

IWP Women of Lisbon Tour

Do you know that 8th March is International Women's Day (not 9th March as I heard on the radio, justified because women took so long getting ready!)? This year, the Events and Excursions Team of International Women in Portugal arranged a walking tour enlightening us about the women of Lisbon. Blessed with a beautiful blue sky we accepted colourful paper flowers celebrating the day, received from such diverse donors as police officers at the entrance to Armazens de Chiado and women outside Misericórdia, who explained they'd been made by individuals with Down's Syndrome. In addition, flower sellers' stalls abounded, displaying attractive bouquets as well as individual stems in appreciative gifts to women.



The IWP Women of Lisbon tour group, with guides Vanessa and Inês left, assembled in Praça do Comércio

Having divided into two groups, each with a guide, we were first informed of a Roman slave called Flávia who bought her freedom, and who is commemorated in Travessa do Almada. She subsequently took the name of a Greek priestess and was the first woman of Lisbon whose achievement was registered in the city.

Walking into the Chiado we were told about Madame Villaret, a 19th century stylist whose creations extended to fake boobs and whose book included topics ranging from corsets to advice on concealing imperfections! This district was among the most cosmopolitan ones in Lisbon and was also home to Italian sisters, Carolina and Josefina, otherwise known as the Parliquitetes. Left penniless by their brother who took the family money, these sisters would promenade up and down the Chiado all day, dressed in their refashioned outfits bearing their trademark flower in the jacket lapel. Opposite Rua Capelo, # 31 Rua Ivens was the home of Maria Eduarda, who had lived in France and was therefore revered for her chic fashion style. Escorted by the author of *Os Maias*, Eça de Queiroz, she was considered a goddess of the fashion world.

Outside São Carlos Opera Theatre, we learned of one artiste, Condessa d'Edla, who married Dom Fernando II after the death of his wife D. Maria II, having received this title two days before her wedding. Working in the theatre, she was considered an unsuitable match for royalty, the press having claimed she was a social climber. In contrast, despite the 24-year age difference, she remained married to the king until his death twenty years later. The monarch had constructed Chalet da Condessa at Palácio da Pena for his beloved wife, which he bequeathed to her, along with Castelo dos Mouros and the royal porcelain and silverware collections, among other possessions, and which his son subsequently bought back.

Moving on to the Bairro Alto, in Praça de Camões, we were informed that the poet whom the square commemorates was the lover of a royal princess. As one of the richest women in the world, D Maria never married though her brothers had Camões arrested for being one of her lovers!



One of the groups taking a rest in Largo de Sao Roque

Moving on to Largo de Sao Roque, we learned of Preta Fernanda, brought from Cabo Verde by a German captain who fell in love with her. Considered an exotic individual, and working in a bourgeois household, she was well-connected and opened a saloon in the Bairro Alto, presenting only male artists. Its opening was considered scandalous, compounded by the fact that she would accompany Eça de Queiroz to the theatre! This remarkable woman even became a bull-fighter at Campo Pequeno and, aged fifty, wrote a book, its final chapter detailing her lovers' sexual preferences and character. *Memoirs of a Colonial* (1912) is out of print.

Within this square, our guide explained that D Leonor, married to Dom Joao II, lost both her sons, one at birth and the other from a fall from a horse (or that the Spanish killed him, depending on which version you accept). She subsequently established Santa Casa da Misericórdia at this location and All Saints' Hospital, besides.

Following a short break (refreshment or shopping, depending on preferences) in Rossio, we were impressed by D Maria II whose father had fled to Brazil during the Napoleonic wars then brought her to the capital, and who was married four times! Following her fifth pregnancy, she was told she shouldn't give birth again if she were to survive. The doctor's advice went unheeded with eleven pregnancies in sixteen years. Determined to produce heirs, she lived up to her claim of 'I will die being a queen', succumbing during childbirth aged 34.



Walking through Mouraria, we penetrated the district associated with fado. In the small square outside Severa's home it was explained that this type of music was originally associated with prostitution, as it was for this first, renowned fado singer. With the arrival of Estado Novo the status of this type of music and songs was improved until its eventual, respected state of today.

Our final stop was in Largo do Intendente, where the first League of Republican Women was founded in 1908. Having been encouraged to do so by pro-republicans, following the end of the monarchy these same leaders became anti-feminist, breaking their promises. Carolina Beatriz Augélio campaigned for women's rights which eventually saw all women having the vote but just in 1968! Previously only single, divorced or widowed women could vote and until 1931 divorced women were denied custody of their children.

Thanks were expressed to our guides and IWP events organizers before we headed homewards or broke into groups in search of lunch. For information about IWP visit the website at: <http://www.iwpportugal.org>