

Out of sight, out of mind: A Sereia de Pedra (1922), the tale of a lost Portuguese film

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Panel 8 – ARCHIVES & CENSORSHIP: LOST & FOUND

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Abstract

A Sereia de Pedra (*The Stone Mermaid*, 1922) is one of Portugal's lost films. Today, all that remains is what was written about it in the 1920s press. Despite having disappeared, the importance of this film for Portuguese cinematic history should not be ignored. *A Sereia de Pedra* was the first film to have ever been produced by a woman in Portugal: Virginia de Castro e Almeida and her production company, Fortuna Films. Furthermore, the plot for the film was based on a short story written by Virginia de Castro e Almeida, *A Obra do Demónio* (*The Devil's Work*, 1917), adapted to film by Alberto Jardim. The film was also shot in Portugal but had both a French and Portuguese cast and crew. *A Sereia de Pedra* might be a lost film, but it should not be a forgotten one.

This paper aims to: (1) shed new light on the film *A Sereia de Pedra*; (2) unravel the story that is yet to be told about the plot of the film and changes made from short story to screenplay; (3) study the making of the film with a multicultural and almost all-male crew; (4) restore Virginia de Castro e Almeida's rightful place in Portuguese cinematic history.

Virginia de Castro e Almeida was a pioneer in Portuguese cinema, she was the first woman producer and woman screenwriter in Portugal, and perhaps (new research is underway) the first woman director in Portugal. Nonetheless, and despite her unquestionable importance, Virginia de Castro e Almeida has been blatantly disregarded by film aesthetes and researchers. Analysing this lost film and the influence Virginia de Castro e Almeida had in the making of it will be instrumental in paving the way for a voice that has been rendered silent in Portugal to emerge: the female voice.

Keywords – Portuguese cinema, lost films, pioneers in film, women in film, multicultural filmmaking

Ana Sofia Pereira (Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Portugal) has just completed her PhD funded by a scholarship by FCT on the topic "Women Screenwriters: A Dynamic Definition of language in the Feminine in Portuguese Cinema" at Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, with a stay at the University of Reading (UK).

She founded Cimbalino Filmes, a Portuguese production company, right out of college, and she has worked as a freelance screenwriter and script doctor for several production companies both in Portugal and in North America. Her latest work as a screenwriter and script supervisor includes the TV series *2 minutos para mudar de vida* that was broadcast early in 2019 in primetime on one of Portugal's major networks, RTP1. Additionally, she has taught screenwriting at a university level in several national and international institutions, namely her Alma Mater, the School of the Arts, Universidade Católica Portuguesa, for over ten years.

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