



church

CHURCH OF SAINT MARY OF MEINEDO





## 1. The church in the Middle Ages

The Church of Saint Mary of Meinedo, in the municipality of Lousada, is a reference in the context of the Romanesque architecture of the Sousa Valley because it presents an architectonic program very close to the rural Romanesque, perpetuating decorative schemes, projections and walls that follow Romanesque models, although its dating should be tagged in the late 13<sup>th</sup> and early 14<sup>th</sup> century.

In spite of this late date, the church's prestige is enormous, considering that Meinedo was the head of a bishopric in the 6<sup>th</sup> century.

A little to the North and possibly in the site of a Roman *villa*, there are traces of walls and some capitals apparently belonging to a basilica connected to the Bishopric of *Magnetum*<sup>1</sup>. The archaeological excavation campaign conducted between 1991 and 1993 allowed to identify the apse of a cross-shaped building which can be traced to the Suevi period<sup>2</sup>.

The Bishop of Meinedo, Viator, was present in the II Council of Braga, in 572, presided by Saint Martin of Dume. The basilica would have then turned into a parish church, according to reference in the *Parochiale suevicum*, a document recording the number of parishes belonging to each diocese, whose elaboration derived from the parish's organization started by Saint Martin<sup>3</sup>.

Meinedo was then a *vicus*, which meant the existence of a village with part of its *habitat* organized in streets. The remaining elements of the basilica, namely capitals and impost blocks, reveal a construction of relative greatness and majesty, traceable to the mid 6<sup>th</sup> century<sup>4</sup>.



1. Featuring a tardy program very characteristic of the rural Romanesque, the Church of Saint Mary has a high symbolic value, since Meinedo hosted a bishopry seat in the 6th century.

1 ALMEIDA, Carlos Alberto Ferreira de – *História da Arte em Portugal. Arte da Alta Idade Média*. Lisboa: Publicações Alfa, 1986, p. 30.

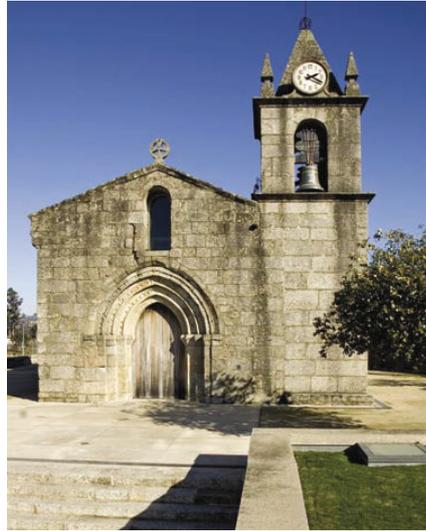
2 *Igreja Matriz de Meinedo/Igreja de Santa Maria*. <http://www.monumentos.pt> (research from December 27<sup>th</sup> 2006).

3 ALMEIDA, Carlos Alberto Ferreira de – *ibidem*.

4 IDEM, *ibidem*.



2. South façade.



3. West façade.

In 1113, the Bishop of Porto, D. Hugo, receives the Charter of the Monastery of Saint Thyrus of Meinedo from D. Afonso Henriques<sup>5</sup>. This monastery's foundation date is unknown, although the legend, consecrated in the *Portuguese Hagiology* (1652)<sup>6</sup>, claims that it was the father-in-law of the Visigoth king Recaredo who brought the body of Saint Thyrus from the city of Constantinople, raising the monastery under his invocation<sup>7</sup>.

The aforementioned excavation campaign also detected structures related to a monastic ensemble. It is certain that the published documentation systematically refers the designation of monastery or church of Saint Thyrus of Meinedo until the 17<sup>th</sup> century<sup>8</sup>, when invoking *Our Lady* or *Saint Mary* seems to have permanently settled.

The chapel adjacent to the North façade of the church of Saint Mary is dedicated to Saint Thyrus, his relics highly worshiped in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, as Jorge Cardoso points out in the *Portuguese Hagiology*.

Confronting the references to the Church of Meinedo recorded by Jorge Cardoso (1652) and Friar Agostinho de Santa Maria in the *Marian Sanctuary* (1716)<sup>9</sup> we get the impression that the change of saints was due to devotional *rivalries*.

Jorge Cardoso enhances the miraculous value of Saint Thyrus' relics, although he recognizes the church's designation as of *Our Lady*, assuring that those relics were motive of great affluence of church-



4. Next to the church's North façade, the chapel of Saint Thyrus holds the saint's relics.

5 For documentation on the parish of Meinedo see: LOPES, Eduardo Teixeira – *Meinedo. Subsídios para uma possível história desta freguesia*. Lousada: Câmara Municipal de Lousada, 2001.

6 CARDOSO, Jorge – *Agilógio Lusitano*. (Organization, survey and indexes by Maria de Lurdes Correia Fernandes). T. I. Porto: Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto, pp. 278-280 (original ed. from 1652).

7 LOPES, Eduardo Teixeira – *Meinedo. Subsídios para uma possível história desta freguesia*. Lousada: Câmara Municipal de Lousada, 2001, pp. 28-31.

8 Cf. IDEM, *ibidem, passim*.

9 SANTA MARIA, Fr. Agostinho de – *Santuário Mariano e História das Imagens Milagrosas de Nossa Senhora, E das milagrosamente aparecidas, que se venerão em os Bispados do Porto, Vizeu, & Miranda*. T. V. Lisboa: Off. de António Pedrozo Galram, 1716, pp. 36.37.



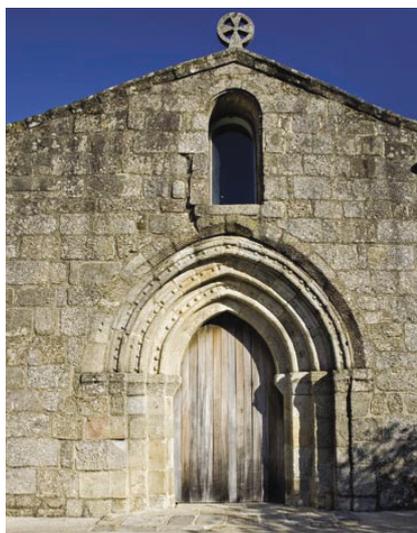
5. South façade of the nave and transept. The transept and nave's corbels, almost devoid of sculpted elements, are an indication of the tardy character of this church.

goers and pilgrims, for being the martyr saint who advocated against fevers and disease, delivering the sick who had gathered dirt from his grave and carried it in *nominas*, i.e., pouches in which relics, talismans or printed prayers were kept<sup>10</sup>.

Agostinho de Santa Maria, arguing against those who attributed the church to the invocation of Saint Thyrusus, tells an interesting episode. The image of the Lady of Meinedo was in the main chapel's retablo until she was removed in 1686 to make a new retablo. Because the image was large and seemed out of proportion in the new retablo, rumor flew about the intention to destroy or bury it. The population, a great follower of *Saint Mary the Tall*, was so outraged with that pretension that "to calm down the devout commotion, the lady was placed in one of the Collateral Altars, while a proper Altar was fabricated for her to receive all the worship, reverence, & cult she deserved"<sup>11</sup>.

It is curious that a Gothic limestone image of *Saint Anthony* with traces of polychromatism was found during an archaeological excavation campaign in the 1990s, buried in the North side of this church parvis, a subject to be developed later on. The sculpture is broken in two fragments and beheaded. The partial destruction and burial of this image may be related to this episode of the main retablo's transfer.

The Church of Saint Mary of Meinedo features an architectonic program that is very attached to the rural Romanesque resistance, proving how this type of construction was highly esteemed in the North of Portugal until late periods.



6. West portal. Not bearing a tympanum nor columns, this portal features a common projection of the rural Gothic.



7. West portal. Detail of the archivolts.

10 CARDOSO, Jorge – *Agilógio Lusitano*. (Organization, survey and indexes by Maria de Lurdes Correia Fernandes). T. I. Porto: Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto, p. 274 (original ed. from 1652).

11 SANTA MARIA, Fr. Agostinho de – *op. cit.*, p. 37.

The temple presents a single nave and rectangular transept (as do most of our medieval parish churches), both with gabled high wood covers. The main portal, without tympanum or columns, opens in pointed arch and the archivolts are decorated with pearl motives, very much in the rural Gothic taste.

The transept is topped by a cornice sustained by plain corbels, while the nave displays similar elements featuring, however, some sculpted corbels. The South lateral portal is undecorated and the one to the North is blocked.

Combining these elements, we may trace this construction to the late 13<sup>th</sup> or early 14<sup>th</sup> century, noting however that the Church of Saint Mary of Meinedo is a reference in the architecture of the Sousa Valley, once it perpetuates decorative schemes, projections and walls made according to Romanesque models.

As A. de Sousa Oliveira has observed, there are traces of mural painting in the main chapel's front wall, hidden by the retable. In the nave, next to the cross arch and by the Epistle, there would be a fresco representing the *Annunciation*, equally covered by the respective altar<sup>12</sup>. There are also traces of painting on mortar, in the stone of the altar table.

### 1.1. The image of Saint Mary of Meinedo

In this church, special attention should be paid to the image of *Our Lady of Meinedo*, in limestone and with traces of polychromatism, which concurs with the description made by the author of the *Marian Sanctuary* when he refers that it was *painted in color and gold*.

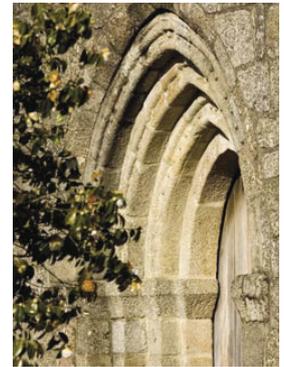
It is an icon sculpture whose proportional devotion is well documented in the Modern Period and corresponds to the Gothic period, although the liking for the antiqueness of this sort of images often leads them to be classified as Romanesque. The sculpture was excavated in the posterior part, a rather frequent circumstance destined to make the images lighter so that they could be carried in processions.

Little has survived from iconic Romanesque sculpture. Its production would have been far less than in the Gothic period, since relics satisfied the devotional needs. Nevertheless, there are documented references from the Romanesque period accounting for the existence of *majesties*, images of the enthroned Virgin as *Sedes Sapientiae*, often made in wood and lost due to changes in taste and devotion. The Synodal resolutions ordered old and degraded sculptures to be broken and buried in holy ground, in the churches transepts or in the parvis.

In Meinedo, during an archaeological excavation campaign from the 1990s, a fragmented Gothic image depicting *Saint Anthony* in limestone with traces of polychromatism was found buried in the North side of the church parvis. Its elimination is consistent with the aforementioned resolutions and it was not just a question of poor condition the reason why these sculptures were broken and buried. Changes in taste or the emphasis on the cult of a saint over another would have also dictated its disappearance.

Considering these phenomena, the rareness of iconic sculpture specimens from the Romanesque period in Portugal is best understood, which is why one should point out the partially destroyed *Angel of the Annunciation* in the See of Porto (Machado de Castro National Museum – Coimbra), whose skilled modeling, as well as the masterful draping, evince influences from the Center and West of France, consistent with Proto-Gothic approaches.

12 OLIVEIRA, A. de Sousa – *A Igreja românica de Sta. Maria de Meinedo e a sua raiz na Alta Idade Medieval*. 1969, p.12.



8. West portal. This portal's elements and the corbels featured in this church point to a chronology of the late 13<sup>th</sup> or early 14<sup>th</sup> century.



9. The image of *Our Lady of Meinedo* corresponds to a Gothic period typology. Displays traces of polychromatism.

The church of Carrazedo de Montenegro (Valpaços), in Trás-os-Montes, keeps an image of *Our Lady* included in a Baroque retable, and another, of the *Angel of the Annunciation*, showing influences from the sculpture developed by Master Mateus in the Glory portico of the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela. Although documentation guarantees the existence of iconic sculpture in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, a common phenomenon in other European countries, in Portugal, it was in the 14<sup>th</sup> century that Gothic sculpture reached its peak.

The large increase in the production of Gothic sculpture, whether icons or altarpiece sculptures, should be regarded in the contemporary devotional panorama. If, as C. A. Ferreira de Almeida wrote, in the Romanesque period one would pray in front of the relics, in the Gothic period, those no longer satisfied the devotional needs. People started to pray in front of sculpted or painted images on the walls or in retables.

Altars multiply inside the churches, either following orders from brotherhoods, or in chapels instituted with the purpose of celebrating suffrages, an aspect that follows the progressive belief in *Purgatory*, which commands an enormous amount of masses to be programmed in wills.

In the Gothic period, there is a growing need to see. It is necessary to see the saint, to touch him, pray to the image, scrape the sculpture or the painting because its matter is sacred and has healing powers. The saints are the chosen middlemen between men and God, and their capacities are multiple. They cure, convert, make miracles and provoke strong emotions.

When studying the images, one cannot simply consider their iconographic or narrative forms, but also their *purposes* and *usage* in constantly renewable social, political and ideological contexts.

The value of a saint's image or of a narrative cycle does not resume itself to its miraculous power. The images also need to dazzle and cause admiration. They should be beautiful, colorful, rich, or expressive and dramatic in order to make an impression and fascinate the beholder.

Asides from the images of Saints, the Gothic period particularly adored the image of *Our Lady*, represented as the *Mother of Christ*.

In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, intense sculpture production evolved around Coimbra, whether regarding icons, altarpiece or funerary sculpture. The limestone quarries located in Ançã, Outil and Portunhos provided excellent material. Around the 1330s, Coimbra would have witnessed the arrival of Master Pêro. Probably Aragonese, the artist followed the journey of the future queen, Isabel of Aragón, to Portugal to be married to king D. Dinis. She presumably ordered her tomb (Santa Clara-a-Nova, Coimbra) and many other works of sculpture to Master Pêro. The activity of Master Pêro and his workshop has been considered as a fundamental element in the evolution of Portuguese Gothic sculpture. Master Pêro introduced a Gothic movement to icon sculpture, also innovating the typology of funerary arks.

Our Lady is represented within various iconographic types. When enthroned and sitting the Child on the left knee, it is called *hodegetria* and corresponds to an evolution in the Romanesque representation in which the Virgin, also sitting, has the Child sitting on both knees in a frontal position, an iconography named *nikopoia*.

More accordingly with the Gothic period and the intent to draw the followers closer to the sacred figures of the time is the representation of *Our Lady* standing, holding the *Child*, usually on the left arm, an iconographic type called *eleousa* which will originate variants like *Our Lady of the Milk*, already included in the very Gothic variations of the *Virgin of the Tenderness*.

In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the area of Coimbra will equally be responsible for the production of quality Gothic sculpture. From the local workshops, special attention to Master João Afonso's. This workshop's large

production has spread further to the Center and South of Portugal, however, there are examples in the North to consider. His work has even reached Galicia. The *Virgin with Child* of the church of Saint Andrew of Veia (A Estrada, Pontevedra) is an image with the typical features of João Afonso's workshop. In the North, Mário Barroca also lists a series of images of *Our Lady* standing with the *Child* in the Church of Monsul (Póvoa de Lanhoso), in the chapel of Our Lady of the Conception (Vila Franca – Viana do Castelo), in the churches of Ribeiros (Fafe), Souto (Guimarães) and the Mother Churches of Ponte de Lima and Barcelos<sup>13</sup>.

Diogo-Pires-o-Velho was another master sculptor working the area of Coimbra. An image of *Our Lady* of his making arrived to Leça da Palmeira, ordered by D. Afonso V in 1481, also remarkable in its size and plastic quality.

The image of Meinedo would fit in this production center, probably dating from the 15<sup>th</sup> century by the way in which vestments are shaped and the way in which *Our Lady* holds the *Child*. Nevertheless, the almost total disappearance of polychromatism grants it a somewhat archaic aspect, making it more complex to provide an accurate date. [LR]



10. *Our Lady of Meinedo*.

## 2. The church in the Modern Period

As for precise details concerning this temple in the Modern Period, they are equally scarce, because the extent of the influence held by this church over the parish territory is unknown, for it is impossible to identify the chapels and hermitages affected by it and, likewise, it is yet impossible to unravel information on the state this building was in during that period.

Observing the whole comprehending the church of Saint Mary of Meinedo, on the outside as on the inside, the building exposes countless elements from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, applied over a medieval structure.

Architecturally, regarding the main *façade*, quite plain in general, we stress the inclusion of the bell tower to the South of the medieval *façade* as a visible example of the extension occurred in post-medieval times. With a quadrangular cut, the tower is organized in two basic levels, the first corresponding to the base itself and the second to the area of the four windows hosting the bells. The cover has the shape of a pyramid, with four small pyramids placed in the vortexes of its base.

In the North side of the church, one recognizes the volumes of the lateral chapel and the sacristy: the first is oriented perpendicularly to the nave and the second is parallel to the main chapel, adjacent to the latter. The lateral chapel has a high gabled roofing, the vortexes of the triangular pediment showing bulb-like pyramids on the side, and a cross in the central vortex. The organization of volumes is made in platforms.



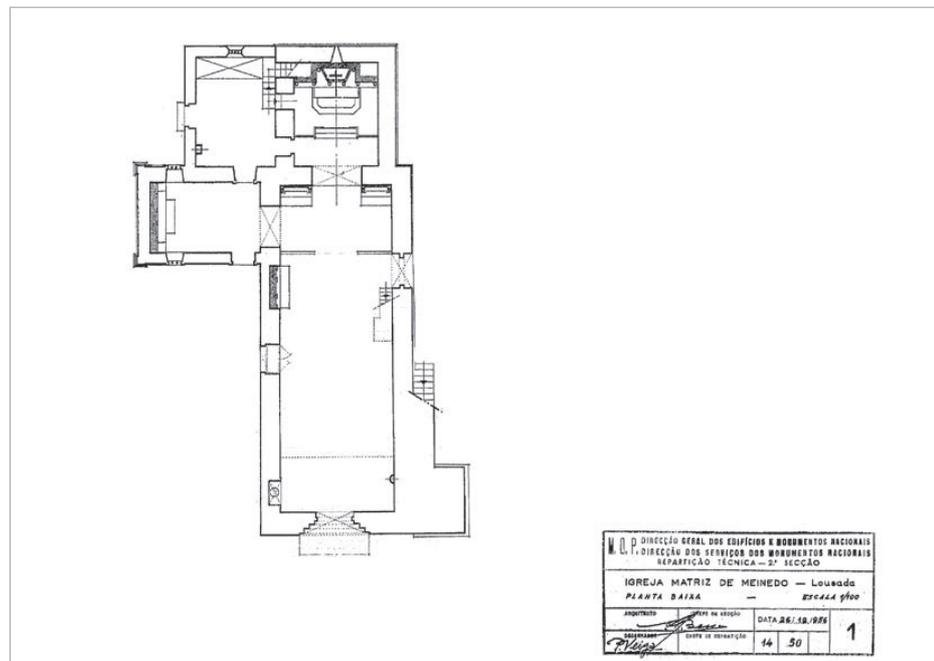
11. The disposition of this church's interior answers to a reform from the Modern period and the intervention occurred in the 1990s.

<sup>13</sup> ALMEIDA, Carlos Alberto Ferreira de and BARROCA, Mário Jorge – *História da Arte em Portugal. O Gótico*. Lisboa: Editorial Presença, 2002, pp. 163-179.

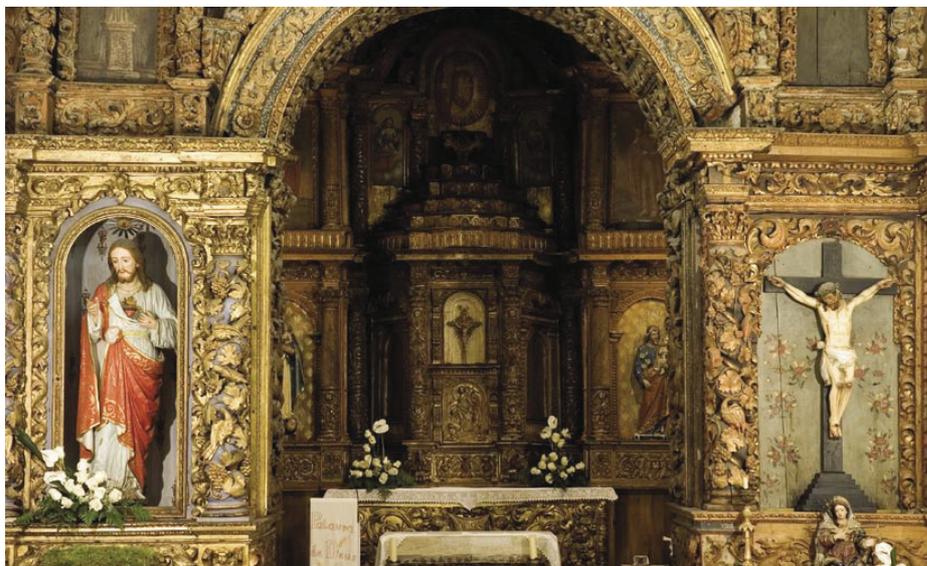
About the main chapel, it is important to stress that it answers to a restructuring carried out in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, its interior housing an ensemble of great impact for the quality and harmony of the artistic coating applied, where gold gilding, glazed tile and painting fully complement themselves. This main chapel, as architectural structure, is from the last third of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Designed as a rectangle, it has a simplified structure, the lateral projections livened with two illumination spans. Two wide windows enlighten the character of that church component's renovation, adapting it to the Baroque liturgical ritual.

The sacristy is from the time of the main chapel's renovation. It follows the same austere architectural pattern, becoming a space that essentially serves the purpose for which it was designed: storing the liturgical apparel and serving as a place for preparing the priest before the celebration of the Eucharist. In this sense, one of the sacristy walls is endowed with a granite wash-basin, where a vernacular artistic vocabulary springs from the interpretation given to the architectural elements of cultured trait, namely, cornice, pyramids and front.

It is, indeed, inside this temple that the artistic splendor of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries is most evident. The nave and particularly the main chapel display aspects that perfectly define the refinement of the art from that period, common to Portuguese Baroque church interiors.



12. Map of the church. Includes the Chapel of Saint Thyrsus and the Sacristy, both from the Modern period.



13. The collateral altars and the triumph arch's adornments correspond to the *national style* of the Portuguese Baroque gilding.

## 2.1. Gilding, painting and tiling

In the church space, recently renovated with works that have granted it a more refined aspect, the gold gilding occupying the entire surface of the wall adjacent to the triumph arch stands out. The collateral altars that frame the main chapel are also part of that structure. Thus, the main chapel of Saint Mary of Meinedo, through the articulation witnessed between architecture, gilded wall coating, tiling and painting, as well as the structure of the three retables composing the whole, is a raised example of the aesthetic unity of the sacred space in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Scenery, sumptuousness, didactic purpose of the arts are values that define the Portuguese sacred space in the Baroque period, and in this main chapel they take on a fortunate interpretation, which is still maintained. The use of different artistic techniques to embellish one space, as gold gilding with hagiographic painting on wood, patterned tiling in the lateral projections and sectioned wood ceiling to frame figurative paintings, endows the space with a rich and diversified color profusion, a prerogative of the Portuguese Baroque sacred space.

Chapels, churches (parish or monastic), brotherhoods, mercy houses, sanctuaries, hermitages, among others, from North to South, have been renovated according to this artistic articulation seen in Saint Mary of Meinedo. Following the noble character of gold, its mystic glow, reinforced by the candle light that used to fill those spaces, as well as the sculptural and volumetric value provided by gilding, and the color palette of the hagiographical paintings integrated in it – all contributed to provide the believer with the immeasurable sensation of magnificence felt in the house of God. To this image, add the incense fumes and the priest's gestures, the lead actor in that space, and surely the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>-century parishioners were dragged by the envisioning of divine glory.

The dramatic and rhetoric effect exerted by the main chapel over the churchgoers participating in the liturgical rituals in the nave was pre-defined in the Tridentine norm. And art, or arts, was a strong instrument for the institutional propaganda enclosed in the paradigm of the post-reform's religious militancy. Considering the shortage of images, which adorned the households, the Baroque devotees were actors and spectators in a scenery of abundant religious illustration of high artistic and aesthetic value. One must not ignore that the church dictated the daily habits of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>-century man. As a normative imposition, this was where one attended the weekly mass; where the most significant steps of one's life were witnessed, as birth (baptism), marriage and death; and since the church was the main collective construction of the parish, it was also here that the most essential collective manifestations took place, like festivities and fairs; notices and collective news were communicated from the pulpit. These reasons explain why the church emphasizes the daily experience of the Portuguese Baroque man. In Portugal, and especially in the countryside, collective culture cannot be dissociated from the role of the church in the midst of the parish's micro-society.

Let us analyze the main chapel of Saint Mary of Meinedo from the church nave. A gilded frame – triumph arch and collateral retables – focuses the main chapel's visual center: the Eucharist throne. A space for exhibiting the Holy Sacrament, it is the quintessential refuge for the mystic transcendence of the Baroque man. The church in its triumphant transformation reserves the main chapel's focal point for an ostensive presentation of the body of Christ, symbolized by the consecrated host, the Holy Sacrament: the fundamental principle of the post-reform affirmation facing the transmutation void claimed by the zestful Lutherans. This quarrel was installed in the midst of the Church in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, justifying the ideological fragmentation, and it was held in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century as an unquestionable principle of Catholic devotion. Therefore, the church's central space, its main chapel, is seen in Meinedo as an artistic scenery and the ultimate paradigm of the post-reform Catholic norm. On top of the pyramid formed by the Eucharist throne, the real presence of God was proudly displayed to the parish community.

The gilding in the collateral altars and the coating of the triumph arch are in national style, showing a profuse decoration emphasized by the rolling of acanthuses, mixed with flowers and other botanical elements and, specifically, in the columns (marking the place for the collateral altars) vine leaves and grape clusters, to which birds and cherubs are occasionally added. The delicately designed golden wood panel in the altar fronts is more recent, already presenting forms that are characteristic of Joanine gilding, with the initials «CJ», next to the Gospel, and «IHS», next to the Epistle inscribed in a central chiseling. Since the whole is attributed to the late 17<sup>th</sup> or early 18<sup>th</sup> century, the altar fronts are inserted in a timeframe around the 1740s.

The collateral altar next to the Gospel has, in the torn niche from the first level, an image of the *Sacred Heart of Jesus*, and immediately over it, in the second level and as a finishing, a painting depicting the image of the Virgin with Child. Over the triumph arch's attic is another panel depicting *Christ Resurrected*. Next to the Epistle, the niche in the lower level of the collateral altar keeps an image of *Christ Crucified*, which is overlapped by a panel that, due to ill condition, makes it impossible to recognize the represented theme. Over this retable's stool is an image of *Our Lady of Sorrows*, an iconographic representation that is dear to Post-Tridentine Catholicism, reminiscent of an expression stated by Simeon the priest who, upon the *Presentation of Jesus in the Temple*, announces to Mary the "sword of sorrow that will pierce through the mother's soul". [Lk 2, 34-35]



14. Triumph arch's adornments. Detail.

The Baroque concept of a “total work of art” works fully in this main chapel space due to the combination of gilding, glazed tiling and painting that totally cover the interior.

The gold gilded main altar, attributed to the last third of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, presents a structure divided in two horizontal levels, evolving over the base of the retable, then separating into three vertical strips, the wider, central one corresponding to the space that holds the sacrarium and the Eucharist throne. The design is defined by the inclusion of architectonic elements, like columns and entablatures which, through consecutive application, stand out in the reticulated pattern described above. The columns in the lateral vertical strips, of composite capital, present a frustum decorated in its first third with botanicals elements, among which a cherub and a bird, the remaining surface being decorated by twisted stretchings.

In the main altar's lower level, next to the sacrarium structure, are the images of *Our Lady with Child* and of *Saint Joseph*, next to the Gospel and to the Epistle, respectively. Above, at the level of the Eucharist throne, the pictorial representations of *Saint John the Baptist* and of *Saint John the Preacher* were included in the lateral strips, accordingly with the images of *Our Lady* and of *Saint Joseph*.

The sacrarium and the Eucharist throne, resulting from a later addition to the altarpiece structure, are overlapped in the retable's center, defined by a perfect arch. In the intrados of this arch are four panels, distributed by the structure's two main levels: in the lower, by the sacrarium, are the depictions of *Saint Peter* and *Saint Paul*, placed to the left and to the right, accordingly; and to these panels, at the level of the Eucharist throne, correspond the depictions of *Saint Bernard* and *Saint Stephen*.

The shape of the sacrarium structure, divided in two levels, is a trapezoidal prism, whose vertical edges feature columns with a frustum that is profusely decorated with an abundance of delicate botanical elements to which cherubs and birds are added. The door was sculpted with a representation of the *Resurrection of Christ*, and over it, a small niche with a crucifix.

Also note that the altar table's front is in fine quality gold gilding, in National style, the decoration made by the rolling of acanthuses, children and birds, placed so as to envelop the initials “IHS” marked in the center of the piece.

The entire walls in the main chapel's lateral projections and the ones corresponding to the triumph arch are covered with polychrome glazed tiles from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, with pattern compositions forming a ceramic tapestry that borders all of the space's original spans.

The applied module creates a 2x2 pattern lowering in 180°, which produces a horizontal and vertical rhythm in the whole composition<sup>14</sup>. Over a white background is an element shaped like a diamond, filled in blue and outlined by a yellow wavy line, which contains in its center an also yellow circle marking the pattern's rotation axis. Deriving from white botanical motives, eventually completing that element's interior, other elements painted in yellow project towards the exterior, leading to a blue cruciform motive.

14 Identified by Santos Simões as P-251. See SIMÕES, J.M. dos Santos – *Azulejaria em Portugal no Século XVII*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. T. I. Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1997, p. 63.

15. The main altarpiece is traceable to the last third of the 17th century.



This tiling's border consists of a bar, composed of frieze and frame, encircling the limits of the ceramic tapestry. The frieze is composed of a chain of white entwining painted over a blue background, interconnecting from a flower with yellow petals<sup>15</sup>. The frame module, also over a blue background, derives from a botanical motive, painted in yellow and shaped like a diamond with a hollowed center. Around, a botanical element painted in white evolves into volutes. This element connects to a similar one through a yellow ring. The connection link of the border pattern is a second diamond, painted in white and blue, and from its center spring small, twirling stems drawn in yellow<sup>16</sup>.

The main chapel's artistic ensemble is completed by a ceiling formed by a total of nine painted sections, whose decorative motives carved in the frames (displaying great affinity to some of the motives in the main retable) point to the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. The panels are figurative and represent a set of episodes associated with Marian iconography [See Iconographic scheme of the main chapel's ceiling]. Technically, the line reveals some ingenuity in the representation of the forms, the dominant color palette being mostly composed of reds, browns and grays.

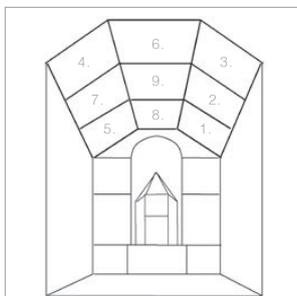
For all of the aforementioned aspects, concerning the interventions from the Modern Period, this spatial unit is a paradigm of the sort of taste and the investment applied in the artistic renovation of Portuguese sacred spaces, specifically during the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Although we know that the general aspect currently presented by this church is different from the one shown in 1886<sup>17</sup> – the temple then having a coated and whitewashed exterior –, the overall condition of the several constituents should be considered a model. In fact, few deviations from the original character of the different elements are recorded, especially during the Modern Period, in the transept area, which is something to consider and, therefore, a plus upon the evaluation of the patrimonial value of the whole. [MJMR/DGS]



16. Main altarpiece. The Eucharistic Throne is derived from a later addition to the altarpiece structure.

#### ICONOGRAPHIC SCHEME OF THE MAIN CHAPEL'S CEILING



#### ICONOGRAPHIC PROGRAM MARIAN THEME SUBJECTS

1. ANNUNCIATION
2. VISITATION
3. NATIVITY
4. EPIPHANY
5. ESCAPE INTO EGIPT
6. CIRCUMCISION
7. PRESENTATION OF JESUS IN THE TEMPLE
8. CROWNING OF THE VIRGIN
9. ASSUMPTION OF THE VIRGIN

15 Identified by Santos Simões as F-10, p.131.

16 Identified by Santos Simões as C-74, p.154.

17 Cf. VIEIRA, José Augusto – *O Minho Pittoresco*. Vol. II. Lisboa: 1886, p.363.

17. Main chapel. Ceiling with sectioned paintings of themes pertaining to the Marian iconography. Late 17th century.



### 3. Restoration and conservation

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Restoration in the Church of Saint Mary of Meinedo began in 1991, with a church recovery and restoration project designed by architect Francisco Cunha, under the guidance of the IPPAR. The parish's support equipments and exterior maintenance are also the responsibility of Francisco Cunha.

Asides from the conservation and restoration of the temple, this project also aimed for archaeological excavations inside the Chapel of Saint Thyrsus, the church nave and sacristy; probing was conducted outside, by the building's South façade. The archaeological findings certified Meinedo's ancient roots.

Within the *Route of the Romanesque of the Sousa Valley* project, occasional maintenance was conducted. [MB]

## Chronology

(mid) 6<sup>th</sup> century – Construction of the basilica, head of the Bishopric of Meinedo;

1113 – Reference to the existence of the Monastery of Saint Thyrsus of Meinedo;

13<sup>th</sup> - 14<sup>th</sup> century – Church construction;

17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century – Tiling the main chapel with blue and white glazed tiles and building the Modern bell tower. Placing the retables and main retable in gold gilding;

1991 – Restoring the Chapel of Saint Thyrsus by the Church's Factory Committee;

1990s – Beginning the recovery and restoration of the Church of Meinedo by the IPPAR, with project by architect Francisco Cunha.