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Books and cities: book commerce in 18th Century Portuguese cities and the learned sociabilities

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Abstract

One of the main characteristics of learned sociabilities in the 18th Century was the production and circulation of books transmitting news, scientific discoveries, voyage narratives to exotic lands – particularly those of recent European contact – and philosophical polemical debates around disciplinary paradigms. This paper will try to see how the presence of books in Portuguese cities of the 18th Century was perceived and represented by foreign travelers – whether they were scientist or not – who travelled through Portugal during the second half of that century and publish their voyage narratives. The foreign view will be confronted with the state of the art on the history of the written word in the Portuguese Empire, which allows us to know the commerce, circulation and possession of printed works as fundamental aspects of urban existence in that period.

The printed word has been scrutinized by historians of the past decades, around the many aspects involved in writing, printing, distributing and reading books (Darnton, 2007). Such studies have also been carried out in Portugal by Manuela Domingos (2000) Diogo Ramada Curto (2007a; 2007b) among others, but, to my knowledge, very few studies have been devoted to the daily presence of booksellers in 18th Century Portuguese cities, except maybe through the lenses of the censorship apparatus, as seen in the works of Maria Teresa Payan Martins (2005) and Luis Carlos Villalta (1999). There have also been a number of studies about Portuguese libraries, such as those by Maria Luisa Cabral (2013; 2014) and Francisco Vaz (2009), which is another important aspect of book history, since it focuses on the preferences and tastes of readers, while also dealing with the constraints of censorship and educational conflicts and processes.

When confronted with the question of how books could be offered to readers in 18th Century Portuguese cities, both by booksellers or in libraries, a problem of documental sources arose. Except from the biased view of the censorship or the police enforcing the Royal policies, how else could we find the daily interactions of readers and their “suppliers”? The contractual documents collected by Diogo Ramada (2007) and other historians of the book give insight into some aspects of the lives of many of the Portuguese “peoples of the book”, particularly booksellers and printers of the 18th Century and, like the censorship, the judicial or inquisitorial processes, or the police confrontations, deal with moments of rupture – a commercial partnership is started or ended, a wedding is celebrated, a last will and testament is filed.

One possible source (but not the only one) for information about the daily aspects of urban life in the past – and, in this instance, about how Portuguese men and women of the 18th Century went about finding and reading their books – are the several narratives written by foreign travelers who roamed Portugal during that Century, particularly the second half, when both book production and travels increased in number and importance.

The voyage is considered, here, in its widest possible meaning, keeping in mind that the greatest motivator for geographical displacement at this time was, undoubtedly, war (Moureau, 2005: 26). Notwithstanding, people had other commercial or intellectual reasons to travel, even if this was ultimately a once in a lifetime occasion (Moureau, 2005: 28). Even so, many people did travel, regardless of the reason, and despite the fact that, as the century ended and the revolutionary turmoil increased, the voyage as “life school” – typical of the *Grand Tour* – was slowly replaced by the fear of traveling or the need to flee (Moureau, 2005: 37).

The voyage, which implied some preparation, and resulted in writing, either during the voyage itself – or at a later date, consulting his own notes and other narratives – was particularly important during this period, because:

[...] *el viaje por Europa* [...] *actúa como un laboratorio de ideas y sensaciones de descubrimientos y redescubrimientos que hacen de este último siglo del Antiguo Régimen, un momento antes de la era de los nacionalismos, el testigo de un continente que se construía en si su propia imagen* (Moureau, 2005: 42).¹

Also, the voyage meant *true knowledge* acquired through first person observation (Chincilla, 2016: 306), as well as it dealt with the idea of “lived reality”, which warranted likelihood and authenticity to the narrative written by the voyager (Tobar, 2005: 8). This true knowledge acquired during a trip and shared through an account of that trip was instrumental in forming the ways in which spaces and men were perceived and models of thought were adopted throughout Europe (Buescu, 1988: 27).

In the specific case of voyages to Portugal, there was a load of previous information, given by the reports published by French Enlightenment authors (Voltaire and Montesquieu, for example) who had never actually been to the Iberic peninsula, which made the travelers visiting Portugal and Spain to expect countries “dominated by the Inquisition, with nearly arabic laws and mores” (Brito, 2014: 75). As actual travelers arrived, such ideas were eventually replaced by more accurate descriptions of live, particularly in the capitals.

One last note, regarding 18th Century travelers, is their fondness for books and libraries, as many were actually devoted to buying books for themselves, for their comrades or for their patrons, kings, academies or universities. Many voyages had the acquisition of books as an objective – although sometimes a secondary one (Moureau, 2005: 32-3).

¹ “[...] the journey through Europe [...] acts as a laboratory of ideas and sensations of discoveries and rediscoveries that make this last century of the Old Regime, a moment before the era of nationalisms, the witness of a continent that was building its own image”.

Many travelers who passed through or spent time in Portugal eventually published their narratives, sometimes in the form of letters, and a few were published only in the 20th Century (Pimentel, 2012: 18-23). Coming from a number of different European countries, their descriptions and representations of Portuguese cities and landscape were frequently made in comparison with their own homelands. For this paper, thirteen such narratives were chosen, ranging from trips made as early as 1760 up to 1811, and published mostly in the last decades of the 18th Century.

The first work analyzed was Giuseppe Marc'Antonio Baretti's *A journey from London to Genoa, through England, Portugal, Spain and France*, describing a trip made from 1761 to 1765, first published in Italian as *Lettere famigliari* and later translated into English and published in London in 1770, where the literary critic, poet, writer, translator, linguist and author had been living. The next book is Charles-François du Perrier du Mouriez's, (better known as General Dumouriez, of the French Republican Army) *Etat présent du royaume de Portugal, en l'année 1766*, written after he returned to France from a diplomatic mission to Madrid, and published only in 1775. Next were the *Travels through Portugal and Spain in 1772 and 1773* written by the Englishman Richard Twiss and published in 1775, with French and German translations following one year later. The fourth book was *Letters from Portugal, on the late and present of that kingdom*, by the British Royal Navy officer John Blankett, who traveled in 1777, and most likely published his book in that same year. Also traveling in 1777, Jean François Bourgoing's *Voyage du ci-devant Duc du Chatelet en Portugal* was written when the author traveled through the country in his way to Spain, where he was secretary to the French legation sent by Louis XVI, and published in 1798, when he had become the Ambassador of the revolutionary France to Spain.

The Scottish James Ferrier spent the years of 1778 and 1779 as an officer in the Portuguese navy and reported his travels around the country to his brother, in a book published later (1787) under the alias Arthur Willian Costigan and entitled *Sketches of Society and Manners in Portugal*, which is the fifth book used here.

Having arrived in Lisbon in 1787 on his way to Jamaica, the British author William Beckford spent nine months in Portugal and his trip was registered in two books: *Italy; with sketches of Spain and Portugal*, published in 1834 and *Memoirs of William Beckford of Fonthill*, published in 1859. Next is the narrative of the Irish Architect James Cavanagh Murphy, *Travels in Portugal through the provinces of Entre Douro e Minho, Beira, Estremadura and Alem-Tejo in the Years 1789 and 1790*, published in 1795 in England, with translations to German and French being published in 1796 and 1797 respectively.

The English poet and historian Robert Southey wrote his *Letters written during a short residence in Spain and Portugal* in 1795, and published them two years later, while the French doctor Joseph-Barthélemy-François Carrère traveled during 1796 and published

Voyage en Portugal et particulièrement a Lisbonne ou Tableau moral, civil, politique, physique et religieux de cette Capitale, best known as the *Tableau de Lisbonne*, in 1798. The German botanist and naturalist Henry Frederick Link travelled through Portugal from 1797 to 1799 with Count Johann Centurius Hoffmannsegg and published his *Travels in Portugal and thorough France and Spain* originally in German, with an English translation being published in 1801. The *Voyages to Portugal, Spain, Sicily, Malta, Asia-Minor, Egypt &c. From 1796 to 1801* by the British lieutenant Francis Collins had three different editions before 1813, while Carl Ruders, a Swedish naturalist who stayed in Portugal from 1798 to 1802 published his *Portugisisk Resa* (*Voyage in Portugal*) in 1807, with a German translation being published the following year. Last, but not least, the Lieutenant General Georges Cockburn passed through Portugal on his way back from the Sicilian campaign of 1810-11 and published his *A Voyage to Cadiz and Gibraltar, up the Mediterranean to Sicily and Malta in 1810 and 1811, including a description of Sicily and the Lipari Islands, and an Excursion in Portugal* which was published in 1815.

From the nobleman to the scientist, the merchant to the poet, the diplomat to the military leader, these narratives of their voyages will serve the purpose of giving us insights – albeit foreign and frequently biased – on aspects of Portuguese print culture, book commerce, libraries and reading, so that we can, in future studies, contrast these perceptions with other sources that will help comparisons and analysis to be made (or re-made).

We can start with how the reading habits impacted the foreign view of Portuguese society. General Dumouriez (1797: 213) observed, in 1766, that both the literary studies as well as the book commerce (*la librairie*) were in a bad shape (*fort mauvais état*), despite the fact that the Portuguese people had the spirit and disposition for such tasks, both being long “without application”. According to the French nobleman, some young nobles (explaining a little better what he understood as “people”) “begin to throw themselves into literature; they are passionate especially about Voltaire, Rousseau and the new philosophy”, due to the fact that “all these books were translated into Portuguese”. A few decades later, other travelers did not see such changes. Carrère (1798:79) writing about Portuguese women, stressed their idleness, “being accustomed to do nothing, they never hold a needle, or a book”, and Ruders (2002:168), writing in 1801, described the masculine coquetry of using reading glasses, always at hand, or around one’s neck, just as a fashion, “few being those who, in Lisbon, need them to read a book”. Beckford (1834:316) offered a different view, in 1787, stating that “first class families” were extremely generous with guests, offering musicians and their library and a librarian, if the visitor so desired. Costigan (1787:150) having experienced the situation one decade earlier, described how convent priests were “zealous and ready in producing any books they either had or could procure, to assist us in our researches” about the Spanish-Portuguese wars.

The destructive events of the period also were kept in mind by most authors, particularly the 1755 earthquake. Forty years after the event, Southey (1797:354-5) reminded his readers of its consequences, when writing about Pedro de Azevedo Tojal's 1716 poem *Carlos Reduzido*, stating that "[t]he book is very rare, as are all Portuguese books that have not been reprinted since the earthquake [...]". Five years after the event, Barreti (1770: 243-4) complained that the earthquake made book prices "almost out of the reach of my purse". He also noted that "the fire that follow'd [the earthquake], has destroyed many public and private libraries in this metropolis, and a Portuguese book of any note is now become as dear as a ruby" (Barreti, 1770:241). William Beckford (1834: 141) was also reminded of the catastrophe in 1787, while visiting the *Teatino* convent, in Lisbon: "We looked into the library, which lies in the same confusion in which it was left by the earthquake; half the books out of their shelves, tumbled one over the other in dusty heaps".

But the century was full of other catastrophic events to take their toll in books and libraries, as well as in lives and property. The Lieutenant General Cockburn (1815:174) describing the farmlands of northern Portugal in 1811-12, mentioned seeing "several houses, or rather their remains, that had been burned by the French or English army; and an officer told me, that in many instances our fellows wantonly destroyed prints, pictures, &c. &c. and often boiled their kettles by a fire made of books".

Most travelers were very much concerned with the dealings of the Inquisition and the censorship in Portugal and Spain, partly, as mentioned above, due to their preconceived ideas that related the Iberic countries with the Catholic institution (Brito, 2014: 75), which in turn had a particularly fearsome trait for the non catholic British, German and Swedish voyagers. However, some were interested in the trip precisely to dismiss such ideas, as Twiss (1775: p. i-ii) stated in the preface to his book:

[...] that I determined to visit Spain and Portugal; and I was the more eager, as I had never seen any satisfactory account of those two kingdoms, promising to myself the enjoyment of objects entirely novel, in countries which were imagined to be far behind the rest of Europe in arts and literature.

It is not strange, therefore, that a number of narratives devoted themselves to detailed accounts of the censorship apparatus set up by the Marquis of Pombal after 1768, with the respective reforms carried out under the Reign of D. Maria (Martins, 2005: 58-81). John Blankett ([1777]: 29) described the change in "licensing the press" from the inquisition to "a council for that purpose, which was to consist of a mixture of magistrates with the clergy", with the result of prohibiting only books which had "a manifest tendency, to loosen

the ties of civil and ecclesiastical government, and to corrupt the morals of the people”, in opposition – one wonders – of what the Inquisition did. Link (1801:475) made much the same description in 1798, emphasizing the structure previous to Pombal – three different licences were to be obtained, from the inquisition and other tribunals, for a book to be published, whereas after Pombal, only one “college of censorship” was established in order to approve books to be printed and sold within the country and its colonies. At about the same time, Carrère (1798:227-8) described the historical changes regarding the censorship structure, making the same kind of comparisons with the inquisition that the previous authors made. For him, the entire censorship office was “sometimes very difficult”, but was still easier and “as complacent as the Inquisition had been difficult, meticulous, and repulsive”. He also explained that books arriving from abroad were rigorously inspected (Carrère 1798: 234-5), which ended up making a good number of excellent works to be barred from the country, for the censors could prohibit the books sometimes for “a doubtful word, an idea beyond the scope and intelligence of the censor who is charged with examining them”, and sometimes books were condemned due to their titles or just their authors, without any further examinations of their contents.

He illustrated his narrative with the censorship of the book *Medicina Theologica*, anonymously published in 1794 with the necessary licences, but found to have been written by Caetano Alberto Dragazzi (DeNipoti, 2014). Carrère defined the book as “full of materialism” and obscenities which could “war up the Portuguese imagination”, describing how, after a swift approval by the *Meza Censória* [actually named, since 1787, the *Real Comissão Geral sobre o Exame e Censura de Livros*], the book was forbidden, and, as a direct result, the censorship structure was dismantled, and the power and duty to censor books was given back to the Inquisition, as Carrère (1798: 230) colorfully described:

Cette epèce d'anarchie a duré pendant six mois; il en a résulté un dommage considérable pour l'imprimerie et pour le commerce de la librairie. Pendant ce tems-là on n'a pu rien imprimer; les imprimeries ont été fermées; les libraires n'ont pu retirer les balots de livres venus des pays étrangers; ils ont perdu l'intérêt de leur argent, quelques-uns ont perdu beaucoup de livre qui se sont moisis par l'humidité de la douane, où ils ont été pendant huit ou neuf mois.²

Southey (1797:318-325) was quite likewise (negatively) impressed by the actions of the inquisition towards reading, transcribing an entire *Auto de fé* of 1779 listing several

² “This kind of anarchy lasted for six months; There has been considerable damage to the printing press and the bookshop business. During this time nothing could be printed; The printing works were closed; The booksellers could not remove the bales of books from foreign countries; They lost interest in their money, a few lost a lot of books that were molded by the dampness of the customs, where they were for eight or nine months”.

punishments – a number of soldiers and cadets from the artillery regiment of Oporto for the crimes of possessing or reading prohibited books, which made them “profest Atheist[s]” who denied the existence of God.

Besides the censorship, book apprehensions were a major concern for many travelers, since customs officers were keen on taking away books which might even hint at heresy. Barreti (1770: 260, v.2) advised his readers to be very careful not to carry anything “subject to pay custom” when travelling from Portugal into Spain, or vice-versa: “no new shirts, no new handkerchiefs, new stockings, new shoes, new any thing, or you will in some place or other be vexed more than you are aware.” If any books were part of the luggage, they should make sure these were Spanish, Portuguese or Italian. Books in English, Dutch “or even French” were bound to provoke the zeal of the customs officers, although there were ways around it: “A friend of mine who wanted to carry an English book to Madrid, took care to paste an image of St. Anthony on the first leaf, and thus saved it from confiscation”. Carrère (1798: 230-1) explained in details what happened if you had your books confiscated:

*L'étranger qui arrive à Lisbonne éprouve des tracasseries, des retards, et beaucoup de courses fatigantes, s'il a quelques livres mêlés avec ses effets, en quelques livres sont d'abord arrêtés à la douane; il faut présenter des placets à l'intendant de police pour en demander le renvoi à l'inquisition; il faut solliciter les subalternes de la douane; il faut leur faire des gratifications pour être expédié. Les courses, les frais recommencent à l'inquisition; des placets, des sollicitations, des nouvelles gratifications deviennent encore nécessaires. On est trop heureux lorsqu'on retrace ses livres après trois mois de fatigues, lorsqu'on parvient à n'en perdre aucun, et lorsqu'on en est quitte pour 20 ou 24 livres tournois de déboursés.*³

When the topic of the narrative changed to the commerce of books in its many forms, including binders, booksellers and printers, most authors were more descriptive, giving us some eyewitness views. Link (1801:228) stated the existence of “many booksellers’ shops” in late 18th Century Lisbon, albeit only doing local business, without links to other European countries. He then uses the “widow Bertrand and son” as a contradictory example of such commerce, given the French origin and connections of most Lisbon booksellers of the time (Guedes, 1998). According to Link, you could easily find new Portuguese

³ “The foreigner who arrives at Lisbon feels harassment, delays, and many fatiguing errands, if he has a few books mixed with his effects, and if a few books are at first arrested at the customs; It is necessary to present petitions to the police superintendent to demand their return to the Inquisition; The subalterns of the customs must be solicited; It is necessary to give them gratuities to be despatched. Taxes and expenses begin again at the Inquisition; Places, solicitations, new rewards are still necessary. One is too happy when one retraces his books after three months of fatigue, when one succeeds in losing none, and when one parts with 20 to 24 livres tournois”

works at the same prices “marked in the printed catalogue”. Constantly rebuffing “Mr. Jungk’s complaint, in his preface to his portugueze grammar” about how difficult it had been to “procure books at Lisbon”, for they were rare and expensive (perhaps due to the earthquake). Link (1801:475) stated again that you could find new Portuguese books, at reasonable prices in many Lisbon shops. But there were, according to him, no old books for sale, except perhaps in bookbinder’s shops or the “book-stalls as at Paris, where both portugueze and many good foreign books, especially spanish, may be bought for a trifle”. Carrère (1798:63) emphasized the French origin of most booksellers, whose trade was “quite lucrative”, but hindered by the censors:

Les libraires se dégoûtent d’un commerce où ils sont exposés à tout perdre, où leur fortune dépend de la volonté, du caprice d’un censeur ignorant, prévenu, difficile, qui voit mal, qui est souvent hor d’état de juger; ils n’osent fair venir aucun de ces ouvrages transcendants, qui répandent la lumière dans toute l’Europe. (Carrère, 1798: 235).⁴

The Swedish Ruders (2002:142) was silent about the French origin of booksellers in Lisbon, not mentioning any in the specific part or his book where he describes the French colony of Lisbon, but he also used the widow Bertrand and son as example of a Lisbon shop in which one could also find forbidden books which “were not exposed in the shelves with the others”, being sold “without any witnesses” and for a larger sum (Ruders, 2002:225-6). He also mentioned the small *Livraria Portuguesa* in the *Terreiro do Paço* where one could find the kingdom gazette and “the most modern Portuguese books”. Besides these, there were a number of peddlers in the streets and the squares during the days, “with 3 or 4 shelves” of old books of very low price “where, from time to time, one can find some good books”. But these peddlers were never in the markets, as well as any of the more established booksellers.

Musing about why the Portuguese authors were little known outside the country, Murphy (1795:199-200) attributed this to the fact that there was little knowledge of Portuguese, which made “little or no sale for books in that language out of the country”. Also not being a nation of readers, “very few books therefore will defray the expence of printing and paper, especially if they treat on scientific subjects”. This reflected in the commerce of books, as the other voyagers described it.

⁴ “The booksellers are disgusted with a trade in which they are exposed to losing everything, where their fortune depends on the will, the caprice of a cognizant, ignorant, prejudiced, difficult, who sees ill, who is often in a state of judgment; They dare not bring any of these transcendental works, which spread the light throughout Europe.”

Ruders (2002:224) exposed another form of book trade, regarding the “foreign” books irregularly brought into the country. After claiming to ignore the process, he went on to say that the “most usual and less embarrassing” way was contraband, which avoided censorship altogether and allowed people to have and read prohibited books. According to him, there were no inquiries into the matter, as long as the books were not declared at customs. He even assumed that every book he used during his own voyage had never been declared at customs, otherwise he would not have been able to have them, for “when someone wants any book from foreign lands, the sailors normally are in charge of bringing and delivering such books”.

Ruders also described other forms of book circulation, giving the example of “the Frenchman M. de Meaussé” who had set up a “reading cabinet” in Lisbon, and regularly received “as many books as he want[ed] to, albeit he is not allowed to grant access to the natives of the country”. However, this could also be circumvented by the use of a “third”, or some foreigner who would borrow books from the cabinet at the request of “a lady of society”, for example, and later, hand the book over to her. He also indicated that this particular cabinet had books of the kind which were forbidden “in many countries”, such as those “know by the title *Memoires secrets sur la Cour de...*”⁵

As for printing, a few travelers noted the peculiarity the industry, since “[e]very writing fomenting superstition can be printed and sold here, without any impediment” (Ruders, 2002:224-5) even if “*L’imprimerie n’est pas plus avancée: les caractères sont anciens, grossièrement exécutés; ils n’ont ni netteté, ni correction; les éditions sont mal soignées et incorrectes;*” (Carrère, 1798:240).⁶ Scientific books were printed at the expense of the Crown, “the number of readers being too small for any bookseller or printer to gain by them” (Link, 1801:225). That was also the reason Link claimed to be responsible for the “infancy” of Portuguese literature, in 1797, since little was written “and literary fame unknown [...] Nor can anything serve literary men but family or other connections”. Young aspiring scientists, however, could advance their careers by publishing a “short treatise or dissertation” (Link, 1801: 478) in a government institution such as the Academy of Sciences. Link considered that “[i]nstead of numerous establishments and regulations the government should take care that more occasional works of this kind should be published in order to accustom the nation by degrees to reading books of science and information.”

The more mechanical aspects of the industry were considered by Carrère (1798, p. 240), as quoted above. He went on to describe the poor quality of the paper and binding to the

⁵ Most likely Rustaing de Saint-Jory Louis’s *Memoires secrets de la cour de France: contenant les intrigues du cabinet, pendant la minorité de Louis XIV* (F. Girardi, 1733).

⁶ “printing is not very advanced; the characters are ancient, roughly executed; They have neither sharpness nor correction, the editions are badly treated and incorrect”

point that “*A peine peut-on citer diz éditions passables, sorties des presses de Lisbonne; encore on-elles été exécutées avec des caractères que’on a fait venir de Paris.*”⁷

Both Twiss (1775:7) and Link (1801:478) were negatively impressed by the absence of newspapers in Portuguese. Twiss claimed they were prohibited in 1763, even though one could find gazettes in other European languages in the coffee houses of Lisbon, “of which there are two extremely elegant, especially that of *Casaco*, which is pannelled with looking glasses”, giving us further evidence of reading habits and practices in the urban environment. Link also notes that the only such publication, *The Gazeta de Lisboa*, announced briefly “new works [...] and printed bills of them posted up as in London and Paris”, but there were no literary occasional publications even at the university in Coimbra “and the numerous literary institutions at Lisbon”. Link (1801:477) went on to emphasize that the prohibition of all “political journals” - with the official exception of the *Gazeta de Lisboa*, forced that “political news arrive somewhat tardily, and sometimes very late”. Ruders (2002:225-6) defined the *Gazetta* (which he named *do Reino*) in 1801 as “very thin” with incomplete news from abroad and three or four announcements. He also pointed out that most news were glued to the walls in street corners, sometime up side down since the workers who did this job could not read themselves. Despite this somber view, Ruders (2002:191) mentioned learning about the outcome of the War of the oranges in 1801 through newspapers (Ventura, 2008).

By far, the largest contact with the printed word by voyagers was when they visited libraries – public, domestic or in monasteries – in several cities around Portugal. Although this aspect has already been explored before, by Maria Luisa Cabral (2014:39-45), a few notes on the topic are worthwhile.

Link (1801:227-8) described how he found the situation in 1797:

There are public libraires in Lisbon, which though far from ranking in the first class, are by no means so bad as some travellers would describe who have merely taken a cursory view of them. But it is very unjust to complain because we happen to be too much alarmed ad the voluminous *Acta Santorum* to take the trouble of asking for any other book. The principal of these libraries, which is in the large building in the praça do commercio, contains many works of importance, and even some papers on natural history. I am better acquainted, however, with the library in the benedictine monastery of Nossa Senhora de Jesus, as I lived nearer to it. Here is a very complete collection of portugueze and modern spanish

⁷ Scarcely can we mention some passable editions of the presses of Lisbon; Still they were executed with characters which were brought from Paris.

literature; nor is there any want of french works, as, for instance, a complete set of the *Encyclopédie par ordre des Matières*. German books are not to be expected in any foreign part, though Wolf's latin works, Brucker's History of Philosophy, and other books of that period, occur in every portugueze library. Next to french literature, that of Italy is most abundant, still more, though it might not be expected, than the english, which the portugueze seldom learn, though they are always reading french. In short, both these libraries may be compared with many of the public libraries in considerable towns in Germany. A third library, that of the monastery of San Vincente de Fora, is indeed not open to the publick [sic.]; but it is sufficient to be once introduced to be always admitted. It contains a very complete collection of even the smallest portugueze works”

In the beginning of the following Century, Cockburn (1815:1294) described the public library of Lisbon, created in 1796 (Cabral, 2014), as having “large and extensive” rooms with “a number of the best books” even if not many people were there when he visited. Carrère (1798:240), however, clearly stated that there were no public libraries in Lisbon⁸, but there were private libraries – such as that of the friars of Saint Augustin, which he considered the richest. Twenty years earlier Chatelet had mentioned “*Il y a quelques autres maisons, en très-petit nombre, où l'on trouve des bibliothèques*”, but they were not opened to foreigners (Bourgoing, 1798:71).⁹ Murphy and Link mentioned the library of the University of Coimbra in passing in their narratives, describing it as having a large number of “printed books and manuscripts” (Murphy, 1795: 26) and being “much visited and used by the students” (Link 1801:269-7).

Almost every narrative mentioned at least one visit to a convent or monastery with a library, and the descriptions are more or less the same, as far as the physical characteristics of the buildings are concerned. The library of the Mafra Convent is described by Barreti (1770: 238-9) (“[t]heir library takes up a very large hall, besides a pretty large room”), Twiss (1775: 16) (“[...] the new library is three hundred and eighty-one palms in length, and forty-three in breadth.”) and Beckford (1858: 327. v.1 and 1834:97) who repeated that and added that it was “finely stuccoed, and paved with marble”, while Murphy (1795:289) and Ruders (2002:220-1) repeated those dimensions using different units.

⁸ “Lisbonne n'a aucune bibliothèque publique.”

⁹ “a few houses, in very small number, where libraries [were] found”

Barreti offered the longest description of this library, having spent “the space of four hours” browsing Portuguese books among the almost seventy thousand volumes he claimed to exist there (1770:238), leaving the “good-natured Librarian” in “raptures to see me so inquisitive about the learning of his country”(1770: 244). He added that:

Besides that vast number of genealogies in quarto and other [ileg.] there are in that lesser library many histories of the Portuguese conquests in various parts of the ultramarine world. Then follow the theological and devotional books, which are far from being few. This to me is a proof that the Portuguese are pious and skilful in divinity. But what abounds there without measure, are the lives of Saints, male and female, foreign and domestic [...] (Barreti, 1770:240).

Beckford (1834:97) , mentioning sixty thousand volumes, was unimpressed by the organization of the bookshelves, “clumsily designed, coarsely executed, and darkened by a gallery which projects into the room in a very awkward manner”, whereas amongst the books, there were several “well preserved and richly illuminated first editions of the Greek and Roman classics” which he did not have time to see in detail, being rushed by the librarian to other parts of the building.

Murphy (1795:289) only mentioned that the library was “supposed” to hold between forty to fifty thousand volumes and Ruders (2002: 220) emphasized the latter number, praising the shelves, the bindings and the catalogues.

Many other convent libraries, in different Portuguese cities, were described by these voyagers. Mostly, they were concerned with which books they found in each one of these places, giving us a faint idea of their general contents – and perhaps some reading practices. Barreti (1770: 206-7) visited the library of the Italian Capuchins in Lisbon in 1760 and found grammars, dictionaries, catechisms and “some Latin Fathers simply bound make the first figure in the place: then many School-divines and Casuists, with a considerable number of Asceticks, and several collections of Italian and Portuguese sermons. Amongst which *Segueri* and *Vieyra* hold the first rank.”

Costigan (1787:130) had a similar description for the library of the “the Recluses of St. Bruno”, which was “filled as usual with the same dull, polemical and biographical Works, thickly interlarded with miracles; and the only book which attracted our notice was an excellent copy of Homer’s *Iliad*, in folio”.

In Alcobaça, Twiss (1775:41) found “*Baskerville’s Virgil*, and *Foulis’s Homer*” while Murphy (1795:94) was abashed to find a library with less books than “pipes of wine in the cellar”. Link (1801:276), in turn, considered the library “not bad”, and was shown

the *Encyclopédie* and “many other new french works relating to natural history”, which Cockburn (1815:165) confirmed in 1811, describing “many French books” in the library, with “a collection of prohibited books, but no manuscripts” in an adjoining room. Other institutions had similar collections, such as the Setubal convent, where Ruders (2002:63) described in 1799, “modern and excellent” books such as the “French Enciclopedia”, Bossuet and others “among the books wich, in most parts, are works by the Church Fathers, with their respective and heavy commentaries”.

We have, then, a possible change in the contents of the library within the three decades or so between visits, from exclusively catholic to philosophical and scientific, from mainly Portuguese and Italian, to French books and from not impressive to rather good, which is a change that can be mirrored in many other works dealing with books, censorship and ideas in Portugal and Europe at the time frame under scrutiny here. This is coherent with the studies on book history and printed culture published in the last few decades, which show an increase of French books both in commerce and in translations being published in Portuguese (Silvestre, 2007; DeNipoti & Pereira, 2014).

We can gather from these narratives that book commerce and reading was always seen in comparative terms by the voyagers, who had their own cities in mind when observing the exotic within Europe, being quite concerned with the Inquisition – or, at least, the general view of the Inquisition held in protestant countries – and the censorship, which was unique in its structure and reach. There were several aspects of urban daily life in the past narrated in each book, and as far as the printed word was concerned, they say very little, in comparison.

However, even the short, abbreviated comments on commerce, printing, writing and libraries is enough to give the historian clues to learned sociabilities and cultural practices related to the printed word in the past, and to confront such clues with evidence given in other historical sources.

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