

edited by Joaquim Rodrigues dos Santos

PRESERVING TRANSCULTURAL HERITAGE:

YOUR WAY OR MY WAY?

Questions on Authenticity, Identity
and Patrimonial Proceedings in the
Safeguarding of Architectural Heritage
Created in the Meeting of Cultures



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Proceedings in the Safeguarding of Architectural
Heritage Created in the Meeting of Cultures

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LAYOUT

Fernanda Cavalheiro
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ISBN

978-989-658-467-2

DOI

10.30618/978-989-658-467-2

LEGAL DEPOSIT NUMBER

428851/17

ISSUE

07.2017



EDIÇÃO

CALEIDOSCÓPIO – EDIÇÃO E ARTES GRÁFICAS, SA
Rua de Estrasburgo, 26 – r/c dto. 2605-756 Casal de
Cambra. PORTUGAL
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CONSERVATION OF TRANSCULTURAL HERITAGE

COOPERATION TOWARDS CORRECT INTERPRETATION AND COMMON STRATEGIES – THE VICE-ROYS PORTRAIT GALLERY

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https://doi.org/10.30618/978-989-658-467-2_30

ABSTRACT

India and Portugal share custody of an important portrait collection to both countries and their common past. The paintings surface is currently much altered due to several layers of coarse repaints which damage original materials and prevent its correct interpretation and appreciation. Recent investigations and scientific studies concluded the need to conduct a proper analytical methodology before any kind of restoration procedure, due to the need of safeguarding the correct interpretation of this historical document. In that sense international cooperation and multidisciplinary teams are required to achieve common strategies towards best practice in conservation.

KEYWORDS

Sharing conservation decisions; Transcultural Heritage; Vice-roys portrait gallery; Documental value

A transcultural collection from Portugal and India: The Vice-Roys portrait gallery

The portrait gallery of the Vice-Roys and Governors of former Portuguese territories in India¹ was first commissioned by Vice-Roy D. João de Castro in 1547 to portrait himself and all the 12 rulers that preceded him since 1505. Authorship is uncertain, but Portuguese chronicler and former secretary of Afonso de Albuquerque, Gaspar Correia (1495-1561) mentions to have given instructions to a local painter regarding anatomic traces of the first twelve rulers². Art historian Pedro Dias believes the local painter was a highly regarded Hindu artist, converted to Catholicism with the name Constantino³. Also art historian Vítor Serrão mentions the possible authorship of local painter Aleixo Godinho of some of the portraits from the XVIIth century⁴. We also know that some of the paintings were executed in Lisbon, but we believe most of the portraits were made locally by the best artists available, before the ruler left his charge. Besides the physical traces, these portraits documented the ruler's iconography through the depiction of the coat of arms, military insignia, armoury, costume and the inscription of the main achievements. This tradition was kept until the last General Governor, António Vassalo e Silva, existing today 120 full size portraits which document 400 years of common history between both countries. Unfortunately, their conservation condition doesn't allow a proper artistic study and comparison with other indo-Portuguese paintings and portraits.

The collection is currently divided between two museums, with the most part of the collection exhibited in the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) Museum in the World Heritage Site of Old Goa and three portraits in the National Museum of Ancient Art (MNAA) in Lisboa⁵. Investigations regarding this collection started in 2011 associating academic investigators and research institutes such as HERCULES Laboratory (from Évora University, Portugal) and José de Figueiredo Laboratory (from Portuguese Directorate for Cultural Heritage). We believe it's time to move forward, towards an international cooperation between these institutes, ASI, and both governments of India and Portugal, due to the urgent need for preserving this unique transcultural heritage which was largely reproduced and mentioned by chroniclers, voyagers, explorers, historians and investigators over time.

Since its first display in the Palace of Sabaio in 1547⁶, this gallery has always caused a great visual impact to all its beholders, deliberately creating an imposing and reverent background in the main acts room, which illustrated the Portuguese military and diplomatic achievements in India. Viceroy and humanist D. João de Castro's inspiration were probably other European portrait galleries and the enhancement of the notion of Empire associated with the Portuguese territorial extension from western Lisbon ruled by King D. João III to eastern Goa. With this gallery, D. João de Castro was 'honouring himself and also paying a visual tribute to the epic men that preceded him'⁷.

Chronicler Diogo do Couto (1542-1616) describes this room in the end of Governor Fernão Teles de Menezes government (1581), in the moment when he places his portrait in the 'room of fame': 'In this room the Vice-Roys and Governors perform the Councils and dispatches, because it's very beautiful, and it's righteous that they always have those Characters before their eyes, so that they strive in order to imitate the heroic accomplishments of those Men (...) thus following the order of the Athenians, which used to have in the Senate the portraits of their illustrious, so that they were seen and followed by all'⁸.

Sadly, the grandeur of this gallery was lost during the following centuries, mainly due to poor renovation interventions, as described by British explorer Richard Burton during a visit

to the Governor's Palace in Pangim, between 1842 and 1849: "The collection is, or rather has been, a valuable one; unfortunately some Goth, by the order of some worse than Goth, has renewed and revived many of the best and oldest pictures, till they have assumed a most ludicrous appearance. The handsome and chivalrous-looking nights have been taught to resemble the Saracen's Heads, the Marquis of Granby, and other sign-post celebrities in England. An artist is, however, it is said, coming from Portugal, and much scraping and varnishing may do something for the De Gamas and the Castros at present so miserably disfigured"⁹.

Effectively, the current conservation condition that still affects these paintings doesn't allow a correct interpretation of the documental value associated with these portraits, especially the ones depicting the rulers from 1505 to 1656. In fact, investigations regarding this collections' past¹⁰ indicates that through its 400 years of existence, these paintings moved nine times from place of exhibition and suffered at least four renovation interventions which profoundly altered the portraits composition. Restoration reports from 1957 which took place in the former Institute for the Exam and Restoration of Works of Art (IEROA)¹¹, in Lisbon, proves that paintings dated far back to the late sixteenth century were covered with five different paint layers. One must also consider the environmental and climatic agents of degradation associated to the subtropical climate of Goa which certainly were the main reason to justify this number of interventions. In fact, under the surface paint layers one can easily detect paint flaking and large areas of pictorial lacunae, which were covered, but not stabilized. These facts pose an important question which needs urgent response: what's the effective conservation condition of the primitive portraits that still survive under these repainted layers? Is it still possible to recover its documental value? Who should be responsible?

Analysing the reports of the seven portraits¹² restored in IEROA between 1954 and 1961 one can appoint several facts: a) some of the portraits which apparently belong to the first series of 13 from 1547 are missing (or hidden under other portrait) and were replaced during the seventeenth century; b) the paintings which apparently belong to the mentioned first series that still exist are in bad state of conservation with large areas of paint layer missing, but may be possible to recover the documental information; c) there are panels where two different characters are depicted one over the other; d) Results from the restoration intervention from IEROA proves the need to create multi-disciplinary teams and thorough scientific analysis of all portraits in order to guarantee the correct interpretation of their documental values and avoid all kind of misconceptions.

Correct interpretation: which values should be preserved?

When dealing with repainted objects, several issues surround the decision whether the repaints should be removed or not removed. Even with previous exams and analysis that can guide us through the process, the definitive elimination of these paint layers will destroy values associated with them such as the historicity of the object itself, especially if these interventions are documented and have an historical background. The ultimate decision must always be well supported in terms of ethics, deontology and technical/operational scope.

Nevertheless, the restoration procedure that will necessarily follow the repaint removal must also be accounted for before the removal itself as well as the perception of the quality and quantity of original layer that will be revealed. It's important to understand which information can be restored and what the proper methodology to be used is.

In this case, the study of the portraits reproductions and descriptions as well as the study of the ruler's biographies can give us important data that will assure a correct interpretation and recognition of the formal values to be preserved. In fact, the documental richness and values of this collection lies on the iconographic representation of each ruler, namely their coat of arms, inscriptions, military and religious insignia, armoury and even their garments, due to its reference in coeval documents.

The following case-studies, from some of the portraits restored in IEROA prove the need to conduct a thorough study before any intervention as well as the need to have resourceful multidisciplinary teams to assure correct interpretation of data.

Case-study 1: Portrait of D. João de Castro

In this particular case-study, the restoration process valued the overall standardization of the portraits that were being restored, using an ochre background surrounding the profile of the figure which, unfortunately, also covered an important iconographic symbol of D. João de Castro, the palm leaf crown.

Gaspar Correia mentioned 'the Governor had himself painted by natural, armed like he was when he entered [Goa] in triumph'¹³. Diogo do Couto described with great detail the apparatus surrounding this event which celebrated Castro's victory in the second siege of Diu, namely his appearance 'dressed with a French costume in carmine satin, all garnished with gold and with cuffed sleeves', a leather corset decorated with silver studs and the carmine cover. He also describes the moment when his cap is removed and a councilman places a palm crown in his head and a palm leaf in his hand¹⁴. This was the image which inspired the composition of Castro's portrait from that moment on and that one can compare with Correias' illustration of 'Lendas da Índia', and the early reproductions of the gallery by Lizuarte de Abreu (c. 1560) and Barreto de Resende (c. 1635)¹⁵.

Restoration report signed by IEROA's chief restorer Fernando Mardel, confirms the existence of five paint layers in the inscriptions area and that the removal of the repaint revealed a character matching the descriptions of Diogo do Couto, which included the palm crown. But during chromatic integration process, the crown was covered with the mentioned ochre layer. Until present time, no reference was found regarding if that 'concealment' was deliberate or just misinterpreted. The traces of this crown weren't very clear and mingled with the upper inscription, and without the proper historic background it's possible that the restorer's team choose to value the inscription, as mentioned by Mardel: 'Through radiographic process and surveys of paint layers, we verified the presence of an original painting totally different from the later and given the fact that it offered conditions to be restored and that it had greater documental interest, the portrait was totally clean from upper layers and reconstructed the original painting. Also part of this original painting was an upper inscription and other in the lower part of the painting which were also reconstructed'¹⁶.

Besides the probable lack of access to this archival information, other situations may have contributed to this result, like the absence of the best working conditions, mentioned in the requests from MNAA's director to increase the restoration atelier's budget¹⁷ due to its overflow of work, taking in account the number of restorers in duty. Also, recent investigations prove there was an exterior pressure to conclude this portraits' restoration in order to be included in the 1955 international exhibition of Portuguese Art in the Royal Academy of Arts, in London¹⁸.

Case-study 2: Portraits of Afonso de Albuquerque, Lopo Soares de Albergaria and D. Francisco de Mascarenhas

In this case-study we wish to demonstrate the complexity which surrounds a possible restoration intervention in this collection and the challenges one can face if not properly informed.

As mentioned above, the portrait of Afonso de Albuquerque was also restored by IEROA and was exhibited in Lisbon in 1956, after returning from the exhibition in London. Contrary to the portrait of D. João de Castro, the image revealed after the removal of the repaints didn't match the ancient reproductions and descriptions of an elder man with long white beards and didn't fulfil the expectations of some, in particular the ministry of the National Education, who was used to that iconography, and ordered the addition of beards to the portrait¹⁹.

Both the restorers and MNAA director, João Couto, vehemently opposed this decision and asked a technical opinion to the heraldic specialist (and activist towards the restoration of this gallery) Jorge de Moser, who defended that this type of 'technical difficulty' could only be solved with the exam and restoration of all the 13 portraits from the first series. In fact, by studying the slides from the intervention, he observed that in the original layer of Albuquerque's portrait, was the coat of arms of Governor Lopo Soares de Albergaria and that several other portraits still in Goa had their coats of arms also misplaced²⁰.

Nevertheless, the minister only authorized the sending of the portrait identified as Albergaria but the removal of the repaint didn't reveal Albuquerque, it actually revealed the 13th Vice-Roy, D. Francisco Mascarenhas, whose coat of arms was represented in the portrait identified as Albergaria since the great renovation from 1840²¹. Almost 60 years has passed and this 'technical difficulty' still isn't solved: a) Albuquerque's portrait is in fact Lopo Soares de Albergaria, but 'altered' with beards to look like Albuquerque, which means his portrait is missing; b) the nineteenth century version of Albergaria was eliminated, but a replica in canvas was sent to Goa and currently belongs to the Goa State Museum; c) There is another portrait in Goa identified as D. Francisco Mascarenhas, but the coat of arms apparently belongs to a Francisco Álvares Botelho (1629). Surprisingly, this governor also has a portrait, but the coat of arms doesn't correspond to any known ruler or family.

These two case-studies clearly reveal that a lot of work needs to be done to properly understand and correctly interpret this puzzled gallery. The rearrangement of all loose pieces can only be achieved with a multidisciplinary team composed by experts of painting conservation, scientific exam and analysis, art-history, ultramarine history, heraldic and military iconography.

Conservation challenges and the need for a common strategy

In order to define a proper methodology, one must first understand what challenges this collection faces regarding a possible conservation-restoration intervention:

a) To begin with, the need to conduct a thorough diagnosis, using scientific equipment, through photographic and radiographic exams, followed by chemical analysis for materials identification and characterization. This essential data, when crossed with historical documentation, will provide information regarding the conservation condition of all paint layers, as well as uncurtaining of the older portrait underneath, namely the correct identification and its execution timeframe. In an era where conservation science tools have proved to be a great ally in

the benefit of conservation practice²², the recollection of data to a user friendly database which allows an easy access and sharing of information, and promotes the use of common terminology between the working groups will also be essential.

b) Secondly, defining a conservation methodology for the whole collection which respects both countries heritage laws and international conservation codes of ethics and that is inclusive to stakeholders' involvement. What, why and to whom conservation concerns and what values should be considered? How can we develop a sustainable project regarding the technical difficulties and the resources needed for such undertaking?

c) Thirdly, the need to assure long term preservation of this collection. Issues such as conservation conditions, correct museographic display, conservation training and relation with the community who still "connect" with this heritage are essential for a positive outcome.

Sharing conservation decisions within transcultural heritage

The concept "Sharing conservation decisions" was first developed by Stefan Michalski in 1992²³ and has been passed on to conservators and heritage managers by ICCROM courses since 2002, having influenced contemporary conservation theorists like, Barbara Appelbaum, Erica Avrami, Sarah Staniford, Munoz Vinas, Amita Baig and others. It urged from the need to 'strengthen further interdisciplinary decision-making in conservation and restoration, to develop common discourses and unifying themes, while recognizing and celebrating approaches and methods, which are rooted in different cultures, [thus improving] conservation decisions by ensuring transparency, traceability, and the effectiveness of the process'²⁴. How could we apply these concepts to a transcultural heritage conservation project outside the European context, which is associated with a colonial background and to a cultural minority that may pose some sensitive issues in the political and sociological sphere?

One of UNESCO's fundamental principle is that the cultural heritage of each is the cultural heritage of all. Responsibility for cultural heritage and the management of it belongs, in the first place, to the cultural community that has generated it, and subsequently to that which cares for it. However, in addition to these responsibilities, adherence to the international charters and conventions developed for conservation of cultural heritage also obliges consideration of the principles and responsibilities flowing from them.

Indian heritage management consultant Amita Baig has many time approached conservation issues in India, specially the importance of involving local communities and citizens towards the 'responsibility for their cultural heritage' and the governments' role in defining clear policies to that end, stating that they haven't been 'proactive and certainly not progressive'²⁵. Recently, though, ASI's Museum Guidelines' update in 2013 reflected the need to improve the universal interpretation and knowledge of its sites and collections. One of its six pillars in museum management mission, 'Research and Dissemination', is dedicated 'to establish the historic, archaeological, cultural, ecological and aesthetic value of the objects and the site', including the involvement and collaboration 'with stakeholders, community, scholars and experts, to develop a narrative for the museum, collections and the site'²⁶.

Inevitably, the cooperation towards the conservation of this transcultural heritage will imply reaching consensus in the definition of a common strategy between several agents from a broad spectrum of knowledge: a) experts of sociological, humanities, arts and science fields; b) stakeholders and custodians and c) institutions responsible for heritage conservation and

legislation from two countries, with different cultural and sociological traditions, influenced by eastern or western conservation philosophies and deontology.

What would then be the proper approach? How to share decisions in this context? Who should be involved? Conservation theorists from all over the world seem unanimous: dialogue, transparency, negotiation, sharing, custodianship, as one can understand from the following quotes.

‘Genuine partnership can only be invoked in an atmosphere of transparency and trust’²⁷;

‘An optimal treatment will rely on explicit decisions shared with all stakeholders, not by the formulaic applications of familiar pre-conceived patterns of treatment. A uniform methodology provides the structured space within which such discussion can take place’²⁸.

‘Cultural significance for the purposes of conservation decision making can no longer be a purely scholarly construction but, rather, an issue negotiated among the many professionals, academics, and community members who value the object or place—the “stakeholders”²⁹.

‘An ethics is claimed in which the different points of view and the different functions of the object harmonize as much as possible’³⁰.

‘In Asia, conservation of the heritage should and will always be a negotiated solution reconciling the differing values of the various stakeholders, and underscored that this “negotiated state of mind” is a value inherent in Asian cultural processes’³¹.

Towards a cooperation model

The Portuguese presence in India and the heritage associated with it (tangible and intangible) are constantly being studied and discussed by a great number of investigators, scholars and a vast community of citizens worldwide who still share this interest and easily connect with each other through internet forums and international meetings, accessing and sharing information. Throughout 400 years, political and religious authorities were responsible for the creation of most of that heritage, so the portrait gallery of the ‘Estado da India’s’ rulers gains a special place in the imaginary of this community, also entitled to share its custodianship. In that sense, we should understand the importance of this cooperation between India and Portugal, not just in the benefit of the institutions involved or just in the scope of the gallery itself, but as a first step towards a greater comprehension of the indo-Portuguese heritage, towards its valorisation and universal acceptance and, ultimately towards its preservation. ASI Museum, in Old Goa, could become an important centre for international investigation, where ‘intangible heritage information [could be] associated with its cultural collections’, providing the understanding and documentation of ‘the links between the objects, the stories surrounding the objects and the communities that produced them’³².

Amita Baig’s perspective regarding management of cultural heritage should be still considered: ‘Public-private partnership is not the mere grant or receipt of funds, it is the sharing of knowledge, of custodianship. Most crucially it expands the base for decision-making and enlarges the stakeholder’s role. The management of the cultural heritage is more than ever before, a transdisciplinary undertaking. It must become one of the key building blocks for the future’³³.

Ultimately, we believe a long term India-Portugal cooperation would truly benefit this transcultural heritage project. On one hand, the correct interpretation issue is inherent to it and constitutes, in our opinion, the most important criteria to respect, in terms of intervention. On the other hand, stakeholders and custodians will play an important role in the preservation of this collection. In this sense, the sharing of knowledge and the development of discussion round tables, fieldworks, training, seminars and interchange of professionals will be the key to adjust the different ways of thinking and integrate them in a common strategy, thus overcoming language, distance, political background and sociological barriers, in a 'sustainable relationship based on trust and mutual respect' which already proved to be essential in other international cooperations³⁴.

NOTES

- 1 The Portuguese presence in India lasted for 400 years, from 1505 to 1961. It once included the coastal territories from the Malabar Coast until the Bay of Bengal. The territories which still constituted the Portuguese State of India in 1947 were Goa, Daman, Diu, Dadra and Navegar Aveli which returned to Indian administration in 1961.
- 2 Correia, 1858.
- 3 Dias, 1998.
- 4 Serrão, 2011.
- 5 The portraits of D. Francisco de Almeida, Afonso de Albuquerque and D. Francisco Mascarenhas.
- 6 Correia, 1858.
- 7 Jordan-Gschwend, 1995, p. 78.
- 8 Couto, 1787, p. 107. Translated by the author.
- 9 Burton, 2003, pp. 28-29.
- 10 Reis, 2014.
- 11 Moura, 1961.
- 12 Mardel, 1956; Moura, 1961.
- 13 Correia, 1878, p. 596-597, translated by the author.
- 14 Couto, 1781, Vol. V, p. 311-320.
- 15 Correia, 1858; Abreu, 1992; Resende, 1646.
- 16 Mardel, 1956, translated by the author.
- 17 Couto, 1956.
- 18 Fernandes, 2001.
- 19 Reis, 2014.
- 20 Moser, 1957.
- 21 Reis, 2014.
- 22 Heritage, Golfomitsou, 2015.
- 23 Michalski, 1992.
- 24 ICCROM, 2008.
- 25 Baig, 2003.
- 26 ASI, 2013.
- 27 Baig, 2003.
- 28 Appelbaum, 2010, p.25.
- 29 Torre; Avrami, 2000, p.9.
- 30 Muñoz Viñas, 2003. Translated by the author.
- 31 UNESCO, 2003.
- 32 Daniel, 2008.
- 33 Baig, 2003.
- 34 Daniel, 2008; Cotte, 2008.

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