The Military Orders Established in Portugal in the Middle Ages: A Historiographical Overview

Paula Pinto Costa
Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto
ppinto@letras.up.pt

Abstract

The aim of this study is to single out the latest directions taken by the historiography of the Religious and Military Orders established in Portugal in the Middle Ages and to discuss the current state of research into them. We shall also examine the main tendencies characterised by such research and the way it has been formally organized, drawing attention to how it fits in with other historical topics. The historical course of the Military Orders in Portugal has influenced the documentary output that supports research into the topic, and also the actual organization of the archives and their use. In this regard, we should first describe the orders, showing how they originated and where they became implanted, as well as their relationship with the monarchy.

Keywords

military orders; historiography; Portugal; middle ages

The aim of this study is to single out the latest directions taken by the historiography of the Religious and Military Orders established in Portugal in the Middle Ages and to discuss the current state of research into them. We shall also examine the main tendencies characterised by such research and the way it has been formally organized, drawing attention to how it fits in with other historical topics. The theme follows the overall trends of Portuguese medievalism, which is opening up to new topics given the expansion of the chronologies covered, the increasing number of historians and the university setting for such coverage (Homem, 2001). In this context, research into the Military Orders is expressed in academic work related to a university career, and also involves the dynamics of institutionally structured working groups.1

The historical course of the Military Orders in Portugal has influenced the documentary output that supports research into the topic, and also the actual organization of the archives and their use. In this regard, we should first describe the orders, showing how they originated and where they became implanted, as well as their relationship with the monarchy. These institutions, apart from the Order of Christ, first came into being beyond the frontiers of Portugal, and this is reflected in the recognition of their canon law and the management of their estates. The Orders became established in Portugal with the acquiescence of the county of Portucalense, represented either by Dom Henrique and Dona Teresa or by their son, Dom Afonso Henriques. There were several reasons favoring the support of this new monachism, emerging from the disputes between religious and civil powers and affiliated with the reform of the Church in the 11th century. In fact, Dom Henriques's French origins, his empathy with the Crusade project and his close relations with Diogo Gelmires, archbishop of Compostela, in addition to the spread of Cistercianism and the restoration of certain lines of Saint Augustine’s thought, are essential points in this analysis. All these factors, plus the circumstances prevailing in the Portuguese territory in the 12th century, helped to pave the way for the definition of a geographical area for the implantation of these institutions, which had

1 www.fct.mct.pt (consulted on 1 March 2004). Note the development of a line of investigation into Military Orders, under the scope of the R&D indicated by the Centro de Investigação Histórica/FLUP.