

ROTA
LITERÁRIA
do ALGARVE

S. BARTOLOMEU DE MESSINES





S. BARTOLOMEU DE MESSINES LITERARY WALK

Useful information

Average length of the walk: 2h

Approximate distance: 1.4 km

Level of difficulty: easy

Type of route: linear

Starting point: House where João de Deus was born



Stopping points

1

House where João de Deus was born

2

Parish church

3

House-Museum of João de Deus

4

Old town

5

Statue: Monument to João de Deus

6

João de Deus nursery school

7

Penedo Grande hill

S. BARTOLOMEU DE MESSINES ITINERARY MAP

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- 1 *House where João de Deus was born*
 - 2 *Parish church*
 - 3 *House-Museum of João de Deus*
 - 4 *Old town*
 - 5 *Statue: Monument to João de Deus*
 - 6 *João de Deus nursery school*
 - 7 *Penedo Grande hill*



São Bartolomeu
de Messines

6

7

1

3

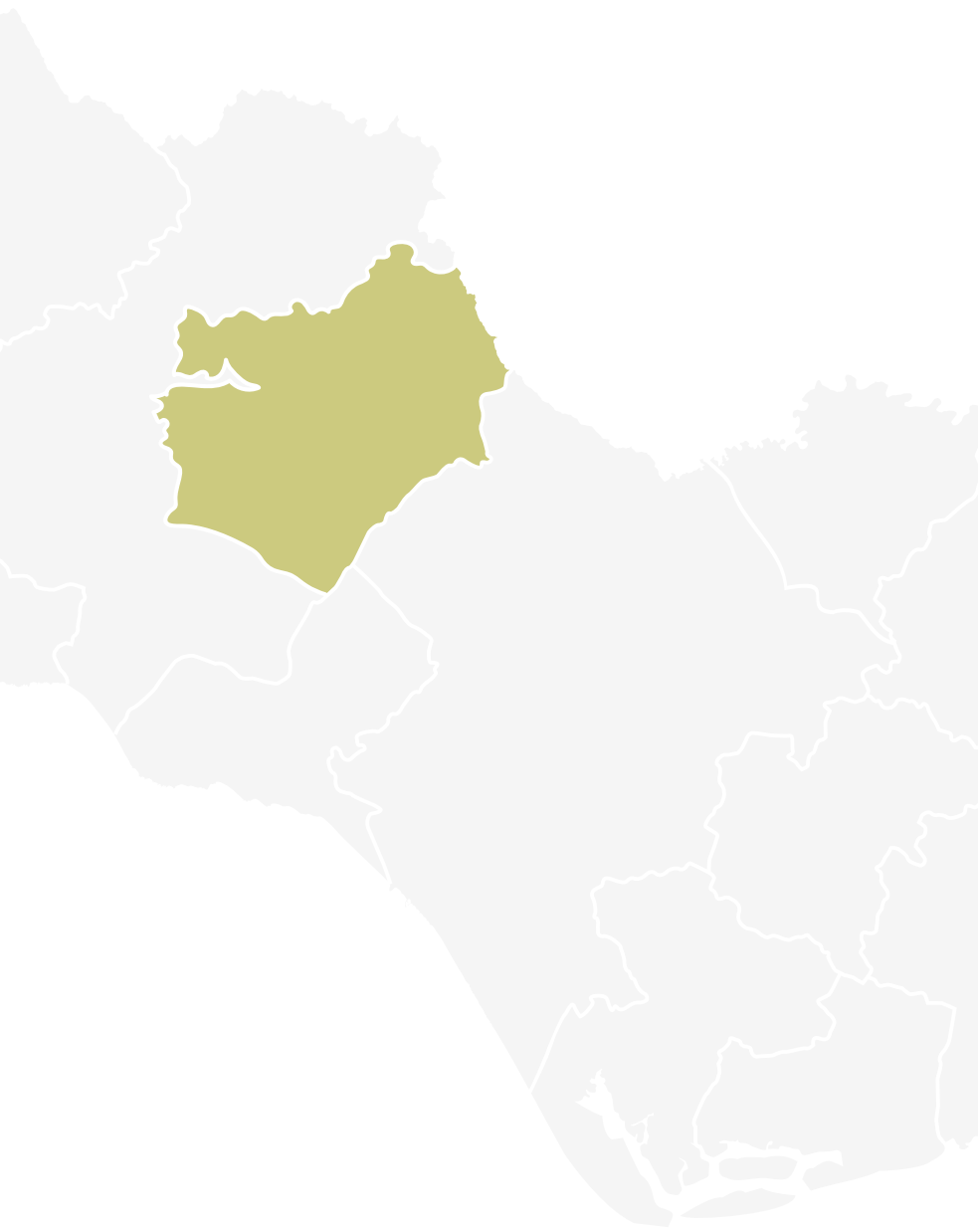
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INTRODUCTION

THE VILLAGE AND THE ORIGIN OF ITS NAME





You are in São Bartolomeu de Messines, which has been classified as a *vila*, or town, since 1973, in the municipality of Silves. The town stretches along a fertile valley, protected to the north by the Penedo Grande, where the *serras* of Monchique and Caldeirão meet, and on the border between the *barrocal*¹ and the hills of the Algarve. The parish has around 8500 inhabitants, of whom 2500 live in this small town (Population census 2011).

From a brief historical review of the town, we know ancient traces of human presence have been identified, from the Palaeolithic to the Iron Age (with epigraphic

stelae in the enigmatic Writing of the Southwest); a Roman settlement (*Villa Romana de Corte*) and, later, an Arab settlement, called *Mussiene*, whose records date from the times of the first conquest of the city of Silves by the Christians, in 1189.

As for the urban settlement we see today, it was gradually built up after the foundation of the Parish Church (the second stopping point of this tour) in the 16th century, due to the abundant presence of water resources and also to the fact that this is an important crossing point of roads, to the north, south, east and west, which made it easier to cross the rugged Algarve hills

1. The *barrocal* is the name given to the inland area that lies between the Algarvian coast and the hills to the north.

towards the Alentejo, and vice versa (Cabrita, 2019: 31).

This Algarvian parish has always stood out, as one of the most economically prosperous (Cabrita, 2019: 42).

However, the first half of the 19th century was turbulent here, as it was throughout the whole country, as a result of the bloody Civil War between 1828 and 1834. The conflict, led by the brothers D. Pedro and D. Miguel, opposed liberals and absolutists and brought horror and grief to São Bartolomeu de Messines. However, this was also an opportunity for rapid economic growth for some *Messinenses* (people from Messines), as was the case of the parents of the poet-educator João de Deus, whose poems will accompany us on this tour.

Currently, the local population lives mostly from trade and agriculture (especially citrus fruits), but there

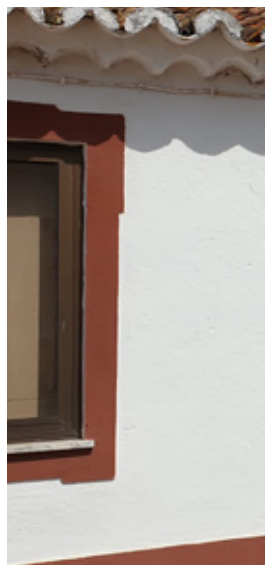
is also some local industry, namely carob crushing. In a not-too-distant past, almonds and figs also took the name of this town across borders, as two important exporting companies were located here. The cork industry also deserves to be mentioned in São Bartolomeu de Messines, as well as the export of *grés*, the red sandstone of the region, which can be seen in the columns and forecourt of the Parish Church.

As already mentioned, it was in this village that João de Deus was born (São Bartolomeu de Messines, 8 March 1830 - Lisbon, 11 January 1896); one of the most beloved personalities of the Portuguese, who made education the driving force of his passion. He proved to be one of the most celebrated national pedagogues when he published, in 1877,² the *Maternal Booklet or the Art of Reading* and, in 1879, *Bases for Writing*.

2. It was actually published in 1877, but with the date of 1876.



Photo 1: Largo João de Deus, no. 10.



In addition to this extraordinary achievement in the pedagogical context of learning to read and write, João de Deus was a poet and preacher, journalist, designer, musician, lawyer and member of parliament for Silves.

It was around this figure and his poetry that we built this walk, which takes you through the places associated with João de Deus and also remembers some moments in the history of this town.

We will also recall the literary controversy that animated the country in the 1860s: the Coimbra Question or the Question of Good Sense and Good Taste.




Photo 2: The house where João de Deus was born.

*To start the walk,
use the Church
façade as a point
of reference.*

When you get there, facing the façade, go up, to the left, into *Rua Visconde de Messines*. Then, turn left again towards *Largo João de Deus* (Photo 1). Number 10 on this square is the house where João de Deus was born (Photo 2). This is the first stopping point of our tour.

1

*House where João de
Deus was born (Largo
João de Deus, no. 10)*



João de Deus is often presented as the poet in praise of love, women and children, devotion to God and the simple and beautiful things in life (Balsa, s.d.: 1-2); the poet of “simple and universal images and metaphors (flower, bird, sky, fountain, wind, star, perfume cloud, angel)” (Laranjeira, 2001: 382-383) and a perfectionist in the art of poetry.

However, this passionate man – who made poetry and the struggle for literacy the great projects of his life – was also blessed with a perceptive sense of humour that stood out in several episodes of his life and also in his literary works.

For this reason, and because we are here in front of the house where the educator was born, and where he certainly celebrated some of his birthdays, we chose the poem “Birthday” as a first reading:

Birthday *(to Zeferino Brandão)*

So you fell into the disgrace
Of becoming on Thursday
Twenty-six years old! What a fool!
If they could be undone...
But gaining them does not become
Whoever has any nous.

I don't know who said to me
That they committed the same folly
Here the year before...
Now the next approaches, I bet,
As he has had a taste,
Won't he do the same? Poor thing!

Don't do it; because what do the years
Bring us? Tricks
That make folk old:
Do something else; for, in brief
Not doing anything,
I also don't advise it.

But years, don't fall for it!
See that folk begin
By sometimes fooling around,
But later it becomes a habit,
Now without a motive,
And they have birthdays whether they want to or not!

João de Deus ([1893] 2002: 129)



After this note of good humour and fine irony, we should recall that João de Deus (full name: João de Deus Nogueira Ramos) was the fifth of seven children of the merchant couple Pedro José Ramos and Isabel Gertrudes.

A good friend and admirer of the poet, Teófilo Braga (1843-1924), tells us that from his parents João de Deus “inherited the unwavering austerity of character and firmness in his ideals and [...] that unfathomable kindness that, as revealed in his expression, he felt for all human pain, and the passive conformity in the face of the fatality of things” (1905a: 7).

In addition to the traits pointed out by Teófilo Braga, João de Deus has been described as a generous and good man (Magalhães, 1995: 8), free, humble and with a deep feeling of brotherhood and love for his fellow men (Deus, 1979: 4, 6). Eugénio de Castro (1869-1944) - also a writer and the author of a book about João de

Deus - presents him as humorous and serenely heroic, a great and incomparable soul who “knew how to show his dignity as a man and as an artist in the pure realms of work, silence and meditation.” (Castro, 1906: 10).

Regarding the good-humoured personality of the author of the *Maternal Booklet*, we recall an episode recounted by Teófilo Braga. The Azorean author and politician tells us that one day, when asked for a drawing of a crucifix, João de Deus drew just that and not the figure of Christ. Then, when asked to include the figure of Christ, João de Deus smiled and wrote at the bottom of the drawing: “*Non est hic. Surrexit.*” (He is not here. He has risen.) (1905a: 6).

Still on the subject of two of the traits that most characterized him throughout his life: those of detachment from material goods and immense generosity, we recall a couple more biographical anecdotes.



The first happened after the publication of the *Maternal Booklet*, when the publishing house sent an employee to deliver “a bag of gold coins” to João de Deus. The pedagogue’s reaction was to dump the contents of the bag “on the table where he worked and [to say] kindly to the employee, naturally and as if it were something worthless: ‘Help yourself!’” (Deus, 1979: 9).

The second is told by Eugénio de Castro, and concerns the absence of João de Deus at a meeting scheduled at the *Brasileira* café and tobacconist’s in Lisbon. When asked about the reason for his

absence, João de Deus replied that that afternoon, a poor man had asked him for boots to go to his daughter’s wedding and João de Deus gave him the first ones he found.

However, at dusk, when he was getting ready to leave, he found that he had no others and, as he himself concluded, he “could not appear on the street in slippers” (*in* Nunes & Bento, 1996: 31).



Whilst lulled by his generous and fraternal personality, we now invite you to read one of his most beautiful poems: “Charity”.

Charity

I could speak any language
Of people and of angels;
But if I had no charity,
It would be no more than clanging metal,
From a vain ringing bell.

I could have the gift of prophecy,
Knowing all there was to know,
Having faith able to move mountains;
But if I had no charity,
It would be worth nothing!

I could spend a fortune
For the good of the unfortunate,
Let them throw me alive into flames;
But if I had no charity,
It would be no use to me.

Charity is docile, it is benevolent,
Has never been envious,
Never advances recklessly,
Is never boastful!

It is not ambitious; it doesn't work
For its own advantage; it does not get
irritated;
It never suspects malice!

It never flees when it sees injustice;
It rejoices in the truth!

It tolerates all! In all it believes and hopes!
In sum, it suffers all!

João de Deus ([1893] 2002: 200)

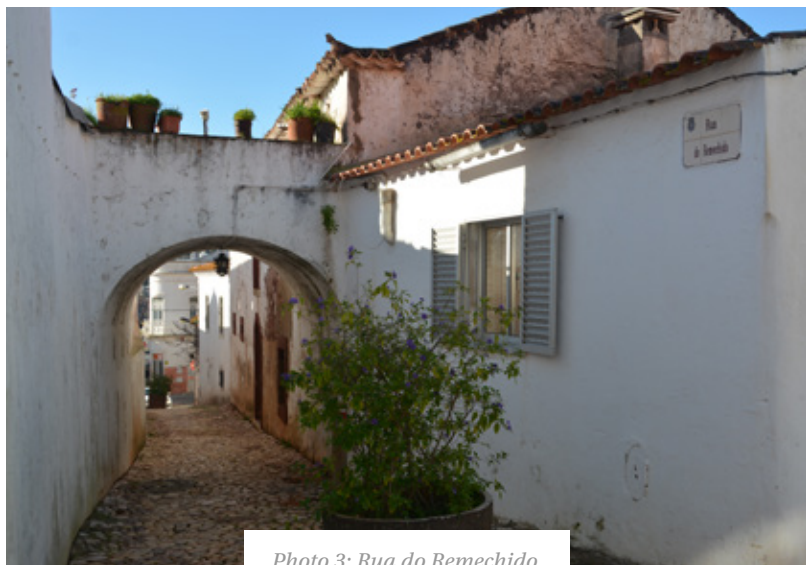


Photo 3: Rua do Remechido.

Continue the walk.

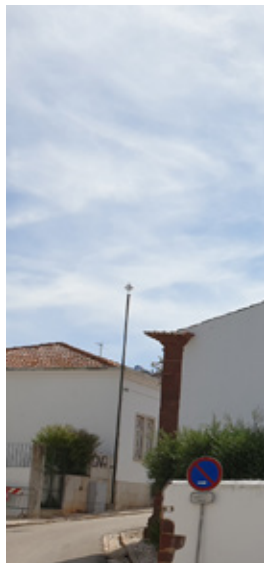
Now head back to the Parish Church, but this time go down the steps and into *Rua do Remechido*³ (the street with the arch) (Photo 3).

3. Nowadays this is written as *Remexido*, but we opted to leave it as it is seen in the street name sign.

Continue the walk.

At the bottom of this street, in the last house on the right, lived one of the most controversial figures on the stage of the Liberal Struggles: José Joaquim de Sousa Reis (1797-1838), known as the *Remexido*, a supporter of D. Miguel's cause and who, at that time, contributed to São Bartolomeu de Messines gaining national prominence (Cabrita, 2005: 32).

When you get here, turn left and walk to the Parish Church.



2

Parish church

The church (Photo 4) dates from the first quarter of the 16th century. It was built during the period of Manueline influence (examples of which are the naves and side chapels), but had some additions in the 18th century.



Photo 4: The Parish Church.

Among these, we should note the beautiful Baroque façade of great scenic effect, the gilded altars, the pulpit and the liturgical services table in the sacristy.

The naves were perhaps designed by Diogo de Boitaca (1460-1527), the author of the first outlines of the Jerónimos Monastery in Lisbon, and the Convento de Jesus, in Setúbal, and whose passage through the Algarve region is documented (Cabrita, 2019: 32).

In any case, these works were carried out in the golden era of the Algarve, when the development of trade and African markets brought enormous wealth and importance to this region (Cabrita, 2016: 30, 32).

It was in this church of singular beauty, with its contrasting whitewash of lime and the red sandstone of the region, its three naves and unusual six spans, that João de Deus was baptized on March 16, 1830.

At this stopping point, we offer you the poem “Christ”,⁴ in which the author expresses his faith and his love for the son of God. Many of his poems attest to the fact that João de Deus was a man of transcendent faith, but we have selected this particular one because it truly reflects the force of his love for the divine.



4. In some Editions, for example the Europa-América edition, this poem was published with the name ‘Crucifix’.

5. In Portuguese, the word for ‘sky’ (céu) also means ‘heaven’.

Christ

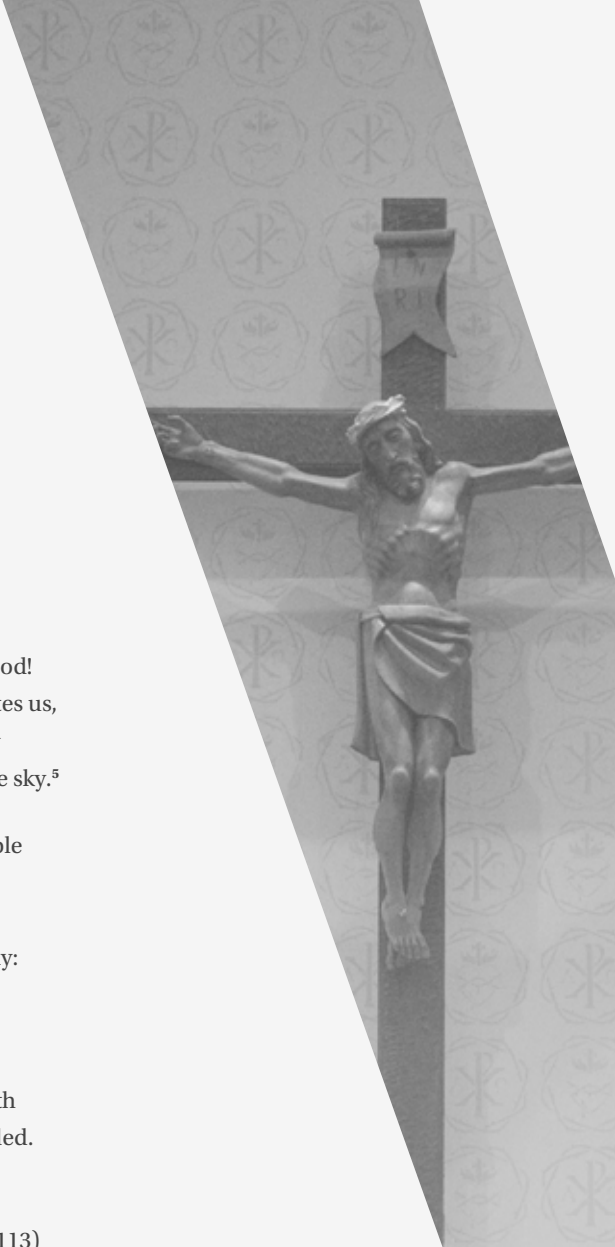
Mother, who is it that
Is nailed on that cross?
– That, son, is Jesus...
It is his holy image!

And who is Jesus? – He is God!
And who is God? – He creates us,
He sends us the light of day
And made the earth and the sky.⁵

And He came to teach people
That we are all brothers,
And we should join hands
One with another fraternally:

All love, all kindness!
And did He die? – To show
The people that for the Truth
You must let yourself be killed.

João de Deus ([1893] 2002: 113)



On leaving the Parish Church, to your right you will see the House-Museum of João de Deus, which is the third stopping point of our walk.



3

House-Museum of João de Deus

If your visit coincides with when the House-Museum (Photo 5) is open, we suggest a visit.⁶

In 1841, when João de Deus was 11 years old, the family moved into this house, thus displaying their social, economic and symbolic status by inhabiting the most noble and central place in the village (Cabrita, 2019: 416). It was here that João de Deus lived during his youth.

As with many families, the parents of the future educator sought to guide him and his two brothers to the seminary. It happened, however, that at this stage, the São José seminar in Faro was closed as a result of the “civil war and anti-congregationism, arising from the new liberal order” (Cabrita, 2016: 170).

For this reason, in 1848, João de Deus attended the

6. Summer opening hours: 10am-1 pm and 2pm-6pm; winter opening hours: 9am – 1pm and 2pm – 4pm. Closed weekends and public holidays. If you would like to have a guided visit, please call: 282 440 892.




Photo 5: House-Museum of João de Deus.

ecclesiastical classes of Father Joaquim Veríssimo Almeida in São Bartolomeu de Messines and, in September of that year, successfully passed his final exam in São Brás de Alportel.

After this stage of his life and in order to study at the Faculty of Law in the University of Coimbra, in March 1849, then aged 19, he went to study at the Coimbra Seminary, in order to complete his studies and the preparatory courses that would allow him to enter the University. This happened on October 23, 1849,

after passing the exams in Latin, Doctrine, French, Philosophy, Arithmetic and Geometry (Nunes & Bento, 1996: 54).



It was in this city that the young João de Deus awoke to poetry. However, it was in the Algarve that he wrote his first poem, “Pomba” (Dove) (1850) dedicated to a young woman named Maria Cândida, whom João de Deus met when he visited his brother in São Brás de Alportel.

These verses reveal the simplicity of the expression of first love:





Dove

Chaste lily, white dove,
You are so beautiful in your dawn!
There is no star more beautiful
With so magical a glow.
Unspoilt dove, impeccable lily
You are so beautiful, my love!

Speak, maiden, do you now feel
Your heart beating?
Are your dreams, maiden,
Not so tranquil?
Do you know, poor innocent,
How much one passion costs?

But you, maiden, blanch,⁷
Appearing to fade away;
Maiden, don't you trust me
With the secrets of your suffering?
Speak, maiden, you don't speak,
Are you ashamed to speak?

João de Deus ([1893] 2002: 66)

7. The Portuguese verb *descorar* can mean 'to lose colour' and 'to be carefree', so there is a possible second, ironic meaning in its use.



In the following years, he lived between the Algarve and Coimbra and his fame grew as a poet, a portraitist and a bohemian who frequented gatherings in which he played his own musical compositions, often improvised, to the sound of his own viola. But as this fame grew, his commitment to his studies declined (Nunes & Bento, 1996: 64):

The school discipline bothered him, the doctoral pedantry revolted him, the text of textbooks without scientific criteria pushed him away from his studies and [...] João de Deus was left behind, failing school years due to absences, and it became necessary for someone to remember to enrol him [...]. (Dâmaso, s.d.: 7)

With this growing disinterest in the academic world, when asked when he would finish his studies, he responded indifferently and with humour that it would no doubt take “as many years to decide as the Trojan war!” (Dâmaso, s.d.: 8).

It was in this student phase that he published, for the first time, some of his poems dedicated to love and the female figure, in several of the Institute of Coimbra's magazines – the *Estrêa Literária*, *O Atheneu* and *Revista Científica e Literária* – and it was with the little income from this that he lived, poorly, in this town.

It is because of this that we suggest the reading of his humorous poem “Money”:

Money

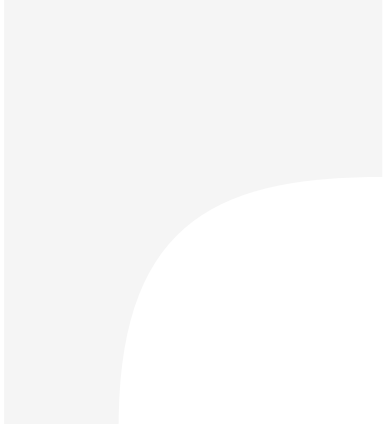
Money is so beautiful,
So beautiful, so much fun!
It has so much charm, the rascal,
It is so droll, the thief!
In speaking, it speaks in a style...
Everything is it, it everything...
And the women think it so comely!
Little old ladies and young lasses see it,
However aloof they are.
Clink!
Craw.

[...]

That physiognomy
Is the guile that the demon has!
But on a desk
There you can see it well!
When he is on ceremony,
The minister enters his room,
Uses the occasion:
“Do you know my old friend?”
Oh, my friend for so long!
(Clink!)
Surely not!

João de Deus (1868: 151)





As already mentioned, the study of law was not his greatest ambition and that is why he made long visits to São Bartolomeu de Messines: some to help the family and others perhaps to let the enrolment deadline pass (Chá-Chá, 2009: 40).

On one of these visits, in 1854, he applied for the position of sub-deacon (one of the subordinate ministers in the structure of the Church), benefiting from the fact that his parents transferred to him the assets of his brother – João Gregório Ramos – who had passed away after being ordained as a priest (Duarte, 2012: 62).

However, his religious ambition was thwarted by the opinion of the parish priest of São Bartolomeu

de Messines, who, when asked for information about the candidate, replied that although there is nothing to point out morally, João de Deus is “indolent, abulic, lazy, showing little interest in ecclesiastical things and showing no willpower” (Duarte, 2012: 62).

João de Deus’s father interceded for his son with the Bishop of Algarve, but to no effect. Five years later, when he had finally completed the law course in Coimbra, João de Deus gave the estate to his brother António do Espírito Santo Ramos and definitively abandoned the desire to receive the Holy Orders.

Having abandoned the option of an ecclesiastical life and finished the law course in 1859, João de Deus

remained in Coimbra, as a writer for some periodicals (*O Instituto*, *Estrêa Literária*, *O Académico*, *O Phosphoro* and *O Atheneu*) and as a translator of French-language literary works. During this period, his talent as a poet and prosaist was increasingly recognized. Public manifestations of recognition of his art begin to emerge, such as that of Antero de Quental (1840-1891), when he wrote in a Coimbra periodical: “João de Deus was until

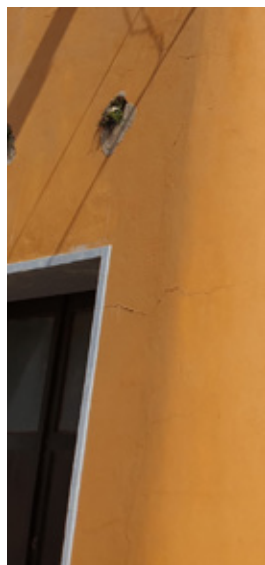
recently ignored by everyone, but today some friends of true Art know him and love him.” (*in O Phosphoro*, no. 7, 1861, *in Viegas*, 1996: 28).

Camilo Castelo Branco (1825-1890) also paid him a great compliment when the poem “Beatriz” was published in *Atheneu* magazine:

I have finished reading your *Beatriz* and I envied you. For this sin I will go to Hell; as for the others, I do not even dare mention them to either God or the Devil. J. D. is my sweet poet: he I would call esteemed if not for the shade of my literary sovereignty. If only others could share those privileges of reputation! But they only know how to rise and float above the slobbers on the dirty slopes of Castalia. O write, and write a lot. Forget about the mud and the women of Coimbra. Be wholly transported by that wanting, for you are a desired friend and a friend from whom we ask to be taken to the divine world where hymns dwell. ([in the Portuguese original] *in Deus*, 1898: 72).



Photo 6: Rua da Fábrica.



In 1862, he chose to leave Coimbra and, on his way back to the Algarve, ended up staying in Beja. At the invitation of the director of the local newspaper *O Bejense* he became a writer for, and, later, director of the publication. During the two years he was there, in perfect harmony with his detachment from

material goods, he refused a salary, accepting only that his expenses with accommodation and tobacco be paid (Nunes & Bento, 1996: 27).

In 1864, he returned to Messines, only to leave again in 1865 in the direction of Évora, where he worked on the newspaper *Scholastico*



Photo 7: Rua do Norte.

Eborensis, as well as *Folha do Sul* (from Montemor o Novo) and *Campeão do Alentejo* (from Portalegre).

We will now leave the poet's House-Museum and proceed to the fourth stopping point of this walk: *Vila Antiga* (the Old Town) – with its cobbled, labyrinthine and uneven streets. To do so, as soon as you leave the House-Museum, turn left into *Rua Francisco Neto Cabrita*.

Then take the first street on the right – *Rua da Igreja* - and then

first left - *Rua do Forno*. Then left again into *Rua da Fábrica* (Photo 6), then turn right and first left, you will find the beginning of *Rua do Norte* (Photo 7).

Now you are in the centre of the Old Town (the fourth stopping point of this tour) and we invite you to read the following information.



4

Old Town

In 1867, after two years in Évora, João de Deus returned to Messines and tried, albeit reluctantly and probably for that reason, without any success, to practice as a lawyer in the nearby town of Silves.

In an attempt to make the poet more financially stable and thus to give him a better quality of life, two of his friends – José António Garcia Blanco and Domingos Vieira – decided to present João de Deus as an independent candidate for Silves in the parliamentary elections of April 1968.

However, João de Deus was not at all committed to the campaign, to the extent that he went through the streets of Silves, as well as the neighbouring villages, mounted on a donkey asking the population not to vote for him (Santos, 2000: 919)!

However, despite his obstinate dedication to not getting elected, there was an initial tie in the results, and when the election was repeated on April 12, he was elected (Cabrita, 2019: 208). On May 13, at the age of 38, he took an oath at the Chamber of Parliament in Lisbon.



As in his university student days, the poet of Messines was also not very assiduous in Parliament. In fact, in 1868 he missed two of the 37 parliamentary sessions, and in the following year, of the total 13 sessions of the Chamber, he participated in just three.

Moreover, he limited himself to simply being present; he never joined any committee, or even took the floor at any of the assemblies he attended. After all, and as he justified himself: “What the hell do you want me to do in parliament?

Sing? Recite verses? It must be [...] a cage where maybe I can sleep listening to the music of the other birds. I will sleep for sure!” (*Correio da Noite* newspaper, in Damião & Piedade, 2016: 14).

At the end of 1868, he resigned from these functions.

With regard to the world of politics, we include in this tour another satirical text by the poet – this time about the lack of social and political ethics – one of his recurring themes and concerns.

Elections

There is between El-Rei⁸ and the people
An eternal accord for sure:
El-Rei forms a new government,
Straightaway the people are the government
Through that eternal accord
That there is between El-Rei and the people.


Thanks to this harmony,
Which is really a mystery,
There being so many factions;
The government, the ministers,
Always win the elections
With an enormous majority!

There being so many factions
It really is a mystery!

João de Deus ([1893] 2002:150)

8. The original phrase is in Spanish.





Follow Rua do Norte and turn left into Rua de Cima.

Keeping to the right, walk about 300 metres until you reach the end of the street near the carob crushing plant.

Turn left and then immediate right. Walk about 200 metres until you come to the statue of João de Deus on your left: this is the fifth stopping point.

Statue: Monument to João de Deus

In the streets of the Old Town, we learned that after his brief spell as member of parliament to Silves in 1868, João de Deus settled in Lisbon, where his friend Garcia Blanco edited the anthologies *Flores do Campo (Flowers of the Countryside)* (1868) and *Ramo de Flores (Bunch of Flowers)* (1969).

Although we cannot be sure whether the poem “*Despedida*” (*Farewell*) was written at this stage, we decided to include it at this stopping point, as it is the poetic expression of someone who is divided between the pleasures and the comfort of their homeland and the curiosity to know more about the world, even if this feels like leaving your heart behind:

Farewell

Goodbye, friend village,
All a garden of flowers!
Here the air soothes
And eases our pains!

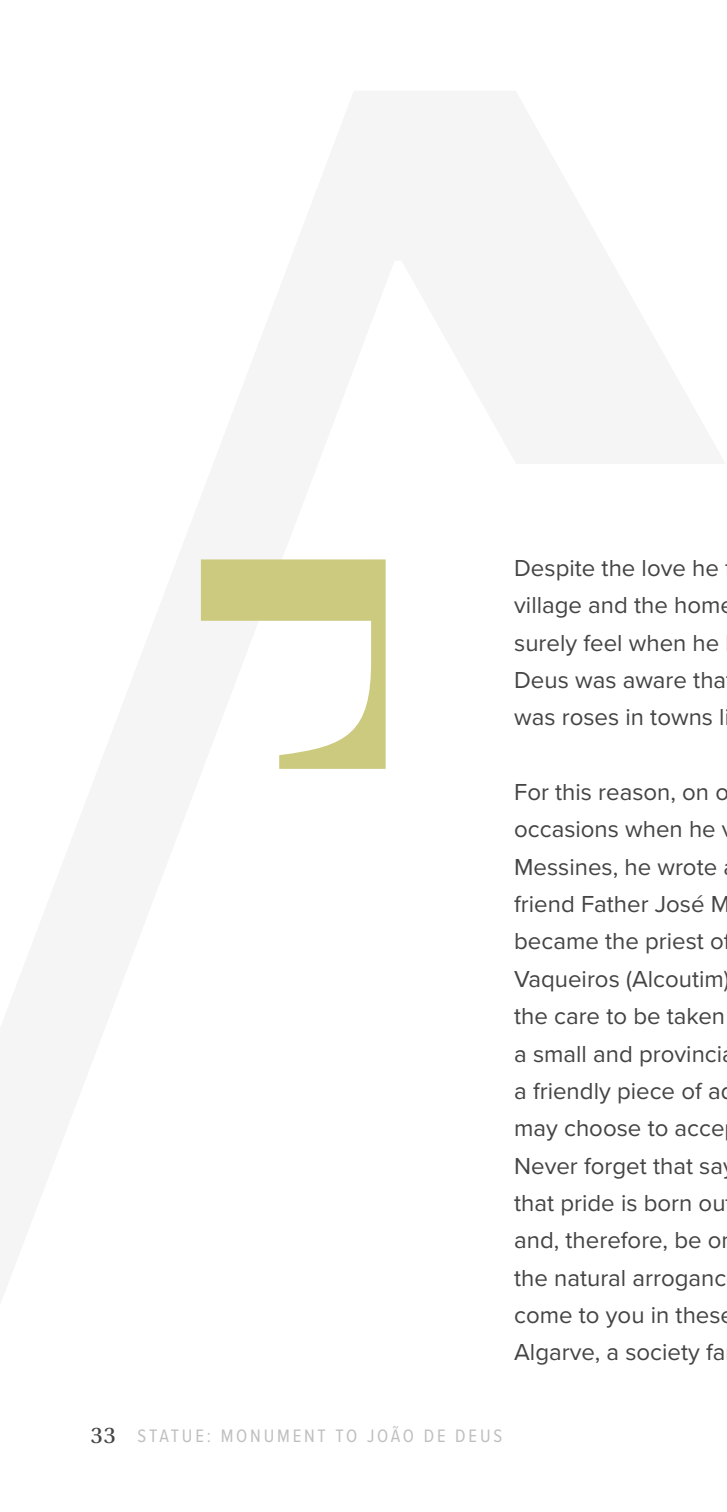
The world calls me
When I loved you with passion;
I will go though leaving...
Leaving my heart!

Goodbye, goodbye hills
And vast horizons!
Goodbye, divine songs
Of birds and of springs!

The world invites me
To go away! There, no...
I will go, leaving my life,
Leaving my heart!

João de Deus ([1893] 2002: 211)





Despite the love he felt for his village and the homesickness he surely feel when he left it, João de Deus was aware that not everything was roses in towns like his.

For this reason, on one of the occasions when he visited Messines, he wrote a letter to his friend Father José Maria Reis who became the priest of the village of Vaqueiros (Alcoutim), alerting him to the care to be taken when living in a small and provincial town: “Now a friendly piece of advice that you may choose to accept as you wish. Never forget that saying by Homer, that pride is born out of loneliness and, therefore, be on guard against the natural arrogance that may come to you in these villages in the Algarve, a society far inferior to the

one in which you are truly worthy of living.” (Deus, 1898: 479).

In Lisbon, he first lived in a rented room in *Rua do Salitre* and then in *Rua dos Douradores*. At this stage, he did some literary translations, wrote religious sermons, composed sacred hymns, wrote *O Indígena (The Indigenous)* (1873) - an intense satirical text on social customs - collaborated with the literary magazine *A Harpa* and participated in many gatherings at the café *Martinho da Arcada*.

A determining factor in the success of his love life and subsequent family life was having met and married Guilhermina das Mercês Battaglia on May 4, 1874. Four children were born from this marriage.⁹

The plan to erect a monument to João de Deus in São Bartolomeu de Messines dates back to his death,

in 1896. This was partially realized in 1909, with the inauguration of a tombstone in the house where he lived. However, the idea of a statue didn't materialise until the 1930s, when Costa Motta made a bronze bust of João Deus to place in the village. The initiative was, however, strongly contested by the people of Messines and many other Algarvians.

It was only in the 1950s that the intention to consecrate a monument to the poet and pedagogue in his place of birth was reborn, eventually coming to fruition on March 8, 1964.

9. Only one of his children – João de Deus Ramos – would continue his pedagogical work.




Photo 8: The statue of João de Deus.

João de Deus: The pedagogue

The statue (by Raul Xavier) (Photo 8), whose sculptural ensemble shows the patriarchal figure of the poet, with two children reading the *Maternal Booklet*, is a well-deserved tribute that Messines paid to the poet.

He made literacy his crusade, because in his own words, knowing how to read is a fundamental need for full civic participation:



There is a primitive, fundamental, essential need in political societies, which is that all citizens should be able to read, for without this, whatever the form of government, it will not have a basis, strictly speaking, in opinion nor, consequently, in law.


There is only public opinion when there are people who opine: well, when only one in a thousand knows how to read, public opinion is a phrase that is empty of meaning.

Our periodicals circulate in a narrow circle; the recognition of public affairs is the privilege of a few thousand individuals; and among four million inhabitants, when only four thousand, that is, a thousandth part, gives approval for public affairs, we must confess that we are failing in majorities and in public opinion

[...]

As a condition of human dignity, we will say that the man who cannot read is a barbarian.

João de Deus (1898: 249-251; italics in the original)



In the face of such convictions, when, at the age of 40, João de Deus was invited by Senhor Rovere from Casa Rolland, a publishing house in Porto, to create a method of reading the Portuguese language, the poet readily accepted. This would become the great project of his life and would occupy six intense years of work.

However, before the method was completed, Casa Rolland went bankrupt. The project was completed by António Madureira's Porto printing house.

Thus, in 1877, the *Maternal Booklet or the Art of Reading*¹⁰ was published, which was immediately a great success, since compared to the traditional booklet (that of António Feliciano de Castilho, of

10. This set out a phonetic method of learning to read, teaching the name of the letter and the way it is read, according to its different values or value. As already mentioned, the booklet was published in 1877 although it is dated 1876.

whom we shall speak again at the last stopping point on this walk), João de Deus' method was more practical, with lessons that were less repetitive and more appealing for children.


In the following years, João de Deus devoted himself to training teachers who travelled to Lisbon from all over the country. In 1879, as a complement to his method, he published *The Art of Writing*.

In 1882, with the financial help of Casimiro Freire (a journalist and Republican industrialist), he founded the Association of Mobile Schools by the João de Deus Method (the current João de Deus Nursery School Association). By applying the fundamentals of the booklet, he profoundly changed the order of things by bringing free education to those who did not go to school and to those who had no financial means. In such a way that, between 1882 and 1920, 479 literacy missions were created and 28,656 people learned to read,

write and perform the four basic arithmetic operations (in Website of the Association of Mobile Schools by the Method of João de Deus).

In 1888, Parliament unanimously approved the method created by João de Deus as the national method of learning to write and read the Portuguese language and João de Deus was named, for life, General Commissioner of the Maternal Booklet Reading Method.

This was the moment of well-deserved public recognition for his work, since throughout the previous year, the 'normalist' teachers in Lisbon (those who defended Castilho's method) "gave him to a relentless struggle" (Nunes & Bento, 1996: 36).


A large, light-colored stone statue of João de Deus, an elderly man with a full white beard, wearing a suit and tie. He is shown in a contemplative pose, with his right hand raised to his chin. The statue is set against a background of a cloudy sky. A large, stylized, olive-green letter 'A' is superimposed over the lower right portion of the image, partially overlapping the statue and the text area.

Having established the method of the *Maternal Booklet* in 1893, aged 63, João de Deus saw his poetry collection *Campo de Flores (Field of Flowers)* published and prefaced by Teófilo Braga. And in 1898, after his death, the work *Prosas (Prose)*, was also edited and published by Teófilo Braga.

At this stop, we invite you to read the eulogistic poem “The lesson of João de Deus” by José Galvão Balsa:¹¹

11. José Galvão Balsa was born in Coruche, lived in Angola and later in Silves. His texts have been awarded many prizes in literary competitions, both in Portugal and Angola.

The lesson of João de Deus



Over there, in the shade of the laurels,
Of the tall poplars and pines,
That are the green frame
Of the granite sculpture
In which was formed
The poet-teacher, enamoured
With the child and with poetry,
João de Deus continues still
Absorbed in his magic,
There, in the open school, the great outdoors
Of his place of birth,
To teach his Maternal Reading Booklet
And his Field of Flowers,
That are still his loves...
Sweet little book of first letters,
Which are, in the pure eyes of children,
The dawn of their hopes,
Announcing distant goals to them!...
And, given to be read, placed on the knee,
The message of love and of beauty,
Of truth and of purity,
From his lyrical gospel:
The luminous lesson
Of the most beautiful revolution,
That makes a man happy
And makes favoured his country.

José Galvão Balsa (1986: 73)

Let us now go to the penultimate stopping point of this literary itinerary: the João de Deus nursery school.

Retrace your steps until you find *Rua Teófilo Fontainhas Neto* on your left. Go up that street and turn right at *Rua Maria da Luz de Deus Ramos* (the name of João de Deus' granddaughter). There you will find the João de Deus nursery school building (Photo 9).

6

João de Deus Nursery School

The successful expansion of the *Maternal Booklet* primer method made João de Deus a very popular figure. For this reason, on March 8, 1895, as a tribute, the “School Youth” (Braga, 1905a: 28) organised a festival in his honour.

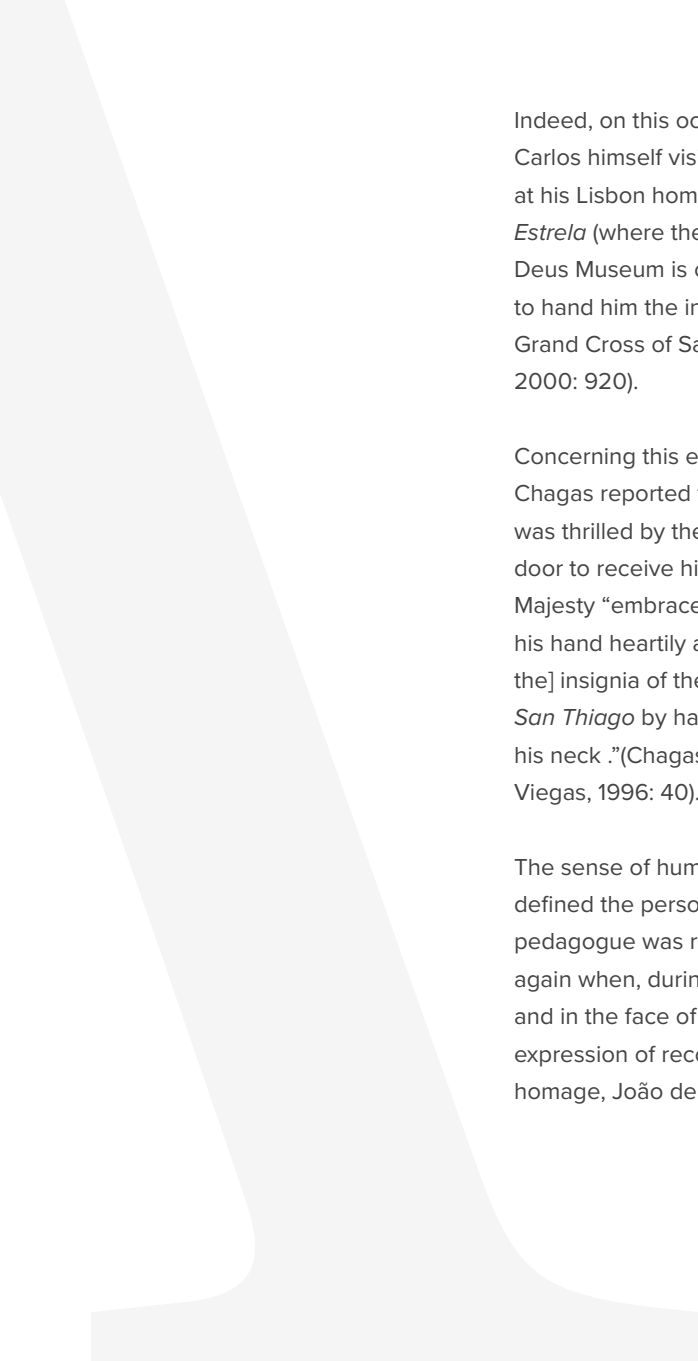


Photo 9: João de Deus Nursery School.

The press, public collectives, and government entities joined the cause as well as large numbers of the population.

Thus, to mark his 65th birthday, people of all political and religious creeds gathered and there was a huge party. Never before had such a tribute to a poet been seen in Portugal: the Government decreed a three day school holiday so that the student community could participate.

In the *Comércio do Porto* newspaper (12.06.1895) it was reported that “the commemorative parties took hold in such a way that for eight days there was no talk of politics at all; for eight days in the newspapers, even the most ardent, politics gave way to the glorification of art.” (*in Braga, 1905b: 167-168*).



Indeed, on this occasion King Carlos himself visited João de Deus at his Lisbon home in *Largo da Estrela* (where the Lisbon João de Deus Museum is currently located) to hand him the insignia of the Grand Cross of Santiago (Santos, 2000: 920).

Concerning this episode, Pinheiro Chagas reported that João de Deus was thrilled by the visit, ran to the door to receive him and then His Majesty “embraced him, shook his hand heartily and [delivered the] insignia of the *Gran-cruz of San Thiago* by hanging it around his neck .”(Chagas, 1895: 235, in Viegas, 1996: 40).

The sense of humour that always defined the personality of the pedagogue was revealed once again when, during this Festival, and in the face of such great expression of recognition and homage, João de Deus asked:



What have you come here to do, oh youth,
Bid farewell to me? How much I owe you.
From you I bear so much loss
When arriving there at the other life...
I'LL WRITE!

(*in Santos, 2000: 920,*
maiúsculas no original)

A year later, on January 11, 1896,
João de Deus died of heart disease.

The funeral had State honours,
with a mass at the Basilica da
Estrela and then going on to the
Jerónimos Monastery (s.a., 1896:
2).¹² Seventy years later, in 1966,

with the completion of the Santa
Engrácia church, the body of the
“poet of simplicity, of God, of
Woman, of Nature [and] of Love”
(Santos, 2000: 920) was transferred
there, alongside other heroes of the
nation.

12. Between 1836 and 1966, before the completion of the Santa Engrácia church, the Jerónimos Monastery had the function of the National Pantheon. Since 2016 it has held this statute once again, as does Batalha Monastery and the Santa Cruz Monastery in Coimbra.

At this point of our tour, we suggest reading the poem “Pátria” (Motherland) in which the poet expresses an eternal feeling of love for his origins, expressing a desire to return there when the moment

of “eternal sleep” comes, because, as the poet says: “Leave me to rest where I lie / My holy father, and his eternal wife / – My holy mother! / To me the cold slate will then be lighter...”.

Motherland

As the prodigal returns to the paternal home
Realising what he sought was in vain,
I already enfeebled by this struggle
Amongst dreams of good fortune
Wished to enjoy the eternal sleep
Opening next to the cradle the grave!
To finally close the circle of life
At the wistful point of departure!
When that day, sir, has arrived,
The light which illuminated me may be put out,
Leave me to rest where lie
My holy father, and his eternal wife
_ My holy mother!
To me the cold slate will then be lighter...
That the land where it one is was born is mother also!

João de Deus ([1893] 2002: 100)





Continue the walk.

To go to the last stopping point of this itinerary – Penedo Grande hill – go along the dirt track on your right for about 150 metres until you get a panoramic view of the village of São Bartolomeu de Messines below you.

We suggest you stop there for a while and enjoy the scenery.



Photo 10: Panoramic view of the village of São Bartolomeu de Messines.

7

Penedo Grande hill

Here on Penedo Grande – a 248m hill – we have a panoramic view of the village of São Bartolomeu de Messines (Photo 10), which José Galvão Balsa says is:

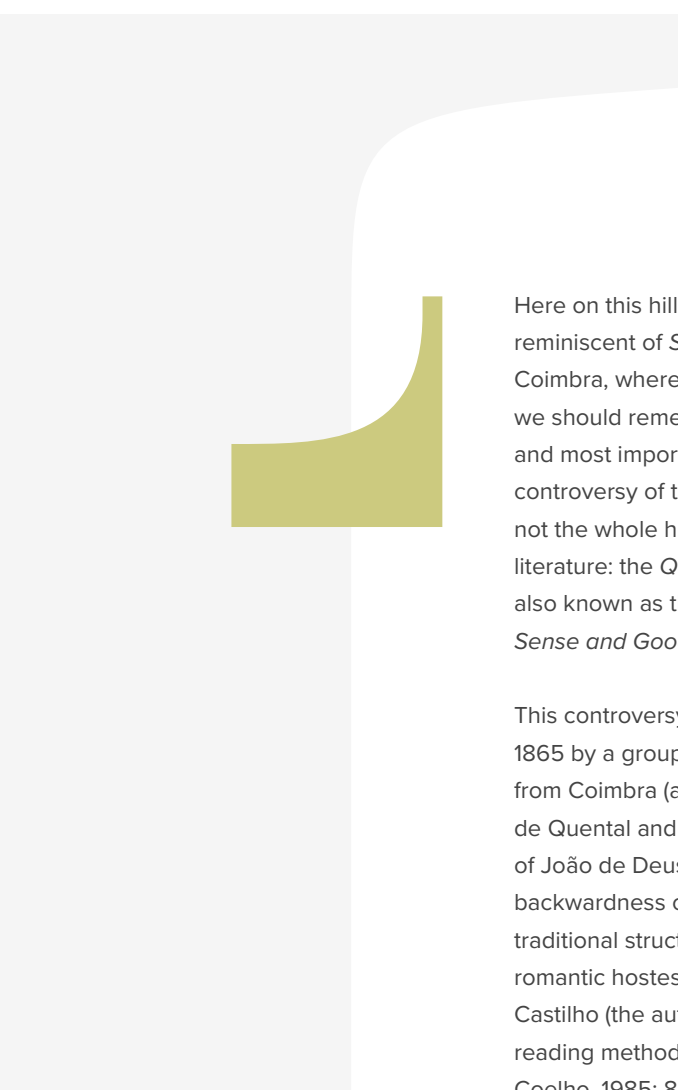


[...] an old Moorish cloak, laid out in the sun, in the pastures below three rounded knolls, colourful fragment of Algarve, with the historical marks and the signs of the tradition that the reconquest¹³ imprinted and with the Portuguese and Christian action it borrowed, in successive phases of renewal [...]. [A town] endowed with hard-working and restless folk, of profoundly Portuguese traditions, of pruned almond and carob trees, of vigorous cork trees on hillsides and bountiful allotments, extensive flood-plains dotted with brilliantly white cottages and capricious chimneys as reminders of the Arabs. (s.d.: 1)

Manuel Teixeira Gomes also refers to it in *Inventário de Junho* (*Inventory of June*):

One day I went to see the poet's village and I was in the churchyard contemplating the house where he was born. Afterwards I climbed the rugged knoll, which rises there just as the sun was transforming the scene. It was the end of June; down the slopes of the frontier hills the fields of purple gold flowed and came together undulating, but now without colour, at the bottom of the enormous valley [...]. ([1899] 2010: 179)

13. The Portuguese reconquering of Moorish territory in southern Portugal.



Here on this hill, which is reminiscent of *Saudade* hill in Coimbra, where João de Deus lived, we should remember the biggest and most important literary controversy of the 19th century, if not the whole history of Portuguese literature: the *Question of Coimbra*, also known as the *Question of Good Sense and Good Taste*.

This controversy was triggered in 1865 by a group of young people from Coimbra (among them Antero de Quental and Teófilo Braga, friends of João de Deus) against the cultural backwardness of the country, its old traditional structure and the ultra-romantic hostes of Feliciano de Castilho (the author of the traditional reading method booklet) (Prado Coelho, 1985: 895-897).

The controversy – which gained expression in letters, chronicles and articles in the press, as well as through poetry, satirical texts and lectures – began when (in the afterword to *Poem of Youth*, by Pinheiro Chagas) António Feliciano de Castilho criticized the new generation of Coimbra (the one that would become known as the Generation of the 70s) for its innovation in the realistic and naturalistic style that, in his opinion, resulted in unintelligible poetry.

In reaction to this opinion, Antero de Quental – supported by Teófilo Braga and Ramalho Ortigão (1838-1915) – wrote the pamphlet *Good Sense and Good Taste: Letter to the Honorable Mr. António Feliciano de Castilho*.

Despite belonging to Antero's group, João de Deus stayed away from this battle, not only because he had left Coimbra three years earlier, but also because, in fact, João de Deus always put himself literarily out of fashion and always conceived his art in a very personal way, since his real motivation was not “to line up literarily with others to form a group”, but “to try to be simple, and to follow his soul” (Magalhães, 1995: 11-12), always defending his greatest literary idol: Luís Vaz de Camões.

The last poem by João de Deus which we invite you to read is entitled “My mother” and is a beautiful hymn of love to the origins of this pedagogue, whom Eça de Queiroz said was the embodiment of the “poetic soul of

the Portuguese people”, as it was “[...] this incarnation, which made him a naive and profound, childish and sublime poet.” (*in Braga, 1905b: 455-456*).

My mother

Motherland, cradle, of love that rocks the soul
While the vital light illuminates us,
And where only rested reclines,
Who, far from her, is tormented by continual pain...

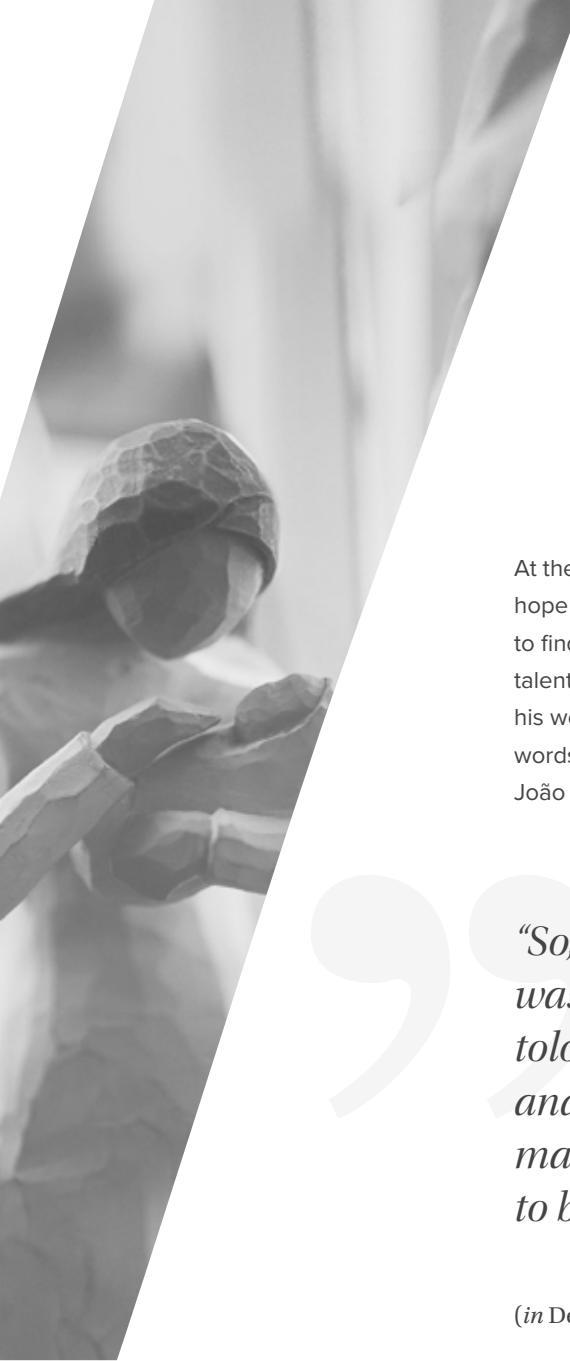
If in this essence, mother, that the flower exhales,
In the essence of a flower from that hill,
You see tears of love which it undermines within
With longing for the one who speaks from Heaven:

If when Heaven searches, smoke ebbs
When the sun leaves this valley undecided,
You can see how smoke and flower aspire, yearning.

A father, a God, a sky, a Heaven,
Ah! With my having everything, everything in my village,
See if my lips give in to laughter!

João de Deus ([1893] 2002: 82)





At the end of our walk, which we hope has aroused your curiosity to find out more about this talented man from Messines and his work, we evoke the beautiful words of Guerra Junqueiro about João de Deus:

“So, quite simply, he was born in São Bartolomeu de Messines and died in Lisbon, a man who just wanted to be a poet.”

(*in Deus*, 1979: 6)

SUGGESTIONS AND OTHER INFORMATION



Please find below a set of suggestions to make your walk even more enjoyable.

Other places of interest

- Pedreirinha Necropolis
- Gregórios Menhir
- Funcho Reservoir and Dam
- Museum of Costumes and Local Customs

Events

- Flea Market (second Saturday of every month)
- Monthly Market (4th Monday of every month)
- João de Deus Cultural Festival (March)
- Traditional Festival (August)
- Annual Fair (September)
- Feasts in Honour of Our Lady of Health (September)
- Gastronomic Week (November)

Tourist Information Desks

Museum of Costumes and Local Customs and João de Deus House-Museum

References

The list of bibliographic references for the information in this literary walk is available at rotaliterariadoalgarve.pt.



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