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Madeiran Couscous

An Archaeology of Know-How

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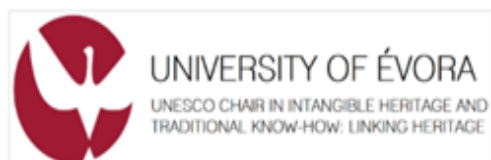
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MADEIRAN COUSCOUS: AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF KNOW-HOW

ABSTRACT

This volume of «Cadernos do Território» presents two studies documenting the complex trajectory of couscous on Madeira Island, challenging the theory of its direct introduction by enslaved populations from the Maghreb. The first study establishes a comparative basis through a corpus of recipes (1930s–present), whose technical affinities suggest a «top-down» transmission originating from early-modern aristocratic Ibero-Christian matrix shared with other surviving traditions in Portuguese territory, namely those in the Azores and Trás-os-Montes. The second study, based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in 2023 in Funchal, bridges the gap between the capital's historical sources and the records of traditional know-how in the rural world. The work demonstrates that the survival of this heritage resulted from successive mutations and ruptures: from the aristocratic sphere to the countryside and, finally, from local agricultural production to a dependence on global flows, a process marking the decline of cereal cultivation in the region and the consequent loss of agrobiodiversity.

Keywords: Madeira couscous, traditional techniques, archaeology of know-how, discontinuity, food heritage, agrobiodiversity.

RESUMO

Este volume dos «Cadernos do Território» apresenta dois estudos que documentam a complexa trajetória do cuscuz na ilha da Madeira, desafiando a tese de uma introdução direta por populações escravizadas do Magrebe. O primeiro estudo estabelece uma base comparativa através de um *corpus* de receitas (década de 1930 – presente), cujas afinidades técnicas sugerem uma transmissão *top-down* com origem nas mesas nobres da Idade Moderna – uma matriz ibero-cristã comum a outras sobrevivências em território português, nomeadamente nos Açores e em Trás-os-Montes. O segundo estudo, assente em trabalho de campo etnográfico realizado em 2023, no Funchal, faz a ponte entre as fontes históricas da «Cidade» e os registos do saber-fazer no mundo rural. A obra demonstra que a sobrevivência deste património resultou de sucessivas mutações e rupturas – da esfera aristocrática para o campo e, finalmente, da produção agrícola local para a dependência de fluxos globais, processo que assinala o declínio do cultivo de cereais na região e a consequente perda de agrobiodiversidade.

Palavras-chave: Cuscuz da Madeira, técnicas tradicionais, arqueologia do saber-fazer, descontinuidade, património alimentar, agrobiodiversidade.

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Introduction

Excavating the Gesture Archive. An Archaeology of Know-How

The gastronomy of Madeira Island is often celebrated as a living repository of Atlantic practices, where insularity functioned as both a filter and a catalyst for traditions. At the heart of this cultural heritage lies couscous—from the Arabic *kuskus*—a granulated pasta that constitutes a complex knot of historical and identity-based meanings. This monograph brings together two studies that, through an intertextual reading, document the social trajectory of this foodstuff via an archaeology of its know-how.

The preparation techniques contain defining marks inherited from a long transcultural odyssey. The term *kuskus* originally designated the manual process of rolling semolina. Its genesis, however, remains a subject of academic debate, divided between the thesis of an emergence in the medieval Maghreb and the hypothesis of a Sahelian root linked to the steaming traditions of sub-Saharan Africa. Regardless of its original focus, it was in the thirteenth century that couscous saw its first moment of fixation in the Iberian Peninsula, with technical descriptions and archaeological evidence of couscous steamers (*cuscuzeiros*) in areas under Muslim rule. This was followed, however, by a social and documentary hiatus, with the trail of this practice being lost until its resurgence during the Renaissance—a period in which it reappeared with renewed vigour in historical sources, culinary treatises and manuscript notebooks.

From the 15th century onwards, Madeira assumed a central role, emerging as the spearhead of Portuguese expansion in Africa, Asia and America. This strategic position transformed the island into a hub for human flows, bringing populations from both the Maghreb and the West African coast to the territory. Couscous subsequently travelled to new Portuguese conquests, namely Cape Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Brazil, where traditions developed with distinct characteristics from previous matrices.

The recourse to «archaeology», informed by Michel Foucault's perspective, is justified precisely by this sinuous and fragmented nature of the history of couscous, marked by profound discon-

tinuities. Unlike a linear historiography that would seek an uninterrupted evolution or a long stagnation, we treat know-how not as the result of a process of fossilisation, but as a succession of layers that resisted the silences of history. The archaeological method allows us to confront documentary hiatus and analyse the ruptures and drastic shifts in social context that the object underwent.

Thus, a transition is made from an «Archaeology of Knowledge»—a methodological approach applied in *Les Mots et les Choses* and later formalised in *L'Archéologie du Savoir*—to an «Archaeology of Know-How», focused on the intelligence of the body and the materiality of gestures. This archaeology performs a kind of anatomy of the technical gesture: it does not view the practice as a grammar or a language, but as a material fact where the gesture does not «speak» about knowledge but is the knowledge in action. In this sense, each technical operation is treated as a material statement (*énoncé*) whose condition of existence is what allows it to emerge as a tangible unit of knowledge. To clarify this concept: an *énoncé* is the gesture itself plus the conditions that surround it and force it to be exactly that way.

The transition to an «Archaeology of Know-How» is anchored in the concept of the «operational chain» (*chaîne opératoire*) developed by André Leroi-Gourhan. This methodological option was inspired by the profound symmetry between Foucault's «excavation» and Leroi-Gourhan's *Le Geste et la Parole*: if the former explores the layers of discourse, the latter identifies the exact location where these layers are recorded in the absence of texts—the operational chain conceived here as an archive of conditions of existence.

By dissecting the operational chain, we reveal a density that manifests what Foucault termed heterochronia and heterotopia: the coexistence of multiple temporalities and distinct geographical origins within the same technical space. While some gestures are material statements that fulfil the conditions of existence of the seventeenth century in Portugal or even the Middle Ages in Maghreb—carrying their specific technical memory, «appellations», and associated tools such as the *cuscuzeiro* (couscoussier) or *ralador* (grater), and ingredients like *fermento* (ferment) or *segurelha* (thyme)—others represent more recent adaptations to industrial flours or new domestic contexts in Madeira.

Even within a confined geographic area such as an island, a diverse repertoire of technical variants can coexist; a shift in the production or consumption context may trigger the reactivation of one specific variant or, conversely, lead to the definitive abandonment of another through a process of cultural selection within the technical space of the couscous' preparation. This space functions as a heterotopia, where gestures originating from distant cultural topographies and social strata are mirrored and juxtaposed in a single, real place: where the couscous maker stands. By deconstructing and dissecting the process into a sequential series of gestures, we treat each operation as a material manifestation of a specific layer of technical memories that can be shared by traditions of couscous in other geographical areas such as the Azores, Trás-os-Montes or the Maghreb.

In this outlook, the operational chain functions as the stratigraphical framework where historical density, heterochronia, and the conditions of existence of each technical operation become visible. The «thickness» of the gesture allowed the know-how to survive the transition from aristocratic tables to rural domesticity, and finally to the recent collapse of local wheat cultivation. This cross-disciplinary approach allows us to observe how technical memory is stored in the stratigraphy of gestures, words, ingredients and artefacts, which remains legible even when the agricultural and social structures of consumption that once sustained the preparation of couscous have been profoundly transformed.

In the first study, a comparative basis is established through an original survey and systematisation of a corpus of 13 recipes (1930s–present). This analysis, which captures nuances and subtle variations previously obscured by piecemeal approaches, confirms an affiliation with a prestige matrix that remained anchored at noble tables and as a festive dish in the Convents of Funchal during the Early Modern Period. It was only in the twentieth century that the practice «descended» to the rural world.

The second study dialogues with this archive by presenting the know-how of Mr Rui César Gomes, whose urban practice perpetuates both the consumption and a singular *chaîne opératoire*. Within it, the use of «bran» (*fãrelo*—particles from a previous preparation) to initiate production stands out—a technical detail that finds an exact

parallel in the «*comecillo*» of an eighteen-century recipe and which, in its integral management of the cereal, curiously aligns with contemporary principles of macrobiotics and zero waste.

The two studies demonstrate that the know-how consolidated on the island was not a direct transposition of popular Maghrebi currents, but rather the result of an Ibero-Christian technical mutation. As will be seen below, this practice has survived major agricultural and economic transformations on the island. However, although it has a long history in Madeira's food heritage, couscous is today poorly known by most islanders. By documenting these gestures and techniques, this work aims to record a know-how that has become unfamiliar, restoring its rightful place within the regional intangible heritage.

Study 1

The Couscous of Madeira. Ingredients, Utensils, Operational Chain, Culinary Lexicon, and Aetiology

Couscous is a granulated pasta traditionally made by hand, with flour sprinkled with water. The same term also refers to a typical Maghrebi dish prepared with this ingredient. Once steamed in a perforated vessel, couscous can be eaten immediately or dried for later consumption. In 2020, Algeria, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia inscribed couscous on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Since then, UNESCO's recognition has reinforced the perception of this food legacy as an identity marker of Maghrebi cuisine¹. However, some of the earliest recipes were written not in North Africa, but on the Iberian Peninsula during the 13th century (ROSENBERG, 1989, 77-78; CERVERÓ, 2021, 58), with the consumption of couscous in the Ibero-Muslim elite confirmed by historians (OUBALHI, 2012, 414) and archaeologists² during the same period.

In the Early Modern Age, a few recipes appear in Portuguese manuscripts and cookbooks³, as well as one in Spanish (MONTIÑO, 1611), attesting that this type of pasta was part of the diet of the upper echelons of Christian society. Today, this culinary tradition is only perpetuated in three Portuguese territories: Trás-os-Montes, the Azores, and Madeira. There, it is now considered a peasant meal, traditionally substituting rice, which was once unaffordable. According to popular belief, couscous was introduced to Madeira by enslaved Moors slaves shortly after the island's discovery⁴.

This paper presents an ethnographic account of this food heritage, based on a comparative analysis of a corpus of 13 recipes from the 1930s to the present day. The analysis will examine ingredients,

utensils, operational chains (*chaînes opératoires*), and the culinary lexicon, enabling us to question the purported Saracen origin of Madeiran couscous. The results will be compared with historical, ethnological, and linguistic data from other regions with related traditions. It will be argued that Madeiran couscous did not likely originate from the Maghreb through enslaved Moors. Instead, we suggest it arrived from the mainland as part of a «top-down» process of transmission, with strong affinities in its preparation method to the *cuscuz* enjoyed by the Portuguese elite during the Early Modern Period.

METHODOLOGY

The 13 selected recipes date from 1939 to the present day. Some of them mention the specific location of the fieldwork, while others do not. A few were likely recorded in Funchal, where most of the island's population resides, but there is no way to confirm this location. All have been published⁵, except for the last one (recipe r13), which was transcribed by the Author 1 from an informative panel displayed at the Parish Hall of the Church of Lameiros (São Vicente) during ethnographic fieldwork at an annual gastronomic event (*Mostra do Cuscuz*) on 22nd October 2017.

r1: Eduardo Clemente Nunes Pereira (1939, Madeira).

r2: Viscount of Porto da Cruz, (2a: [1949]1963 / 2b: 1955, Madeira).

r3: Maria Ângela Leotte Rezende (1961⁶, Canhas and Câmara de Lobos).

r4: Anonymous author (1961, Madeira).

r5: Lucília Boullosa Valle (1987, Madeira).

r6: Margarida Rodrigues Camacho (1988, Madeira).

r7: Manuela Freitas (1998, Madeira).

r8: Júlio Pereira (2003, São Vicente).

1. Stengel *et al.*, 2020, 13; Othmani, 2021, 2; Boukadida, 2021, 70; Braga, 2023, 603.

2. Gomes, 2002, 115, 118, 129, 131, 515; Navarro Palanzón, 1991, 38.

3. Domingos, 1814, 127-129; Ramos *et al.*, 2013, 168-169; Barros, 2014, 114-115; Coelho, *n.d.*, 36-38; Braga, 2015, 129, 136; Henriques, 2021, 179.

4. Silva *et al.*, 1921/1922, vol. 2, 178 (Mouros); Sarmiento, 1938; Cruz, 1963[1949].

5. r1: Pereira, 1939, 577-578; r2a: Cruz, 1963[1949], 42-47; r2b: Cruz, 1955, 126-127; r3: Rezende, 1961, 282-283; r4: Anonymous author, 1961; r5: Valle, 1987, 15, 113; r6: Camacho, 1997[1988], 44, 60; r7: Freitas, 1998, 40; r8: Pereira, 2003, 50; r9: Cardoso, 2004, 106; r10: Sousa, 2011, 16; r11: Gomes, 2013, 51, 59; r12: Ferreira, 2015.

6. Apud Nunes, 2016, 257.

r9: Maria Zita Saldanha Vieira Cardoso (2004, Madeira).

r10: Teresa Gregório de Andrade (2008, Lameiros).

r11: Corina Ferreira Gomes and others (2013, Madeira).

r12: César Ferreira (2015, Madeira).

r13: Anonymous author (2017, Lameiros).

Although the preparation process is described in each of these recipes, there has not yet been any comparative analysis. This paper will address this gap by mapping the ingredients, utensils, operational chains (*chaînes opératoires*)⁷, and culinary lexicon. The Madeiran tradition will be compared not only with those of Trás-os-Montes and the Azores but also with the Maghreb, Sahelian Africa, Cape Verde⁸, Brazil, and Early Modern Age recipes from the Iberian Peninsula⁹. This approach will allow for a re-evaluation of the local belief that enslaved Moors introduced this culinary legacy to Madeira and propose an alternative theory, arguing that couscous was introduced from the mainland through a «top-down» transmission from the colonial elite to peasant communities.

FINDINGS

THE INGREDIENTS

In Madeira, couscous is made exclusively with wheat flour¹⁰. Genetic studies confirmed the introduction of this cereal from the mainland, documented by historical sources since the early days of the colonisation of the island, and spread to the Azores and Canary Archipelago (SANTOS *et al.*, 2012, 1385).

7. The preparation of couscous, as described in the Madeiran recipes, will be analysed here as an operational chain. This concept, introduced by André Leroi-Gourhan (1967), is well-known. We apply it here to account for the various actions that bring together operators, ingredients, gestures, kitchen tools, know-how, and the transmission of knowledge, including through written forms. The approach adopted will also allow for the operational sequence to be broken down into a series of actions aimed at a common objective. The culinary use of couscous, as described in several recipes within the corpus, will not be addressed here.

8. Couscous is documented for the first time in Cape Verde in 1645 (Coppier, 1645, 16).

9. Regarding the spread of couscous through the sea and land, see: Barboff *et al.*, 2021, 96-98; Boukadida, 2021, 66.



Fig. 1. Seeds of local wheat displayed during the 4th *Mostra do Cuscuz* (Lameiros, São Vicente, 2017. Photography: Author 1).

Eduardo Pereira specifies that it is appropriate to use the local landraces. According to him, the imported variety tends to clump¹¹. This author does not, however, specify which cultivars are the most appropriate and whether they are soft (*Triticum aestivum*) or hard wheat (*Triticum durum*), still cultivated by the islanders in the first half of the 20th century¹². Thanks to the testimony of Maria da Conceição Correia, we know that, in the 1950s, families continued to meet their needs through their own means¹³. Despite some resilience (Fig. 1), cereal farming declined throughout the Madeiran Archipelago in recent decades (SANTOS, 2009, 364). As most of the recipes in our corpus were compiled from that moment onwards, by force of circumstances, it is therefore most often imported flour of soft wheat bought in local drugstores and supermarkets, which is used as an ingredient in the couscous preparations that they describe.

10. «*farinha de trigo*» (r1, r2, r8, r11). The other recipes barely say it's flour (r3, r12). However, in Portuguese, when the cereal is not specified, it is implied that it is soft wheat flour.

11. r1.

12. Silva *et al.*, 1998[1940-1946], vol. III, 376-379 («*Trigo*»). This entry largely reproduces that of the first edition of *Elucidário Madeirense*, published in 1922 (Silva *et al.*, 1922, vol. II, 526-527). Twenty years ago, a local variety of semi-hard wheat (*Triticum turgidum*), called *trigo russo*, was used in the village of Maloeira (commune of Calheta) to make couscous. <https://agromadeira.pt/cultura.php?id=38>. At this time, islanders still cropped a few landraces of the species *Triticum durum* Desf., even though bread wheat prevailed (Santos, 2009, 368, table II).

13. Correia, 2014, 79.

The authors say nothing about the appropriate type of grind. What should we therefore understand by what they designate *farinha*¹⁴? The fact is that most of the recipes analysed here were written in a period of transition not only regarding cultivation but also milling. The mechanisation of this activity dates to the middle of the 19th century in Madeira, but it was not until the turn of the following century that the first truly industrial units appeared, such as the Fábrica Lealdade of António Giorgi & C^{ie}, the Fábrica Blandy Brothers & C^{ie} and the Fábrica Progresso Industrial of Azevedo Santos & C^{ie}, all located in Funchal. The processing of imported wheat then became almost exclusively their responsibility¹⁵.

However, the know-how inherited from the past did not disappear immediately, persisting for a long time, mainly in the countryside (BRÜDT, 1937-1938, 289-303). According to a census carried out in 1906, there were still 7 windmills (*«moinhos de vento»*) and 356 watermills¹⁶ (*«azenhas»*) in the Madeiran Archipelago. The first type of facility existed only in Porto Santo where there is no river, and the second one was found exclusively on Madeira, where a vast network of channels (known locally as *«levadas»*) diverts water from numerous mountain streams to fertile seaside terraces (*«poios»*)¹⁷. The construction of new *«azenhas»* was prohibited from 1932¹⁸. However, some of them continued their activity for a long time after.

The technologies from the past allowed three different products to be obtained from the wheat: the *«farinha»* (that is the flour), the *«rolão»* and the *«farelo»*. The *«farelo»* is pure bran, today appreciated for its high fibre content but used only to feed the cattle and chickens in the past (MENDONÇA, 1989, 107; CAMACHO *et al.*, 1992, 35; MATA, 1992, 113). Regarding the *«rolão»*, it is a mix of small-sized particles of bran and groats. This sub-product was less valued than the pure flour, being sometimes given for free by the millers to their clients (CAMACHO *et al.*, 1992, 35). In the old days, they could offer to them a *«farinha»* more or less white according to its finality, separating or not most of the *«rolão»* from the tender core of the grain.



Fig. 2. Inside a traditional watermill in Ponta do Pargo, 1956 (ABM—Arquivo e Biblioteca da Madeira, Fundo Eduardo Nunes Pereira, cx. 24, n.º 276, Ficheiro 24-4, 276a, m0354).

Meanwhile, with the general decline of cereal cultivation in Madeira during the 3rd quarter of the 20th century, *«azenhas»* and *«moinhos de vento»* lost their raison d'être. Manuel Nóbrega (1989, 24) already describes traditional milling in Madeira as a reality of the past in 1988. In 1992, owners explained the abandonment of this activity by the lack of grain and water, the payment of taxes and the physical effort that it involves now considered unnecessary (CAMACHO *et al.*, 1992a, 28; CAMACHO *et al.*, 1992b, 33-34). In 1991, there were only 13 *«azenhas»* still operational in Madeira (MATA, 1992, 114-115). In Porto Santo, there were two windmills left in the year 2000, which by then had already stopped working (RODRIGUES, 2000-2001, 20). The fact that the most recent recipes from the Madeiran corpus do not specify the variety used leads us to believe that it is flour industrially made of *Triticum aestivum* imported from overseas, which islanders use to make couscous, since the end of the 20th century.

Four other ingredients are needed: salt, yeast, thyme, and water, extracted from the mountains of the centre of the island, being acidic to slightly alkaline (6.13-8.4), due to the volcanic geology, presenting different degrees of mineralization (PRADA *et al.*, 2005). Despite some attempts to produce salt locally, importation from the mainland had been the rule since the foundation of the colony in the 15th century (SANTOS, 2010). Regarding the thyme (*«segurelha»*), it is an aromatic herb typical of the Madeiran cuisine, mostly

14. «farinha»: r1, r2, r3, r8, r11, r12.

15. Câmara, 2002, 58-60.

16. Fig. 2.

17. Silva, 2018, 72.

18. Pereira, 1989[1939], vol. I, 631. See also: Oliveira, 1969, 53.

consumed in a very popular bread soup («*açorda*»¹⁹), appreciated by locals during the cold days of winter²⁰. In the past, it was also used to flavour the rice and cabbage soup according to Eduardo Pereira²¹.

THE KITCHENWARE

The couscoussier

The word «*cuscuzeiro*» names²² the kitchen accessory that is used to steam couscous, known as *couscoussier* in English²³. The variant «*cuscuseiro*» is also common in the first half of the 20th century²⁴. They derive respectively from «*cuscuz*» and «*cuscus*» meaning both couscous. It is often compared to a cooking pot²⁵ and only once to a basin²⁶. However, the holes drilled in the surface of the base distinguish the «*cuscuzeiro*» from these two vessels²⁷, being for this reason sometimes assimilated to a sieve²⁸ or even to a chestnut pan²⁹. Some authors specify that it has a semicircular shape³⁰ and an oval base³¹. The most detailed description is that of Eduardo Pereira, in his book *Ilhas de Zargo*. According to him, it usually had a diameter of 39.5 cm and height of 31.5 cm in his time. The page where this is mentioned is illustrated by a photograph, the original of which is now deposited in the Regional Archives of Madeira (ABM)³². By examining this picture from the 1930s, it is thus possible to confirm that this utensil, which would be produced locally, has a frustoconical or sub-hemispherical body, with a medium or low-height hull. However, it is difficult to specify its exact shape from this image. What the description from *Ilhas de Zargo* does not say is that the

example in question has two horizontal handles, which explains why this type of piece is sometimes compared to cooking pots, as we mentioned before. All the «*cuscuzeiros*» that the Author 1 had the opportunity to observe³³ in the collections of the Madeiran museums (one exemplar exhibited at the Solar do Ribeirinho, Machico³⁴; three others exhibited at the Museu Frederico de Freitas, Funchal³⁵; and another belonging to the Museu Etnográfico da Madeira, Ribeira Brava)³⁶ and in ancient pictures (Fig. 8) are similar to the example exposed during the 4th *Mostra do Cuscuz* (Fig. 5), in what concerns their morphology. All of them are made in ceramic³⁷. However, during the 2017 event in Lameiros, the author saw a customised *couscoussier* in stainless-steel (Fig. 3)³⁸, like those used today to make couscous (Fig. 14), exhibited at the side of an old one in ceramic (Fig. 5).



Fig. 3. Customised *couscoussier* in stainless-steel (exhibited during the 4th *Mostra do Cuscuz*, Lameiros 2017. Photography: Author 1).

19. Cruz, 1963[1949], 43.

20. It is worth mentioning that what is called locally «*segurelha*» is thyme and not savory (*Satureja hortensis* L.) as it is known in the mainland, where the word «*tomilho*» is the one appropriate to name the *Thymus vulgaris*.

21. «Não se coze arroz e sopa de couve e açorda sem ramo de segurelha», Manuscript note «Culinária especialidades madeirenses», ABM, Eduardo Nunes Pereira, cx. 16, n.º 14.

22. Alberto Artur Sarmiento (1951, 121) is the only one to call couscous steamers «*cozedores de cuscus*». On another occasion, he refers to it as «*cuscuzeiro*» (Sarmiento, 1938). It is worth mentioning that the word «*cuscuzeiro*» has another meaning in the Madeiran dialect. It also names a hollow sphere made of aluminium, composed of two articulated bodies with perforated walls, used to cook rice inside a stew («*cozido*») (Nunes, 2016, 258). It was also used to rehydrate couscous in the broth of this precise dish, according to the recipe collected by Maria de Lurdes Modesto (r4).

23. r1, r3, r4, r6, r7, r9, r10, r11, r12, r13.

24. r1, r2a, r2b.

25. r2a, r2b, r3.

26. r2b. The Viscount of Porto da Cruz, author of this description, nevertheless compares the «*cuscuzeiro*» to a «*panela*» in the earlier version of this text (r2a).

27. r1, r3, r10, r13. Cf. Sarmiento, 1938.

28. r2a, r2b.

29. r3.

30. r1, r13.

31. r2a, r3, r13.

32. ABM, Arquivo Eduardo Nunes Pereira, Pt25, n.º 382.

33. There is another exemplar in the collections of the John de Passos Museum (Ponta do Sol), but we have not yet had the opportunity to study it (available at <http://www.madeira600.pt/pt-pt/sabia-que>).

34. NMM.SR/06-26. Élvio Sousa dates this piece from the late 18th century, and the 19th century in two different passages of his PhD thesis (Sousa, 2011, vol. 1, 337; vol. 2, 747-Figs. 1580 and 1581).

35. José Sainz-Trueba (1987, 40) identified four «*cuscuzeiros*» as part of the Dr. Frederico de Freitas / Sra. D. Élia Lordelo collection, three of them probably being those which are today exhibited at the Museu Frederico de Freitas in Funchal.

36. Ferreira, 2015, artefact n.º 3.

37. r1, r2a, r3, r10, r13. Cf. Sarmiento, 1938.

38. r13.

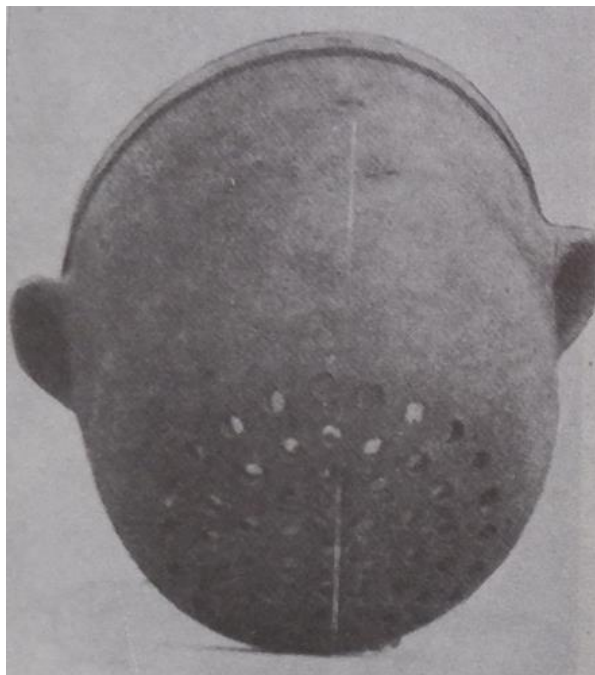


Fig. 4. Couscous steamer in ceramic, 1930s (ABM—*Arquivo Eduardo Nunes Pereira*, cx. 16, n.º 13—*Receitas para o corpo e para a cozinha*, n.º 8).



Fig. 5. Couscous steamer in ceramic from the Olaria Pimenta, Funchal (exhibited during the 4th *Mostra do Cuscuz*, Lameiros 2017. Photography: Author 1).

The pan

The «*cuscuzeiro*» alone is not enough to prepare couscous. Other utensils are necessary both downstream and upstream, starting with the pot on which this accessory must stand during steam cooking, forming what Mettouchi (2021, 86) called a «dissociated dispositive» with the couscoussier, the pan being also used for other kinds of preparations. This is what the authors of the Madeiran corpus recipes call «*panela*»³⁹, being specified only once that it must be large⁴⁰ and on another occasion that it is made of iron⁴¹. This term originally designated a ceramic or metal pot with a globular shape, with two equidistant handles⁴². Today the same word normally refers to stainless-steel vessels with a cylindrical shape. The flat bottom of this type of piece, also called *tacho*, is suitable for use on an electric or gas hob, the habit of cooking with the heat of a wood fire having since been lost. This new cooking technology became widespread in Madeira from the 1960s⁴³. The Viscount of Porto da Cruz, for his part, suggests the cauldron («*caldera*»), an extra-large cooking pot, as an alternative to the «*panela*»⁴⁴.

The hyssop

All recipes that describe rolling couscous also mention the hyssop used to moisten the flour, which some authors call «*hissope*»⁴⁵, «*vassourinha*»⁴⁶ or «*ramo/raminho*»⁴⁷. This is an improvised sprinkler made from a bouquet of thyme twigs («*segurella*»⁴⁸). The anonymous recipe specifies that the inhabitants of Lameiros use a mixture of boxwood («*buchos*») and thyme for this purpose⁴⁹. To our knowledge, these makeshift brushes are not used to prepare any other recipe in the traditional Madeira repertoire.

The bakery instruments

The «*alguidar*» is often referred to in the Madeiran recipes⁵⁰. It is an open vessel, of the basin type, with a flat bottom. The frustoconical body, generally

39. r1, r2a, r2b, r3, r6, r9, r10, r11, r12, r13.

40. r2a, r2b.

41. Fig. 8; r9.

42. Brüdt, 1937-1938, 98. Fernandes, 2012, Part. I, 326-328. Casimiro *et al.*, 2017, 112-113.

43. «Campanha do Natal», ARM, *Diário de Notícias*, n.º 27941, 18/12/1960, 2. Cf. photography.

44. r2a.

45. r1.

46. r2a, r2b, r9.

47. r12, r13. However, two other recipes specify that the hyssop is made with small branches of thyme (r1, r2b).

48. r1, r9, r12. The Viscount of Porto da Cruz uses the variant «*sigurella*» (r2a, r2b).

49. r13. Fig. 6.

50. r1, r2, r9, r12, r13.

large, does not have handles, with the edge usually being flared (BRÜDT, 1937-1938, 89, fig. 4d). This container is also used for rolling⁵¹, and to cover the couscoussier during cooking⁵². It is made of ceramic⁵³ but there is a wooden version with the same name⁵⁴. There is another vessel that, when used to knead bread (as the «*alguidar*»), is called a «*masseira*»⁵⁵ and, more often, an «*amassadeira*»⁵⁶. Finally, the sieve («*crivo largo*»⁵⁷, «*joeira*»⁵⁸, «*peneira*»⁵⁹) is employed to calibrate the flour.

Other utensils

The «*púcaro*»⁶⁰ alluded to by the Viscount of Porto da Cruz in his time designated an entire category of containers with a closed shape⁶¹. The *Postura* of 1587, which fixes the prices of ceramics marketed by the potters of Funchal, already mentions two of these containers, one of a small size and another larger, with two handles. This document says nothing about the «*cangirão*»⁶² suggested by this author as an alternative. However, in 1738, the *Taxa dos Oleiros* specified that it was a vessel used by tavern-keepers to sell their wine⁶³.

Other utensils seem to be part of the kitchenware of the local elite, as their use in peasant homes has not been attested by the ethnolinguistic survey of Kate Brüdert (1937-1938) in rural areas of Madeira. This is the case of the grater («*ralador*»)⁶⁴ used as an alternative to the sieve, which possibly corresponds to the «*ralo*» or «*rapadeira*» referred to a few times during the 18th and 19th centuries in the account books from the Convent of Santa Clara (Funchal)⁶⁵.



Fig. 3. Hyssop made with twigs of thyme and boxwood (exhibited during the 4th *Mostra do Cuscuz*, Lameiros 2017. Photography: Author 1).



Fig. 4. Sieve full of wheat flour inside a *masseira* (exhibited during the 4th *Mostra do Cuscuz*, Lameiros 2017. Photography: Author 1).

51. r2a, r2b, r9, r12, r13.

52. r1. A wooden lid can be used instead of the «*alguidar*» (r13).

53. r12. The Viscount of Porto da Cruz specifies that the surface of the «*alguidar*» is glazed (r2a).

54. r9, r13.

55. «*masseira*», r1. It is the same container that the Viscount of Porto da Cruz mentions in one of his recipes specifying that it is used to knead bread (r2a).

56. Fig. 7, 8. Ferreira, 2012, 2 and note 1. Brüdert (1937-1938, 306) also refers to the variant «*massadãira*». However, she defines it as synonym of «*alguidar*» instead of designating the wooden kneading-trough, which she calls «*sãilha*».

57. Fig. 7; r1.

58. r12.

59. r2a.

60. r2a.

61. Brüdert, 1937, 88-89 (Fig. 4; a-c).

62. r2a.

63. «Posturas feitas na forma / da Ley este anno de 1738 sobre as Taxas», ABM, *Posturas 1685*, fol. 267 («*Taxa dos oleiros*»).

64. Fig. 8; r1; r3.

65. ANTT, CSCF, ref. PT/TT/CSCF/011/0005, livr. 40, 1733-1736, 121. ANTT, CSCF, ref. PT-TT-CSCF-0011, liv. 46, 1774-1777, fol. 92. ANTT, CSCF, ref. PT/TT/CSCF/011/0044, liv. 79, 1873-1876, fol. 85.



Fig. 5. Couscous maker and his tools: *cuscuzeiro*, *panela*, *crivo*, *ralador*, *masseira*, Santana 1976 (ARM, Aragon Mendes Correia, Calheta, cx. 2, 03118_m09668).

THE OPERATIONAL CHAIN

The preparation of couscous described by the Madeiran recipes can be broken down into the following succession of operations:

- 1 - **Fermentation:** to increase the digestibility and flavour of the final product;
- 2 - **Rolling:** to agglomerate the moistened flour;
- 3 - **Calibration:** to standardise the size of the couscous grains;
- 4 - **Preparation for cooking:** to guarantee the necessary conditions for cooking to achieve the desirable effect;

- 5 - **Steam cooking:** to give the final product the expected texture and flavour;
- 6 - **Ginning:** to re-individualise the couscous grains which tend to clump together during cooking;
- 7 - **Drying:** to dehydrate the couscous to be consumed later;
- 8 - **Culinary use:** using couscous which is still only a simple ingredient to prepare an elaborate meal (not addressed in this paper).

All these operations are part of the different operational chains documented by the Madeiran corpus from the contemporary period. However, there are exceptions. Fermentation and calibration are not described by any of the recipes by the Viscount of Porto da Cruz⁶⁶, although these two operations were already mentioned by Eduardo Pereira in the 1930s⁶⁷. Furthermore, certain operations sometimes tend to be repeated at different stages of the couscous preparation. This is particularly the case with the calibration in the recipes of Maria Rezende⁶⁸ and Eduardo Pereira⁶⁹, the latter of which probably served as inspiration. The recipe that César Ferreira wrote down in 2015 also mentions a second fermentation after rolling or following the calibration if it is carried out⁷⁰. Let us now see in more detail what each of these operations consists of.

Fermentation

In the recipes that allude to this operation, the yeast—diluted in warm salted water—is added to the flour before rolling it⁷¹. This is the «*pão de fermento*» to which the anonymous author explicitly refers⁷². Eduardo Pereira and Maria Rezende specify that the quantity added is around 1 kg of yeast base for a bushel of wheat⁷³. The unleavened couscous described by the Viscount of Porto da Cruz for the first time in 1949⁷⁴ would thus have a very different flavour from those described in the other recipes.

66. r2. The anonymous author (r13) mentions fermentation but does not allude to the calibration.

67. r1.

68. r3.

69. r1.

70. r12.

71. r1, r3, r12, r13.

72. Fig. 9; r13.

73. r1, r3.

74. r2.



Fig. 6. «*Pão de fermento*» after adding salt, used to make couscous (during the 4th *Mostra do Cuscuz*, Lameiros 2017. Photography: Liliana Pereira).

Rolling

Before the middle of the last century, it seems that there were two very different ways of rolling couscous in Madeira: either by *touillage*⁷⁵, most commonly used to obtain couscous, or indirectly by shaking the basin which contains the flour. The Viscount of Porto da Cruz is the only one to report this second technique⁷⁶. It is the *touillage* which has prevailed to this day with a few nuances as evidenced by the recipes which explain the rolling in sufficient detail⁷⁷. Another Madeiran peculiarity consists of adding thyme leaves to the flour before processing it⁷⁸.

If this herb is always mixed directly, the «*pão de fermento*» can be added in two different ways once diluted: either added it before starting the rolling or sprinkled it on top throughout the operation. In the first case, the yeast will be left in the centre of the mix⁷⁹. Eduardo Pereira specifies that it is first necessary to form a crater in the flour to accommodate it⁸⁰. The second possibility is only mentioned by the anonymous author⁸¹.

Even when the couscous is not fermented or the yeast is added in another way, the improvised hyssop made of thyme is used to sprinkle⁸² the flour with saline water at room temperature or warm⁸³. This improvised utensil allows for moistening without reaching the water saturation point where the flour becomes pasty, as César Ferreira explains. He also mentions two operators who stir face to face at a constant and synchronised rhythm⁸⁴, but both can sprinkle the flour when necessary.

If we rely on the precise description of the *touillage* itself left to us by Eduardo Pereira, César Ferreira and the anonymous author⁸⁵, it is always a sequence of two very distinct gestures that is in question, even if the way of designating and describing them varies from author to author. Eduardo Pereira is the first to break down driving into two very distinct phases. So, after pouring the fermented water into a crater in the middle of the flour, the maker works it in a constant rising movement⁸⁶ allowing all the flour to be evenly moistened. Once the fermented water has been completely absorbed, the chunks of flour are piled in the middle of the «*masseira*», then worked again, but this time in a downward and circular motion until it begins to dry⁸⁷.

César Ferreira's recipe, which begins in the same way as that of Eduardo Pereira with the diluted ferment poured into the centre of the pile of flour, also separates the *touillage* into two steps, the first consisting of «*mexer*» and «*envolver*» and the second consisting of «*amassar*» and «*levantar*» with both hands, exerting just a little pressure on the flour, at the same time as it is sprinkled.

The anonymous recipe from Lameiros⁸⁸ also very clearly separates the rolling into two phases, even if the starting point is different from that described by the first two recipes. In fact, as the fermented water has not been previously poured over the

75. By *touillage* we mean a sort of «collective rolling» (*roulage collectif*), which involves direct contact between the flour and the hands of the operator (Oubalhi, 2006, 60).

76. r2a, r2b.

77. Maria Rezende and Zita Cardoso for their part just list the ingredients, the necessary instruments and the expected result of the rolling (r3, r9).

78. r1, r3, r12, r13.

79. r12.

80. r1.

81. r13.

82. The anonymous author calls this action «*pingar*» (r13).

83. r1, r2a, r2b, r12.

84. r12.

85. r1, r12, r13.

86. r1.

87. r1.

88. r13.

flour, the sprinkling starts immediately. This author thus distinguishes the action of «*apagar*» and «*torcer*» the flour, separated by an intermediate action like the first recipe, which, in this case, aims to divide the flour to be granulated into two different sides of the basin (before starting to «*torcer*»).

«*Apagar a farinha*» which literally means «to erase the flour» seems to have the same objective as the incorporation described by the two previous authors, which is the nucleation of the couscous, if defined strictly as the initiation of particle agglomeration⁸⁹. When the flour begins to clump together in the form of small scraps («*farrapos*»), it is then time to move on to the next operation: «*torcer*» (Fig. 11). At this point, sprinkling the flour stops. Rolling continues until the mixture begins to dry, the granulation being ready when it stops sticking to the hands⁹⁰, which is described by César Ferreira in a very similar manner⁹¹. The final product thus obtained has, ideally, a rounded shape, though it is very irregular in practice. It presents a certain variability regarding particle size according to what Author 1 observed during fieldwork in Lameiros. It can be steamed just like that or calibrated before moving on to the next stage.



Fig. 7. Action called «*apagar a farinha*» (observed during the 4th *Mostra do Cuscuz*, Lameiros 2017. Photography: Liliana Pereira).

89. Fig. 10; Chemache, 2018, 217.

90. «[...] até que fique tudo envolvido (sem ficar farinha na mão), seco e a *talingar*», r13. We don't know the exact meaning of «*talingar*» in Madeiran dialect.

91. r12.

Calibration

Only the recipes by Eduardo Pereira, Maria Rezende and César Ferreira mention this operation, which is optional according to the latter author. Unfortunately, none of them detailed the calibration process, which is regrettable. The three authors limit themselves to specifying which instrument is used: a grater («*ralador*») or a sieve («*peneira*») according to Eduardo Pereira⁹², exclusively the grater according to Maria Rezende or exclusively the sieve according to César Ferreira («*joeira*»). These three authors also explain when this accessory should be used. Eduardo Pereira and Maria Rezende affirm that this operation must be carried out twice: after rolling, and again after ginning while the couscous is still hot⁹³. César Ferreira only mentions this operation once following the rolling⁹⁴.



Fig. 8. The action called «*torcer*» (observed and experimented by Author 1 during the 5th *Mostra do Cuscuz*, Lameiros 2018. Photography: Liliana Pereira).

92. This author says that a special sieve is used for this purpose («*peneira especial*»), without unfortunately explaining what distinguishes it from other accessories in this category (r1).

93. r1, r3.

94. r12.

Furthermore, it seems that the coexistence of calibrated and non-calibrated couscous is longstanding in the archipelago, as evidenced by the first recipe from the Viscount of Porto da Cruz who, although certainly acquainted with the work of Eduardo Pereira, does not mention this operation at all. The anonymous author makes no reference to it either⁹⁵. However, even when calibrated, the couscous produced still has a heterogeneous particle size, as Author 1 observed in 2017.

Preparation of the cooking

In Madeira, water seems to have always been the only liquid used for the steaming, which gives the couscous its final texture. The quantity required is generally not indicated, perhaps because it goes without saying that it cannot come into contact with the contents of the «*cuscuzeiro*». Maria Rezende states that the cooking pot should only be filled halfway⁹⁶. César Ferreira considers that the quantity of water required corresponds to one third of the total volume of the container⁹⁷. Several recipes specify that the pan must also contain ceramic sherds⁹⁸ or «*caramujo*»⁹⁹ shells¹⁰⁰ or a mixture of both¹⁰¹.

In no case is the couscous placed directly in the «*cuscuzeiro*». Some recipes specify that the fabric used for this purpose is linen¹⁰². The anonymous author simply says that it is a white tablecloth¹⁰³. Some branches of «*urze*» (*Ericaceae f.*) can be used to prevent this linen from sticking to the bottom of the «*cuscuzeiro*», as Teresa Andrade explained to Elvino Sousa in 2008¹⁰⁴, at the same time facilitating the circulation of steam inside¹⁰⁵.

Eduardo Pereira¹⁰⁶ suggests using a cross made of two branches of heather for this purpose. His testimony therefore differs from that of Teresa Andrade in 2008. Then aged 81, this resident of Lameiros remembered that her mother used branches of this shrub for this purpose¹⁰⁷. César Ferreira¹⁰⁸ also documents the use of two bean stalks in the shape of a cross which he called «*zelo*»; this is not easy to accomplish because it is a climbing plant with a flexible and helical stem. The anonymous author also informs us that a folded tea towel is usually placed between the «*zelo*» and the white linen¹⁰⁹.

César Ferreira is the only one to specify the quantity of couscous contained in this linen. According to him, it must not exceed the height of the base of the «*cuscuzeiro*»¹¹⁰, which does not seem like much. He also specifies that craters are dug with a wooden spoon into the surface of the couscous to insert twigs of thyme, an addition also being laconically mentioned by the anonymous author¹¹¹. The surface of the couscous is also sealed with the linen. The latter can be covered by a blanket, and in turn by a basin or a wooden lid¹¹².

Before fitting the «*cuscuzeiro*», a cord of dough made with «*rolão*» moistened with water is applied all around the perimeter of the top of the cooking pan (Fig. 12). The latter must be reinforced by a second cord on the outside once the «*cuscuzeiro*» is in position. The goal is once again to avoid loss of steam and heat during cooking¹¹³. This process is described several times, but the raw material varies somewhat from one recipe to another: dough made from wet «*rolão*», bran or cooked sweet potatoes¹¹⁴.

95. r13.

96. r3.

97. r12.

98. r1, r10, r12.

99. This species of the mollusc family, very abundant on the north coast of the island, is consumed by the Madeirans as a snack, although less appreciated than limpets («*lapas*»). Cruz, 1963[1949], 46.

100. r12.

101. r13.

102. r2a, r9.

103. Fig. 13; r13.

104. r10.

105. r1.

106. r1.

107. r10.

108. r12.

109. r13.

110. r12.

111. r12, r13.

112. r1, r12.

113. r12, r13.

114. r1, r12, r13. Sweet potatoes produced locally are an important part of the daily diet of Madeirans since a long time ago (Silva, 2020, 67).



Fig. 9. «Rolão's» paste applied in the base of the «cuscuzeiro», with beans stalks inside (during the 4th *Mostra do Cuscuz*, Lameiros 2017. Photography: Liliana Pereira).



Fig. 10. Preparation of the steaming cooking of couscous (during the 4th *Mostra do Cuscuz*, Lameiros 2017. Photography: Liliana Pereira).

Steam cooking

All the recipes specify that the couscous must be steamed only once (Fig. 14). It is therefore the steam («bafo»¹¹⁵), which will cook the couscous and not



Fig. 11. Steaming cooking of couscous (during the 4th *Mostra do Cuscuz*, Lameiros 2017. Photography: Author 1).

directly the water which boils in the cooking pot¹¹⁶. Thus, to carry out this type of cooking successfully, it must be ensured that the water does not come into contact with the bottom of the «cuscuzeiro», as explicitly recommended by Eduardo Pereira¹¹⁷. Otherwise, the couscous will tend to clump together to form a sort of paste, as Teresa Andrade explained to Élvio Sousa in 2008¹¹⁸.

Conversely, the water should not completely evaporate before the end of the operation. This is why sherds, «caramujo» shells or beer caps are placed at the bottom of the cooking pot before fitting the couscoussier. These different kinds of materials allow the water level to be monitored, as Eduardo Pereira clearly states¹¹⁹. The point is to listen to the noise they produce once the water is boiling. Each time it stops, the «cuscuzeiro» must be removed temporarily with its contents to restore the water level inside. It will boil again when the clicking sound returns¹²⁰. This monitoring system helps to determine the duration of the steaming process. It

115. The anonymous author is also the only one to use «bafo» as a synonym for heat (r13).

116. r1, r2a, r2b, r3, r9, r10.

117. r1.

118. r10.

119. r1.

120. r1, r3, r10.

is worth mentioning that some of the recipes under analysis do not state how long the process will take¹²¹.

The Viscount of Porto da Cruz affirms that it takes a few hours, without specifying how many¹²². Two hours are enough according to Eduardo Pereira¹²³. César Ferreira estimates that the couscous is ready after an hour and a half. According to this author, time should only be counted from the moment when the sherds begin to rattle for the first time, which indicates that the water has boiled and is beginning to transform into steam¹²⁴. This author is also the only one to specify that the pot must be maintained over low heat. During the steaming, Teresa Andrade notes that it is necessary to perform some other action on the couscous with a spoon in the centre of the «*cuscuzeiro*», without being able to explain how or why to do it¹²⁵.

As soon as the couscous is cooked, it must be removed from the «*cuscuzeiro*» so that it can be ginned as soon as possible.

Ginning

During steaming, the couscous tends to «set» in the «*cuscuzeiro*», which is why it must be granulated again. The terms used in Madeiran recipes to designate this operation are quite varied: «*esfregar*»¹²⁶, «*esfarelar*»¹²⁷, «*esfolar*»¹²⁸, «*desmanchar*»¹²⁹. Only the Viscount of Porto da Cruz does not mention this step.

Once cooked, the cloth containing the couscous is removed from the inside of the «*cuscuzeiro*» and placed directly on a table¹³⁰. It can also be worked in the «*masseira*» where it was previously rolled¹³¹. It is then time to proceed with the ginning, considered necessary to preserve the couscous for



Fig. 12. Couscous ready to be ginned after cooking (during the 4th *Mostra do Cuscuz*, Lameiros 2017. Photography: Liliana Pereira).

later consumption¹³². It is important to get started while it is still hot¹³³. The «cake» is first split into large chunks and after cooling a little the rest will be ginned by hand as described by the oldest Lameiros recipe¹³⁴. At this point, the homogeneity of the grain's size can be improved by rubbing against a grater, as described previously¹³⁵. Once ginned, the couscous is finally ready to be dried.

Drying

All recipes refer to the possibility of drying the couscous, with the aim of dehydrating it so that it can be consumed later¹³⁶. This involves spreading it on a wooden tray¹³⁷, covered or not with a cloth¹³⁸. It can also be spread directly on a sheet¹³⁹. In most cases, the grains dry out solely through exposure to the sun¹⁴⁰. However, in Lameiros at least, salt was sometimes added to the couscous to aid in the dehydration

121. r2, r9, r10.

122. r2a.

123. r1.

124. r12.

125. «*Punha uma colher de pau, assim a meio, e ia penando o cuscuz*», r13. The purpose could be, eventually, aerate the couscous during the steaming too.

126. r1, r3.

127. r9, r12, r13.

128. r10.

129. r13.

130. Fig. 15; r9, r10.

131. r12.

132. r12.

133. r1, r3, r9.

134. r10.

135. r1, r3.

136. Fig. 16; r2a.

137. r2b, r9.

138. r2a.

139. r12.

140. r1, r2a, r2b, r3, r9, r12.

process¹⁴¹. Care had to be taken to collect it every time it rained¹⁴². If prepared during the winter, this operation took place entirely indoors¹⁴³.

How long it takes is therefore quite variable and is generally not specified¹⁴⁴. César Ferreira estimates that it will take at least two or three days¹⁴⁵, which aligns with the anonymous author's suggestion¹⁴⁶. Once dried, the couscous can be stored in boxes or bags¹⁴⁷, made of cotton, tow or plastic¹⁴⁸. If it is still wet at this stage, it will eventually spoil¹⁴⁹. Properly dried couscous, however, can remain edible for quite a long time¹⁵⁰, even from one year to the next¹⁵¹, with only the required amount being removed from the packaging for cooking each time¹⁵².

DISCUSSION

The idea that Madeirans owe their couscous to the slaves deported from the Maghreb shortly after the island's discovery is well anchored today. However, the 13 recipes analysed here point in another direction. Indeed, the islanders' tradition has more in common with those from the Azores and Trás-os-Montes, despite these three territories never having had a significant Muslim presence, nor having been under Islamic occupation¹⁵³. It is worth remembering that the production and consumption of couscous have been documented in the kingdom of Portugal since the Renaissance (OUBALHI, 2006, 61; BRAGA, 2023, 604). At this stage, it was not only appreciated within the Ibero-Moorish communities¹⁵⁴, but also in the Old Christian milieu¹⁵⁵. As referred above, there are several recipes describing the preparation process written by chefs at the service of aristocratic families and the royal courts of Lisbon and Madrid, and before that in manuscript notebooks from religious



Fig. 13. Couscous produced during the 4th *Mostra do Cuscuz*, after drying (Lameiros 2017. Photography: Liliana Pereira).

communities from Portugal. It is precisely in the monastic establishments of Funchal—which hosted the daughters of the pre-eminent families of the colony¹⁵⁶, where the habit of eating couscous was regularly documented for the first time¹⁵⁷, being downgraded only later to a rice substitute affordable to poor peasants.

Several facts suggest that this culinary tradition came from the mainland, and not directly from North Africa as many authors believe, being closely related to the Portuguese recipes of the Early Modern Age. Firstly, the technical vocabulary used by the islanders is not the same as that of the Maghrebis. Indeed, «*cuscuz/cuscus*» derives from the Arabic *kuskus* (ALVES, 2013, 422), and ultimately from the Berber language (CHAKER, n.d.; CHEMACHE *et al.*, 2018, 212; ELAOUNRI, 2021, 45). However, this word was already assimilated by Portuguese in early modern times (BLUTEAU, 1712, vol. II, 645; MORAIS, 1789, vol. 1, 506). Regarding the «*cuscuzeiro/cuscuseiro*», this cooking utensil is also called today like that in

141. r10.

142. r12.

143. r12.

144. r2a, r2b.

145. r12.

146. r13.

147. r2b.

148. r12.

149. r9.

150. r2b, r10.

151. r9.

152. r2a.

153. Some authors argue that couscous was introduced to Santa Maria by Portuguese settlers from that island of the Azores

archipelago, who were captured by Sarracen pirates after the end of their deportation to the Maghreb.

154. Jimenez Arias, 1792[1588], 259 («*simila*»); Oubalhi, 2006, 61; Braga, 1999, 106; Braga, 2002-2003, 21; Braga, 2007a, 53; Braga, 2007b, 118; Braga, 2019, 64; Braga, 2023, 604.

155. Oubalhi, 2006, 61; Braga, 2007a, 40, 53; Braga, 2019, 66; Braga, 2023, 604-605.

156. Sousa, 1991, 7; Silva, 1995, vol. II, 927; Carita, 2014, 184.

157. Carita, 1999, 332; Fontoura, 2000, 346; Gomes, 1995, 133; Verissimo, 1987, 39-40; Braga, 2019, 80; Braga, 2023, 605. During the Early Modern Age, the female communities in Portugal shared the foodways of the upper strata of the Portuguese society (Braga, 2015, 30), as did those in Funchal too, at least until the middle of the 18th century (Carita, 1999, 332; Silva and Santos, 2022, 208).

Trás-os-Montes¹⁵⁸ and the Azores¹⁵⁹. Even if some terms are only documented in the Madeiran recipes, many others are common to the two other Portuguese territories, and some of them already appear in recipes from the Early Modern Age¹⁶⁰. So, the words «*cuscuz*» and «*cuscuzeiro*» do not validate the slaves' theory by themselves. Their appropriation reflects on the contrary the long-term entanglement with Islamic civilisation, increased by the Portuguese presence in North Africa from the late Middle Ages to the 18th century (BRAGA, 2019, 42).

Some specificities, inherited from this period, let no doubt about the Maghrebin DNA of the Portuguese traditions of couscous. Regarding the utensils, the use of a dissociated device is not exclusive to the Muslim world. However, it has been documented since Middle Ages in North Africa¹⁶¹, as the practice of sealing the top of the cooking pot where the couscoussier is nested too (OUBALHI, 2012, 406). Another point in common is obviously the ingredients, the salt already referred by Muslim sources of the 13th century (OUBALHI, 2012, 403) and most importantly, the cereal. In Ibero-Christian recipes from early days until the present, it is exclusively wheat. It has always been preferred to other carbohydrates, being the food par excellence of the social elite, mostly consumed in urban contexts since the Middle Ages throughout Europe (LAURIOUX, 1992, 19). This predilection for the *Triticum* is not, however, the reflection of a divergence but rather a sort of cultural selection within the universe of the Muslim legacy. It is worth remembering that some authors as Albertini (2020,

25) believe that the couscous made with this cereal was already prominent in Maghreb during the 17th century, being still preferred today (HOUARI, 2019, 45; ALBERTINI, 2020, 25), which does not mean it is the only one¹⁶². In the long run, while wheat is one option among others in North Africa, it is the only one adopted by the Portuguese and Spanish since the beginning. In the Maghreb the hard variety is preferred (METTOUCHI *et al.*, 2021, 84), rarely the soft one (GAST, 1968, 95-99; OUBALHI, 2012, 403-note 5). In Madeira, the Azores and Trás-os-Montes, it is precisely the contrary. Hard wheat could have been employed in the past¹⁶³, however, with the decline of cereal cultivation for self-consumption, *Triticum aestivum* became more convenient, being the only variety available in Portuguese supermarkets and grocers today.

Another particularity of the national traditions is using a single sort of grind, which seems to be the result of a recent evolution of the preparation process of couscous. Indeed, this practice is only attested earlier in the late recipe erroneously attributed to Domingos Rodrigues (BRAGA, 2015, 94; BRAGA, 2017, 38-Anexo 1; BRAGA, 2019, 71), the only known recipe of the Early Modern Age not to mix two kinds of grinds. Currently in the Maghreb, at least two size classes of semolina (METTOUCHI *et al.*, 2021, 84), and sometimes also flour (OUBALHI, 2012, 403; CHEMACHE *et al.*, 2018, 211) are involved in the rolling operation. However, in the old days, it seems that one grind sufficed, according to travellers' testimonies¹⁶⁴, which is confirmed by the few written recipes of the Middle Ages that describe the making process in

158. Alfredo Saramago (1999, 103) uses the feminine form «*cuscuzeira*» to refer to the accessory used to cook couscous, which he spells «*cuscuz*», as is the norm today in Portugal. Afonso Belarmino (1982, 43) uses «*cuscoseira*», and Mouette Barboff (2021, 98) «*cuscoseiro*». These two variants derive from «*cusco/cuscos*», a word that usually refers to couscous in Trás-os-Montes.

159. In the Azores, the use of the variant «*cuscuseiro*» is the most frequent (Costa, 1960, 138; Gomes, 1998, 35).

160. Some of these words, such as «*alguidar*», have an Arabic etymology. However, they were introduced into the Portuguese language in the Middle Ages.

161. There are evident affinities between couscoussiers used in Portugal and the Maghreb. However, more research is needed to explain how and why.

162. Laoust, 1920, 78, note 3-4; Foucauld, 1888, 125; Oubahli, 2012, 421-431; Houari, 2019, 43. In the Sahel, couscous is rarely made with wheat (Chastanet, 2010, 152-153), this cereal being mostly substituted by millet, fonio, or sorghum (Lenz, 1887, 166; Leriche, 1949; Mettouchi *et al.*, 2021, 81) and even maize (Oubahli, 2012, 432), normally used to prepare couscous in Cape Verde (Chelmicki *et al.*, 1841, 328) and in Brazil. It is substituted

by cassava or rice flour in some areas of the country (Farias *et al.*, 2014, 38; Rocha, 2019, 107, 109, 111).

163. Couscous made with semi-hard wheat was documented in Madeira twenty years ago, as noted before. In Trás-os-Montes, Mouette Barboff refers to some couscous made with hard wheat in 2010, assuming that the translation of «*seródio*» mentioned by her source (Belarmino, 1982, 43) is correct. Recent accounts only refer to «*barbela*», a local species of *Triticum aestivum*. Most contemporary recipes only mention «*farinha*», which simply means flour, designating metonymically soft wheat flour when used alone, as mentioned above. In recipes from earlier periods, it is difficult to know for sure whether they refer to a soft or hard wheat. Even when the name of a cultivar is indicated, we cannot be sure. Indeed, the denominations of the Early Modern Age do not necessarily have a direct relation to current names of wheat varieties. This issue, in its own right, deserves an entire research line, to avoid simplistic explanations.

164. Peyssonnel *et al.*, 1838, 71; Poirer, 1789, 37-38; Saint-Olon, 1694, 90; Windus, 1725, 72. Some testimonies recorded at the end of the 19th century and the 20th century still only refer to a single wheat grind to make couscous: Laoust, 1920, 94-95; Pellow, 1890, 67.

sufficient detail¹⁶⁵. On the other hand, the rolling technique described by the Viscount of Porto da Cruz, which consists of shaking the «*alguídar*», is only attested in the Azores (COSTA, 1960, 138).

The operation chains registered in Madeira, the Azores and Trás-os-Montes also are less complex than those from North Africa today. The succession of steaming sessions, interspersed with grain oiling has no parallel overseas. In the Maghreb, this is the norm when the couscous is eaten on the same day¹⁶⁶, with only that destined to be dried being cooked a single time (METTOUCHI *et al.*, 2021, 84). However, as a rule, it is produced to be preserved from one year to another; ultimately this is a consequence of the Portuguese preference for precooked couscous, and thus the fact of using simple water instead of broth as it is usual in the Maghreb (OUBAHLI, 2012, 406). On the other hand, using a piece of cloth between the steamer device and its content documented in Trás-os-Montes, the Azores and Madeira, only occurs in the Sahara, where couscoussiers are made of basketwork (METTOUCHI *et al.*, 2012, 86), a possibility unknown overseas.

The way of hydrating the couscous with an improvised hyssop during the rolling, often involving a second operator, also distinguishes the Portuguese and the Maghrebin traditions. This method well documented in the recipe analysed here is also the norm in Trás-os-Montes (BARBOFF *et al.*, 2021, 98). A willow branch or a «*piassava*»¹⁶⁷ is usually chosen and it is only in Madeira and the Azores that twigs of thyme are referred to for this

purpose¹⁶⁸. Portuguese recipes from the Early Modern Period already advocate the same technique, recommending a bouquet made with branches of gorse¹⁶⁹, rosemary¹⁷⁰, «*urze*»¹⁷¹ or myrtle¹⁷². Spanish chef Francisco Martínez Montañó suggests doing this operation with a (liturgical?) hyssop¹⁷³. This operation matters because, in the present state of knowledge, it is unknown in other areas¹⁷⁴. It seems to have appeared in the Iberian Peninsula during the Renaissance and only spread to the archipelagos of Madeira and the Azores, at least to the island of Santa Maria.

Regarding calibration, the few Madeiran recipes which allude to this operation do not give details. The winnowing documented in North Africa (CHASTANET, 2010, 155; OUBAHLI, 2012, 404; METTOUCHI *et al.*, 2021, 84-85) and the Sahel (CHASTANET, 2010, 167-168; GAST, 2010, 72) has no parallel in the Iberian traditions. The calibration by sieve, documented in Madeira for this purpose, has been the only method since the Early Modern Period in the mainland. Today, it continues to be the only way to do the job in Trás-os-Montes (BARBOFF, 2010, 50-51; BARBOFF *et al.*, 2021, 98-99). The repetition of this operation at two different moments of the process is alluded by Francisco Martínez Montañó in the early 17th century. A single calibration as described by César Ferreira¹⁷⁵ was recorded in Trás-os-Montes by Alfredo Saramago and Mouette Barboff (2010, 50-51)¹⁷⁶. However, the previous testimony of Afonso Belarmino does not mention this step at all. Thus, the calibrated and non-calibrated couscous coexisted not only in Madeira but also in Trás-os-Montes at the

165. Of the eight couscous recipes of the 13th century, those by Ibn Razin a-Tudjibi and Ibn al-ʿAdim are the only ones to explain how to make it. However, in both cases, it is only a question of a single kind of grind, respectively semolina of good quality (*a-samīd a-tayyīb*), and flour (Oubahli, 2012, 402-note 3, 403; Pitchon, 2020, 216). Still in the 15th century, Anselmo Adorne refers to a single type of flour to prepare couscous in Tunis. There's no reason to believe that this is an omission on his part, since in the following passage of his itinerary he describes the three grinds of wheat that are found in the city (Brunschvig, 1936, 204-205).

166. This was not the case in the Middle Ages, as couscous was cooked only once according to the Arabic sources of the period (Oubahli, 2012, 407).

167. Saramago, 1999, 103. According to Mouette Barboff (2010, 50), the «*piassava*» is a «*espèce de palmier du Brésil qui fournit des fibres dont on fait des balais*».

168. Costa, 1960, 138.

169. Ramos *et al.*, 2013, 168-169; Barros, 2014, 114-115; Coelho, n.d., 36-38; Henriques, 2021, 179.

170. Henriques, 2021, 179.

171. Henriques, 2021, 179.

172. Domingos, 1814, 127-129.

173. In the early 17th century, the Spanish chef Francisco Martínez Montañó (1611, 222) advised his readers to use a hyssop to moisten wheat flour during rolling. This practice is not, however, attested in any of the recipes in the Madeiran corpus, with the authors preferring to use twigs from several kinds of shrubs for this purpose as suggested by other Portuguese recipes of the Early Modern Period. Cf. r2a, r2b, r9, r12. The analogical use of the word *hyssop* to designate this improvised sprinkler is, however, attested by the Madeiran recipe recorded by Eduardo Pereira (r1).

174. In the Maghreb, the sprinkling is usually done by hand, without using any utensils (Houari, 2019, 50). In Northeast Algeria, the semolina is hydrated with a ladle before rolling (Chemache, 2018, 217).

175. r12.

176. In 2020, Mouette Barboff observed a second calibration after ginning the couscous within the framework of her last fieldwork in Trás-os-Montes (Barboff *et al.*, 2021, 99).

end of the 20th century¹⁷⁷. As the couscous rehydrated in boiling water, and not by steaming as it is the rule in the Maghreb, this step is not obligatory in this case.

In general terms, the limited number of steps recalls Middle Ages recipes, and the testimony of the Europeans abroad, who witnessed to the couscous preparation in North Africa during the following centuries. Anyway, even the recipe in use in the Spanish court during the early 17th century (MONTIÑO, 1611) is not as complex as those from North Africa today (CHEMACHE *et al.*, 2018, 215), despite being the most elaborate recipe ever in the Christian World. In fact, even when compared with Portuguese recipes from early modern times, the preparation process is simpler in Madeira, the Azores and Trás-os-Montes. This tendency seems already to be in progress around 1800, as testified by the short operational chain described again by the recipe of pseudo-Domingos Rodrigues (1814, 127-129). The final product is consequently a bit different, having a very heterogeneous calibre despite being sieved. It includes a significant proportion of grains larger than 1mm, considered by Muchnik (2010, 108) as the maximum size of a «true» couscous, which makes it impossible to cook it by steam, needing to be boiled in water like rice. However, as noted by Mettouchi *et al.* (2021, 80), Maghrebis consider «*berkukes*», with a diameter above of this limit, as couscous¹⁷⁸. So, it is the steaming cooking and more importantly the rolling and calibrating process—and not the granulometry—that defines this kind of granulated pasta, in an «emic» perspective at least.

Despite a remote filiation with Moorish traditions, the Portuguese seem to have developed their own ways since the first monastic and aristocratic recipes of the Early Modern Age, evolving into simpler making process, perhaps already by the end of the 18th century, perpetuated today in only three regions of the country. It seems that, even if the Ibero-Christian tradition has a remote Maghrebin origin, it has tended to diverge since the beginning through a mix of cultural selection and innovation, the subsequent evolution accentuating the difference from current practices in North Africa.

Despite undoubted similarities with Trás-os-Montes and the Azores, Madeira presents a few particularities, which make it unique. Regarding the technique, it is the shells, sherds and other materials used to monitor the boiling of the water during the steaming. Regarding utensils, it is the grater used to calibrate even if the sieve is also a popular option. Regarding ingredients, it is the thyme to aromatise the couscous and above all the yeast to trigger the fermentation. Neither Mouette Barboff nor the other authors she cites allude to this practice in Trás-os-Montes¹⁷⁹, before it was only referred to by Domingos Rodrigues (1814, 127-129). Ultimately, it is the historical recipe closest to the Madeiran ways of preparing couscous, which continues to evolve.

CONCLUSION

Today, most of the inhabitants of Madeira do not know what couscous is and only a few are able to prepare it from scratch, mostly peasants living in the rural areas of the island. The comparative study of a corpus of 13 recipes, dated from the 1930s to the present day, revealed a certain degree of variability regarding the utensils, the operational chains, and the culinary lexicon, while the ingredients remain always the same: wheat flour, salt, water, thyme and sometimes yeast.

There is no evidence of a direct introduction from the Maghreb regarding the preparation process or the technical vocabulary employed to describe it. In fact, the affinities with the recipes recorded in manuscripts and cookbooks of the Early Modern Age from the Iberian Peninsula, mostly Portugal, are numerous. This direct connection with the mainland contradicts the local belief that couscous was introduced by Moorish slaves at the beginning of the colonisation of Madeira. A «top-down» spread of the related know-how within insular society is more plausible in light of the present state of the art.

177. In the Azores, Carreiro da Costa (1960) and Augusto Gomes (1998) did not record any kind of calibration.

178. This idea is not consensual. Oubalhi (2012, 405) does not consider large-sized couscous as true couscous.

179. During her first fieldwork in Trás-os-Montes (2010, 51), Barboff observed what appeared to be a natural fermentation, simply letting to rest the couscous for a while before steaming. This

process is sometimes documented by Arabic sources of the Middle Ages (Oubalhi, 2012, 405) and some authors consider that this is a specificity of Sahelian couscous (Chastanet, 2010, 169), which is perhaps exaggerated. Fermentation triggered by yeast is also mentioned a few times by Muslim authors of the Middle Ages (Oubalhi, 2012, 404).

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Study 2

The Last «*Cuscuz*» Maker in Town. An Ethnological Account of Couscous Preparation in Funchal (Madeira Island, 2023)

Today, few Madeirans know how to make couscous, called «*cuscuz*» in Portuguese (ALVES, 2013, 422). This word refers to a local version of the well-known type of granulated pasta, which remains a staple food in the Maghreb (HOUARI, 2019; BARBOFF *et al.*, 2021; ABDERRAZAK, 2021). Its consumption is well documented during the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period in other parts of the Mediterranean, including the Iberian Peninsula (OUBALHI, 2006). Today, it has totally disappeared in Spain (CERVERÓ, 2021, 58) and only remains in Portugal. More specifically, it is found in Trás-os-Montes located in the north-east of the mainland (BELARMINO, 1982, 43; BARBOFF, 2010, 48-54) and in the middle of the Atlantic, in the outermost regions of the Azores (COSTA, 1960, 138; CORTES-RODRIGUES, 1968, 170; GOMES *et al.*, 2017) and Madeira, where this tradition persists today.

Concerning the latter, the historical sources attest to the presence of couscous in Funchal, the capital of this Portuguese autonomous territory, from the Early Modern Age to the first half of the 20th century. However, it is currently only documented in rural areas, mostly in the western part of the island as will be discussed below. In 2023, ethnographical fieldwork was conducted in collaboration with an inhabitant of this city, who still produces couscous, allowing the preparation to be observed first-hand from beginning to end. After reviewing Madeiran traditions, the methodology followed during the fieldwork will be addressed. The ingredients, utensils, culinary vocabulary and operational chain will be presented next. The results allow the link to be established between the historical sources that suggest a dissemination from the elite milieu of Funchal and the ethnological accounts within the peasant communities of the island. This demonstrates that this food heritage is still alive in the city, despite the lack of knowledge among most of the inhabitants.

METHODOLOGY

Ethnological fieldwork was conducted by the authors in the Funchal parish of São Roque. The starting point was a casual conversation with a local inhabitant who remembered that in the 1990s, his brother—then still a child—worked in a couscous factory located close to the parish church. A «door-to-door» approach enabled us to identify the precise building which hosted this production unit in the past, which has since been transformed into a local lodging establishment for tourists. Luiz Pinto Machado, the current owner of the property, kindly granted us access. As he was never involved in the couscous business, he suggested we contact a former employee who started working there at the end of the 1980s for the owner of the factory, and who later took over the facility to continue the activity on his own.

In the absence of an exact address, a second «door-to-door» survey was undertaken to locate the residence of this person, named Rui César Gomes (hereafter referred to as Rui). The study was based not only on his interview but also on participant observation. Indeed, the fact that our informant continues to prepare couscous for his own consumption gave us the opportunity to be involved in the preparation process. The interview was recorded on 3 November 2023, and the fieldwork was scheduled for 10 November, both at Rui's home, also in São Roque. The participant observation continued the next day at the Penteada Campus of the University of Madeira, where the couscous was dried for the first time.

The methodology adopted involved not only recording what our informant told us about the ingredients, the utensils, and the technical lexicon, but also actively taking part in the preparation of the couscous. As there were two researchers, Author 2 was involved in the production process, leaving Author 1 with the hands free to take notes and photographs when needed. A few weeks later, the Author 1 scheduled another meeting with Rui. This time, the objective was to present him with a draft of the fieldwork report, enabling him to correct possible misunderstandings and share further facts or details which he deemed relevant.

The data collected were then compared with the results of the Study 1. A set of recipes from the second quarter of the 20th century to the present was subject to comparative analysis to define the characteristics and specificities of the local tradition and its affinities with other areas, in Portugal and abroad, where couscous is still made by hand. The results of this fieldwork will complement that study, presenting for the first time a case study from Funchal, instead of the rural areas of the island, which have been the focus of ethnological fieldwork in recent decades.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the Study 1, the authors conducted a comparative analysis of a set of couscous recipes from Madeira, cross-referencing all the data available and allowing a general portrait of the island's traditions to be drawn for the first time. More specifically, this study enabled the mapping of the ingredients, utensils, operational chains and the culinary lexicon related to the process of making couscous over almost a hundred years. Regarding ingredients, the base is always wheat flour, the only cereal employed to make couscous. In the past, both hard and soft wheat were grown locally (SANTOS *et al.*, 2005), and were still being milled in the traditional way in rural areas during the 20th century (BRÜDT, 1937-1938, 289-303; CAMACHO *et al.*, 1992b, 33-34), despite the appearance of the first industrial units in Funchal one hundred years earlier (CÂMARA, 2002, 58-60). However, with the decline of the cereal cultivation, the old processing technologies quickly became obsolete even in the countryside (CAMACHO *et al.*, 1992a, 28; MATA, 1992, 114-115; RODRIGUES, 2000-2001, 20).

The norm today is to make couscous with industrial bread wheat flour (*Triticum aestivum*), as observed by Author 1 in the village of Lameiros (municipality of S. Vicente, in north-western Madeira) in 2017 and 2018. It is the only variety available in supermarkets and grocery stores on the island. The other ingredients remain the same as in 1930: salt, water, thyme and, in some cases, yeast. Most recipes also describe a small set of utensils used in the preparation, the most important being the «*cuscuzeiro*». This vessel is mostly made of stainless-steel today and was previously made of ceramic. The mesh of holes in the base allows for the steaming of the couscous when this utensil is

placed on top of an iron pan («*panela*»), which is not only used for this purpose but also to prepare other kinds of dishes. Furthermore, an improvised hyssop made with sprigs of thyme («*segurellha*») and/or other kinds of shrubs is needed as are various bakery utensils, such as a wooden or ceramic bread kneader («*masseira/alguidar*») and sieve («*peneira*»). Some recipes refer to a grater («*ralador*») as an alternative to the sieve. Although sometimes other utensils are mentioned, these are the most frequently reported.

In the same study, the authors noted that the preparation of couscous described by the Madeiran corpus can be broken down into the following sequence of operations:

- 1 - **Fermentation:** to increase the digestibility and flavour of the final product;
- 2 - **Rolling:** to agglomerate the moistened flour;
- 3 - **calibration:** to make the size of the couscous grains uniform;
- 4 - **Preparation for cooking:** to guarantee the necessary conditions for cooking to have the desirable effect;
- 5 - **Steam cooking:** to give the final product the desired texture and flavour;
- 6 - **Ginning:** to separate the couscous grains which tend to clump together during cooking;
- 7 - **Drying:** to dehydrate the couscous for later consumption;
- 8 - **Culinary use:** to prepare different kinds of dishes with couscous which is still a simple ingredient at this stage (not addressed in this paper).

All these steps are usually represented in the operational chains documented in previous accounts from the last century. However, calibration can be repeated throughout the preparation process or, conversely, not undertaken at all. The final product is characterised by a very heterogenous particle size, even when sieved or grated, with the grains being roughly spherical. It includes a significant proportion of grains larger than 1 mm in diameter, which makes it impossible to cook by steaming after drying (MUCHNIK, 2010, 108), and so it needs to be boiled in water like rice.

The exclusive use of wheat, the heterogeneity of the particles, the fact of using a hyssop to humidify the flour during the rolling and the culinary lexicon registered by the recipes distinguish the couscous traditions of Madeira from those of the Maghreb despite the local legend that Moorish slaves («*Mouros*») had introduced it soon after the discovery of the island (SILVA *et al.*, 1921-1922, vol. 2, 178; SARMENTO, 1938; CRUZ, 1963[1949]). While there are some similarities with the couscous of North Africa—particularly in historical accounts from the Middle Ages and Early Modern times—the specificities mentioned above are common to the two other Portuguese territories where this food legacy still exists, Trás-os-Montes and the Azores.

This previously allowed the authors to propose a dissemination from the mainland through a top-down transmission process and not the reverse as Madeirans believed in the past. Indeed, the first evidence of the consumption of couscous on a regularly base is from the female convents of Funchal during the Early Modern Age.¹⁸⁰ The first ethnological accounts of the couscous-making process from the first half of the 20th century may have been collected in the city. However, the authors (PEREIRA, 1939; CRUZ, 1963[1949]; CRUZ, 1955) do not mention the exact location. Further fieldwork was always undertaken in other areas of the island (CARDOSO, 2004; FERREIRA, 2015; NUNES, 2016, 257; PEREIRA, 2003; SOUSA, 2008), with this food legacy now viewed as a heritage of the poor peasantry not only in Madeira, but also in Trás-os-Montes¹⁸¹. The fieldwork presented next will challenge this outlook of couscous as a purely rural legacy.

FINDINGS

This chapter presents the results of the ethnological fieldwork conducted in the Funchal's Parish of São Roque, on 10 November 2023, following the interview with our informant the week before, on 3 November. The ingredients, utensils and operational chain will be presented next, specifying the technical vocabulary employed by our informant Rui, where relevant.

1. INGREDIENTS

Our informant used very few ingredients to prepare the couscous:

- a. Wheat flour («*farinha de trigo*»): 15 kg. This is industrial flour produced locally by the company Insular based close to Caniçal (municipality of Machico). It is made with imported grain, the cultivation of cereals being merely residual today in Madeira, occurring mostly in the northern and the rural western areas of the island (SANTOS *et al.*, 2005). The 15 kg of flour included 5 kg of type 150 («*farinha integral*») and 10 kg of type 65 (Fig. 17).
- b. Small particles of couscous («*farelo*»): approx. 1 kg. Rui explained that his boss also used to recycle the smallest grains of couscous extracted by sieving in the previous cycle of production. In Portuguese, the word «*farelo*» means bran and is applied in this case by analogy to name the discarded part of the final product by reference to the extraction of bran from white flour. We asked him later to sieve 1 kg of the couscous produced during the fieldwork and weigh the «*farelo*» left over in front of us. It allowed us to determine that the «*farelo*» corresponds to 145 g that is around 15% of the total amount.
- c. Baker's yeast («*fermento de padeiro*»): approx. 30 g. This kind of fresh yeast used before only by professional bakers is now available to the public in local supermarkets.
- d. Water («*água*»). The water is from the public grid of Funchal. It is extracted from the mountains in the centre of the island, being acidic to slightly alkaline (6.13–8.4), due to the volcanic geology, presenting different degrees of mineralisation (PRADA *et al.*, 2005).
- e. Thyme («*segurelha*»): a bouquet. This is an aromatic herb typical of the Madeiran cuisine, being the base of a very popular bread soup («*açorda*»), appreciated during the cold days of winter (CRUZ, 1963[1949], 43). It is worth mentioning that what is called locally «*segurelha*» is thyme and not savory («*Satureja hortensis* L.») as it is known in the mainland, where the word «*tomilho*» is used for *Thymus vulgaris*.

180. Carita, 1999, 332; Fontoura, 2000, 346; Gomes, 1995, 133; Veríssimo, 1987, 39-40; Braga, 2019, 80; Braga, 2023, 605. Despite being affiliated with Portuguese traditions in which couscous originated from the aristocratic and monastic recipes of the Early Modern Period, the Madeiran tradition presents some unique characteristics, such as the use of shells, pottery sherds and

other substances to monitor the boiling of the water during the steaming, the grater to calibrate the grains, the thyme to flavour the final product and the fermentation with yeast.

181. Belarmino, 1982, 43; Cardoso, 2004, 106; Ouballi, 2006, 61; Barboff, 2010, 50; Silva, 1959, 23; Nunes, 2016, 259.

2. COOKING TOOLS

The couscous making involved the following tools:

- a. Small plastic basin («*bacia em plástico*»).
- b. Two stainless-steel bowls («*tigelas em inox*»).
- c. Large plastic basin («*alguidar de plástico*»). Despite being made of plastic, its shape is similar to the ceramic «*alguidar*» observed by Kate Brüdt (1937-1938, 88-89, Fig. 4d, 306) during her stay in Madeira in the 1930s.
- d. Rounded trowel or scoop («*cocho*»). This tool, made from a zinc sheet, was used in the past by grocery owners to serve their clients various grains and powered products kept in large containers to be sold in bulk.
- e. Small plastic bag («*saco de plástico*»).
- f. Three fine wooden slats («*ripas de madeira*»).
- g. Sieve («*peneira*»). This is a large, round wooden sieve (35 cm in diameter), similar to those used in the past by bakers to sieve flour. The metallic mesh is fine enough to separate the smaller particles («*farelo*»), while retaining the mix of the wheat grinds («*rolão*») and flour (Fig. 17).
- h. Brown paper sheets («*folha de papel pardo*», Fig. 17), several units are used.
- i. Plastic bucket («*balde em plástico*») with a capacity of 10 litres.
- j. Bouquet of thyme («*ramo de segurelha*»). The thyme is used both as a tool to sprinkle the couscous and to flavour it as will be detailed below.
- k. Grater («*ralador*»). The grater (Fig. 18) is a handmade tool commissioned in the 1980s from a local tinsmith (*Mestre Silva*), who was a neighbour of the informant's former boss. It is similar in shape to the sieve (37 cm in diameter) and was made from scratch from a zinc sheet. Instead of a metallic grid, this tool is topped by a sheet of zinc, manually pierced with a punch to form a homogeneous mesh of holes with prominent burred edges facing upwards. The purpose is to create a rough surface capable of breaking down large chunks, making the grain size of the couscous uniform through hand pressing.
- l. Cuscus steamer («*cuscuzeiro*»). This tool was also hand-crafted from a zinc sheet. It has a truncated cone shape (base diameter: 28 cm; top diameter: 46 cm; height: 38 cm). Several large holes are uniformly distributed across the bottom. It was also commissioned from *Mestre Silva* in the 1980s by Rui's former boss.



Fig. 14. Wheat flour type 65 (right), next to the «*farelo*», and behind them are the brown paper sheets used during the processing of the ingredients (Photography: Author 1).



Fig. 15. The grater used to calibrate the couscous grains (Photography: Author 1).

- m. Iron pan («*panela de ferro*») and trivet («*tempera*»). The side of the trivet has a sheet of iron covering half of its circumference. Traditional pans did not need this accessory, as they had three integral feet on the base. This was once a staple kitchen utensil in the countryside, where almost everything was cooked in the same vessel (BRÜDT, 1937-1938, 98). Despite living in an urban district, our informant has a small area in his backyard equipped for open-fire cooking.
- n. Cotton towels («*toalhas de algodão*»). Our informant has two different uses for the well-preserved and old ones, as will be explained next.
- o. Aluminium stick («*pequena barra de alumínio*»). This is a rounded piece of metal less than 1 cm in diameter and approximately 50 cm long.
- p. A wooden tool like a trowel (Fig. 19, the informant does not recall its specific name).



Fig. 16. The wooden tool used to break the largest paste chunks after steaming (Photography: Author 1).

3. OPERATIONAL CHAIN

Rui's way of making couscous can be summarised in eight basic operations:

A. Fermentation

The day before the fieldwork commenced, our informant mixed the 30 g of baker yeast with approximately 250 g of type 65 wheat flour and tepid water into a plastic bowl, letting it to prove until the next day (Fig. 20). He did not add salt to the water.

B. Preparation

The next day morning, we met our informant on the ground floor of his residence, where we began the process of making couscous. He started by putting the rest of the type 65 flour and the «farelo» into the large plastic basin, using the «cocho» for this purpose. Next, he used the sieve to remove the bran of the type 150 flour obtaining the «rolão» (Fig. 21). The result of this action is similar to the industrial type 115 («semi-integrab»). After the mix had all fallen onto the brown paper, he folded the paper carefully to pour it into the stainless-steel bowl. The contents were next poured into the large plastic basin, left on the floor of the room. When Rui worked in the factory, he and his boss used a big wooden bread kneader («masseira») to do the work, which is still located in a room of the building. Next, he placed the starter («fermento») into the plastic bucket, diluting it in approx. 5 litres of tepid water.

C. Rolling

Rolling the couscous is a two-person job and, according to our informant, his former boss was always helped by his wife to complete this task. So, as Rui's wife (Josefina) was not present at this moment, we agreed that one of us could take her place (Author 2, always called the assistant hereafter).

The first task of the assistant was to carefully mix with both hands the different kinds of flours inside the basin. Our informant then pushed the entire contents of the basin to one side with his hand. Next, he began to spread successively little portions of it from back to front with a horizontal movement. Meanwhile, the assistant took the bucket in one hand and the bouquet of «segurelha» in the other, using it to slowly and repetitively sprinkle the water with diluted yeast onto the flour mixture (Fig. 22).

Our informant asked her to do it more softly the first time so as not to let all the liquid fall at the beginning. After that, the movement had to be more vigorous to flick more drops before plunging it again in the bucket. He also told her to rotate the bouquet in her hand to keep its shape during the whole process. After having humidified all the contents of the basin, the operation was repeated twice more, until it was uniformly wet «a farinha é molhada até deixar de estar farinhamenta». At this stage, the mix of flour was already agglomerated in non-rounded chunks of different sizes.

D. First calibration

The following steps of the process took place in the backyard of the house. Rui delimited the perimeter of a table with fine wooden slats except on the side where he was standing. The aim of this was to prevent the grains accidentally falling on the floor during the next stage. With the help of Josefina, he covered all the surface with a large cotton towel (Fig. 23). Then, he filled one of the stainless-steel bowls used previously with part of the conglomerates of flour rolled before. Being right-handed, he positioned the vessel on his left side on top of the table, next to the grater.

Then he showed the assistant how she had to granulate («ralar») the couscous with this tool. He poured a little portion of the conglomerates on top, pressuring them constantly and gently against it through a circular movement, the right hand moving counterclockwise and the left one clockwise. The purpose of this operation is to crush the biggest chunks («grumos»), the finest falling down into the interior of the perimeter of the «ralador», together with a residual portion of non-aggregated flour. Our informant continued this operation until most of the «grumos» were disaggregated. The chunks that could not be split were used to assemble a big ball left in a corner of the table. At the end, he gently pushed («arrastar») all the grains that fell through to the right side without lifting up the grater from the surface of the towel. The assistant repeated this operation several times until the entire contents of the plastic basin were processed (Fig. 24).

E. Preparation for cooking

Meanwhile, our informant began the preparations for cooking the couscous. First, he carefully positioned the iron pan on top of the trivet. Then he put the «*cuscuzeiro*» on top of it, previously filled with water. After that, he used the ball made of the leftover chunks to seal all the perimeter in contact with the pan, to avoid steam leaking during the process (Fig. 25).

Next, he covered the interior with pieces of old cotton towels, having previously placed a few little branches of wood in the bottom to avoid direct contact between the boiling water and the contents of the «*cuscuzeiro*». All the couscous granulated in the previous stage was poured inside in successive steps using the stainless-steel basin (Fig. 26), and some twigs of thyme were put on top to flavour the couscous. Finally, our informant folded the edge of the pieces of towels on top of the «*cuscuzeiro*» to cover its contents. He also put old pieces of towels to seal the couscous more efficiently (Fig. 27). Next, he chopped some wood with an axe to obtain smaller pieces that he carefully placed underneath the trivet and lit the fire.

F. Steam cooking

After the water started to generate steam, our informant opened the towels several times to disaggregate the «couscous cake» with the aluminium stick to maintain the steam flow between the grains, as they tend to stick to each other during this part of the process (Fig. 28).

G. Ginning

After three hours of steaming, the entire contents of the «*cuscuzeiro*», still warm, were poured again onto the left side of the table where they had previously been processed. A wooden tool was used to press and disaggregate the biggest chunks, and the sprigs of thyme were removed, leaving only the leaves (Fig. 29).

H. Second calibration

After ending the ginning, all the couscous was passed through the «*ralador*» a second time as described before.

I. Drying

Once it had been calibrated a second time, our informant spread the couscous to cover all the surface of the towel, allowing aeration, and at the same time preventing fermentation (Fig. 30), as he explained to us. The next morning, the assistant helped our informant and his wife to carry it to the roof of the Pentecada Campus of the University of Madeira to conclude the drying process («*secagem*»). This location was selected

as it had good solar and wind exposure and was close to the couple's house. Two towels were spread on the top floor, with the edges kept in place with small rocks. The couscous, previously packaged in plastic bags for transportation, was again spread uniformly across the surface of the towels (Fig. 31).

In the middle of the afternoon, our informant turned the «*cuscuz*» upside down to guarantee that all the grains received direct sun. When the sun went down, he evaluated the stage of dehydration one last time in two empirical ways, taught by his former boss. First, he smelt the couscous and after that he crunched some grains between his fingers, which allowed him to conclude that it was sufficiently dry to be kept in bags without danger of perishing. However, as he judged the couscous needed to lose a little more moisture, he decided to dry it again the next day in his backyard. The final operation consisted of sieving the couscous to remove the finest particles and the non-aggregated flour that will be the «*farelo*» used the next time to make more couscous.



Fig. 17. The yeast dissolved in water the day before, left to prove (Photography: Author 1).



Fig. 18. Sieving the type 150 wheat flour to remove the bran (Photography: Author 1).



Fig. 19. Rolling the couscous using the bouquet of thyme to hydrate the flour (Photography: Author 1).



Fig. 22. Sealing the *cuscuzeiro* on top of the cooking pot (Photography: Author 1).



Fig. 20. Preparing the table to calibrate the couscous (Photography: Author 1).



Fig. 23. Filling the *cuscuzeiro* with the rolled grains (Photography: Author 1).



Fig. 21. Calibrating the couscous with the grater (Photography: Author 1).



Fig. 24. Covering the top of the *cuscuzeiro* with the cloth (Photography: Author 1).



Fig. 25. Using an aluminium stick to aerate the couscous (Photography: Author 1).



Fig. 27. The couscous ready to dry (Photography: Author 1).



Fig. 26. Crushing the biggest chunks with the wooden utensil (Photography: Author 1).



Fig. 28. Spreading the couscous to dry on the roof of the University campus (Photography: Author 1).

DISCUSSION

The way that our informant makes couscous has strong affinities with previous descriptions of the preparation process collected in Madeira, from the 1930s until the present. The vocabulary he uses to refer to the utensils, the ingredients and gestures is also similar, despite a few terms not documented in previous accounts, such «*ralar*» and «*farelo*».

The main ingredient is wheat, the only kind of cereal used by the islanders. In this case, it is specifically industrial wheat flour for bread, which became the norm after the gradual closure of this activity, of traditional milling units (CAMACHO *et al.*, 1992a, 28; MATA, 1992, 114-115), and the collapse of the local wheat cultivation (SANTOS *et al.*, 2009, 364) during the last decades of the 20th century.

However, Rui's recipe is distinguished from all those published earlier by mixing two grinds, using not only the standard type 65, but also type 150, which

he sieves to extract the bran to obtain the so-called «*rolão*», that is, a mix of small particles of bran and groats. He explained to us that his former boss only used the first kind of grind, produced exclusively with the endosperm (tender core) of the grain. He justified the addition of «*rolão*» as a way to make the couscous healthier, within the framework of the macrobiotic diet that his wife and he have followed since they were young, always favouring the absorption of nutrients in their purest form.

Nevertheless, our informant is not the only one in Madeira to roll couscous with unrefined flour. During previous fieldwork in the village of Lameiros (October 2017 and 2018), Author 1 had the opportunity to observe that some of the couscous produced by the inhabitants was made with a mix of fine flour and «*rolão*». In 2018, one of them explained to him that some consumers preferred the yellowish hue of the mix, without mentioning any dietary reason for this preference.



Fig. 29. Couscous maker (municipality of Santana, 1976) and his tools: *cuscuzeiro*, *panela*, *crivo*, *ralador*, *masseira* (ARM, Aragão Mendes Correia, Calheta, cx. 2, 03118_m09668).

The recycling of the finest particles from previous preparations (*«farelo»*) is also specific to our informant's recipe. According to him, his former boss did the same, to avoid waste, primarily to reduce production costs. Today, Rui continues this practice simply because he is an adherent of «zero-waste» cuisine, and no longer for economic reasons. Despite not being documented until now in Madeira, the reuse of the finest particles from previous preparations was documented in the second quarter of the 18th century, in a recipe which calls it not *«farelo»*, but *«comecillo»*. This description of preparing couscous belongs to the manuscript notebook of Francisco Borges Henriques, deposited at the National Archives of Portugal¹⁸². The identity of the author is not definitively established. However, it is clear that he was familiar with the culinary preferences of the higher strata of Portuguese society (BRAGA, 2004, 64; BRAGA, 2017, 69).

Other ingredients, such as thyme, water and yeast mentioned in accounts collected previously are also part of the Rui's recipe. However, the water to dilute the yeast is unsalted, contrary to what is common in Madeira. When confronted with this fact, our informant told us that it was the way his former boss taught him to do it. He believes that the reason was so that to prevent the utensils used during the preparation, such as the grater and the *«cuscuzeiro»*, from deteriorating, as they were made from zinc sheets, and were susceptible to corrosion through repeated exposure to salt.

Regarding the other utensils, Rui uses mostly the same as those described previously. A photograph from 1976 portrays a couscous maker from the rural municipality of Santana (Fig. 32). Close to him can be seen a pan, a sieve and a grater which looks like those that our informant showed us. However, there are no such things as plastic or stainless-steel containers in this picture. The bread kneader seems to be made of stone, and the couscous steamer is still made of ceramic, as was the norm in the first half of the 20th century. In the current state of the art, the *«cuscuzeiro»* made of zinc sheets that Rui «inherited» from his former boss is not documented in other sources from Madeira. It is common today to drill holes in pans and other kinds of stainless-steel vessels to turn them into improvised couscous steamers, as explained by an inhabitant of Lameiros to Author 1 in 2018. The wooden trowel-like tool used by Rui during the ginning is also not represented, nor is it described in previous descriptions of couscous making.

The operational chain observed during the fieldwork includes all the operations mentioned in previous studies. As stated above, not all the couscous makers from Madeira have the habit of fermenting the couscous or standardizing the particle sizes. Indeed, as Author 1 had the opportunity to observe in 2017 and 2018, the inhabitants of Lameiros do not calibrate it at all. They sometimes use the sieve without shaking it to place the granulates already done inside the *«cuscuzeiro»*, but it seems to be only to extract the unrolled flour. When the calibration is documented, it may be done with a grater as is the case here, this utensil not being documented in other geographical areas with couscous traditions

182. Henriques, Francisco Borges, *Receitas dos milhores doces e de alguns guizados particulares e remedios de Conhecida experiencia / que fez Fr[ancisco] Borges H[enriques] para o uzo de* 32

sua Casa, 1715-1729, Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, manuscrito 7376, pp. 178-179.

or alternatively with a sieve. On the other hand, only the oldest recipes mention the repetition of this operation after the steaming. In this point of view, our informant's technique is very old school. The final product is, however, still quite inhomogeneous like the countryside versions, with particle size being very randomly distributed (Fig. 33).

A granulometric analysis enabled us to confirm that more than 66% of the total weight corresponds to particles with a diameter of up to 3 mm, some of them close to 10 mm. The use of the grater seems only to prevent the extra-large chunks. The weight of particles between 3 mm and 1 mm represents approximately only half of the weight of the «>3 mm» class (see Table 1), those with a diameter of 1 mm or less being merely residual. It is worth mentioning that this is precisely the normal class of particle sizes in Maghreb. In fieldwork in the north-east of Algeria, it was observed that, as a rule, the diameter of the finished grains is between 0.63 mm and 2 mm (CHEMACHE *et al.*, 2018, 217). Some authors (MUCHNIK, 2010, 108) even consider 1 mm as the maximum size of «true» couscous, as it is impossible to cook those of a higher diameter with steam after drying as is usual in Maghreb, and they need to be boiled in water like rice. Rui explained that for each cup of «*cuscuz*» he adds 1.5 cups of salted water seasoned with thyme, garlic and olive oil to the pan, and it is ready after absorbing all the liquid.

Particle size	Weight (g)	%
> 3 mm	267	66.75
3 mm–2 mm	89	22.25
2 mm–1 mm	43	10.75
< 1 mm	1	0.25
Total	400	100

Table 1. Granulometry of a couscous sample produced by Rui during the fieldwork, established by sieving with a LACOR sieve with multiple mesh sizes.

Despite these differences, the similarities with other accounts of couscous making show that this case study from Funchal is closely related to the other preparations methods documented previously in rural areas of Madeira and is even closer in certain ways to the operational chains described in the early descriptions of the first half of the 20th century.



Fig. 30. Couscous granules after one day of drying (Photography: Author 1).

CONCLUSION

This fieldwork is the first to map how couscous is made today in Funchal, the capital of Madeira. The first descriptions of the preparation process from the first half of the 20th century may have been collected in this city. However, it is not certain. Since then, the recipes describing the procedure have been collected exclusively in the rural areas of the island, contributing to the present image of couscous as «peasants' food» and to the lack of knowledge of the city inhabitants about this intangible legacy, even if its consumption was documented there first.

Despite a few peculiarities, the way Rui works, the utensils, the ingredients and even the technical lexicon employed by him to describe what he does are consistent with previous accounts in Madeira. From this point of view, the informant's know-know is the «missing link» between the past and the present of this misunderstood heritage, and this ethnological fieldwork a testimony to its survival until the present in the city where its history probably began.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

All the data collected about the couscous factory where Rui learned to make couscous was not explored in this research work and is reserved to a further one which will focus specifically on the history of this establishment. The culinary uses of the couscous were not addressed either, as they deserve a research line of their own.

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Conclusion

Successive Ruptures and the Autonomy of the Technical Gesture

The study of Madeiran couscous, as developed in these pages, seeks to contribute to a broader reflection on the convergence of different fields of knowledge. Beyond the specific history of this foodstuff, the analytical model of an archaeology of know-how suggests a space for effective dialogue between history, ethnology, sociology, and linguistics, treating the technical gesture as a shared document.

From a historical perspective, this approach allows for the expansion of the traditional archive. By integrating the operational chain as a source of information, it becomes possible to address periods of documentary silence and to understand how technical memory persists through historical ruptures. Here, history is not merely a chronological narrative but a study of the conditions that allowed certain practices to survive or be reconfigured over centuries.

In a synchronic perspective, technical know-how may circulate independently of written discourse, being transmitted through embodied practice and oral instruction. In a diachronic perspective, however, these same techniques reveal stratigraphic layers where operational continuity intersects with historical documentation, showing that technical knowledge cannot be reduced either to textual archive or to purely oral tradition.

Dialogue with ethnology and sociology is equally fundamental. The persistent association between technical knowledge and oral transmission may partly result from the synchronic bias inherited from structuralist anthropology. A diachronic perspective reveals that technical practices often circulate across mixed regimes of transmission, where written documentation and embodied practice intersect across long historical durations.

By shifting the focus from the social status of the practitioner to the technical operation itself, we can observe how know-how adapts to different social environments. The transition of couscous from aristocratic contexts to rural domesticity is not treated as a loss of original meaning, but as a technical adaptation to new social and material realities. This perspective allows for a sociology of the gesture

that identifies how practical knowledge maintains its internal logic even when its external support changes.

In this context, linguistics also plays an active role. The terminology associated with the preparation of couscous is not regarded as a simple set of labels, but as an integral part of the technical space. Terms such as «*comecilho*» or «*segurelha*» function as linguistic indicators of specific temporalities and geographies, coexisting with the physical tools and the materials used. They are part of the same stratigraphy that constitutes the know-how.

It is precisely this intersection of disciplines that allows for a comprehensive reading of the object of study. By applying these transdisciplinary tools to the specific case of the Madeiran tradition, the results of the research can be synthesised through the following observations:

- (1) The cross-analysis of the two studies gathered here allows us to conclude that Madeiran couscous is not a fossil of an imported Maghrebi tradition, but rather the result of a complex social and technical trajectory. Through the application of an archaeology of know-how, it has become evident that this heritage did not follow a continuous line of evolution; instead, it was marked by successive ruptures and changes in context—true stratigraphical breaks—that shaped its current configuration.
- (2) It has been demonstrated that the technical operations that endured on the island belong to a prestige matrix that circulated at noble tables and ecclesiastical institutions throughout the Portuguese territory during the Early Modern Period. This aristocratic origin explains the formal affinities that Madeiran couscous maintains with other remnant traditions in Trás-os-Montes and the Azores. However, the history of the object did not settle there. The transition to the rural world in the contemporary period required the adaptation of the operational chain to a new social context, allowing its survival outside elite circles through a reconfiguration of its conditions of existence.
- (3) This shift in class was followed by another radical discontinuity, visible in the most recent technical statements—the autonomation of know-how from local agricultural production. By being produced with imported industrial flours, the gesture became decoupled from the regional sowing cycle—a system that is today, effectively, in decline. This process is directly associated with the abandonment of local cereal species, resulting in a drastic reduction in agrodiversity. This rupture demonstrates that the practice persisted through a profound mutation, in which the technical gesture became

detached from its original biological base and survived as an autonomous archive despite the loss of its territorial support.

The systematisation of this corpus of recipes and the recording of the know-how carried out here provide the material to better understand the processes of cultural transmission. This case demonstrates that the continuity of a practice does not depend on linear evolution nor on a process of calcification, but rather on a succession of layers and adaptations. The thickness of the gesture allowed it to persist through the fractures of history, functioning as a heterochronia where medieval and modern techniques remain legible even when the agricultural and social structures that once sustained them have been definitively lost.