

BRACARA OBSCURA: A POTENTIAL DARK TOURISM ROUTE IN THE CITY OF BRAGA, PORTUGAL

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Abstract:

Braga is a city with a history spanning over 2,000 years. A long history, which sometimes includes dark chapters, legends and fateful episodes. This article aims to compile Dark Tourism resources and create a route through the city for tourists to follow. To date, the darkest episodes in Braga's history, such as the Inquisition, the civil war, periods of plague, and other specific episodes of rivalry within the Church, have been identified but not catalogued in a single document. The objective of this article is to conduct bibliographic research to bring together these known episodes from Braga's darker history and associate them with the places in the city where they occurred or which are in some way related to the historical event. After compiling the locations, a field visit was conducted to ascertain whether they could be visited and enjoyed by tourists. The aim is to create a route through the city that can be used for tourist entertainment, to attract this niche audience to the city and demonstrate that a city with such a long history may have had darker periods, which can be used to promote tourism.

Keywords: Braga, dark tourism, touristic route, touristic animation

1. INTRODUCTION

Braga is a city with a long history. The area has been inhabited since pre-Roman times, but it has been a city ever since Caesar Augustus founded it. Since then, its history has evolved, and it has maintained a strong relationship with the Catholic faith. Before the Fatima apparitions in 1917, Braga was something of a religious capital of Portugal and a popular pilgrimage site. Although it has many churches and monasteries, it is not a city without a darker side.

Dark tourism is a form of tourism based around morbid subjects such as death, the macabre, disasters and wars. To date, various works have identified some events and episodes in Braga's history, but these have not been catalogued together. This work aims to catalogue these events

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and explore the possibility of creating a dark tourism route in Braga, featuring sites associated with these episodes.

This work is entitled 'Bracara Obscura', considering the name that the Romans gave to the city, 'Bracara Augusta', and the fact that episodes related to dark tourism have not yet been compiled in a single work, with some existing only in academic circles.

2. METHODOLOGY

To create this article, bibliographic research was conducted to define dark tourism and identify episodes and locations in Braga's history associated with it. After compiling a list of historical events, a field trip was undertaken to identify places in Braga associated with them and to develop a route for tourists keen to learn more about the city's darker past.

2.1. Dark Tourism

Dark tourism is a relatively new field of study within the academic community. Research into morbid themes only began in the 1990s (Sharpley, 2009, as quoted by Coutinho & Batista, 2014). Dark tourism focuses on visiting places associated with death, suffering, the macabre, crime and accidents. Stone (2006: 146) defines it as 'the phenomenon by which people visit, purposefully or as part of a broader recreational itinerary, the diverse range of sites, attractions and exhibitions which offer a (re)presentation of death and suffering'. Dark tourism is also related to prisons, concentration camps, torture-related events, dictatorships and natural disasters (Vieira, 2023).

Dark tourism is a form of cultural tourism that sheds light on historical events that are sometimes overlooked in history books. It is also associated with superstitions and other intangible heritage related to death and suffering. Tourists often visit places associated with dark tourism without realising it (Vieira, 2023).

This kind of tourism enables people to explore their curiosity about death and dark themes in a socially acceptable way, opening the door to a taboo subject such as death (Coutinho & Batista, 2014). 'We could argue that we have always been fascinated by death, whether our own or that of others, driven by a combination of respect and reverence, or by morbid curiosity and superstition' (Stone, 2006: 147). Through dark tourism, people can engage with death, accidents and disasters in a way that does not threaten anyone's existence, allowing them to learn about and educate themselves on these events. Dark tourism can provide an opportunity for places that would otherwise not be included in tourist routes to be incorporated into them (Vieira, 2023).

Stone (2006) identifies seven categories of Dark Tourism, ranging from the least intense to the most intense: Dark Fun Factories (sites, attractions and tours with a predominant entertainment focus and commercial ethic that present real or fictional death and macabre events); Dark Exhibitions (products revolving around death, suffering or the macabre, often with a commemorative, educational or reflective message); Dark Dungeons (prisons and courthouses); Dark Resting Places (cemeteries or grave sites); Dark Shrines (places of remembrance and respect for the recently deceased); Dark Conflict Sites (activities, sites or destinations associated with warfare); Dark Camps of Genocide (concentration camps and genocide sites).

In their study, Coutinho and Baptista (2014) examined tourists' perceptions of dark tourism in places associated with death. The authors found a consensus that dark tourism provides

education, information, and reflection on mortality and the causes of death. The individuals also argued that not all places associated with death should become tourist attractions; only those where death and suffering occurred a long time ago and which have historical and artistic value should be considered. However, they also believed that dark tourism sites should be visited so that people can learn about the events that occurred there and ensure that history is not forgotten or repeated.

Portugal is a country with historical sites associated with dark tourism. This is because its history includes some dark periods, such as the 1755 earthquake, the dictatorship and the Inquisition (Vieira, 2023).

2.2. Dark Stories of Braga

A compilation of events and situations related to the previously mentioned periods, as well as death and suffering, has been created. To present these events more effectively, we have divided the dark stories of Braga into the following themes: The Inquisition; Plagues and Diseases; Death; Wars; Crimes and Conflicts; 'Pio Latrocínio'; Disasters and Misfortunes; and the Dictatorial Period.

2.2.1. The Inquisition

Although Braga is an important city for the Catholic faith, it also has a history of persecution of the Jewish community by the Inquisition. The Inquisition was established on 17 December 1531 and ended on 5 April 1825 in Portugal (Carneiro, 2000). Although it is still known today for persecuting Jews, it was actually created to control the population and punish those who deviated from the desired norm.

Braga had a Jewish community in the Middle Ages that lived in a street called 'D. Gonçalo Pereira' Street. By the time of king João I in 1400, the community had moved to a different street (Carneiro, 2000). In 1466, the community was transferred to another street, which is now called 'Santo António das Travessas'. The parish priest of Santiago Church was unhappy about this change because it meant a decrease in income. This situation was resolved through an agreement made by the Chantre of the Chapter of Braga in 1468, which involved taxing the Jewish community to offset the church's losses (Carneiro, 2000). The king Afonso V, in the year 1480, wrote to the Chapter of Braga, recommending that they should not force Jews to attend sermons and he was surprised that the excommunication was being imposed on Christians who spoke with Jews (Belino, 2018a; Mendes, 1994). However, the Inquisition kept its work, not just against Jews, but against anyone whose behaviour deviated the norm.

The city of Braga still has an object that portrays the Jewish community in a negative manner. Inside the cathedral, the baptismal font is a Portuguese Gothic piece depicting Hell, which was studied by Almeida (2015). According to this author, the Jews are depicted in Hell as the Catholic community perceived them. The font was commissioned by D. Diogo de Sousa, who became Archbishop of Braga in 1505. This was years after the 1477 Braga Synod, which produced five anti-Semitic decrees (Almeida, 2015). Therefore, the baptismal font was sculpted at a time when the Jewish community had been forced to convert yet were still hated and feared by the surrounding community (Almeida, 2015).

In her study, Almeida (2015) identifies a particular hat known as the 'Judenhut' (Jewish hat) in some figures. She also argues that the exaggerated gestures of the figures depict Jews as

engaged in unarticulated movements that symbolise vice and evil. However, she also suggests that these gestures could depict a traditional Jewish dance, which the friars viewed as idolatry or black magic (Almeida, 2015). Almeida (2015) also suggests that the depiction of a dog being eaten by a lion could represent a Jew in Hell, as dogs were seen as evil in the Middle Ages.

Carneiro (2000) studied the inquisitorial visitation of Braga in 1618, analysing the names of victims and their trials up to 1655 — the year of the final auto-da-fé involving the victims under study. While it is an interesting study that reveals many names, for the purposes of this work, we will focus on the types of crimes listed.

The accusation that claimed the most victims was that of being a Jew. Between 1466 and 1509, 52 people were accused. A couple was also accused in 1565, and a further 40 people were accused between 1618 and 1626. In most cases, the victims were accused by neighbours and maids.

Twenty women and one man were accused of witchcraft and attempting to heal people (Carneiro, 2000). Mendes (1994) also mentions a lady that was sentenced by the Inquisition in 1567, accused of being a witch. Since he did not provide a name, we cannot confirm if it's one of the names listed by Carneiro (2000).

Other victims of the Inquisition were persecuted on grounds of faith. They were persecuted for questioning the Christian faith or making statements that appeared to contradict it. Of the 17 victims, six were members of the clergy, including the Dean of the Chapter of Braga and an inquisitor (Carneiro, 2000).

During the inquisitorial visitation, there were trials for crimes of a sexual nature. One man was accused of bigamy. Two members of the clergy — a priest and the Dean of the cathedral — were accused of living in concubinage with a woman. Nine men were accused of sodomy by the victims, two of whom were priests. Five priests were also denounced by the victims for soliciting a total of 27 women (Carneiro, 2000).

2.2.2. *Plagues and Diseases*

Some plagues were discovered to have been documented in the research, but there are only a few mentions of specific locations. One plague occurred during the reign of King D. Afonso V, which some date to 1348. This epidemic spread throughout Portugal (Belino, 2018a). Another plague is mentioned in 1505 (Belino, 2018a; Marques, 1988).

Between 1569 and 1570, the city of Braga was hit by a plague. To control the spread of the disease, a hospital was established on the outskirts of the city, in hunting grounds owned by the archbishops, an area known today as São João de Ponte. The archbishop D. Frei Bartolomeu dos Mártires served as a nurse there (Belino, 2018a; Ferreira, 2016; Rodrigues, 2005).

An epidemic occurred in Braga in 1716, resulting in the expansion of the Saint Marcus Hospital (Soares, 2002). In 1855, a cholera epidemic hit Braga. Initially, patients were treated at Saint Marcus Hospital, but the Civil Government then established a hospital for cholera patients on the outskirts of the city (Soares, 2002). On 1 May 1585, the Brotherhood of Saint Sebastian was established due to the plague spreading in the Portuguese kingdom (Mendes, 1994). Saint Sebastian is the patron saint of contagious diseases. For centuries, the city hall maintained the tradition of holding a procession around the city perimeter with a wax roll at the

Saint Sebastian Church during the festivities (Belino, 2018a). This tradition has now been lost, but the chapel still has a wax roll on display.

Other recorded epidemics occurred on the following dates: 1731 – influenza or pneumonic epidemic; 1769-70 and 1791-92 – typhus; 1753-54, 1781-82, 1864-66, 1868 and 1870 – gastrointestinal diseases; 1824-29, 1847-48 and 1872-73 – smallpox and subcutaneous diseases (Soares, 2002).

In the 19th and 20th centuries, Saint Marcus Hospital treated patients with syphilis. However, if a couple were affected by the disease, only one of them was admitted at a time (Soares, 2002). In the 19th century, the Hospital paid for treatment at the Bom Jesus sanctuary for employees who contracted syphilis (Soares, 2002). The ‘good air’ at the Bom Jesus sanctuary was renowned at the time, and people with lung diseases also visited the sanctuary. Over the last two centuries, Portugal has experienced two pandemics: influenza in 1918–19 and the current pandemic of SARS-CoV-2 (Covid-19) in 2020–21.

2.2.3. Death

When we think of death, we are first transported to cemeteries. Braga has one cemetery called 'Cemitério de Monte d’Arcos', dating back to 1870. Before that, people were buried in churches because the ground is sacred.

There are still churches in Braga with tombs and tumular stones inside. The cathedral is one of them; as the main church, it held the burials of clergymen and noblemen inside, while commoners were buried in the cloister of Saint Amaro. As well as having a large number of churches, the city used to have a large number of monasteries and convents, where their own nuns and monks were buried.

In addition to these buildings, Braga used to have hospitals in the city centre. In 1508, it had three: the Pilgrims', the Lazarus and the Gafaria (Mendes, 1994). While it is not recorded if these hospitals had burial sites, it is probable that they did. It is known that patients who died at the Saint Marcus Hospital were buried in the catacombs, with 150 to 200 burials per year (Soares, 2002). The Misericórdia (Mercy Institution) de Braga also provided shrouds, graves and masses for pilgrims and travellers who died in its hospital (Neves, 2023). This area corresponds with one of the Roman necropolises. Inside the former hospital, which is now a hotel, there is still a Roman tomb.

Further back in time, the earliest necropolis for which we have evidence dates from the Roman occupation of the city. Although pre-Roman settlements have already been excavated and studied, there is no evidence of burial sites yet. However, the study of the Roman necropolis is ongoing. To date, four Roman necropolises have been identified in the city of Braga (Martins & Delgado, 1989; Delgado et al., 1987) – Maximinos, Rodovia, Campo da Vinha and Largo Carlos Amarante to Rua do Raio. While not all necropolises have an established chronology, two have been occupied from the 1st to the 4th century AD - Rodovia and Largo Carlos Amarante - (Martins & Delgado, 1989; Delgado et al., 1987), which is similar to the period of Roman occupation that began in the 1st century BC and ended in the 4th century AD. The tombs unearthed during archaeological excavations are housed in the D. Diogo de Sousa Museum.

There is a legend from Roman times about a martyr saint called Victor who lived during the reign of Diocletian. According to the legend, Victor refused to worship a pagan deity and was beheaded as a punishment in an area of Braga called 'Goladas' (Azeredo, 2008). The Church

of Saint Victor has tiles on the walls depicting the life of the saint, and there is another church dedicated to him in Braga called the Church of Saint Victor the Old, to distinguish it from the 'new' church. Inside the old church, there is a stone on the main altar with a red stain which people believe marks the spot where Saint Victor was beheaded (Belino, 2018b).

On 22 December 1400, Prince Afonso, son of King João I and Queen Philippa of Lancaster, died of a fever (Mendes, 1994; Rodrigues, 2005). His parents buried their son in Braga Cathedral. It is the only tomb in the country made of golden copper. However, the boy's body is missing a leg and his hands (Mendes, 1994).

Belino (2018b) comments that, like other cities, Braga had women who, due to life's disappointments, would retreat to a small, permanently sealed stone cell from which they would never emerge while they were still alive. Food and communion were administered through a small door. These women were known as 'Emparedadas' (the walled-up). However, no place that could have housed these women is mentioned.

Recently, in 2025, a 19-year-old was stabbed to death in a student's bar (Gonçalves, 2025). This year a 50-year-old woman was found at the Bom Jesus Sanctuary, already deceased (Cerqueira, 2026).

2.2.4. Wars

Just like with plagues, not many locations were found when searching for information about wars, though several military episodes are mentioned. For example, the city of Braga was invaded and plundered by the Visigoth king Liuvigildus in 585 AD (Ribeiro & Melo, 2015).

After the Battle of Guadalete in 716 AD, the Moors invaded Braga, plundering the city and destroying the main church, which was later rebuilt (Mendes, 1994). In 996, the city was destroyed by Almanzor on his way to Santiago de Compostela (Mendes, 1994). However, the implications of these invasions for the urban structure are yet to be determined from an archaeological point of view (Ribeiro & Melo, 2015).

There is also mention of a Norman attack in 968 (Mendes, 1994). According to Father Nuno Forjaz, the site of today's Saint Victor Church was once occupied by a monastery which was destroyed by a Moorish invasion in 1031 (Azeredo, 2008).

Construction of the Cathedral of Braga began in 1070, and it was consecrated in 1089. However, the original architectural project was never completed due to an attack by D. Teresa's troops between 1109 and 1110 (Rodrigues, 2005).

During the 14th-century war between King Fernando and Henrique de Trastamara, Braga suffered Castilian attacks (Ribeiro & Melo, 2015). During this conflict, 16 houses were destroyed on Boavista Street, 34 on Chãos Street, and 29 on Maximinos Street (Martins & Ribeiro, 2016). On 20 May 1384, D. Nuno Álvares Pereira fought the mayor, Vasco Lourenço, who had seized Braga Castle with forces loyal to the King of Castile. After 20 nights and one day, the mayor surrendered and D. Nuno Álvares Pereira emerged victorious (Mendes, 1994).

Napoleon invaded Portugal three times. Braga suffered a second invasion by the Napoleonic army in 1809 (Mendes, 1994). Soult invaded northern Portugal, and General Bernardim Freire de Andrade was responsible for operations in the Minho region, stationed in Braga. He had to contend with the people of Braga, who embraced the ideals of the French Revolution. Rumours spread that the French were approaching the city, causing panic amongst

the population. Realising the situation, Bernardim decided to leave Braga, but he was insulted and intimidated by the people, so he fled to Porto while part of the army defended the French in Carvalho d'Este. He was captured 6 or 7 km from Braga by the people, who dragged him away and humiliated him. When he was about to be taken to prison, he was killed by the mob (Gomes, 2024).

The consequences of this invasion were numerous. Houses and institutions in the city were plundered, the Convent of Remédios was occupied and many lives were lost. The number of widows and orphans increased. Women who were raped by French soldiers received treatment for syphilis at Saint Marcus Hospital (Soares, 2002).

During the Portuguese Civil War, Braga was the headquarters of D. Miguel (Mendes, 1994). In March 1835, Manuel Joaquim da Silva Manso, the council secretary, threatened and attacked councillor Félix Coelho de Araújo Ribeiro at his home. That same night, Gaspar Alves Martins sent word to José Diogo de Morais Ferraz saying that he would attack him with a knife if he found him (Macedo, 2022).

On 10 July 1838, during the fair, people began shouting their opposition to the new 10% tax on goods. Amid cries of 'death', the army left the Archbishop's Palace to intervene at the fair. However, as confusion escalated, the City Council decided to withdraw the soldiers, which caused the mob to disperse. However, the City Council was forced to withdraw the tax to keep the population happy (Macedo, 2022). On the morning of 14 April, a crowd entered Boavista Street to the sound of a drum and headed for the Pópulo barracks, firing several shots as they went. The soldiers gathered and armed themselves, successfully expelling the crowd from the barracks. They fired shots as they descended Boavista Street, leaving several casualties in their wake. This episode lasted about three hours (Macedo, 2022).

On 17 May 1846, the people went to Campo de Sant'Ana (Central Avenue), while the army remained in Campo da Vinha. A soldier fired a shot into the air, frightening the crowd and causing them to scatter and flee. Two soldiers and two civilians were killed (Macedo, 2022).

20 December 1846 was an unfortunate day for Braga. A battle took place between the 'cabralistas' and the 'legitimistas' behind the cathedral. Most of those killed were defenders of D. Miguel. People leaving the Holy Cross church after the afternoon mass were also killed (Belino, 2018a). To this day, there is an altar on the street behind the cathedral with a panel of 'alminhas' to commemorate this event, alongside a painting of Jesus' face created by Luiz Vermell in 1870 (Belino, 2018b). Gomes, quoted by Macedo (2018), mentions that, in addition to these two encounters, there were two more in the city, resulting in 102 deaths and almost the same number of injuries.

Although peace was declared, violence persisted. Members of the clergy raped women, houses were frequently robbed, and currency was smuggled. On 25 August 1847, the Pópulo Church was robbed. The robbery was carried out by a soldier and was discovered when the goldsmith who bought the items found a tabernacle key and a small piece that suggested they were church items in the middle of the package (Macedo, 2002). The Portuguese Civil War and Liberal Revolution left scars on the population. This period could be mentioned in the Death and Crimes and Conflicts sections due to the increase in the number of widows and orphans, and the rise in begging and stealing, which created fear of disease transmission among the population. To avoid repetition, we will keep this mention here.

2.2.5. Crimes and Conflicts

Crimes can differ in nature and context. Here, we have compiled the crimes that appeared in the bibliographic search, despite their differences.

In 1341, the people of Braga revolted against Archbishop D. Gonçalo. To punish them, he published a letter of excommunication (Belino, 2018a). In 1391, at the Évora court, D. Lourenço Vicente, the Archbishop of Braga, spoke of nobles violently taking possession of monasteries and encouraging the poor not to fulfil their vows to Santiago (Marques, 1988).

D. Fernando da Guerra was the Archbishop of Braga from 1417 to 1467. Upon seeing the state of the cathedral library, he donated books from his personal collection (Marques, 1988). However, in 1448, Pope Nicholas wrote a document excommunicating those who stole books from the cathedral library (Mendes, 1994), suggesting that this was a common occurrence. D. Fernando da Guerra also had to address the issue of concubinage among priests and abuse of power by the nobility (Marques, 1988). King João I, D. Fernando's uncle, ordered an investigation into these incidents.

There is also a record of a crime committed by one of the archbishop's staff. King Afonso V pardoned João de Lisboa, an archbishop's servant, for kidnapping Beatriz Vasques, the daughter of João Vasques, a tax collector in Braga (Marques, 1988).

In the Middle Ages, Portugal had a network of inns to cater for travellers, students and, in particular, pilgrims. Braga was an important pilgrimage site and was also located on the route to Santiago de Compostela. In the 13th century, Braga had eight such establishments: São João do Souto Inn, S. Tiago Inn, Saint Marcus Inn, the New Brotherhood of Cividade Inn, Rocamador Inn, Maximinos Inn, Nova Street Inn and Paio Manta Street Inn (Neves, 2023; Ribeiro, 2016). Open 24/7, these establishments welcomed all arrivals and provided shelter for vagabonds, who would sometimes take refuge there or rob overnight guests (Neves, 2023).

At Saint Marcus Hospital, the pilgrims stayed on the ground floor so as not to disturb the patients on the upper floors (Neves, 2023). Dancing and making noise were prohibited, and a person was assigned to supervise the rooms (Neves, 2023). Conditions in pilgrim inns varied, but in Braga, pilgrims slept on straw and received olive oil for their lamps, having to search elsewhere for food. A major issue at the hospital was the behaviour of the chaplain, who would not close the door at night and would receive women, whether they were pilgrims or not, in his room (Neves, 2023).

In 1575, reports of theft in Braga increased due to famine. Thefts occurred at the Pópulo Church and at a Jesuit farm in São Gregório, located next to the church (Carneiro, 2000).

In 1603, Pope Clement VIII issued a bull instructing the Archbishop of Braga to prevent the nuns from breaking their vows of seclusion. This followed an incident in which a nun had left the convent to spend the night with a clergyman (Carneiro, 2000).

Archbishop D. Sebastião de Matos led a conspiracy against King D. João IV, resulting in his imprisonment in 1641 (Mendes, 1994). He died in prison a few years later.

On 23 November 1698, Archbishop D. João de Sousa ordered the arrest of two nuns. They were taken to the Menace Tower of the castle for 'speaking too much' (Belino, 2018a; Mendes, 1994). The same archbishop also arrested five devout women from the Retreat of the Blessed

Capuchins because they refused to accept a woman sent there by D. João de Sousa (Mendes, 1994).

In 1730, the abbot of the College of Saint Benedict in Coimbra visited Braga, but was arrested on the orders of the archbishop's vicar, Canon João da Silva Ferreira, for entering the city wearing a pectoral cross (Mendes, 1994).

In March 1742, Archbishop D. José de Bragança had sixteen of his canons arrested for refusing to carry sceptres in the Holy Week procession. Fearing that their imprisonment would be prolonged, the canons wrote a letter to King João V complaining about the archbishop. Aware of the situation, the archbishop went to his brother the king to justify himself, even disregarding the order to release the canons (Mendes, 1994).

On 3 September 1758, King D. José I was attacked in Braga while travelling by carriage to the Archbishop's Palace. He sustained injuries to his right arm. He was treated by the surgeon António Soares (Mendes, 1994).

Saint Marcus Hospital had its own regulations defining the rules of conduct for professionals and patients. In the 19th century, disrespectful patients had their diet or rations halved for two days as a punishment. If they complained, they were punished for four days. If they persisted in protesting, they lost half their food rations and were confined to isolation for three days. The 1912 Regulations even provided for expulsion (Soares, 2002). In the first half of the 19th century, the hospital admitted military personnel as patients but later stopped due to negative experiences with the 'furious ones' (Soares, 2002). The 1912 and 1916 Regulations contain the following rules: visits by women are prohibited, except for those with family ties; talking, gesturing at the window, singing, and wearing clogs or slippers are prohibited.

Soares (2002) provides examples of individuals and circumstances in which hospital rules were broken. Nurse Serafim was dismissed for allowing syphilis patients to leave the hospital to visit prostitutes, and for accompanying them. Nurse Sebastião dos Santos, aged 30, was dismissed for causing disturbances. A patient was previously dismissed for visiting a nurse's bed, while nurse Luís António Fernandes, aged 41, was dismissed for beating patients. Father João Lopes stole goods and money offered to patients and tried to strangle a patient during confession.

There is an area in Braga called Falperra that still has a vast forest. According to Azeredo (2008), this name refers to a time when thieves and robbers would hide in the trees and attack people passing by on the road. Diego Torres de Villarroel, a Spanish citizen, walked the Camino de Santiago in 1737, having spent three years in exile in Portugal (Villarroel, 2003). While there, he fell ill and promised Saint James the Apostle that he would undertake the pilgrimage if he recovered, which he did. The pilgrimage began in Salamanca and passed through Portugal and the city of Braga (Villarroel, 2003). This route is now one of the official routes of the Way of St. James and is known as the Camino de Torres. In his book, Villarroel recounts his travels in verse, mentioning the cities and villages he passed through. From Guimarães, he travelled to Braga. The journey did not go well: in his book, he recounts arriving in Braga without trousers and with torn clothes (Villarroel, 2003). Although he does not explain what happened, the route passed through Falperra, so it is possible that he was robbed.

2.2.6. ‘Pio Latrocínio’ – ‘Holy Theft’

The relationship between Braga and Santiago de Compostela has been shaped by a historical event involving the two cities from the 12th to the 20th century. This episode is known in Portuguese as 'pio latrocínio' and in Spanish as 'robo santo', both of which literally mean 'holy theft'. In 1102, Bishop Diego Xelmirez of Santiago de Compostela visited Braga and transferred the relics of several saints there to his own city. As these churches were under the jurisdiction of Santiago de Compostela, this created a schism between the two cities.

The episode was written by D. Hugo, a canon of Santiago de Compostela, shortly after Diego became Bishop of Santiago. According to D. Hugo, Diego wanted to visit the churches and properties owned by Compostela in the Portucalensis territory. He sent a messenger to Braga to inform Archbishop S. Geraldo of his arrival. This gave the archbishop time to prepare a procession and celebrate a special mass in welcome (Reis, 2010). Subsequently, Diego began a pastoral visit to the Church of Saint Victor, where, according to D. Hugo, he discovered that the saints' relics were not being adequately cared for. He therefore removed the relics of Saints Victor, Cucufate, and Silvester from this church, and the relics of Saints Susan and Frutuoso from their respective churches (Fandiño Fuentes, 2017; Reis, 2010; Rodrigues, 2005).

Although D. Hugo explained that the relics should be sent to Santiago de Compostela to receive better care, he also informed us that they had been taken from the churches and transported in secret. This may explain why the Archbishop of Braga was not informed of the true purpose of Diego's journey (Reis, 2010). In 1103, Saint Geraldo travelled to Rome, where Pope Paschal II issued five papal bulls in favour of Braga, including one ordering Diego to return the churches of Saint Victor and Saint Frutuoso to the city (Fandiño Fuentes, 2017; Reis, 2010). However, in 1110, Diego persuaded the Pope to confirm Compostela's possession of Correlhã and the churches of Saint Victor and Saint Frutuoso in Braga in a papal bull (Reis, 2010).

Relations between the two cities deteriorated, and the relics remained in Santiago de Compostela until 1966. Today, half of the relics are in Braga, while the other half remain in Santiago de Compostela.

2.2.7. *Disasters and Misfortunes*

Being born outside of a marriage or to a single woman was considered unfortunate. In Portuguese society for centuries, unwanted babies or babies born to single women could be sent to an institution where they would be cared for by others. In Braga, there was an institution known as the 'Casa da Roda', where people could anonymously leave their babies. This system operated until 1897 (Direnor, n.d.).

Due to the earthquake of 1135, the Archbishop D. Paio Mendes ordered the reconstruction of the towers on the façade of the Cathedral of Braga (Rodrigues, 2005).

On 1 November 1755, an earthquake shaped European history. It is famously known as the Lisbon earthquake, but it also shook Braga. The impact was so strong that the church bells started ringing by themselves (Mendes, 1994). As there were no casualties in Braga, an oratory was built in the Saint James Tower. Designed by André Soares in 1756, the small chapel was dedicated to Our Lady of the Tower (Direnor, n.d.). On 24 August 1758, the Abbot of Freiriz brought the image of Our Lady of the Tower in procession (Mendes, 1994).

On 15 April 1866, Braga suffered a significant loss of heritage when the archives building caught fire (Belino, 2018a; Mendes, 1994). Many documents were lost in the fire, and it is mentioned that some documents ended up in Póvoa de Lanhoso (Mendes, 1994). The fire was extinguished by the 8th Infantry Regiment.

The Este River runs through Braga. Although some floods have been recorded in history, one in particular resulted in casualties. On 30 June 1779, the river flooded so suddenly that the current swept people and livestock away, destroying houses and mills and killing 32 people in the Galos Street area (Ferreira, 2016; Mendes, 1994). Thankfully, when the river flooded again in the Galos Street area in February 2026, there were no casualties.

2.2.8. Dictatorial Period

The dictatorial period in Portugal began with a military coup led by Marshal Gomes da Costa. On 28 May 1926, he left the Pópulo Barracks in Braga for Lisbon (Mendes, 1994; Pereira et al., 2024). This was followed by a military dictatorship which, in 1933, led to Salazar's Estado Novo dictatorship. This ended on 25 April 1974 with another military coup. To mark the 40th anniversary of 28 May, Pópulo Square will host an event where Salazar will deliver a speech from the balcony of the former Pópulo Barracks (Mendes, 1994; Pereira et al., 2024). There is a statue of Gomes da Costa in Pópulo Square.

Table 1. Braga locations related with the dictatorial period

Resistance to the fascist regime:	Loyalty to the fascist regime:
Grundig factory	Correio do Minho newspaper
Sá de Miranda School	Nogueira da Silva's house
Theatro Circo	Pópulo Barracks
Victor Bookstore	The German House
Municipal Square: Old Court + Doctor Humberto Soeiro's office + Doctor Guilherme Branco's office	A Brasileira coffee shop
Senhora-a-Branca Church	Archbishop's Palace
The headquarters of the Metalworkers' Union	Municipal Square
Vianna, Astória, Peninsular coffee shops	Republic Square
O Nosso Café	
Nova Brasileira	
the headquarters of Humberto Delgado's campaign	
Central Avenue	
Joaquim Ribeiro's House	
Raio Street Clinic	
Eça de Queirós Street: numbers 32, 42 and 44	

Source: Own elaboration

The city also has statues dedicated to Salgado Zenha, who was arrested several times by the PIDE secret police, and to José Ferreira Salgado, a lawyer who defended political prisoners. The dictatorship ended in Lisbon on 25 April 1974 with the Carnation Revolution.

Cordeiro (2024) and Pereira et al. (2024) have compiled a list of places in Braga associated with the fascist movement and the anti-fascist resistance. Some of these places are associated with both. As the list is long, we have compiled all locations in the table below (table 1).

2.3. Field Trip

On 11 February 2026, a field trip was conducted in Braga to investigate the potential for creating a tourist route. Following an investigation into Braga’s dark history, a list was compiled of places in the city that still exist and could be visited. This list is presented in the following table:

Table 2. List of all locations mentioned on the research:

Dark Tourism of Braga Themes:	Places referenced on those themes:
Inquisition	Cathedral of Braga
	D. Gonçalo Pereira Street
	Santo António das Travessas Street
	Santiago Church
Plagues and Diseases	São João de Ponte
	Saint Marcus Hospital
	Saint Sebastian Church
	Bom Jesus Sanctuary
Death	Monte de Arcos Cemetery
	Cathedral of Braga
	Carlos Amarante Square + Saint Marcus Hospital
	D. Diogo de Sousa Museum
	Church of Saint Victor
	Church of Saint Victor the Old
	Bom Jesus Sanctuary
Wars	Cathedral of Braga
	Saint Victor Church
	Saint Marcus Hospital
	Menace Tower
	Boavista Street
	Chãos Street
	Maximinos Street

	Archbishop’s Palace
	Pópulo Square
	Campo da Vinha
	Central Avenue
	‘Alminhas’ at Forno Street
Crimes and Conflicts	Cathedral Library
	Carlos Amarante Square + Saint Marcus Hospital
	Pópulo Church
	Menace Tower
	Falperra
‘Pio Latrocínio’ – ‘Holy Theft’	Saint Victor Church
	Saint Frutuoso Church
Disasters and Misfortunes	Casa da Roda
	Cathedral of Braga
	Archbishop’s Palace
	Galos Street
Dictatorial Period	Pópulo Square
	Grundig Factory
	Sá de Miranda School
	Theatro Circo
	Victor Bookstore
	Municipal Square: Old Court + Doctor Humberto Soeiro’s office + Doctor Humberto Soeiro’s office
	Senhora-a-Branca Church
	Central Avenue
	O Nosso Café
	Nova Brasileira and A Brasileira Coffee Shops
	Headquarters of Humberto Delgado’s campaign
	Joaquim Ribeiro’s House
	Raio Street Clinic
	Eça de Queirós Street: numbers 32, 42 and 44
	Headquarters of the Communist Party
	Salgado Zenha Statue

	José Ferreira Salgado Statue
	Correio do Minho Newspaper
	Nogueira da Silva’s House
	Headquarters of Legião Portuguesa
	German House
	Archbishop’s Palace

Source: Own elaboration

After compiling this list, we used a map to identify the places to visit, starting with those furthest from the historic centre of Braga, as most of the locations were in that area. The field trip took the entire day, during which it was confirmed that all the locations on the list could be included in the tour. However, not all the institutions exist today, and some of the churches are closed throughout the year. After this, we decided to create a tourist route.

3. ROUTE

Considering the time that took to visit all locations and the distance between some of them, it was decided to create 2 types of routes: one for a walking tour in the city centre and another that includes all locations for the tourist to perform self-paced.

For the walking tour, a maximum duration of 3 hours was considered. The author has experience of leading walking tours, and has found that this is the maximum duration that people can endure when the tour has a theme. This route is confined to the city’s historical centre.

For this, the following route was decided:

Figure 1. Locations of the walking tour (in red)



Source: Own elaboration using Google Maps

These are the themes associated with each location on this walking tour:

Table 3. Locations and associated themes of the walking tour

Locations:	Themes:
Cathedral of Braga	Inquisition
	Death
	Wars
	Disasters and Misfortunes
D. Gonçalo Pereira Street	Inquisition
Santo António das Travessas Street + Cathedral Library	Inquisition
	Crimes and Conflicts
Santiago Church	Inquisition
Saint Marcus Hospital	Plagues and Diseases
	Death
	Wars
	Crimes and Conflicts
Saint Sebastian Church	Plagues and Diseases
Monte de Arcos Cemetery	Death
Carlos Amarante Square	Death
	Crimes and Conflicts
D. Diogo de Sousa Museum	Death
Archbishop’s Palace (Largo do Paço)	Wars
	Crimes and Conflicts
	Disasters and Misfortunes
	Dictatorial Period
Pópulo Square + Church	Wars
	Crimes and Conflicts
	Dictatorial Period
Campo da Vinha	Wars
Central Avenue / Republic Square	Wars
	Dictatorial Period
‘Alminhas’ at Forno Street + Casa da Roda	Wars
	Disasters and Misfortunes
Theatro Circo	Dictatorial Period

Municipal Square: Old Court + Doctor Humberto Soeiro’s office + Doctor Guilherme Branco’s office	Dictatorial Period
O Nosso Café (Av. da Liberdade 709)	Dictatorial Period
Nova Brasileira and A Brasileira Coffee Shops	Dictatorial Period
Eça de Queirós Street	Dictatorial Period

Source: Own elaboration

As for the self-paced route, we decided that all the locations in Table 2 should be included since the tourist can choose whether or not to see everything. To facilitate this, the route will be inserted into an audio guide app that uses GPS to trigger audio content related to the tourist’s location.

Table 4. Locations and associated themes of the self-paced route

Places:	Themes:
Cathedral of Braga	Inquisition
	Death
	Wars
	Disasters and Misfortunes
D. Gonçalo Pereira Street	Inquisition
Santo António das Travessas Street + Cathedral Library	Inquisition
Santiago Church	Inquisition
São João de Ponte	Plagues and Diseases
Saint Sebastian Church	Plagues and Diseases
Bom Jesus Sanctuary	Plagues and Diseases
	Death
Monte de Arcos Cemetery	Death
Carlos Amarante Square + Saint Marcus Hospital	Plagues and Diseases
	Death
	Crimes and Conflicts
D. Diogo de Sousa Museum	Death
Church of Saint Victor	Death
	‘Pio Latrocínio’
	Wars
Church of Saint Victor the Old	Death
Menace Tower	Wars
	Crimes and Conflicts

Boavista Street	Wars
Chãos Street	Wars
Maximinos Street	Wars
Archbishop’s Palace	Wars
	Crimes and Conflicts
	Disasters and Misfortunes
	Dictatorial Period
Pópulo Square + Church	Wars
	Crimes and Conflicts
	Dictatorial Period
Campo da Vinha	Wars
Central Avenue / Republic Square	Wars
	Dictatorial Period
‘Alminhas’ at Forno Street + Casa da Roda	Wars
Falperra	Crimes and Conflicts
Saint Frutuoso Church	‘Pio Latrocínio’
Galos Street	Disasters and Misfortunes
Grundig Factory	Dictatorial Period
Sá de Miranda School	Dictatorial Period
Theatro Circo	Dictatorial Period
Victor Bookstore	Dictatorial Period
Municipal Square: Old Court + Doctor Humberto Soeiro’s office + Doctor Guilherme Branco’s office	Dictatorial Period
Senhora-a-Branca Church	Dictatorial Period
O Nosso Café	Dictatorial Period
Nova Brasileira and A Brasileira Coffee Shops	Dictatorial Period
Headquarters of Humberto Delgado’s campaign	Dictatorial Period
Joaquim Ribeiro’s House	Dictatorial Period
Raio Street Clinic	Dictatorial Period
Eça de Queirós Street	Dictatorial Period
Headquarters of the Communist Party	Dictatorial Period
Salgado Zenha Statue	Dictatorial Period
José Ferreira Salgado Statue	Dictatorial Period
Correio do Minho Newspaper	Dictatorial Period

Nogueira da Silva's House	Dictatorial Period
Headquarters of Legião Portuguesa	Dictatorial Period
German House	Dictatorial Period

Source: Own elaboration

4. CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

This study aimed to explore the concept of dark tourism, shedding light on episodes of Braga's history in the process. Although the city is renowned as a religious destination, it has a wealth of dark stories. The study mapped and compiled these darker episodes, transforming overlooked historical data into a tangible tourism product. Despite being associated with sad events and bad memories, it was demonstrated that dark tourism can be used as an educational tool, helping tourists learn more about a destination's lesser-known aspects.

The research revealed a far greater density of dark tourism sites in Braga than initially anticipated, necessitating a strategic pivot in the final proposal. By categorising these sites based on their geographical location and historical significance, two distinct offerings were developed to cater to different visitor profiles.

The first option is a three-hour walking tour of the historic city centre. This provides an immersive yet condensed experience of the city's grim heritage, optimised for time and accessibility. The second is a comprehensive digital audio guide that uses mobile technology to include sites outside the city centre, enabling visitors to explore at their own pace.

Ultimately, this dual-route approach enriches Braga's tourism portfolio and serves as a tool for historical preservation. By incorporating these 'dark' narratives into the urban landscape, the project guarantees that the city's intricate past, encompassing tragedy and judicial history, is not forgotten, fostering a deeper, more nuanced connection between visitors and the territory.

However, this study has some limitations. Firstly, the research was not conducted in the media or newspapers, where crimes usually appear in the news. Of the two news articles that were studied, one was very recent and the only source we could find about Freire de Andrade's death. No crime-related statistics or PIDE victims were searched for, since there was no prison in Braga, although the city had victims in other cities. The research was based on books and theses related to the history and institutions of Braga.

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