

QUINTA DA REGALEIRA

A GARDEN OF HERMETIC AND TEMPLAR INITIATION

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The Quinta da Regaleira (or Regaleira) is located near the centre of Sintra (Portugal), thirty kilometres west of Lisbon, and it is formed by a Palace, a Chapel and gardens with grottos, wells and subterranean areas, built from the end of the 19th century to the eve of the republican revolution in 1910, by a very rich Portuguese man of Brazilian birth, António Augusto Carvalho Monteiro (Rio de Janeiro, 1848 – Sintra, 1920) and his architect, the Italian Luigi Manini.

I started to study this 'quinta' (in French 'domain') in 1989 and by that time some esotericists were saying that it was of no importance, and a proof of the builder's and owner's exhibitionism. The art historians said for a long time that it was in fact an example of bad taste and 'senile revivalism', a pastiche of Manuelino (the Portuguese gothic style) and so on.

I submit that, besides the style, which is indeed syncretic revivalism, and apart from the question of 'good' and 'bad' taste, there exist in Regaleira some symbolic and mythological themes, some of them of an esoteric nature:

- The Age of the Holy Ghost and its popular cult: introduced by Isabel of Aragon, Queen of Portugal married to King Dinis (who changed the name of the Order of the Temple to the Order of Christ); this cult is present in Portugal and in Brazil up to the present day. An example of this theme of the Holy Ghost is the presence of doves in the Palace and the Chapel and in a grotto (the Leda's grotto) and also the Dante's '515' announcing in some way the millenaristic and heterodox Joachim de Fiore's 'Third Age' ('515' or 'Il messo di Dio', also 'il veltro', as Beatrix says in the Purgatory of The Divine Comedy), and in three sculptures (2 in the gardens and 1 in the Palace).

- Hermetic and alchemical themes: sculptures of an 'athanor' (alchemical furnace) in the Chapel, statues of Hermes/Mercury and the presence of Ibis/Thoth in a house in the garden, and also several sculptures of symbolic animals (an eagle with breasts, etc.), the Virgin Mary in the Chapel with the three colours of the alchemical Opus (black, white and red) and also the close proximity between a tower/ziggurath (for contemplating the celestial world) and the entrance of the subterranean world (guarded by two crocodiles as in Egyptian mythology, suggested to me by Michael Baigent) – calling to mind the Hermetic axiom: 'as above so below'.

But there exists also in Regaleira an initiatic path in the gardens – offering a spiritual 'experience of self-knowledge' as Lord Northampton mentioned on Portuguese television in his visit last Summer - composed of two wells (one ten metres deep and another thirty metres deep) for descent and ascent of people, tunnels and subterreanean galleries, a big entrance guarded by crocodiles, and grottos of which the most important is the Leda's grotto, also with an alchemical/rosicrucian meaning (the marriage of heaven and earth, or the spiritualisation of matter and the correspondent materialization of spirit, in an hexagonal grotto).

There are several Templar crosses in this path – which is close to the classical paths of initiation, like the Divine Comedy – in the bottom of the big well, and in the Chapel and its crypt which I believe may be the end of a Knight Templar initiatic path in a neo-templar version. This neo-templarism has possibly some masonic roots not only because of the presence of a flaming triangle with a KT cross at the entrance of the Chapel (in the top of the entrance) and KT crosses similar to those of the German Strict Observance in the crypt, but also because of one painting in the ceiling of the owner's office, which in my opinion represents the three 'masonic graces': Wisdom, Strength and Beauty.

What could be the explanation for this possible masonic influence? The owner and his father (catholics like several masons in Portugal by that time, as the Cardinal of Lisbon and various Bishops and Archbishops), were close friends of the King of Portugal, Ferdinand the II (Saxe-Coburg) and by the end of the 19th century Portuguese Freemasonry was not yet completely influenced by the atheism of the Grand Orient of France. Besides, there is a 'leitmotif' in Portuguese Freemasonry of that century: the assumption of the tradition of the Order of the Temple and of the Order of Christ (the Grand Master Costa Cabral, Count of Tomar, in the middle of the 19th century bought a part of the Convent in order to establish the Headquarters of Portuguese Freemasonry there).

We don't know if the owner was a Freemason – though it was not impossible because traditional Freemasonry didn't disappear suddenly by magic at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th in Portugal. On the contrary it did remain in small groups. But we do know its spiritual will and message left to the future generations in Regaleira marrying paganism and christianity in such an

harmonious way. We don't know of any literature or comments about a work as important as Regaleira – there are absolutely no letters on this subject which is a very strange thing. But we do know about it through a catalogue of some manuscripts belonging to the owner, edited by the Library of the Congress in Washington D.C. ('The Portuguese manuscripts'): Portuguese tradition (the works of the poet Camoens), Portuguese milenarism ('Sebastianism'), the myth of the Fifth Empire, alchemy and so on.*

A year ago I read a very important article by Christopher Macintosh, entitled Gardens of Initiation (in *Ésoterisme, Gnosés et Imagination Symbolique: Mélanges Offertes à Antoine Faivre*, org. R. Caron, J. Godwin, Peeters ed., Leuven, 2001) in which the author defines an 'initiatic garden' ('which conveys sacred or philosophical meaning – besides playfulness – (...) through a visual and experiential language (...) and leads to an (...) initiation', op. cit.) and a 'masonic garden' ('most probably not like an orthodox Lodge (...) rather we would expect symbolic allusions reflecting the world view of Freemasonry (...) in a random manner or as initiation itineraries (...) reflecting the symbolic journey undertaken by the masonic initiate', op. cit.), both containing 3 basic elements: the form of the garden, the symbolism of plants and the objects (statues, hills, grottos, caves, temples, etc.). Christopher Macintosh points to the book of Francesco Colonna, *Hipnerotomachia, or the Dream of Poliphilo* (Venice, 1499). For an illuminating introduction, see the article of Adam McLean *The Dream of Poliphilus, a Source for the Allegory of the Chemical Wedding* (in *The Hermetic Journal*, nº.30, 1985) - as the 'biggest literary inspiration for initiatic gardens', containing impressive and symbolic elements, such as a dark wood (or labyrinthine forest) with a dragon, a ruined temple, an underground passage to the realm of hell, where the hero lives his initiatic adventures with nymphs and goddesses. It gives us some examples of gardens inspired by Colonna's book: 'initiatic' as Villa de Castello (near Florence, about 1540s), the gardens of Bomarzo (Latium, mid 16th century), Stourhead (Wiltshire, 17th century) – with the theme of descent and ascent as in Regaleira -, and 'masonic' as Désert de Retz (Marly, France, 17th century), Torrigiani Garden (Florence, early 19th century), Villa Malmanara (Saonara, Padoa, Italy, early 19th century), Worlitz Park (near Dessau, Germany, 18th century) – with a labyrinth with tunnels as in Regaleira) and so on, so that the Portuguese Palace and gardens of Regaleira could be one of the latest examples of this important family of 'initiatic' and (who knows?) 'masonic' gardens in the west (in a revivalistic way, of course).

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Postscript - I pointed to the possible influence of 'Poliphilo's Dream' on Regaleira in an essay *A linguagem dos pássaros*. I included it in my book *O Esoterismo da Quinta da Regaleira*, but I considered other influences – besides one as evident as Dante's *Divine Comedy* - like that of Rabelais (the *Thelema's Abbey*) and of Louis Claude de Saint-Martin's book *Le Crocodile* (Saint Martin was a freemason). But I dare to pose an hypothesis concerning Regaleira's initiatic path (or paths, as there may be more than one): that the one related to neotemplarism is influenced (through Ferdinand Saxe-Coburg?) by the 6th degree of the Swedish Rite – to which I assisted, as a demonstration, in the 1997's International Conference on Great Priorities, in the Masonic palace of the Grand Lodge of Sweden, in Stockholm – which includes a path in a labyrinth, crossing the paradise gardens, an 'adoubement' of the knight in the crypt and the consecration of the knight in the Chapel – all elements we have in sequence in Regaleira.

Bibliography of José Anes' works on Regaleira:

- "Re-criações herméticas", Hugin ed., Lisbon, 1st ed., 1997, 2nd ed., 1998.
- (with Paulo Pereira and Denise Silva) "A Quinta da Regaleira: história, símbolo e mito", Fundação Cultursintra, Sintra, 1998
- (interview conducted by Vitor Mendanha) "O Esoterismo da Quinta da Regaleira", Hugin ed., Lisbon, 1st ed. 1998, 3rd. Ed. 2001.