

BALTASAR AND BLIMUNDA ROUTE SOME INTRODUCTORY WORDS

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The *Baltasar and Blimunda Route* is a new cultural and touristic project characterized by a strong literary and heritage component. The epic lyricism of the book *Baltasar and Blimunda* by José Saramago united in 2017 the cultural departments of three municipalities — Loures, Mafra and Lisbon — in the creation of an original itinerary, evoking a series of topics romanticized in that book: the impressive characters of Blimunda and Baltasar, the utopian dream of flying by Bartolomeu de Gusmão, the exaltation around the music of Domenico Scarlatti, the promise of the king D. João V to build a convent-palace, and, finally, the people who built it.

The Route following the narrative of the book, illustrates certain passages through the emphasis given to places referred to in it. In this way, it aims to become a literary journey, bringing together some events and monuments related to the 18th century, a journey that takes place between Lisbon and Mafra, passing through Loures. In that spirit, it chooses three main locations, one in each municipality, which serve as anchors: “Casa dos Bicos”, where the head office of the José Saramago Foundation is located, and which functions as a “gateway” on the Route; the Monumental Square of “Santo Antão do Tojal”, in Loures; and the National Palace-Convent of Mafra. These main poles are then added along the way. This means that the Route highlights a network of locations with classified properties, all related to 18th century Portuguese and European history, and in close articulation with Saramago’s text.

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This intermunicipal project, led by the municipality of Loures, started in 2017 and for its implementation was decisive the co-financing guaranteed by an application submitted to the “Lisbon Regional Operational Plan 2014-2020”¹.

Since the beginning of the project, the José Saramago Foundation has collaborated in several of the Route initiatives, becoming an important pillar of its success. This partnership was consolidated in November 2020 with the signing of a Collaboration Agreement between the Foundation and the municipalities promoting the project. The signing of this agreement represented an important moment in the process of implementing the Route, and symbolically sealed its inspiration in the work and figure of our Nobel Prize very clearly. At the same time, the Foundation started to play a significant role in the cultural initiatives that the Route aims to implement.

To better understand the objectives of the *Baltasar and Blimunda Route* it is important to mention that it is structured in four fundamental axes: presence in the world of digital communication, through an interactive website and its connection to social networks; physical presence in the territory through informative signs at the various points selected along the Route, in the three counties; implementation of an annual, diversified cultural program, aimed at different audiences; and the creation of a network of local, national and international partnerships, important for their dissemination, promotion and sustainability. Regarding the second axis mentioned, it is also necessary to add two interpretation centers, both located in the municipality of Loures, one of them being installed in the former sacristy of the Franciscan convent “Arrábido do Espírito Santo” (current Municipal Museum of Loures – “Quinta do Conventinho”), and another at the José Saramago Municipal Library. These two cultural facilities allow the visitor to make several “time travels”, one on the territory of the Loures valley in the 18th century (sacristy of “Conventinho”) and another on the characters of Saramago’s novel (Library).

the Route, hand in hand with literary fiction, accompanies fictional characters out of José Saramago’s imagination, alongside with authentic historical figures, on their journeys by roads, paths and places, between Lisbon and Mafra, passing

through Loures. To better find out about all these contents, those interested can visit the Route website, mentioned above, already available through this link: <https://www.rotamemorialdoconvento.pt/>

So, after all, what is the historical, fictional, patrimonial itinerary that this Route seeks to show and promote? Let us see it succinctly, county by county.

In Lisbon, the lines of the novel run in parallel with José Saramago’s work and biography. The itinerary can start or end at “Casa dos Bicos”, (head office of the José Saramago Foundation, as mentioned) in front of which is located the olive tree brought from “Azinhaga do Ribatejo” (birthplace of José Saramago), and whose roots welcome the writer’s ashes. In “Praça do Comércio”, also one of the Route’s visiting points, aspects of the court’s life are explained to the visitor, and above all one of the most emblematic stories in the book: that of Father Bartolomeu de Gusmão, and his invention of the flying machine that aimed to cross the skies of Lisbon. At “Rua dos Fanqueiros”, the old Corpus Christi Convent is evoked, where D. João V’s wife, D. Maria Ana de Austria, used to come to pray. We continue towards “Praça da Figueira”, where the privileged view over the hillside of the Castle reminds us of Blimunda’s house and the flight of the flying machine, “Passarola”. In “Rossio”, Baltasar and Blimunda’s first meeting is remembered, which takes place during an Act of Faith where the protagonist’s mother is punished, condemned for witchcraft. The Inquisition, its establishment in Portugal, its methods and the persecutions that echo in the novel are remembered at the Church of “São Domingos”.

In Loures we intend to signal and highlight the centrality of “Santo Antão do Tojal”, with its magnificent monumental baroque square. The Archbishop’s Palace, a building integrated in the imposing set of the square, served as a hosting place for the King and the Court during the frequent trips he made to Mafra. It was in this square that the bells destined for the convent’s Basilica were blessed and where the Italian statues disembarking at the “Rio Trancão” quay, followed the same destination as the bells. But the Route in Loures includes

¹ A total of 392.397,20€, with the following partial allocation of funding to each of the partner municipalities: Lisbon = 41.272,94€; Loures = 179.592,69€; Mafra = 171.531,57€.

other points of cultural and touristic interest based on two communication axes used at the time: the “Estrada Real Lisboa-Mafra” and the waterways of the “Tejo” and “Trancão” rivers where people and materials (including the mentioned bells along the sculptural ensemble) circulated. Thus, visitors are invited to visit examples of religious built heritage, such as the Church of “Unhos” and the former Franciscan Convent “Arrábido do Espírito Santo” where, as said, the Loures Municipal Museum is currently installed.

In Mafra, the Route values the “Real Obra” through two routes. The first goes from “Vila Velha” to “Alto da Vela” (this being the place where the palace-convent was built) and the second, corresponding to the transport of a huge block of limestone, known as “Pedra Benedictione”, on a route between “Cheleiros” and Mafra. The first, along the path that connected “Alto da Vela” (“Real Obra”) to “Vila Velha”, follows the old royal roads that served for the transport of raw materials, statues, and circulation of workers, master builders and the King himself, when visiting the “Real Obra”. The second route corresponds to the five days that the transport of that monolith took from “Cheleiros” to Mafra.

It remains to add that one of the strategic lines of the Baltasar and Blimunda Route has been, and will be, the realization of a set of a diverse cultural events, of which we highlight international congresses, which result from fruitful collaborations with universities. One of these meetings was the “Congresso Internacional José Saramago e o Memorial do Convento” that took place between 14 and 15 November 2019, at the National Palace of Mafra. Another successful scientific meeting was the International Congress “Baroque Festivities between the sacred and the profane: Europe and the Atlantic”, which took place between 17 and 19 October 2019 in Loures, at the Palace of “Correio-Mor”, framed in a protocol of collaboration with the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences² of the Universidade Nova de Lisboa.

² And in particular with the participation of the following institutes: Instituto de História de Arte (IHA/ NOVA/ FCSH), Instituto de Estudos de Literatura e Tradição (IELT/ NOVA/FCSH) e Instituto de Etnomusicologia/ Centro de Estudos em Música e Dança (INET-MD/ NOVA/ FCSH).