

The Great Battle of Bluster

At a time when splendid whiskers and extravagant costumes were the latest fashion, the small border village of Sousel, situated a few kilometres from the border between Portugal and Spain, was a place where the rivalries between the two countries manifested themselves in strange and amusing ways.

In 1662, a notable event occurred in Sousel, which to this day is the subject of heated debates in the taverns on both sides of the border. This was the Legendary Battle of Bluster, which involved a castle that was in favour of the Restoration, as the name of the war indicated.

The battle in question began in the early morning, with a lunch break; fried sardines on the Portuguese side and tortilla on the Spanish side, and lasted into the night.

By sunrise, the battle was over. The Spaniards, with their exuberant character and tendency towards exhibitionism, swore blind that they had won the battle with great ease. They marched to the castle, raising colourful standards and shouting Olé, Olé, Olé... and the Portuguese, full of fear, surrendered immediately. They claimed that they had conquered the castle without resistance, and hoisted the flag of the Kingdom of Spain and Castile atop the walls.

However, they quickly realised that the castle lacked the desired strategic importance, and nor did it possess riches of any note. Faced with this lack of interest, they abandoned the castle and returned to Spain; certain they had fulfilled their duty but with their pockets empty.

In contrast, the Portuguese, known for their wit and love of theatre, portrayed the battle in a completely different light. According to them, it was an epic victory over a much superior Spanish army. The Portuguese claimed that they had attacked the Spaniards in the dead of night, who had then fled in shame to the Castilian side of the border. They said that the Spaniards had left behind a delicious feast, complete with tapas and paella, which the Portuguese devoured with enthusiasm after the battle, dubbing it the 'Restoration of the Flavours'.

So who, in the end, won the Battle of Bluster? Did the castle fall into the hands of the evil Spaniards or did the strong and courageous Portuguese defend it with honour and resist a colossal army, expelling them to its frontier? The truth, as often happens in history, may lie somewhere in between the two versions. Perhaps the Spaniards occupied the castle temporarily, but were gently persuaded, in the Portuguese way, to leave them alone. After all we are all Hermanos and Tapas round the dinner table.

The most surprising thing is that there are no reports of injuries or deaths, on either the Portuguese or the Spanish side. Some say the soldiers took advantage of the battle to exchange recipes for paella and salt cod. That is what's left for posterity.

The Battle of Bluster is now remembered with a touch of humour and exhibitionism both sides of the border. And while the tale continues to be told in the taverns, one thing is certain: Bluster will always be a place where the rivalry between Spaniards and Portuguese is as colourful and mysterious as their own histories. And we will never know who the winner was.

Adélia Carvalho