



**The defensive lines between the 17th century and Napoleon**  
**International Congress of Archaeology and History**  
**Portugal, 1-2 September 2017**

With the evolution of firearms, the old fortresses no longer have the defensive efficiency for which they had been planned. Many are restructured and integrated in new defensive systems; many others are abandoned for not having any strategic value.

When a kingdom is under an invasion threat, when it is conquered and it wishes to break free from the invader's power, it's necessary to build defensive campaign systems, by taking advantage of the territory's landform. These defensive systems may integrate one or more defensive lines and are constituted by small strongholds that, when equipped with men and cannons, will form the territory's defence.

These structures are advantageous for the economy, since they don't require maintenance and don't need any equipment during peaceful times. From the military perspective, they are efficient since they are adapted to the most recent tactics and weaponry. Their function and main duty is to postpone or prevent the invader's progression.

Beira Baixa is located in the interior of central Portugal and is on one of the country's entry routes and on the path to reach the capital. Many invading armies have chosen this route many times, with the objective to conquer Lisbon and therefore control the kingdom.

It is on this track, in 1762, that a defensive system is built around Abrantes, from which the Defensive Line of Talhadas-Moradal (its forefront line), takes advantage of the extreme difficulties caused by the mountain regions of Talhadas and Moradal. During that time, Portugal gets involved in the Seven Years' War due to the refusal to sign the Pacte de Famille (Family Compact) with the Spanish and French court. Facing an impending invasion of the national territory by a Franco-Spanish army, the Marquis of Pombal asks the British government for help. The British nominate Willhelm Schaumburg-Lippe (supreme count of Schaumburg – principality of the Lower Saxony, in Germany) who was serving the British army at the time, as the captain of the Portuguese army.

However, its history doesn't end with the end of the conflict. The line subsists and evolves.

In 1801, during the War of the Oranges (considered by some investigators as the first Napoleonic invasion), the Defensive Line of Talhadas-Moradal is restructured and equipped with new structures, and a military road is also built in order to make

communications easier. All this was under the command of Marquis of Alorna. However, the invasion occurs through Alentejo and the line is not used.

In 1807, the French army passes through this line, which was empty of men and weaponry, with great difficulty. Not a single shot was fired, as ordered by the Prince Regent John (future King John VI of Portugal).

In 1810, still during the Peninsular War, Marquis of Castello Melhor and Manoel Jozé Dias Cardoso concede recognition of the lines that integrated the East defensive system, with the goal of reactivating and occupying them in case of need. This defensive system would possible work together with the Torres Vedras Lines, which were being built at the time.

The making of this Congress was motivated by the archaeological investigation works, as well as the public appreciation of the Talhadas-Moradal Defensive Line. This line is on the forefront of the Defensive System built around Abrantes, in 1762, with the participation of Portugal in the Seven Years' War, which is the main subject of the first session.

In this Congress, we aim to exchange knowledge about the defensive lines that were built in the European territory, between the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the Napoleonic Wars, focusing on its topography, the different structures that integrate them, their function, evolution and efficiency, among other aspects. The historical context that determined its origin is also part of this study.

The Congress' program is structured in four sessions dedicated to the following subjects: Session 1 *The Talhadas-Moradal Defensive Line*; Session 2 *Defensive planning between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries*; Session 3 *Defensive Systems in Europe between the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries*; Session 4 *Lines of Research and Appreciation*.