

Abaton. Revista de figuración, representación e imágenes de la arquitectura

ISSN: 2530-4887

ISSN-e: 2990-367X

<https://dx.doi.org/10.5209/ABAT.57013>



EDICIONES
COMPLUTENSE

Belém. Historia, Política, Arquitectura y Fotografía

Nuno Pinheiro¹

Recibido: 27 de enero de 2019 / Aceptado: 3 de marzo de 2019

Resumen. Belém es una de las partes más conocidas de Lisboa. Tiene dos de los monumentos más importantes y más fotografiados de Portugal desde los años 1860. Torre de Belém y Monasterio de Jerónimos, los dos son simbólicos de la Edad de Oro de Portugal, la de las grandes viajes de descubrimientos marítimos. Estos monumentos ganarán una gran importancia simbólica a fines del siglo XIX, sobre todo cuando se organizaron las fiestas del tricentenario de Camões. Antes de eso habían sido el sujeto de fotografías, sobre todo estereoscópicas de fotógrafos portugueses y extranjeros que veían en ellos un ejemplo de exotismo. Este exotismo era dado por el estilo manuelino, característico de los años cercanos a 1500 y que incorporaba una decoración inspirada en el mar y la naturaleza.

Cruzando fotografía, historia e ideología, intentaremos entender cómo se tornó esta parte de Lisboa tan simbólica y tan importante como uno de los principales locales de memoria en Portugal. Cuestionaremos la fotografía como instrumento ideológico y del deseo burgués de construir una memoria visual de la Historia.

Palabras clave: Belém; fotografía; memoria; arquitectura.

[en] Belém. History, Politics, Architecture and Photography

Abstract. Belém is one of Lisbon better known areas, It has some of the better known and most iconic monuments; they are among the most photographed since the 1860's. Jerónimos Monastery and Belém Tower are symbolic of the Golden Age of Portuguese Seaborne Empire. These monuments gained a great importance in 19th century Portugal, as they were the stage of 1880's Camões tri centennial, one of the most important political and social happenings of late 19th century Portugal. Before that they were the subject of stereo images made by Portuguese and foreign photographers, mostly for stereo card sale. They saw here an example of exotism, given by Manuelino Style, strong in Portugal, around 1500, and it's heavy decoration with sea, and nature motifs. We will try to intersect History, Ideology, Architecture and History, to understand how this place became so important, as one of the places of memory for Portugal. We will question photography as an ideological tool of the bourgeois desire of building a visual account for History.

Keywords: Belém; photography; memory; architecture.

Cómo citar: Pinheiro, N. (2023). Belém, Historia, Política, Arquitectura y Fotografía. *Abaton. Revista de figuración, representación e imágenes de la arquitectura* 1(1), 151-159.

Belém is now the major tourist spot in Lisbon, and one of the most photographed. From unique 16th century monuments, to popular museums and modern art collections, it has all the attributes to attract crowds. Many will also line up to eat the famous pastry which is not too different from what you can find in any small café in Lisbon.

This is today's Belém, with two new museums opened in the last couple of years, however this is the result of being for 500 years a privileged place for political representation. From around 1500, up to 2016 different political regimes in has used this spot close to the Tagus River and west of Lisbon (now in west-

¹ CIES-IUL
<http://cies.iscte-iul.pt/index.jsp>
nap658@gmail.com



O Ocidente, 1-1-1883, Jerónimos Cloister (made after a photograph).

ern Lisbon). We will try to understand how, from the 19th century, this part of Lisbon was used as an ideological showcase for political regimes, crossing photography, architecture and ideology.

Methodologically we assume photography as an ideological instrument in the context of 19th century nationalism, used to visually highlight political issues. From the age of mass produced stereograms, photography has been also a major means of bourgeois enlightenment. It was used to (before travel was common) give visual knowledge about places and monuments². Born and epistemologically built during the 19th century, photography and history are linked as they both underline the desire of objectivity³. Photography provided the visual part of historical knowledge, now considered necessary in bourgeois society⁴. Photography's role was as important as the text, and 19th century Portugal saw the

appearance of important texts on History, of greater or lesser importance. From Alexandre Herculano and Oliveira Martins, to Pinheiro Chagas, but photographs of the main monuments did also appear, as stereo cards, and in the press.

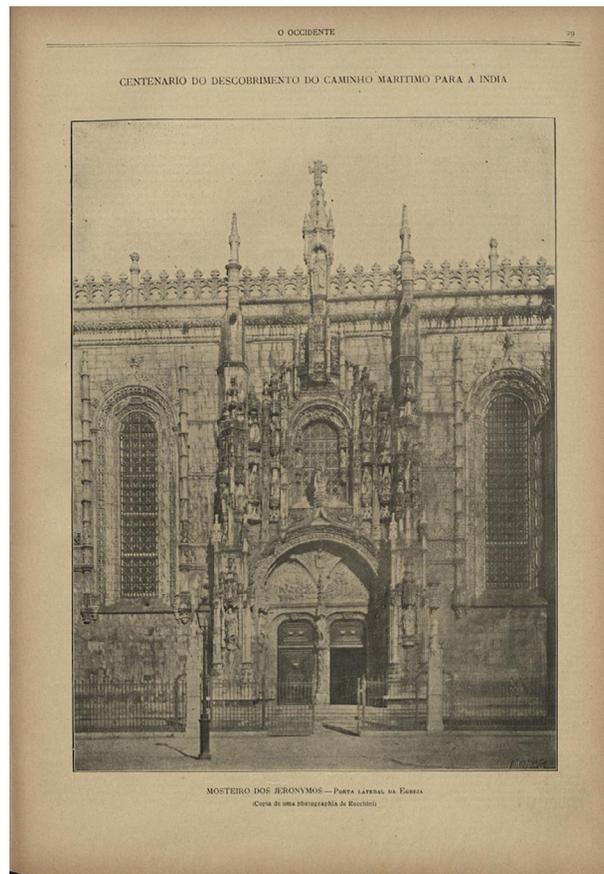
Within this framework we will try to understand how photography of two buildings may have contributed to their role as a major political symbol. However they are also of great artistic and architectural significance, making them very noteworthy in late 19th century Portugal. Jerónimos Monastery was the stage for one of the great 19th century commemorations, then acted as National Pantheon, with the tombs of past glories (Vasco da Gama), very symbolic persons (Luís de Camões, the national poet) and of the writer and politician Alexandre Herculano, symbolically giving him the role of greatest 19th Century Portuguese.

This began in the early 16th century with the building of the Jerónimos Monastery, as a commemoration for the arrival of Vasco da Gama to India. Tradition says that it was built

² ALLISON, 1989, pp. 42, 60, p. 57,58.

³ PINHEIRO, 2006

⁴ EDWARDS, 2012, p. 7,9



O Ocidente, 10-02-1898, Jerónimos, Lateral door (made after a Rochinni photograph).

in the place of a small chapel used by seamen to pray before they went to the sea. Another 16th century monument is Belém Tower, a utilitarian building Torre de Belém was assigned to Lisbon defence; however with successive changes it became a highly decorated building and a symbol of Portuguese Golden Age.

The Jerónimos Monastery was built as a major political demonstration, it is majestic in dimensions and decoration. Jeronimos Monastery building started in 1502 or 1503, and spanned through a few decades⁵, up to Portugal's annexation by Phillip II in 1580, from then on it no longer made sense. It lost the symbolic value as the display of imperial power, but continued to be used as a monastery up to the 19th century, when monastic orders were extinct. It was one of the few, and the major monument built in the Manuelino Style. This style, said to be a Portuguese endogenous one, is mostly a late gothic variation with maritime and vegetable subjects. However for the decoration motifs

and the epoch it was made Manuelino is also a symbol of Portuguesa sea discoveries.

«Manuelino» style, is named after D. Manuel I, the king who ordered its construction. The term «Manuelino» and the idea of it being a particular style is a 19th century creation⁶, owing much to liberal nationalistic ideology. There was the ideological need to create a style, particular and exclusive to Portugal, in the quest for the past imperial glory. The Empire needed to be more than an economical or religious enterprise. It had the need for science, and art. If the discussion on «Manuelino» style is out of this text's scope, it is important to outline his particular characteristics, namely the heavy decoration with maritime and naturalistic elements, which does justify its connection to sea travels.⁷ Even if it is not being considered now as an autonomous architectural style, it is easily recognisable and exotic. This

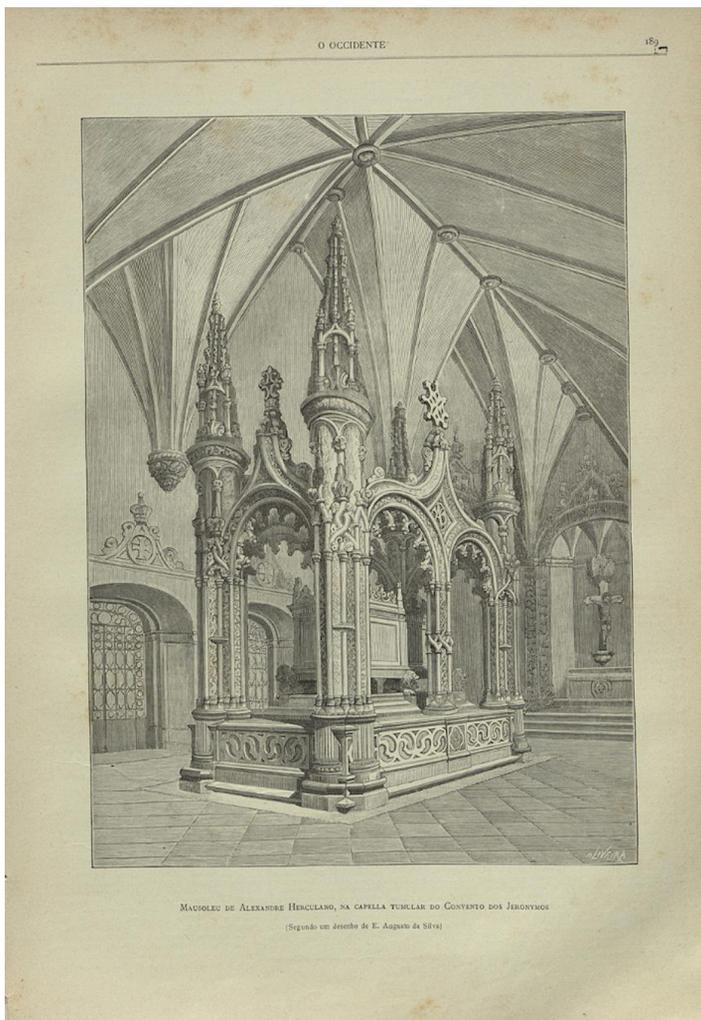
⁵ «Jerónimos» in SERRAO, 363-365.

⁶ His main theoreticians are even from a later time. Reynaldo dos Santos and Mário Chicó theorized about Manuelino well into the 20th century.

⁷ PEREIRA, pp. 11-101, p. 53-57.



O Ocidente, 01-01-1879, Roof collapse in Casa Pia Bulding (made after a drawing).



O Ocidente, 01-01-1878, Project for Alexandre Herculano tomb.

would be important for 19th century photographers and their orientalist quest.

According to 16th century chronicler Damião de Goes, in 1556, the King, D. Manuel: «Built to his grave, and of his wife, Queen D. Maria, his wife, and of his sons, a Monastery, in invocation of Our Lady of Belem close to the beach, five kilometres from Lisbon, bellow Restelo, and installed there with S. Jerónimo's monks, and we say, there is no other bigger or grander in Europe, he didn't finish the Monastery, as death came to him, the King John the third, his son, continued the work, made a great part of it, without yet finishing it».⁸

As home to these monuments no wonder Belém was seen as a symbol of Portuguese past glory becoming a crucial point for 19th century liberals. Liberal ideology was concerned with history and saw the country as being decadent since late 16th century discoveries, which they considered to be the golden age for Portugal, when the seaborne empire was seen as being at its greatest. Belém, and the Jerónimos Monastery were the stage for the 1880 celebration of Camões 3rd centennial. Camões is the national poet, not only because his major work «Os Lusíadas» tells a part of Portuguese History in an epic way, but also as the title might be seen as designating the Portuguese, seen as descendants of the ancient people; Lusitanos. Camões' death is also coincident with the annexation of Portugal by Phillip II. Camões was important enough to out shadow Vasco da Gama (the first to go to India by sea), whose remains went to Jerónimos at the same time as Camões did.

This use of the Belém area as a major ideological display, linked to the past imperial glory, continued through the 20th Century, from Salazar's dictatorship, to the EU treaty signature.

The area continues to have a strong symbolism; it is one of the major tourist spots, but also one of the most important places for memory in Portugal. Everything happening there makes way to passionate arguments, even of dubious importance. The recent plan of Lisbon mayor to create new arrangements in local gardens replacing old colonial symbols faces a strong opposition.

We will try to understand how this area became a major magnet for 19th century photography and how photography helped to build and promote Belém's identity as a symbolic place for Portugal and his history. This will be made with photographs appearing in the press, mostly on the quarterly «O Ocidente», published from 1878 to 1913. The choice for a publication, the only illustrated published regularly through the late 19th century is justified by the widest diffusion these photographs had, when compared to others. They do not have the scope to cover all the period, but they may show the changes and the occasions where Belém was in the limelight. This choice of a periodical is also needed as in Portugal there was never an organized photographic survey on monuments, common in other countries.

Portugal was not a part of the Grand Tour, not even a focus point for orientalists⁹, however, 19th century photographers did come to Portugal, most of them to Lisbon and the Belém area was a major focus point. The monastery was present in a large number of stereoscopic card collections, sometimes identified as Casa Pia orphanage. The same happened on a lesser scale with Belém Tower. There is a list of stereo companies who sold stereocards of Belém. Ferrier et Soulier (1870-1880); Iberia estereoscópica (1900-1910); J. Laurent (1871), Keystone, Lachenal et Favre (1871), Léon et Levi 1870's, Underwood (1903 ?)¹⁰. Some images seem to have gone from company to company, as there the same images were sold by different companies. Portuguese photographers were also interested in the Monastery, Carlos Relvas photographed it around 1870, and he was not the only one.¹¹

It is striking how the monument looked different from what it does today. The two west towers were much taller, there was no central tower, an adjacent building also does not appear. But photographers did more than photograph the general view of the monuments. For Jerónimos Monastery, there are general images, as well as decorative details, the cloisters, or the heavily decorated main door.

⁸ Quoted in SANTINHO, 1989, p. 130. Translation by the author.

⁹ PÉREZ GALLARDO, 2015.

¹⁰ <https://web.fe.up.pt/~jmf/stereo/>

¹¹ AAVV, 2003, p. 215, 218.



O *Occidente*, 10-03-1913, Belém Tower, Photo A. Lima.

There is the need to deepen the very simple explanation on the Monastery origins. Belém, now a part of Lisbon, is located west of the city, closer to the end of the Tagus river. It was at the same time a good place to have ships departing to faraway places, and a good place to display power and wealth. Seamen would go to a small chapel there and say their prayers before leaving to the sea in what would be most likely a long trip, with a strong possibility of no return. With Vasco da Gama trip to India in 1498, sea travel became a bigger business, and there was the symbolic need to have some kind of display of that power and wealth.

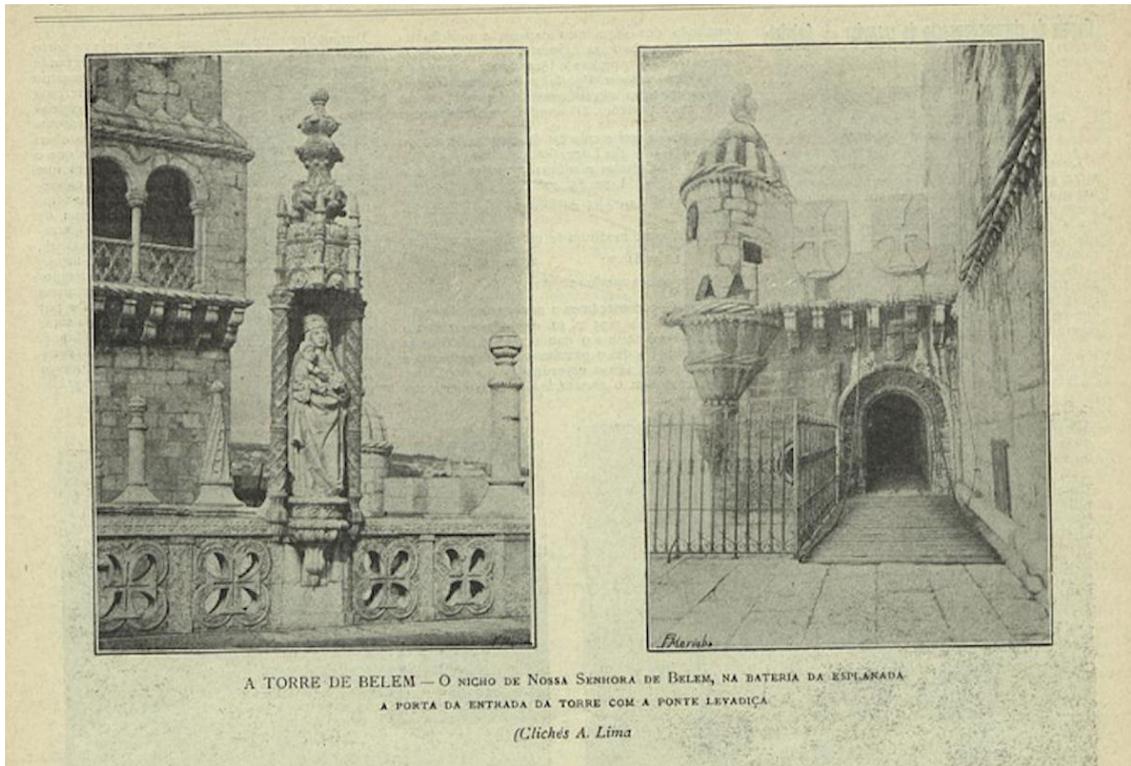
Jeronimos Monastery building started in 1502 or 1503, and spanned through a few decades, up to Portugal's annexation by Phillip II in 1580, from then on it no longer made sense. It lost the symbolic value as the display of imperial power, but continued to be used as a monastery up to the 19th century, when monastic orders were extinct.

The building was made in the so-called «Manuelino» style, named after D. Manuel I,

the king who ordered its construction. The term «Manuelino» and the idea of it being a particular style is a 19th century creation¹², owing much to liberal nationalistic ideology. There was the ideological need to create a style, particular and exclusive to Portugal, in the quest for the past imperial glory. The Empire needed to be more than an economical or religious enterprise. It had the need for science, and art. The discussion on «Manuelino» style is out of this text's scope. The most important is to outline his particular characteristics, namely the heavy decoration with maritime and naturalistic elements, which justifies its connection to sea travels.¹³ Even if now it is not being considered now as an autonomous architectural style, it is easily recognisable and exotic. This would be important for 19th century photographers and their orientalist quest.

¹² His main theorists are even from a latter time. Reynaldo dos Santos and Mário Chicó theorized about Manuelino well into the 20th Century.

¹³ PEREIRA, 1995, pp 11, 101, p 53-57.



Belém Ideological Showcase for Portugal.

Up to the late 19th century the area had been all but abandoned as a political symbol. A text appeared in «O Ocidente» says it was forgotten from 1755 great earthquake, up to the establishment of the court in the close by Palácio da Ajuda in 1862¹⁴. To tell the truth there were things happening there which no one would want to remember, namely the 2nd most famous trip to Brazil, that of the Portuguese king and court, escaping from Napoleon's invasion in 1908.¹⁵

Actually this is somehow optimistic. The Jeronimos Monastery had been expropriated in the 1830's, like most church properties, and was used by «Casa Pia de Lisboa» as an orphanage. In 1879 it was being rebuilt, when a major collapse happened. On the news appearing in «O Ocidente» it is still referred to as «Casa Pia», not as «Jeronimos Monastery». The same was also truth for some of the stereograms sold by several companies.

Works on the Monastery have been rather controversial, There was a roof fall in 1878... The number of projects was overwhelming, with different projects being rejected from 1860 to

1898¹⁶. Refusing and replacing projects and architects shows the need to have political control of those works. The need to rebuild was somehow enhanced by the destruction of several important buildings in post liberal revolution Lisbon.¹⁷

It was only in 1880, with the commemoration of 300 years of Camões death that did put the Belém in centre of politics, as the supposed remains, as well as those of Vasco da Gama were taken into the Monastery. Camões has a role for Portuguese letters similar to that of Cervantes in Spain or Shakespeare in Britain. He was the national poet, and a national symbol. His death close to the date of Portugal's annexation by Phillip II and a major work called «Os Lusíadas» (which could be rough fully translated as «The Portuguese» do help in making it a symbol.

Restoration works spanned for decades, and were finished very close to 1900. The Monastery assumes the condition (although not in a written form) of «Pantheon National». Alexandre Herculano, famed writer and liberal politician, first and only mayor of Belém was buried there with a tomb inspired by «manuelino» which was finished after

¹⁴ «O Ocidente» 1-08-1882.

¹⁵ PINHEIRO, 2011, p. 193.

¹⁶ ANACLETO, 1997, p. 207 a 271.

¹⁷ Pinheiro, op. cit, (note 14) p. 217.

1900. Besides Herculano other politicians and writers were buried there. It became again the national centre for political representation. Of course without Camões and Vasco da Gama there would be no pantheon. After the 1910 Republican Revolution, the presidential palace was established in Belém, confirming that importance.

There are plenty of photographs from 19th century Belém and his monuments. The tower may have not that many changes, but the Monastery is difficult to recognize from Laurent, or other photographers' images. This area became politically important in the late 19th century, after centuries of being forgotten, but was already attracting photographers since before 1870. Photographers preceded politician's interest in that area.

Maybe foreign photographers came to Portugal in the quest for orientalism. They did so, with large success in Spain. Portugal was not so well known and did not have a large number of Moorish or more exotic places and buildings. These two buildings were the most exotic they could find in Lisbon, or even in Portugal. So a photographer's quest for the exotic, in order to sell stereocards, may have preceded politicians' understanding of a place which could be a potential political showcase.

In the late 19th century Portugal would turn itself again to colonial policy (and adventures). Being a symbol and a commemoration for the maritime travels, these monuments were in the centre of a nationalist rebirth with a strong point in History (like most nationalism) and in the golden age of discoveries and maritime travel. Showing 400 years of maritime empire would be an argument for Portuguese colonial pretensions. The place built to celebrate those travels would gain enormous symbolic importance. Maybe this would not be so easy without a decade's long tradition of being a major focus point for photography.

No better way of showing that importance, as staging there the tricentennial commemorations of Camões. Those were one of the great social, cultural and political happenings of late 19th century Portugal, as they were commemorating 300 years of Camões death, and the journey of Vasco da Gama to India. They were at the same time an affirmation of Portugal's willingness to return to previous greatness and also of the desire to return to the last part of the empire, Africa. It was not an easy return, but the idea remained for almost

100 years, up to the end of the colonial empire in 1974/75.¹⁸

These pretensions were challenged after the Berlin conference in 1885, and the pretension to have a large territory connecting the territories of Angola and Mozambique in the west and east coast of Africa, was halted by British plans for southern Africa. This is the reason for 1890 political unrest, for a big growth in the Republican Party. It was a major political change, which eventually preceded the 1910's republican revolution. The current Portuguese national anthem is still a product of 1890.

The monastery's works only finished around 1900. Besides Camões, Vasco da Gama and Alexandre Herculano's graves, there were also a few other important personalities being translated there. The style characteristics were somehow enhanced to emphasise the maritime and naturalistic decoration. The monastery had important changes, parts rebuilt (from centuries of use, and the 1878 collapse), towers changed and added, and a new building which technically was not part of the monastery, but was perceived as being so. Alexandre Herculano's grave was particularly significant, now it is simplified, but was an elaborate example of Neo-Manuelino, to be encompassed by the monastery's style. Demolitions and rebuilding were not without ideology and enhanced the characteristics of Manuelino style.

Photography had an important role. At first, it made these monuments well known. Stereocards were on sale in Portugal, like everywhere else. «Depósito Geral das Estampas» sold them, as early as the 1960's, and it was not the only company doing it. It is not easy to tell how important was photography's influence on this process, however there is no doubt that it was an important way of knowing those buildings. Photography of these buildings does also reflect the changes in the form of its diffusion. Photography's evidential quality turned each image into a statement that could not be accomplished by words.¹⁹ National memory was also being built by images of places and monuments, Jerónimos and the Torre de Belém were among them.

Portugal was entering in the mass politics epoch, public opinion was now to be taken seriously. There was press, but this press was more relevant when illustrated with photographs, or with photography based engravings, was strong-

¹⁸ PINHEIRO, 2015, pp. 303-317.

¹⁹ EDWARDS, op cit. (note 3) p. 2.

er because of the illustration. Urban middle class was growing and gaining more political importance. photography was an instrument to their personal representation, as well as for political representation as would appear in photography of monuments, landscapes and local types, as a part of national identity. Torre de Belém, and mostly Jerónimos Monastery became part of Portuguese representation of history and of the countries visual knowledge.

References

- AA.VV. (2003), *Carlos Relvas e a Casa da Fotografia*, Lisboa: Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga.
- Allison, D. (1989), “Photography and the Mass Market”, in Ford, Colin, ed. *The Story of Popular Photography, Century*, London: Ashgate.
- Anacleto, M^a R. (1997), *Arquitetura Neomedieval Portuguesa*, Vol II, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisboa: Junta Nacional de Investigação Científica e Tecnológica.
- Edwards, E. (2012), *The Camera as Historian, Amateur Photographers and Historical Imagination, 1885-1918*, Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Pereira, P. (1995), “As Grandes Edificações, 1450, 1530”, in Pereira, P., (dir.), *História da Arte Portuguesa*, Lisboa: Circulo dos Leitores.
- Pereira, P. (1995), *As Grandes Edificações, 1450, 1530*, in Pereira, P. (dir.), *História da Arte Portuguesa*, Lisboa: Circulo dos Leitores.
- Perez Gallardo, H. (2015), *Fotografía y arquitectura en el siglo XIX*, Madrid: Cátedra.
- Pinheiro, M. (2011), *Biografia de Lisboa*, Lisboa: Esfera dos Livros.
- Pinheiro, N. (2006), *O Teatro da Sociedade, Fotografia e Distinção Social no espaço Privado e no Público*, Lisboa: CEHCP.
- Pinheiro, N. (2015), “Emigração, imagens e representações”, in Rollo, M. F., Santos (ed.), *Ecos das Migrações, Memórias e Representações dos Migrantes, Séculos XIX-XX*”, Coimbra: Almedina.
- Santinho, M^a M. et all. (1989), *A Arte em Portugal e os Descobrimentos*, Porto: Asa.
- Serrão, J. (Dir.) (s.d.), *Dicionário de História de Portugal*, Lisboa: Iniciativas Editoriais, vol III.