

Cultural Landscapes and Flora in Sophia de Mello's Poetry

This paper belongs to a project named Landscapes as described by contemporary geographers and non-geographers, initiated in 2018. The quest about the issue: "Are novels objects of investigation in landscape geography?" was the target of previous publications, about three other Portuguese writers and one Brazilian, that proved this research question answer to be affirmative. The case study presented here focuses exclusively the literary production of a Portuguese poet, for the first time. She wrote novels and poems, altogether, describing flora and places in her country and elsewhere in Europe, Africa and Latin America, but Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen books selected for this contribution were poems only. Methodology used was twofold: 1) Literature analysis and flora identification in three books of poems, first edited in 1947, 1967 and 1989; 2) Flora and landscape interpretation by the techniques of scientific literature comparison and online flora taxonomical links consultation, as the places visited and plants named were the object of our previous scientific missions of the author. Thus, the paper presents the image of the world by non-geographers, as there is the concept of geographic alphabetization and the poet analysed was a Classic Literature expert that devoted her life to travelling, writing and to politics. She was deputy to the Portuguese Parliament, during the period of 1975-76, one of the 19 ladies elected and the only one that presided a commission charged of writing the Constitution. Results show that her rhymes are good sources of information about flora, gardens, and landscape research on several locations she visited throughout her life.

Keywords: Literature, tranquility, landscape, garden, sea, geography, order versus chaos, Greece, Portugal, Brazil, Prince Island.

Introduction

Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen enjoyed travelling. In 2019 her son, Miguel Sousa Tavares, also a known Portuguese writer said in an interview that for her "to travel is to observe" as announced to him in Rome (Barros, 2019). This brings us to the reason why I've chosen the poet as a study object in my quest for the research question: Are novels objects of investigation in landscape geography? Etymologically Geography is the description of the Earth, the planet we inhabit together with a big array of living beings like plants. Therefore, this quest is being done in several locations around Portugal and the world, usually using novels as case studies, as with Agustina Bessa-Luís (Madaleno, 2021), Almeida Garrett (Madaleno, 2024), Camões (Madaleno, 2025a) and the Brazilian Jorge Amado (Madaleno, 2025b).

The most recent essay was presented at a conference, in Italy (2025), analyzing not only theatre plays but also poetry, as was the example of Luíz Vaz de Camões, writer from the 16th century. Following this line of research, here is the examination of three of the poetry books published by Sophia during her long

life, 85 years from 1919 to 2004. They were written in three decades with about twenty years of difference between them (1947, 1967, 1989). Sophia has written about several countries, cities and countryside lending another path to the research, as she mixed Greek mythology with her wonderings around the world. So, the research question is: Can poetry books also become objects of research in Geography?

This paper will argue that is the case. Let's read her rhymes about travelling:

*"I've seen rocky countries with rivers
Where dark clouds like spiders
Ate the violet profile of the mountains
Amid cold Rosen sunsets."*

"Dia do Mar" (2003, p. 79) – Author's translation

Methods and Materials

Methodology used in this contribution was twofold: 1) Literature analysis and flora identification in three books of poems, first edited in 1947, 1967 and 1989. The editions used in the current case study were published in the beginnings of the 21st century, in 2003 and 2004, an application done to update the Portuguese orthography; 2) Flora and landscape interpretation has been done through the techniques of scientific literature comparison and online flora taxonomical links consultation, as the places visited and plants named were the object of our previous scientific missions, within Europe (Madaleno, 2021, 2024), Africa (Madaleno, 2020) or in South America (Madaleno, 1996, 2025b).

Materials used were sheets of paper, laptop computers, and photo's comparison. Regarding flora, a table was used to examine the plants mentioned by Sophia de Mello. The table includes the vernaculars for species in Portuguese and in English and the botanical identification of gender, species and family, whenever possible. The taxonomy used the Missouri Botanical Garden's (MBG 2025) and University of *Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro* (UTAD, 2025) site taxonomy, available online. The American site was used for tropical species and the Portuguese site for European plants. Table 1 gives us the excerpt of the text, in order to contextualize the flora cited and the place where the plant was seen or imagined, as mythology is frequently utilized in Sophia's poems.

Literature Review

Regarding flora, some of the most valuable research comes from students' fieldwork and phytogeographical inventories (Lozano-Valencia, Varela-Ona and Díaz-Sanz, 2023). According to Lozano-Valencia et al. *"Even though it is not a function of the biogeographic expert to determine the taxonomical classification, it is their assignment the knowledge of plant species, and their correct identification, using dichotomic keys"* (2023, p. 96). It is also necessary to stress that flora is only one chapter that studies vegetables in the larger branch that researches natural beings,

1 therefore known as phytogeography. And biogeography is a branch of geography that
 2 research both the plants and the animals, their habitat, and the different ecosystems
 3 existent on Planet Earth, where we all live (Lacoste and Salanon, 1969). These
 4 animals and plants have an interrelationship with humankind that has evolved through
 5 time (Elhai, 1968). Because geographers aren't qualified to classify plant species, in
 6 this paper we will use the *taxa* available online in certified sites, as stated (MBG, 2025,
 7 UTAD, 2025).

8 This paper presents the image of the world by non-geographers, as there is the
 9 concept of geographic alphabetization, meaning: "*the capacity of understanding and*
 10 *utilizing geographic knowledge to understand our environment*" (Trigo and Ondoño,
 11 2023, p. 121). The usage of Literature books in geographical learning has been done
 12 in Spain, as was the case of "Jack and the Magic Beans" and "Thumbelina", in the
 13 research of Cristina Isabel Gallego García, Lorena Castellero Ruiz and Rubén Antonio
 14 Macías (2023). In their words: "We have started from a constructivist methodology,
 15 with project-based learning." Using the above-mentioned tales, "*we have learned*
 16 *geographical concepts, among them: relief, climate, soil, flora, fauna.*" As to
 17 teaching, tales "*improved students (...) understanding the world around them and the*
 18 *relationships between man and the environment*" (José Prada Trigo and Irene Sánchez
 19 Ondoño, 2023, p. 242).

20 Cultural landscapes are, on the other hand, part of landscape research in
 21 geography, traditionally divided into physical and human geography, as the
 22 "*European Landscape Convention, of the Council of Europe, (...) underlines the*
 23 *dual nature of landscape, both the physical reality as a result of the action and*
 24 *interaction of human and natural factors, and the spatial representation we make*
 25 *of the landscape itself*" (Kratochvíl, López and González, 2023, p. 610).
 26 Previous research conducted by the author of this paper defined cultural
 27 landscapes as: "*built-up by the observer; a construct more or less detailed, using*
 28 *the written word, the photography or drawings*" (Madaleno, 2021, p. 250).
 29 Depending on the quality of the observer, the formation and information of the
 30 writer, cultural landscapes can be richer or poorer. Sophia de Mello Breyner
 31 Andresen had remarkable observation power and thus her poems are quite good
 32 sources of landscape research.

33 Literature landscapes are representations of natural or human landscapes,
 34 idealised or not by the writer. Thus, "*the landscapes described (...), the real and*
 35 *the symbolic ones, are cultural landscapes*" (Madaleno, 2021, p. 249). This
 36 contribution emphasizes the places mentioned in Sophia's verses; some are
 37 places she visited and immediately wrote about, (Greek landscapes); other places
 38 where she travelled along her life (Brasília) and that she remembers in her
 39 rhymes. Flora is omnipresent and thus it is to flowers and fruits, trees and bushes
 40 that we give utmost attention to, analyzing the context in which they are
 41 mentioned, as they are integral parts of cultural landscapes.

Sophia's Biography

Sophia was born in the northern city of Porto (fig. 1), from an aristocratic family and was sent to study Classic Literature at the University of Lisbon (1936-1939). In an unedited beginning for her life memories, that she never finished, here is an excerpt of her childhood, as published by her daughter, Maria Andresen (2016):

"I was born in Porto.

There were the enormous linden trees, the foggy mornings, (...) platanus and cherry trees, camellias. (...)

There was the river, the cascaded houses, the boats floating close to the marginal road, during the winter cold coloured afternoons".

(...) We heard Mahler before the time when Mahler became fashionable. (...).

We read Proust, the medieval Songs of Friendship, Horacio, Goethe, Rilke, Lorca".

Because I was born in Porto I know the names of the flowers and the trees (...)"

"A Casa Desmedida" (2016, p. 4) – Author's translation

Figure 1. Riverine Northern Portuguese City of Porto



Source: Portugalist (2025)

In 1944 she published her first poetry book. According to the National Library record, she has published a total of twelve (12) books, all deposited there (BN, 2025). Her work has been translated into such idioms as Italian, French, English and Mandarin (UA, 1998). As written by her in 1988, to be recited at Sorbonne University, "before I knew how to read, I heard the ancient Portuguese poem *Nau Catrineta*" (Andresen, 1989, p. 76).

"There goes the Portuguese ship

That has a lot to tell us

1 *Listen now, gentlemen*
 2 *Its remarkable story*
 3
 4 *One more year and one day*
 5 *And it was still navigating*
 6 *Nothing to eat there was anymore”*

7
 8 Almeida Garrett (1851) “*Nau Catrineta*” from “*Romanceiro*” – Author’s
 9 translation

10
 11 So, Sophia first learnt how to recite oral tradition related to the History of
 12 Portuguese navigations. She wrote that she thought poems weren’t written by
 13 people, but things that the world produced said by itself. That’s again a measure
 14 of the importance of geography in her young mind. Earth was a divine entity,
 15 placed above all things and people. “*I also thought that, if I could sit still and*
 16 *quiet in certain mythical places of the garden, I would be able to listen to those*
 17 *poems*” (Andresen, 1989, p. 76). The importance of gardens and of silence in
 18 literature was enforced with her attraction for travelling, around Greece (Fig. 2).
 19 “*One day at Epidaurus – making good profit of silence left by tourist’s lunch*
 20 *break – I placed myself in the centre of the theatre and recited loud the beginning*
 21 *of a poem*” ...:

22
 23 “*My voice climbs the last steps*
 24 *And I hear the impersonal word flying*
 25 *That I recognize being not my own, anymore”*
 26 (Andresen, 1989, “*Ilhas*” p. 76) – Author’s translation

27
 28 It must be emphasized that her youth garden is now the Botanical Garden of
 29 the University of Porto (Melo, 2014). According to Cortez (2013) the challenges
 30 of Sophia’s lifetime, marked by dictatorship (1926-1974) and wars (the 2nd world
 31 war and Portuguese colonial war) required not only an answer using the esthetic
 32 but also the ethics of social conscience. Having married a lawyer (1946) engaged
 33 in defending prisoners of conscience, her life had plenty of experience with
 34 people in need of both financial and human rights aid. She was from Danish
 35 descent, and she received several national and international prizes, including the
 36 prestigious Camões (1999). She was deputy to the Portuguese Parliament, during
 37 the period of 1975-76, one of the 19 ladies elected and the only one that presided
 38 a commission charged of writing the Constitution, following the Carnage
 39 Revolution (1974).

40

41

42 **Results**

43

44 Gusmão (2005) has analyzed the book of poems “*Geography*” (1967)
 45 where he found that her poems were written images of the world. The sky of
 46 such mediterranean seas and remarkable places as Greek beaches or monumental
 47 theatres (see Fig. 2), appears frequently in her lyrics, mingled with mythological

figures, in clear contrast with the Northern Europe cloudy skies. Among her poems are Epidaurus, a place in History and in Geography that repeats itself in the 1967 “Geography” and in her “Islands” book poems (1989), as said. As the researcher Rosa Maria Martelo (2005) signaled, to the chaos of the minotaur she contraposes the order of things in her written words. And order is freedom whereas disorder is anarchy. Her verses look for order and repel or reject all tendency for injustice, as to be fair to people is to abide with law. A law that is just, not oppressive to the living beings. That’s why she was engaged politically during all her existence.

Figure 2. *Epidaurus theater located about 130 km of Athens, Greece*



Source: <https://turistaprofissional.com/teatro-de-epidauro-grecia/>

It is under Rosa Maria Martelo’s (2005) lens that one can understand her poem about Brasilia, that Sophia compares to city and order in Greece:

*“Brasília
Drawn by Lúcio Costa, Niemeyer and Pythagoras
Logic and lyric
Greek and Brazilian
Ecumenic
Proposing to all men and races
The universal essence of just forms
Brasilia (...)
Clear like Babylon
Tall like the trunk of a palm tree ...
“Geografia” (2004, p. 80) – author’s translation*

The last verse has driven us to the recurrent issue in Sophia's poems: the flora. The verses reflect the preferred places to write – her gardens. Used in metaphors and periphrases, a total of 30 different plants is mentioned in the 3 poetry books selected for this essay (see table 1). But returning to Brasilia, this city drawn by the urbanist Lúcio Costa, using square and rule to design an orderly third capital of Brazil, favourably impressed Sophia. Located in the inner and dry highlands, Brasilia was designed to meet the needs for shelter of about half a million fonctionnaires that would work for government, the judicial system and for parliament, following the abandonment of the mundane Rio de Janeiro. All residents should inhabit regularly conceived neighbourhood units and modernist apartment blocks. The centre of work drawn by the famous Oscar Niemeyer was the *three powers core* of Brasilia. There, like hands open to the sky, Niemeyer drew the amazing cathedral (see Fig. 3).

The spectacular architecture of the Catholic cathedral reminds us of another book of poems written twenty years earlier and another plant, a biblical one, *incense*:

*"The hand that places the flower in a jar
The hand that lightens incense
The hand that unrolls the tapestry
The hand that sings and makes music out of harp..."*
"Ilhas (2004, p. 14) – author's translation

About Brazil, Sophia was proud to make a trip from Brasilia to Rio de Janeiro, I've had the opportunity to make too, driving along nasty roads, when between 1992 and 1994 I've studied the third capital of Brazil for my Ph.D. Thesis (Madaleno, 1996). Sophia de Mello also wrote about a good Brazilian friend, Helena Lanari:

*"I like to hear Brazilian Portuguese Idiom
Where words recuperate their total substance
(...) When Helena Lanari said «the coconut tree»
The coconut tree became much more vegetable"*
"Geografia" (1989) – author's translation

Plants and gardens were recurrent in her verses, as said, and Sophia enjoyed the peace and tranquility of green spaces to write her poetry, as stated. As Oidinposha Imamkhodjaeva (2025) stressed, the "*philosophy of Epicureanism, arguing that its emphasis on ataraxia (tranquility)*" are essential not only for hedonism but also for sustainable venues, as gardens, where one can feel safe and reliable for artistic production. Imamkhodjaeva (2025) wrote that "*Epicurus himself cultivated a small, self-sufficient community*". What we want to emphasize is that several notable painters preferred flora, water and forests for inspiration. It was the case with impressionists, like Monet, and poets like Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen, that often looked for the serenity of blue and green spaces to feel the "angel". The angel is perceived by many Catholics as the inspiration of "divine voices", for clarity and orientation necessary for creativity

in general, and writing poems, in particular (Lourenço, 2004). This drives us to the next discussion of flora in Sophia's verses.

Figure 3. *Cathedral of Brasilia, located on the Central axis of the Capital of Brazil*



Source: Author's photo (2008)

Discussion: Flora Location in Sophia de Mello's Poems

Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen has travelled throughout the world and wrote poems about remote places like the "Prince" island, that before 1975 still belonged to Portuguese African colonies or overseas territories.

*"I've arrived later amid the noise of the airplane
On a brusque speed
But I also had the opportunity to bathe on the waves
Of the beautiful beaches of the genesis
And crossed the greenery of the forest
And I've smelled the scent of recently cut oca
"Ilhas" (2004, p. 73) – Author's translation*

Oca is *Ceiba pentandra*, a known tropical forest tree, that Sophia enjoyed as much as the paradisiac beaches of the Prince Island (see Fig. 4). Regarding the flowers, the vernaculars vary from Japanese *camellias* (*Kimono of camellias*) to Portuguese *lilies* (*on a plane where lilies grow*), *magnolias* (*beauty as carnal as magnolia*), *narcissus* (*narcissus undulate*), the childhood *Linden* trees (see Fig. 5) and Greek *roses* (*venom from the most ancient June rose*).

1 **Figure 4.** *Ceiba pentandra*, the *Ocá*



2
3 Source: Madaleno (2013)

4
5 As to fruits the array of vernaculars are: apples (*There is a wooden and apple*
6 *like flavour*); blackberries (*light like blackberry spreads westwards*); cherries (*I*
7 *left a scissor forgotten within the cherry tree branches*); coconuts, the tree
8 already cited about Brasilia; coffee beans (*coffee has the powder of the*
9 *Turkish*); figs (city with some fig trees); and grapes (*I touch the shadow of a*
10 *fresh vineyard*). Let's contextualize better her verses in Table 1:

11
12 **Figure 5.** *Linden tree from Sophia's childhood*



13
14 Source: Madaleno (2013)

1 **Table 1.** *Flora Mentioned in Three of Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen Books*

Common Names (Portuguese)	Botanical Names	Text	Places	Pages
1.Apple (Maçã)	<i>Pyrus malus</i> L. ROSACEAE	I. There is a wooden and apple like flavour	Portugal: Amarante city	58
2.Bamboo (Bambu)	<i>Bambusa mitis</i> (Lour.) Poir. POACEAE	I. The colloquium of bamboos went silent	Orient and Middle-East	14
3.Blackberry (Amoras)	<i>Rubus ulmifolius</i> var. <i>ulmifolius</i> Shott ROSACEAE	II. A light like blackberry spreads westwards	Greece: Gulf of Corinth	62
4.Boxwood (Buxo)	<i>Buxus sempervirens</i> L. BUXACEAE	III. Boxwood garden	Portugal	20
5.Cactus (cactus)	CACTACEAE	III. Twisted Cactus a thousand ways	Portugal	10
6.Camellias (Camélias)	<i>Camellia</i> sp. APIACEAE	I. Kimono of camellias	Japan	60
7.Cedar of Lebanon (Cedro do Libano)	<i>Cedrus libani</i> Subspecie <i>Libani</i> A. Rich. PINACEAE	II. Swallows the blue cedars and the vines	Portugal	39
8.Cherry tree (Cerejeira)	<i>Prunus avium</i> L. ROSACEAE	II. when I left a scissor forgotten within the cherry tree branches	Brazil (to the poet Manuel Bandeira)	78
9.Coconut tree (coqueiro)	<i>Cocos nucifera</i> L. ARECACEAE	II. the skyscraper has the delicate thinness of a coconut tree.	Brazil: Brasília	80 81
10.Cypress (Cipreste)	<i>Cupressus sempervirens</i> L. CUPRESSACEAE	II. The cypress contemplated its own silence	Portugal: Algarve	22 35 57
11.Incense (Incenso)	<i>Boswellia sacra</i> Flueck. BURSERACEAE	I. The hand that lightens incense.	Middle-East	14
12.Coffee (Café)	<i>Coffea arabica</i> L. RUBIACEAE	I, “The coffee has the powder of the Turkish”	Greece	47

13.Fig tree (<i>Figueira</i>)	<i>Ficus carica</i> L. MORACEAE	II.The city with some fig trees	Portugal: Algarve	11
		II.The sweetness of the day opens the fig	Greece Crete	65
14.Kapok (<i>Ocá</i>)	<i>Ceiba pentandra</i> (L.) Gaertn MALVACEAE	I.I've smelled the scent of recently cut <i>ocá</i>	Ilha do Príncipe (Prince)	73
15.Laurel (<i>Loureiro</i>)	<i>Laurus nobilis</i> L. LAURACEAE	II.Phebo no longer possesses the shack nor the prophetic laurel	Greece	71
16.Lilies (<i>lírios</i>)	<i>Lilium longiflorum</i> Thunb. LILIACEAE	II.So I brough lilies with me	Portugal: Igrina (Algarve)	9
		III.On a plane where lilies grow	Portugal	95
17.Linden tree (<i>Tílias</i>)	<i>Tilia tomentosa</i> Moench MALVACEAE	I.The wisper of Linden trees close to the house of childwood	Portugal	37
		II.Perfume of linden and oregano	Algarve: Lagos	95
18.Magnolia (Magnólia)	<i>Magnolia</i> sp. MAGNOLIACEAE	I.Beauty as carnal as magnolia and its fruit (1987)	Orient (Statue of Buda)	63
19.Narcissus (<i>Narciso</i>)	<i>Narcissus</i> sp. AMARYLLIDACEAE	III.Narcissus undulate	Portugal	20
20.Nard"or "spikenard (<i>Nardo ou espiqueuendo</i>)	<i>Nardostachys jatamansi</i> (D.Don) DC. CAPRIFOLIACEAE	III.Secret flavour of rose and nard	City smell with scent	46
21.Oregano (<i>Orégão</i>)	<i>Origanum vulgare</i> L. LABIACEAE	II.The perfume of oregano invades happiness	Portugal	9
		II.The perfume of oregano inhabits the wall	Algarve	10
			Lagos	94

		The perfume of oregano		
22.Palm trees (<i>Palmeiras</i>)	Palmae sp. ARECACEAE	I.A country of tigers and palm trees II.In a paper noise the wind blows the palm tree Tall like the trunk of a palm tree	Orient Portugal Brazil: Brasília	72 53 54 80
23.Pinus tree (<i>Pinhal e pinho</i>)	<i>Pinus</i> sp. PINACEAE	I.Do not forget Thasos nor Egina, the pinewood... I.His face looks like pinewoods shades and sorrows II.Late in autumn under pine trees from Adriana III.Here and there, thin and straight pine trees Landscape of Pine trees and hills The greenery of pinewoods, the voice of the sea III.Each pine contained ... the explanation for all heroes	Ancient world and lack of humanity (Hiroshima) Teixeira de Pascoais revisited (Portugal) Greece Portugal	16 25 68 10 48 57 75
24.Poplar (<i>Choupo</i>)	<i>Populus alba</i> L. SALICACEAE	I.The face like poplar at moon light	Portugal	35
25.Rice (<i>Arroz</i>)	<i>Oryza sativa</i> L. POACEAE	I.The teeth shine as rice grains	Orient	13

26. Roses (<i>Rosas</i>)	<i>Rosa</i> sp. L. ROSACEAE	I. Secret flavour of rose and nard	City smell	46
		II. the rose bushes' leaves	Portugal	39
		II. venom from the most ancient june rose	Greece	57
		III. Roses flowering in Persian gardens	Persia	74
27. Sandalwood (<i>Sândalo</i>)	<i>Santalum album</i> L. SANTALACEAE	I. The bed made of sandal	Orient	13
28. Thistle (<i>cardo</i>)	<i>Silybum marianum</i> (L.) Gaertn. ASTERACEAE	II. The thistle flourishes over day clarity	Greece Crete	65
29. Vineyards (<i>Vinho e Uvas</i>)	<i>Vitis vinifera</i> L. VITACEAE	I. Resin wine from fresh vines.	Greece	47
		II. Perfume of wine and roses	Portugal: (Cesário Verde)	57
		II. I touch the shadow of a fresh vineyard	Italy: Pompey	66
				69
30. Wheat (<i>Trigo</i>)	<i>Triticum</i> sp. POACEAE	I. It has the sweetness of the wheat	Spain: Santiago of Compostela	24
		I. The clarity of the wheat on her face	Cyprus	28
		II. The silence of grapes and of wheat	Greece	57

Sources: I. Ilhas (1989); II. Geografia (1967); III. Dia do Mar (1947)

Concerning food, Sophia names several staples like wheat (*The clarity of the wheat on her face*) or rice (*Teeth shine as rice grains*). Wooden trees as pines (*Do not forget Thasos nor Egina, the pinewood...*), poplar (*The face like poplar at moon light*), and sandalwood (*The bed made of sandal*). As to spices Sophia recurrently names oreganos (Fig. 6), recalling her of Southern Portuguese Algarve, where she and her family spent summer in a house located in Lagos. Vineyards and wine are named over and again in Mediterranean places (*Resin wine from fresh vines*).

1 **Figure 6.** *Oregano (Origanum vulgare)* from Sophia's poems



2
3 Source: Botanical Garden of Montevideo, Uruguay (Author's photo, 2011)

4
5 All these vernaculars drive us to locations, meaning the geographies of her
6 life, where Portugal and Portuguese gardens are detached as locations of
7 tranquility, where she liked to stroll and sit, having written her poems there.
8 Northern Portugal is also named, Amarante (apples and apple trees), Porto and
9 her youth garden (*boxwood, roses and linden trees*). Mediterranean countries,
10 such as Italy (*I touch the shadow of a fresh vineyard*), Greece (*The silence of*
11 *grapes and of wheat*) and Cyprus (*the clarity of the wheat on her face*) are
12 recurrent in Sophia's poetry. Spain appears in a poem to Santiago of Compostela
13 (*It has the sweetness of the wheat*).

14 The Middle East and the Asian Oriental environments are cited when
15 wondering along museum corridors, whereas observing statues (*Beauty as*
16 *carnal as magnolia and its fruit*), paintings (*A country of tigers and palm trees*)
17 or (*Roses flowering in Persian gardens*), and Screens (*Kimono of camellias*).
18 This drives us to perfumes, like nard (*Secret flavour of rose and nard*), roses
19 (*venom from the most ancient June rose*), and again oregano (*the perfume of*
20 *oregano invades happiness*). Let's examine some more poems:

21
22 "Nambam screens tell us
23 The merry story of navigation
24 Stunned people suddenly
25 Encountered face to face"
26 "Ilhas" (1989, p.60) - Author's translation

27
28 In fact, history books show that the Portuguese Jesuits were the first to reach
29 Japan, having the aim of converting extreme-orient peoples. As written in
30 Portuguese Chronicles, by earlier colonization authors, such as Diogo de Couto:
31 "*From the Islands of Sunda*" and from Ceylon the Portuguese brought cinnamon.
32 Regarding the *spices islands*: "*at the door of Ternate fortress is a beautiful tree*
33 *named catopa (...) that looks like the European chestnut* (1778, volumes 4, 5 and
34 8). So, Portuguese navigators not only discovered the maritime route to India,
35 looking for oriental spices in need to preserve food, but they went Eastwards

towards the Chinese seas, because the caravan's route was distraught by the Ottoman Empire expansion (1299-1922). The discovery of Japan by Europeans is dated to 1543 when three Portuguese landed on the island of *Tanegashima* "During approximately one century (and until the "Edict of Exclusion" of foreigners) the two countries maintained intense commercial relations" (MNE, 2025, p.1).

Flora Location Along Time in Sophia de Mello's Poems

Portugal, and in particular, northern Portugal, is described in the 1947 book but not absent from the later ones, as in Sophia's letter to Maria do Carvalhal Alvito:

*Dear Maria – suddenly the thinness
Of this first cold mixed
with the flavour of wood and apples
(...) I come inside your house, and you are my shelter
Written in Lisbon, 1986, and published in "Ilhas, 1989, p. 58)*

The earlier book "*Day of the Sea*" contains a total of six plant names: roses (3); pine trees (4); lilies (2); narcissus (1); boxwood (1); and cactus (1). The book presents several poems about Greek mythology, and about paintings such as a Michel Angelo drawing:

*"From human chaos, confuse and hostile,
Miraculously appears your profile"
"Dia do Mar", 1947, p. 30 - Author's translation*

This excerpt shows how she depreciated anarchy or chaos, preferring instead of the contemporaneous ideology, the beauty, harmony and order of her aligned verses. Sophia wrote about the Portuguese poet Camões, another Classic culture admirer, even though in the 16th century poet that is part of the canons of Renaissance (Madaleno, 2025a), whilst in Sophia it is owed to her Classic literature education. Several poems are about Lagos, during her trips to Algarve, in southern Portugal as much as, again, about Greeks Cassandra, Medeia, Eurydice and even Roman Catilina, in this beautiful sonnet:

*"I am solitary and never lie
I've torn all vanity piece by piece
And walk fearlessly and without lies
At the crepuscular light of my instinct"
"Dia do Mar", 1947, p. 44 – Author's translation*

Thus, any mythological or historical figure that could remind her about the sea (Tristan and Isolde) was edited in this after the second world war volume:

*"The waves broke one by one
I was alone with the sand and the foam*

Of the sea that sang only for me”

“Dia do Mar”, 1947, p. 9 - Author’s translation

The sea, both the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea is, however, mingled with gardens, pines and roses: *“The garden is brilliant and flowery (...) It is the acid and multicoloured May”* (p.17). Pines are particularly praised, as we have noticed:

“One day dead, wasted, we will return
To live freely like animals
And even if we are tired, we will flourish
Brothers living from sea and pine trees
“Dia do Mar”, 1947, p. 57 - Author’s translation

Angels and gods are intertwined with landscapes, lost Edens and leaves, light, wind and shadows. It’s poetry, rhythmic and colorful.

*“Among countries and landscapes
They walk towards images
And the earth hugs them warmly
Members made of flesh and leaves”*
“Dia do Mar”, 1947, p. 32 - Author’s translation

Regarding the 1967 book, called “Geography” (II. In Table 1), it names a total of fourteen (14) plants: lilies (1); oreganos (3); fig trees (2); Cypress (3); roses (3); Cedars (1); pine trees (1); Laurel (1); Palm trees (4); coconut trees (2); vineyards (4); wheat (1); blackberries (1); and thistle (1). The poem that mentions more *taxa* is in page 57:

*“There, then, in the ancient world
Shadowed by the cypress and the vineyards
Looking at the long wavery seas
In a silence of moons and of wheat”*
*(...) In a perfume of wine and roses
(...) Everything is so close to the seas
As it was in the first day of creation”*
“Geografia” (1967, p. 57) – Author’s translation

As to the “Islands” book (1989), Sophia lists the biggest number of vegetable genders, eighteen *taxa*: rice (1); incense(1); bamboos (1); poplar (1); wheat (2); pine trees (2); sandalwood (1); lilies (1); palm trees (1); *ocá* (1); linden trees (1); roses (1); nard (2); coffee (1); vineyards (2); apples (1); camellias (1); and magnolias (1). By contrast, in this book, the most beautiful rhymes do not mention flowers, but Mediterranean Sea cities:

1 “Inside this room or in another one
2 Like a Carpaccio on the streets of Venice
3 Second image is a surprise whisper
4 As are the streets of Venice”
5 “*Ilhas*”, 1989, p. 23 – Authors translation

6
7 “They went together to Olympia, the place of athletes
8 To where they belonged
9 Their large shoulders and narrow hips
10 Their slender, thick strength swinging
11 And the narrow forefront like veal” ~
12 “*Ilhas*”, 1989, p. 38 – Authors translation

13
14 In fact, the light of the southern European historical sites was among
15 Sophia’s preferences and thus all poetry books refer to these Italian or Greek
16 locations she admired. Regarding plants, let’s appreciate the roses and nards, the
17 biblical perfume with which Maria Madalena anointed Jesus Christ:

18
19 “*Large long, sweet horizons*
20 *The unfolded light of sunset*
21 *A scent of beach on the city streets*
22 *Secret flavour of rose and nard burns*”
23 “*Ilhas*”, 1989, p. 46 – Authors translation

24
25 That reminds us of another biblical species, the *lilies* and another Poetry
26 book Sophia published earlier:

27
28 “*My hope inhabits*
29 *On the wind and mermaids –*
30 *It is the fantastic blue of dawn*
31 *And the lily of the sands*”
32 “*Dia do Mar*”, 1947, p. 95

33 34 35 **Conclusion**

36
37 The research question was: Can poetry books also become objects of
38 research in Geography? The answer is affirmative. Sophia de Mello Breyner
39 Andresen has travelled throughout the world and wrote poems about remote places
40 from Africa, landscapes from Brazil and mostly about Southern European gardens,
41 beaches, theaters, both cities, and rural areas. The geographies of her life are in
42 these three books of poetry, and one can recognize modern landscapes and flora
43 species in her rhymes. Gardens were the places of the angel, where tranquility and
44 Greek mythology met her. Inspiration also came from looking at the sea, both the
45 Mediterranean and the Atlantic Ocean, in her country, Portugal or in southern
46 Europe and tropical Prince Island. Sophia was like the Copenhagen mermaid
47 enchanted by the flowers and trees of the gardens of her life.
48

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