

THE RESTORATION OF MONUMENTS IN PORTUGAL: FROM ATHENS 1931 TO VENICE 1964 CHARTERS

Maria João Neto

ARTIS - Institute of Art History, School of Arts and Humanities, University of Lisbon, Portugal
mjneto@letras.ulisboa.pt | ORCID 0000-0002-1777-7698

ABSTRACT

In Portugal, the restoration of monuments was directed by the General Directorate of National Buildings and Monuments (Direção-Geral dos Edifícios e Monumentos Nacionais — DGEMN) in the period amid the two world wars and, even after 1945, when Europe was being re-erected. This entity, centralized in the Ministry of Public Works, with its own section of technicians, will respond to the ideological objectives of the *Estado Novo* (New Regime) of António de Oliveira Salazar (1889-1970). The dictator himself has a particular commitment towards the actions of this organization and consistently exploits the image of the nation's heritage under restoration as an example of the regime's competence, commitment and effectiveness. His triumphalist vision of the History of Portugal, electing the heroes responsible for the nation's golden moments, determines as prime targets for restoration the monuments from the past linked to these figures and facts. Thus, it is essential to establish an aesthetic and artistic correspondence between these and the historical time meant to evoke. This attitude conditions, from the outset, a practice of stylistic unity in the restoration of monuments.

The departure from these ideological-political conditions was gradual, and the receptiveness to international principles was prompted by DGEMN's affiliation to foreign organizations created after World War II. This came at a time when, internationally, the discussion of restoration attitudes was in the agenda.

KEYWORDS

Restoration of Monuments | General Directorate of National Buildings and Monuments (DGEMN) |
Estado Novo | Stylistic Restoration | Conservation Principles

RESTORATION: ESTADO NOVO'S MOTTO

In a famous speech given in Braga, Oliveira Salazar decided to make the new Public Library an example of the political conduct of the *Estado Novo*. This occurred in 1936, on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Revolution of May 28th. The building was formerly the Bishop's Palace of Braga, ruined and abandoned, then restored by General Directorate of National Buildings and Monuments (DGEMN) (Salazar, 1945: 147). Hence, it was made evident the propagandistic dimension that the regime saw in the action of this organization. Created in April 1929 (Decree n.º 16 719), DGEMN brought back these responsibilities to the traditional dependence under Public Works, after decades of disputes within successive governments, between this directory and that of Public Instruction, through its Fine Arts department.

The decree that created the new section contemplated the existence of a Central Office, two Directorates of National Buildings (North and South) and a Directorate of National Monuments. These services were responsible for drawing up complete projects for the repair, restoration and conservation of national monuments and palaces, and their execution, by administration or contract, while rigorous inspection of the work was also carried out. Additionally, the Directorate of Monuments had the responsibility of promoting cooperation between the State and private entities owning classified properties, as well as updating the general inventory of classified properties, including the organization of the catalog and iconographic archive of national monuments; promoting and ensuring various legal aspects relating to monuments and formulating the technical precepts and all the rules to be observed, whether in the treatment and conservation, or in the

execution of repair works or restoration of the properties.

The choice for Director General went to the military engineer Henrique Gomes da Silva (1890-1969). This nomination is explained by the relationship of loyalty and trust naturally established in the military between Gomes da Silva and the generals who at the time headed the government after the Braga Revolution. The position of Director of the Monuments' Service was taken on by the architect Adães Bermudes (1864-1948) and, after his removal, by the architect António do Couto Abreu (1874-1946).

The services were taking the first steps in their organization, at a time when the country was looking for the desired financial balance and was waiting for a political definition. It will be according to the conduct of the new regime that DGEMN will extend its action. We will witness fundamental changes in its structure at significant moments (1930, 1935, 1947, provided, respectively, by Decrees 18 070 of March 10, 26 117 of November 23 and 36 314 of May 31) that strengthen their capacity of intervention.

In the first years of the new organization's life, we witnessed a continuity of the actions that had been carried out since 1926. Gradually, the services were improving their performance, with the support of Architect Baltazar de Castro (1891-1967), responsible for a large number of interventions, while António do Couto Abreu converged exclusively to the works on the cathedral in Lisbon (Neto, 2016: 114-119). If we look at the funds allocated for interventions, they also did not undergo major changes until 1935 [fig.01].

EVOLUTION OF EXPENDITURE WITH INTERVENTIONS IN MONUMENTS (1929-1960)

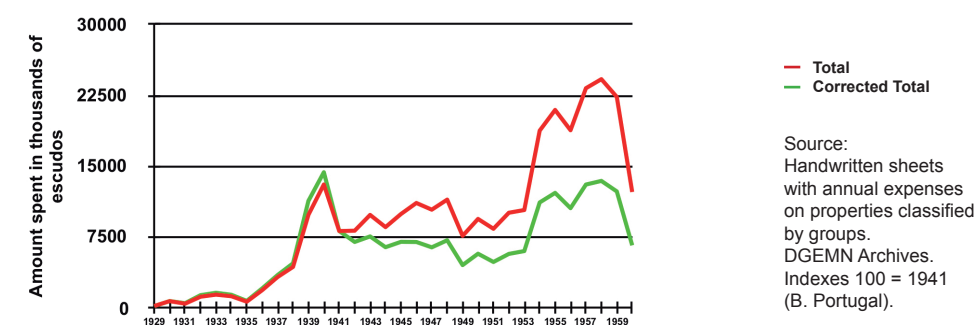


Fig 01. Graph showing the evolution of expenditure for interventions in National Monuments, 1929-1960.

The country had witnessed the institutionalization of the *Estado Novo* regime, with Oliveira Salazar at the head of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers since July 1932, without deviating from the policy of financial containment that he began as Minister of Finance in 1928. Duarte Pacheco (1900-1943), Minister of Public Works, took on one of the most important dual roles of the *Estado Novo*: modernity versus tradition. Along with the development of the sector of major works and infrastructures, the standard of change, progress, efficiency and prosperity, there was particular care into carrying out the task of preserving the national architectural heritage, as one of the main cultural-ideological commitments of the regime [fig.02].

The nationalist values of the *Estado Novo* were conditioned by the perspective of triumphalism in the historical evolution of the Nation. The moments of triumph in our history served as testimony to the greatness of the past and justified the present's intention to regain the same status. To authenticate these golden moments, the regime found living proof in national monuments, which had the particularity of proving facts and characters from times of glory. DGEMN assumes the undertaking of a task particularly esteemed to the political power. The projected interventions respond to selection criteria that are often misaligned with the real needs of the real estate and its artistic dimension (Neto, 2001: 139-146).



Fig 02. António de Oliveira Salazar and Duarte Pacheco in the foreground at the opening of the Portuguese World Exhibition, at Praça do Império, in Lisbon, 1940, Mário Novais; Gulbenkian Foundation Art Library [CFT164.1159].

This entire setting had a decisive influence on the adoption of intervention doctrines by DGEMN technicians. The intention was to restore the buildings to their primitive state, expunging them from later additions, in order to facilitate the reading of the symbolic message, forcing the monuments to present an aesthetic-artistic grammar, according to the historical period with which they were identified. Such an attitude required the sacrifice of elements from other times, which disturbed the correct assimilation of the intended image. Thus, the *Stylistic Restoration* found a particularly favorable environment in Portugal's *Estado Novo*. Even through different mental constraints from those in the 19th century, it still managed to survive among us in the middle of the following century.

The collection of *Bulletins* edited by DGEMN is a precious source for reconstituting the history of this entity and respective criteria of conduct. These are publications on the monuments, in which an intervention program under the responsibility of those services was carried out. This initiative aimed to publicize its action, while expressing the regime's commitment to the work of 'restoration' of the nation's monuments. Following the same principle, some texts are published expressing theories of intervention, while trying to justify the actions of the services, thus revealing their actions were not entirely exempt from criticism.

It cannot be said that the architects at the service of the General Directorate, whose training and practice fit the ideological and mental demands of the moment, were the great mentors of this line of action. Instead, they were more like interpreters of a program with essentially political contours. Even so, one cannot speak of a single theoretical conduct on the part of this entity. Although the principle of reintegration according to the primitive style of the monument dominates, interventions were carried out without this intolerance of communion of styles in the same building. There was even some theoretical discussion within the section, with the architect Raul Lino (1979-1974) leading a critical current (Neto, 2001: 224-227) – in opposition to the stylistic precepts of Viollet-le-Duc (1814-1879) – in favor of the *conservation principles* theorized by William Morris (1834-1896), after being outlined by John Ruskin (1819-1900).

If the criteria predominantly followed were already disapproved by the *Charter of Athens*, issued in 1931, it is not possible to ignore the scale of the undertaking

carried out by DGEMN, when many of our monuments were in ruins. It was a reality that the political moment favored their actions, in order to show the testimonies of the past, in accordance with carefully outlined historical perspectives. This attitude had high moments confirmed by the analysis of the indicators, both in the number of interventions carried out and in the amount of funds spent during the entire administration of Engineer Henrique Gomes da Silva. These moments correspond to historic festivities carefully organized and properly explored by the system's ideology.

Coinciding with a certain economic stability, from 1935 onwards there was a significant increase in the amount spent on interventions in monuments, at a time when the Celebrations of *Year X of the National Revolution* (1936) were approaching. Works in favor of the national architectural heritage were duly explored. This policy was reinforced with the decision to celebrate, in 1940, the VIII Centenary of the Birth of Portugal and the IV Centenary of the Restoration of National Independence. Throughout the country, castles are the target of intense interventions, which seek to activate a medieval physiognomy, a portrait of the heroic Christian reconquest times. In the same vein, the cathedrals were restored, a symbol of episcopal power and territorial organization nucleus of the young nation created by D. Afonso Henriques, the First King of Portugal. In addition to castles and cathedrals, a large number of former convents and churches are the object of work campaigns guided by the historical importance of the buildings, often to the detriment of their aesthetic value and their function and religious experience [fig.03,04,05].

In the wake of this type of commemorative and propaganda initiatives, DGEMN's enterprises appeared prominently in the exhibition *15 years of Public Works 1932-1947*, organized at the main School of Engineering (Instituto Superior Técnico), in 1948, with the aim of demonstrating that the *Estado Novo's* initiative in favor of monuments had not ended in 1940. It was a time for carrying out projects for the reuse of some monuments, with welfare, social and health purposes, as well as tourism and leisure.

Some monuments had interventions in the context of preparations to receive high-ranking foreign personalities. Visiting Portugal in the post-war period, mostly in the 50s with the intensification of diplomatic contacts in favor of redefining the Portuguese position

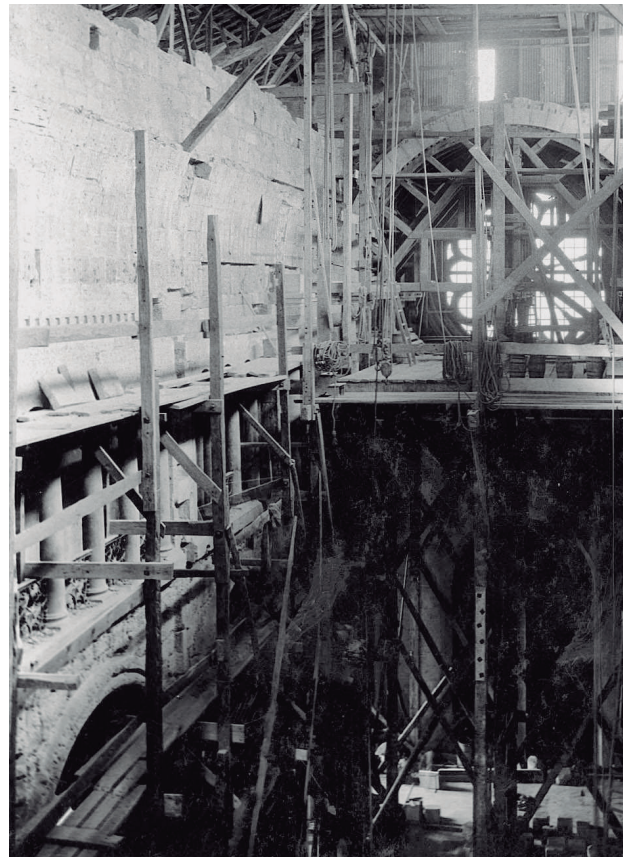


Fig 03. Lisbon Cathedral, nave, during restoration; photo SIPA/DGPC 00516074.

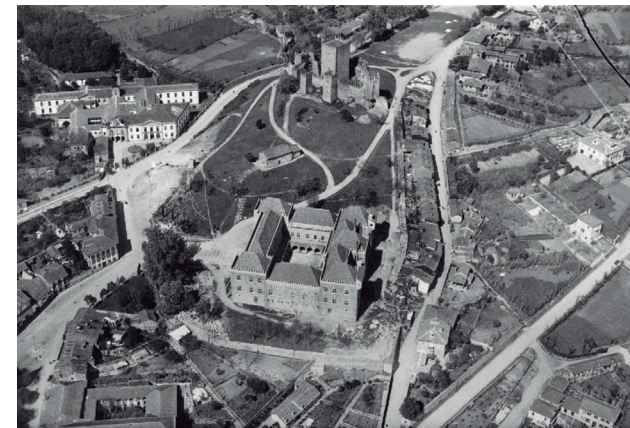


Fig 04. Paço dos Duques de Bragança, in Guimarães, during restoration; photo SIPA/DGPC 00508673.

Fig 05. Aerial view of Monte Latito in Guimarães, comprising the castle, the chapel of São Miguel and the Paço dos Duques; photo SIPA/DGPC 00508666.

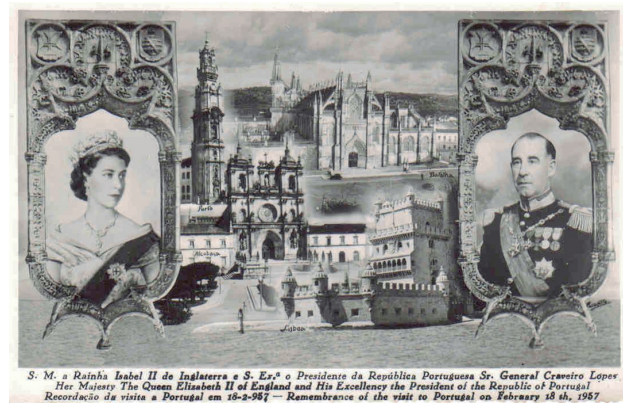


Fig 06. Illustrated postcard commemorating the visit to Portugal of Queen Elizabeth II of England, 1957; Batalha Monastery Archive, DGPC.

in the new international framework after 1945. In this context, the visit of Queen Elizabeth II of England (b. 1926), in February 1957, should be emphasized. Within the schedule to be carried out by the sovereign, the visit to the monasteries of Batalha and Alcobaça stands out, the latter having been the target of a considerable work campaign [fig.06.07].

Right after the British royal visit, DGEMN technicians pivoted to the execution of a work plan determined by the program of commemorations of the V Centenary of the Death of Prince Henry the Navigator, to be celebrated in 1960. Naturally, it was the buildings, which history linked to the prince, the target of the initiatives. Lagos and Sagres, after the interventions

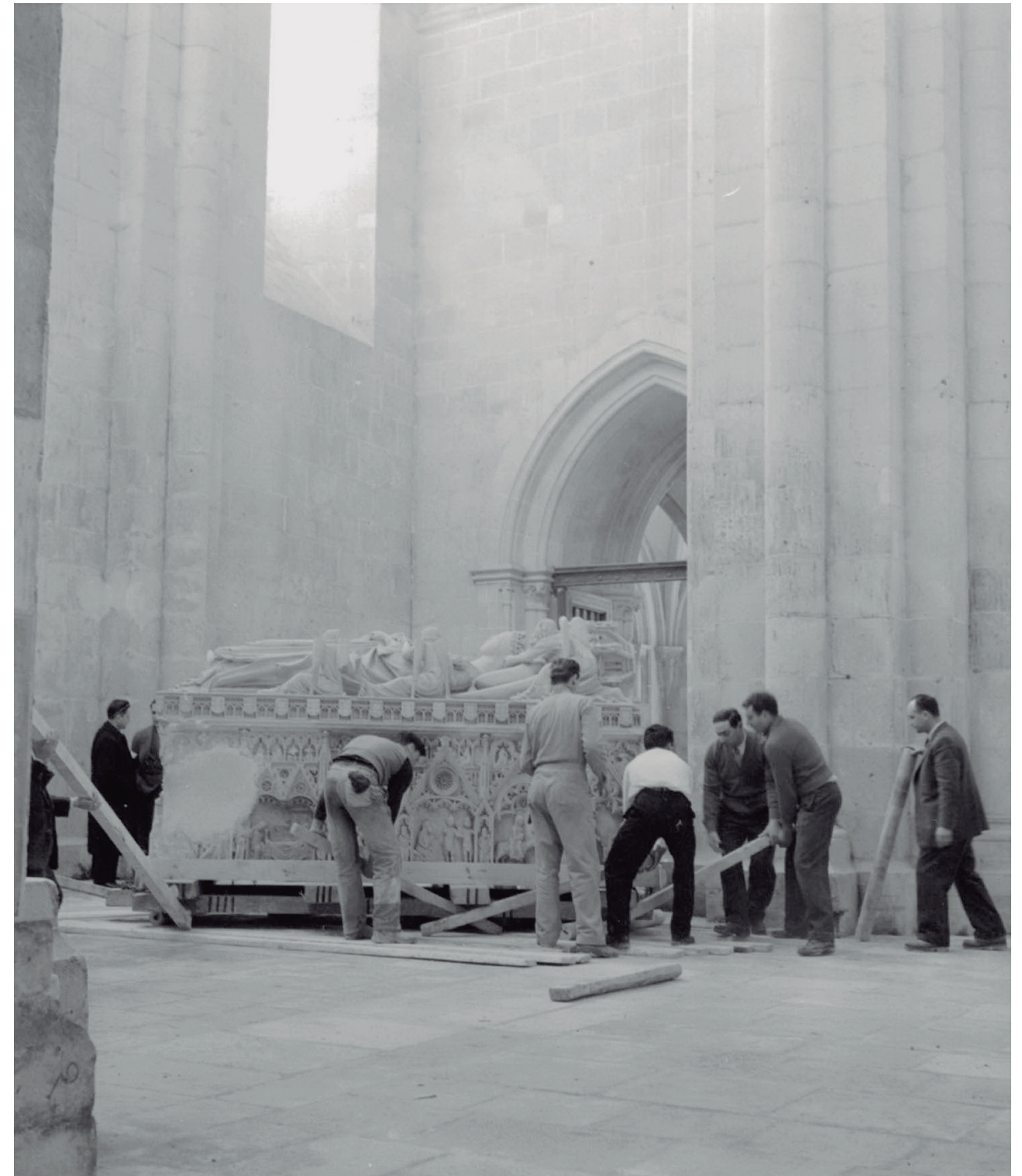


Fig 07. Alcobaça Monastery, relocation of Inês de Castro's tomb, from the Sala dos Reis to the church's transept, on the occasion of preparations for the visit of Isabel II of England, 1956; photo SIPA/DGPC 00501466.

carried out, were the stages of the historic festivities. There were attended by the President of Brazil, Juscelino Kubitschek de Oliveira (1902-1976), who enjoyed the particularly imposing landscape and the mythical sense of the place of Sagres' promontory (Neto, 2001: 250). Once again, the regime associated displaying monuments intervened by DGEMN with a historic and

propagandistic event. The moment was particularly sensitive, given the pro-independence sentiments that were beginning to threaten the Estado Novo rule on overseas colonies. Hence the importance of praising the image of the *Infante Navigator*, seeking to legitimize the possession of the territories that Portugal still held.

THE PROGRESSIVE EXTERNAL OPENNESS

1960 marks the end of the long term of Engineer Henrique Gomes da Silva as the head of the General Directorate. Engineer José Pena Pereira da Silva (1906-?) replaces him. Signs of change in the operation of this organization were already being felt, due to the contact with foreign institutions. These were struggling, all over Europe, with the reconstruction of monuments seriously affected by World War II. Relations were intensified in the late 1950s, with DGEMN joining the International Institute of Historical Castles, Internationales Burgen-Institut (IBI), an organization created in Switzerland in 1949, with the aim of promoting, in particular, restoration of castles and fortresses bombed during the war (Neto, 2006: 95).

Pereira da Silva had, therefore, the difficult task of leading a situation of change in the organization's

approaches. However, Salazar, in the midst of the regime's crisis, in the throes of internal and external opposition and the colonial war, decided to once again use the image of a monument in need of intervention, with clear objectives of propaganda and power. The unfinished church of Santa Engrácia, in Lisbon, wrapped in a supposed curse that prevented its completion, was the ideal example to demonstrate the ability of the *Estado Novo* to *pulverize myths of incapacity*. Postponed for more than two centuries, the works were completed in two years by Salazar's resolution [fig.08]. Carried out between 1964 and 1966, Santa Engrácia inaugurated in the same year as the Bridge over the Tagus River, in Lisbon, on the occasion of the celebrations of the fortieth anniversary of the regime (Neto, 2010: 126-127).



Fig 08. Church of Santa Engrácia, onset of the dome's construction, c. 1964; photo National Pantheon.

Under the direction of architect João Vaz Martins (1910-1988), the "Works of Santa Engrácia" were completed, intended to become the National Pantheon. Thus, it represented the emblematic culmination of the activities of the General Directorate for almost four decades, fulfilling the regime's intentions. Notwithstanding, this was accomplished without ignoring the discussions generated abroad in these matters. Despite the political constraints, the architects in charge of completing the intervention exercised restraint in the project to complete the church, as the original design from the 18th century was unknown. At the same time, the promulgation of the *Venice Charter* in 1964, had the Portuguese architect Luís Benavente (1902-1993) – director of the Monuments service, in the 50s – on the editorial committee.

Gradually, Portugal draws near Europe in terms of heritage safeguarding. In the year following the Venice event, the IBI goes on a study trip to Portugal from the 9th to the 18th of June, with a program laden of visits to the main monuments, precisely in the week before the constituent assembly of ICOMOS, in Warsaw (21st and 22nd of June). In 1968, it is Lisbon's turn to receive the participants of the *Colloque sur la Sauvegarde du Paysage et des Sites Historiques* (20-24 September) and, in the following year, Viseu is the stage for the IX

Scientific Meeting of the IBI, chaired by Piero Gazzola (1908-1979) on the subject "The Venice Charter applied to the restoration of castles" (Neto, 2006: 95-96).

The progressive broadening to the evolution of internationally established concepts and criteria in the field of safeguarding built heritage, together with an internal mobilization of services, which had a dynamic group of leading architects, sensitive to the exchange of knowledge within Archeology and History of Art, allowed for a modernization of acting philosophies (Guimarães, 1967). Although the main national monuments have been irremediably restored to the proclivity of the *Estado Novo* heritage, there was a healthy coexistence of ideas that would gain more traction after the establishment of the democratic regime in 1974. It was the time to carry out projects for protected areas after assimilating the importance of the monument's surroundings, which also lacked conservation care. The new concepts of *ensemble* and *site* implied the expansion of the area to be safeguarded. Under the effects of the promulgation of the *Venice Charter*, the Portuguese technicians were also aware of the conceptual expansion and dynamics of safeguarding the cultural heritage, starting to defend the commitment to the current notion of "integrated conservation" as a methodology of action.

CONCLUSION

Portugal had never known a time when national monuments had been the object of a planned and carefully executed restorative intervention program, as during the *Estado Novo*. The entity created for this purpose – the Directorate-General for National Buildings and Monuments – was endowed with a team of technicians and funding to carry out a task, in which Oliveira Salazar himself had particular interest. The restoration of monuments was an important tool of propaganda and power at the service of the regime, particularly explored in the context of historical commemorations and official visits of high-ranking foreign personalities in Portugal.

The regime's ideological-mental premises conditioned the restoration criteria practiced, dominated by the use of *Unity of Style*. Even so, the dissenting position

by architect Raul Lino progressively had an effect on a younger generation of technicians within DGEMN. The condemnation of stylistic unifications expressed in the *Athens Charter* and the conservation principles professed by William Morris, based on John Ruskin's ideas, were assimilated by DGEMN. After World War II, the reality of the deep wave of destruction of historic urban centers and monuments, particularly in Europe, required a new reflection on how to act. Organizations were created and debates were established in scientific meetings of technicians, under the sponsorship of the newly created UNESCO. DGEMN's adhesion to these entities and the research tours of their architects abroad were decisive in consolidating a gradual opening to new principles of action. This explains the fact that Portugal had the architect Luís Benavente among the restricted 10-member committee responsible for drafting the *Venice Charter* in 1964.

BIBLIOGRAFIA

GUIMARÃES, Fernando Peres de – *Principes et méthodes de la conservation*. Strasbourg: CE, CCC, 1967.

NETO, Maria João – *Memória, Propaganda e Poder O Restauro dos Monumentos Nacionais (1929-1960)*. Porto: Faculdade de Arquitetura do Porto Publicações, 2001.

_____ – “A propósito da Carta de Veneza (1964-2004) Um olhar sobre o património arquitectónico nos últimos cinquenta anos”. *Património Estudos*, 9 (2006), 91-99.

_____ – “O fim de um mito”. *Obras de Santa Engrácia O Panteão na República*, Catálogo de Exposição. Lisboa: IGESPAR, 2010, pp. 126-127.

_____ – “A Sé de Lisboa e o seu claustro: sucessivas campanhas de obras e de restauro”. *RP – Revista Património*, 4 (2016), 114-119.

SALAZAR, António de Oliveira – *Discursos II (1935-1937)*, 2.º edição. Coimbra: Coimbra Editora, 1945.