



Parques de Sintra

# BETWEEN MNEMOSYNE AND TERPSICHORE

A guide to  
the National Palace  
of Sintra  
for critical minds

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AND  
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the National Palace  
of Sintra  
for critical minds**

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## INTRODUCTION

### The project

This guide is the result of an Erasmus+ Partnerships for Creativity project whose patrons are Mnemosyne, the titan of Greek mythology who personifies memory, and Terpsichore, one of her nine daughters and the goddess of dance and chorus. We chose to emphasise memory, since the project encourages two historic palaces to reconsider their narratives in order to create a field of common reflection with their local communities, represented here by two local schools. Moreover, dance is included in this project given that, as a form of expressing emotions and individual interpretations, it is felt to have the ability to act as a powerful means of cultural mediation. This is where Mnemosyne meets Terpsichore.





During one school year, two groups of pupils, one from the Agrupamento de Escolas Monte da Lua in Sintra and the other from the LXXXVI Liceum Ogólnokształcące im. Batalionu “Zośka” in Warsaw, created two dance performances based on their visits to the National Palace of Sintra and the Museum of King Jan III’s Palace at Wilanów, respectively. Despite the different contexts, the pupils were invited to develop their performances based on the same set of themes: memory, nature, senses, body and power. This focus on themes rather than facts aimed to create a bridge between the history of the palaces and the contemporary reality of the pupils. Accordingly, the pupils interpreted the palaces through issues that they felt directly engaged with, and the palaces placed the youths’ perspective at the centre of how their heritage was interpreted. Over several weeks, the Madrid-based contemporary dance association Meet Share Dance helped the pupils to express themselves through dance. The result went far beyond a mere show. The pupils established an emotional and critical relationship with the palaces, boosted their self-esteem and self-confidence, and broadened their horizons through cultural exchange with their European peers.





This guide is structured around eight chapters, five of which are the same themes at the heart of the pupils' reflections and which were also used to develop a digital app to tour the palaces individually – a product developed by the Portuguese company byAR. For this guide, we have added three more themes: time, education and far away. The challenge remains the same: to help visitors/readers question issues that go beyond the history of the building itself and that might connect to their own lives. It is a guide to stimulate minds and to develop critical thinking, key skills for a democratic and actively engaged society.



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## How to use this guide:

The aim of this guide is to stimulate critical thought, which is one of the key skills required in the world we live in today. It was designed to ask questions and encourage reflection. We want to talk about the history of the palace and to use heritage to better understand and help us to live in a world which is undergoing rapid change.

The guide can be read before, during and after your visit.

You can use it as an introduction to the palace and as preparation for a thought-provoking exercise during your tour. You can also use it while you are at the palace, reading parts of it while you take a small pause. Or you can read it when you arrive back home to remember what you saw while reflecting on the issues the guide raises.





If you are with someone, talk to the people around you, using the themes we suggest. If new questions arise, it is because you are making good use of this guide.

Critical thinking is also the ability to ask questions. Don't worry if there are too many questions or if you don't always find the answer. Just thinking and considering alternatives is a good exercise for your brain!

Instead of telling you about everything that can be seen in the National Palace of Sintra, we have selected some themes that are relevant to today's world but which connect us to the history of several centuries ago. These themes are time, nature, power, education, memory, body, senses and the far away. The same themes are covered by a guide to the Wilanów Palace in Poland, prepared by Polish museologists (available in English), which you can also use!

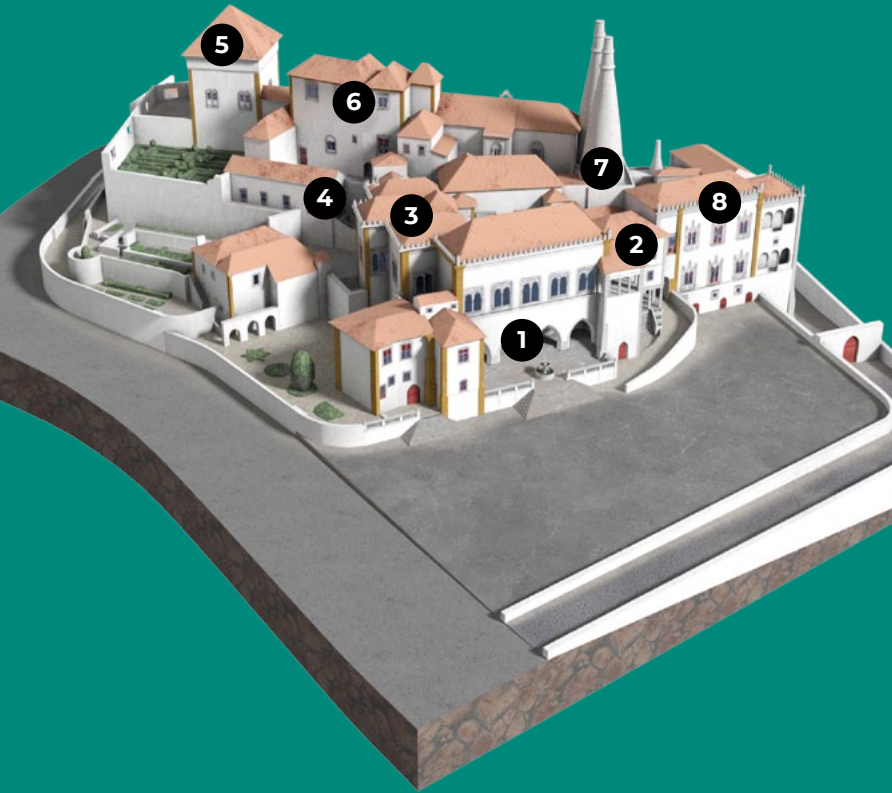
The guide will accompany you as you visit the palace with your family, friends or by yourself.

**We hope you enjoy it and don't forget  
to share your thoughts!**





## MAP



- |            |   |
|------------|---|
| #Time      | 1 |
| # Nature   | 2 |
| # Power    | 3 |
| #Education | 4 |
| # Memory   | 5 |
| # Body     | 6 |
| # Senses   | 7 |
| # Far away | 8 |



# #Time

The National Palace of Sintra embraces around a thousand years of history. A thousand years of history that has filled this unique space where the palace stands today.



Throughout history, time is often seen as a modifying agent that transforms everything in its wake. Take the Palace Loggia as an example. Dating back to the 15th century, when the king was João I (1357–1433), it is one of the palace's most important places, an exterior space where the people of Sintra would request justice, sign contracts, do business and pay their taxes. Over time, this public space became more limited in use, turning into a vestibule in the 18th and 19th centuries. The entrance following the stairs became a men's and women's dressing room, while the inner corridor, whose windows can be seen from the inside of the Loggia, became the "coat hanger corridor". Today, the Loggia is where visitors show their tickets to enter the museum.

**What about the future? Two hundred years from now, what will we find here? Will the palace still be a heritage site open to everyone? Will we still be able to visit it?**



On the other hand, time can also be seen as a stabilising agent, i.e. something that organises human activity. People needed to know when to sow, when to celebrate the different religious feasts or when, quite simply, a baby would be born. The people of Sintra also knew that the royal court would move to the town at certain times of the year, whether it was to hunt or to spend the holidays, which implied greater social and economic development. Additionally, it was the time of the year when the king and queen were within closest reach, bringing increased benefits and privileges to those who lived here. Nowadays, the peak tourism season is the time when the town is most bustling. The foreseeable return of the court to Sintra in the past or the arrival of tourists in the present therefore represent stability in the life of the local population.

The predictable nature of these more dynamic time cycles creates the sensation that we can control time. But to do that, we need to know how to measure and organise it. Marking the time and creating calendars establish a common reference point for a certain space and time period. However, time is also relative and depends on people's individual perceptions.

*"The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there."*

(from L.P.Hartley, *The Go-Between*, 1953).



In 1787, an English nobleman and his friend visited Sintra from Lisbon. They boarded their coach in the morning and took six hours to travel the 30 km to the town. They passed through various villages along the way, one of which was Porcalhota, which in Portuguese stands for a dirty person. They finally reached Sintra and visited the palace, commenting on the Loggia. The whole experience took around 12 hours. The next day, the English visitor described it in a letter that took several days to reach its destination. Now imagine the same situation today. An Englishman and his friend leave Lisbon and catch the train from Rossio Station. Along the way, it stops at several places, one of which is called Amadora, once known as Porcalhota. Forty-five minutes later, they reach Sintra and walk to the National Palace where they buy a ticket to visit the inside. They validate their tickets in the Loggia where they also take a photo which they instantly send to their friends in London with comments. The whole experience takes about an hour and twenty minutes.





Measuring time on an instrument like a clock clearly shows the difference between how long a visit would take in the past and the time it takes today. However, given that it is highly subjective, no instrument can measure how the passing of time was experienced by people in any particular era, especially considering that these visits occurred at different times, separated by different mindsets and approaches to life. Actually, the past is different from the present. But it still has a profound influence on it, as we can easily see when we look at the history of the National Palace of Sintra.

**What if King Afonso Henriques (d. 1185) hadn't conquered Lisbon to the Moors in 1147 and, consequently, Sintra hadn't been taken by the Christians?**

**What if King Dinis (1261–1325) hadn't made improvements to his palace in the 14th century?**

**What if King João I (1357–1433) hadn't ordered the construction of the palace's chimneys that are now the symbol of Sintra?**

**What if King Manuel I (1469–1521) hadn't built the Heraldic Hall, one of the palace's most surprising rooms?**

If any of these events hadn't occurred, a visit to this monument would certainly be very different.



There are various layers of history to discover at the palace. Let us multiply all the events that took place here by the different lived experiences of those who inhabited it and by the perspectives of those who visit it today: the experience of the king, who would spend a season here, the clerk, who lived here permanently, the ambassadors, who merely visited for a few days, and visitors today, who spend a few hours of their lives here. These examples clearly show how time inevitably influences how places are experienced. Countless timelines are therefore interwoven in the palace, repeating and at times ending whole cycles. Accordingly, anyone who visits the palace today, or works here, sees the result of all these interactions. Can they all be recorded?

Visiting the National Palace of Sintra is therefore an invitation to reflect critically on the way in which time fulfils its role as agent of change and stability, but also on the way in which it is experienced differently by each of us.

A vibrant tropical garden scene. In the foreground, there's a lush green lawn with scattered pink and red flowers. A tall, slender palm tree stands prominently in the center. To its left, a white building with arched windows and a tiled roof is visible. A large, ornate stone pillar is positioned near the base of the palm tree. The background is filled with dense green foliage and another palm tree. The sky is a clear, bright blue. A large, semi-transparent green circular graphic is overlaid on the right side of the image.

**# Nature**





Though an interior room, the Entrance Hall, which is the connecting point between the palace of King João I (r. 1385–1433) to the west, the palace of King Manuel I (r. 1495–1521) to the east and the kitchen to the north, stands out as one of the places in the palace where you can see various nature-related elements. **Can you find them?**

**It's easy:**

- The multiple windows linking the interior to the green hills outside show the continuity between culture and nature;
- The tiles, decorated with vine leaves and bunches of grapes, refer us to late summer and harvest time, when nature is filled with the exertions of collecting this fruit;
- The water spouts from the fountain, brought by a complex system of hydraulics, flows into a shell-shaped base, reminding us of a stream flowing into the sea;

Like an umbilical cord, for over 600 years nature has fed the palace with water, game, fruit and vegetables, and firewood to cook and heat the rooms. Its dependence on nature can be understood by looking through the windows.



Nature also functions as a symbolic language incorporated into the architecture and other objects. For example, the tree trunks in the Manueline-style windows, visible from the outside, easily remind us of the way you might draw a “family tree”; on the carved stone portal leading to the Manueline Room, the pomegranate may be a symbol of hierarchical medieval society, fertility or an evocation of eternal life. Nature therefore offers symbols to represent ideas and visions of the world.

### **Can you find any other decorative elements related to nature that also have a symbolic aspect?**

Humankind has always regarded nature as a source of all its needs. This dependence requires that the needs of human cultures are sustainable. How can different lifestyles draw us closer to or further away from nature? How can we imagine an economy where the consumption of natural resources is based more on balance than exploitation? For example, in the 15th century, King Afonso V prohibited the cutting down of fruit, cork and oak trees for firewood, out of a concern to avoid a lack of resources. Decades later, King Manuel I ordered every farmer to plant fifty fruit trees over four years to replace those that had been cut down. These concerns are evident in a document from the time of Manuel I:

*“(...) in the other woods around our palaces in this town (...) we are of the opinion that (...) no chestnut or cork oak trees should be cut down, because it pleases us that they should be protected.”*

(from Torre do Tombo National Archive,  
Chancelaria de D. Manuel, book 29, f. 64v)





Bearing in mind how our choices can affect the balance between culture and nature, we would like you to try the following activity:

1. Imagine you have travelled back to the 15th century, and you decide to organise a big banquet for your guests. Draw a table with three columns;
2. In the first column, write down the number of guests you want at the feast;
3. In the second column, write a list of the natural resources you think you will need to hold the banquet for that number of guests. Always bear in mind that, if the number of guests is higher or lower, the amount of resources will also vary proportionately. For example, for 10 people, how many wild boars will you need to hunt, how much water will you need to cook and to give to guests, and how many trees will you need to cut to heat the rooms and to cook?
4. In the third column, like Afonso V and Manuel I, note down the measures to be taken to compensate the resources used, as they need to remain available so as not to affect the daily needs of the population.

Now look at the results. What is best to ensure the balance between culture and nature? More compensatory measures or a re-calculation of your initial choices?

The image features a central Gothic archway set against a wall of intricate blue and black geometric tilework. Inside the arch, a medieval tapestry depicts a scene with several figures in period clothing. A large figure in a white and gold robe stands prominently, while others are seated or kneeling. The tapestry is framed by a decorative border. A semi-transparent blue overlay covers the bottom right portion of the image, and the text "# Power" is centered over the archway.

**# Power**



The palace is a place where the spaces, objects and rituals are interlinked with power relations in society. Take the royal apartment as an example. The Swans Hall was the palace's great ceremonial hall open to everyone; the Magpies Room was for those offered a royal audience; the Gold Chamber, where the king slept, was only open to the most privileged; and, lastly, the Wardrobe and the *Camarin* ('the small chamber') were reserved exclusively for the king and where valuable objects were kept. Incorporated into the palace built by João I in the 15th century, this apartment shows how access to the monarch was key to the hierarchical positioning of those around him or her. The closer one's physical proximity, the higher one's social status. The way a person was received and treated inside the royal palace, therefore, defined many of the privileges they could obtain. How did this dynamic work?

One of the areas in which these power relations stood out was the architecture, an aspect that is very visible in the case of the National Palace of Sintra. Looking at the typical construction of a medieval palace, mentioned in the work *Leal conselheiro, o qual fez Dom Duarte* ['The Loyal Advisor', by King Duarte], the entrance door to the great reception hall was higher and wider than the others, allowing not only more people to enter but also a broader social strata.



The Swans Hall

Ostentatious wealth and splendour were constantly on display. They were not just evident on solemn ceremonies but also at festive occasions, such as feasts and banquets. In the palace's great hall, the Swans Hall, where these events were held, the king's magnificence would be on show. On banqueting days, the table was set up in this room. However, the most important piece of furniture was the credenza, a sideboard where the finest items, such as plates, glasses and Chinese porcelain, from around the world were displayed. **Were these merely decorative?** Clearly not. Through the richness and variety of the objects displayed, the monarch showed the extent of his or her power.



Access to the smaller Magpies Room is via a smaller door, thus restricting the number of people who could enter. Those who were allowed in, normally to be received by the king, were of greater importance than those who could only enter the Swans Hall.

**In addition to rooms, objects can also be a distinguishing factor in power relations. But how?**

When the king gave someone an audience, a dais covered with a carpet was mounted in the Magpies Room and a chair placed on top of it. A canopy made of rich fabrics was then erected over it. **How did these objects demonstrate social distinction?**





The Magpies Room

Have you noticed, for example, that the dais places the king in a higher position, separating him from everyone else? The way he received someone was also relevant. There is a 16th-century document that notes how João III reacted during an audience: as the dukes entered, he would pull his bonnet backwards; for archbishops and some lesser nobles, he would only pull it partially back; for counts, he would merely place his hand on it without removing it. A certain tension was therefore created with regard to how the king would receive someone: **would he remove his bonnet or just touch it?** A simple gesture or attitude could determine the importance of the person received and even ruffle the established social hierarchy. **What about nowadays?** Opening a door for someone or addressing them formally or informally are gestures or demeanour that denote social distinction. **What similar gestures do we sometimes perform without noticing?**



The Gold Chamber

Following the Magpies Room is a naturally smaller, and therefore more private, room called the Gold Chamber. In the 16th century, this is where King Sebastião (1554–1578) slept, but it was also where he would have received more important people such as ambassadors and cardinals. At that time, the privacy of the king's apartment was different from how we imagine it today. The lord chamberlain, for example, slept beside the king's bed or next to the door to protect him during the night. Dressing the king was a ceremony that involved many people: the Wardrobe boy prepared his shirt and gown; the Keeper of the Keys brought the undergarments and socks, which were then handed to the king by the *Sumilher*; and the *Veador* (who oversaw the clerks) entered the chamber followed by an entourage of people bringing other accessories (breeches, doublet, boots, sword, belt, hat, gloves, kerchief and water to wash his hands and face) on gold platters.



The Wardrobe and *Camarim*

The Wardrobe and *Camarim* ('the small chamber') stored many valuable objects that formed the basis of the king's power. These rooms were located in a part of the palace to which only a very small group of people had access. **What objects might be considered valuable, for example, in the 15th and 16th centuries?** Besides the more obvious ones that we would consider of great material value today, such as jewels and artistic and religious objects, the Wardrobe, or its natural extension, the *Camarim*, also stored more utilitarian objects such as serving utensils, bed linen, clothes (like the Moorish costumes Manuel I lent to knights on feast days), musical instruments and even hunting objects. These rooms also housed another type of wealth – knowledge – in objects such as scientific instruments and books. **What objects do we consider valuable today and what rooms in our homes do we display them in or store them to keep them safe?**

Therefore, rooms, objects and rituals were all marks of status and privilege that revealed a person's rank in society. Social status was clearly defined and had to be evidently visible. **What about today? To what extent does this need to show differences in social rank still exist? Or, on the contrary, do you think that we are heading towards a more equal society?**



# # Education

Two rooms stand out at the National Palace of Sintra for their close association with knowledge and education: the **Camarim** ('the small chamber') and the **Galleys Room**.



Together with the Wardrobe, the *Camarim* was one of the palace's most private rooms where objects of high value were kept. It could only be entered therefore by a small group of people responsible for its care and by the king, who would retire to it. **So what would be considered a valuable object around 500 years ago?** Besides objects of high material value, such as jewels, artworks and furniture made of exotic materials in far away places, pieces linked to knowledge and education, like scientific instruments and books, were also kept in rooms with controlled access, precisely because they were deemed precious. Knowledge and education were therefore regarded as very valuable.

**But what is education and what is it for?** Besides being a process for passing on knowledge, values and rules of conduct, education also fosters an individual's core skills so that he or she can become part of and contribute actively to society. Crucial to an individual's and society's future at different times in history, the education of a prince reflected what was considered best for the realm. Let's travel back to the time of King Sebastião (1554–1578), who regularly stayed at the palace.

**What would it have been like to grow up and learn at the palace around 450 years ago?**

**What knowledge would a future king have needed for a prosperous realm?**

Some books of the time presented methods for teaching the perfect sovereign, such as *Mirrors for Princes* or writings intended specifically for a future monarch. When writing *Sentenças para a Ensinança e Doutrina do Príncipe D.*



*Sebastião [Thoughts on the Teaching and Erudition of Prince Sebastião]*, André Rodrigues de Évora used the teachings of sages, philosophers and doctors of the church to compile the principles that ought to guide the future king and ensure good governance.

Born little more than two weeks after the death of his father, Sebastião bore the responsibility of ensuring the continuation of Portugal's ruling Avis dynasty. Given this situation, providing the only heir to the Portuguese Crown with a good education so that he could learn how to exercise power was essential to safeguard the future success of the kingdom.

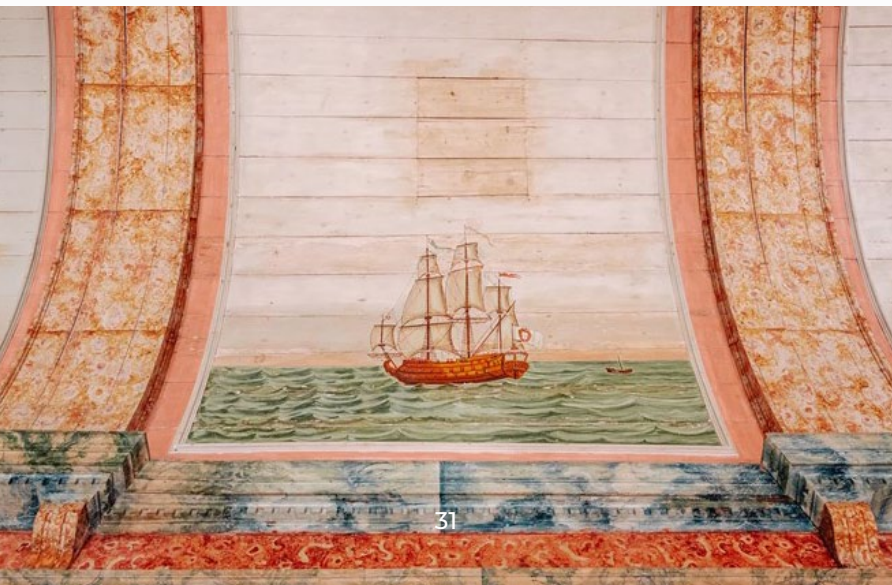
The most illustrious masters were chosen. Often, however, he would also receive lessons with other young nobles who, between the ages of 8 and 10, would leave their parents' home to serve the king and learn at court. It was thought to be healthy to foster competition between students to achieve better results.

**What ought a student be taught at that time?  
What would someone need to learn in order to  
govern perfectly?**



A prince like Sebastião would follow the method of education used at that time, which was split into two major components: theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge. The former was based on the liberal arts and divided into two categories (the *trivium*, which included logic/dialectics, grammar and rhetoric, and the *quadrivium*, comprising arithmetic, music, geometry and astronomy). The latter consisted not only of physical education (like horse-riding, dancing and swordsmanship) but also the behaviour expected of a king as a model for his subjects.

The prince was also supposed to be an example of moderation and balance, both in body and mind. The future king ought therefore to embody the four cardinal virtues: justice, strength, prudence and temperance. For example, during a banquet, he should show moderation, i.e. temperance, since that would be a sign of his ability to take prudent and balanced political decisions. From a young age, he was taught to control his impulses and avoid vices. Education was therefore a behind-the-scenes effort to prepare the prince for his future role as ruler. This learning was achieved by using examples taken from Antiquity and Christianity.





The *Camarim* is currently home to several objects that are characteristic of this: a tapestry showing the Roman general Julius Caesar being warned by a clairvoyant of the perils of his future as ruler, emphasising the need for prudence; Schissler's 16th-century celestial globe representing the various constellations, knowledge of which would be crucial for the education of any young noble or a future navigator.

The education given to the prince in the palace was therefore very focused on the practical application of theoretical knowledge. Knowledge of rhetoric was important for the monarch to be able to express himself clearly to his subjects. What about today? Is the art of clearly expressing and articulating ideas in public still important? If so, does it only apply to those in positions of power or other areas of professional activity too? How can theoretical knowledge help with day-to-day practical needs? Compared to what you are studying, what areas of knowledge do you think are central to education? Which do you think are no longer relevant?







Renaissance education considered dialogue with the masters to be one of the main ways of acquiring and producing knowledge, as well as developing a critical mind. Major 16th-century humanists like Francisco de Holanda (1517–1585) and Garcia de Orta (1501–1568) wrote their treatises in the form of a dialogue with questions and answers. Father Amador Rebelo, Prince Sebastião’s master of writing, also noted that it was common for the king to use a “very spacious room with many windows with a wide and joyful view” for “taking a nap” and to which he “called his masters to talk and practice with them”. This type of learning was conducted in places like the gallery, which might correspond to the current Galleys Room at the National Palace of Sintra. Today, education is not the sole preserve of the elites and it no longer takes place in restricted environments.

**What then are the places and ways we have to explore our critical thinking?**

The image shows a highly detailed, ornate ceiling, likely from a historical building. The ceiling is composed of a grid of octagonal panels. Each panel is filled with intricate, golden scrollwork and floral patterns on a dark background. The panels are separated by thin, light-colored lines. In the center of the ceiling, there is a prominent crest or coat of arms, featuring a shield with various symbols, surrounded by decorative flourishes. The overall appearance is one of grandeur and historical significance. The text "# Memory" is overlaid on the center of the image in a bold, white, sans-serif font. A large, semi-transparent, golden circular shape is visible in the bottom right corner, partially overlapping the ceiling pattern.

**# Memory**



Preserving memory is the key to avoiding forgetfulness. However, throughout history, this memory has been selected according to what each era was intended to represent. The Blazons Hall, built in 1516–1518 by order of Manuel I, is one of the most representative rooms in terms of valuing memory in the National Palace of Sintra. **But what facts or people are actually worthy of being represented and thus eternalised?**

When you look at this room's dome ceiling, you realise whose memory it was designed to preserve: in addition to the coats of arms of Manuel I and the children from his second marriage, represented here are the realm's 72 most important families, a number of biblical significance. At the base of the dome, on the cove above the tiles, the importance of these families is reinforced by the following inscription:



*“Pois com esforços leais serviços foram  
ganhadas com estas e outras tais  
devem se ser conservadas”*

[“Through the loyal services rendered  
shall these and others be remembered”].

**But what makes these noble families represented here stand out from others? What are the differences between who was deemed a hero 500 years ago and who is deemed a hero today?**

To understand how the heroic deeds of yesteryear were different from what we consider them to be today, we challenge you to find the following coats of arms on the ceiling:

- King Manuel I;
- “Castro” family (with six circles);
- “Pereira” family;
- “Gama” family;
- “Almeida” family.

Each of these represents a family lineage in which someone can be identified who, at a certain time, was deemed a hero. **Do you know any of these names? Do you know what deeds made them stand out in the history of Portugal?**



## MANUEL I, king of Portugal

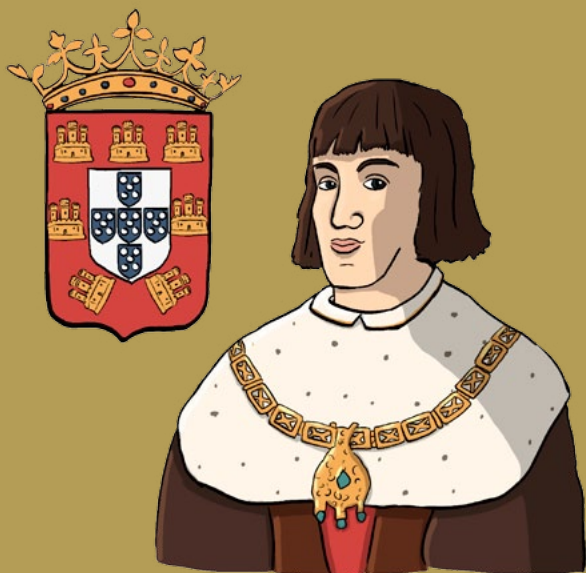
(1469–1521)

### Who was he?

One of the richest and most powerful kings in Europe at a time when Portugal had an empire that stretched across four continents.

### Why does he stand out in history?

Manuel I ensured the Portuguese Crown maintained a monopoly over the trade in pepper, a much sought after spice that was only produced in Asia. His wealth funded the construction of buildings as iconic as the Tower of Belém and the Monastery of Jerónimos in Lisbon. He also supported the painters, writers and humanists of the era, making reforms that modernised the realm's administrative and legal systems. However, his reign was also marked by the decision to force Portuguese Jews to convert to Christianity on threat of expulsion (1496).





**“Castro” family  
(coat of arms with six circles)  
– INÊS DE CASTRO**

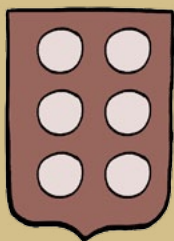
(c. 1320–1355)

**Who was she?**

A Galician lady who came to Portugal in the entourage of Princess Constança, the Castillian fiancée of the heir to the Portuguese throne, Prince Pedro, with whom she became romantically involved.

**Why does she stand out in history?**

This illicit relationship placed the diplomatic agreement between Portugal and Castille at risk. Inês was sentenced to death and her execution ordered by Pedro's father, King Afonso IV, in 1355. Years later, when he became king, Pedro declared Inês queen of Portugal.





## **“Pereira” family** **– NUNO ÁLVARES PEREIRA**

(1360–1431)

### **Who was he?**

Constable of the Realm, this Portuguese soldier was a great strategist under King João I.

### **Why does he stand out in history?**

He defeated the Castillian troops at the Battle of Aljubarrota in 1385, despite a smaller army. He imposed his military authority at the Cortes in Coimbra in 1385 to ensure João I was chosen as king. For his deeds, he was rewarded with various lands by the king and became the realm’s biggest landowner. After his wife died, he founded the Convent of Carmo in Lisbon, which he retired to as a monk, abdicating all of his worldly possessions.





## VASCO DA GAMA

(1469–1524)

### Who was he?

He was Admiral of India and commanded the first fleet to sail from Europe to Asia in 1497–1498.

### Why does he stand out in history?

He was a great navigator who stood out for his knowledge of mathematics, navigation and astronomy. The maritime link between the two continents was decisive for the process of globalisation, establishing an unprecedented intercultural dialogue. Nevertheless, Gama resorted to violence against the Muslims in Asia to achieve his aims.







## **“Almeida” family** **– LEONOR DE ALMEIDA**

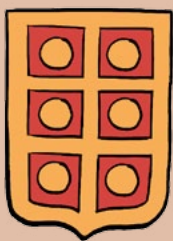
(1750–1839)

### **Who was she?**

The 4th Marquise of Alorna. She grew up incarcerated in the Convent of Chelas after her family was accused of participating in an attempted coup against King José I, ruler of Portugal from 1750 to 1777.

### **Why does she stand out in history?**

She was an important figure in the arts and culture of the time as a painter and poet. She also promoted education for the least privileged in society. She was heavily influenced by Enlightenment values. Benefitting from her wealth and privileges as a noble, she married one of Queen Maria I's highest officials, allowing her to travel around Europe.





These people are considered Portuguese heroes today. However, they were responsible for both good and bad deeds.

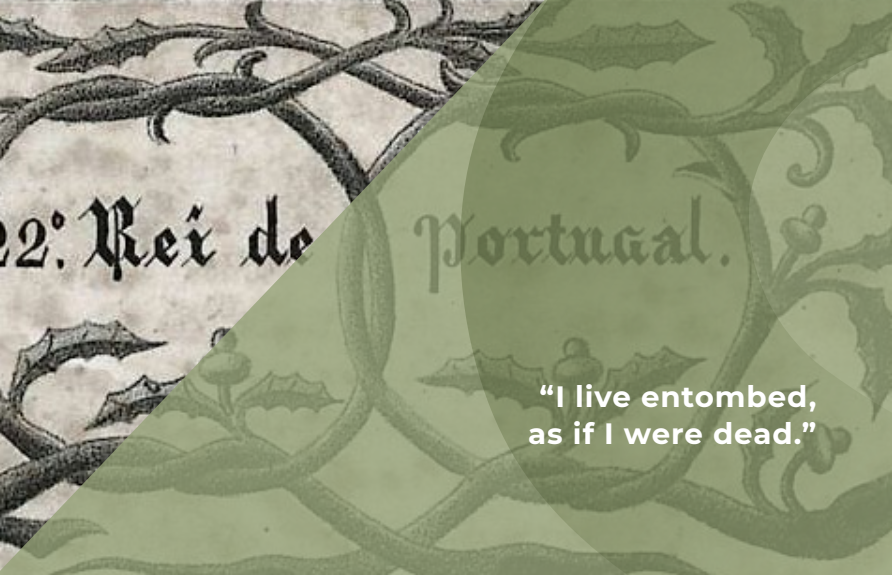
Would their good deeds be enough to define them as heroes today?

What defines a hero?

How can the era and circumstances create or destroy the image of someone we consider to be a hero?



# # Body



"I live entombed,  
as if I were dead."



**King Afonso VI** (1643–1683) lived the last nine years of his life incarcerated in a room at the National Palace of Sintra. Succeeding his father, João IV (1604–1656), it was during his reign that Portugal's independence from the Hispanic Monarchy was consolidated, a fact which later earned him the epithet “the Victorious”. How then did he end his days in captivity, allowed only to walk from his room to the palace chapel? He was imprisoned in a room, by his condition and inside his own body.



He was not born to be king and was not prepared to be one. Around the age of three or four, Afonso caught a “malignant fever” that left his entire right side largely incapacitated. Misfortune followed him. Later, as a young man, a hunting accident left him infertile, further limiting his future as a king and progenitor, as he was unable to guarantee the continuity of the Braganza lineage.

His older brother, Teodósio (1634–1653), died unexpectedly at 19, after which the succession passed to Afonso, who, from one moment to the next, was forced to accept a series of rules that becoming king imposed on his private life. Though he was not fit to rule, he was practically obliged to accept.



The king's role was to be a vehicle for political and social interests, which were often contrary to his own personal wishes. The monarch was the personification of his kingdom, so everything that happened to him had direct repercussions on the realm and the people who governed.

The atmosphere around him was also not deemed very beneficial. One of his closest friends was António Conti, a merchant's son, who was given the position of "Keeper of the Keys", allowing him the privilege of free access to the Ribeira Palace in Lisbon and to enter highly restricted places. This was greatly resented by the high nobility. Furthermore, Conti brought women to the palace to sleep with Portugal's future king and also helped him during his nocturnal wanderings through the streets of Lisbon, during which there was always trouble. The king's mother, Queen Luísa de Gusmão, was forced to extend her regency for longer due to the many doubts as to her oldest son's ability to rule. Why couldn't the future king choose his own friends without most of the court interfering?

Despite all the doubts and rumours about this controversial figure, he was acclaimed king in 1657. Shortly afterwards he was forced to marry. Not out of love or to the woman of his choice but due to an agreement with another kingdom in order to reconcile common interests. The wife chosen for him was the French princess Maria-Francisca-Isabel d'Aumale of Savoy. Portugal's alliance with France needed to be consolidated as a useful ally against the Hispanic Monarchy, with whom Portugal was still at war, after independence had been restored in 1640. The obligation to ensure children from this union was also essential, implying an uncomfortable intimacy between two people who had possibly only met for the first time on the day of their wedding and who were expected to share the same bed



and have intimate relations to further the interests of both kingdoms.

As António de Sousa e Macedo, the king's favourite, later stated in connection with Afonso's confinement in the National Palace of Sintra, "Princes are unfortunate in that they may not love who they wish like other men..."

Against his will, the king was pressured to visit the queen in her apartments and, according to their contract, procreate with her. The days went by and Afonso VI's visits to the queen's quarters grew more infrequent until they finally ceased altogether, since he knew he was unable to consummate the marriage. After a year, the queen retired to a convent and requested the Pope to annul the marriage.

A chorus of voices rose up in criticism of Afonso. He was put on trial and his body and sexual life were judged by various witnesses: his doctor attested to his sexual incapacity; women with whom the king had had affairs recounted his failed attempts at intercourse; and the people closest to him revealed the anguish of a man unable to fulfill his obligations. The king was deemed incapable and his younger brother, Pedro, was declared *curador do Rei e governador dos reinos* [King's administrator and governor of the realms], later marrying his brother's former wife. Afonso VI was a king without power, left unable to even decide the fate of his own body. He would remain incarcerated to the end of his days: first on Terceira island in the Azores before a few rooms in the Palace of Sintra became his final home.

Unlike the rest of the court, which was itinerant and constantly moving between the various palaces of the realm, Afonso was now confined to his rooms with an uncontrollable body and under permanent observation.



His movements were restricted to his bed chamber and the tribune where he attended mass, kept out of sight of other people, in sharp contrast to a king's assumed public role.

Ironically, even after his death, his body would be used in the interests of the kingdom. His funeral ceremonies were held in the same palace where he was held captive, and his body was exhibited with all of the pomp deserving of a true king, since his brother would only be crowned Pedro II after his death.

**What do you think of Afonso VI's fate? What was he feeling when he said "I live entombed, as if I were dead"? How would you feel if you were constantly watched and had no privacy, not even in your own bedroom?**

**Who, after all, did the king's body belong to?**

**How might our use of social media nowadays be limiting or invading our privacy again? What if the internet had existed in Afonso VI's time and his situation had been published online? Would it have amplified his public exposure and public humiliation or aroused a wave of solidarity?**

**Where is the line drawn between public and private, between what can (and what should not) be exposed on social media?**





# Senses





The senses are the means by which human beings perceive and define the reality around them. However, the way we sense the world around us depends on the historical period and the culture. The feeling we have today when we enter the National Palace of Sintra's kitchen is of a different reality to that of the past. Even so, via the senses we can try to recreate what life used to be like and to evoke other realities.

Sheltered by its two monumental chimneys (roughly 33 metres high), the kitchen was built in the 15th century during the reign of João I (r. 1385–1433) and was one of the busiest places in the palace during banquets. There are various explanations for the shape and size of the chimneys, which still noticeably mark Sintra's landscape today: their conical shape provides greater wind resistance; their greater height than the rest of the building prevents smells and smoke entering through the windows in other parts of the palace; and they exhibit the king's power, demonstrating the capacity to house and feed many people.



When we visit the palace kitchen today, therefore, and find a room with no food, people, utensils or the natural resources used to prepare the countless dishes served at banquets, to what extent can the experience of what we have read, seen and lived fill the gaps?

The challenge is to do precisely that: to build a step-by-step mental image using the following instructions of what life could have been like in a kitchen like this one around six hundred years ago. **Can you imagine it or even draw it on paper?**

1. It was common at that time for people to sleep where they worked. What would the kitchen have been like early in the morning before the daily hubbub began when the meals were prepared? And at the end of the day when it was time to rest?
2. Everyone in the kitchen had their own job and there was a hierarchy within this circle of people. What jobs would have been done here?



### 3. Using your five senses, what do you imagine it would have been like in the kitchen on the day of a banquet in the 15th century?

- a. Beginning with your most immediate sense – **sight** – what objects are needed to perform these tasks? Where would they be located? And the chimneys? Would they be as white and clean as today? How many busy people would be moving around?
- b. As far as **smell** is concerned, besides smoke, food, spices and the smell of the people themselves, what else might you smell in this kitchen during João I's reign?
- c. A sense associated with smell is **taste**. Amid so many foods and utensils to prepare them with, what flavours would have mixed here? Many dishes were both sweet and savoury at the same time, like a dessert called *Manjar Branco*, a kind of blancmange whose ingredients included shredded chicken, rice flour, sugar and eggs. How do your taste buds react to what you have just read?
- d. If you hum in the kitchen, you'll certainly notice that the **sound** reverberates in a very particular way – with an echo. Prick up your ears and imagine what sounds once echoed here. Close your eyes and imagine what the crackling of firewood, handling of pots and pans, people's voices and even running water would have sounded like.
- e. Finally, we cannot forget **touch** for the huge diversity of textures. What objects or foods would you like to touch? What sensations might you feel when putting your hand under the water or approaching the wood-fired oven? Or even shredding the chicken to make *Manjar Branco*?



Now that you have recreated on paper or in your imagination what a day in the kitchen of the palace in the 15th century might have been like, the challenge is to think about the following: **could the images and sensations we know today, many possibly influenced by the films we watch or the books we read, recreate the reality of life six hundred years ago?**

When we think about the known world six centuries ago, we quickly realise that we now have access to far more information than our ancestors. Whereas today we can visit a street anywhere in the world virtually in a matter of seconds, in the 15th century many people never left their home village. The unknown world was far larger in the past than it is today.

**Is our imagination more limited?**

**Can we imagine a reality that is different from the one we know?**

**How, in fact, can we imagine what the world was like in the past without being influenced by what we know today?**



# **Far Away**



In a palace, you are surrounded by many things: beautiful things, expensive things and things from very, very far away. The objects in the Manueline Room testify to that. The luxurious chandelier is from Venice, some of the porcelain is from Asia and the furniture was made with tropical wood from Brazil and Africa. **Human beings have an attraction for sophisticated objects that are hard to obtain. The harder they are to get, the more we want them! Where does this need come from?** What risks are involved in getting them? How far are these risks justified, bearing in mind the final benefits?



Human attraction to rare objects and products led to huge efforts being expended in the past to obtain them. However, only a small section of the population had the means to do so. During the 15th century, the kings of Portugal invested in maritime exploration of the African coast in the hope of finding a direct route to the spice islands. At this time, pepper, cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg and cloves were luxuries that the rich used in large quantities. From 1497–1498, the discovery of this route, along which these goods began to be imported, brought the Portuguese crown great profits, allowing King Manuel I to build great monuments, such as the Monastery of Jerónimos in Lisbon, or undertake major building work on the Palace of Sintra, namely the addition of new apartments. The Manueline Room is an excellent example. Originally, it was the Great Hall of one of these new apartments, and it was designed to receive large number of courtiers. In the 19th century, the palace ceased to be a centre of political power and the hall was divided into small rooms to house King Luís I (1838–1889). Later, these divisions were removed to rebuild the hall from Manuel I's time, then regarded as the golden age of the Portuguese Empire when all kinds of rare goods arrived in Europe on Portuguese ships.

Many of the products that were rare in the past have become common features of our daily lives. Pepper is an essential condiment in our food, and cinnamon is widely used in traditional desserts. Similarly, many of the objects we see around the palace were rare and extremely expensive when they were made, but today could be produced much more cheaply. Porcelain, which was once only made in China, is available everywhere today, and glass, then characteristic of Venetian culture, can be made to very high quality in countless factories around the globe. While a product from China in the 16th century was rare and expensive, nowadays it is common and often reasonably priced.





**What other products are there that were only produced in distant and hard to find places but which are now part of our culture?**

**Can you imagine life without things like cocoa (used to make chocolate) or coffee, which in the Middle Ages were completely unknown in Europe?**

In parallel, the very idea of remoteness can be looked at in spatial, temporal and cultural terms. Whereas 200 years ago a product might have been specific to a certain culture and considered exotic elsewhere, today its use has become commonplace everywhere. Today, sushi, originally from Japan, is common almost everywhere in the world.

The global marketplace has accelerated cultural interconnection, refuting the idea of an authentic, unadulterated culture. What would Italian pizza be without tomatoes originally from South America? What would traditional Portuguese desserts be without cinnamon from Asia? The components of any culture are the product of a long process of exchange between different peoples that have influenced each other to a greater or lesser extent.

The furniture on display in the Manueline Room is testimony to these processes of exchange. Today, the decorative forms are a very sophisticated and technically adept example of 17th and 18th-century Portuguese cabinetmaking, but they were all made from tropical wood. The twisted effect of the legs of the pieces and the “ripple” mouldings around the drawers were only possible due to the incredible density of the wood used. The quality of the material together with the particular decorative effects created a special taste in the 17th century for this type of furniture, whose raw material

was hard to obtain and was chiefly used in shipbuilding. However, the wood's physical properties and diverse applications stimulated greater demand, increasing tropical wood imports into Europe.

**But what is the true impact of our consumer habits?**

There are positive and negative aspects, both at the environmental and social and human level.

Environmentally, we can point to the example of tropical wood. Its high density and strength means it is more durable than other types of wood. The potential of its physical properties also boosted the creative and artistic capacity of the carpenters who specialised in working with this type of material, contributing to greater diversity in luxury furniture. However, it is evident today that its greater consumption contributed decisively to the deforestation of large areas of Latin America, Africa and Asia.





In social and human terms, consumption of products from distant regions has always had a negative, at times invisible, impact. As much in the past as in the present, consumption of goods from remote places frequently depended on the use of forced labour, including enslaved people. The consumption of tropical wood in the 17th century or seafood from the western Pacific today are an example of this. On the other hand, there are also benefits from the interest in products from far away. For example, cloves, which were used to soothe toothache, or pineapple and turmeric, used as anti-inflammatories, allowed advances in medical knowledge and practices. Simultaneously, the journeys themselves contributed to scientific knowledge on human needs. Whereas in the past the long journeys in uncharted seas revealed that the lack of fresh food caused major health problems, such as scurvy, today we are presented with the unknown in space, where the lack of gravity leads to muscle loss in astronauts. Voyages and distance are therefore an opportunity for scientific progress.

**But are the benefits sufficient to compensate the harsh ecological and social impacts? What do you think?**

**What is the impact of everything we consume today? How was the furniture we have at home made? What is the impact of the way it is made and shipped?**

With the current tendency towards the creation of a “global village”, we increasingly depend on products from far away places to feed our growing consumption of these goods. However, as we progress along this path, we need to be aware of the impact the whole process has had on the environment, society and human rights.



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