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## The Fronteira Palace – from War Time to the Triumph of Peace

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### ABSTRACT

The XVII<sup>th</sup> Cent. Fronteira Palace and surrounding Estate is located in Benfica, Lisbon, at the Monsanto Park foothill. From early ages, this country area was known for the farming and hunting activities. When the future King D. Pedro II challenged his friend, the Count D. João de Mascarenhas to be invited for a hunting party in his Estate. The Count excused himself and asked for some time extension to improve his modest dwellings in order to host this important Royal guest and his entourage. As a result, the construction of a remarkable Palace took place completed with magnificent gardens. This architectural ensemble with its set of glazed tiles (“azulejos”) panels provides a deep insight into the Portuguese built heritage. In the first floor (“piano nobile”), a large assembly room – the Room of the Battles, depicts on the walls *azulejos* panels the major battles where the Count participated and major victories against the invading Spanish Army. These Restoration War battles are a living testimony of the Portuguese need of freedom. The outdoor space adjacent to this interior war room is located the Liberal Arts Gallery where knowledge is emphasized. Along this extensive veranda promenade, the trivium and the quadrivium areas of knowledge are represented on large *azulejos* panels separated by white marble statues representing the mythology gods. The N-S frontier wall dividing the indoor and the outdoor spaces is covered with the Poetry *azulejos* panel, probably, to elate this supreme art form. The major purpose of this work is to present an important art legacy created more than 300 years ago with the importance of the arts over the war disasters. A promise of an enduring brighter future through education and culture may improve our lives.

Keywords: architecture, gardens, glazed tiles, liberal arts, palace, poetry.


### 1. Introduction

When a given civilization reaches its peak it usually brings within itself the seeds of destruction. Portugal is no exception and, after a glorious past through the Discoveries Golden Age, a single battle fought in Northern Morocco – Alcácer Quibir, on Aug. 4, 1578, led the Portuguese Kingdom to the political

\* The CIAUD, Research Centre for Architecture, Urbanism and Design, Lisbon School of Architecture, Universidade de Lisboa and the national funding through FCT - Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, I.P., under the Strategic Project ref. no. UIDB/04008/2020, travel grant, is gratefully acknowledged by the author.

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and financial collapse, due to the royal army annihilation on the desert sands. The young King D. Sebastião was killed in action and as he had no direct successors, a dynastic crisis began.

During nearly a century vast amounts of riches were brought from far overseas territories to this European country in the SW end of Europe. Although there were joint peaceful experiences with the powerful Spanish neighbour quite often, there were skirmishes, battles and various wars fought fiercely between both countries. However, in 1580, the Spanish King Philip II was enthroned as King of Portugal, during the Tomar Court assembly. Portugal lost its independence as a sovereign kingdom and it was annexed into the Castille kingdom.



a. Army  
Field-Marshal.



b. Coat-of-Arms.



c. Marquis of  
Fronteira (1670),  
Galleria. degli Uffizi.

Fig. 1. D. João de Mascarenhas (1633–1683), Second Count da Torre.

The Spanish rule lasted until the First of December 1640, when a group of nobles decided to expel the Spanish Governor from the country and to acclaim the Duke of Braganza as the new King of Portugal – D. João IV. Naturally, this unilateral Declaration of Independence resulted into a state of war between both countries that lasted nearly 28 years. During the 28-year long Restoration Wars period, the young Count became responsible for the extensive Alentejo Province where some of the major battles occurred. On Feb, 13, 1668, the Lisbon Peace Treaty was finally signed between both countries, with the assistance of the English Ambassador in Lisbon. A new Peace-era began and the Portuguese kingdom was able to rebuild. A more peaceful moment in time began.

The incoming years under peace were essential to recuperate from wartime losses. A large amount of funds from the vast properties income were slowly becoming available and they could be

used in more enjoyable activities. The Count D. João de Mascarenhas, Portuguese Army Field-Marshal in charge of the Alentejo Province, has now enough available funds to assume a magnificent enterprise, Fig. 1. In 1670, while he still was the Prince Regent, the future King D. Pedro II bestowed for the first time, the title of Marquis of Fronteira to the Count D. João de Mascarenhas.<sup>1</sup>

From 1958, the late Arch. Prof. Emeritus Frederico George (1915-1994) was in charge with the restoration works. In 1988, the author began working on the Palace restoration works. Within this built ensemble, the extensive use of glazed ceramic tiles (“*azulejos*”) on the building walls, as well as, on some roof coverings, make the ensemble an unique Portuguese cultural landmark. These decorative elements also fulfil another important assignment which is to provide the monument with a structuring program to celebrate the Arts Patron: Count D. João de Mascarenhas (1633-1681) glorious achievements, both military and cultural, his taste, dreams and objectives.

This study main purpose is to present a unique portuguese architectural ensemble built during the XVII-th. Century third quarter in the Lisbon northern region, at the Monsanto hill footsteps. This 50,000 sq. m. property includes not only the Palace, as well as, the Gardens, the Large Water Tank, the farming plots and a small forest, all enclosed along its perimeter by a tal stone masonry wall.

## 2. A Time of Peace - the Palace and the Gardens

Upon a royal invitation to host a hunting party, Fig. 2, in his Benfica Estate, then in the Lisbon outskirts, he excused himself with His Majesty the King D. Pedro II. Instead, he asked for some extra time to build a new house where he could host the royal party. The actual poor conditions of the estate deserved to be improved with a more grandiose construction plan, to host such important royal guest. The actual conditions and the adaptation to a royal invitation can be underlined by José Ortega y Gasset thoughts:

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1. Susana Varela Flor, “Portraits by Feliciano de Almeida (1635-1694) in Cosimo III de Medici Gallery”, *Journal of the International Association of Research Institutes of the Art History RIHA Journal* 0144, Dec. 01, 2016, 14-15; <http://www.riha-journal.org/articles/2016/0144-flor>; doi: 10.11588/RIHA.2016.0.70196.

Hemos de buscar a nuestra circunstancia, tal y como ella es, precisamente en lo que tiene de limitación, de peculiaridade, el lugar acertado en la inmensa perspectiva del mundo. No detenernos perpetuamente en éxtasis ante los valores hieráticos, sino conquistar a nuestra vida individual el puesto oportuno entre llos. En suma: la reabsorción de la circunstancia es el destino concreto del hombre.<sup>2</sup>



Fig. 2. Wild boar hunting scene (liberal arts gallery).



a. North Loggia façade – main entrance.



b. East façade adjacent to the formal garden.



c. Formal Garden and King's Gallery.



d. Palace and gardens – staircase top view.

Fig. 3. Palace Fronteira and Gardens, in Benfica.

2. Ortega y Gasset, José, *Meditaciones del Quijote*, (in Spanish); edición facsímil de 1914 (Madrid: Alianza Editorial S.A., Fundación José Ortega y Gasset - Gregório Maraion, Fundación Residencia de Estudiantes, 2014), 42–43.

The magnificent XVII<sup>th</sup> Cent. ensemble currently occupies about 50,000 sq. m. and it comprises the: (a) Palace; (b) Main Formal Garden; (c) Kings' Gallery; (d) Venus Garden; (e) Palatine Chapel; (f) Liberal Arts galleria; (g) farming areas – orchard, vineyard, vegetable garden, and wheat fields; and, (h) a large forest area, Fig. 3.

While construction works were underway, the Italian Prince Cosme III de Médicis, visited the construction site on February 7, 1669, and he wrote on his travel diary his impressions:

“the whole building and the garden fence are decorated with figurative tiles depicting stories and fables. They say that, to date, the owner has spent 50,000 *cruzados* and yet a lot still remains to be done...”- travel report by the Marquis Filippo Corsini.

After several years of construction hardships, that nearly brought the Count's finances into exhaustion, he was finally able to invite the King D. Pedro II to the long expected hunting party, Fig. 3. This unique Palace that has been continuously inhabited by the same family during the past 350 years.

Although the author of this design solution is not known, it is supposed that one of the royal architects from the “*Aula do Risco*” - where the construction classes hosted in the Royal Palace (“*Paço da Ribeira*”) located in downtown Lisbon, was the possible author.

The Palace design solution is based in the Sebastião Serlio classical drawings from his building treatise. The main façade loggia is recessed from the two lateral elevations creating a classical movement in the global volume. The open air loggia with its three arched openings supported on Ionic marble columns is also a classical representation of

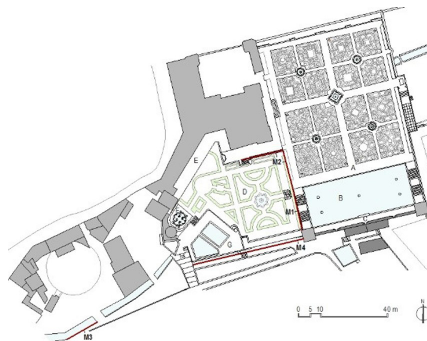


Fig. 4. Palace Fronteira and Gardens, in Benfica.

Serlian architecture models.<sup>3</sup>

In the southern building area, the first floor (“*pianno nobile*”) establishes a dialogue between the Battles Room and the exterior long outdoor veranda overlooking the Venus Garden. The inner, more secluded, Battles Room celebrates the Portuguese Army victories over the Spanish army invaders. The tension created by this interior space is released with the great outdoor veranda, or the Liberal Arts Gallery, provides a thoughtful moment regarding the major advantages of Peace. In this extensive space, leading to the Palatine Chapel, the visitor can wonder about the importance of two important life guidelines – the education and the pursuit of knowledge, in order to enjoy the divine gift of Life.

### 3. The War Memories – The Room of the Battles

Probably, Battles Room is the most important iconic space and the “soul” within the whole ensemble. It is located in the Palace core *piano nobile* with three major windows facing south and overlooking the intimate Venus garden. It has the interior dimensions in plan of 8.80m by 11.30m, and a maximum height of 7.00m, becoming the largest interior Palace space, Figs.4 and 5 – a, b.

After the rebellion against the Spanish rule, on the First of December 1640, the country faced a 28- year attrition war with Spain. On the wall, all around the Room of Battles, from the wooden floor up to nearly 1.70m, a series of “*azulejos*” panels depict the most important battles fought during this time period. On these panels, the Count D. João de Mascarenhas, Portuguese Army Field-Marshal is depicted in military actions of remarkable bravery.<sup>4</sup>

In chronological order, the various battles were: (1) Montijo (May 26, 1644); (2) Arronches skirmish (Nov. 8, 1653); (3) San Miguel (Jul. 22, 1658), near Badajoz, Fig. 9; (4) Linhas de Elvas (Jan.y 14, 1659); (5) Ameixial (Jul. 8, 1663); (6) Castelo Rodrigo (Jul. 7, 1664); (7) Montes Claros (Jun. 17, 1665); and, (8) Trás-os-Montes ambush (Nov. 20, 1667), Figs. 6 and 7.

3. Cassiano Neves, José, *Jardim e Palácio dos Marqueses de Fronteira* (in Portuguese), 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Lisboa: Câmara Municipal de Lisboa, 1954).

4. Cassiano Neves, José, *Jardim e Palácio dos Marqueses de Fronteira* (in Portuguese), 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Lisboa: Câmara Municipal de Lisboa, 1954).

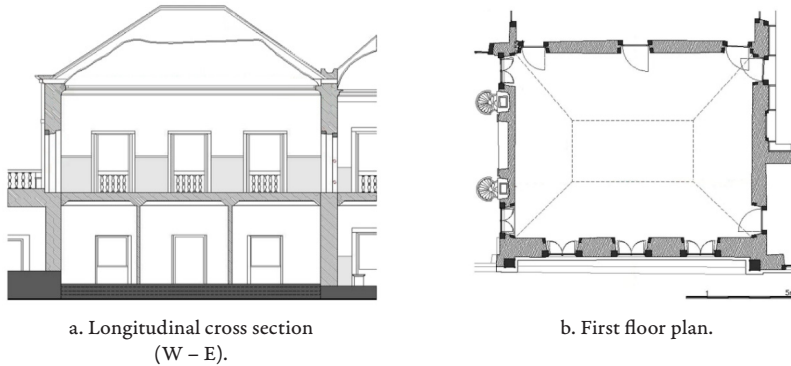


Fig. 5. The Room of the Battles, Fronteira Palace, Benfica.

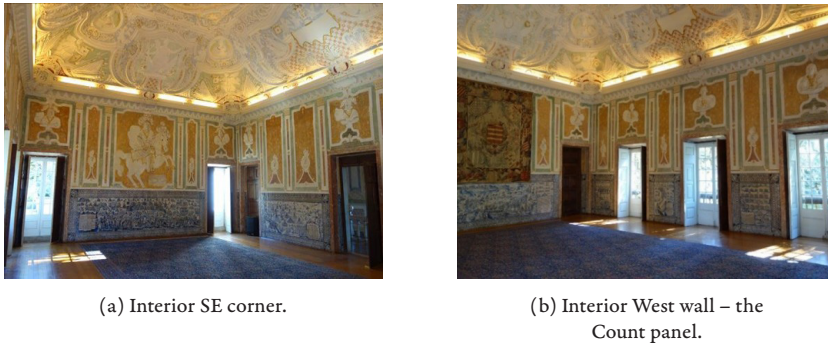


Fig. 6. The Room of the Battles.

During the National Independence War (1640 - 1667) main battles, the Count is depicted in several of the eight various size glazed panels located all around this room. These 17<sup>th</sup> century Portuguese original panels were produced based on drawings made by a soldier - artist. Probably, he participated in all of these actions, due to the depicted geography, the two armies disposition in the battlefield - the infantry men, the artillery location, the cavalry groups and the different tactics, Fig. 7.

Above each door opening there is stucco work with the several remarkable Mascarenhas family nobles that became known in those days by their actions and deeds:

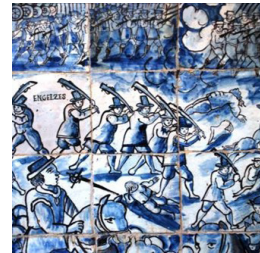
[A] East wall – (1) D. Fernão Martim (King D. João II Royal Horse Guards Captain); (2) D. Francisco – First Count of Coculim (India);



a. Montes Claros battle (Jun. 17, 1665).



b. San Miguel battle, near Badajoz (Jul. 22, 1658).



c. English allies (detail).

Fig. 7. Room of the Battles - glazed tiles panels.

[B] South wall – (1) D. José Trazimundo – Fifth Marquis of Fronteira; (2) D. Fernando Jozé – Fourth Marquis of Fronteira; (3) D. João José – Third Marquis of Fronteira, Fourth Count of Torre;

[C] West wall – (1) D. Fernando – Second Marquis of Fronteira, Third Count of Torre; (2) Field-Marshal Horseman – D. João de Mascarenhas – First Marquis of Fronteira, Second Count of Torre; (2) D. Fernando – First Count of Torre; and,

[D] North wall – (1) D. Manoel – King’s Private Council member; (2) D. Fernando – King D. Sebastião Private Council member; (3) D. Manoel – King D. João III Private Council member.

The Fronteira Palace gravitates all around the Room of the Battles area. An important emotive space, conveys to the visitor the pride of the national independence so arduously obtained in the different country battlefields. To relieve the visitor from the strong impressions

in this interior space, the access to a long veranda is just located on the other side of the bordering west wall.

## 4. A Unique Peace Peace Legacy

### 4.1 *The Seven Liberal Arts Gallery*

Quite often the rise of a civilization is associated with the organization of its cultural and educational foundations. Around the Mediterranean Sea, one of the earliest civilizations to endorse this concept was Greece. Aristotle refers that for the free man aspiring to the intellectual knowledge and the moral fortitude, the knowledge acquired through the “liberal sciences” is deemed necessary.<sup>5</sup>

The complete ensemble of school studies known either by Liberal Arts – sciences, or studies are going to be the foundations of preliminary high school syllabus i.e., the *gymnasia*, to be followed by philosophy or, the actual and more specialized – university. The universal group of Liberal Arts studies that being considered were: (1) grammar; (2) rethoric; (3) dialectics; (4) music; (5) arithmetic; (6) geometry; and, (7) astronomy.

Greek educators had not a fixed list of subjects to be taught. However, the usual sequence used for the preparatory studies began with the first three liberal arts mentioned above. When these initial subjects were successfully achieved, the student was able to apply to the four other liberal arts disciplines to complete the considered “only” general education.

These seven liberal arts were designed for students to pursue the search of science and not to earn a living with trade or other economic activities. The first group of three Liberal Arts that are related with the science of language (grammar), oratory (rethoric) and logic (dialethics), incorporate the language studies. These group of arts are considered the trivial arts or *trivium*, Fig. 8.

The second group – music, arithmetics, geometry and astronomy are the mathematics – physics studies or the real arts (“*physicae*”). These quadrivial arts or the *quadrivium*, i.e., a cross road between four main paths to be pursued, Fig. 9. This second phase learning process

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5. Willmann, Otto *The Catholic Encyclopedia on-line*, s.v. “The Seven Liberal Arts”, (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907); accessed on Aug. 22, 2024, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01760a.htm>

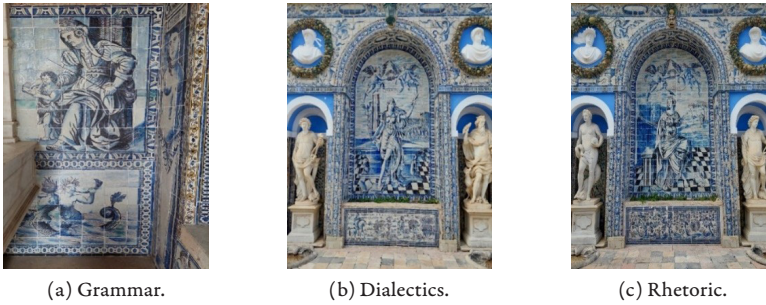


Fig. 8. The *Trivium* – elemental learning.

begins after the student is able to master the previous *trivium* arts, which are the major foundations to access more advanced learning matters.

#### 4.2 From a War period to a state of Peace

When the Portuguese Crown Prince D. Pedro asked the Count to organize a hunting party at his Benfica estate, he excused himself from this obligation mentioning that he needed more time to improve his existing humble hunting lodge. During the next decade he got involved in a revolutionary architectural program far exceeding all the expectations. Most likely, the design solution originated from a royal architect office at the “*Paço da Ribeira*”, downtown Lisbon, where the “*Aula do Risco*” classes were lectured.

The built ensemble encompasses an iconic solution, site integration, materials tectonics, water supply technologies and sustainable economic requirements that were perfected during the construction

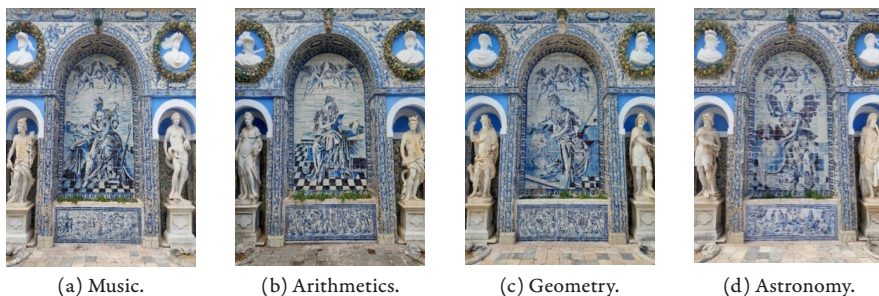


Fig. 9 – The *Quadrivium* - the real arts.

phase. The Count was so enthusiastic about his new residence that almost went bankrupt. Finally, when the banquet took place the whole ensemble – building, gardens, fountains, were a matter of great wonder and admiration, as housing models of this magnitude seldom occurred.

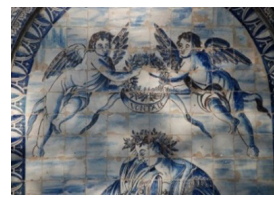
During the construction phase and, even in the coming Century, new additions / improvements were made to the original construction, as it is referred by contemporary documents. However, one puzzling “message” is incorporated into the glazed tiles located over the doors openings. The first four words: (1) “*Memória*” (memory); (2) “*Entendimento*” (comprehension); (3) “*Vontade*” (a strong will); and, (4)



a. South wall  
- Memory.



b. Comprehension.



c. Strong Will.



d. West wall – to  
Enjoy.



e. To Touch.

Fig. 10. Liberal Arts Gallery - the Powers of the Soul.

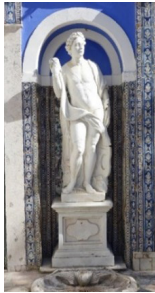
“*Gostar*” (enjoy), are related to the conspicuous powers of the soul. The human being his “built” with these four powers. The fifth word “*apalpar*” (to touch) is related with the human perception of the surrounding world through the human touch, Figs. 10 and 11.

This east part of the Liberal Arts gallery with the reference to the Soul Four Powers is centered around the powerful Poetry panel image, Fig. 11. The main reason is that the Count was very keen of poetry and a great admirer of the national Poet Luís de Camões.

Architecture together with Sculpture and Painting are the major structuring areas of Fine Arts domain. The connection along the extensive veranda, between the east end and the opposite west end is

made through an extensive Galleria where the different liberal arts are intertwined with the mythology Gods and Goddesses. These magnificent marble sculptures addressing: Dianna, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Apollo, Jupiter and Saturn were chosen with a purpose. The XVI-th. Cent. Universe model followed the Ptolemy geocentric concept,<sup>6</sup> as used by Luís de Camões in the “*Os Lusíadas*”, Figs. 13 and 14.

These sculptures are separated by six major “*azulejos*” panels that refer to the Liberal Arts learning areas. One of them – the Grammar,



a. Apollo.



b. West wall with Poetry panel.



c. Marsias.



d. Music room exterior South wall.

Fig. 11. Liberal Arts gallery – east end – the Human Soul Powers.

was placed near the Chapel entrance, in the porch small corner adjacent to the water marble basin, Fig. 12-b. The reason is that the Count D. João de Mascarenhas had a greater preference for Poetry rather than for Grammar.

6. Pais, Amelia Pinto (org.) – *Os Lusíadas por Luís de Camões*, (in Portuguese), (high school edition), (Porto: Areal Edit., 2011), 509.



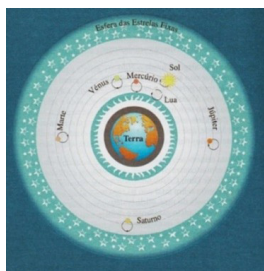
Fig. 12. The Palace Chapel and the seven Liberal Arts gallery.

The Chapel importance is singular: D. Pedro de Mascarenhas (1484–1555), Portuguese ambassador to the Holy See, was able to succeed in bringing with him the Jesuits to Portugal. His travel companion was Saint Francisco Xavier, S.J., who became later known as the Apostle of the Indias through his celebrated Asian missionary



Fig. 13. Ptolemy's Universe – a XVI<sup>th</sup> Cent. Geocentric Model – marble statues.

actions. As the tradition mentions, before departing to Goa (India) on his birthday Apr. 7, 1541, he celebrated his last mess in Portugal at this unique Chapel location, Fig. 14. The ambassador D. Pedro de Mascarenhas was also a close companion of St. Ignatius of Loyola and the cultural influence he experienced while resident in Rome may have influenced later on the Palace Fronteira design program.



a. Ptolemy model.



b. The Poet – Luis de Camões.



c. Poetry – a model.

Fig. 14. Planetary geocentric system (Ptolemy model) and the Poetry of Life.

## 5. Final Observations

The powerful images conveyed to the Palacio Fronteira visitor in the interior Battles Room and the exterior adjacent veranda carries an important semiotic message. The dark hours that the Portuguese Nation experienced during 28 years fighting (1640–68) for its Independence from the Spanish rule can be envisioned through the glazed tiles panels showing the major battles that took place between both countries.

The ensuing time of peace guaranteed by the 1668 Lisbon Peace Treaty released the much needed financial resources for the Count D. João de Mascarenhas to be able to carry this magnificent construction enterprise with a Palace, Gardens, Lakes and Fountains in his Benfca domain. The resulting XVII-th. Cent. architectural solution is an historical heritage landmark, with deep references to the Portuguese culture, i.e., the numerous “azulejos” panels and their contents. Currently, this built heritage location is very important in the education of architecture students. One of the most remarkable XX<sup>th</sup>.

Cent. philosopher – José Ortega y Gasset,<sup>7</sup> discusses the important role of science and culture within our civilization:

La ciência biológica más reciente estudia el organismo vivo como una unidad compuesta del cuerpo y su medio particular: de modo que el processo vital no consiste sólo n un adaptación del cuerpo a su medio, sino también en la adaptación del medio a su cuerpo. La mano procura amoldarse al objeto material a fin de apresarlo bien; pero, a la vez, cada objeto material oculta una previa afinidade com una mano determinada. Yo soy yo y mi circunstancia, y si no la salvo a ella no me salvo yo. *Benefac loco illi quo natus es*, leemos en la Biblia. Y en la escuela platónica se nos da como empresa de toda cultura, ésta: “salvar las apariencias”, los fenómenos. Es decir, buscar el sentido de lo que nos rodea.

This concept of regional design / concept is well seen with the Fronteira Palace extensive message provided by the “azulejos” panels. The site integration and the farming solution that gravitates around the Palace built ensemble is another important factor that deserves to be seen. The total resulting solution would not be possible without the contribution of dozens of skilled unknown workers that converge to the desirable built solution.

More than 350 – years ago, when Count D. João de Mascarenhas decided to build a magnificent Palace in his Benfica Estate he didn’t realize that he was perpetuating his memory and celebrate his life actions through a single architectural heritage landmark.

In this study, an “*enigma*” between two Palace areas is presented: (1) the Battles Room with its historical meaning, in the difficult process of guaranteeing national sovereignty through a time of war; and, (2) the exterior veranda with the cultural message referring to the important process of education through learning, i.e., the seven liberal arts. The Universe permanent questioning is still conveyed with the Ptolomy geocentric model, by using the marble statues representing the mythology gods.

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7. Ortega y Gasset, José, *Meditaciones del Quijote*, (in Spanish); edición facsimile de la primera edición de 1914; (Madrid: Alianza Edit. S.A., Fund. José Ortega y Gasset – Gregório Marañon, Fund. Residencia de Estudiantes, 2014); Depósito Legal M. 13.921-2014; pp. 43-44.

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