

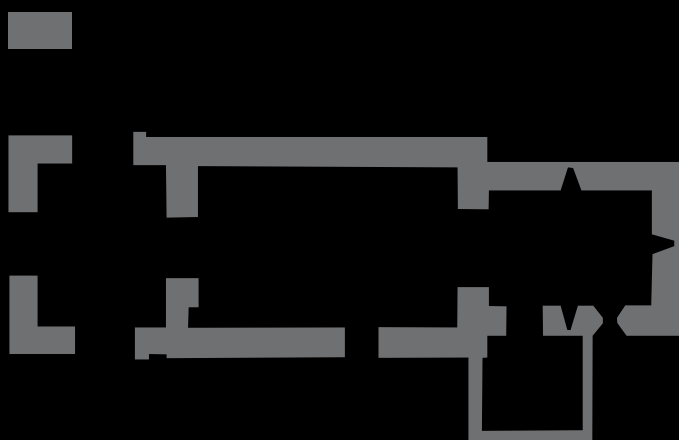




CHURCH
OF SAINT JOHN
THE BAPTIST
OF GATÃO

AMARANTE

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Plan.

HISTORICAL SUMMARY

In the Middle Ages, the Church of Gatão seems to have been part of the vast “terra de Sousa”, in which the Catalogue of Churches of 1320 includes it, taxing it in 80 Portuguese “libras” [former Portuguese currency unit] – an amount that is rather small when compared with the taxes paid by the neighbouring Churches of Telões (1500 “libras”) or Feixo de Baixo (400 “libras”) (Almeida & Peres, 1971), both in Amarante. In the subsequent reorganization that affected this borderline region (between bishoprics), it became part of the also vast territory of the municipality of Celorico de Basto.

Despite the reduced economic importance of the Church of Gatão (certainly a reflex of its small limits), it became an abbey and, throughout the Modern Period, there is some information that suggests an increase in its capital: in 1706 it yielded 200 thousand “réis” [former Portuguese currency unit], and in 1758 (Craesbeeck, 1992: 342) it yielded 500 thousand “réis”, according to the parish priest João de Magalhães (Niza, 1767: 267). In early 18th century it didn’t have a tabernacle, perhaps due to the fact that it served a relatively small number of major taxpayers (150 housing units in 1706 and 70 in 1767) (Costa, 1706-1712: 149; Niza, 1767: 267).

In 1758 it was still ecclesiastically and spiritually subject to the archbishopric of Braga¹, while civilly and judicially it was subject to the district of Guimarães and the town of Celorico de Basto, of whose term the Marquis of Valença was the done. The patronage of the Church belonged to the Ordinary, i.e., to the bishop of Porto who presented the parish priest and collected the income, which amounted to the aforementioned 500 thousand “réis” (Magalhães, 1758).

Due to the diocesan reorganization of 1882, it was transferred from the archdiocese of Braga to the diocese of Porto (Igreja Católica, 1881).



General view.

¹ At the time of the Inquiries of 1258 he was presented by the archbishop of Braga.

THE MONUMENT DURING THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD: ROMANESQUE TRACES

Isolated from the town it served, the Church of Saint John the Baptist of Gatão is, in the words of Luís Urbano Afonso, a good example of the stylistic hybridity expressed by many of the rural Portuguese buildings from the 13th and 14th centuries (Afonso, 2009). The clearly Romanesque ornamental elements are juxtaposed with others that belong to later artistic periods, which eventually left a deep mark in the physiognomy and legibility of this specimen of religious architecture from Amarante.

This is a Church with a longitudinal plan composed of a galilee, a single nave and a quadrangular chancel. Regarding the volumes, in terms of the façades, although the galilee and nave have the same height, as if they were a single element, the chancel is lower than the latter.

Therefore, the chevet is the only Romanesque element preserved with greater integrity. The back wall has a Romanesque flared crevice whose round arch is surrounded by a torus on the inside. On the Epistle side there are two clearly Modern large rectangular windows, which allow illuminating this internal space. It is also on this side that we find the access door to the sacristy. On the north façade there is a narrow crevice identical to the ones on the nave and on the apse's back wall. It is worth highlighting the cornice that, on both elevations of the chevet, is supported by a Lombard frieze. The south elevation is adjoined to the sacristy, which was built in a later period and is lit by two small rectangular windows; however, still reveals this typically Romanesque motif which appears in several monuments that were built in this period along the Sousa, Tâmega and Douro valleys: Paço de Sousa (Penafiel), Ferreira (Paços de Fer-



East and north façades.



North façade. Chancel. Cornice.



Triumphal arch.

reira), Sousa and Airães (Felgueiras) or Saint Martin of Mouros (Resende) are some examples. It was from the main façade of the old Coimbra cathedral that this motif was propagated across most Portuguese Romanesque buildings, taking on a peculiar position within what Manuel Monteiro called the “nationalized Romanesque” style (Monteiro, 1943): resting on flat corbels, the cornice above little arches stands out from this family of the Portuguese Romanesque style being associated with the upper end of side elevations.

The apse of Gatão stands out as an intimate and sheltered space and it is the result of the size and span of the triumphal arch that separates it from the nave. And it is precisely on this round arch that we find the most typical Romanesque elements in this building. According to Aarão de Lacerda (1937: 251) it is also “the most striking note of antiquity” of this Church from Amarante. Composed of two archivolt which are broken but faceted and smooth, it is surrounded by a chequered frieze. The inner archivolt rests on two columns, whose short and thick frustum shows two impressive carved capitals, in a composition formed by vegetal and winding motifs, although, because they’re different, the ones on Epistle side reveal more careful stonework. These capitals are original, but rather late, although comparable to the ones from the cloister of the collegiate of Guimarães (Almeida, 1978: 226). The torus-shaped impostes extend as a frieze along the nave’s back wall. The bulb-shaped bases of the columns have a plinths decorated with geometrical motifs.

Despite the fact that it was visibly transformed during the Modern Period, the nave still reveals its Medieval origin. In addition to the narrow crevices – two on each side – that allow



South façade.

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illuminating the interior, on the south side there is a simple portal with a slightly broken arch but devoid of any decorative element. Its structure may well be an indication of a late chronology for the design of the Medieval construction of Gatão. Halfway up this façade, an eave and a few protruding ashlar, much like modillions, suggest the existence of a porch-like structure which, at some point, disappeared. On this side, we should also note the differences in terms of the way how the ashlar that embody the wall were cut, which provide evidence, either of the existence of multiple building campaigns, or of the marks left by the deep transformations underwent by Gatão over the centuries.

Both of the nave's elevations have an arch at the end, whose Classical matrix is evidenced by the lines of the impost. Providing a lateral access to the galilee, its keystone shows a mascarón which also has a Classic origin and is identical to the one that completes the main façade's keystone.



Galilee.

In the transition from the Middle Ages to Modernity

Quoting João de Castro², “one of the most important signs of nobility of the Church of Gatão is, as we know, the collection of frescoes that adorn some of its interior walls” (Castro, 1951: 9). A campaign which dates back to the late 15th century left us six mural painting panels, whose discovery in the 1930’s has been ascribed to the parish priest Manuel Couto (Correia et al., 1936-1960: 226). Aarão de Lacerda was the first one to publish them in 1937. The existing paintings are distributed along the nave’s front wall and the chancel’s back wall. Considering their plastic characteristics, they are the result of the same campaign, suggesting a relatively early chronology given their pronounced archaism (Afonso, 2009: 351).

In the nave, the murals are painted above the probable level of the “outside altars” and were most certainly associated with them (Bessa, 2008: 192). On the Gospel side there is a representation allusive to the *Coronation of the Virgin*, accompanied by angels, with the Child. Luís Urbano Afonso highlights the empirical way in which the ornaments are created and the notion of volume shown in the Virgin’s draperies (Afonso, 2009: 352). On the Epistle side we see a representation of a series of saints, formed by *Saint Lucia* (very damaged and almost halved), *Saint Sebastian* (attached to a column and spiked by arrows) and *Saint Catherine* (together with her attributes, the wheel of martyrdom and a 15th century sword with a bulbous pommel) (Bessa, 2008: 192); they are all facing forward, each within an architectural structure, defining an arcade with rather slender small columns sheltered by dome covered with scale-shaped shingles (Afonso, 2009: 352). Every saint corresponds to a type of pavement: the female saints are standing on a pavement formed by lozenge-shaped off-white tiles and their background is a yellowish wall, while *Saint Sebastian* is standing on a space paved with yellow square tiles.

In general, these hagiographic representations don’t create any sense of spatial depth, presenting the figures against the background without any kind of transition (Afonso, 2009: 352). The figures are schematic in terms of design and modelling, and the existence of a model to draw their facial elements (eyes/nose/mouth) is particularly noticeable (Afonso, 2009: 352), especially in the case of faces depicted in three-quarter views. Both Paula Bessa and Luís Urbano Afonso agree in identifying important similarities between these paintings and the ones that have been ascribed to the workshop based in Valadares (Baião) or Saint Nicholas (Marco de Canaveses): they show the same type of design, the same way of treating the angel’s clothes, diamond-shaped pavements and the quatrefoil motif (Bessa, 2008: 193; Afonso, 2009: 353-356).

On the axis of the triumphal arch there is a painting that may be dated back to the second half of the 16th century which represents a *Calvary*, although it was extremely repainted (Afonso, 2009: 352). Christ appears together with the Virgin and Saint John. As highlighted

² The several “Historical News” published in DGEMN – Direção-Geral dos Edifícios e Monumentos Nacionais [General Directorate for Buildings and National Monuments]’s Bulletins until 1955 were certainly written by this playwright, a fact that is also proven by the Directorate-General’s administrative processes (Grilo, 1999: 4).

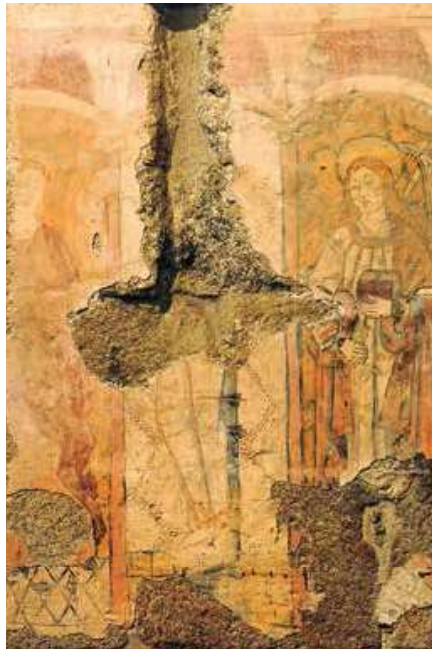


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Triumphal arch. Wall. Mural painting.



Wall on the Gospel side. *Coronation of the Virgin.*



Wall on the Epistle side. *Saint Lucia, Saint Sebastian and Saint Catherine of Alexandria.*

by Paula Bessa, this painting is one of the few surviving cases that results from a persistent determination to paint images depicting a *Calvary* with Our Lady and Saint John above the triumphal arch, as decided in the 16th-century inspections that are kept in the archbishopric of Braga (Bessa, 2008: 194).

There are still mural paintings from an earlier campaign on the chancel's back wall. The central position was occupied by the depiction of *Saint John the Baptist*, which was detached during the restoration intervention carried out by the DGEMN – Direção-Geral dos Edifícios e Monumentos Nacionais [General Directorate for Buildings and National Monuments] in the Church of Gatão, as a result of the option of exposing the Romanesque axial crevice; in fact, this criterion was usually followed in this type of interventions. We may recall the example of the Church of Saint Isidore of Canaveses (Marco de Canaveses), which is located nearby. Because the central panel of this composition depicts the Church's patron saint, it was taller and wider than the other images; it was painted on a niche defined by the middle of the arch and opened on the chancel's back wall, where the axial crevice had once been (Afonso, 2009: 353).

The photos taken before the detachment of the panel of *Saint John the Baptist* show that the original composition was conceived as a fake triptych, framed by a decorative stripe formed by acanthus foliages painted in grey (Afonso, 2009: 353). These formed a sort of altarpiece in the Romanesque chevet. Luís Urbano Afonso mentions the fact that there is still part of an inscription that belonged to this composition, which merely identified the depicted theme; it is placed just below the lower limit of the figures but, unfortunately, it cannot be fully read, both due to the wear of the painting and to the dirt that covers it. The composition was described by



Triumphal arch and chancel. Mural painting before the intervention carried out by the DGEMN. *Calvary* and *Saint John the Baptist*. Source: IHRU archive.



Triumphal arch. Top of the wall. Mural painting. *Calvary*.



Chancel. Back wall. Mural painting. *Christ on the way to the Calvary and Saint Anthony.*

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Aarão de Lacerda, who examined it *in loco* in 1937, with the following words: “it is the Saint in the desert, wearing furs from which there are bones hanging to keep them straight – he is holding the little lamb over a book on his left hand and his right hand is pointing as a symbol that should be worshiped... Around him, above the torus-shaped frame and the base, there is a decoration with Renaissance motifs” (Lacerda, 1937: 254-255).

On the side of the Epistle, *Saint Anthony* is wearing his Franciscan habit and holding a fleur-de-lis and the Child on a book. At the bottom of this fresco there is the following inscription, which is already incomplete: “ORA...NOBIS...B...ANTONI (...)” (Lacerda, 1937: 257). At the other end there is a scene depicting *Christ on the way to the Calvary*; here He is represented as one who seeks to raise the cross, with a severely wounded face where, under the crown of thorns, we can barely distinguish His painful eyes (Lacerda, 1937: 252). At the bottom, under the edging of fake Hispano-Arab tiles, we may read the following inscription: “HVMILIAVIT SEMETIPM VSQUE AD MORTEM” (Bessa, 2008: 190)³. In this panel there is a stripe with a chain of metal rings (Bessa, 2008: 191).

The western façade is, plastically speaking, an element that results from a campaign conducted in the Modern Period, despite its clear artistic moderation. Quoting Aarão de Lacerda, “we could consider it a small 17th-century temple, quite discrete, if we look at it like this, just from the front...” (Lacerda, 1937: 250). The whitewash on the walls that surround the voussoirs of the round arch, which allows accessing the inside of the galilee, stands out from the ensemble. Here we also see the same mascarón that closes the arches of the lateral accesses, which we’ve

³ This incomplete expression alludes to the verse of the Epistle of Saint Paul to the Philippians (Ph 2, 8): “Humiliavit semetipsum, factus obediens usque ad mortem, mortem autem crucis” (He humiliated himself, and was obedient until his death, a death on the cross).



West façade.

already mentioned. Above this arch there is an oculus. The façade is surmounted by a broken pediment, topped by Baroque pinnacles on the angles and displaying simple granite cross at the centre. There is a double belfry adjoined to north section of this façade, which also has a cross and is topped by pinnacles on the angles. On the lower section of the bell tower there is a round arch that allows accessing the Church's lateral façade through the churchyard.

Inside the galilee there is a wooden roof that shelters a simple portal formed by two slightly broken archivolts supported directly on the wall. On the observer's right we see a simple holy water font hanging from the wall.

Returning to the Church's interior, we should highlight a sculpture of the Virgin of the Rosary, one of the last remains of the integrated assets that used to fill the ecclesiastical space. Following the rehabilitation of the frescoes and the DGEMN's purist interventions from the mid-20th century, all the altarpieces were demolished. Thus, from the description of 1758, only the images remain: "the Church has three altars: the Main Altar and two Collateral [sic], in the middle of the Main Altar there is the sacrarium of the Holy Sacrament, and one the side of the Gospel there is the full-body image of Saint John, in the collateral [sic] Altar on the Gospel side is Our Lady of the Rosary, also in full-body, and in the other Collateral on the Epistle side is the Child JESUS". The full-body sculpture mentioned by priest João de Magalhães while describing the collateral altar on the Gospel side may be the one that is still displayed to worship on a plinth in the chancel. This is an upholstered and flesh-tinted sculpture in polychrome wood that represents a standing Virgin carrying the Infant Jesus in her arms; leaning on His Mother's left hand, he seems to be blessing the devotees who address them.



North façade. Galilee and bell tower.



West façade. Galilee and portal.

Traditionally, the Virgin of the Rosary is recognized by having this prayer-supporting element, which is so appreciated by the Dominicans, hanging from her hand (usually the right one). However, this is a model of the Virgin with Child that moves away from the common iconography of the rosary and depicts a typology of invocations marked by attributes such as the rose or the pomegranate, symbols of purity and fertility that accompanied the dissemination of Marian worships throughout the Middle Ages and the early Modern Period. So, considering the iconography, and despite the good ornamental work that is already announcing the Baroque lavishness of damask draperies in full-body upholstered images, this is still a 17th-century work of art⁴.

When the 1924 inventory was drawn up, following the Republican decrees that defined the Church-State relations in the First Republic, the number of mobile assets reflected a reduced and poor collection: an image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus; an image of Saint Anthony; an image of Saint John the Baptist; a large-sized image of Our Lady of the Rosary, as well as a small-sized one; a missal; two cabinets to store vestments; three metal crosses; six flower vases; a yellow metal vase; a yellow metal thurible; four chasubles with the corresponding maniples and stoles⁵.

To Gatão, to its Church and the cemetery opposite the temple will always be associated with the figure of Teixeira de Pascoaes, who is buried here. He was born in São Gonçalo, Amarante, on November 2nd 1877 and died at home in Outeiro, on December 12th 1952.

Called Joaquim Pereira Teixeira de Vasconcelos, he was excelled in the areas of literature and philosophical discussion within the turbulent atmosphere experienced in Portugal during the late 19th century and the early 20th century. He was one of the most prominent essayists, poets and mystic writers within the cultural scene in Portugal during the first contemporary period, whose end is associated by a few authors with his death. Feliciano Ramos described him as a poetic visionary (Ramos, 1958: 853), whose work had similarities with the metaphysical and spiritual density of António Nobre and Guerra Junqueiro, despite the fact that he only shared the ideal of homeland with the latter because, as far as political regimens were concerned, they were on opposite sides. The son of a fervent monarchist, a peer of the Kingdom, Teixeira de Pascoaes kept his love to the Crown, combining it with the struggle he always waged against rationalism and atheism and singing the world where he lived and died, under the shade of the Marão mountain.

4 Therefore, we cannot agree with the date provided by the entry found in the inventory of the diocese of Porto (Inventory no. PM80.0003) that suggests the chronology 1701-1750 (Costa, 2008). By way of example, we believe that the Virgin of the Rosary of Gatão presents similar techniques, materials and iconography to the ones of the image of the Virgin and Child from the parish of Resende (Paredes de Coura), which dates back precisely to the 17th century (Tedim, 2002: 10).

5 PORTUGAL. Ministério das Finanças – Secretaria-geral – Arquivo. Comissão Jurisdicional dos Bens Culturais. Distrito do Porto. Concelho de Amarante. *Arolamentos dos bens culturais*. Igreja de Gatão. 1924-08-4. Liv. 67, fl. 78-80. ACMF/Arquivo/CJBC/PTO/AMA/ARROL/019.



CONTEMPORARY INTERVENTIONS

In 1864, the parish priest of Gatão, Domingos Alves da Silva, in response to the inquiry conducted by the diocese of Porto, mentions the antiquity of the “Church of Saint John the Baptist of Gatão or Hagatão”⁶. The information provided by the parish priest is scarce: besides mentioning the Church’s “Gothic taste” and good state of repair he adds nothing about its foundation.

One of the crucial years for the valorisation of the heritage of the Church of Gatão was 1937 when, as we’ve already mentioned, following the discovery of the frescoes by Father Manuel Couto, Aarão de Lacerda published a report about them in the *Prisma* magazine⁷. It was precisely the discovery of these frescoes that triggered the intention to classify this Church of Amarante as a National Monument. The official letter addressed by the architect Baltazar de Castro to the engineer Henrique Gomes da Silva, the Director-General for National Buildings and Monuments, the former makes a plea in favour of the classification of the Church of Gatão and its frescoes, which are described as “precious”⁸. In the following year, the proposal for the classification of the Church of Gatão, “including the fresco paintings that decorate the walls”, had already obtained a favourable report from the National Board for Education⁹. Despite its “naïve simplicity, and the fact that its construction is so disrupted”, it was considered that the “worth” of Gatão “is the result of a few “affresco” paintings that decorated the Church during the 16th century and that it still keeps, despite the misfortunes it went through, thanks to the noble and loving interest of the parish abbot”¹⁰. So, through Decree no. 30762, published in the Government Gazette no. 225, of September 26th, 1940, the Church of Gatão, together with its frescoes, was classified as a National Monument. This classification created the necessary conditions for its preservation, which included, precisely, an in-depth restoration intervention.

“The ruinous state of the Church of Gatão, despite being serious and covering almost the entire building, was not externally revealed by any major, or even clearly visible, damages when the DGEMN began the preliminary studies that always precede the complex works required by the restoration of the oldest historical buildings” (Castro, 1951: 15). However this was not the opinion of the parish priest Manuel da Silva Couto who, alluding to “worshiping difficul-

6 Silva, Domingos Alves da – Missiva (sem data) [1864]. IRHU/Arquivo ex-DGEMN/DREM, Cx. 3216/3. *Correspondência igrejas do concelho de Amarante*. 1864-1867.

7 In fact, we should note that when the author visited the Church in the previous year, “the paintings were still hidden by the altars, both in the nave, and in the chancel, and only the one above the triumphal arch was visible” (Lacerda, 1937: 252).

8 Ofício n.º 1264 de 11 de julho de 1939 [SIPA.TXT.00898617] PT DGEMN:DSARH-010/026-0061 [Online]. Available at [www.<URL: http://www.monumentos.pt>](http://www.monumentos.pt) [Nº IPA PT011301160008]. Here we should note the praise made by Aarão de Lacerda to the interest that these two men – one acting as Director-General and the other acting as Director of National Monuments – had been showing in the fresco within the scope of “an already long series of restorations which is well worth highlighting within the context of Portuguese contemporary Archaeology, so practical in its protective action” (Lacerda, 1937: 259). It is within this context that the frescoes have been actively protected, due to actions that are unavoidably associated with José de Figueiredo, who also drew the Country’s attention to them.

9 Ofício n.º 107, livro A-2 da Junta Nacional de Educação de 6 de abril de 1940 [SIPA.TXT.00898619]. Idem.

10 Parecer da Junta Nacional de Educação, 1.ª subseção – 6.ª Secção de 12 de abril de 1940 [SIPA.TXT.00898621].



Nave before the intervention carried out by the DGEMN. Source: IHRU archive.

ties” and to the visible danger faced by the frescoes, calls for the urgent need to carry out the “already promised” internal and external repairs¹¹. This was March 13th, 1941. In the following month, Baltazar de Castro draws the responsible departments’ attention to the need of carrying out “major works”, given the monument’s poor state of repair¹². And, although these may be expensive, “an expenditure that is not proportional to the temple’s artistic and historical value, the value of its frescoes requires the conduction of works (...) for their preservation”¹³.

The memoir regarding the intervention of reconstruction, cleaning, restoration and treatment of the frescoes of the Church of Gatão [*Obras de reconstrução, limpeza, restauro e tratamento dos frêscos da Igreja de Gatão – Amaranite*]¹⁴ dates back to July 26th, 1941. Based on the building’s poor state of repair, the required works were then itemized; these included the reconstruction of the external sacristy, which had a slightly offset position when compared to the existing one (although there was a decision to lower its walls instead, “to free the Lombard arches found on the chancel’s cornice” (Castro, 1951: 22)); improving the access to the high choir building a new staircase on the inside and using the service staircase that already existed on the outside, “embedded on the front end of the nave’s lateral wall”; this wall was supposed to be repaired (but there was a decision to demolish an old staircase instead, “which allowed accessing the choir, through the galilee’s (south) lateral wall” (Castro, 1951: 22)). Besides a general improvement of the Church’s liturgical equipment, which included the pulpit (that was provided with a new wooden parapet) or the design of a new wooden cabinet for the choir, it was simultaneously decided to remove the “simple wooden altars that flanked the triumphal arch” to the outside of the Church, due to the lack of appropriate conditions; the same happened to the chancel’s altar, “which was also made of wood and belonged to the same type, in order to free the primitive granite altar whose table still remains intact”¹⁵.

As we may infer, the restoration carried out in the Church of Gatão was quite purist. As explained by João de Castro – the author of the text published in the DGEMN’s Bulletin regarding this intervention –, the restoration allowed retrieving “a constructive unity that was necessary for the (...) conservation and aesthetic dignity of this building”, which had irretrievably lost its “architectural unity” long ago. We believe that the fact that this speech appears in 1951 in a work with clear informative purposes is extremely important. As it is known, the strong political criticism made by Manuel Mendes to the “work of pure scenography” that the DGEMN had been carrying out in the castles, which he considered a heresy, comparing the placement of merlons on the castle’s walls with “dentures” (Mendes, 1949)¹⁶ dates back to

11 Couto, Manuel da Silva – Missiva de 13 de março de 1941 [SIPA.TXT.00898625] PT DGEMN:DSARH-010/026-0061 [Online]. Available at [www: <URL: http://www.monumentos.pt>](http://www.monumentos.pt) [Nº IPA PT011301160008].

12 Ofício n.º 1135, de 23 de abril de 1941 [SIPA.TXT.00898626 e SIPA.TXT.00898627]. Idem.

13 Idem.

14 Memória de 26 de julho de 1941 [SIPA.TXT.00898659 a SIPA.TXT.00898655]. PT DGEMN:DSARH-010/026-0061 [Online]. Available at [15 Idem.](http://www: <URL: http://www.monumentos.pt> [Nº IPA PT011301160008].</p>
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16 This comparison, made by a member of the central committee of the Opposition Candidacy’s services during a rally organized in Porto to support General Norton de Matos, was intended as a reply to the propagandist intents of the regime that were embodied in the Exhibitions of the *15 years of Public Works*, which were held in Lisbon, in 1948, and in Porto, in the following year. The opposition replied to the criticism of the Minister for Public Works with an extensive article published in *República*, in which the State is accused of spending large sums of money on a project that was “improvised and, therefore,

1949. We believe that, although in a different context, it is not a coincidence that, in this Bulletin from 1951, the “constructive unity” is opposed to the architectural unity, claiming also that the DGEMN did not intend to rebuild the Church of Gatão as “it would have been originally, because that would be the same as deceiving, with the law of fantasy itself (erudite or not), the law of historical truth – that is, masking the true monument with a fake one” (Castro, 1951: 20). Further confirming this change of attitude in the official discourse of the DGEMN¹⁷, we now see the monument being accepted “just like it was left by countless Portuguese generations who, in different periods, rebuilding it well or not, have commendably contributed to its conservation”. We believe that, for this reason, the intervention in Gatão deserves to be in the annals of the history of the restoration and conservation of built heritage in Portugal.

Here we should note that, during the execution of these works, the same parish priest of Gatão, Manuel da Silva Couto, addressed the responsible services with a rather original proposal for his time¹⁸. Taking advantage of the building work atmosphere that the Church of Gatão was experiencing by then, the parish priest requests an expansion of the Church, asking if “the main portal could be moved forward and form a façade according to the church’s style. The church’s body would become too long in proportion to its width and to the chancel. But couldn’t there be, for example, an inscription justifying this anomaly for worshiping needs?”. The parish priest claimed the need to have space for the devotees and that priority should be given “first of all, to worship, which is the purpose of the church”. Understandably, this request was not fulfilled.

Let’s return to the intervention itself. The frescoes in Gatão were an element of paramount importance for the implementation of the process to protect the building. In fact, in 1941, the removal of the frescoes to a museum was even considered in order to avoid any intervention in the Church (Tomé, 1998: 167). That didn’t happen. Despite the fact that most of the discovered paintings were been preserved *in situ*, it was nevertheless decided “to detach and relocate the fresco found the altarpiece of Saint John the Baptist, with no further damages, to another wall of the temple and, in addition, to restore, by reopening the unused crevice-window, the chancel’s primitive features” (Castro, 1951: 11). First of all, we should note that this decision was surely made after the memoir of 1941, which states that “the front crevice on the chancel’s wall shall remain walled-up on the inside because of the fresco that covers it, in order to allow the installation of a stained glass panel on the outside”¹⁹. We weren’t able to ascertain when the decision to detach the central image of the triptych painted on the chevet’s back wall was made. The truth is that, according to information from 1951, after the appropriate “improvement works, the image of the Precursor reappeared, without any deformity in its original frame, and was placed in the nave, close to the baptistery” (Castro, 1951: 11). But currently we no longer find it there. In 1953 its condition was already deteriorated: “a large part of its surface was damaged by spots that look like mould to such an extent that, at the time, it was no longer possible

arguable”. About this issue of the “criticism to the precepts that were practiced and to the situation of the national artistic heritage” please read Neto (2001: 258-270).

17 For further development on this matter, please read Botelho (2010: 338).

18 Couto, Manuel da Silva – Missiva de 27 outubro 1942. IRHU/Arquivo ex-DGEMN/DREMNDM – DGEMN: DREMNDM-2492.

19 Memória de 26 de julho de 1941 [SIPA.TXT.00898659 a SIPA.TXT.00898655]. PT DGEMN:DSARH-010/026-0061 [Online]. Available at [www: <URL: http://www.monumentos.pt>](http://www.monumentos.pt) [Nº IPA PT011301160008].

to clearly observe part of the painting”²⁰. The inconvenience of its placement close to the water from the font was even accepted. Another document, dated from early 1969, mentions its poor state of repair once again, which no longer allowed the identification of any chromatic layer since the entire panel had the appearance of a dark spot by then²¹. At that time, the possibility of recovering this fresco was discussed, although it was decided that the mobile brigade of the Institute of José de Figueiredo should look at it on site²².

Thus, the “Technical Information” of the Report written by the brigade that visited Gatão, dated February 21st, 1969, confirms this diagnosis: the Church’s frescoes were “in a very bad condition” at the time, and the same was happening with the fresco “that had already been displaced and attached to a new fibre-cement support”²³. The documents attached to the report are more explicit when they mention its degree of decay: “the entire lower section of the image has almost completely disappeared, although, on the upper section, both the face and body still preserve a bit of their drawing and even several expression details”²⁴. After the conduction of the necessary laboratory tests, the Institute’s technicians considered that the frescoes of Gatão needed to be cleaned and fixed. After the consolidation of four mural paintings, it was informed that, on September 15th, 1970, the restored fresco, i.e., the one that depicts the image of *Saint John the Baptist* and was located on the nave, close to the font, had returned to the Institute²⁵. On September 20th, 1970, the Directorate-General for Higher Education and Fine Arts authorized the transfer of the fresco to the Institute of José de Figueiredo, as well as its restoration²⁶. The frescoes that remained *in loco* were then fixed – the ones on the chancel with water and lime injections, and the ones on the nave’s front wall were also fixed with water and lime injections plus lime water and small amounts of plaster²⁷. In 1977, another Institute of José de Figueiredo brigade returned to Gatão and confirmed that the frescoes required further restoration works (Almeida & Pessoa, 1977).

Finally, in 1985, an explanation was provided: the Institute of José de Figueiredo concluded that the fresco of *Saint John the Baptist* was impossible to recover, given the irreversible nature of the materials used during the restoration works carried out in the 1940’s and taking into account that the remaining areas of true original work were already too small²⁸. So, recommending that it shouldn’t be displayed to the public, neither in the Church, nor in a Museum,

20 Ofício [ilegível], 3 de abril de 1953. IRHU/Arquivo ex-DGEMN/DREMN/DM – DGEMN:DREMN-2492.

21 Ofício n.º 251, Proc.º P. 21 de 3 de fevereiro de 1969 [SIPA.TXT.00900718] PT DGEMN: DSARH-010/026-0104 [Online]. Available at www: <URL: <http://www.monumentos.pt>> [Nº IPA PT011301160008]. In fact, we should note that in 1937 Aarão de Lacerda (1937: 255) had already mentioned its “extremely deteriorated state, from the landscape, which was mistreated, to the image of the Precursor, whose face is almost vanished, but reveals signs of a careful painting work”.

22 Ofício da Direção-Geral do Ensino Superior e das Belas-Artes de 26 de março de 1969 [SIPA.TXT.00900720]. Idem.

23 PORTUGAL. Instituto de Museus e Conservação – Biblioteca Central – Cabral, Teresa – Relatório, 21-2-1969. *Processo de Brigada Móvel de Pintura Mural – Gatão*. Pasta 340. 1969.

24 PORTUGAL. Instituto de Museus e Conservação – Biblioteca Central – [Brigada Móvel do Instituto José de Figueiredo, 2-Junho70].

25 PORTUGAL. Instituto de Museus e Conservação – Biblioteca Central – Cabral, Teresa – Relatório, 21-2-1969. *Processo de Brigada Móvel de Pintura Mural – Gatão*. Pasta 340. 1969.

26 Ofício da Direção-Geral do Ensino Superior e das Belas-Artes de 20 de julho de 1970 [SIPA.TXT.00900723]. Idem.

27 [Brigada Móvel do Instituto José de Figueiredo, 2-Junho70, manuscrito, sem assinatura]. Idem.

28 Ofício PMO-5 do Instituto José de Figueiredo de 19 de maio de 1985. IRHU/Arquivo ex-DGEMN/DREMN/DM – DGEMN:DREMN-2492. Idem.

as usual in these cases, it was suggested that the parish priest should keep it in a “moist-free place”²⁹. However, the then parish priest didn’t show any “interest in receiving the fresco in that condition”³⁰. In 2004, the fresco was still in the facilities of the Instituto Português de Conservação e Restauro [Portuguese Institute for Conservation and Restoration]³¹.

Let’s return to the 1940s. One of the most extensive interventions that were necessary to carry out was the full replacement of the Church’s roofing system. The memoir of 1941 mentions the complete reconstruction of the roofs, including new wooden planking as part of the intervention. However, during this work stage, it was felt that there was the need to demolish and rebuild the Church “halfway up the nave’s (south) lateral wall”, taking that opportunity to replace the large window that had been opened in the Modern Period “with two properly located crevices” (Castro, 1951: 22). Besides the consequent change in terms of the elevation’s legibility, this intervention becomes even more significant due to the fact that it gave rise to a protest by the parish priest of Gatão. On December 14th, 1942, Father Manuel da Silva Couto mentions the fact that the work had been suspended³². Considering that only the foundations for the new wall had been made, the Church “was going through the winter in this state”, without roof tiles and with a demolished chapel, since October. According to an explanation given by the architect Baltazar de Castro, that interruption was due to the fact that the funds required for the roof repair works had been channelled to the demolition of the nave’s south wall, which was threatening to collapse³³. Besides, the purchase of wood for the roof frame drained the initial allocation. The granting of a new financial allocation allowed the works to be quickly resumed (Tomé, 1998: 167). The Bulletin that recorded these works was published in 1951 (Castro, 1951).

The Church’s electrical wiring is installed in 1966³⁴. The initiative behind that intervention was taken by the new parish priest of Gatão, José Augusto de Sousa Marques, who mentioned “the advantages for the devotees, during the acts of worship, and the fact that, in this way, certain parts of its interior, which not even the sunlight can illuminate, would draw the visitors’ attention”³⁵. However, the comment made by the parish priest regarding the dimness that had filled the interior of the Church of Gatão until then, giving it a “heavier, nobler atmosphere, more consonant with its centuries-old age” is nonetheless interesting.

In the second half of the 1970s, several conservation works were carried out, including the construction of new doors, the cleaning of the roofs and the reconstruction of mortars on the main façade³⁶. Several works were also carried out in the monument’s protection zone, namely



Nave after the intervention carried out by the DGEMN. Source: IHRU archive.

29 Idem.

30 Ofício PMO-57 do Instituto José de Figueiredo de 16 de janeiro de 1986. Idem.

31 Ofício PMO057 de 4 de outubro de 2004. Idem.

32 Couto, Manuel da Silva – Missiva de 14 de dezembro de 1942 [SIPA.TXT.00898709] PT DGEMN:DSARH-010/026-0061 [Online]. Available at [www: <URL: http://www.monumentos.pt>](http://www.monumentos.pt) [Nº IPA PT011301160008].

33 Ofício n.º 13, 2 de janeiro de 1943 [SIPA.TXT.00624459] PT DGEMN:DSID-001/013-1823/3. Idem.

34 Memória descritiva de 30 de junho de 1966 [SIPA.TXT.00900692 e SIPA.TXT.00900691] PT DGEMN:DSARH-010/026-0104 [Online]. Available at [www: <URL: http://www.monumentos.pt>](http://www.monumentos.pt) [Nº IPA PT011301160008].

35 Marques, José Augusto de Sousa – Missiva de 25 de janeiro de 1966 [SIPA.TXT.00900694 e SIPA.TXT.00900695]. Idem.

36 Memória de março de 1976 [SIPA.TXT.00900745]. Idem.

in the parish residence and in the cemetery, which was expanded³⁷. In the 1990s the Church of Gatão was already in need of a new plaster coating³⁸.

Within the scope of the integration of the Church of Gatão in the Route of the Romanesque, in 2010, we now witness the development of a new intervention project for this Church of Amarante (Costa, 2012). [MLB / NR]

A conservation and restoration project of the mural painting in the chancel and triumphal arch (DRCN, 2014a) has also been planned, which also includes the built heritage – figure sculptures and ecclesiastical furniture (DRCN, 2014b) – of this Church. [RR]

³⁷ PT DGEMN:DSARH-010/026-0104 [Online]. Available at [www. <URL: http://www.monumentos.pt>](http://www.monumentos.pt) [Nº IPA PT011301160008].

³⁸ Marques, José Augusto de Sousa – Missiva, 18 de janeiro de 1996 [SIPA.TXT.00900784]. Idem.

CHRONOLOGY

13th-14th centuries: proposed chronology for the construction of the parish Church of Gatão;

1320: the Church of Gatão paid a tax of 80 Portuguese "libras";

Late 15th century: mural painting campaign in the Church of Gatão;

1758: there were three woodwork altarpieces in Gatão;

1864: the state of repair of the Church of Gatão is considered "good";

1882: due to the diocesan reorganization, Gatão was transferred from the archdiocese of Braga to the diocese of Porto;

1937: Father Manuel da Silva Couto warns about the existence of mural paintings in the Church;

1940: classification of the Church of Gatão as a National Monument;

1941-1951: major restoration campaign;

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

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