

# Overview of the Commemorations of the Bicentenary of the French Invasions

Fernanda Paula Sousa Maia<sup>1</sup>  
Isilda Braga da Costa Monteiro<sup>2</sup>

The commemorations of the French invasions in Portugal continued until the end of September 2010, this being the date that marked two hundred years since the Battle of Buçaco. These commemorations did not yet mark the date of the definitive withdrawal of the invading forces from Portuguese territory, which was only to happen in early April 1811, when, under the command of Massena, the French troops, already having been defeated and confronted with the defensive complex formed by the lines of Torres Vedras that barred their advance upon Lisbon, crossed over the border from Portugal to Spain, bringing an end to what was to become known as the 3rd French Invasion.<sup>3</sup> The date of the Battle of Buçaco is, however, of important symbolic significance as it represented the moment when the Anglo-Portuguese army, under the command of General George Wellington, defeated the French army, thereby marking a decisive turning point in the confrontations with the invading forces, a moment that, at that time, was immediately and enthusiastically signaled by the remarkable musical composition of António José do Rego (*c.* 1765-post 1844) in his work entitled *A Batalha do Buçaco*. As David Cranmer recently demonstrated, this musical piece, composed in 1810, offers a highly detailed description of its context, relating the first events in the confrontation and closely accompanying the text of the official notice by Lord Wellington, published a week later in the *Gazeta de Lisboa*, 3 October 1810 (CRANMER, 2007: II, 239-51).

At a time when the commemorations of the bicentenary of the French invasions are drawing to a close, and as is normally the case with the passing of the dates of other historic events, it is important to ask a series of questions that must necessarily provide a new understanding, not only of the subject matter that is being commemorated, but above

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<sup>1</sup> Researcher at CEPESE—Centro de Estudos da População, Economia e Sociedade (Center of Research on Economics, Population and Society), Portugal. *E-mail:* fpaulamaia@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup> Researcher at CEPESE—Centro de Estudos da População, Economia e Sociedade (Center of Research on Economics, Population and Society—Science Program 2007—Foundation for Science and Technology, FCT), Portugal. *E-mail:* isildamonteiro@bragadacosta.com

<sup>3</sup> According to Mesquita Carvalho, this was not the third but the fourth invasion, based on the assumption that the first invasion had been the episode known as the War of the Oranges (CARVALHO 1904: 1-28). This thesis was recently suggested again by António Pedro Vicente. See VICENTE 2007.

all of the present time, its aims and intentions. In fact, we all know that no commemoration is innocuous. The whole commemorative process brings with it concerns, questions, problems, doubts, tensions, expectations and choices as to the precise moment when the evocation should take place. Evoking the past, more than simply remembering it, has therefore also been a means for conveying an interpretation of the present, a representation of the nation, of its people or of the characteristics that are considered appropriate from the point of view of another future. Almost inevitably on such occasions, therefore, it is not solely the past that is at stake, but rather it is the present and the future that now become our concern.

These were some of the theoretical premises that guided the research into this theme that we have already been undertaking for several years, leading us to try and discover how the first centenary of these invasions was celebrated in Portugal at the beginning of the twentieth century. Since this was a period that was so fertile in political and social transformations,<sup>4</sup> we wished to understand how this event was experienced and planned by the authorities at that time. As we have had the chance to note, more than at any other time, this was a period when people were able to explore various mechanisms for the legitimization of the Nation-State, using them as instruments for the production and reproduction of a national memory in keeping with the values of the present, as has been so well demonstrated by Fernando Catroga (1996: 547-671).

These theoretical premises now provide the basis for our present analysis of the commemorations of the bicentenary of the invasions of the French armies in Portuguese territory, from the moment when the *Official Commission of the Bicentenary of the Peninsular Wars* was set up (or, in other words, at the end of 2005) until the present. Thus, now that we have defined the period under analysis, we shall attempt to list the main moments of the evocative celebrations, not only in order to make it possible to identify the main actors and the formats that were preferred for the commemorations, but also to identify the aims that lay behind these celebrations. At the end, we shall present a bibliographical appendix, in which we list a significant number of publications that, on a variety of different supports,

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<sup>4</sup> On this subject, see MAIA, D. L. 2000: vol. 1, t. 1, 493-504; MONTEIRO, Isilda Braga da Costa. *O Exército e os militares na comemoração do 1º Centenário das Invasões Francesas*. Paper presented at the Conference “Portugal ante o Bloqueio Continental de Napoleão.” Porto: Instituto de História Moderna da Universidade do Porto; Círculo Dr. José de Figueiredo, Nov. 21, 2006; MONTEIRO; MAIA 2007: II, 503-516; MONTEIRO. *O Porto e a primeira invasão francesa: memória e comemoração no Primeiro Centenário*. Paper presented at the Conference “Em torno do Bicentenário da 1ª Invasão Francesa. A ocupação franco-espanhola da cidade do Porto e do norte de Portugal.” Porto: Instituto de História Moderna; Círculo José de Figueiredo, Dec. 13, 2007; MONTEIRO. *Comemoração e Memória. O Exército e os Militares na comemoração do 1º Centenário da Guerra Peninsular*. Lecture at the Museu Militar do Porto, Apr. 30, 2009; MONTEIRO; MAIA 2010: 2, 1088-1108.

have appeared in the period covered by our study. We remain, of course, constantly aware that this type of data collection is never complete and that we can never exhaustively compile the whole of the universe of published material. As these are the first commemorations of this historic fact to take place under a democratic regime, we shall therefore begin with a general, although provisional overview, due to the fact that the commemorations are only now drawing to a close.

The process of commemorating the bicentenary was set in motion by the Portuguese Commission of Military History, which, since 2004, at the initiative of its president, General Alexandre Sousa Pinto, had been calling upon its supervisory body, the Ministry of National Defense, to set up a national commission to organize the celebrations of the event. The political and governmental situation at that time did not allow for a rapid response to the general's wishes and the commission in question was only to be set up, under the auspices of the Portuguese Commission of Military History, through a ministerial order published in November 2005 (ALMEIDA 2010: 362-63).

Although there was no formal program of commemorations, contrary to what had happened in the case of the first centenary celebrations, the *Official Commission of the Bicentenary of the Peninsular Wars* decided to outline what were to be the main lines of force for the evocation of the event.

In turn, in 2007, under the auspices of the army, a steering committee was set up to commemorate the bicentenary of the Peninsular War.<sup>5</sup> A program of commemorations was drawn up, presenting a calendar of the commemorations that would take place between 2007 and April 2014, the date that marks the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Toulouse, in which Portuguese troops fought alongside allied armies against the French troops under the command of Soult.<sup>6</sup>

Detailed analysis of the commemorative events that have been held allows us to identify different aspects. One with a predominantly scientific nature, aimed at a restricted and specialist audience, such as, for example, the publication of documentary sources, the holding of seminars, congresses and conferences, together with the publication of works

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<sup>5</sup> PORTUGAL, Ministério da Defesa Nacional, Exército Português, Gabinete do CEME. Presentation of the Program for the Commemorations by the Army of the Bicentenary of the Peninsular War. Available at: <[http://www.exercito.pt/portal/exercito/\\_specific/public/ueo/compinfo/Programa%20Comemora%C3%A7%C3%B5es%20200%20Anos%20Guerra%20Peninsular.pdf](http://www.exercito.pt/portal/exercito/_specific/public/ueo/compinfo/Programa%20Comemora%C3%A7%C3%B5es%20200%20Anos%20Guerra%20Peninsular.pdf)> (consulted June 26, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> The list of the "Events organized by the Army or in partnership with civil bodies in the commemorations of the Bicentenary of the Peninsular War" can be consulted in COELHO; FONSECA 2009-2010.

resulting from different research projects. Another was aimed at the general public, involving innovative strategies for publicizing events, associated with leisure and the use of the new technologies for the preservation of the memory.

Under the scope of this first aspect, for example, we can see the army's concern with promoting a cultural and technical intervention designed to deepen our knowledge about the subject in question—the Peninsular War. This is how we must understand the enormous and invaluable efforts made by the Military Historical Archives to scan the primary sources, which can now be accessed on the Internet,<sup>7</sup> as well as the provision of several thousand images relating to Portuguese military cartography between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries made available online by the Geographic and Military Documentation Center of the army's Geographic Institute, which will make a major contribution towards ensuring more rapid access to this type of information for scholars researching into this period.

Consolidating this vast program of intervention in terms of access to information and its dissemination, namely at the level of the built heritage and the documentary research sources under military supervision, the army used its Military Engineering Units to set in motion a program designed to recover the fortifications of the defensive lines of Torres Vedras,<sup>8</sup> or, in other words, a large part of the military field fortifications erected between 1809 and 1810, which were fundamental in defending the city of Lisbon against attacks from Napoleon's armies. This investment was made under the scope of a partnership with the Intermunicipal Platform for the Lines of Torres (PILT), which had been set up in the meantime and was subsidized by funds from the European Union,<sup>9</sup> involving the municipalities of Arruda dos Vinhos, Loures, Mafra, Sobral de Monte Agraço, Torres Vedras and Vila Franca de Xira, duly backed, from the technical point of view, by

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<sup>7</sup> In 2007, it was announced that over one million four hundred thousand images of documents from the Military Historical Archives could now be accessed on the Internet. The only regret was the slowness of the process and some difficulty that users experienced in obtaining their search results.

<sup>8</sup> This amounts to an extremely interesting cultural heritage that has gradually fallen into decay, consisting of an extensive defensive system (over 80 km in length) composed of a large number of fortifications (152), built to the North of Lisbon. Involved in their construction were not just the Portuguese, but also the English and other European allies (Available at: <<http://www.rhlt.com.pt/conteudos/>> Accessed on July 26, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> The Finance Agreement was signed on December 13, 2007, under the scope of the Financial Mechanism of the European Economic Area, which, in this case, had as its donor states Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway. It involved overall financing of 1,494,220€, for the period 2007-2011. Available at: <[http://www.rhlt.com.pt/ficheiros/conteudos/files/PDF1\\_contrato%20de%20financiamento%20MEE.pdf](http://www.rhlt.com.pt/ficheiros/conteudos/files/PDF1_contrato%20de%20financiamento%20MEE.pdf)> (accessed on July 27, 2010).

the Institute for the Management of Architectural and Archaeological Heritage and the Army's Infrastructure Department (DIE). This resulted in the project entitled the *Historic Route of the Lines of Torres Vedras*, whose main aim was to recover, enhance and promote the heritage of the 1st and 2nd Lines. After several specialized meetings had been held, the prospective aim of this project was made quite clear at the seminar held in November 2010, in Vila Franca de Xira, which brought together civilian and military specialists to discuss the theme of *The Lines of Torres Vedras—A History with a Future*.

This interesting initiative clearly shows how, in the twenty-first century, the paradigms for commemorations have changed in western societies. In fact, these commemorations designed to mark the bicentenary of the French invasions already incorporate a genuine revolution in conceptual terms that, since the end of the twentieth century, has involved all matters related with the question of heritage. In fact, in recent years, and to some extent all over the world, cultural heritage is beginning to be seen not only in its historical dimension, but, above all, as a source of wealth and a driving force for economic development (HERNÁNDEZ HERNÁNDEZ 2002: 8). This new perception has inevitably given rise to changes, particularly notable in the search for diversified strategies that can generate greater economic returns and social benefits from the heritage resources of a particular region or country.

This is how we must understand the commemorative initiatives organized under the scope of the project known as the *Historical Route of the Lines of Torres Vedras*, which formed part of the International Platform for the Lines of Torres Vedras and were presented to the public in November 2009. Operating in a coordinated fashion, the municipalities involved in the project introduced a series of joint innovative activities designed to provide the interested parties with information, encouraging their participation and even providing some educational courses. Thus, besides the traditional promotional activities, involving exhibitions and art competitions, the award of prizes for research into the theme of "The Lines of Torres Vedras," the holding of thematic seminars and lecture cycles, an Interpretation Centre was opened to the public and different itineraries were included in the *Route of the Lines of Torres Vedras*. These initiatives represent a new way of enhancing the local historical and cultural heritage, now transformed into a driving force for the development of the region itself, through the creation of an Intermunicipal Footpath of the Great Route type, or, in other words, a footpath more than 30 km long that provides an itinerary covering the territory of the six municipalities involved in the Intermunicipal Platform. Visitors will be able to visit not only places of historical and

military interest but also the different forts belonging to the defensive system and the places where the general headquarters were set up. Along this footpath, they will also have the chance to enjoy another type of heritage, such as natural spaces and the local fauna and flora. This new type of initiative devised for commemorative purposes also included the creation of the official website of the Historical Route of the Lines of Torres Vedras, and the subsequent inclusion of multimedia events has confirmed the need that is currently felt for promoting this historical and cultural heritage, especially as a tourist product.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, both the army and the Intermunicipal Platform of the Lines of Torres Vedras, as well as several higher education and research institutions, and municipal and private organizations, have set up various activities of an academic and research-based nature. These have included publishing initiatives, such as translations, the publication of annotated editions or the republication of documentary sources or works that were already sold out and/or out of print, as well as the publication of other previously unpublished works, resulting from individual research projects, sometimes undertaken in an academic environment<sup>11</sup> and sometimes not, such as fictional works, for example. One of the most notable publications was that made by the National Library in 2007 of an important bibliographical catalogue coordinated by António Ventura and Maria Leonor Machado de Sousa, which not only includes the most significant pieces from its collections, but also the whole bibliography acquired by the library about this theme since 1910.<sup>12</sup> Besides this extremely vast bibliography, it is also appropriate to highlight the publication, in 2009, of the four-volume study entitled *O Porto e as Invasões Francesas* and coordinated by Valente de Oliveira, which includes contributions written by several researchers about the north of Portugal in general and Porto in particular. This was a joint publication of the *Público* newspaper and the Porto Municipal Council and was included in the program to commemorate the bicentenary of the French invasions in the Porto metropolitan area (2008-2009).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> It should be mentioned that the Carnival in Torres Vedras was itself dedicated to the theme of “The Invasions,” and that an International Showjumping Competition is programmed to take place in Vimeiro, as well as Mountain Bike Rides, allowing people to discover more about the Lines of Torres Vedras. Also planned is the Lines of Torres Vedras Athletics Grand Prix, amongst other sports and leisure activities.

<sup>11</sup> It seems entirely fair and appropriate here to highlight all the work of António Pedro Vicente, a major researcher into this theme, whose highly pioneering academic approach to this subject has given rise to new ways of looking at and understanding the French invasions.

<sup>12</sup> This work is considered to be a fundamental tool for all those researching into this theme: VENTURA; SOUSA 2007.

<sup>13</sup> The Program was designed to commemorate the Bicentenary of the French Invasions in the Porto metropolitan area (2008-2009) and included the holding of debates, conferences, lectures, congresses,

In turn, the Portuguese Commission of Military History has been sponsoring the publication of a collection entitled *Nas Comemorações do Bicentenário*, from which a number of studies have already been published. Also worthy of note are the initiatives of Almeida Municipal Council, which has been publishing the Bicentenary Collection of the Peninsular War and has already published several titles, and Torres Vedras Municipal Council, which has been publishing or supporting the publication of several works devoted to the theme of the French Invasions, placing special emphasis on local and regional matters. 2010, which was the year that marked the historical event, therefore saw a fairly large number of book launches.

Besides this, there were other events with a purely academic intention, amongst which we should highlight the national and/or international conferences, lectures, and seminars held on the theme in Portugal. These included: the International and Interdisciplinary Conference evoking the Peninsular War, which was included in the 17th Congress on Military History, held in November 2007, under the auspices of the Portuguese Commission of Military History and the Center of Anglo-Portuguese Studies, on the theme of *The Peninsular War: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*; in December 2008, the conference was centered on the theme of *Portugal, Brazil and Napoleonic Europe*, organized by the Institute of Social Sciences of the University of Lisbon; and, above all, the 35th International Congress on Military History, held in Porto, from August 31 to September 4, 2009, whose proceedings have meanwhile been published. Besides these events, we should also emphasize that many others were held all around the country, being mainly local and regional in nature, but nonetheless representing yet more important moments for reflection that are being organized under the auspices of the commemorations. The scattered and diverse nature of events of this type does not make it possible for us to highlight any one of them in particular, although we should, however, register the great concern displayed by many of the institutions, most notably the local authorities, in sponsoring and organizing these events, as well as in ensuring the publication of their results.

As these events were aimed at a specific segment of the population and had important educational implications, we should stress the appearance of another type of publication preferentially aimed at the younger population and also supported by the local authorities. These are the comic books dedicated to figures and/or facts related with the

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exhibitions and book presentations, musical concerts, Requiem masses, and the unveiling of the monument evoking the Disaster of the Ponte das Barcas (March 29, 2009), as well as historical reconstructions.

Peninsular War, which had undeniable benefits at the level of history teaching, particularly in relation to local memories.

In parallel to these initiatives aimed at a more specialized audience, many other activities were also organized for wider sections of the population. In this case, we should emphasize the exhibitions held in the meantime, evoking the bicentenary of the Peninsular War. While some of them were naturally ephemeral in nature, others left us with important testimonies, namely through the publication of catalogues.

With a much broader impact and an undeniable capacity for local attraction, historical reconstructions were one of the most popular formats of the bicentenary commemorations. Generally based on known facts, ascertained through the dynamic involvement of the Napoleonic associations that, in each country, dedicate themselves to the dissemination and recreation of the battles of this period, these events were marked by the historical rigor and great scenic impact achieved in the same settings where these events took place 200 years ago. This was what happened, for example, in Amarante, in the evocation of the defense of the town's bridge; in Porto and Vila Nova de Gaia, with the historical recreation of the Battle of Porto, fought in May 1809; in Almeida, with the siege of the castle, in August 1810; and in Buçaco with the reconstruction of the battle with the same name, which took place in September 1810. All of these initiatives attracted large numbers of spectators and can now be revisited in short films available on the Internet.

As a sign of the new times, the commemorations of the bicentenary of the Peninsular War ended up being marked by what is undoubtedly the great technological innovation of today's world—the Internet—completely altering the parameters for the dissemination of information. With the use of the tools made available in recent years, we have witnessed a new type of experience for the dissemination of information, one that is dynamic, up-to-date, interactive, and, sometimes, eminently personal—the *website* and the *weblog*. Amongst the former, we should like to highlight the websites sponsored by associations, societies and local authorities, which provide official information with the authority and guarantee of the disseminating agency, and which have in the meantime multiplied quite dramatically.

In turn, the *weblogs*, better known as *blogs*, by being more personal and amateur experiments at publication, tend to result in a product with a heterogeneous quality, depending on who is producing them and with what purpose. We therefore think that, for the first time, the commemorations were rendered truly democratic, insofar as they ceased to be the exclusive preserve of a small group of specialists, beginning to be shared by all



those who, either individually or otherwise, are truly interested in them. With their quite different formats, ranging from those with the appearance of an electronic diary, recording thoughts and personal opinions, to the more elaborate, with more objective contents and even including electronic publications of a quite different size and type, there are numerous examples available, multiplying the information within reach of those wishing to access them.

This is, after all, the most innovative feature of the commemorations of the bicentenary of the Peninsular War. Benefitting from the global potential of the Internet, the general public were able to appropriate the commemorations, actively participating in them, expressing their opinions, making criticisms, transmitting memories, promoting events and/or presenting testimonies, in short ceasing to be mere spectators. Decisive steps were taken towards forming what can be called a virtual community, or, in other words, a broad group of people who, focusing on this theme, establish social relations between one another, via computer, generating impacts that will certainly continue far beyond the official dates of the commemorations of the bicentenary.

Unlike in the nineteenth century, when the first centenary was commemorated, in these commemorations we are not confronted with a discursive theme associated with patriotism as a national end in itself. Faced with a naturally divisive theme that evokes a difficult moment in the relationship between various European countries, marked by a war that went on for some time, the political authorities in Portugal have had some difficulty in positioning themselves appropriately in relation to the prevailing discourse of a united Europe. This is the probable explanation for a certain indifference exhibited by the government institutions in addressing the commemorations of the bicentenary.

Since they are not afraid of adopting an ideological discourse, both the army and local authorities, in their turn, have frequently been able to collaborate with one another, thus enhancing their own potential and improving the relationships between institutions. In fact, they have been the great driving forces behind the commemorations of the bicentenary. Taking advantage of the situation to promote the values associated with these celebrations, the army and local authorities have also seen in them an opportunity to promote themselves. Using them as an instrument for the enhancement of the nation's documentary, historical and cultural heritage, and making a great effort to find out more about and reconstruct its past glories, these institutions have also been able, through recourse to a variety of different mechanisms, to establish a strategy for sustainable

development, one that is innovative and takes multiple advantage of the effects generated. This is an added value that only the generations of the future will be able to evaluate.

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## Appendix

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