

Hermitical Landscapes: The Congregation of Saint Paul of Serra De Ossa

Authors : Rolando Volzone

Abstract : The Congregation of Saint Paul of Serra de Ossa (Ossa Mountain) was founded in 1482, originated by the eremitic movement of the homens da pobre vida (poor life men), which is documented since 1366. The community of hermits expanded up to the first half of the 15th century, mostly in southern Portugal in the Alentejo region. In 1578, following a process of institutionalization led by the Church, an autonomous congregation was set up, affiliated in the Hungarian Order of Saint Paul the First Hermit, until 1834, when the decree of dissolution of the religious orders disbanded all the convents and monasteries in Portugal. The architectural evidences that reached our days as a legacy of the hermitical movement in Serra de Ossa, although studied and analysed from an historical point of view, are still little known with respect to the architectural characteristics of its physical implantation and its relationship with the natural systems. This research intends to expose the appropriation process of the locus eremus as a starting point for the interpretation of this landscape, evidencing the close relationship between the religious experience and the physical space chosen to reach the perfection of the soul. The locus eremus is thus determined not only by practical aspects such as the absolute and relative location, orography, existence of water resources, or the King's favoring to the religious and settlement action of the hermits, but also by spiritual aspects related to the symbolism of the physical elements present and the solitary walk of these men. These aspects, combined with the built architectural elements and other exerted human action, may be fertile ground for the definition of a hypothetical hermitical landscape based on the sufficiently distinctive characteristics that sustain it. The landscape built by these hermits is established as a cultural and material heritage, and its preservation is of utmost importance. They deeply understood this place and took advantage of its natural resources, manipulating them in an ecological and economically sustainable way, respecting the place, without overcoming its own genius loci but becoming part of it.

Keywords : architecture, congregation of Saint Paul of Serra de Ossa, hermitical landscape, locus eremus

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