

Was littoral a void territory in medieval times? Dealing with Portuguese coastal counties during the first dynasty

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The theory of the French historian Alain Corbin which considers that until modern times, due to natural and anthropic dangers, the coastal areas were the so-called “territories of the void”, was generally accepted as irrefutable. However, the coasts are not all the same, once there are exposed coasts and sheltered coasts (estuarine and lagoons). Coastal zones should not be assumed as a global and univocal set. Moreover, even on the exposed coastlines, is it really proven that these were “no man's lands” until the 19th century? In the Portuguese case, there is not any detailed study that allows us to confirm it. Therefore, this subject must be studied. This communication presents the preliminary results of the ongoing Project funded by Citcem, namely regarding a medieval chronology. Oliveira Marques argues that Portuguese medieval settlement was “coastal-inland”. But what was the distance from the ocean? Was it similar in all the coastline? The impossibility of a global survey concerning Portuguese territory occupation in remote periods, made us elect the dispersion of counties as the main proxy, using the “Forais Velhos” (documents granted by the Portuguese medieval authorities as a kind of a birding certificate of a county). This source allows us to perceive urban settlement rhythm and measure their distance from the coast, but not the occupation density. To infer the demographic contingent of the first dynasty in Portugal, we resorted to the General Inquiries of the Kingdom and the “Rol dos Besteiros do Conto”. The intersection of such medieval sources allows statistical analysis and the graphical and cartographic representation of data. It's just that it's not enough to perpetuate existing and generally accepted ideas. Is the coast territory of emptiness? Science must be proven if only to create a paradigm that can be discussed, improved, or even refuted by future generations.