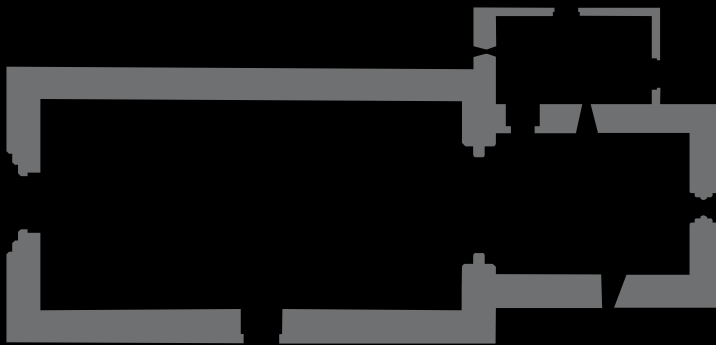




CHURCH
OF OUR LADY
OF NATIVITY
OF ESCARAMÃO
CINFÃES

CHURCH
OF OUR LADY
OF NATIVITY
OF ESCARAMÃO
CINFÃES



Plan.

HISTORICAL SUMMARY

In 1258, the “couto” [a type of Portuguese administrative division] of Vila Meá belonged to the monastery of Saint John of Pendorada (Marco de Canaveses) and, according to the deponents, it had been donated by King Afonso Henriques (k. 1143-1185) to Sarracino Mendes, nicknamed “o Espinha” [the Spine]. Some authors believe that this nobleman called Sarracino Viegas (doc. 1123-1165)¹ was the lord of the castle of Benviver and one of the patrons of the aforementioned monastery, who was rewarded both by Queen Teresa of Savoy (1080-1130) and by her son for the services he rendered while fighting against the Moors. It was during the abbacy of the abbot Pedro (1121-1143) that, through an exchange, Vila Meá became part of the temporal domain of Pendorada, according to a strategy of dominial acquisitions made within the monastery’s line of sight. Moreover, during the same period, there were a number of donations and property exchanges in Souselo, Espadanedo, Travanca, Sardoura, etc. It seemed more convenient to the abbots of Pendorada to cross the Douro in order to perform their duties than to surpass the mountainous foothills where their own monastery had been settled.



Monastery of Alpendorada (Marco de Canaveses). General view.

¹ The beginning and end dates are those indicated by Mattoso (2002).

In the 13th century the “couto” was formed by the villages of Escamarão, Vila Meã, Merujais, Vila Pouca and Couto (which stood at the western boundary, right at the entrance). Escamarão, a town located on a hill over the confluence of the rivers Douro and Paiva, was an attractive area for passersby. On the one hand, it was close to an important pier and, on the other hand, it was located at the intersection of two roads that headed from the coast towards the inland: one followed along the southern margin of the Douro and the other turned south, running along the river Paiva. In order to mark, not only its temporal domain, but also its spiritual domain, the monastery of Pendorada made arrangements for the construction of a temple (or, at least, for its reconstruction): a small building which would ensure the religious independence of the small “couto” from the contiguous parishes of Souselo or Fornos, on the other side of the river.

The Church was consecrated in honour of Saint Mary, according to monastic tradition, and in the Modern Period it took on the invocation of the Nativity, despite the fact that it was still called Saint Mary of Escamarão in the *Censual da sé de Lamego* (16th century, 1st quarter). It was exempt from confirmation since it was a monastery-related vicarage (Fernandes, 1999).

In 1527, the enumerators include the “couto” in the “julgado de termos” [a type of Portuguese administrative division] of Sanfins (to which it reported for legal matters) and, according to them, it included 13 residents distributed by Escamarão and Vila Nova, omitting the names of the places that had already been mentioned in 1258 (Collaço, 1931). These are only be mentioned again in the 18th century together with Várzea, Fonte, Cruz, Bouça and Granja, hamlets that certainly emerged as a result of the demographic pressure that characterised both the Portuguese and the European society during the Ancien Régime.

Indeed, the most faithful portrait of the then already old “couto” dates back to 1758: a small territory between the Douro and the Paiva rivers, with 10 hamlets, where the parishes of Fornos, Sobrado, Souselo, Pendorada, Várzea, Fornelos, São Miguel and Canelas de Entre-os-Rios have been found. To the rector António Pereira de Andrade, within the limits of the parish there wasn't any monastery, “misericórdia” [a welfare institution] or hospital. There was only a chapel dedicated to Saint John the Baptist in the hamlet of Vila Meã (adjoining the house of João Antunes de Guimarães, from Porto) and a few traces of a fortification on a hill at the mouth of the Paiva, between Escamarão and Fornos.

According to the memoirist, the Church had three altars: the largest one was dedicated to Our Lady of the Nativity, Saint Benedict and Saint Michael and the two collateral ones to Our Lady of the Miracles and Our Lady of Grace. There weren't any confraternities, brotherhoods or benefit holders; only the Rector assigned by Alpendorada who earned eight coins and a half.

The building's simplicity contrasted with a certain spiritual importance, since the Church was the centre of four processions that came from the parishes of Sanfins: one on the first Sunday of May, another on Passion Sunday, one in the second octave of the Holy Spirit and, finally, a last one in June. However, the rector pointed out the decay of the patron saint in terms of hagio-therapeutic worship, since he noticed a decreasing influx of pilgrims who came “more for the speech of time (...) but not as regularly as they used to”. And tradition says that it gave prestige and wonder to the Marian invocation, once (perhaps) the protector of motherhood and fertility: “and having heard the old people from this Parish, and from outside its borders



General view.

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as well, say that the Lady of this church had brought a Christian, who had been captive in Moorish territory, to this land, in iron chains inside a box and with a Moor sitting on it, and that the chains had come to this church, and that the parish, due to the course of time, had ordered these to be transformed into nails; there is a round carved stone as long as three “covados” vertically raised, at the sight of this church which is called Cal do Luzio, in the parish of São Pelágio de Fornos, which people say standing in memory of this most evident miracle (...)” (Andrade, 1758).

Moreover, the same rector highlights the key economic aspects of the parish, such as the markets and the Douro, which was as an important channel of communication with the city of Porto. Of the two fairs that were held in Escamarão, the tax-free fair of Saint Michael was the most significant one and lasted for a whole week. It was still an impressive fair in the 19th century, considering the influx of traders and buyers and the picturesque nature of its camp, which was immortalised by Alberto Pimentel (1872). The other fair, which was smaller and held on a monthly basis, included cattle trading, a major source of income for the region.

Located over the mouth of the Paiva, the strategic position of Escamarão and of the “couto” of Vila Meã surely did not escape the manorial power’s attention. That is proved by the fortification of Outeiro do Castelo (turned into an islet after the river was dammed up) and, of course, by the interest of the Medieval nobles who held several interests here, even after the “coutamento” [transformation into a “couto”]. So, rector Andrade’s note about the 60 barrels of wine that boats were able to carry down the Douro, despite its impassioned tone, is not surprising. This was a place for docking and crossing, as evidenced by the repeated references in Portuguese cartography to the site of Escamarão, Santa Maria do Escamarão or other toponymic distortions that are still easily relatable to the borough which was located close to the junction of the two rivers.

The “couto” and the parish were extinct by the arrival of liberalism; the parish was attached to the one of Souselo by Decree no. 24 of May 16th 1832, even though the site has remained as a place for passers-by which is closely connected to river traffic until the present day.



Island of Castelo (Castelo de Paiva).



General interior view from the nave.

THE MONUMENT DURING THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

When Pedro Dias studied “the archaic constructions [Gothic] from the Entre Douro e Minho, Trás os Montes and Beira regions”, he mentioned the Church of Escamarão, among other examples, as a model of persistence of a repertoire that was very attached to the Romanesque style and kept on being used during the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries (Dias, 1994: 151). Following the same common scheme, churches such as the parish churches of Tarouca (Lamego), Azinhoso and Algosinho (both in Mogadouro) or Gatão (Amarante), are usually composed of a low body covered by a single wooden roof. The single nave is generally poorly lit, with oculi and narrow crevices as sources of light. The decoration has a popular nature, showing an attachment to the Romanesque bestiary and, sometimes, small and rough buttresses on the outside (Dias, 1994: 151).



Church of Gatão (Amarante). Chancel.

It is in this sense that we should understand the Church of Our Lady of Nativity of Escamarão, as an evidence of the persistence of Romanesque formulas in a period that is already associated with a new aesthetic movement. The French Gothic, which emerged in the mid-12th century in the Île-de-France region and underwent a great expansion over the two following centuries, was seldom reflected in the Portuguese religious architecture through the opening of large lighting windows or through the creation of large, diaphanous and interconnected spaces (Rosas, 2008: 164). Moreover, since the Portuguese Gothic style is more connected to Southern Gothic solutions, which favour wall masses, it is by the massive look of the walls that it actually stands out. As Lúcia Rosas reminds us, a style cannot be characterized just by its shapes, but also by the relationship between the parts of the building, by the use of the built space, by the way it is embellished and symbolized and by the different ways to meet the requirements of its own period (Rosas, 2008: 164).

Carlos Alberto Ferreira de Almeida justifies the diversity of the Portuguese Romanesque style with the fact that it lasted over a long period of time (Almeida, 1971: 87). Chronological variants are more persistent than geographical differences. While mentioning the new approaches to historical-artistic research, Vítor Serrão – evoking Carlo Ginzburg, Enrico Castelnuovo e Carlo Poni (1991)² – refers the operative notion of “high” and “low”, a method that examines all the creative behaviours of a specific time and space in an equal way, either the “peripheral” ones, which are marked by a more intense timelessness, by rurality and by the freedom of local imageries (the “low”) or the ones from the so-called of “high culture”, which were generated in the “centres” by a world imbued with imageries with erudite references (the “high”) (Serrão, 2001: 220-221).

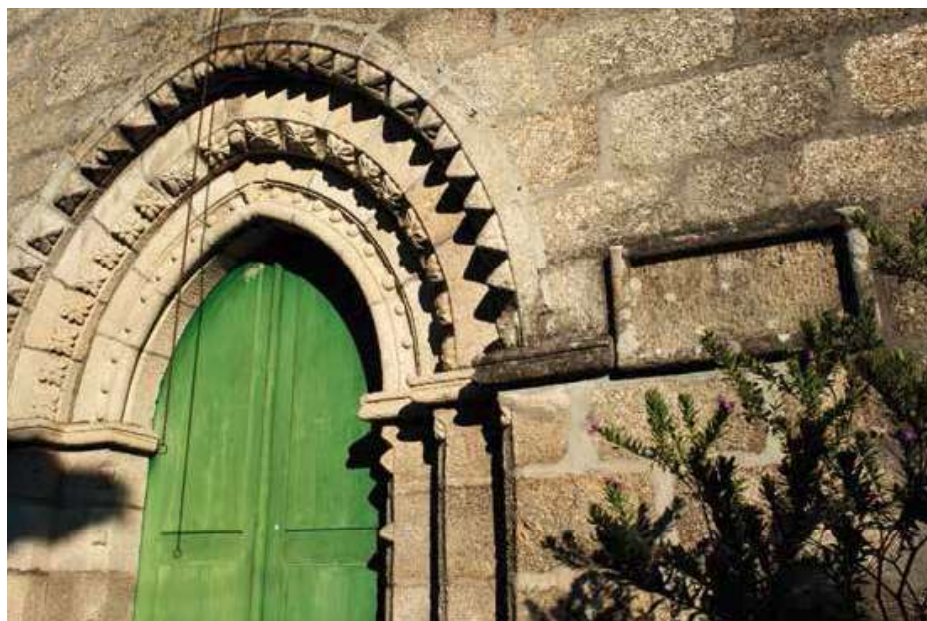
Besides, Lúcia Rosas reminds us that the issue of the concept of “style” and of the temporal scheme that includes beginning, progress and decline moments – which allows inferring a linear mechanism that explains the influences and the ways how shapes are conveyed – is one of the issues that are too rooted in artistic historiography (Rosas, 2011). That is why this author believes that the operative notions of “high” and “low” are very useful for the study of Medieval Portuguese art and, especially, for the study of its “peripheral” and/or “late” expressions that we usually call “epi-Romanesque”, “late-Romanesque”, “proto-Gothic” or “rural Gothic” expressions.

So, the Church of Escamarão fits into the classification of the so-called “rural Gothic” style. First of all, we are standing before a Church composed of a single nave and a rectangular chancel, both defined by massive walls. Except for the Gothic mullioned window which cuts the chancel’s back wall and the small rosette that tops the triumphal arch at the nave’s level, the lighting of this small Church’s interior is made through narrow crevices opened on both elevations of the nave and chancel.



East façade. Oculus and window detail.

² The model developed by these authors had its starting point on a microgeographic analysis focused on Italy.



West façade. Portal and inscription.

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The Church's portals confirm its late chronology. The main and south portals are cut in the thickness of the wall, showing no tympanum, and their archivolts lean directly on the walls. Therefore, we stand before a building that is devoid of column-shaped supports (Graf, 1986: 88). Both the naturalism of the floral motifs that adorn the main portal's central archivolt and the one inside the chancel's Gothic window, as well as the nave's square-shaped corbels and the shape of the ones in the chevet's forepart contribute to the theory of a late chronology that can even be placed sometimes during the 14th century. However, we should notice the persistence of Romanesque ornamental motifs, as shown by the pearls that decorate the external archivolts which surround the chancel's mullioned window and the triumphal arch. Resistances and innovation come together in this Church built in Escamarão.



South façade. Nave. Portal.

Although there are authors who advocate the earliness of this building, considering it as a specimen built in the 12th century – the period when the “couto” was donated to the monastery of Alpendorada (Graf, 1986: 88) –, the truth is that, in addition to the structural and artistic aspects mentioned above, there is another reason that contributes to corroborate this idea of a much later chronology. We are specifically referring ourselves to the inscription written in Gothic characters that is located next to the main portal. Despite being barely legible, Mário Barroca suggests the following reading: “+ : ERA : M : CCCC : XX : III [...] / [...] / [...] / [...] / [...] / [...] / [...] / [...]”³.

Epigraphic inscriptions are a first-hand resource to learn about the aspects related to the construction of any Medieval building. Indeed, any inscription represents a contribution to the knowl-

³ It reads: Era 1423.



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South façade.



South façade, Chancel, Corbels.

edge about the evolution of a building, even when it is not directly associated with a specific construction-related event or when it becomes clear that it is a result from the reuse of an older inscription (Barroca, 2000: 308). Even when these inscriptions do not show a specific date, the analysis of their formal elements, from the type of characters to the abbreviations, including the relationship between their layout and the available space, allow us to infer a somewhat relative and approximate chronology.

These inscriptions provide us with different information levels, ranging from a simple chronological indication to the identification of the bishop who consecrated a given building, as in the Church of the Saviour of Unhão (Felgueiras), located in the Sousa basin (Botelho, 2010b). But there is an aspect of paramount importance that is associated with its location within the building. In other words, knowing that, as a rule, Romanesque and Gothic constructions began by the chevet and then progressed to the façade, could this inscription in Escamarão indicate, even if not explicitly, that the completion of the Church's construction occurred in the Era of 1423, i.e., in 1385? Regardless of the event that this inscription intends to commemorate, the fact that it shows this date and also that it was placed on the façade corroborates our thesis because, so far, nothing indicates that it is the result of a reuse or an inscription made after the construction of the Church.

We should also note that in the south elevation there was a single-gabled porch-like structure that sheltered the lateral portal, as denounced by the five corbels placed approximately halfway up the two narrow crevices. Because these structures were built using ephemeral materials (such as wood and tile) they did not reach the present day. However, the existence of the porches is still luckily evidenced by corbels that appear in almost all of our Medieval buildings. Within the context of Portuguese Romanesque buildings, the purposes of these porch-like spaces may have been many: from a meeting place to a simple shelter for devotees.

Inside the Church, dominated by the worship of pure granite, the liturgical furnishings already belong to the Modern Period. However, we have several published reports and a photographic evidence from 1944 to prove that this Church had, at least, one specimen of mural painting. The first reference we have for this fresco dates back to 1910 and is reported by José de Figueiredo (1910: 121). While seeking the origins of pictorial representations in Medieval Portuguese architecture, this author believes that we may quote “the church of Saint Michael of Escamarão, bishopric of Lamego, as a typical example” since the fresco had disappeared under a whitewash layer, “as it certainly occurred to most of the frescoes painted in Portugal”. He adds nothing more about this fresco, besides referring that it is “relatively recent”; the same fresco is mentioned years later, this time by Manuel Monteiro (1936: 1).

While not adding any information about the fresco of Escamarão, this author refers this painting in the context of his approach on the state of 16th century Portuguese mural paintings found in Romanesque churches. Although the specimens he mentions form “a rather significant ensemble”, the author regrets the fact that these paintings are “almost all barbarically mutilated and insulted by the installation of carved wood partitions that cover them – an artistic scourge that has epidemically spread across the entire country since the 17th century” (Monteiro, 1936: 1).

So, by going through the photographic record that is kept on file at the extinct DGEMN – Direção-Geral dos Edifícios e Monumentos Nacionais [General Directorate for Buildings and National Monuments], we can say that it was a male figure wearing the Franciscan habit. On his left hand he was holding a book and, on the right, he was carrying a staff (?). It could be an unusual figuration of Saint Anthony, which was often depicted, by osmosis, as Saint Anthony the Great.



Triumphal arch. Wall on the Gospel side. Collateral altarpiece before the intervention carried out by the DGEMN (1944). Source: IHRU archive. It is possible to see in the image a mural painting that no longer exists.



Triumphal arch. Wall on the Gospel side. Collateral altarpiece after the intervention carried out by the DGEMN.

THE MONUMENT DURING THE MODERN PERIOD



Triumphal arch. Wall on the Epistle side.
Collateral altar.

One of the noteworthy aspects of this Church are the Mudéjar tiles that decorate the front of the collateral altars, which are also identifiable in other geographically close Churches: Jazente (Amarante), Fandinhães (Paços de Gaiolo, Marco de Canaveses) or Cête (Paredes). During the 15th and 16th centuries, the Mudéjar world naturally had a strong aptency for the use of tiling materials and developed specific techniques, such as the “alicatado”, the dry rope or edging technique or the “cuenca”. We believe that the technique found on the altar frontals of Escamarão is the latter one. It was developed around 1500 onwards and its tiles were the most common ones in Portugal. After defining a hole, the recessed moulds will print the motif on a raw clay plate, thus defining small edges between the different colours and creating a sort of protruding profile that prevents the glazed surfaces from mixing during the firing process (Meco, 1989: 38-39).

Although Seville was the most important production centre in terms of edged tiles – decorated with Renaissance themes and used until the mid-16th century –, other centres such as Toledo also produced this type of tiles; these could be distinguished from the Sevillian ones by their thinner and more refined edges and by the preservation of Moorish ornamental schemes. We do not know the origin of the tiles from Escamarão, which could only be revealed by documentary sources. But their presence in a small Church located on the south bank of the Douro shows how the influence of Islamic and “Moorish” art reached the northern territories of Portugal, adjusting the Islamic art to the Christian art. Of course, we should not forget that this Church was attached to the monastery of Alpendorada, a privileged centre of knowledge and a meeting point of ideas and tastes. Besides, our country reflects the Spanish tradition of lining the “antependia” with tiles imported from Seville (Simões, 1971: 211), the exclusive supplier of the Portuguese market during the first half of the 16th century (Simões, 1971: 56).

The polychromy of these panels, based on ochre, green and blue shades on a white background, creates standardized compositions with phytomorphic and floral motifs, thus anticipating the “carpet-type” tile trend that was very popular in Portugal during the 17th century. Using the patterning technique, through the development of geometric compositions and the combination of tiles to form surfaces, we see repeated motifs that lead to the emergence of patterns or serial compositions of surface repetition. The module is repeated and an interconnection (diagonal) emerges between the decorative motifs, since the patterns rarely take up a single tile.

However, we should note that on the frontal located on Epistle side we may easily identify the presence of two tiles whose pattern is not interconnected with the rest of the ensemble. We believe that this fact can be explained based on information reported during the inspection held on May 23rd 1775, in which the rector António Pereira de Andrade informs that “the construction not only of the Chancel, but also of the Church’s Body belongs to the Tither, ie, the Monastery of Alpendurada. The Reverend Rector orders the Abbot Priest to fix some of the Tiles, that would be missing in one of the side Altars”⁴.

⁴ ADL – *Visitações*, Escamarão, fl. 2 v.º.



Triumphal arch. Wall on the Gospel side. Collateral altar. Tiles.

These inspections are one of the most important sources for the study of the legacy bequeathed by Medieval and Modern Period in terms of art. As pastoral inspections, they were a mechanism of episcopal monitoring of the state of the parishes under its jurisdiction. Although, in some cases, they were carried out by the chapters of the dioceses, by collegiate churches, monasteries or military orders, pastoral inspections produced significant information about the material, moral and religious state of the parishes, their inhabitants and members of the local clergy (Carvalho & Paiva, 2000: 365-370). In Portugal, the documentary traces of pastoral inspections from the period prior to the second half of the 16th century are not abundant. The Council of Trent opens an intense period of pastoral inspections, considering that in the last two decades of the 16th century there were many prelates, or their delegates, who conducted inspections on a regular basis, as determined in 1545-1553.

According to information produced by the 18th-century inspectors, we learn that, besides the lack of tiles on the altar frontal of one of the collateral altarpieces – the one on the Epistle side –, the Church of Escamarão was “poorly decorated”⁵ in 1755. The inspection of May 28th

⁵ Idem, *ibid.*

1784, conducted by the Abbot of Freigil, João Baptista Pereira, alludes to the state of neglect that the Church under study already presented, all the more because the “Festivity of Our Lady of Nativity, the church’s Patron Saint”, wasn’t even celebrated there any more. These were the inspector’s words:

“It was with incomparably great pain and spiritual feeling that I visited this Church, the most decaying one I have found in this Inspection, which does not even have the appearance of a temple, a house of God, by not featuring any altars, or altarpieces, or any Holy images that may move Christians’ devotion, nor anything decent enough to house and celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass (...)”⁶.

Is then ordered to the abbot of the monastery of Alpendorada to celebrate the festivity of the patron saint, “with sermon and sung Mass and the necessary candles; should he refrain from doing so, he shall be fined every year = 4800 Reiz [former Portuguese currency unit], and shall give the two customary wax candles to burn in convent mass services; And for the said festivity and further solemnities, the said Father Abbot has ordered the preparation of a white silk damask and dalmatic vestment for the Chancel”⁷.

As a result of the same inspection, we learn that in the altarpiece of the Church of Escamarão there was an image of Saint Benedict, something which is easily understandable considering its connection to the Benedictine monastery of Alpendorada. But, considering its poor condition, considered indecent, the same inspector order it to be buried as determined by the constitution. A note published by Domingos de Pinho Brandão leads us to assume that this image was originally placed in the Benedictine monastery, located on the opposite bank of the Douro, and was renovated at the time of its placement in this adjoining Church, because a document from the Benedictine collection of Tibães, dated April 30th 1752, mentions the gilding of the “altarpiece from chancel of the church of Escamarão” and the renovation of the “image of Our Lord Father Saint Benedict that had served before and was placed in our church of Escamarão” (Brandão, 1987: 59).

The Church’s main altarpiece was designed according to the so-called National Style [1690-1725], surely before mid-18th century. This type of Portuguese woodwork began taking its first steps at the end of the previous century, corresponding to a nationalization of gilded woodwork (Sobral, 1986: 13-14). In general, the artistic historiography has been associating this new language with the structure of Northwestern Romanesque portals and with the naturalism of Manueline [style also known as Portuguese late Gothic, which develops during the reign of King Manuel I (k. 1495-1521)] decorations (Sobral, 1986: 107). Among the fundamental elements that define this new language of the altarpiece structure, we identified in altarpiece of Escamarão the spiral columns (pseudo-Solomonic) and the semicircular archivolt. Sure we have to take into account the regionalized nature of this specimen in national carving, here

⁶ Idem, fl. 19.

⁷ Idem, *ibid.*



Chancel.

attested by its polychrome traits, somewhat vernacular. It bears, to the centre and as finishing, the coat of arms of the Benedictine Order.

In the late 18th century, the Church of Escamarão still presented itself in the eyes of the inspectors in a state of abandonment. On April 29th 1788, the Bishop João António Binet Pincio was of the opinion that he “had never seen such serious and virtuous congregation as the one in Saint Benedict and how it had its church of Escamarão, from where the Convent of Saint John of Alpendurada received its Tithes, in the state we have seen it and which stood as awkward news to us”⁸. But in the inspection carried out on July 26th 1814 by the abbot of Travanca, Joaquim José de Carvalho, the Church is already considered “well repaired and rather significantly provided with recent vestments”⁹. Is this already an allusion to the new collateral altarpieces with a Neoclassical flavour?

Despite the fact that currently we can only see the clearly Neoclassical pelmets, in which there are refined golden floral motifs on a raw background, the truth is that the photographs taken by the architect José Marques Abreu Júnior in 1944, before the most recent restoration interventions, show us that the collateral altars had their corresponding altarpieces. There was a simple panel flanked by Classicist pilasters and surmounted by a triangular tympanum on each side, which framed the images of the Virgin of the Rosary of Fátima, on the Epistle side, and of the Virgin and Child (the Virgin of Miracles?), on the Gospel side.

⁸ Idem, *ibid.*

⁹ Idem, fl. 22 v.º



Triumphal arch and collateral altars before the intervention carried out by the DGEMN (1944).
Source: IHRU archive.

CONTEMPORARY INTERVENTIONS

The information we have about the Church of Our Lady of Nativity of Escamarão during the 20th century are very sparse. The process for its classification as a Public Interest Building was initiated in 1944 because, at the time, it was considered that this monument was “one of the few Romanesque works whose structure is still intact”¹⁰. The proponent of this classification was Armando de Mattos¹¹, one of the most important theorists who dealt with the Portuguese Romanesque style¹². Considering the temple as part of the “ogival-Romanesque” style, this expert valued the apse’s window and the “much-quoted inscription, despite being almost impossible to read”, which is located next to the main portal. Inside the Church, he highlighted the “remains of frescoes that had already been mentioned by José de Figueiredo and a few noteworthy tiles”¹³.

We were not able to look up the entire process that led to the classification of the Church of Our Lady of Nativity of Escamarão as a Public Interest Building by Decree no. 37 728, of January 5th 1950.

Depending on their relative value, and according to Law no. 107/2001, of September 8th (Article 15), properties may be classified as having “national interest”, “public interest” or “municipal interest”. The instruction of a classification process and its subsequent conclusion determine that the building, ensemble or site that are classified, or submitted to classification, automatically obtain and associated protection zone or a special protection zone; the latter may include *non aedificandi* areas, as provided by Law no. 107/2001, of September 8th¹⁴. It is in this sense that we should understand the inventory drawn up in May 1948 by the owners of the buildings included the protection zone of Escamarão¹⁵.

The classification of this Church was accompanied by a photographic file made by José Marques de Abreu Júnior. Since they show the state of the Church of Escamarão in 1944 in a detailed way, it is through these photographs that we get to know the elements that no longer exist in the building, such as the fresco or the Neoclassical structure of the collateral altarpieces, which we have already mentioned. It is also through these photographs that we can see that all the internal and external wall faces of the Church were whitewashed.

According to a document issued by the DGEMN¹⁶, the local Building Commission carried out several building works at its own expense in the early 1960s without consulting the DGEMN’s technical services about them, as required by the classification of the monument as a Public Interest Building. The works began with “external wall-cleaning procedures, remov-

10 Idem, *ibid.*

11 Comunicação n.º 279, 25 de abril de 1944 [SIPA.TXT.00821235]. PT DGEMN: DSID-001/018-003-2383/1 [Online]. Available at [www: <URL: http://www.monumentos.pt>](http://www.monumentos.pt). [N.º IPA PT011813020003].

12 Cópia, 1 de outubro de 1947 [SIPA.TXT.00821238]. Idem.

13 Please refer to what we wrote about this author in Botelho (2010a: 208-212).

14 Cópia, 1 de outubro de 1947 [SIPA.TXT.00821238]. PT DGEMN: DSID-001/018-003-2383/1. Idem.

15 LAW no. 107. O.G. [Official Gazette] *Series I-A*, 209 (2001-09-08) 5808-5829, art.º 43.

16 Cópia, 23 de junho de 1948 [SIPA.TXT.008212445]. PT DGEMN: DSID-001/018-003-2383/1. Idem.



West and south façades before the intervention carried out by the DGEMN (1944). Source: IHRU archive.



East façade before the intervention carried out by the DGEMN (1944). Source: IHRU archive.

ing the existing whitewash layer and re-sealing the joints”, which resulted in the accumulation of cement-based mortar applied in wide and non-concave joints, as well as the sharpening of the ashlar from the arches of the lintels of the main entrance, with loss of their natural patina¹⁷. Later, the same Building Commission applied a new wooden floor on the nave’s pavement, which the DGEMN considered “inappropriate due to its type and characteristics”¹⁸. The DGEMN’s specialized services regretted the fact that the Building Commission had not filed a request for their technical assistance before carrying out the aforementioned works¹⁹.

Finally, between 1974 and 1975, there were more restoration works (Graf, 1986: 88); however, we were not able to ascertain their scope and impact.

In 2010, the Church of Escamarão became part of the Route of the Romanesque and, under this scope, it has been subject, since August 2014, to conservation, protection and valuation works. The project’s ultimate goal is to “provide the building with better conditions for the function it keeps alive – being a place of worship and organization of ceremonies” (Silva, 2012: 5). The intervention shall be based on the principle of reversibility to ensure the building’s continuity, resorting both to traditional and current techniques in order to achieve so; many different actions shall be carried out, focusing on the building’s internal and external elements, including also the manufacture of liturgical furnishings (Silva, 2012: 17). [MLB / NR]

17 Ofício n.º 1022, 12 de agosto de 1963 [SIPA.TXT.00821262]. Idem.

18 Idem.

19 Ofício n.º 4993, 19 de agosto de 1963 [SIPA.TXT.000821263 and SIPA.TXT.000821264]. Idem.

CHRONOLOGY

1121-1143: during the abbacy of the abbot Pedro, Vila Meã joined the sphere of the temporal domain of Pendorada [Alpendorada];

1258: belonging to the Monastery of Saint John of Alpendorada, the "couto" of Vila Meã had been donated by King Afonso Henriques to Sarracino Mendes;

14th century: construction of the Church of Our Lady of Nativity of Escamarão;

1385: date of the inscription engraved in the Church's main façade;

1st half of the 16th century: Mudéjar tiles from the frontals of the nave's collateral altars;

1527: the "couto" of Vila Meã appears integrated in the "julgado de termos" of Sanfins;

1st half of the 18th century: design of the main altarpiece;

1752, April 30th: gilding of the main altarpiece and intervention in the image of Saint Benedict, from the monastery of Alpendorada;

1755, May 23rd: commissioning of the replacement of the missing tiles in the frontals of the nave's collateral altars;

1784, May 28th: in an inspection conducted by the abbot of Freigil, João Baptista Pereira, there is a reference to the Church's state of neglect;

1788, April 29th: the inspectors continue to consider that the Church of Escamarão is in a state of neglect;

1814, July 26th: references to the improvement of the church's interior;

1944: opening of the process for the classification of the Church of Escamarão, by Armando de Mattos;

1950: classification of the Church as Public Interest Building;

1960s: conduction of several conservation works in the Church at the expense of the local Building Commission;

1974-1975: conservation and restoration works;

2010: the Church of Escamarão was included in the Route of the Romanesque;

2014-2015: general preservation works both on the inside and outside of the Church.

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