

HERITAGE AND HISTORY OF THE MARBLE INDUSTRY IN ALENTEJO (PORTUGAL):

AN INTERDISCIPLINARY PROJECT IN PROGRESS

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ABSTRACT

The Heritage and History of the Marble Industry project (PHIM), based on interdisciplinary principles and practices, highlights the importance of the Portuguese marbles of Alentejo Anticline in a context of patrimonial and cultural valuation of a region where the ornamental rock industry defines landscapes, shapes the economy, and defines ways of life. Knowledge coming from scientific research is being disseminated through various platforms and audiences, contributing to regional development and providing solid contents for industrial and cultural tourism of quality. After two phases of the project that allowed to achieve broad knowledge about the application of the Alentejo marbles in the artistic heritage, the 3rd phase serves to expand the chronology under study (from Roman times to the 20th century) and to allow for new interdisciplinary perspectives, with the cooperation of History of Law and Economic History.

KEYWORDS

Marble. Cultural heritage. Portugal.

PATRIMÔNIO E HISTÓRIA DA INDÚSTRIA DOS MÁRMORES NO ALENTEJO (PORTUGAL): UM PROJETO INTERDISCIPLINAR EM PROGRESSO

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RESUMO

O projeto Patrimônio e História da Indústria dos Mármore (PHIM), baseado em práticas e princípios interdisciplinares, pretende destacar a importância dos mármore portugueses do Anticlinal Alentejano num contexto de valorização patrimonial e cultural de uma região onde a indústria das rochas ornamentais define paisagens, molda a economia, estabelece modos de vida. O conhecimento, atingido através da investigação científica, vem sendo disseminado através de várias plataformas e públicos, contribuindo para o desenvolvimento regional e proporcionando conteúdos sólidos para um turismo industrial e cultural de qualidade. Após duas fases do projeto que permitiram alcançar um amplo conhecimento sobre a aplicação dos mármore do Alentejo no patrimônio artístico, a 3ª fase pretende ampliar a cronologia em estudo – da época romana ao século XX – e abrir novas perspectivas interdisciplinares, com a cooperação da História do Direito e da História da Economia.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Mármore. Património cultural. Portugal.

1 FRAMEWORK AND OBJECTIVES

The Heritage and History of the Marble Industry project (PHIM) is part of the Regional Operational Program of Alentejo (ALENTEJO 2020), with financial contribution of ERDF (European Regional Development Fund), of which the Institute of Art History of the School of Arts and Humanities of the University of Lisbon (ARTIS), is a partner. Since 2017 the 2nd phase of the project has highlighted the important contributions that Art History can offer in research, which, among other aspects, aims to study the potential of an exceptionally ornamental stone for works of art. Its long history and application in national and international monuments, some of them classified as World Heritage¹ led to the so-called Estremoz Marble (the formal name encompassing Estremoz, Borba and Vila Viçosa) being recognized internationally, in 2018, as Global Heritage Stone Resource (<http://globalheritagestone.com/other-projects/ghsr/designations/>).

¹These are the capitals and bases of the columns of the Roman Temple in Évora, Portugal; several sculptural pieces of the College of the Holy Spirit – Évora, Portugal; the main chapel of the Jerónimos Monastery – Lisbon, Portugal; the columns of the Roman Theatre in Mérida – Spain; some applications in the Escorial Monastery – Spain; Notre Dame and Palace of Versailles – France.

FIGURE 1

Vaulted ceiling of
the high chapel
of the Jerónimos
Monastery,
16th century,
Lisbon, Portugal.
Photography: Carlos
Filipe (CECHAP).



FIGURE 2

College of the Holy
Spirit/University,
16th/17th centuries
– Évora, Portugal.
Photography: Carlos
Filipe (CECHAP).



The 1st phase of the PHIM project was launched in 2013 by the Centre for Studies in Culture, History, Arts and Heritage (CECHAP), in partnership with several university institutions (CIDEHUS, IHC and CIES)², while the 2nd phase started in March 2017, with the theme *Os Mármore do Anticlinal Alentejano: 2000 anos de Memória e Património* [The Marbles of Alentejo Anticline: 2000 years of Memory and Heritage]. The 3rd phase began in September 2019, with new research dealing with chronological and thematic challenges.

The 1st phase, developed between 2013 and 2015, was devoted to the study of the History of the Industry of the Marbles of Alentejo, in the period between 1850 and 1986, when several aspects of this industry were researched, dealing with its regulation, the social and labour aspects inherent to the exploitation of quarries, the techniques and technologies used and the characterization of the landscape where this industry has been developed. The efforts of the 1st phase led to creation of the Portal of Heritage and History of the Marble Industry (<https://www.marmore-cechap.pt/en>), a digital documentation centre and an interactive web portal, with open access and available in Portuguese, English, French and Spanish, about the history of the sector. The website provides considerable information (archival research, bibliographic, oral testimonies) and promotes the development of new studies; and the mobile application Roteiro dos Mármore [Marbles roadmap] (https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.indice.roteirodosmarmores&hl=pt_PT), for touristic exploration, provides information on the different locations selected for the digital guide on a mobile phone or tablet. The ambition is to make available the results achieved to broad audiences.

² CIDEHUS – Interdisciplinary Centre for History, Culture and Societies (University of Évora); IHC – Institute of Contemporary History (Universidade NOVA de Lisboa); Centre for Research and Studies in Sociology (CIES/IUL- ISCTE – University Institute of Lisbon).

FIGURE 3

Portal of Heritage and History of the Marble Industry – 360° images of the Estremoz Anticlinal. Photography: Carlos Filipe (CECHAP).

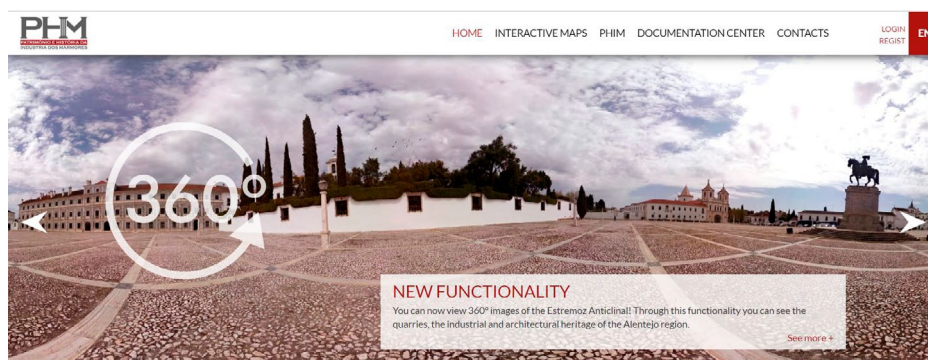
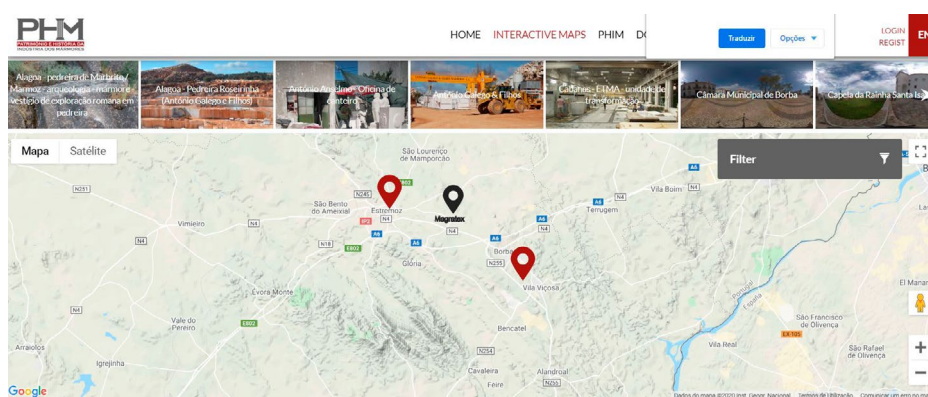


FIGURE 4

Portal of Heritage and History of the Marble Industry – Interactive Maps. Photography: Carlos Filipe (CECHAP).



Framed in the same multidisciplinary way that characterized the 1st phase, the 2nd phase of the PHIM project, involving several university research centres (CIDEHUS, IHC and ARTIS)³, was developed taking into account the 1st to 4th and 16th to 20th centuries. Several areas of expertise contributed to this: Roman Archaeology and Industrial Archaeology; Art History; Construction History; History of Techniques and Technologies; Cartography; Georeferencing; Photographic Survey and Digital Humanities. It aimed not only to continue and deepen the studies already carried out, but also to systematize and develop new areas of study, which would allow both the production of scientific knowledge and its impact on different audiences.

³ ARTIS – Institute of Art History (School of Arts and Humanities of the University of Lisbon).

At the same time, is the 2nd phase aimed to enhance the cultural dimension of the Anticlinal of Estremoz and the tourism related with the marble industry. The Portal of Heritage and History of the Marble Industry now has new features, namely, more documentary information for online research, as well as an Urban Route module with beautiful 360° panoramic images of places such as Borba, Vila Viçosa and Estremoz, allowing virtual visits to quarries, marble mason's workshops, manufacturing industry and reference monuments in the region through interactive maps (<https://www.marmore-cechap.pt/en/virtualTour>), in order to encourage actual visits. The mobile application "PHIM – augmented reality", *Roteiro dos Mármore* [Marbles roadmap], improved in the 2nd phase of the project, is a tool that allows visitors and tourists to prepare, in advance, a visit to the region around the heritage and history of the Alentejo marbles. A video was also produced to publicize the project, available on the home page of the portal <https://www.marmore-cechap.pt/en>. With a duration of 2 minutes, without text or narration, it is a multimedia resource that aims, above all, to give greater visibility and make the cultural heritage of the Anticline region more attractive through very suggestive images obtained-by drone and followed by an intense soundtrack, encouraging discovery and adventure.

FIGURE 5

General view
of a quarry in
Vigária, Vila
Viçosa (Solubema
company).
Photography: Carlos
Filipe (CECHAP).



The relevance of this project – pioneering both in Portugal and worldwide – is strengthened by the absence of a national integrated policy that focuses on the importance of using ornamental stones, particularly marble, and recognises its heritage and cultural value.

Starting from the recognition of the archaeological, patrimonial and artistic legacy of the Alentejo Marbles in the Anticline geographic space, which essentially includes the municipalities of Borba, Estremoz and Vila Viçosa, evidence of their related activities that had been left for two thousand years. The evidence is either in the form of underground exploration, or in the use of this raw material as an architectural and sculptural element, leaving its mark not only in the appearance of places but also in the daily life of those who inhabit them. The abundance of a wide range of calcitic marbles, of varied shades (white, grey, black, pink or cream), is one of the main riches of the Central and Northern Alentejo, the marble having been widely used in the South and Centre of Portuguese territory since the Roman era.

FIGURE 6

Monastery of Santa
Maria Scala Coeli
(Cartuxa), 16th
century, Évora.
Photography: Carlos
Filipe (CECHAP).



FIGURE 7

Chapel of São
Tiago, 18th century,
Vila Viçosa.
Photography: Carlos
Filipe (CECHAP).



The interest in the use of Alentejo marbles was quite significant in periods of economic expansion of ornamental arts and heritage construction. Marble quarrying in the region experienced an intense activity between the 16th and 19th centuries, responding to new architectural and artistic designs from the renaissance to romanticism, both nationally, and in some European countries to where the marbles of the Alentejo were exported.

As in other European countries, where cultural projects centred on the territory and framed around their native products are already practiced, the PHIM project aims to deepen knowledge about the history of the Alentejo marbles industry. The project can provide a clear and broad view of the extent of the exploitation of those ornamental stones over several periods – from Classical Antiquity to recent times – and translate that into a serious inventory of this resource as an element of memory and heritage. At the same time, the project intends to promote the safeguarding and conservation of places, valuing the historical, artistic and heritage resources of each site, in a multidisciplinary work involving Roman Archaeology, Industrial Archaeology, History, Art History and Digital Humanities.

2 MARBLE ARTS: HISTORICAL-ARTISTIC PERSPECTIVES

The 3rd phase of the project (2019-2021), continuing the main objective of promoting the Estremoz Anticline region of marbles as a source of highlighting the cultural heritage of the municipalities of Borba, Estremoz and Vila Viçosa, is intended to continue research in the field of art and heritage in the wide chronological spectrum, from the 12th to the 20th century. At the same time two new areas are integrated: Law – from Roman Law to the recent Quarry Legislation; and Economy, with the study of marble markets from the 16th to the 20th centuries⁴.

The participation of researchers from ARTIS – Institute of Art History gains relevance in a project that aims to study the use of marble from Estremoz Anticline, as a raw material, in the design of architectural, sculptural and decorative elements that define the urban landscape of the region known as the “zone of the marbles”, which essentially includes the municipalities of Borba, Estremoz and Vila Viçosa.

With a chronology that goes from the 12th to the 20th century, the time frame defined for this phase of the project, the study of the use of marbles in architecture and art is a central objective of the ARTIS team. It seeks to identify the quarries, those participating in the working of the marble, the types of contract, the selection criteria of the materials, the quarrying techniques and instruments, as well as other relevant data about the marble and its practical use.

The survey of bibliography, of periodicals, of the extensive travel literature, both national and foreign, produced between the 18th to 20th centuries, and of some relevant archival collections, have proved to be essential for the constitution of a *corpus* to characterize the marble industry in the Anticline region, in the period under study, and to contextualize its application in the design of heritage goods of outstanding historical-artistic value. This requires the selection of more representative case studies in both Portugal and Spain. In the 2nd phase of the project those studied were: the Almodôvar church-hall (16th century); the Ducal Palace of Vila Viçosa (16th and 20th centuries); the National Palace of Ajuda (19th century); the

⁴ Partners of the 3rd phase are: CIDEHUS, ARTIS-FLUL, CLEPUL, IHC-UNL, CIES-IUL(ISCTE), FEP (Social Sciences Department), THD-ULisboa e ICS.

Palace of the Courts – current Assembly of the Republic – (20th century); the Church of Santa Engrácia-National Pantheon, the last three located in Lisbon; the sepulchre of the Bishop of Coria in the church of San Nicolàs in Plasencia, Spain (17th century). The loading of contents on the ZOTERO platform, a software for managing bibliographic references, was substantially enhanced after the first phase of the project – with more than 9,000 records introduced – and this allowed its sharing by all team members, encouraging a collaborative research.

FIGURE 8

Church of Our Lady of Expectation, high altar, 18th century, Campo Maior. Photography: Carlos Filipe (CECHAP).



FIGURE 9

Dona Maria estate, statue of Neptune, Estremoz. 18th century. Photography: Carlos Filipe (CECHAP).



FIGURE 10

Church of Santa
Engrácia-National
Pantheon, floor,
20th century.
Photography: Carlos
Filipe (CECHAP).



The contents have provided not only the enrichment of knowledge about each object, but also the creation of new tourist routes that combine the unique beauty of rock formations in quarries, with the beauty of the historic artistic heritage built in the region, as well as exceptional gastronomy.

In the 3rd phase of the project, taking place between September 2019 and August 2021, new case studies are being selected and researched in architecture, and particularly in sculpture, an area where the quality of Alentejo marbles has been held in high regard by countless national and foreign artists, both in the past and in the present day.

We also look forward to the preparation of heritage education books for young/school-aged audiences and other innovative communication strategies, creating attractive contents within the various periods of study, seeking to transmit knowledge of cultural and industrial heritage and landscapes of the region in a playful and dynamic way. The intention is

to stimulate, involve and attract young people while, at the same time, disseminating and sharing knowledge and raising awareness of the value of the cultural heritage of the marble region.

The implementation of the heritage education program will strengthen the ties of cultural identity and will promote knowledge and recognition of the importance of the past, creating instruments for the present and future preservation of heritage.

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