

5.- PORTBOU and WALTER BENJAMIN. The Retrat and the Second World War.

PRACTICAL DETAILS

- Duration: 1 day
- Price per adult / student: €12 / Groups up to 20 adults / students: €240 / group

DESCRIPTION

Walter Benjamin, German philosopher of Jewish origin, arrived in Portbou in late September 1940, fleeing the German occupation of France. When he discovered that the Spanish authorities were going to return him to Vichy France and that, therefore, he would not be able to reach the United States, he committed suicide in the hotel where he was staying.

"It is more arduous to honour the memory of the nameless than that of the renowned. Historical construction is devoted to the memory of the nameless."

Walter Benjamin

The death of this great European intellectual is one more example of the prominent role of the Pyrenees border during the Second World War, as well as the involvement of the Franco dictatorship with the Axis powers.

The route begins at MUME with a brief introduction to the time that covers the post-war Franco period and the world war and then continues to Portbou following the final steps of the German thinker. The activity is completed with a visit to the Exile Memorial of Coll dels Belitres, the cemetery and to the sculptural site of Dani Karavan and with an exercise of reading and discussion of texts by Walter Benjamin himself and other writers linked to the events of that time.



OBJECTIVES

- Offer students and participants the opportunity to walk on paths which are a part of the history of our country and experience feelings of empathy difficult to find in books alone.
- Offer spaces and moments of observation and reflection, both individual and collective.

METHODOLOGY

- The perception of the surrounding landscape and the feelings that it provokes will be accompanied by readings of letters and testimonies as well as a collection of photographs, which will help better understanding of the complexity of the Spanish Civil War and its consequent exile. It will also allow an understanding of the situation of a Europe in conflict, where freedoms were threatened by fascism. There will also be an introduction to the figure and work of Walter Benjamin.

DYNAMIC OF THE ROUTE

- **10 am** - Tour of MUME of 45/60 min. The tour enables us to locate the war historically and geographically as well as to receive specific information about the 1939 exile. The visual material of the permanent exhibition of the museum facilitates empathy with the events and allows a global vision of the conflict.
- **11 am** - Short break for breakfast and departure for Portbou by coach
- **12.15 pm** - Arrival in Portbou
- The coach will leave us at Coll dels Belitres, the border crossing offering a simultaneous view of both states, as well as the possibility to cross the border on foot and experience empathy with the experiences of exile. Tour of the Exile Memorial, which houses photographs by Manuel Moros. Explanation of the international context of the time and the Pyrenees border as a witness of another exile: those who fled the Nazi persecution in occupied Europe.
- **12.30 pm - 3 pm** - Descent into Portbou on foot. Biographical information about Walter Benjamin and his arrival in Catalonia.
- **1 pm** - Historical situation of a border town. We visit the village and reach the site of the now vanished Hostal França, where the philosopher died.
- Visit to Portbou railway station, point of arrival for many refugees.
- **1.45 pm-2.15 pm** - Picnic lunch on the promenade.
- **2.30 - 3.15 pm** - Visit to the cemetery and to the installation-memorial to Walter Benjamin by the artist Dani Karavan. Excellent views of the natural surroundings and the village. The installation manages to move the spirit of visitors by evoking the mysterious and controversial death of the German philosopher. Entrance to the cemetery to see the site of the mass grave in which he was buried.
- **3.15 pm** - Reflection and sharing of ideas.
- **3.30 pm** - End of route.
- The route will be complemented with readings of texts and a biographical and philosophical approach to the thinker Walter Benjamin, as well as an exercise in empathy and knowledge of the historical events of the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War.