





# **CHURCH** OF THE SAVIOUR OF FERVENÇA

CELORICO DE BASTO

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Plan.

## HISTORICAL SUMMARY

Located along the valley of the Esporão brook, the parish of Fervença was, during the reigns of Kings Afonso II (k. 1211-1223) and Afonso III (k. 1248-1279), a territory marked by instability and conflict. This conflict was either triggered by intra and inter lineage matters or by disputes between individuals and institutions; partly because of the political, demographic and economic circumstances that favoured such strifes – regardless of the reason to order or exercise violence – this period was almost always marked by issues related to the possession of assets or to the pursuit of power and prestige. In the centre of a 13<sup>th</sup> century dispute between a certain clergyman and Gil Vasques, a “rico-homem” [nobleman] from Fervença, was the possession of the Church demanded by the former, perhaps because he considered himself related to it. Once the latter refused to give up the domain without the payment of certain fees, “the clergyman claimed the church and destroyed it”<sup>1</sup>. The priest’s strategy, which we might consider as inappropriate regarding his occupation and status, was part of a policy of asset maintenance and acquisition that was only possible in a nation “under construction”, for which the first inquiries were one of the most important tools. Using this tool, the royal power could take severe measures against, sometimes chaotic, situations that, sheltered by isolation or strong family ties, raged in the new kingdom.

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The inquiries of King Afonso II (1220) mention a Church whose patronage, though uncertain, did not belong to the king. Except for a few “reguengos” [royal properties], farmhouses, windrows and “foros” [chartered lands], everything belonged to local or regional lords (Lopes,



Aerial view.

<sup>1</sup> The translation is by Eduardo Teixeira Lopes (2008: 173), whose edition we used in subsequent quotes.



2008: 173). In 1258, besides the aforementioned situation, which had opposed an heir to a local knight over the ownership of the Church's patronage and associated rights (with a favourable outcome to the former), the farmhouses identified in Fervença were subject to many landlords, including the monasteries of Arnoia (Celorico de Basto) and Refojos (Cabeceiras de Basto) and the monastery of Telões (Amarante), a "certain knight from Maravilhas" and the church of Borba de Godim (Felgueiras). The inquisitors also collected the name of several local owners, as well as the set of assets allocated to the Church of Fervença, a patrimony with a significant extension that could very well justify the strifes, despite the fact that this institution paid the modest sum of 80 Portuguese "libras" [former Portuguese currency unit] to aid the Crusades in 1320 (Lopes, 2008: 173). It is already mentioned as being annexed to the monastery of Saint Claire of Vila do Conde that same year (Almeida & Peres, 1971: 107).

The donation of Fervença's patronage and respective benefits to the Poor Clares of Vila do Conde may be explained by the need to assist the works of the monastery, which was under construction at the time, as the priest António Carvalho da Costa refers in 1706: "[the Church of Fervença] was of Royal Patronage, and was given by King Diniz to his bastard son Afonso Sanches, Lord of Albuquerque, on May 30<sup>th</sup>, who, in 1318, donated it to the Monastery of Nuns of Vila de Conde, which was being built at the time" (Costa, 1706-1712: 147)<sup>2</sup>. The fact is that the Church remained under the domain of the nuns until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, while the religious women presented the rector and gathered the fruits and income that amounted to 200 thousand "réis" [former Portuguese currency unit] (Niza, 1767: 238).

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East and north façades.

<sup>2</sup> A few years after the publication of this work, Francisco Craesbeeck (1992: 358) adds very few information to *Corografia portuguesa*... He only inventoried the four tombstones divided between the larger chapel and Church's body.

## THE MONUMENT BETWEEN PERIODS



South façade. Nave. Portal.

The chevet is the only existing remain from the Romanesque Period in the parish Church of Fervença, which is consecrated to the Saviour. Judging by the remaining Medieval traits, we may assert that the primitive Romanesque construction showed an unusual plastic quality within the region it integrates. From the data provided by Francisco Craesbeeck, which are particularly focused on the epigraphic reading of the graves, we can infer that the nave had at least one “trasverse door” (Craesbeeck, 1992: 358). Would it be in the same place of the one that is currently open on the nave’s south wall (which is round, as a matter of fact), raising the possibility of a reuse of the Romanesque construction when the nave was remodelled in 1970’s (Sampaio, 2005: 117)? Both the stucco coating found on the nave’s interior, and the emphasis of the joints between the external ashlar, made with cement, do not allow us to go beyond this supposition. We should also note that the external wall faces of the Romanesque chevet were subjected to the same joint emphasis, surely in order to grant a supposed unity to the outside of the building, since it shows none on the inside. The narrowing of the nave in the area closest to the triumphal arch and the presence of granite on the intrados of the rectangular openings may indicate that, at least in this part of the temple, a previous structure was reused. An analysis of the external wall face of the nave’s north side shows us the presence of ashlar with different types of carvings, whose transition seems to be denounced by a scar found close to the large rectangular window (perhaps a result of the Church remodelling carried out in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Gonçalves, 2007) and whose structure is identical to the one of the two large windows that were opened on the chancel’s wall, on the Epistle side).

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General interior view from the nave.

And regarding the data collected in 1758, in addition to confirming that this Church had only one nave, they are mainly related to the four “altars” that existed at the time: “three altars in which to celebrate mass and the altar of the Souls that is not used for mass. The first belongs to the patron saint, the second to Our Lady of the Rosary and the third to Saint Anthony” (Pereira, 1758 *apud* Lopes, 2005: 166). So, we don’t have much information about the Romanesque nave of Fervença and the subsequent adjustments it received throughout its history.

The existing nave shows a prevalence of a contemporary language that, on the main façade, although resorting to granite, gives a special emphasis to the lighting openings. Inside, we highlight the use of tile panels as a decorative element: on the nave’s walls we see a high polychrome skirting composed of geometric motifs that follow, in their contemporary nature, the scheme of the 17<sup>th</sup> century “carpet-type” compositions. Above the triumphal arch there is a large cobalt-blue figurative composition allusive to the patron saint, which is depicted here at the time of his *Ascension* to heaven, and finally, close to the font, there is a polychrome panel that depicts the scene in which the Lord is baptised by His cousin John on the banks of the Jordan river.



South façade. Corbel.



West façade.



Nave. Lateral walls. Skirting tiles.

The Romanesque chevet, which is rectangular and has two bays, shows a significant contrast with the nave. As the external buttresses – one on each side of the chancel – denounce, the chancel had an already broken barrel vault. As in the Church of Ferreira (Paços de Ferreira), after the first bay there is a fluted ledge that corresponds to a significant difference between floor levels. The triumphal arch’s capitals, featuring vegetal and phytomorphic motifs, also resemble their counterparts from Ferreira. Carlos Alberto Ferreira de Almeida (1978: 218) saw in them a Romanesque influence that was developed on the left bank of the Minho river, which finds its





Triumphal arch. Top of the wall. Tile panel. *Transfiguration of Christ*.

origin in the building site of the Tui cathedral (Spain)<sup>3</sup>. This is suggested by the turgid nature of its bulky sculpture.

Confirming the confluence of the several inflows that characterized the Romanesque architecture built along the Tâmega basin, here we may also identify clear elements whose origin lies in Romanesque constructions built in the region that we have been calling as the “Braga-Rates axis” (Botelho, 2010: 432). One is the motif of the so-called palmettes from Braga that, placed at the level of the triumphal arch’s impostes, extends along the nave’s front wall and also as a frieze along the inside of the apse. The motifs carved in relief that decorate the broken archivolt which surrounds the triumphal arch are also from Braga: inside there are lanceolate motifs, and outside there is a set of three tori punctuated by incised ovuli.

Besides the buttresses we’ve already mentioned, and the contemporary treatment given to the joints of the ashlar that, despite their different sizes, make up fairly regular rows, the apse’s back wall only shows one narrow crevice on the outside, much to the Romanesque taste. On the lateral elevations, the cornices are supported by sculpted corbels, whose decorations feature a strong geometric emphasis, and among which we highlight a barrel, the roll motif or a composition made with volutes.

Given the ornamental motifs found in the chevet and the sharp point of its vault, its chronology has been placed in the second quarter of the 13<sup>th</sup> century (Almeida, 1986: 102).

From the Romanesque Period we should also mention the terminal crosses found on the back wall gables of the apse and main façade. The latter, simpler than the other one, is “pattée”. The one in the apse is more elaborate. It is a hollowed cross that combines a cross “pattée” with circular motifs. Outside, close to the Church’s entrance, there is a Romanesque font whose bowl has a polygonal design.



Churchyard. Font.

<sup>3</sup> For further development on this matter, please read Rosas (1987).





Chancel.

On the north side, adjoining the main façade, we have the bell tower; its last register is certainly a result of the 20<sup>th</sup> century intervention, taking into account its reinforced concrete crown. In turn, the two lower registers, formed by irregular granite ashlar, may belong to the same period of the campaign that opened the large windows on the nave, which took place sometime during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, taking into account the Classicist frames that finish the pillars' corners.

In 2010, this parish Church of Fervença became part of the Route of the Romanesque. [MLB / NR]



South façade. Chancel. Corbels.





## CHRONOLOGY

1220: the abbot Mendo Dias and other witnesses stated before the inquisitors that the Church of Fervença was not of royal patronage;

1258: Fernando Pais testified before the royal inquisitors that he was aware of certain irregularities regarding the Church's ownership;

1320: the catalogue of churches taxed to aid the Crusades refers Fervença as being patronaged by Saint Claire of Vila do Conde, paying a contribution of 80 Portuguese "libras";

16<sup>th</sup> century: it is referred to as "Saint Saviour of the Abbess of Fervença", with 70 residents;

1706: referred to as a vicarage, which yielded 120 000 "réis";

1758: the parish of Fervença counted 338 dwellings and 995 inhabitants;

1970: reconstruction of the Church's nave;

2010: integration of the Church of Fervença in the Route of the Romanesque.



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