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architectures of the soul

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understanding the past,
shaping the future

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Book of Abstracts

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preservation, the museographic valorisation of cultural sites and their “historical memory”, and history of religious art and experience. She has worked and researched these topics during her collaborations with institutions such as the Poldi Pezzoli Museum, Milan. In 2023, she received a Travel Scholarship granted by ARTES and the Centro de Estudios Europa Hispánica (CEEH) for her research project “Two Annunciations from the Museo Catedral de Santiago de Compostela reconsidered: iconography, original placement and current display”, and an academic merit scholarship from the Fondation Gandur pour l'Art, Geneva, aimed at supporting her during the Master studies.

13. Landscapes of silence, solitude and sympathy. Franciscan resonance in Alentejo narratives

The Franciscan presence in the Alentejo has been enduring, and is visible in the built heritage throughout this region. The Franciscan worldview and its spiritual legacy in Portuguese culture have been acknowledged by scholars, but remain little-researched from the perspective of the landscapes found in Alentejo narratives. Are these landscapes perceived as triggering contemplation and particularly appropriate to stir religious and spiritual feelings grounded on the experience of silence? Are there landscapes of the soul that overflow from the religious sites and echo Franciscan ethics?

Embracing a phenomenological perspective and framed by ecocriticism, this presentation aims at understanding how Alentejo landscapes – commonly associated with places of silence, solitude, serenity – often arouse contemplative attitudes and Franciscan resonances in contemporary Portuguese literature. Drawing on the LITESCAPE database and from a bulk of narratives anchored in the Alentejo, we selected a corpus of 30 excerpts from 10 authors (from the late 19th to the 21st century): Conde de Ficalho, Fialho de Almeida, Florbela Espanca, Manuel da Fonseca, Antunes da Silva, Urbano Tavares Rodrigues, Sebastião da Gama, Almeida Faria, Afonso Cruz, José Luís Peixoto. A close reading of the excerpts reveals that silent and solitary landscapes in the Alentejo, either sites near chapels/convents or just isolated places surrounded by nature, lead protagonists/narrators to acknowledge sympathetic feelings towards non-humans and to express a Franciscan way of understanding life and nature, opening it to the mystery, bringing sacralization to the secular love of things. We conclude that, alongside the Franciscan built heritage, there is also a rooted Franciscanism in Alentejo narratives, a legacy of a spiritual materiality emerging from the immersive contemplation of this region's silent landscapes. This literary legacy could complement a broader outline of Franciscan landscapes beyond the materiality of the religious built heritage, thereby enhancing a more comprehensive meaning of Alentejo landscapes of the soul.

Keywords: Alentejo, Franciscanism, landscape, literature, silence

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Joana Abranches Portela is a PhD student, funded by FCT, in Landscape Arts and Techniques (University of Évora). She is an affiliated researcher of CHAIA. Her PhD research focuses on the representations and perceptions of Alentejo landscapes in Portuguese contemporary literature. She holds a master's degree in Classic Literature (University of Coimbra), a master's degree in Editorial Studies (University of Aveiro) and a degree in Classical and Portuguese Languages and Literature. From 1998 until 2002, she was a lecturer of Classical Studies at the Arts Faculty of University of Coimbra. She worked as editorial assistant at Edições Almedina and, for over 10 years, as freelance copy editor and proofreader. She has moved to Alentejo in 2013, a life change that prompted a new interest in nature, landscape and interdisciplinary knowledge. In 2017, she became a volunteer collaborator of the project LIT ESCAPE – Atlas das Paisagens Literárias de Portugal Continental (IELT/IHC – FCSH-NOVA) and dedicated to the study and mapping of literary landscapes in fictional narratives of Urbano Tavares Rodrigues. In 2019-2020, she was granted a fellowship in the LIT ESCAPE project. She has authored two book chapters and several papers in academic journals in the fields of Classical Studies, Publishing Studies, Anthropology and Humanities.

14. The Soul of Nature. The experiences of the Franciscan Observance and natural phenomena through two unpublished sources from the 15th century

Franciscans sought to return to the eremitic way of life, which was characterized by a more solitary and austere existence. The eremitic life, which emphasizes solitude and seclusion, can have a strong connection with nature. Hermits, whether living alone or in small communities, often seek out remote places in natural settings, such as deserts, forests, or mountains, where they can be close to nature and live in harmony with the natural world. Observant Franciscans' emphasis on poverty, simplicity, and connection to the natural world was a reflection of their belief that living in harmony with nature was an essential part of their spiritual practice. They saw themselves as part of a larger ecosystem and recognized the importance of caring for the earth as a way of honoring God and living out their faith. Through their life in these landscapes, the Observant Franciscans also became deeply connected to the local ecosystems and wildlife. They often worked to protect and care for the land and saw themselves as stewards of God's creation. This connection to nature was reflected in their spiritual writings and art, which often included depictions of animals and natural scenery. Through two memoirs written by Observant Franciscans - including João da Póvoa - we intend to make a qualitative analysis of the various accounts