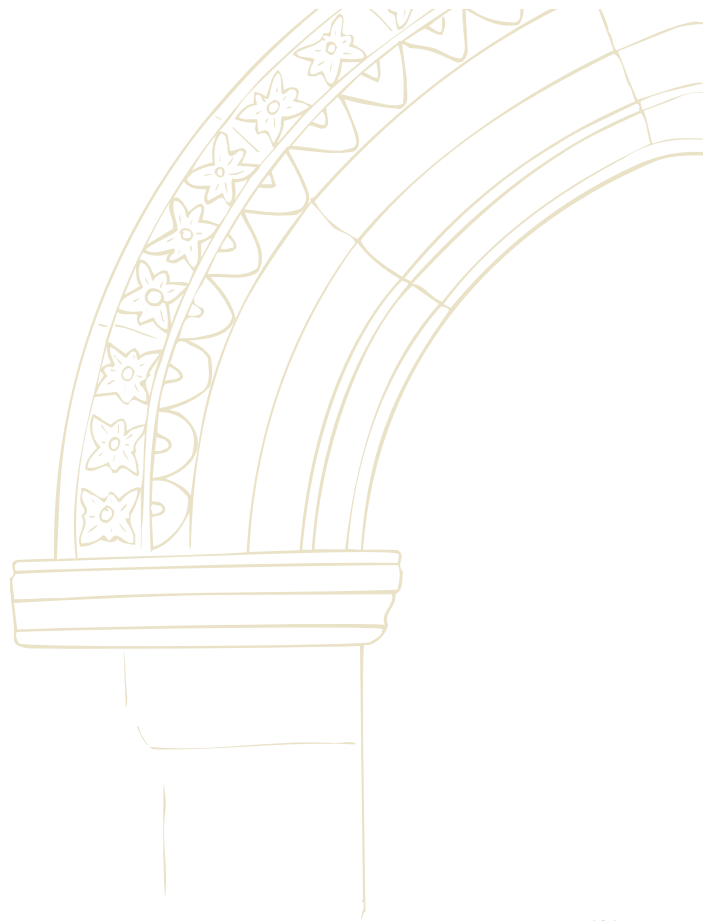




church

CHURCH OF SAINT MICHAEL OF ENTRE-OS-RIOS



1. The church in the Middle Ages

Located in the parish of Eja, or of Entre-os-Rios, in the municipality of Penafiel, the Church of Saint Michael is an example of the *resistance Romanesque*, a characteristic so highly visible in other Romanesque churches in the Lower Tâmega area. In this temple, which should date from a period not prior to the 14th century, we find solutions from the rural Gothic, as seen in the type of botanical decoration, in the cross arch as in the South portal, along with common building solutions from the Romanesque period.

This church is in an important territory in the framework of the political-military reorganization conducted by king Afonso III of the Asturias, with the goal of creating safety conditions to allow the population to settle in the Douro valley¹.

The Lower Tâmega region mainly belonged, in the early times of the Reconquest, to the territory of the *civitas Anegiae*. According to C. A. Ferreira de Almeida, the Douro river was by then an important fluvial passage. This territory was also crossed by two important courses connecting the North to the South. The birth of the territory of *Anegia* is documented in circa 870, contemporary with the claim of *Portucale* (868) and Coimbra (878) and, following A. M. de Carvalho Lima, one of the first signs of populational dynamics in this area, corresponding to the current municipalities of Cinfães, Penafiel, Marco de Canaveses, Castelo de Paiva and Arouca².

Among these territorial claims, strategic points were picked to create fortresses and establish the *committees*, representatives of the Astur-Leonine kings, to insure the safety and settling of the populations in frontier areas, always threatened by Muslim attacks³. The *territorium of the civitas Anegia* is set in a natural



1. The church of Saint Michael of Entre-os-Rios is set in an important territory from the time of the Reconquest.

1 LIMA, António Manuel de Carvalho – “O Território Anegia e a organização administrativa e militar do curso terminal do Douro (Séculos IX-XII)”. In *Carlos Alberto Ferreira de Almeida. in memoriam*. Vol. 1. Porto: Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto, 1999, p. 399.

2 IDEM, *ibidem*, p. 399.

3 IDEM, *ibidem*, p. 400.



2. West façade. Even though early mentions to it are traced back to the 11th century, this church's present state corresponds to a restoration not prior to the 14th century.

corridor, oriented to the Northwest/Southeast and defined to the East by Marão and Montemuro, the South by the massive of Serra da Freita and the West by a mountain known in the Middle Ages as *Serra Sicca*. This natural barrier was fortified, over the Douro river, by the *Castle Mountain* in Broalhos and the *Castle Hill* in Medas (Gondomar). Over the Sousa river was the *Castle of Aguiar* (Paredes), taken by Al-Mansur in 995, and over the Ferreira river, the *Castle Hill*, in Campo (Valongo).

Between the early and the mid 11th century, there is a territorial fragmentation based as much on the decrease of the Muslim assaults as on the social pressure exerted by knight's families, anxious for a larger distribution of military, administrative and judicial powers, which lead to the division of the territory into a series of *terræ*, each headed by a castle.

Although many of these castles were by now identified, either through documentation or through archaeological surveys, their abandonment, of very ancient roots, makes it harder to recognize the architectonic disposition that, as A. M. de Carvalho Lima refers, can only be better assessed through systematical campaigns⁴.

These are the powerful reasons granting this region an important strategic position, ruled by one of the most renowned Portuguese families, the Riba Douros⁵.

The Riba Douro family kept close connection with the Benedictine Monastery of the Savior of Paço de Sousa (Penafiel), the head of a land donated by count Henry, later becoming one of the most reputed monasteries of the region between the Douro and Minho rivers. The oldest documented references referring the Church of Saint Michael of Entre-os-Rios attest to its connection to this Monastery.

4 IDEM, *ibidem*, pp. 401-406.

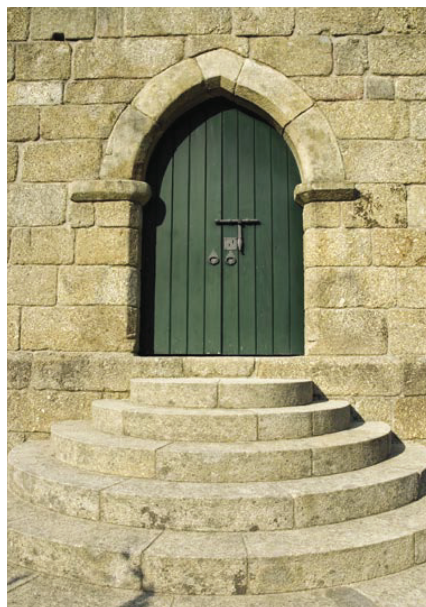
5 ALMEIDA, Carlos Alberto Ferreira de – *História da Arte em Portugal. O Românico*. Lisboa: Publicações Alfa, 1986, p. 94.

The first document reference to the Church of Saint Michael is mentioned in the *Book of Testaments of Paço de Sousa*. The document, dated from 1095, mentions a donation of part of the church to that monastery. Another document, dated from 1120, gives notice of a new donation to the same monastery, referring to yet another parcel of rights over the Church of Saint Michael by that monastic house⁶.

The choice of the patron Saint Michael is probably not unrelated to the Reconquest and subsequent territorial reorganization. It is known that, in this time, warrior and triumphant saints, like Saint Michael, the leader of the Celestial Army, were highly worshipped and evoked.

This church, also known as Church of Saint Michael of Eja, is implemented in the right bank of the Tâmega river. It is part of a large group of examples of peculiar late Romanesque architecture that leave an imprint in the landscape of the Lower Tâmega's Basin, such as the churches of Saint Genes of Boelhe, Savior of Cabeça Santa and Saint Peter of Abragão (Penafiel), of Vila Boa de Quires, of the parish church of Sobretâmega, Constance, Saint Isidore, Saint Nicholas, Tabuado, Vila Boa do Bispo, Rosém and Paços de Gaiolo (Marco de Canaveses)⁷.

In Saint Michael the portals do not feature any columns or tympanums, and the arches are systematically broken. The church does not bear capitals and the resource to impost blocks as a support for the arches, as well as the use of decorative elements based on geometric beveled foliage, as is the case of the vine



3. West portal. The absence of columns and tympanum points to a tardy chronology, within the frame of the Romanesque *resistance*.



4. South façade.

6 MONTEIRO, Maria Teresa e SOUSA, J. Rigaud de – “Livro de Testamentos do Mosteiro de Paço de Sousa”. In *Bracara Augusta*. Vol. XXIV. Braga, 1970.

7 ALMEIDA, Carlos Alberto Ferreira de – *História da Arte em Portugal. O Românico*. Lisboa: Publicações Alfa, 1986, pp. 94-99.



5. South façade. This façade's portal presents the same decorative solution as the triumph arch inside the church. The transept was lengthened and heightened after the original construction.

leaves, so common in the late Romanesque, are other aspects that place this church in a chronology close to the Gothic period, albeit the visible persistence of the Romanesque forms.

194

For all this, C. A. Ferreira de Almeida considers that this church is no older than the 14th century.

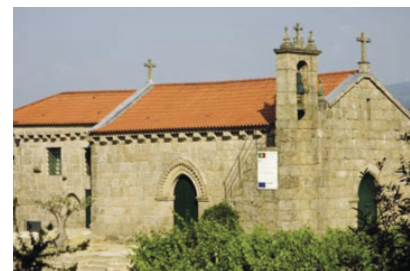
The design follows the usual scheme of a single nave and rectangular transept. The original transept was extended within renovations done to the liturgical space during the 18th century, and we also believe it was heightened, considering that, usually, the medieval transepts are lower than the nave. Actually, since the original cross arch was kept, the transept is very reserved in relation to the nave, creating a peculiar sense of space further emphasized by the magnificent main retable.

The church is built with trimmed granite blocks, in pseudo-isodome rows. C. A. Ferreira de Almeida brought the attention to the curious fact that this church's granite blocks do not contain signs almost in its entirety, since it is common in buildings from the same period to have a greater presence of masonry and position markings. Only one abbreviation from a mason was found in one of the wall blocks in the main façade⁸.

The main façade presents a very simplified portal, topped by a pointed arch and set on quite delimited impost blocks. The façade's entire upper finishing is made of pediment with cross in the vortex and is crowned in the flanks by two pinnacles from the 18th century. This pediment would support the medieval belfry, as the traces of the rope or chain to ring the bell demonstrate over the main portal⁹.

The lateral façades display a corbel sequence sustaining the roof's drip course and, by their large and unsculpted shape, they indicate a later building period, suggesting however reminiscences from the Romanesque style.

The North portal, in broken arch, was doted with a richer decoration than the main portal, being framed by an archivolt decorated with diamond-tip motives and eight-petal faceted and beveled leaves, resembling the cross arch in the church's interior, elements that fit into the late Romanesque and the regional Gothic.



6. South and West façades.

8 ALMEIDA, C. A. Ferreira de; LOPES, Francisco Gaspar Almeida – "Eja: A Civitas e a Igreja de S. Miguel". Porto: Instituto de Arqueologia, 1981-1982. Annex of *Portugália*. Nova Série, Vol. II/III, 1981-1982.

9 IDEM, *ibidem*.



7. North façade.

If, on one hand, it seems as if the West portal is posterior to the South portal, explaining the different construction projections, on the other hand, it is not rare that the lateral door received a more detailed decoration. In the Middle Ages, a church's building was not just an object built for a single purpose. It widely reflected the contemporary social and cultural networks. The parish church is much more than a space where the liturgy takes place and, thus, should be analyzed in relation to the village paths, the procession trails and the funerary rituals. The lateral portals, especially those in connection with the paths, were and still are more commonly used than the main portal. In the Land of Miranda it is not rare to see a higher decorative emphasis and apparatus in the lateral portals, as shown by the Church of Our Lady of Expectation of Malhadas (Miranda do Douro).

The interior of the Church of Saint Michael of Entre-os-Rios presents a single nave with wood cover, separated from the transept by a cross arch of broken span leading to the main chapel, supported by an impost block. It has no columns and is decorated with botanical elements, namely vine leaves, sculpted in the face by the nave's side.

In the main chapel's North wall there is an arcosolium from the time of the medieval church, destined to house a tomb, which was partially cut by the placement of a door, in the Modern Period's restoration campaign. [LR]



8. South façade. Portal finished with typical decoration from the 14th century.



9. The transept's enlargement stems from a granitic layer.

2. The church in the Modern Period

2.1. The parish church: the community's focal point

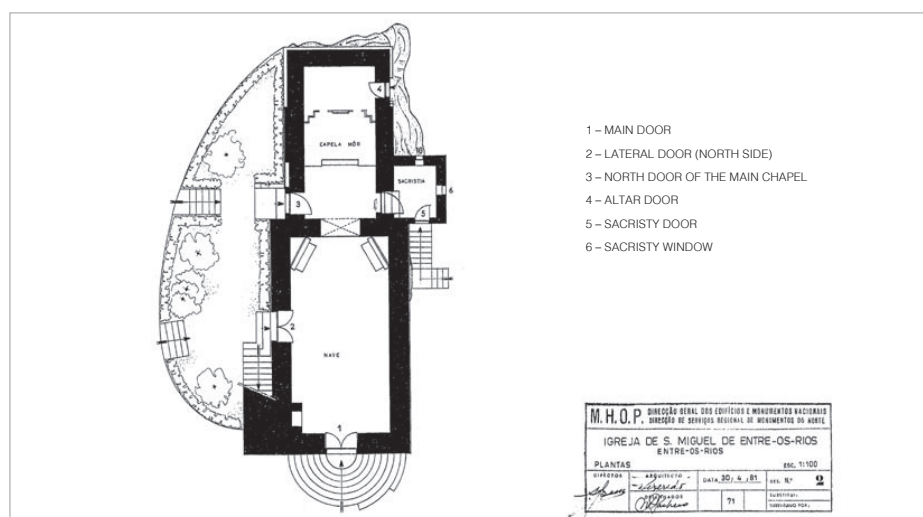
The parish of Eja was, in the 18th century, a small cluster composed of only thirty households and a population not spanning beyond a hundred heads, scattered in five small places or villages. The parish church is isolated on top of a hill descending to the Douro river. This parish church's isolation was already witnessed in 1758, but in spite of its withdrawal from the population centers, every Saturday it would celebrate mass.

The parish church was the focal point of community life. Every week, the collective feeling of belonging to a community would manifest itself in the church parvis and in the joint participation in mass. Asides from fulfilling an expression of religiousness, from this ritualized weekly practice emerged the concepts of collectivity and identity.

In the 18th century, as the church abbot has recorded, every Saturday there would be a mass. In the first day of February, the collective sense of continuity between past and present would be manifested in a *General Celebration for the souls of all the deceased brethren from the Brotherhood of Our Lady*, and, in the following day, they would hold collective festivities, *with splendor and pomp*¹⁰, attended by all of the parish's sons.

The church patron, Saint Michael the Archangel, is worshipped in the main retable of the parish church. Asides from this invocation, the expression of the collective religiousness gravitated, in the year of 1758, in the *God Child*, with a privileged altar in the church's nave, by the Gospel, and in *Saint Cajetan*, placed at the opposite side.

196



10. Map of the church. Includes the Sacristy, from the Modern period.

10 COELHO, Manuel Ferreira – O Concelho de Penafiel nas "Memórias Paroquiais" de 1758. In *Penafiel – Boletim Municipal de Cultura*. 3rd Series. Nos. 4-5. Penafiel: Câmara Municipal de Penafiel, 1987/88, p. 285.

11. Transept. Main altarpiece from the Baroque Period.



2.2. Architecture, gilding and iconography

The Church of Saint Michael of Entre-os-Rios underwent important renovation works in the Modern Period, from which results the present building. Architectonic elements of medieval origin articulate with others dated from later periods, deriving in a curious building for its artistic diversity.

Focusing on the aspects dated from the 17th and 18th centuries visible in the exterior, the church features a small bell tower in the main façade, placed on a wall to the North of the volume corresponding to the nave. The placement of pyramids in the tower and front pediment's lateral angles also bear witness to an intervention occurred in the Modern Period. Another evident aspect of a late intervention in relation to the church's foundation period concerns the addition of flights of stairs in the main façade and in the lateral projections. Notwithstanding, it is concerning the transformation of the medieval church's transept that the Post-Tri-dentine intervention is most evident. Observing the sequence of corbels in the main chapel, one can see that this part of the construction suffered an extension in depth, welcoming new spans for illumination, so as to adapt the pre-existing space to the changes in the liturgical ritual operated after the Council of Trento. The disruption of this sequence certifies to the main chapel's enlargement.

Likewise, entering the building, some elements draw our attention, pointing to a later intervention in the monument occurred in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries.

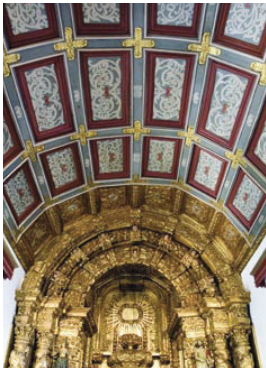
The nave features the altarpiece structures of the collateral altars, already from the 19th century, when the artistic Neoclassic language is developed; further behind, a wooden chancel with baluster is the result of an even later intervention; from the same period are the pulpit's transformation over a stone base, and the wood cover of curved cut.

The nave's retables are extremely contained regarding decoration, painted in white and gold. Both the designs, albeit different, follow classical simplified lines, organized according to a sequence initiated in the altar table, which is the structure's basing, followed by the bench, which is hollowed by a small niche in the altar by the Gospel, later evolving into the body of the retable, sided with columns, with the finishing placed over the entablature area, crowned by a cross curved element that works as a front.

After the triumph arch, we enter the space of the main chapel. The main chapel keeps important elements providing the visitor the most accurate idea on the investment and artistic transformation made in this building in the 18th century, featuring one of the main artistic tendencies from this period and recurrent in the sacred spaces throughout the country: the presence of gilding.

Corresponding to a very peculiar language, this space was restored in the early years of the 18th century with an exquisite altarpiece structure in national styled gilding. The whole was completed by a sectioned roof, from which we may still observe six of its original units (corresponding to the first lines from the main altar) and a purlin (still occupying the main chapel's entire length), having the remaining area been replaced with panels in which botanical motives are painted, resulting in a later and poorer intervention from the 19th century.

The main altar's retable apparatus is decisive in the visual impact created on the spectator, not only for the fact of being goldplated gilding, but also for its profuse decoration, whose quality wood carving is highly exquisite. Organized in concentric arches accentuating the structure's depth towards the tribune, where the eucharist throne is, this retable's decoration essentially relies in botanical motives. From acanthuses rolled in vine leaves and their grape clusters to, mixed with these, children, birds and also winged angel's heads showing traces of polychromatism.



12. Transept. Main altarpiece and painted ceiling. The ceiling panels, by the altarpiece, feature emblems of Marian iconography.

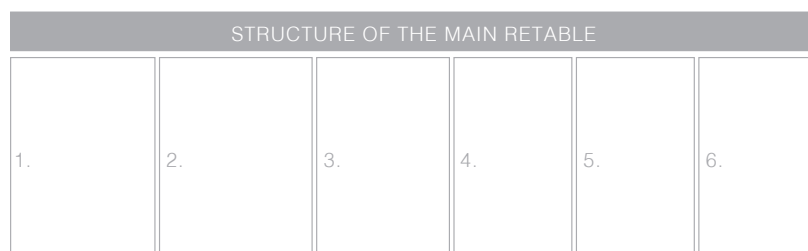
It is important to note that the main retable also includes imagery and painting.

Over the corbel by the Gospel's side is the image of *Saint Michael the Archangel weighing the Souls*, dressed in a breastplate and with his head covered by a feathered elm, holding a cross with his right hand and a scale with his left, as he crushes the Devil. With him, by the Epistle, also over a corbel, an image of *Saint John the Baptist*.

About the paintings, we bring the attention to the existing panels in the eucharist tribune's basing that frame the sacarium, the one on the Epistle's side being the access door to the eucharist throne. There, representations of angels holding thuribles are seen, drawn in profile, kneeling towards the sacarium. Also inside the tribune, laterally, two other panels were placed, equally showing kneeling angels on clouds and holding thuribles, drawn in three-quarters, turned face forward.

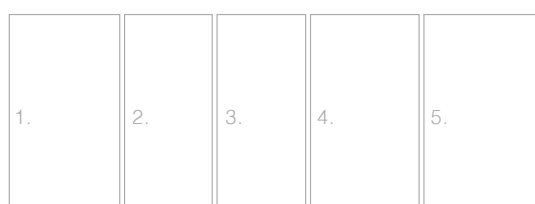
In this altarpiece structure there is also the tribune arch's intradorsum presenting five sections with sculpted emblems associated with Marian iconography, complementing the six remaining sections from the ceiling structure, also sculpted around the same design, featuring further emblems in the center (See Schemes 1 and 2). The presence of Marian iconography in the main retable was, possibly, an intervention from the Brotherhood of Our Lady, hosted by this church, congregating the interests of the parish collectivity.

SCHEME 1 ICONOGRAPHIC EMBLEMS OF THE MAIN CHAPEL'S CEILING SECTIONS



1. MIRROR – Relates Mary to the veterotestamentary passage pointing to the "splendor of the eternal light, the untainted mirror of God's activity and image of his kindness" [Wis 7, 26]. An element referred in the Prayer of the Litany of the Virgin, pointing, in a certain way, to the Virgin's chastity.
2. CLOSED GARDEN – Integrates the Marian symbology, alluding to the Virgin's chastity and inviolability, associating with the following passage: "You are a fenced and closed garden a sealed spring." [Cant 4, 12].
3. LADDER – Emblem associated with Jacob's Ladder uniting Heaven and Earth – Mary's connection to the celestial universe.
4. TOWER [OF DAVID/IVORY] – Associated with Mary as a symbol of chastity, and also as a stronghold against enemies, where one may find refuge in times of distress.
5. ROSES – Allusion to the Mystic Rose referred in the Prayer of the Litany: a rose without a thorn, the rose without sin – Mary has fully preserved the candor of her virginity.
6. WELL – Well from which sprout revitalizing waters; Mary full of grace, overflowing with joy.

SCHEME 2 ICONOGRAPHIC EMBLEMS OF THE INTRADORSUM SECTIONS OF THE MAIN RETABLE'S TRIBUNE ARCH



1. CYPRESS – Associated to Marian iconography, the cypress is a symbol of life and eternity, for its evergreen foliage is raised to the sky. In the book of Ben Sirach is a passage: "Raise me like a cedar from Lebanon, like cypresses in the hills of Hermon" [Sir 24,13].
2. SUN – Mary seen as a glowing element among the creatures, like the Sun among the stars. There are also references to the Sun in the book of the Song of Songs: "appears like the dawn, fair as the Moon, bright as the Sun" [Song 6,10].
3. SOURCE – Associated to the Litany of the Virgin, considering its water as a symbol of wisdom. Also mentioned in the book of the Song of Songs: "And the source of this garden is the spring from whence come the fresh waters flowing from Lebanon" [Song 4,15].
4. MOON/STAR – Mary as the Morning Star, announcing and conceiving the light of Christ.
5. OLIVE TREE – Tree of great symbolic value: peace, fertility, purification, strength.

200

[MJMR / DGS]

3. Restoration and conservation

The Church of Saint Michael of Entre-os-Rios' restoration campaign started in 1936, under the direction of architect Rogério de Azevedo. Initially, the project foresaw greater works, as the plans demonstrate, which were not carried out. The project for the Church of Saint Michael was important to confirm an intervention methodology, present in this type of monuments.

Interventions in the Portuguese historic patrimony have suffered different approaches with time, from which we shall consider the interventions undertaken by the DGEMN, which left traces still well visible in the patrimonial conscience.

The restoration project for the Church of Saint Genes of Boelhe (Penafiel) in 1905 is a forecast of the DGEMN' future performance¹¹. The restitution of the original design to the Romanesque monument was an essential condition, or the best guiding principle.

The reintegrating restorations seek to harmonize the architectonic form with the historical authenticity, recreating at times a monument of exemplary character, as the churches of Saint Martin of Cedofeita (Porto), Saint Peter of Cête (Paredes), Saint Genes of Boelhe (Penafiel) or Saint Mary of Leça do Balio (Matosinhos) show.

¹¹ COELHO, Manuel Ferreira – O Concelho de Penafiel nas "Memórias Paroquiais" de 1758. In *Penafiel – Boletim Municipal de Cultura*. 3rd Series. Nos. 4-5. Penafiel: Câmara Municipal de Penafiel, 1987/88, pp. 39-40.

The Church of Saint Michael of Entre-os-Rios was deeply altered in the Modern Period with the construction of stairs in the main façade, in the North façade to access the belfry, and in the South projection towards the sacristy. Inside, the transformations consisted of placing altars and the pulpit and extending the main chapel and the crevices. The restoration works comprehended: repairing the covering, cleaning the coating, replacing windows and crevices, floor tiling, reducing the main chapel by moving the main altar, blocking a door, unblocking crevices; demolishing the belfry and the access staircase. Between 2003 and 2007, general conservation works were done within the *Route of the Romanesque of the Sousa Valley* project. [MB]

Chronology

11th century ? – Original edification (lost);

13th or 14th centuries – Church edification;

18th century – Extension of the transept's length and height; placing the main altar;

19th century – Placing the lateral retables and pulpit;

20th century – Placing the lining of glazed tiles;

1936 – Conservation and restoration works;

1964 – Restoration works carried out by the priest;

1980 – Cleaning the surrounding vegetation;

1981 – Repairing the covering and carpentry;

1982 – Miscellaneous conservation and repair works;

2003/2007 – General conservation within the *Route of the Romanesque of the Sousa Valley* project: covering, batters and exterior spans, improving pavements, batters and ceilings inside the church; repairing the main chapel's decorative elements; improving the surrounding area and church accesses.