a monumental scale, integrated and articulated with other arts, among other aspects we may consider differentiating, is indeed indisputable. Yet, we cannot but agree with Céline Ventura Teixeira who states that “New methodological approaches need to be applied so as to renew the analysis of that ornamental practice under a more dialectical and critical angle”\(^{36}\) [Teixeira, 2014: 16]. Since the premises pointed out by historiography are, without a doubt, compelling, the breakthroughs in knowledge as well as the methodological doubt that characterizes science allow us to use our critical sense to rethink the true dimension of these differentiating aspects in a broad sense, correlating the national and international production even if not throughout the whole history of the glazed tile, at least to some periods.

**FUNDING**

This study was funded by Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia (FCT-Portugal) with a postdoctoral grant owned by Rosário Salema de Carvalho (SFRH/BPD/84867/2012), supported by the European Social Fund through the Human Capital Operational Programme (HCOP), and by national funds from the Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education.

**REFERENCES**


\(^{36}\) In the source text “De nouvelles approches méthodologiques nécessitent d’être appliquées afin de renouveler l’analyse de cette pratique ornemental et ce, sous un angle plus dialectique et critique”
QUEIROZ, José – Cerâmica Portuguesa. Lisboa: Typographia do Annuario Commercial, 1907.


SABUGOSA, Antonio Maria José de Mello Silva Cesar e Menezes, conde de – O Paço de Cintra; desenhos de Sua Magestade a rainha a Senhora Dona Amelia; apontamentos historicos e archeologicos do conde de Sabugosa. Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional, 1903.


—— – Notícia de alguns pintores portugueses e de outros que, sendo estrangeiros, exerceram a sua arte em Portugal. Lisboa: Typographia da Academia Real das Ciencias de Lisboa, 1903.