



MONUMENT TO JOSÉ MARIA DOS SANTOS



Photograph by Manuel Giraldes da Silva, undated
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JOSÉ MARIA DOS SANTOS (1831-1913)

Son of a Lisbon blacksmith (or farrier), José Maria dos Santos was also born in the capital. With a background in veterinary medicine, he served in the army for a number of years. Following his marriage in 1857 to Maria Cândida Ferreira Braga S. Romão (widow of the Lisbon capitalist Manuel Gomes da Costa S. Romão), he took charge of the properties inherited by his wife. To these he added many others, as a result of his investment in efficient agricultural management and production. He would become the largest Portuguese wine producer thanks to his business management skills, which were unparalleled at the time. When he passed away at the age of 81, he was widely considered the richest man in Portugal.

He held several roles in business and politics, including: founder and member of the board of the Real Associação Central da Agricultura Portuguesa (RACAP), director of Banco de Portugal and the Sociedade Geral Agrícola e Financeira de Portugal and member of the Commission for the Promotion of the Wine and Olive Oil Trade. He also had a political career, serving as a member of parliament from 1869 to 1892, firstly for the Partido Regenerador and then for Esquerda Dinástica, before becoming a Peer of the Realm in 1893.

He played a central role in the agricultural development and colonisation of the Rio Frio-Poçoirão area. He used incentives for hiring workers, used chemical fertilizers, applied new cultivation methods (such as seed selection and the use of innovative agricultural machinery; in 1878 he had 2 steam engines at his estate in Palma and 10 in Rio Frio) and created outlets for produce. These methods were applied at his estates in Rio Frio, Palma and Machados. During certain periods, he had up to 5,000 people working on his properties, mainly producing rice, salt, wine, cork, cattle, vegetables and olive oil. He was a pioneer in the installation of the telephone on his estates.

In Rio Frio he planted 6 million vines at the end of the 1890s; the biggest vineyard in the world in size. At a time when wine production had been decimated by phylloxera, this was a risky decision. He teamed up with Abel Pereira da Fonseca to finance the opening of “A Bocheco”; a wine sales point in Lisbon. He was probably influential both in the layout of the South and Southeast railway line and in the creation of the Montijo branch, given that rail transport was a privileged means of transporting the produce from his properties.

The monument (a tribute paid by his former tenants in 1915, according to the inscription on the memorial stone situated in the square in Pinhal Novo also named after him) consists of a tall stone structure and a bronze bust of the benefactor, bearing the signatures of sculptor Costa Motta Sobrinho.



The structure is supported by two volutes, one on each side, whose profiles are decorated, in low relief, with vines and bunches of grapes. On the lower part of the structure is a bronze plaque in the form of a coat of arms, which symbolically has a hive with three bees. This plaque is surrounded by low relief depictions of agricultural tools - a shovel, a rake, a scythe and a hoe - interwoven by a ribbon. The central section of the monument features a depiction of a wooden sign bearing the following inscription:

AO BENEMERITO E INSIGNE LAVRADOR
(ENG: TO THE CHARITABLE AND DISTINGUISHED FARMER)
JOSÉ MARIA DOS SANTOS
1832-1913

The twisted vines under this inscription lend the sculpture an expressiveness and accentuate its Art Nouveau character.

The bronze bust is a naturalistic sculpture, without excessive detail, which conveys a sense of the strength and serenity of the man being honoured. The signature of C. Motta and the year 1916 can be found on the back of the left shoulder. It is unclear whether the signature belongs to sculptor Costa Motta, Tio (the uncle, 1862-1930) or ceramist Costa Motta, Sobrinho (the nephew, 1877-1956), but the handwriting and the style of the piece indicate that, in all probability, it is the work of the latter.

Costa Motta Sobrinho, a native of Coimbra, learnt about sculpture from his homonymous uncle, before serving an apprenticeship in Paris in 1904-05 at the atelier of sculptor Jean-Antoine Injalbert. Following the death of Rafael Bordalo Pinheiro, he became artistic director at Fábrica de Faianças das Caldas da Rainha in 1908. From 1914 (and in particular after the permanent closure of Fábrica das Caldas in 1916) until the opening of the António Augusto Gonçalves School of Ceramics (later Escola de António Arroio) in 1928, he essentially dedicated himself to sculpture at his Lisbon atelier.

He also produced 13 sculptural groups, commissioned by the National Tourism Council, depicting the Stations of the Cross for the Chapels in the Mata do Buçaco. He made several marble and bronze busts of various public figures, such as that of Fialho de Almeida for the Biblioteca Nacional, that of Júlio de Castilho or that of Actor Taborda in Jardim da Estrela. These were almost always commissioned, as was the case with the bust of José Maria dos Santos.

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