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SACRED MOUNTAINS: THE QUEST FOR THE HEAVENLY JERUSALEM

MONTANHAS SAGRADAS: A BUSCA PELA JERUSALÉM CELESTE

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ABSTRACT – Mountains have fascinated humanity since before the emergence of *lógos*, inspiring fear, devotion, and respect. Because of this, various mythical-religious interpretations have emerged, featuring these elevations as key elements: whether as representations of divinity, its abode, or as sites for its theophanies. Thus, Christianity, like Judaism from which it arose, was no stranger to this pilgrimage to sacred sites, many of which were mountains. Around the year 1000 AD, Christian pilgrims sought to travel to Jerusalem as a means of atoning for their sins at the turn of the approaching new millennium. However, the Ottoman Turks made such access difficult, leading European believers to seek new ways to express their faith, such as the sacred mountains.

KEYWORDS – Sacred mountains; Bom Jesus do Monte; iconology; iconography; myth

RESUMO – As montanhas sempre fascinaram os homens desde antes da efetivação do *lógos*, transmitindo-lhes medo, devoção e respeito. Devido a isso, diversas interpretações mítico-religiosas foram criadas, tendo tais elevações como elementos-chave: sejam como representação da divindade, sua morada, ou locais para suas teofanias. Assim, o cristianismo, como o judaísmo de onde surgiu, não ficou alheio a essa peregrinação aos locais sagrados, muitos dos quais montes. Por volta do ano 1000 de nossa era, os peregrinos cristãos ansiavam por dirigir-se a Jerusalém, como forma de expiar seus pecados na virada do novo milênio que se aproximava, no entanto os turcos otomanos, dificultaram tal acesso, levando os fiéis europeus a buscarem novas alternativas para expressar sua fé, como os montes sagrados.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE – Montes sagrados; Bom Jesus do Monte; iconologia; iconografia; mito

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Introduction

The idea of sacred mountains, as the personification of the divine, the abode of the gods or the place where their theophany took place, has always been a recurring idea regardless of the culture or the place of human settlement, whether in Europe, like **Olympus** – their abode –; in the Middle East, like **Sinai** – where Yahweh revealed himself to Moses –; in Asia, as **Kailashi** – the most sacred mountain in the world for Tibetan Buddhists, Hindus, Jains and Bonists; – Fuji – home of the Shinto gods Fuji-hime and Sakuya-hime – ; **Everest** – a sacred place for several Buddhist denominations –; in Africa, as **Kilimanjaro** – a place of worship for the Chagga and Maasai people who lived at the foot of the mountain –; in Oceania, as **Kilauea** – home of Pele, the Hawaiian fire goddess –; or in America, as **Popocatépetl** – a deity petrified by the wrath of another god – to name a few.

FIGURE 1

Mount Rinjani eruption with volcanic lightning
Lombok, Indonesia, photo by Oliver Spalt, 1994

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Thus, since before civilization existed, probably in a period when the *lógos of* humankind was still forming, when man saw these elevations before him, he realized that there was something more than a mere obstacle. Its size manifested not only its smallness, preventing him from surpassing it, but also his fear of crossing the unknown, due to the rarefaction of the air, the eternal glaciers that stood out there, or the fire expelled by volcanic eruptions, bristling with lightning and thunder (Fig. 1).

Such images provided elements that not only evoked fear of the place, but also respect for it; thus creating other fears stemming from the presence of these invisible, psychic forces that inhabited those inhospitable and treacherous places. These would eventually be personified as deities, demons, or other beings that inhabited the area.

Hegel (1979), when addressing the emergence of myth, states that it is a product of the imagination, because reason did not yet have enough elements to explain these phenomena on its own:

> the central aspect of mythology is the work of fantasizing reason, which transforms being into an object. Still, there is no other organ besides the sensory mode of representation for the gods to appear in human form (HEGEL, 1979, pp. 101-102, our translation).

Unsurprisingly, what was incomprehensible and unexplainable to our ancestors' minds was recreated through mythical images, bringing it closer to their shared understanding.

Thus, such imagery has not only permeated civilization since its beginning, as evidenced by numerous examples across generations, but has also been a fundamental element of it. For instance, we can look at two gods separated in both space and time, yet driven by similar principles: the Greek god **Hephaestus** (Vulcan to the Romans) and the Hawaiian goddess **Pele**. Both deities wield the power of fire channeled through volcanoes as their primary attribute, which extends to other properties related to it and symbolizes the power of its expression in nature. In the first case, he becomes a blacksmith, an activity that requires fire as an essential element; the goddess, meanwhile, has lightning as one of

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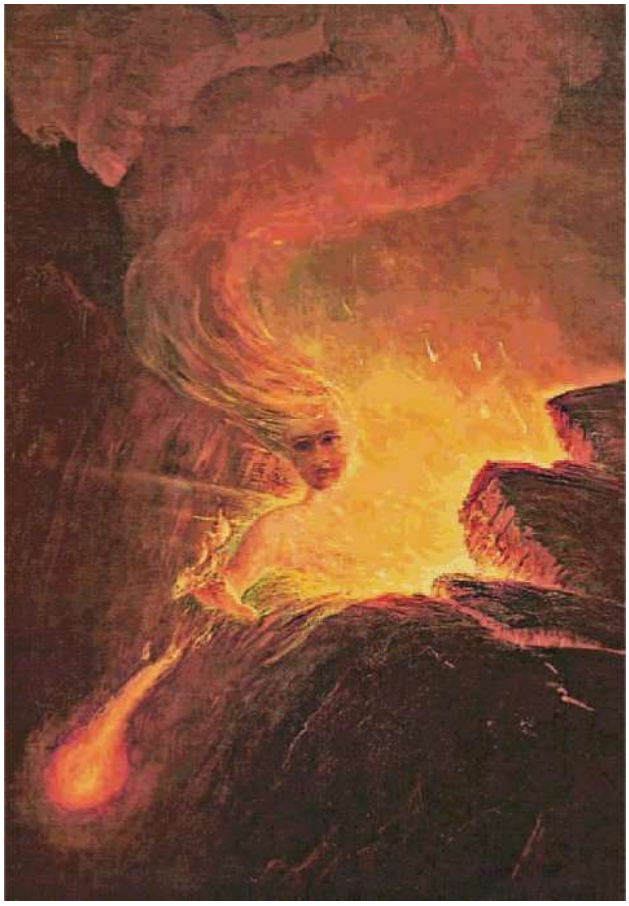
her attributes, alongside fire, as it frequently appears during volcanic eruptions.

In the imagery constitution of the myth, a mirror-like work is perceived: from nature, elements are taken – through the senses, in the image and likeness of their creators – that could be transformed into human figures; without this, their understanding and formation would be impossible (Fig. 2), as seen in Hitchcock's painting that depicts, in his way, the myth of Pele.

FIGURE 2



Skin, Howard Hitchcock, 1929

In the painting, the goddess appears entwined with the Kilauea eruption: the former merges with the latter, as if they were a single

entity with one essence. That may have been observed by native people trying to understand and interpret the event. Their effort led to the creation of the entire subsequent *logo*-inspired imagery meant to support the original mythical version, as seen in Hitchcock's painting. Notably, the artist depicts the goddess's hair blending with fire and smoke, illustrating what is now called "Pele's hair," composed of tiny magmatic fibers of molten basaltic glass that are golden in color.

However, it's worth noting – without debating the merits – that, despite modern Hawaiian communities revising Hitchcock's painting due to its use of a Caucasian, and thus non-native, figure as its model, this imagery might be more faithful to the original myth than Johnsen's. (Fig. 3) Closer examination shows that Johnsen's work aligns more with a later myth version, influenced by *lógos*, but less true to the original story. As a result, it aligns more with what natives expect and want to see.

Oral tradition tells us that Pele, fleeing from her older sister and water goddess Namaka, carries an egg in her right hand that holds her younger sister Hi'iaka. In her left hand, she has a stick (*pã'oa*) used to seek her life force: fire on the small islands where she tries to hide. Her pursuer always extinguishes her fire, forcing her to keep moving farther away. Eventually, on the largest Hawaiian island, she manages to hide and dig deep enough to find fire that others cannot extinguish: within the Kilauea volcano, where she will establish her future home. However, in addition to the fear and lack of knowledge generated by these places, it was noted that, in the first human settlements, springs flowed from the tops of mountains that not only quenched thirst and irrigated the soil but also served as a source of abundant animals for hunting.

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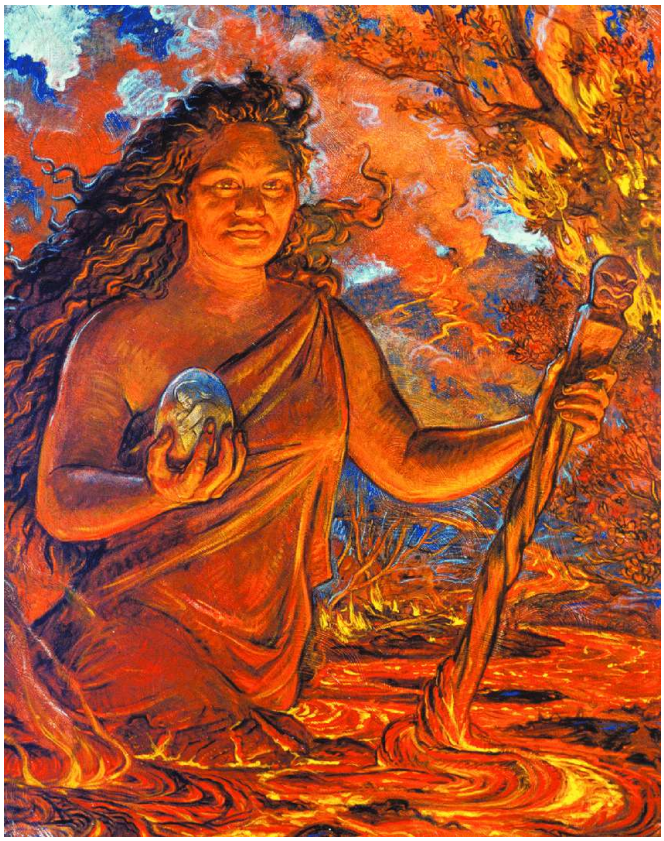
FIGURE 3



The goddess Pele, by Arthur Johnsen, 2005

Thus, the idea of the mountain as a mother goddess from whose throne she ruled and protected all living beings was added to these places, sending them water from both the melting glaciers and the rains that ran down its slopes, fertilizing the soil. It is no wonder that centuries later, these regions would become shelters for anchorites seeking spiritual enlightenment, associating them with divine revelation and human transition in their quest for perfection.

Such images of mountains, as well as the myths surrounding them, persisted for centuries despite the development of civilization. Various mythical and religious ideas, along with cosmogonic models, centered

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around them, to the point where their physical or geographical presence was no longer necessary for veneration – as is the case with Meru in India, whose reality was cosmic and metaphysical. This site, for example, was said to be the center of the universe, and because of its great height, even the sun and moon were believed to revolve around it. Moreover, it was said to be surrounded by circles where different deities were thought to dwell. To this day, Buddhist, Jain, and Hindu temples aim to depict this in their rooftops, as reflected in their traditional layers.

What can we say about the ziggurats built in Mesopotamia by different peoples, which shared not only the shape of a mound but also the belief that gods resided on their highest points? Furthermore, these places were not meant for everyone, but only for select individuals, such as priests.

Would the mythical Tower of Babel also qualify as a ziggurat built on a plain – a place without elevation or a mountain, where communication with the divine was possible – in which they sought to "build a city and a tower that would reach to heaven" (Gn 11:4)?

Aren't the first pyramids in Egypt, for example, similar to these Mesopotamian structures, facing the sky? And what about the pre-Columbian temples in America, which were built millennia later and thousands of kilometers away from these Old-World structures?

It is clear, therefore, that the significance of such elevations has been a constant in humanity's mythical and religious constructions, regardless of time or place. Elevating oneself represented, in one way or another, an encounter with the divine.

Therefore, neither Judaism nor Christianity is immune to this mountain symbolism. Both the Old and New Testaments are filled with such models, such as the Mountains of **Ararat** – where Noah's Ark is said to have come to rest (Gn 8:4-5); **Mount Sinai** – the site of Yahweh's theophany: "Three days later, in the morning, there were peals of thunder and lightning, and a thick cloud descended on the mountain" (Ex 19:16); **Mount Tabor** – the location of Christ's Transfiguration: "Eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John, and James with him and went up on the mountain to pray. As he was

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praying, his face changed in appearance, and his clothes became dazzling white" (Lk 9:28); and **Golgotha** – the place of Jesus' crucifixion, outside Jerusalem's walls: "Jesus took up the cross and went out to a place called 'The Place of a Skull', which in Hebrew is 'Golgotha'" (Jn 19:17).

Pilgrimage: the struggle between different worlds

Christianity, based on Judaism, adopted some devotional practices from it that are mentioned in the Gospel and were followed by Jesus himself, such as the pilgrimage to Jerusalem during Passover. However, these practices became difficult to observe in the early centuries of Christianity due to the destruction of Judea after the Jewish-Roman Wars (63-136 AD) and the repeated persecutions of Christians by Roman emperors. The situation changed after Constantine. Although he did not officially convert to Christianity as is often believed, his mother, Helena, did.

She, incidentally, not only went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to recover relics of the Passion – reviving this ancient tradition – but also sponsored, at the Roman state's expense, the construction of grand basilicas at sites considered sacred by the new faith: the Holy Sepulchre and the grotto where Jesus was believed to be born in Bethlehem. Over the following centuries, many Christians felt compelled to visit the places where Jesus had been, to repent, deepen their religious experience, or seek healing for themselves or loved ones. These pilgrimages, however, were dangerous, as pilgrims traveled into unknown and often treacherous territory, many routes filled with robbers. From the 7th century onward, Islam expanded in the Holy Land through military campaigns known as *jihad*. Yet, both Jews and Christians, called "followers of the Book" (*ahl al-kitāb*), were not barred from the sacred sites nor forced to convert immediately, provided they paid the *jizyah* – a tax specifically for them (Sura 9:29) – which offered them protection (*dhimmi*) over their lives, property, and religious practices. However, this tax was not extended to other groups, viewed as idolaters. Despite *Qur'anic* guidance, many Islamic rulers throughout history often made it difficult for Christian pilgrims to visit these sites,

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persecuted them, and destroyed their main religious structures, exemplified by Caliph Al-Hakim.

Starting in 1007, the caliph regularly limited public Christian ceremonies, such as Palm Sunday and the Blessing of the New Fire on Holy Saturday, which he had previously attended, and required that worship be confined to private settings. He also ordered the removal of crosses from church domes, confiscated church property, and even demolished numerous monasteries and churches in Egypt and Palestine, including the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre, built by Emperor Constantine and consecrated in 335 AD:

> At the start of the eleventh century, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, thought to enclose the site of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, had been partially demolished by the volatile Fatimid ruler known to history as the Mad Caliph Hakim. His subsequent persecution of the local Christian population lasted for more than a decade, ending only when he declared himself a living God and turned on his Muslim subjects. (ASBRIDGE, 2010, p. 28)

This act led to serious consequences for both sides, impacting the Muslim and Christian worlds, and ignited a series of conflicts and intolerance that continue today, including acts of mutual hostility like the Crusades. As the Seljuk Turks seized the Holy Land and saw Christians as their main enemies, they also limited access for Christian pilgrims to the area. Meanwhile, Christian Europe was increasingly eager to make pilgrimages to the holy sites. Given these circumstances, war between the two regions and religions seemed unavoidable, prompting a search for alternatives, which led to the establishment and growth of pilgrimage routes to places like Rome and Santiago de Compostela. This growth marked a significant break from the superstitions common around the year 1000. Society then was mainly rural and sparsely populated, burdened by heavy agricultural work, feudal and allodial payments, endemic violence, and diseases. These pilgrimage paths, deeply rooted in Latin Christianity, gained strength at the end of the 11th century and throughout the 12th, driven by the spontaneous pilgrimages of

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thousands of believers, supported by kings, nobles, and Cluniac monks. (SINGUL, 2004)

To meet the demand for pilgrimage during this period, two options emerged: becoming a crusader – participating in the just war, as Saint Augustine envisioned and Pope Urban initially promoted – or seeking alternative routes within Europe, such as to Rome or Santiago de Compostela, to satisfy their desire for piety and penance.

Constitution of the sacred mountains

Since the original pilgrimage mainly targeted Jerusalem, but reaching it was dangerous, alternative practices were developed. These were substitute routes that preserved the true meaning of pilgrimage to holy sites. Along the two main European pilgrimage routes – the Roman and the Galician – various shrines were built to guide the faithful through rituals of faith, allowing them to replace the physical goal – the earthly Jerusalem – with its heavenly counterpart. These sites housed relics and images that offered moments of spiritual ecstasy.

In the 15th century, a new approach to bringing holy sites closer to the faithful emerged: reconstructing them. Located amid natural landscapes, surrounded by trees and lakes, the goal was to evoke the mystical experience of earthly Jerusalem more effectively, especially since pilgrims couldn't travel there. This task was taken on by the Franciscans, who had been guardians of the Holy Land since the 14th century and could recreate its essence, often allegorically, on European soil. In 1491, this began in Varallo Sesia, Italy; later, the Catholic Counter-Reformation fueled these efforts after the Council of Trent.

Climbing a mountain, ascending to the Heavenly Jerusalem, or seeking to witness key moments in Christianity became more than just a way to be close to Jesus' sacrifice; it also became a means for self-discovery or to atone for evil deeds committed by the pilgrim. Many believers, upon seeing the life-sized sculptures of the Savior in his final moments, experienced a deep sense of mysticism and emotion. They realized that their sacrifices were minor in comparison to the drama of these sacred places. So, at the journey's end, in its cathartic

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climax, relief washed over their souls.

FIGURE 4

Ecce Homo, Sacro Monte di Varallo, photo by Mattis, 2007

The tendency, for example, to feel Christ's pains in one's own body, would be a constant in Christianity, since Jesus, for instance, when condemned to death, had to climb Golgotha to be executed. Therefore, throughout the centuries, Christians have aimed to imitate the Master by retracing the supposed route of the Way of the Cross, especially in Jerusalem. In doing so, they achieved two goals: to reach the divine and to mortify themselves in this ascent, obtaining forgiveness for their sins.

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FIGURE 5

Congonhas do Campo, photo by Jack Brandão, 2023

***Bom Jesus do Monte*: images of the Portuguese 19th century**

One of the fundamental aspects of the sacred mounds was their precise use of imagery, introduced between the 15th and mid-18th centuries, a period heavily influenced by the concept of the image (*eikón*), which, according to the Renaissance, was a **universal** language that was broadly decipherable. Furthermore, such constructions, following the principles of the Counter-Reformation, aimed not only to reconvert those who had strayed from Catholicism but also to retain their faith through emotional appeal. The universality of images, however, proved to be flawed, as not everyone can understand the image in the same way; moreover, it cannot even explain itself, as it needs to seek another essential element for clarification, such as the word (*lógos*). It was precisely this conclusion, along with the image-based stubbornness of these theorists, that created a specific

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artistic genre in that period: the emblem, in which both elements are combined. Using this logo-imagery perspective on the world, they were able to unleash their rhetorical and artistic play, which they enjoyed and used to establish moral standards for their society. It is also worth noting the existence of imagery collections, known as iconologies, such as Cesare Ripa's, which influenced every model of representation during that time. Inserted in this context, despite its temporal extrapolation, the Sanctuary of Bom Jesus do Monte was built in the city of Braga, Portugal. An actual open-air museum, its design was heavily influenced by the Piedmontese and Lombard Sacri Monti in Italy. (Fig. 4) However, it also served as a model for others, such as the Sanctuary of Nossa Senhora dos Remédios in Lamego, Portugal, and the Sanctuary of Bom Jesus do Matosinhos in Congonhas, Minas Gerais, a masterpiece of Brazilian Baroque, with master Aleijadinho (Fig. 5) playing a prominent role.

More than simply capturing a center of popular religiosity through photography, this article aims to reveal some of its unique and specific qualities, as well as its iconographic and iconological features. It emphasizes the importance of not only highlighting its visual aspects but also showcasing the richness and complexity that would otherwise go unnoticed by most visitors. That is a rediscovery of our own culture, rooted in various models of Lusitanian tradition.

Walking along the Alameda do Pórtico, which leads into the complex, we are transported, like on a journey through time, to a portal that opens to visitors who have no idea what they will find on the other side. First, however, we must ascend two flights of fan-shaped stairs, the first with eleven steps leading to a platform flanked by stone parapets. At the corners of this platform, two obelisks rise, flanking the entire square in front of the portico. (Fig. 6)

From the first platform, before the next set of six steps that lead into the complex, one glimpses the portico – a gathering place for what will be encountered on the other side. Like a portal, crossing it symbolizes the encounter between humanity and the divine. This journey begins on earth and ascends toward heaven, as can be inferred from the proportions used

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by the architect in its design. Built by D. Rodrigo de Moura Teles, Archbishop of Braga, in 1723, it is made of dark, rusticated granite, with a depressed arch formed by two seven-meter-high and four-meter-wide pillars, finished with spheres and bulging vases, topped by an archiepiscopal cross with the crucified Christ at the center, and below this, the coat of arms of the archbishop who ordered its construction. By adding the spheres on top of the pillars, the artist intended to demonstrate eternity, as explained by Ripa (2007a) in his allegory on the subject. These elements become even more meaningful when one observes the two fountains attached to the pillars: the one on the left (north) features the figure of the sun surrounded by twelve rays, representing the day; the one on the right (south) depicts the waning moon, representing the night. This cycle reflects eternity's constant return and departure. After all, "the sun and the moon are perpetual creators of things; by their virtue they generate, preserve, and provide nourishment for all lower bodies; [...] the ancient Egyptians used them to represent eternity." (RIPA, 2007a, p. 393)

FIGURE 6

Portico, photo by Jack Brandão, 2018

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On both fountains, we see inscriptions: while the lunar one reads, "Pello illustrissimo senhor Dom Rodrigo de Moura Telles Arcebispo primaz[1]," the solar one states, "Jerusalem sancta restaurada e reedificada no anno de 1723[2]." These words aimed to guide the faithful visiting there: to lead them, through this mystical ascent – symbolized by the mountain and staircase leading to it – to an encounter with Jesus in his last days on earth, as well as to participate in his glory after his resurrection.

Before crossing the portico, it's already possible to see behind an adjoining wall two buildings: the original 18th-century chapels – the Cenacle (Fig. 7) and the Gethsemane – that remain: a cubit-shaped building with a round-arched portal, above which displays the coat of arms of its creator on the cornice, flanked by two small round windows, and topped with a pyramid-shaped roof ending in a sphere.

Beyond these structures, visitors encounter several flights of stairs interspersed with various levels, but what they'll find remains unclear. That is because, along its 573 steps and climbing a 116-meter drop, visitors will traverse three distinct staircases, each beginning in a large courtyard:

a) the Portico staircase;
b) the Five Senses staircase;
c) the Virtues staircase.

[1] By the distinguished Lord Dom Rodrigo de Moura Telles, Archbishop Primate.

[2] Jerusalem sancta restored and rebuilt in the year 1723.

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FIGURE 7

Cenacle Chapel, photo by Jack Brandão, 2018

The first, the Portico, features a zigzag shape that reduces the effort needed for visitors climbing its 376 steps. Crossing a tree-lined path, it creates a mystical atmosphere shaped by the shadows of the forest. Its sections and platforms connect the first six chapels along the route, each with a nearby fountain. These fountains depict iconographic representations of pagan gods such as Apollo, Diana, Mercury, and Saturn. On this first staircase, ten out of the total nineteen chapels depict scenes from the *Via Dolorosa*: Last Supper/Upper Room; Agony/Gethsemane; Betrayal/Arrest; Darkness; Flagellation; Coronation; Praetorium; Road to Calvary; Falls; Crucifixion. However, it's worth

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noting that, except for the first two, all the others were rebuilt, following a different pattern from the original 18th-century design, at the end of the 19th century: instead of cubits, they became octagonal (fig. 8); yet, the interior concept was maintained through sculptural and pictorial images.

These images, for example, are nearly life-size and depict, in a poignant, pedagogical, and allegorical manner, the final moments of Jesus' life among his disciples, culminating in his Passion, Death, and Resurrection. In addition to these elements, their walls are frescoed, giving visitors a three-dimensional view of the scenes portrayed, allowing the faithful to immerse themselves fully.

Let's take the first chapel, the Cenacle, as an example, since it is impossible to cover them all in such a limited space. We can see that, even before examining the imagery within it (Fig. 9), as with all the others, it is possible to infer what will be discussed there[3]. That is because just below the archbishop's coat of arms, on the building's cornice, there is an inscription with the corresponding biblical passage that should lead the faithful to meditation through a logotic preamble, before they have access to the iconic figuration enclosed within:

COENA FACTA
ACCEPIT JESV
P Æ M[ET AIT
COMEDITE:
HOC EST COR
PVS MEVM [4].

Upon approaching the door, whose upper part features wide iron lattices through which one can glimpse the scene inside, one gains access to the depicted scene. It is clear that, although the location and images are deteriorated due to time and natural wear, it is easy to see that each character has their role, following the principles of the **theater of the world** commonly used in the previous period, the 17th century. Before analyzing the images and their arrangement, it is worth returning to the *lógos* expressed earlier (Mt 26:26 and Jn

[3]At least it was for those who, at the time, knew Latin, the language used by the Catholic Church in the liturgy until 1969, when the new Roman Missal was promulgated by Pope Paul VI after the Second Vatican Council.

[4] "After supper, Jesus took the bread and said: eat, this is my body."

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13:2) at the chapel entrance. That is because, based on the Gospel text, the artist will choose the most expressive moment for their work. (LESSING, 1998)

FIGURE 8

Chapel on the Road to Calvary, photo by Jack Brandão, 2018

However, as we will see below, in the chapter in question, the twenty-sixth verse of the Gospel of Matthew, there is not just **one** significant moment, although it revolves around the institution of the Eucharist. Still, several events happen within a short span that deserve mention:

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FIGURE 9

Chapel of the Last Supper, photo by Jack Brandão, 2018

a) the proximity of the Passover celebration: "You know that in two days will be the feast of Passover" (Mt 26:2a)[5], when "the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified" (Mt 26:2b);

b) the moment Judas decides to betray him: "one of the Twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and asked, 'What will you give me if I betray him to you?' They agreed on thirty pieces of silver" (Mt 26:14-15);

c) the search for a place to observe Passover: "The disciples came to Jesus and asked, 'Where do you want us to prepare for you to eat the Passover?' Jesus replied, 'Go into the city and find a certain man and say to him, 'The Master

[5] Since the biblical passages used here are for illustrative purposes, there was no concern with searching for texts from English editions, but rather the decision was to maintain a direct translation of the text in Portuguese.

says, 'My time is near; I will celebrate the Passover at your house with my disciples'" (Mt 26:17b-19);

d) the celebration of the supper in the Upper Room and Jesus' announcement of his imminent betrayal by one of the apostles: "Jesus sat at the table with the twelve disciples. While they were eating, Jesus said, 'I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me'" (Mt 26:20b-21);

e) the institution of the Eucharist: "While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had said the blessing, he broke it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, 'Take and eat; this is my body'" (Mt 26:26).

Therefore, the excerpt used to understand the scene gives the image researcher several elements to analyze the entire Cenacle chapel. These events, scattered throughout its iconography, help us understand the whole meaning of what the faithful or viewer sees, especially in how the characters are depicted within the setting.

Its sculptural ensemble features fourteen figures, thirteen of whom are seated around a table covered with a white tablecloth in a "U" shape. Meanwhile, another figure stands alone to the viewer's left, carrying a covered tray, likely to serve the diners. Jesus is positioned in the center, opposite the door, blessing a loaf of bread with his right hand while holding it with his left. In front of him is a platter with a roasted lamb – an essential part of the Hebrew Passover – and a chalice, not to mention several plates that were, in our 2018 shots, empty, but which could contain other scenographic elements.

Jesus, as the focal point of the composition, is flanked by six apostles on each side. All but one of them direct their gaze toward Jesus: those on his left look to the right; those on the opposite side look to the left. Each of these figures is not there randomly; just as their gestures and facial expressions are not accidental, the importance of understanding and recognizing their position and placement at the table is evident. Just as the biblical text, especially the chapter in question, is not tied to a single event, as we saw earlier, but to a series of events, we could say that the depiction of the apostles also does not exactly match what is described there. While Jesus is focused on the

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Eucharistic mystery he is inaugurating, it seems that Peter and John – one on his right, the other on his left – are as if absent from that moment. Therefore, despite the significance of the theological element in developing the central theme – the institution of the Eucharist – the image also conveys a statement of past events. To understand this, one only needs to analyze the disconnect between the central figure, Jesus, and the two apostles standing beside him. The disciple whom the Master loved, for example, leaned toward his chest not to contemplate the mystery unfolding or to ask him about what Jesus was saying, but about what he had just said: who was going to betray him.

That would not have been the right moment to ask this question, nor the right time to interrupt the Master regarding his unsettling words, which likely did not happen. However, in the scene before us, this disconnect is apparent, highlighting the time gap between the characters despite their shared space. This addition, for example, evokes not the Gospel of Matthew, as mentioned earlier, but that of John, which does not directly discuss the institution of the Eucharist; instead, it depicts the washing of the feet, along with a lengthy testimony of Jesus during the Passover meal that begins with the question of Iscariot's betrayal:

> "I tell you for sure that one of you will betray me." The disciples looked at each other, perplexed, unsure of whom Jesus was speaking. One of them, the one Jesus loved, was sitting at the table next to Jesus. Simon Peter motioned for him to find out who Jesus was talking about. (Jn 13:21b-25)

This statement about Peter is reflected in the sculptural scene, to the point that his gaze is directed at John's, showing that neither was paying attention to Jesus' words at that moment – "This is my body" – since the timing in the sculpture places the apostles before the Master: they are still stuck in the previous moment, in the "one of you will betray me." This mismatch is evident in their looks of confusion and questioning, as they face the Master's present moment, since "They were very sad and began to ask him one by one, 'Lord, is it I?'" (Mt 26:22), as shown by the gestures of the characters.

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FIGURE 10

End of the **Portico Staircase** with the Calvary Way chapel ahead
photo by Jack Brandão, 2018

Just as there is no clear reaction from the apostles to Jesus' words – since they should have shown some sign of disturbance, surprise, or strangeness at what was said – many of the characters play their roles, as can be inferred from their gestures in the scene. Three place their right hands on their chests – symbolizing, according to Ripa's iconology (2007), loyalty and friendship; four place their left hands on their chests – indicating humility and true faith, as well as showing firmness and confidence in their promises; three have their hands either resting on the table or joined together – perhaps to break the established sequence or to mark the end or beginning of an action. It's clear, therefore, that everyone present is, in some way, committed to the Master, except for one: Judas Iscariot.

That, as already recorded, was the only one who does not direct his gaze toward Jesus: his face is turned away from the scene, his

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gaze is distant and apathetic, focused on the emptiness of the scene; his left arm, which Weil (2013) associates with emotion, is close to his body and pointed in the opposite direction from the others, as if hidden, but shows his left hand holding a bag – probably of money – since he was "the one responsible for the common purse" (Jn 13:29).

Thus, unlike the others who communicate with their hands – something demonstrated iconographically and iconologically – and participate in Jesus' plan, his attitude becomes hostile toward what is happening in the group, nearly turning his back on everyone. He feels uncomfortable with the whole situation and wants to leave, until Jesus offers him a piece of bread and says, "What you are about to do, do quickly" (Jn 13:27b).

Continuing this journey, we see that in addition to the ten initial chapels, as we approach the Basilica's courtyard, toward *Terreiro dos Evangelistas*, there will be others that complete the mystical visit to this New Jerusalem: Elevation of the Cross; Descent from the Cross; Anointing/Tears; Resurrection; Apparition to Mary Magdalene; Disciples of Emmaus; Ascension; along with one dedicated to Saint Peter and another to Mary Magdalene.

Like the previous staircase, the next ones will also feature several iconographic representations, such as the Five Senses, whose fountains on their platforms or courtyards allude to each of the senses – sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch – and are filled with statues of biblical or pagan figures. Similarly, the Virtues are represented with rich statues related to their themes, along with fountains full of iconographic allusions that symbolize them.

When eternity is destiny

Even before reaching the end of the Portico Staircase, a large beam of light can be seen emanating from the courtyard beyond. Still on the steps, the Chapel of the Way to Calvary (Fig. 10) is visible ahead to the north. On the opposite side of the stairs, to the south, is the Praetorium Chapel. In the courtyard, to the west, there is a belvedere enclosed by an iron railing, offering views of the city of Braga. To the east, three flights of stairs lead up to the Staircase of the Senses.

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FIGURE 11

Circular courtyard that precedes the Staircase of the Senses,
photo from 360portugal channel, 2020

The change in atmosphere is noticeable: from dark and intimate, shaded by the trees within the forest, it shifts to transparent and open. It becomes impossible to remain hidden, especially since the stairs will no longer be within the forest and will follow an open east-west axis. Therefore, on sunny days, the area will be bathed in light all day.

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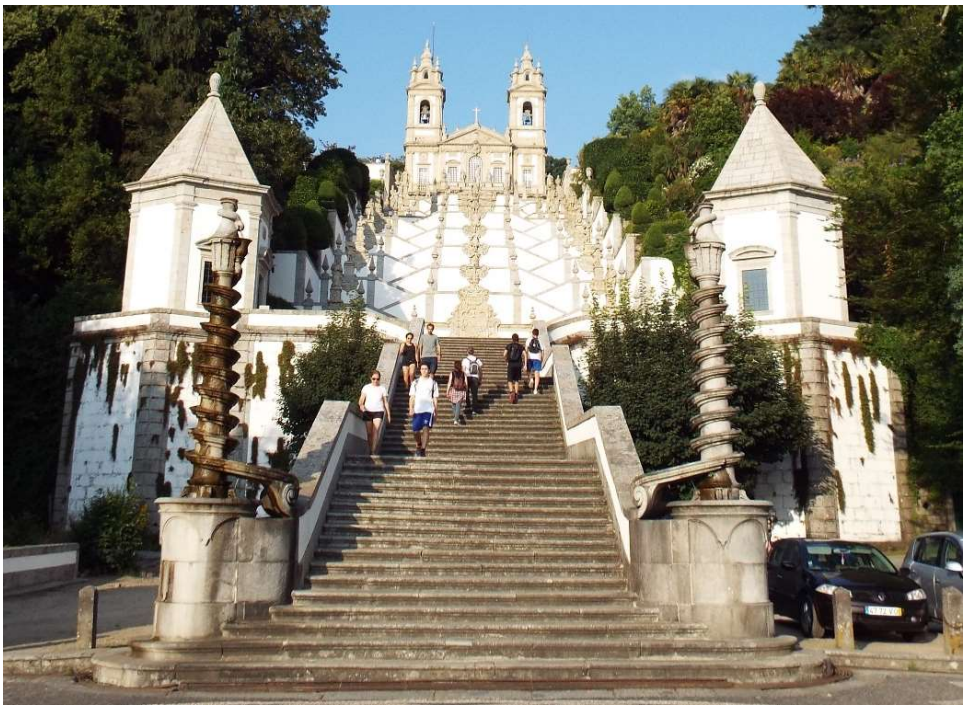
FIGURE 12



Staircase of the Senses, at whose base you can see the two helical columns, photo by Jack Brandão, 2018

Such a change is intentional, as the initial moments leading up to the process Jesus would undergo – Last Supper in the upper room, agony in Gethsemane, betrayal, arrest, scourging, and crowning – occurred during the dead of night. In contrast, his trial by the Roman authority – who held the power to impose death – his condemnation, crucifixion, and death took place in daylight, before several pilgrims visiting Jerusalem during Passover.

Therefore, the significance of the sun is also evident in the courtyard's paving mosaics, from which a large circle can be seen. At its center, a stylized solar depiction radiates twenty-four rays, resembling a large solar disk (Fig. 11). This area deserves special attention in two ways: first, because it was not part of the original 18th-century design;

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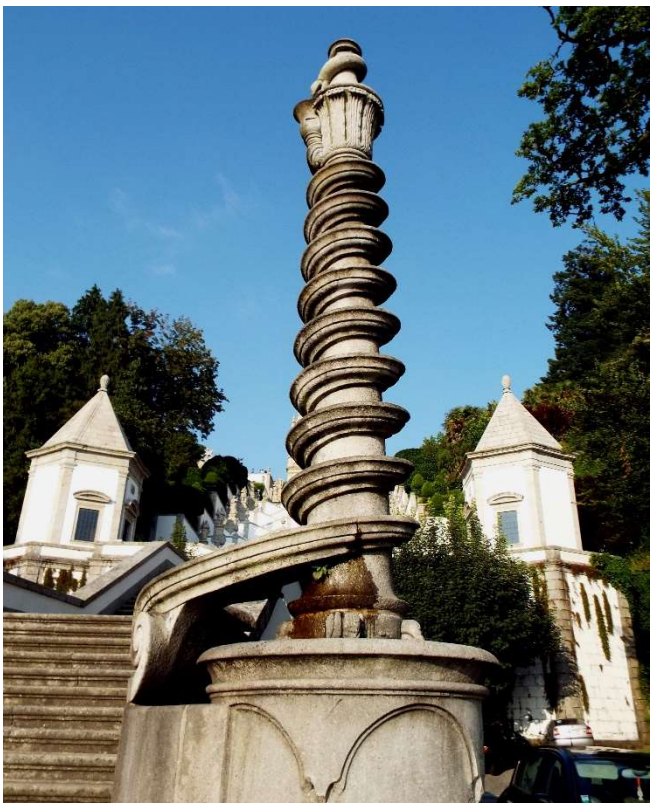
second, because, despite this, it is filled with iconographic and iconological references that no longer belonged to the 19th century when it was finished in 1893.

FIGURE 13



Heliocoil Fountain, photo by Jack Brandão, 2018

Similar to the entrance portico, where columns feature two fountains symbolizing the sun and moon – representing eternity – we now see, in vivid form, the same idea captured in a single image: if the sun at the start of the pilgrimage had twelve rays – symbolizing the twelve hours of the day – we observe that the courtyard's depiction has twenty-four, representing not only the hours of the day but also the twelve hours of night (moon). That once again affirms the idea of eternity, where the sun and moon are not

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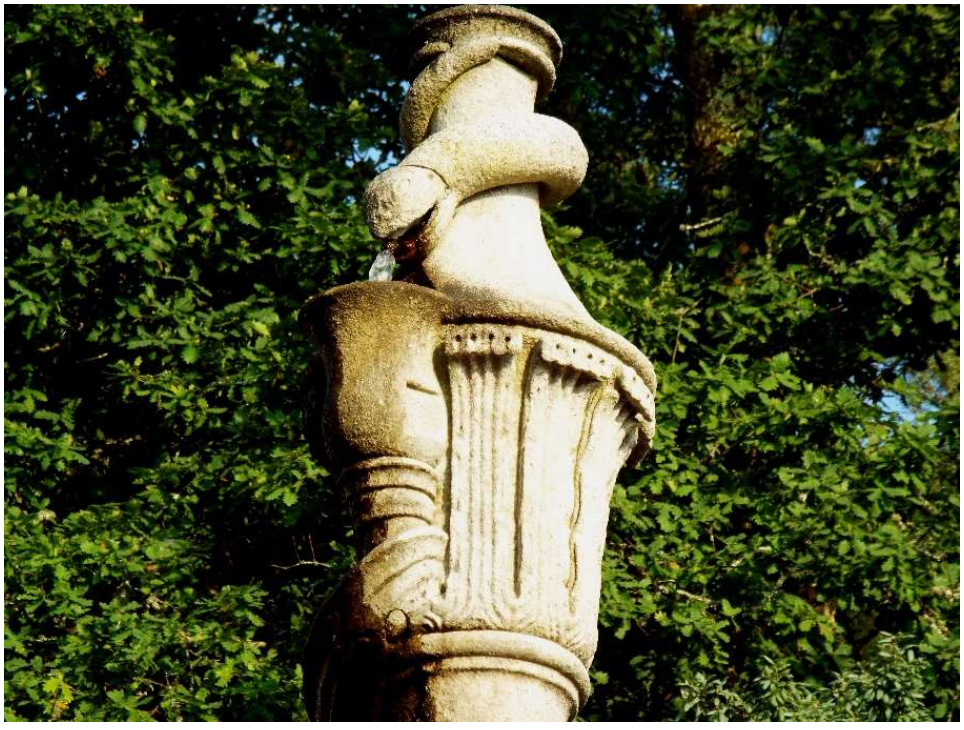
only side by side but also intertwined within one image.

Moreover, the artist repeatedly uses the circle motif in the courtyard. From an aerial view, it's evident that along each of the twenty-four radii extending from the central circle outward, four circles decrease in size as they approach the center, forming four large concentric circles. As previously suggested, the number four symbolizes everything earthly, including humanity itself. We therefore have the mystical union between the divine – represented by the sun and, in a special way, by the circle – and the human, which will be realized more effectively – since the incarnation of the *Lógos* had already become this initial experience – with the death of Jesus on Calvary and his subsequent resurrection. These steps now refer to when the Master takes the cross on his shoulders.

FIGURE 14



Serpent Fountain, photo by Jack Brandão, 2018

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Furthermore, Calvary, which effectively begins now with Jesus taking up his cross, is not (nor can it be) a symbol of death and defeat. Within the large courtyard circle, there are exactly ninety-six circles that, when divided by twelve (the number of hours in a day or night!), give the number eight – a symbolic number since the beginning of Christianity, representing Christ's Resurrection. Before ascending the stairs (Fig. 11), we again notice at their base two helical columns (Fig. 12) that draw our attention not only for their beauty but also for their iconographic and iconological significance. In reality, they are two fountains, each topped with a serpent, from which water flows and spills into a chalice that then descends, winding through nine coils (Fig. 13). Once again, the idea of eternity is present, symbolized by the serpent (RIPA, 2007), along with the sun and moon attached to the columns of the portico at the start of the path. The serpent, incidentally, carries various iconological meanings, ranging from positive ideas – such as prudence, health, and medicine – to negative ones – heresy, ingratitude, betrayal, envy, and sin. However, the symbolism here supports the ongoing theme of this journey, which is toward the Heavenly Jerusalem, or eternity itself. It's no coincidence that the artist's use of the circle (in the courtyard) and the serpent – which, by biting its tail, also forms a circle – have been symbols of eternity since Humanism, both being redundant and expressive. Continuing along the path, we reach the courtyard that leads to the Staircase of the Senses (Fig. 14), where two additional chapels are located at its base: the Chapel of the Crucifixion and the Chapel of the Falls. This section begins on a symmetrical axis, supported by masonry walls plastered and painted white, with granite pillars zigzagging through five double flights (fig. 15-16) – on the left and right – each with nine steps leading to common landings. The center features allegorical fountains in the Rococo style, in high relief, from which water flows through the respective sense organs they represent (Fig. 15). These fountains are topped with statues that evoke the relevant senses. The entire complex is crowned by a beautiful group of fifteen stone statues

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depicting biblical characters from the Old Testament. The ornate entablature and plinth showcase the refinement of the Rococo style. It's worth noting that each complex includes three statues arranged in a triangle (one centered and two on the sides), along with pilasters supporting obelisks and urns.

FIGURE 15

Staircase of the Senses, photo by Jack Brandão, 2018

If we closely examine the Fountain of Taste (Fig. 17), for example, we'll notice some interesting iconographic elements that go beyond the simple fact that water flows from its mouth. One element that catches our attention is the fact that the character is holding an apple in her left hand – the wrong side – a detail that is repeated with the three monkeys also present in the scene: one on the

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right, one on the left, and one at the base of the fountain, all of which also hold the fruit.

It is clear that the choice of the ape was not random, since in many allegorical and iconographic attributes – such as cunning, shamelessness, imitation, persuasion – there is the aspect of the senses, especially taste, which was believed to be sharper than that of humans (RIPA, 2007b). Not surprisingly, in several allegorical representations themed around taste, it is usually depicted in scenes, such as those in Janssens, or series by Rubens and Bruegel.

The apple, in turn, not only symbolizes its appeal to smell and sight but also, and most importantly, to taste (RIPA, 2007b). That is why it represents the fall of man in Eden: because, due to taste, Eve not only ate the forbidden fruit but also gave it to Adam. Therefore, this symbolism is strongly linked to the theme of sin and its consequences, such as perdition and death. However, these will be overcome with the coming of the *Lógos* and His death on Calvary, which the believer, at this moment, accompanies as he climbs the mountain.

FIGURE 16

Staircase of the Senses (detail), photo by Jack Brandão, 2018

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Thus, through his death and resurrection, Jesus once again reconnects heaven and earth, as has been designed since the beginning of this journey. The Master, therefore, becomes the new Adam, and the Virgin Mary, who brought him into the world, the new Eve. This iconographic motif – represented by the mother handing an apple to her son – has been widely used since the Middle Ages to symbolize redemption.

FIGURE 17

Fountain of taste, photo by Jack Brandão, 2018

Continuing, we finally arrive at the courtyard before the final staircase: the **Theological Virtues**, marked by two obelisks. Designed by Carlos Amarante in 1837 in the neoclassical style, it

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features simpler lines. It lacks the decorative excesses seen in the previous staircase, such as in its Fountain of Faith and its sculptural representations. Thus, Faith, Hope, and Charity form the core of the last three flights of the staircase leading to the courtyard of the Pelican waterfall. Along with these allegorical figures, there are other sculptures, including those in the fountains. On the last flight, there are two chapels: one dedicated to Saint Peter and the other to Mary Magdalene, offering views of the rear of the final sculptural group, the previous levels, and the city of Braga. Like the last staircase, these steps – each divided into three sections – feature essential iconographic and iconological elements.

After the *Virtudes* staircase, just three steps lead you to Largo do Pelicano, where you'll find landscaped flowerbeds and a stunning view of the sanctuary's surroundings, including the western *façade* of the Basilica of Bom Jesus. An unusual convex fountain forms a niche with a rounded arch, framed by rusticated pilasters and topped with urns. Inside, there's a depiction of a pelican feeding its chicks with its blood – an iconographic symbol of Christ's sacrifice for humanity – that flows with water. Two half-spiral staircases next to the fountain ascend to the churchyard on the upper level.

We eventually reach the Basilica's Forecourt, featuring statues of figures involved directly or indirectly in Jesus' Passion: Annas, Caiaphas, Herod, and Pilate (on the south side); Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, the Centurion, and Pilate (on the north side). Here, you can also see two chapels: the Raising of the Cross and the Descent from the Cross. Notable nearby buildings include the 1882 funicular railway, the equestrian statue of Saint Longinus, and the basilica itself.

Continuing along the path toward other chapels like the Unction and the Resurrection, you'll find an ample open space with a small lake and a belvedere with tables, offering views of Braga and the gardens below. Further along, one side features a bandstand built in the 1920s; on the opposite side, there's an artificial grotto, inaugurated in 1903, with a small lake inside; and above it, a belvedere. Continuing, you'll reach another chapel

marking the end of the *Via Dolorosa*: the Unction Chapel.

From this point, visitors are invited to participate in the mystery of Jesus' glory by visiting the Chapel of the Resurrection. Soon afterward, they climb a few more flights of stairs to reach the Chapel of the Ascension, with the Fountain of Tears in front of it. At this point, at the top of the hill in the *Terreiro dos Evangelistas*, they can view the last three chapels: the Apparition to Mary Magdalene, the Encounter at Emmaus, and finally, the Ascension of Christ. Additionally, there are four fountains with curved backs, each adorned with sculptures of the four evangelists along with their respective iconographic symbols.

It is clear, therefore, that the Bom Jesus Park complex serves as a vast repository of iconographic and iconological elements that depict a worldview that has long since vanished. Hence, the importance of preserving them not only through photographs but also through iconographic and iconological study. That is particularly relevant because Brazil, in general, lacks research of this depth; therefore, it is vital to equip our researchers and future generations with the long-lost symbolic keys they need.

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