

Crafts in the Portuguese medieval town: organisation, association, and social representation (introduction)¹**Arnaldo Sousa Melo**

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It is our great pleasure to present this special issue of *eHumanista* on the subject “Crafts in the Portuguese medieval town: organisation, association, and social representation”. This is one of the outputs of the project *MedCrafts – Crafts regulation in Portugal in the late Middle Ages (14th-15th centuries)*, running from 2018 to 2022, funded by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology and directed by Arnaldo Sousa Melo.² This project brings together members of different Portuguese research centres with the goal of showing the specificity of urban labour environment in a kingdom characterised by the early and forceful centralisation of power in the hands of the king, supported by deep-rooted municipal power. Concurrently, it aims to promote a comparative approach to other issues, such as the establishment of crafts in the urban space, their regulations, and the constitution of artisanal confraternities, with the ultimate objective of attaining a global understanding of Portuguese medieval crafts which would benefit from further research and publications.

After the contributions to the history of crafts from institutional history in the 1940s and 1950s, the subject saw little development in the following decades. However, significant advances have taken place since 2005, namely from economic and social history, conducted precisely by some of the authors of the present issue. Regarding the Iberian case, attention should be drawn to the recent collective work *Trabajar en la ciudad medieval europea* (2018), which demonstrates the benefit of a comparative approach to studying the medieval organisation of labour in different European regions, namely Portugal, Castile, Aragon, Germany, Flanders, Italy and Poland. Comparative analysis is also a characteristic of the international seminar series «Les formes de réglementation des métiers dans l’Europe médiévale et moderne», organised in different Parisian universities between 2017 and 2021. The first volume resulting from these seminars has already been published, focusing on the actors involved in the production of crafts regulations, trying to unveil the relations between craftsmen and public authorities (*Dans les règles du métier. Les acteurs des normes professionnelles au Moyen Âge et à l’Époque Moderne*, 2020). The present issue aims to contribute to this international discussion, sharing the diversity found in the organisation of labour among different Portuguese cities and towns, which highlights the value of using a comparative approach within a single political space.

Contributions in Portuguese and Castilian explore the integration of crafts in the Portuguese medieval town using case-studies from across the kingdom, between the 14th and early 16th centuries. To this end, they focus on a variety of subjects: the establishment of crafts in the urban space, their organisation by sector, their presence and participation within the municipal institutions, their dealings with the town’s government, the king and

¹ This work was financed by Portuguese funds through FCT – Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia – in the framework of the project *MedCrafts – “Crafts regulation in Portugal in the Late Middle Ages: 14th - 15th centuries”*, Ref.^a PTDC/HAR-HIS/31427/2017.

² Project website at <https://medcrafts2021.wixsite.com/medcrafts>

other authorities, and the association of craftsmen for reasons of materials, spirituality, and solidarity.

The volume begins with an overview of artisans and crafts in the Iberian Peninsula provided by Germán Navarro, one of the external consultants of the MedCrafts project. It analyses the means through which some professional groups sought to achieve institutional recognition, namely notaries, physicians, artists, merchants, butchers and drapers. The creation first of confraternities and then of corporate guilds, never granted these groups complete domain of their respective economic sectors, but at least served as a means of defending their interests by allowing them to participate in municipal governments. This global approach to the political evolution of craft associations is fundamental for properly understanding the case-studies that follow.

Medieval Braga was the seat of the highest ecclesiastical dignity in the kingdom – the archbishopric of Braga – and the jurisdictional power of the city was usually held by the archbishop. Yet, the article written by Raquel Oliveira Martins inquires into this urban context during an exceptional period (1402-1472) in which the political and jurisdictional power of the city belonged to the Portuguese king. The author's purpose was to identify any craftsmen in the urban government of Braga and problematise their responsibilities and expertise as leading municipal offices and magistrates. To this end, she analysed an important *corpus* of municipal documents, finding several craftsmen in records of the city council meetings. The exceptional period studied, and the detailed hermeneutic analysis employed, make this an important contribution to Portuguese urban history and the knowledge of craftsmen's political representation.

In medieval Portugal, professional confraternities played an important role in strengthening the solidarity and collaborative ties between craftsmen. Notwithstanding the religious character of their attributes and their leading aims – solidarity in case of death and participation in the burial ceremonies – these confraternities linked individuals who shared the same profession and economic difficulties. Learning their history is therefore an important step to understanding that of crafts and their regulation before the advent of guilds. However, such research is hampered by the scarcity of written records produced by these associations. This makes Ana Rita Rocha's contribution all the more important. She systematised the data collected on the professional confraternities of Coimbra between the end of 12th century and the second half of the 14th, and analysed it using her deep knowledge of Coimbra's urban structure and social history. Both the depth of the archival work and the hypothesis presented for understanding these religious organisations within the spiritual and social framing of Coimbra's craftsmen are noteworthy.

Rodolfo Feio's article discusses the interaction between artisans from different sectors and the authorities in the process of drawing up and approving their own professional regulations. His research is grounded in a deep analysis of one of the earliest and most detailed sources for craft regulation in the Portuguese urban space – the book of municipal laws from the town of Évora (14th-15th centuries).

The article shows, for instance, that shoemakers and tailors appear to be the most regulated professions, which can be explained by the fact that they produced essential daily items. The regulations' text occasionally shows the craftsmen active participation in the decision processes, particularly through representatives, but also includes rules resulting of municipal imposition. Besides furthering the knowledge of relations between craftsmen and public authorities, the article provides very detailed information on the products made by artisans, thus shedding some light on Portuguese medieval material culture.

Gonçalo Melo da Silva's study relies on a comparative approach of several medieval towns of the Algarve region. He starts by characterising the towns of Tavira, Lagos, Silves, Faro and Loulé between the 14th and the 16th centuries and goes on to examine the craft activities of each city and town, and problematise their similarities and differences. In addition, Silva sought to understand the complementarity of economic resources and occupational activities in this urban regional network, for instance, between coastal and hinterland towns. Founded on a remarkable quantity of primary sources, this contribution focuses on a little known and studied Portuguese region which, in itself, is a significant innovation in the current historiographic context. The quantity and quality of the empirical data, the extension of the author's historiographic knowledge and the multiplicity of questions posed and answered form an appealing invitation to read this sound work.

Next, Josefa Madureira and Luís Miguel Duarte dedicate their essay to the analysis of a crucial craft in Medieval economy: butchery. They start by debating the classical historiographical perspectives on this important job, namely the prejudices associated with those tasks and the great heterogeneity that characterised the sector. They then analyse some of the Portuguese regulations with the purpose of understanding the communication of butchers with public authorities and the connections (and conflicts) with the leather sector. The detailed information provided in this article will enable the readers to properly answer the sassy question suggested in the title: who would want to marry a butcher?

Finally, Arnaldo Melo analyses the organisation of the operational chain of leatherwork in three different cities (Guimarães, Porto and Évora), identifying the urban settlements, the different types of labourers, their techniques, equipment, and workshops. This is an interesting comparative analysis, revealing that leatherwork in these cities was organised into a quite flexible entrepreneurial model, comprising very low permanent costs. These characteristics appear to be quite unique in the European context, proving that different models of labour organisation existed during the Middle Ages. The traditional perspective on the leatherwork operational chain needs to be rethought in light of this new data.

This issue is addressed to all those interested in labour, urban history, and the Middle Ages. The novelty of the presented articles surpasses the simple exploitation of under studied subjects in Portuguese historiography. We believe that it is a fundamental contribution for a deeper comprehension of labour dynamics in Medieval Europe. It not only demonstrates that alternative organisation models to guilds existed, but that craftsmen's presence and activities played a fundamental role in the economic and political evolution of urban spaces in the Middle Ages.