



Because he fell ill, he did not follow the embassy when it left to visit the other ports open to Western trade following the Treaty of Nanking (notably Amoy (Xiamen), Fuzhou, Ningbo and Shanghai) but decided

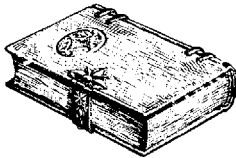
to return to France. He arrived in February 1846 after a journey that took him from Hong Kong to Singapore, Malacca and Georgetown, Sri Lanka and Egypt. 



# Macao Women in History and in Fiction

MARIA ANTÓNIA ESPADINHA\*

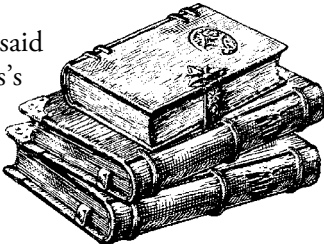
The focus of this article is a genre focus; we want to write about Macao women who have become public or semi-public personalities and have set a different model profile compared to the leading characters of Henrique de Senna Fernandes, Maria Ondina Braga or Rodrigo Leal de Carvalho, for example. Their female characters are fictional women, almost real, who are believed to have lived in Macao at a given historical time. History as well as sociology, geography, or anthropology is always present when a story, novel or short story is written, unless the scenario is a fantasy world. Characters, both men and women, are historically plausible and live in a society that is or will become history. They have names, but they are only character’s names, even though they may be common citizens’ names.



In the first paragraph of this text we have mentioned some authors. They are native authors of African Portuguese-speaking countries. Their historical novels can be included in a *corpus* of post-colonial

literature, because they reflect their search for a pre-colonial identity that the author would like to recover. If we consider the Macao literature, however, the Portuguese-speaking native writers have not, so far, shown an interest in historical characters or facts as a theme for a novel, nor have they produced any post-colonial fiction. This does not mean, of course, that they have no relation to history. The native writers that we might take into consideration are Deolinda da Conceição, who unfortunately was no longer alive in the post-colonial period, and Henrique de Senna Fernandes. Deolinda da Conceição has left us a considerable number of short stories, but not a novel. Her extremely interesting gallery of female characters depicts various precise portraits of the different situations lived and suffered by Macao Chinese women. They are significant contributions to the study of the Macao Chinese community in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The sociological approach is important for history.

The same might be said about Senna Fernandes’s works, both novels and short stories. The novels, of course, give us a richer, more elaborate picture



Several historical novels have been published in Portuguese-speaking countries in recent decades. In ‘A literatura dos PALOP e a teoria pós-colonial’, a paper delivered in the opening session of the 4<sup>th</sup> encounter of Comparative Studies of the Portuguese Language Literature, 1999, Russel G. Hamilton mentions writers from several Lusophone countries who have published post-colonial historical novels: Henrique Abranches, José Eduardo Agualusa and Pepetela from Angola, Mia Couto and Umgulani Ba Ka Khosa among others. Macao, however, has not been very productive in this area, at least regarding Portuguese historical novels.

Considering the rich history of Macao and the long gallery of interesting historical characters who have lived there and were, or are, possible protagonists of novels, we might question why there is no evidence of previous interest for this kind of novel.

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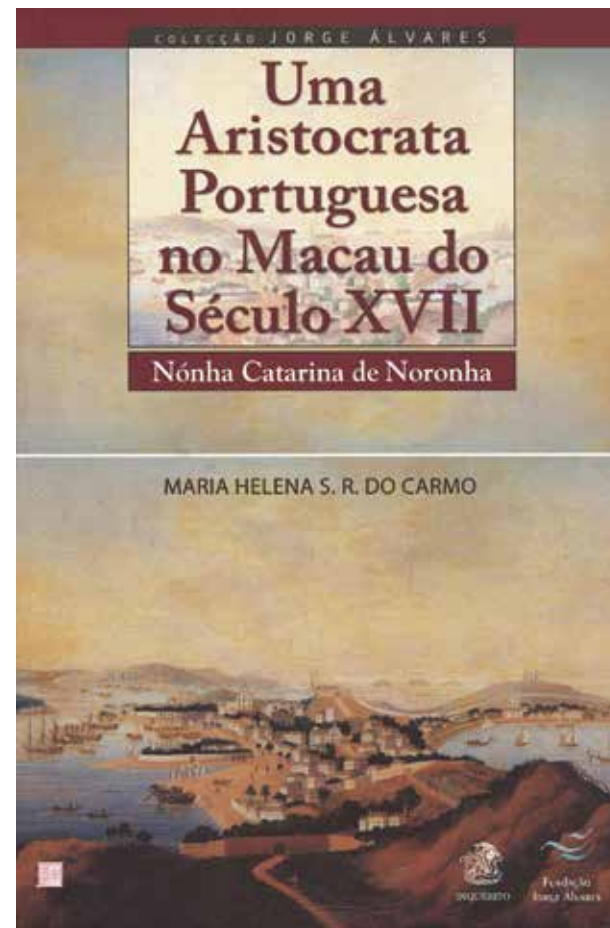
of Macao society, and also of the geography of the city. We could draw Macao maps from the books of Senna Fernandes. This 'geography' is also social, as it shows us the different 'sections' of the city; the 'bairros' (city districts) and their inhabitants, the 'cidade cristã' (Christian city) and the 'Bazar' (China town), the names of the streets, the interaction between the two communities, the emigrations to Shanghai or Hong Kong, the relative importance of several activities, and the existence of other communities that have also influenced the growth and development of Macao in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. And there are references to historical moments and facts, to institutions, urban myths, etc. There is a history of Macao's everyday life in all the novels, but also in the short stories. We cannot speak of his female characters as historic figures, but they reflect the real position of women in the Macanese society. In *Os Dolores*,<sup>1</sup> a posthumous novel published in 2010, the main female character deserves a deep analysis.

The Macao historical novels in Portuguese, however, are a late product, but they are not from native Macao writers. When we speak or write about Macanese literature in Portuguese, we are referring to the works of Macanese authors, born in Macao or descendants of people born in Macao.<sup>2</sup> However, if we talk about Macao literature, we also include works by authors who live or have lived in Macao and write about Macao, its society, its characters, historical or fictional.

For this text, we are considering two books by the same author, Maria Helena do Carmo, who lived in Macao for a couple of years in the late 1990s. Her interest in history led her to take a Master's Degree in Portuguese Language and Culture (Historical Studies). Her research for her dissertation *Os Interesses dos Portugueses em Macau no Século XVIII* put her on the trail of fascinating documents about Macao people and about Macao itself. That was how she 'met' and became curious about Nhónha Catarina de Noronha, who became her first historical/fictional character. She might also have developed this curiosity through the Master's dissertation of her colleague, Anabela Monteiro,<sup>3</sup> who mentions the person and her role in the Macao society of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, confessing however that it was very

difficult to know details of her biography. Who was this lady, after all?

Catarina de Noronha, or Nhónha Catarina de Noronha is mentioned in Anabela Monteiro's dissertation as the widow of the rich merchant D. Francisco Vieira de Figueiredo, a wealthy widow who was living in Timor, she was invited to return to Macao and escorted back home. The homage paid to her was but a pretext to bring the powerful, rich widow and her 'empire' back to the City of the name of God. Macao was suffering a strong economic crisis. Her money, her ships, her business skills were needed and were expected to revitalise the city. The protagonist of *Uma Aristocrata Portuguesa no Macau do Século XVII: Nhónha Catarina de Noronha* (A Portuguese aristocrat in 18<sup>th</sup> century Macao) was the daughter of the Portuguese Governor D. António Manuel da Câmara de Noronha. Catarina's story is a nice narrative; although we are aware that it is not a historical episode; it has a strong historical background.



The novel begins on a cold February morning in 1662, Catarina's wedding day. The groom was D. Francisco Vieira de Figueiredo, a rich Portuguese merchant who was about to celebrate his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. The bride was in her early twenties. Vieira de Figueiredo was a widower and had an adult son, but he is described as healthy and good humoured, had a good reputation as a merchant and almost a diplomat, because he had contributed to the good relations between Portugal and the sultans and Kings of East Asia.

The author offers us a very detailed description of Catarina de Noronha's life and how she met her future husband, who arrived in Macao on the third or fourth day of January 1662. He was on his way from Goa to Timor and his plan was to go back to Portugal afterwards. The Christmas celebrations had not yet finished when he arrived and were followed by those of the Lunar New Year and the new Emperor of China's inauguration.

The Portuguese nobleman (though recently titled) was welcome in every celebration and party. He had been awarded a nobility title for all services rendered to the King of Portugal. He was rich, good-looking, witty and intelligent. He would keep an interesting conversation on several topics. In the first banquet to honor Figueiredo upon his arrival in Macao, he noticed D. Catarina.

D. Catarina did not fail to arouse the newcomer's interest. She was an educated and cultivated young woman, thanks to her intense relationship with the Jesuits who often came to see her parents. Several well-known Jesuit priests are mentioned as regular visitors to the family.

D. Catarina's description is not an ode to her beauty. She was not a beautiful young lady, but her naturally kind temperament, her willingness to help, her clever conversation and her respectful attitude towards older persons minimised her physical appearance that did not match the beauty standards of the epoch. On the other hand, she had beautiful white teeth and a happy smile on her face. Her mother, the Macanese D. Paula Fragosa, instantly detected Figueiredo's interest in her daughter and started to devote more attention to D. Catarina's grooming, especially to her hairstyle, that was changed in a way that suited her. Vieira de Figueiredo's interest for D. Catarina increased, the young lady accepted the marriage proposal made to her father and the wedding was scheduled for the 3<sup>rd</sup>

of February, hardly a month after Figueiredo's arrival in Macao. Of course, the short period of the engagement gave way to many rumours in town, but Figueiredo had to leave on time to take advantage of the favourable winds to sail southwards.

The rich narration and description of the Macanese festivities in January was largely surpassed by the preparations for the wedding and for the journey thereafter. Figueiredo's last days as a 'bachelor' were strongly celebrated, mainly after his ship was ready to set sail.

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D. Catarina also had the opportunity to celebrate with her friends and to understand how much everyone appreciated her future husband. The eve of the 'great day' brought the bride many thoughts about her future. The time of courting had been short, but even if it had been longer the bride would not have been able to guess what kind of husband D. Francisco Vieira de Figueiredo would become. She knew that she was going to marry an apparently good man, who was charmed by her, but whom she hardly knew. Another fact had to be taken in consideration; Macao was facing several problems, mainly concerning the economy. After sixty years of Spanish rule, Portugal was much weaker, and so was Macao. China had also been going through a difficult period with the change of the Ming to the Qing Dynasty and the socio-political situation created by the feudal princes' resistance was certainly not favourable to Macao.

D. Catarina's last night before the wedding was difficult. She could hardly sleep. She was excited,



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though afraid of the changes that she was going to face in the near future. Praying helped her to fall asleep. But she knew that she had accepted to marry Vieira de Figueiredo on her own free will and that she admired him.

The bride's and the groom's outfits, the wedding ceremony in the Cathedral, the bridal procession through the city that was beautifully decorated to celebrate Emperor Kangxi's proclamation to the throne and, later, the banquet that included the best of the Macanese *cuisine*, give us a clear idea of the pomp of a wedding in the Macanese high society.

A long, detailed description of the 'after party', the transportation of bride and groom across the city to the house where they were going to stay during their first days as a married couple, feeds the reader's fantasy. The topography of 17<sup>th</sup> century Macao is clearly described and the reader can follow it on any city map of the time. The western-style wedding is embellished by the complements offered by the Chinese culture and tradition.

The beginning of the married couple's private life was discreetly narrated. Special attention is paid to the festivals related to the Lunar New Year and the fact that the newly wed were guests of honour in many parties and banquets. The New Year celebrations and traditions are described in detail.

Less than one month after the wedding, D. Catarina and her husband left Macao and Vieira de Figueiredo's ship set sail to Makassar, via Manila, where Vieira de Figueiredo had good friends and business partners. The surprises of the journey, the life on board and the first contact with life on a ship, the observation of fish, dolphins and birds and the contact with different cultures, are part of the process of D. Catarina's growth as a woman and of getting more and more involved with her husband. Makassar, in the Celebes, was the place where Vieira de Figueiredo had a good position and was considered a guest of honour. He and his young wife settled there. D. Catarina soon adapted herself to her new life. She was interested in the local culture, met new people, observed everything very attentively and learned the local social rules. The focus of this paper is the character, Nhónha Catarina. We are tempted to look at more historical details, but that would extend this article too much.

We shall only note that both the events that occurred in Macao and in China and those which

happened in Southeast Asia or even in India (Goa) are narrated in the novel, especially those which refer to events that have influenced the life of the couple. Vieira de Figueiredo's position and success were the object of envy; the attempts of several merchants or adventurers, both Portuguese and of other nationalities, to take power kept him aware of the danger of losing his position and also made him stronger. The frequent journeys of Nhónha Catarina's husband also gave her the opportunity to be more independent, to make decisions and face difficulties.

About three years after the wedding, Nhónha Catarina was pregnant and gave birth to a baby girl, who was baptised Ana Maria.<sup>4</sup> The baby was born exactly when Figueiredo was trying to flee from Timor and to take his wife and servants to Larantuka, where he was renovating his old house. They had to stay in Timor and could only leave many months later. Nhónha Catarina had dreamt of leaving Southeast Asia and move to Portugal, or at least to Goa. The constant danger in which she lived and Figueiredo's absences on business or political journeys made her suffer, in spite of her having discovered that she had been betrayed by her husband with a local woman.

Francisco Vieira de Figueiredo's unexpected death in 1667 left his young widow alone and with a small child to care for. The author includes here, as she herself recognises, the completely fictional love story, or rather, passionate love of D. Catarina for a young Italian whom she rejects out of respect for her husband but would have accepted as a young widow after the mourning period. He married a Portuguese young lady of another noble family. The romance, however false, strengthens the good character of Nhónha Catarina; a faithful wife, though aware of having been betrayed, a widow who does everything to save her late husband's property and commerce, an aristocrat who learns everything about trade and diplomacy in Southeast Asia.

The purely fictional part of the novel serves the purpose of showing the noble character of D. Catarina de Noronha, her intelligence and her respect for her husband's memory and her love for her daughter. She received several marriage proposals, but she knew that her estate and money were the real motivation of the proponents.

Nhónha Catarina's wish was to return to Macao, although she was aware that the economy and the political situation there were not favourable. An

embassy had been sent to the Emperor of China, to seek help for the city. Manuel de Saldanha was the ambassador, but he and his embassy were still waiting in Guangzhou for the necessary authorisation to go to Beijing

D. Catarina wrote several letters to the Macao Governor. She was aware of the risks she had been taking. The Dutch fleet under the rule of Johan Van Dam chased the Portuguese and the Spanish ships in the South Sea. D. Catarina wrote to Manuel de Saldanha. Bento Pereira de Faria, the secretary of the ambassador, was in charge of writing the required authorisation.

Bento Pereira de Faria wrote several letters to political entities in order to allow D. Catarina to return to Macao. The ships that had belonged to Figueiredo were returned to the widow. One of her own ships was sent to Larantuka to take her back to Macao. The departure was delayed by the captain's disease and the journey took a couple of months. On the last day of June the ship *Nossa Senhora do Rosário e Almas do Purgatório* sailed into the Macao harbour. D. Catarina was back and she had many plans. She wanted to have her own house, an idea that did not please her mother and sister. She postponed the execution of this idea, although it happened some years later. Revisiting Macao was a pleasure, but many things had changed. D. Catarina kept to her plans and became one of the most respected personalities in Macao. Having been a widow for three years, everybody expected her to get married again, according to the tradition. Again and again she refused to get married. She knew that her property was the main interest of the proponents. She was prettier as a twenty-eight-year-old than she had been at twenty, but she was also wiser and fully aware of her power. She had learned a lot about the world, about people and about herself. She was respected by everyone in Macao. She was generous, charitable and a good business woman. Macao suffered at that time and Saldanha's Embassy failed the objectives, in spite of his having been well received by the young Emperor Kangxi. Saldanha died in Beijing and Bento Pereira de Faria did not respect the Ambassador's will and replaced him, instead of André Coelho Vieira, who had been nominated by Saldanha. The situation is well-explained in the novel and it can be supported by reliable historical sources. The emperor decided to support Macao, but the crisis was not over and D. Catarina tried to help those in need.

A new Portuguese nobleman coming from Goa arrived in Macao; Pero Vaz de Siqueira was his name and he had a brilliant career both as a military and as an officer at the Governor's service. He intended to stay there and it was known that he wanted to marry a lady from Macao. D. Catarina was somewhat interested, but she stepped aside to 'offer' the opportunity for her sister, D. Maria de Noronha, to marry. Siqueira, her brother-in-law, respected her and always sought her advice on important issues.

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Once more Macao, 'the republic', as Macao was called by its people, had operational problems. Another embassy was formed; this time Bento Pereira de Faria was the ambassador. Although the ambassador was well-received, the results of the embassy were not very good except for the punishment of the Guanzhou 'suntó', who was dismissed for corruption.

Details of life in Macao and all the economic and political problems; the changes, the relationship with Portugal, the gossips, everything contributes to give the reader an image in which D. Catarina's character is a model of virtue. She was very well-connected with the rich and powerful and she protected the poor.

D. Catarina was frequently asked for help, not only by the poor. The men who made the political decisions also sought her advice and asked her for money. D. Catarina was cautious, but she loved Macao. She was a woman, therefore she could not participate in the meetings of the Senado, the structure that ruled Macao, even against the Governor and disrespecting the orders of the King or the Queen of Portugal.

The last third of the novel is extremely rich in historical details, even more than the previous

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chapters. Facts, events, personalities, all are mentioned in documents of the time. The ships that sailed to and from Macao, the reestablishment of the silver trade with Japan, the trade with Southeast Asia, the economic crisis in Macao, the Emperor's policies, the new embassy to Beijing, the news about the end of the war between Spain and Portugal, the beginnings of the opium trade, the arrival of new Portuguese officers sent by the king of Portugal to recover the power over Macao, Emperor Kangxi's Tolerance Act in 1692, the important role of the Jesuit Missionaries ... everything is there, as a 'proof' of D. Catarina's existence.

The lady has grown older. Her daughter married a good hardworking young man. D. Catarina was lonely. She became more isolated and ageing made her health more and more fragile. She died in July 1701. D. Catarina donated many valuable assets to the Church and her memory was kept as that of a benefactor and also as a good administrator of the family business, especially the trading ships, as maritime commerce was the main income source for Macao. D. Catarina's position was handed over from generation to generation and later to another Macao citizen, Manuel Vicente Rosa, the tutor of D. Catarina's grandchildren, who had become orphans.

Nhónha, i.e. D. Catarina de Noronha, is historically accepted as a woman who has earned the recognition and the respect of her fellow merchants and ship owners. She had been educated to be a good wife and mother and a good Christian. She was all of those, but she had to learn by herself to combine the so called 'feminine virtues' with skills that she had not recognised in herself. She was also literate and cultured. The author presents her as a very good example of a Macanese lady.

A different way to depict Macanese women can be found in another historical novel by the same author: *Mercadores do Ópio: Macau no Tempo de Qianlong* (Opium merchants. Macao in the epoch of Emperor Qianlong). The novel refers to four generations of a family of ship owners and merchants at a time when the opium trade was the main commercial product in Macao. In this case we will disregard most of the historical facts and pay attention to the women who are the true anchors and shelter of these men. The novel can be considered the saga of four generations of the Valente Rosa family, from 1735 to almost the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Emperor Qianlong resigned in 1796.

Once more, we want to focus on the female characters, although they are not the protagonists but the supporting characters. None of the female characters in *Mercadores do Ópio* is so strong as Nhónha Catarina. Their characterisation cannot be so detailed, because there are less documents about their lives. Their names match the registers in the parish churches where they had been christened or got married. The author uses her capacity to write fiction, surely based on descriptions of the everyday life of wealthy women in Macao and also of girls' education and the contribution of the Jesuits to it.

Who were these women? How did they live? How important were they in their families?

Isabel da Cruz was Manuel Vicente Rosa's wife. He was a 'Reinol', a Portuguese who arrived in Macao in 1704 and married the Macanese Isabel da Cruz, António da Cruz's sister, i.e., a woman related to the best Macanese families. As they had no children, Manuel invited a nephew of his, Simão Valente Rosa, to come to Macao to assist him and become his heir. This invitation was not agreeable to Isabel, but she eventually accepted and even succeeded in finding him a suitable wife. Simão would become a full member of the Macanese merchants society and be entitled to participate in the 'Senado' after having got married.

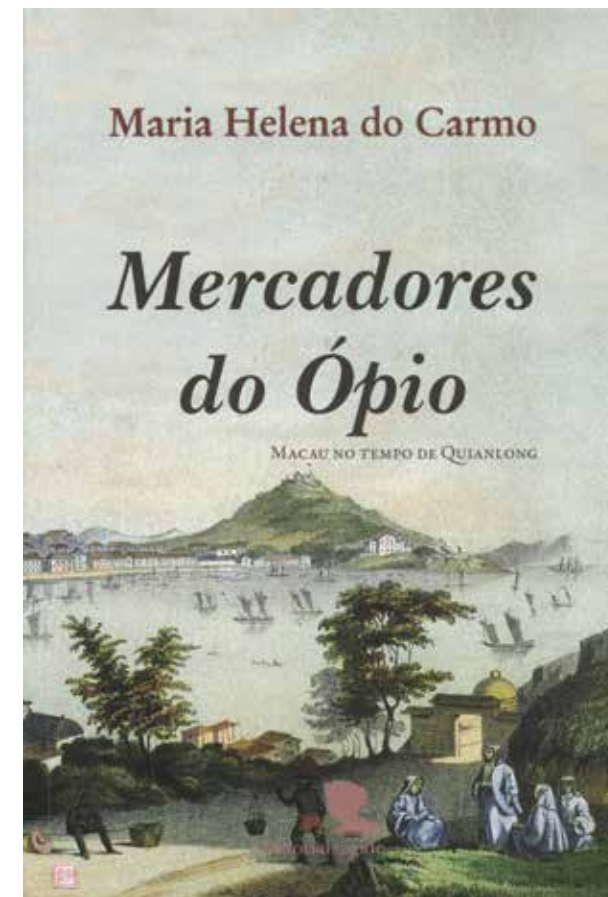
Mariazinha, alias Maria Araújo Barros, was sixteen years old and was impressed by Simão's appearance when she first saw him. She guessed that the elegant young man was the promised groom that she was supposed to meet at a party organised by Manuel Vicente Rosa to introduce his good-looking twenty-year-old nephew to the Society and, of course, to introduce him to Mariazinha. Her parents had already accepted the future union. Other families with eligible young ladies hoped that it would not happen. The wedding, however, was celebrated two weeks later and the bride and groom started a happy family, and had seven children and fifteen grandchildren.

Mariazinha became Dona Mariazinha, a family mother, a respected lady, performing all her social and Christian duties, but she was also eager to learn. Besides being literate, she also could read and write Chinese characters. She was an enthusiastic reader of the novel 'The Odoriferous Concubine'. Mariazinha loved that novel and developed some kind of affection for the Emperor and his beloved Muslim lady,

a war slave. At the time when she read the book, Mariazinha was already the mother of several children; Simão was a respected and wealthy merchant and she felt that she was somehow being neglected because of her husband's business. Although their wedding had been prepared by Manuel V. Rosa and Mariazinha's parents, they had developed a very strong affection and were in love. Xiang-Fei's tragical end—suicide—moved Dona Mariazinha so deeply that she cried while reading the related book chapter. When she finished reading the tragic story of Qianlong and Xiang Fei, an explosion of the feelings that she had been silencing for a long time made her cry so much that her eyes were swollen.

But she calmed down and thought of the positive aspects of her life and all the blessings that she had received. Then she became jealous, although she had no evidence of Simão's treason. On the other hand, she paid more attention to her husband and listened to him with interest and respect. The tragic death of their son Bartolomeu contributed to strengthen their love. But novels and short stories about Qianlong's love and revenge kept Mariazinha and other Macanese ladies interested in reading and even the men commented on the books and the rumours about the Emperor.

Mariazinha often surprised everybody with her wise remarks about politics and business, but also with her knowledge of arts, pottery and other subjects. She is the main female character in *Mercadores do Ópio* and the other ladies are like a reflection of all her virtues. She knew what was right or wrong, she preserved the traditions, but made the required changes. She led the charity groups, but she did not neglect her children. We could say that she was quite a role model in Macanese society.



António, Simão's brother, arrived in Macao in 1748, ten years later than Simão. He was 28 years old, two years younger than his brother. António was not eager to get married, even less to marry someone that he himself had not chosen. He agreed to live at his brother's, in the family mansion of their now widowed uncle. A few years later, however, he moved to a house of his own, because Simão and Mariazinha had many children and he was going to get married to Filipa.

Filipa Pereira is not a prominent character in the novel and we do not have a description of her physical appearance. However, we have an idea of her character and intelligence, for example

when she participated in a dinner party and after the dinner understood that the men were discussing business and politics and the women were not expected to contribute. Filipa spoke out her ideas and claimed her right to participate in the discussion, saying that she loved histories of battles and problems with mandarins and also about life in the emperor's court. She could also read Chinese characters and poems about China and about the Emperor.

Another woman deserves being mentioned: Josefa, a domestic helper ('criada', in local language). She accompanied Mariazinha when she moved to the Valente Rosa's mansion. She was not only responsible for Mariazinha's comfort, but also considered part of the family. She was experienced in household and life and helped Mariazinha raise her children. The domestic helper character, the 'criada', is typical in a Macanese family. They knew and kept the family secrets, loved and protected the children and kept things going smoothly. The language used by 'nhónhas' and 'criadas' was often the Patuá, the Macao crioule. Some dialogues

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in Patuá help to create a special feminine and Macanese atmosphere.

Simão and Mariazinha had daughters and sons. António and Filipa only had one son. The sons got married. Daughters and daughters-in-law were a new generation that led to yet another new generation. This fourth generation took over the family traditions.

Macao suffered several economic crises. The families and in-laws fought over the property, ships and over the trading routes. At that time the ‘casados’ were still powerful in Macao. Missionaries and all clergymen were respected. The Jesuits also were respected and had influence in the Emperor’s court.


Manuel Vicente Rosa died in 1751. His nephew Simão became the patriarch, a role that he had been playing for years on behalf of his uncle. Almost all of Simão Valente Rosa’s children were married at the end of 1750s and a new generation started taking the lead. The young men were ‘casados’, therefore they were allowed to participate in the political life of the city. Besides, marriages also brought connections with other important families or with Portuguese newcomers from ‘good houses’ who came to seek their fortune in Macao.

European companies, first French and Dutch, and then others, established themselves in Macao. The Macanese faced the situation with courage and

strengthened their business and their friendship. Their business, especially the illicit opium trade, made Macao richer and richer. The Valente Rosa family was forbidden to leave Macao, because they were the owners of many ships and their business was the main source of income for Macao. The women of the family were active in charities and helped in social welfare.

D. Mariazinha died in 1791. Besides her fortune, she contributed to Macao with a family that continued to give a lot to the city. Her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren continued the family business and traditions.

We have tried to focus on Macanese women, but the historical and social background cannot be overlooked and the author went through a long process of research. Her Master’s thesis, *Os Interesses os Portugueses em Macau, na Primeira Metade do Século VIII* (The interests of the Portuguese in Macao in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century) gave her good grounding.

The two historical novels referred to above have something in common, something that interrelates them. Characters of the novel *Mercadores do Ópio* or their descendants are already mentioned in *Uma Aristocrata Portuguesa no Macau do Século XVII*. The Macanese families and the women, i.e. the female characters, are correctly and historically identified, but their fictional characteristics enrich both novels. 

NOTAS

- 1

Henrique de Senna Fernandes, *Os Dores*. Macao: Instituto Cultural do Governo da RAEM, 2010
- 2

Cf. Maria Antónia Espadinha, ‘Literatura de Macau’.
- 3

Anabela Nunes Monteiro, *Macau no Tempo de Bento Pereira de Faria (2.ª Metade do Séc. XVII)*.
- 4

Ana Maria Figueiredo de Noronha existed, is documented and married António da Cruz in Macao.

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