

Restoration of historic monuments as utopia: the bell tower(s) of Santa Maria de Belém church.

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Abstract

This essay was written within the ongoing *Conservation and Restoration Plan of the domes of the Santa Maria de Belém church* (Jerónimos monastery and church).

The Jerónimos church, Portugal's most visited monument, is undoubtedly an iconic historic monument that over the centuries has attracted the curiosity and attention of multiple writers, historians, architects, archaeologists, scientists and, naturally, restorers.

During the 19th century the restorers of Portuguese historic monuments, directly influenced or not by the principles of the French architect Eugène Viollet-le-Duc, tried to recover the hypothetical pristine image of these ancient architectonic constructions. In this context, as we aim to demonstrate by addressing the specific case study of the Jerónimos bell tower, there were some restorers that assumed the role of creators of architectonic utopias.

Through this study we will demonstrate that the importance of this monument as a symbol of the Portuguese age of overseas exploration and the principles of the stylistic restoration and European neo-gothic movements, played fundamental roles in the development of different but equally utopic restoration plans of the Jerónimos church bell tower.

Keywords: Restoration of historic monuments, stylistic restoration, Jerónimos church and monastery, 19th century.