

Arabesque: an Arabian Touch on Lace Made in Brazil

Contributed by Isaura Daniel
Friday, 14 April 2006

They left the Arab countries, passed by Europe and ended up on the hands of the lace makers in the state of Paraíba, Northeast Brazil. The arabesques, group of curved and rounded traces characteristic of Arabian art, are one of the main influences of the renaissance lace made in that region of Brazil.

"In the period that came before the Crusades the Arabs made contact with other countries and spread the arabesques," says the designer Christus Nóbrega, who released in the beginning of the month the book "Renda Renascença - uma memória de ofício paraibana", meaning, "Renaissance Lace - memories of handicraft of Paraíba" in a free translation, which speaks of the lace makers of Paraíba.

In the period previous to the Crusades, between 622 and 1089, the Muslim Arab army set off to conquer various regions of the world, including France, one of the countries that colonized Paraíba and took the art of making lace to the state.

According to the writer, the invasions that took place before and during the Crusades in the end also provided for cultural exchanges. The Arabs, according to Nóbrega, became strong in abstract art due to the Islamic religion, which forbids human and animal figures. "This influenced Europe," he says.

The renaissance kind of lace is handmade and has the traces and intertwined stitches as its main characteristic, also found in the arabesques. Currently the arabesques are largely used in Arab architecture and tapestry.

In Paraíba, renaissance lace was propagated in the 1930s through a school of French religious women. "In this school, women learned embroidery and how to mind a house," he stated. The privilege, however, was only for high-society girls, who went to the school of the Filhas da Caridade congregation (Daughters of Charity).

All changed when a servant at the school, called Maria Pastora, started teaching the handicraft of making lace to the lower-class women. The work was presented as an alternative to the region, which faced economic difficulties in times of drought.

Today 2,000 women work with lace in Paraíba, especially in the cities of Monteiro, Zabelê, São João do Tigre, São Sebastião do Umbuzeiro and Camalaú in a region very close to the neighboring state of Pernambuco.

Each one of these cities has a cooperative, which organizes the production and helps the lace makers sell their products and even export them.

Book and Author

The book about the Paraíba lace was made by Nóbrega at the invitation of the Brazilian Micro and Small Business Support Service (Sebrae), which holds capacitation work with the lace makers in the state.

Research was made during six months, in the second half of 2004 by Nóbrega and the historian Emmanuela Lins. The text of the book, which has pictures by Odinaldo Costa, Nóbrega and Emmanuela, was written last year. According to the author, the sources of the work were accounts by the lace makers and also from other bibliography.

Christus Nóbrega graduated in Design by the Federal University of Paraíba and has taught as a professor in the Design course of the Federal University of Campina Grande.

Academically, as well as lecturing, the author also developed researches on handicrafts. The book is sold in the Sebrae agencies and the income with sales will be reverted to social projects for the Paraíba lace makers.

Anba - www.anba.com.br