



Gardens & Landscapes of Portugal Book Reviews

LOURENÇO E SILVA, ANDRÉ, *Conservação e Valorização do Património. Os embrechados do Paço das Alcáçovas*, Lisboa: Esfera do Caos Editores, 2012, 331 pp.

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In his work, the author approaches the study of the Paço das Alcáçovas rock-work, making a different, new proposition and study, on the 'in context' domain of Decorative Arts. Based on his Master's thesis on Interior Preservation and Rehabilitation, presented to the Decorative Arts School of the Ricardo do Espírito Santo Silva Foundation, in Lisbon, the final outcome of this unique and original research, which must be continued is now published – with the approval of the Regional Cultural Board of the Alentejo.

The title leads us to a double feature: the study of the rock-work, specifying a case study, and, simultaneously, the focus on the preservation and appreciation of this artistic heritage.

As a matter of fact, this double feature implies a strong interconnection, permanently emphasised throughout the work.

When we examine both the table of contents and the theme, we see that the work translates several concerns at different moments. We see that the author feels the need to suggest three structuring elements for his book: the first part gives the historical content and the theme of the rock-work study from the European context to the national context.

The second part is a specific approach focused on the studied object – the Garden and the Chapel of the Paço das Alcáçovas – suggesting an artistic approach to the commission and its iconographic program, as well as the treatise influence, along with the site's and the surrounding environment's material on the architectural piece.

Lastly, the third part begins with a diagnose and an assessment of its current preservation state, suggesting contributions, as well as recommendations for an intervention methodology.

The text is well structured and fluent, graphically light, and well documented with unprecedented images, figures, and documents, making the theme easier to read and understand.

Also to be emphasised is the useful glossary and the significant sets still in existence in continental Portugal, comprised in a long time arch, between the 16 and 20 centuries.

In his book, André Lourenço da Silva gives us several work indications and also:

The commented and contextualised analysis of this text leads us to question of the rock-work relevant role over the course of the Portuguese gardens' art and their excellent aesthetic value, implying the cultural environment, as well as the aesthetic currents, which have influenced these sets. The author saved one of the most notable residential architecture buildings in the south of Portugal from oblivion, placing it on a quality cultural tourism itinerary.

Seduced by this bright material symbiosis, the author has depicted a correct intervention strategy on this set.

To conclude, it's important to make note that this book takes us on a journey, inside an artistic universe known and studied by few people in Portugal. Although he has no basic scientific training in the domain of Art History, André Lourenço e Silva is able to master with dedication and intuition the proposed methodological corpus, decoding and analysing the meanings, the influences, the materials, and the techniques used in the artistic set.

Therefore, and in so many other ways, this is a book of happy encounters between different domains: Art History, as well as the preservation and study of materials.

Now, the scientific community is expected to take on the challenge set by André Lourenço, by exploring and continuing his study. 'This is, indeed, an open subject' (p.254).