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THE ALBERTIAN MEANING OF VILLA. A READING KEY FOR THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE “MONTES” ALENTEJANOS.



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Note the title: the term “montes” is in inverted commas due to the difficulty in finding an own designation that allows characterizing the study object of one PhD research in progress. This difficulty arises because of the existence of three distinct realities, in alentejano context: “quinta” (fig. 1), “monte” (fig. 2) and “herdade” (fig. 3).

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The object of study focuses on specific architectures in the rural context that are constituted by the built up for their owners and workers, by the one who gives agricultural support, and by the property intended not only to agricultural exploration, but also to recreational and contemplative areas, which are favourable to rest.

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In order to find a name to title this architectural reality of rural life, we resorted to the translation,¹ as a research process itself: the classical treatises were called to inform the contemporary one. In this way, we realized that it would be appropriate to study the treaty *De re aedificatoria* of Leon Battista Alberti, once characterizes this type of reality. We decided for the reading of four translations² from three passages of the Book V – “Buildings for private purposes”, based on Latin languages, that are the translation of Giovanni Orlandi (Alberti, 1966), of the Javier Fresnillo Núñez (Alberti, 1991), of the Pierre Caye and Françoise Choay (Alberti, 2004), as well as the one of the Arnaldo Espírito Santo and Mário Krüger (Alberti, 2011) (fig. 4).

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The first passage chosen, corresponds to the chapter XIV of Book V once characterized, in general, the houses built in countryside. Note the first name that each author/translator used to characterize this private architecture:³ *abitazioni di campagna* (Alberti, 1991, p. 400), *construcciones de campo* (Alberti, 1991, p. 225), *construction rurale* (Alberti, 2004, p. 255) *construção rural* (Alberti, 2011, p. 353). These expressions represent a type of building, located in the countryside, in rural areas. The use of the terms *countryside* and *rural*, implies not only the recognition of areas which, although they should have a good communication with the cities, they are remote from their centers, where agricultural activities prevailed, but also the willingness of isolation, even temporarily, of the city reality.

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It's considered that the constructions are *simple* (Alberti, 1991, p. 225, our translation) and *easy* (Alberti, 2004, p. 255, our translation). However, in Portuguese translation, this aspect becomes clearer, due to the fact that there are few obstacles that influence this type of construction. In the rural context, the only impediments that may exist, have to do with the natural features that the place itself presents, in opposite to the city world, whose conditions are not only natural, but mainly artificial, due to a largest population concentration and to the consequences that this situation carries.

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In the various translations, is referred a strong investment in the countryside, made by people with some economic power, who appreciate and value the rural world. It is interesting to note that this initial combination overcomes the agricultural activity and production, particular to this reality, referring to other objectives, by which this

1. Quinta das Longas, Elvas, november 2012. fotografia da autora.



2. Monte Atalaia dos Sapateiros, Elvas, november 2012. fotografia da autora.



3. Herdade de Alcobaça, Elvas, november 2012. fotografia da autora.

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requiring, therefore, human and mechanical help as well as someone to manage the work. This is an idea shared by all selected translations. However, the Portuguese one, in addition to these terms, uses another one: produce (Alberti, 2011, p. 355). In this way, it is demonstrated that the *pars rustica*, hasn't a passive activity against the property that should manage: in addition to supporting the collection of assets obtained from the field, is, above all, the place of production where presses, mills, wineries are situated, among others.

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Also in relation to the conservation of *fruits* (Alberti, 2011, p. 355) from the field, besides being a function corresponding to the *pars rustica*, as already mentioned, the Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese translations consider that the same can also be attributed to the facilities of the owner in the city. The Portuguese translation provides more information: the preservation is also *one of the functions of the lords* (Alberti, 2011, p. 355, our translation).⁸ By contrast, the French translation believes that *the conservation of crops* [should return] *to the townhouse of the master rather than remaining under the control of the manager* (Alberti, 2004, p. 257, our translation).⁹ This translation differs from the others for two reasons: firstly, by assigning the *pars urbana* of the *villa*, a function solely of the rustic domain, contradicting the terms used in other translations; on the other hand, it claims that it is a task that can't be fulfilled by the manager, but by the owner of the *villa*. It is this contradiction that points out again the theme of leisure, so characteristic of the *pars urbana*, and that, in this passage, goes on into conflict with the functions that should be done by the homemade and not by the *master*.

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Regarding the *pars urbana*, the various authors/translators designate it by *ville signorili* (Alberti, 1966, p. 414), *fincas señoriales* (Alberti, 1991, p. 231), *la partie réservée aux maîtres* (Alberti, 2004, p. 261), *casa de campo do senhor* (Alberti, 2011, p. 360). It is interesting to note the use of the term *urban* in rural context to define the part of the *villa* inhabited by the owner. Although it is not nominating the townhouse of the owner in the city, we can not disassociate this term from the city context, once the facilities of the owner, in the *countryside*, imply some similarities in the distributive organization that the urban ones contemplate.

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The Spanish translation introduces a new term – *fincas señoriales* (Alberti, 1991, p. 231) – which can be translated by *seignorial farm*.¹⁰ It is a concept that goes beyond the built, which is associated outer spaces that is immediately contiguous and which are materialized in gardens, spaces for contemplation and enjoyment, articulated with the built.

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Either the Italian translation, or the Spanish one, both point out a distinction between *summer and winter villae* (Alberti, 1966, p. 414, our translation).¹¹ The French and the Portuguese translations make that distinction between interior compartments, which belong to the same *villa*. However, it is believed that the four authors/translators might be characterizing the divisions that might exist within the buildings,

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architecture is designed: those who respond to rest and recreational activities.⁴

The Italian and French translations introduce another term. Despite being apparently a synonym of country house, it has a more complex assignment. The term *villa* (Alberti, 1966, p. 400; Alberti, 2004, p. 255) is quoted to characterize these private buildings. Its definition goes beyond the concept of *rustic building*: besides being a country house, the *villa* implies the advantage that its owner can get from the place where this construction is implanted, and from the way it is related to what the best nature offers (fig. 5).

The *villa* is also synonymous of wealthy home for the pleasure and delight of those who inhabits it. For this reason, Alberti holds that it should be implanted in the middle of the field, in a sheltered place, well supplied with water lines. It should be chosen a place that receives sunlight in a plentiful way and that fits the more salubrious area of the territory.⁵

At the beginning of chapter XV, the constitution of the buildings of the *villa* is characterized in detail. Although there are small variations in the various translations – *case di campagna* (Alberti, 1966, p. 404), *casa de campo* (Alberti, 1991, p. 226), *les bâtiments de la villa* (Alberti, 2004, p. 256), *instalações da casa* [de campo] (Alberti, 2011, p. 355) – the thought is common, in what the organization of functions and their distribution and materialization are concerned. In this way, the *villa* has a section devoted to his owner, in order to provide moments of relaxation and leisure; and another one, not only to house the workers of this property, but also to support the agricultural production and exploration.

Crossing this information with the one found in the *Dicionário de Arqueologia Portuguesa* (Alarcão & Barroca, 2012),⁶ we note that the first part presented, correspondes to the designated *pars urbana* and, the other, to the *pars rustica*. For the latter, whose the various translations designate by *case dei contadini* (Alberti, 1966, p. 404), *viviendas de los campesinos* (Alberti, 1991, p. 227), *bâtiments* [des champs] (Alberti, 2004, p. 257), *instalações de servos da gleba* (Alberti, 2011, p. 355), must be situated near the *pars urbana*, that is classified by *villa del patrone* (Alberti, 1966, p. 404), *posesiones de los señores* (Alberti, 1991, p. 227), *bâtiments des maître* (Alberti, 2004, p. 257), *instalações dos senhores* (Alberti, 2011, p. 355).

Opposing this concept with the definition of *villa*, presented in a generic dictionary (Houaiss & Villar, 2002),⁷ we found that, at the *villa* as a built, it is associated outdoor spaces, like vegetable gardens or gardens. The ambiguity, between if this concept incorporates the buildings and property that manages, or just the first, has been carried up to contemporary reality.

Still in chapter XV, the *pars rustica* is characterized: the feature that stands out is the one of *receiving, collecting and storing* (Alberti, 1991, p. 227, our translation) all the products that come from the field,



4. Alberti, L. (1966); Alberti, L. (1991); Alberti, L. (2004); Alberti, L. (2011)



5. Quinta da Ovelheira on the ruins of the roman villa. Elvas, november 2012. fotografia da autora.



6. roman villa of rabçal, Penela, february 2013. fotografia da autora.



7. roman villa of S. Cucufate, Vila de frades, november 2012. fotografia da autora.



8. Monte das Espadas, Elvas, november 2012. fotografia da autora.



9. Monte da Serra do bispo, Elvas, november 2012. fotografia da autora.

in order to meet the demands that the more adverse seasons have. Alberti, not only agrees with this distinction, but also believes that it should be adapted depending on the climatic characteristics of each place. It is very interesting to associate the characterization of *pars urbana*, to the enormous importance that all translations, without exception, give to the the characteristics of the place and how they influence and contribute to its implementation and functional and formal distribution.

Alberti, through these authors/translators, advocates that there should be no generalizations about the implementation of *villam* (Alberti, 1966, p. 415), once each place has its own characteristics that vary from region to region (fig. 6). In this way, there must always be an adjustment of the construction compared to the specific characteristics of each place, in order to balance the temperature and humidity in the various internal compartments. This will become more important and this reality will become more interesting if it takes advantage of the peculiarities of each place, such as the ventilation, the sun exposure and landscape. Its relationship with the landscape is very important at various levels: first should occupy a prominent place in its surroundings, not just to have a visible position, but also to enjoy the best solar orientation and ventilation; on the other hand, will tame the landscape and cause it to be more a key element in the composition of their structure, to allow the contemplation of anything – natural or artificial – in order to provide pleasant views (fig. 7). So, none *villa* will be equal to the other, even if responding to the established canons.

Transposing to the contemporary, the particular type of “monte”¹² that we are trying to point out, it also has all the ambiguities that the various terms in different languages contemplate (fig. 8). Although this is a name that doesn’t belong to classical terminology, it corresponds, formal and functionally, to the Alberti description (fig. 9). However, due to its large variability in alentejano context, it is thought that the contribution of the various translations allowed deepening this problem, which hasn’t, apparently, a clear answer.

Read, interpret, understand, explain (J. Rodrigues, personal communication, December 7, 2012).

The *reading* of the various translations allowed understanding the different concepts that each author/translator uses to explain this architectural reality (urban and rustic). In order to *interpret* the various readings which were done, we proceeded to private retranslation (Ricoeur, 2005, p. 16), fundamental method, because placed, at the same level of reading, the translations chosen, and, it contextualized, in the same language, terms which were found to be different, in these translations (Ricoeur, 2005, p. 21). The three passages were selected to answer to the initial established premise: to support, conceptual and theoretically, the designation of the study object. With these three entries, read and interpreted in four versions, the comparison of terms and thoughts became richer and, therefore, its *understanding*

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much clearer. It worked, as a sort of a fundamental contribution in the *explanation* of this architecture in the alentejano context.

The type of “monte” that we intend to investigate, corresponds to an apparently anonymous architecture, but that has in its genesis an architectural thinking. One of its *written tracks* has been found in Alberti’s treatise, and given *the theoretical voice* in order to allow it *to say what can not* (J. Rodrigues, personal communication, December 7, 2012).

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1 ≥ “[...] form of reading that, can not fail to result in a second written of the text, can not also escape to the despotic reason of the called “original”, [...] to the intrinsic law of this original that requires to be transposed into an environment that it is not “foreign”, but similar - the other language, always said “foreign.” BARRENTO, J. (2002). *O poço de Babel: para uma poética da tradução literária*. Lisboa: Relógio D’Água Editores, 83.

2 ≥ “Translate [...] is serving two masters: the stranger [author] in his work, the reader in his desire of appropriation.”

Ricoeur, P. (2005). *Sobre a tradução*. (M. Figueiredo Trad.). Lisboa: Edições Cotovia, 11.

3 ≥ “Rusticana expeditiora [...]”

Alberti, L. (1966). “Libro V Opere di carattere particolare”. In *L’ Architettura [De re aedificatoria]*. (G. Orlandi Trad. it.). Milano: Edizioni Il Polifilo, (1.a ed. 1485), 401.

4 ≥ Confronting Books II and III of the Alberti, L. (1994). *I libri della famiglia*. Letteratura italiana Einaudi.

5 ≥ “[...] caelum calamitosum, terram cariosam fugiendum; medio in agro ad montis radices aquosa aprica salubrique in regione et salubri parte regionis aedificandum.”

Alberti, L. (1966). “Libro V Opere di carattere particolare”. In *L’ Architettura [De re aedificatoria]*. (G. Orlandi Trad. it.). Milano: Edizioni Il Polifilo, (1.a ed. 1485), 401.

6 ≥ “Villa (pl. villae). Residence of a wealthy roman landowner, with the necessary outbuildings used in any large farmhouse. The residence of the owner was called *pars urbana*; the servants’ living quarters, the barns (*horrea*, sing. *horreum*), the mills (*torcularia*, sing. *torcularium*), the wineries (*cella vinaria* and *cella olearia*, of the wine and olive oil, respectively), the corrals (*stabula*), the workshops, the porches or roofs for various purposes (*tecta*, sing. *tectum*) constituted the *pars rustica*.”

Alarcão, J. e Barroca, M. (2012). *Dicionário de Arqueologia Portuguesa*. Porto: Figueirinhas, 353.

7 ≥ “Villa [...] cottage or recreational outskirts of italian cities; house refined and elegant house; cottage, farmhouse, cottage dependence; courtyard; field; vegetable garden; orchard; garden [...]”

Houaiss, A. e Villar, M. (2002). *Dicionário Houaiss da Língua Portuguesa*. 6 vol.. Lisboa: Círculo de Leitores, 3706.

8 ≥ “É atribuição própria desta parte das instalações que por ela sejam produzidos, colhidos e conservados os frutos que se conseguem tirar do campo, a não ser que considere que esta última actividade, isto é, a conservação da colheita, é uma das funções dos senhores e das casas da cidade mais do que da propriedade rural.”

Alberti, L. (2011). “Livro V Edificios para fins particulares”. In *Da arte edificatória [De re aedificatoria]*. (Arnaldo Espírito Santo Trad. Latin, Introd. Mário Krüger). Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, (1.a ed. 1485), 355.

9 ≥ “Cette partie des bâtiments sert à préparer, rassembler et conserver les fruits tires de la terre, sauf si tu estimes que la dernière opération, c’est-à-dire la conservation des récoltes, revient à la partie de la villa réservée au maître ou à sa maison urbaine plutôt qu’au domaine du régisseur.”

Alberti, L. (2004). “Livro V Edifices destinados aux catégories particulières

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de citoyens”. In *L’art d’édifier [De re aedificatoria]*. (Pierre Caye e Françoise Choay Trad. fr.). Paris: Éditions du Seuil, (1.a ed. 1485), 257.

10 ≥ “[...] the origin of the name remains obscure, but probably derives randomly of the roman surveying; in our middle age the word had a fundamental meaning of the agrarian sub-unit within a villa (rustica), provided with the dwelling, water, plowed land, orchards, vineyards, groves, etc.. [...]”

Machado, J. (1989). *Dicionário etimológico da língua portuguesa: com a mais antiga documentação escrita e conhecida de muitos dos vocábulos estudados.*

Quinto volume. 5.a ed.. Lisboa: Livros Horizonte, 23.

11 ≥ “Riguardo alle ville signorili, alcuni istituiscono la distinzione tra ville estive ed invernali, e stabiliscono che le camere per l’inverno devono essere rivolte verso il sorgere del sole invernale, con la sala da pranzo verso il tramonto del sole nell’equinozio; mentre le camere per l’estate devono essere rivolte a mezzogiorno, con la sala da pranzo verso il sorgere del sole invernale; le passeggiate devono infine essere esposte al sole di mezzogiorno equinoziale.”

Alberti, L. (1966). “Libro V Opere di carattere particolare”. In *L’ Architettura [De re aedificatoria]*. (G. Orlandi Trad. it.). Milano: Edizioni Il Polifilo, (1.a ed. 1485), 414.

“Quizá haya quienes afirmen que las fincas señoriales unas son de verano, otras de invierno, y distinguan uno y otro tipo del modo siguiente: en invierno los dormitorios deben estar orientados hacia el lugar por donde sale el sol invernale, el comedor hacia donde se pone el sol en el equinoccio; las habitaciones de verano, en cambio, hacia mediodía, el comedor hacia el punto por donde nace el sol en invierno; los paseos deben estar situados al mediodía equinoccial.”

Alberti, L. (1991). “Libro V Sobre las obras de uso restringido”. In *De re aedificatoria: Leon Battista Alberti*. (J. Núñez Trad. cast.). Madrid: Ediciones Akal, S. A., (1.a ed. 1485), 231.

12 ≥ The current meaning of “monte” found in the dictionary becomes reducer in the definition and object that is sought and which is intended to investigate:

“Monte [...] the rural property and its facilities [...]”

Houaiss, A. e Villar, M. (2002). *Dicionário Houaiss da Língua Portuguesa*. 6 vol.. Lisboa: Círculo de Leitores, 2537.

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Alberti, L. (1991). “Libro V Sobre las obras de uso restringido”. In *De re aedificatoria: Leon Battista Alberti*. (J. Núñez Trad. cast.). Madrid: Ediciones Akal, S. A., (1.a ed. 1485).

Alberti, L. (2004). “Livre V Édifices destinés aux catégories particulières de citoyens”. In *L’art d’édifier [De re aedificatoria]*. (Pierre Caye e Françoise Choay Trad. fr.). Paris: Éditions du Seuil, (1.a ed. 1485).

Alberti, L. (2011). “Libro V Edificios para fins particulares”. In *Da arte edificatória [De re aedificatoria]*. (Arnaldo Espírito Santo Trad. Latín, Introd. Mário Krüger). Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, (1.a ed. 1485).

Barreto, J. (2002). *O poço de Babel: para uma poética da tradução literária*. Lisboa: Relógio D’Água Editores.

Houaiss, A. e Villar, M. (2002). *Dicionário Houaiss da Língua Portuguesa*. 6 Vol.. Lisboa: Círculo de Leitores.

Machado, J. (1989). *Dicionário etimológico da língua portuguesa: com a mais antiga documentação escrita e conhecida de muitos dos vocábulos estudados*. Quinto volume. 5.a ed. Lisboa: Livros Horizonte.

Ricoeur, P. (2005). *Sobre a tradução*. (M. Figueiredo Trad.). Lisboa: Edições Cotovia.

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