





CHURCH OF THE SAVIOUR OF LUFREI

AMARANTE

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Plan.

HISTORICAL SUMMARY



General view.

The old Church of the Saviour of Lufrei is located in a fertile valley, near the confluence of two small streams, thus contradicting the placement of a large number of parish churches which are located on higher or lower hills or summits. Its monastic origin may explain this location, deemed as ideal by the Cluniacs and the Benedictines and definitely adopted by the Cistercians as the model-location for the placement of their homes. In fact Lufrei is granted the status of monastery for Benedictine nuns which, like in many other cases in the region (namely Gondar, Amarante), resulted in its abandonment and subsequent secularization.

In the royal inquiries of 1258, one of the witnesses ascribes the foundation of the monastery of Lufrei to the family of Gonçalo João da Pedreira. At the time, the institute was responsible for three suffragan or affiliate chapels or churches: Saint Mary Magdalene, in Covelo, Saint Faustus and Saint James (Herculano, 1867: 1152).

However, the extinction of this monastery was not an early one, as in the case of Telões (Amarante), since it already occurred in the mid-15th century. That is stated in the *Benedicta lusitana...*, which indicates 1455 as the year of its downgrading to parish church¹.

Tradition says that Mem de Gundar was the founder of the three Benedictine convents in the region: Gondar, Lufrei and Gestaçô. Despite the lack of documentary grounds, the memory of their connection to Gondar – since they both witnessed the movement that created female Benedictine communities from the 12th century onwards – remained in the submissive position of Lufrei towards that Church due to their patronage. The rector of Gondar was responsible for presenting the vicar of Lufrei, as noted, in 1768, by the author of *Portugal sacro-profano...* (Niza, 1767: 333)².

Then, in the Modern Period, this modestly sized Church began serving the parish of Lufrei, which perhaps had been separated from Gondar.

Ecclesiastically, the parish of Lufrei was initially part of the term of the archdiocese of Braga, and was transferred to Porto in 1882³. In the 20th century, the changes introduced in terms of diocesan geography included it the ecclesiastical district of Sobretâmega (3rd district) and in the second vicarage of Amarante, to which it still belongs.

¹ In 1344-1345, Inês Martins Moreira, a lady from the Moreiras lineage or family (whose sphere of action and domain were Celorico and Tarouquela (Cinfães)), was a nun here (Sottomayor-Pizarro, 1997: 1043). And, in 1431, there are still references to the abbess Beatriz Vasques and the chaplain Friar Gonçalo Anes, a monk of Fonte Arcada (Amarante) (Santo Tomás, 1651: 388). This secularization of Lufrei should be understood within the reformist process of the archbishopric led by Fernando da Guerra (Marques, 1988).

² Although, in 1692, Father Torcato Peixoto said it was a vicarage attached to Saint Gonçalo of Amarante (Azevedo, 1845: 434).

³ As a result of the Bull *Gravissimum Christi ecclesiaum regendi et gubernandi munus* (IGREJA CATÓLICA. Papa, Leão XIII – *Gravissimum Christi ecclesiaum regendi et gubernandi munus* [Bull from September 30th 1881]).

THE MONUMENT IN THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

Its building shows a later chronology, framed within the movement that has been called as “resistance Romanesque” style, or even, “rural Gothic” style. This is a very common Romanesque architecture style in the Sousa, Tâmega and Douro valleys. The Churches of Saint Michael of Entre-os-Rios (Penafiel), of Our Lady of Nativity of Escamarão (Cinfães) or of Saint Mammes of Vila Verde (Felgueiras) are some examples, just to name a few. We believe that, in the case of Lufrei, the simple nature of its structure, which doesn’t have any ornamental carved details, may be explained by its late chronology; so, this Church may be considered as a good example of the vernacular and popular nature of the Portuguese Romanesque *modus aedificandi*⁴. Therefore, Portuguese Romanesque architecture should be understood in its diachrony.

The case of Lufrei is a good example of how the Romanesque shapes persisted over time, even beyond their own chronology, taking on vernacular profiles. We should note the irregularity of the masonry that shapes it because, although there is some homogeneity in terms of the height of the rows of ashlars, the same can not be said about their size. Consisting of a single nave and a rectangular chevet, which narrower and lower than the former, the interior of the Church of Lufrei is only lit through extremely narrow crevices with a clear Romanesque taste, positioned in key locations of the building: above the main portal and the chancel arch and only one on each of the nave’s walls. The corbels have a more square than rectangular profile and are plain, thus showing their late nature. As it is known, it is in the earliest specimens of the Portuguese Romanesque style that we find the most varied sculptured shapes which are best suited to the context of these elements that are so typical of this period’s architecture.



West façade.



East façade.

⁴ About this matter, please read Botelho (2010a: 395; 2010b: 59).



North façade.



South façade.

On both sides of the nave there are still corbels located halfway up the walls which reveal the existence of porch-like structures attached to the Church. Besides, in 1726, Francisco Craesbeeck mentions the existence of a galilee that sheltered the main portal and had two “transverse entrances: the one on the Epistle side was covered with stone and lime, and only the one on the Gospel side remains” (Craesbeeck, 1992: 59). We are not certain whether the author was mentioning the existence of an actual galilee of Medieval origin, performing similar functions to those that still exist in the Churches of Gatão and Telões, both in the neighboring municipality of Amarante, or if he intended to mention the porches attached to Lufrei’s lateral walls. In fact, on the main façade there isn’t any evidence that might give us a hint of their prior existence, or any corbels to support the roof structure, or any visible scars on the wall. On the contrary, the lateral façades still show the corbels that probably supported a porch-like structure. And while the north portal, which internally corresponds to the Gospel side, still serves its purpose today, on the other hand, the one on the south side, i.e., on the Epistle side is currently walled up. Internally there is still a niche that, because it has an ensemble composed of two steps, has lead to believe that it was prepared to accommodate the pulpit (Basto, 2006).

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West façade. Portal.

It is precisely the Lufrei’s portals that confirm the late nature of the Church’s construction. The main portal, in addition to being carved in the thickness of the wall itself, is composed of two broken archivolts that rest directly on the walls and are ennobled by an impost. It doesn’t have a tympanum. The north portal is even simpler, because it is formed only by a slightly broken arch which is carved in the thickness of the wall without any ennobling element. The main façade’s gable is interrupted by a double Romanesque belfry.

In the south surrounding, there are three surviving tombs with their corresponding lids. These are monolithic sarcophagi with trapezoidal, and perhaps anthropomorphic, shapes; their lids are also monolithic, with pentagonal sections and gabled volumes (Barroca, 1987: 372). These three chests were mentioned in the parish memories of 1758: “(...) three one-piece stone tombs, which are kept in the churchyard, raised from the ground, covered also with one-piece stones that are sharply carved along their entire length. These are like no others found in the neighboring areas. In two of these tombs we may see some traces of a beveled name, however, time has corrupted the letters and we can no longer find out to whom they may have belonged, and men don’t have any memories about the people who were buried in them” (Capela, 2009: 170). What is certain is that these Medieval graves are mentioned on this occasion as an indi-



South side surroundings. Tombs.



South side surroundings. Tomb.

cation of the existence of “distinguished men” in the parish of Lufrei. Close to these tombs we find the plain bowl of the Romanesque font⁵.

Inside, the visible Romanesque traces are scarce. We only feel the Romanesque atmosphere of this Church in the crevices that tenuously illuminate it or in the size of the triumphal arch that intimately closes the chancel. It is slightly broken and composed of large voussoirs. It doesn't have any decorative motif. Its edges are sharp.

Inside the white washed vestments prevail. However, today we may find “windows” that were mechanically opened during the conduction of surveys and expanded during the first phase of the restoration works, already carried out by the Route of the Romanesque in 2013. Under the existing whitewash, it is possible to identify the presence of strong chromatic layers, particularly on the chancel's elevations (Pestana, 2010: 9).



Chancel. Back wall (behind the main altarpiece). Mural painting.

⁵ In the context of the conservation and protection interventions of the Church of Lufrei, promoted by the Route of the Romanesque in 2013, the basin was moved to the interior of the nave as a preventive measure. The decision on its final location has not yet been taken.



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

Such interventions confirmed the presence of mural paintings in the chancel and in the nave. In the former, the most significant fragments are located behind the main altarpiece: “the ensemble probably had a central figurative panel – which was partially destroyed by the installation of the altarpiece – surrounded by winding red vegetal ornaments over a homogeneous yellow background” (Pestana, 2010: 6).

In the nave, the surveys and the first phase of the restoration works revealed the existence of mural frescoes on the front wall and on the areas located right next to it. They correspond to two different campaigns: the first one, on the wall of the triumphal arch, uses stamped bars to surround a representation of a *Calvary*, while the second campaign “occupies the same area with the same representation and continues along the contiguous walls, at least on the wall to the left, with what might be a fake altarpiece flanked by marbled columns surmounted by windings and pinnacles” (Pestana, 2010: 9-10). As we may immediately perceive, the treatment of Lufrei’s mural painting seems quite relevant. The removal of the whitewash layers (Pestana, 2010: 14) will allow revealing a series of previously unseen pictures that seems to have a high artistic quality, judging by the surveys that have already been conducted, of which we highlight the fake altarpiece. Furthermore, since the surveys conducted on the nave’s side walls also revealed the existence of paintings, we are actually facing an ensemble with a significant size.

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Nave. North wall before the intervention carried out by the Route of the Romanesque (2013). Mural painting. *Fake altarpiece*.

THE MONUMENT IN THE MODERN PERIOD

Turned into parish church in 1455, it drew the attention of patrons and parishioners who, from then onwards, shaped the ecclesiastical space according to their conveniences and spirituality. The remaining heritage still stands as a witness of the first centuries of collective and individual intervention. Its structure – which was particularly touched by the Mannerist spirit and taste, as proven by three altarpieces – underwent substantial transformations until it was definitely abandoned in the 20th century.



Chancel. Main altarpiece before the intervention carried out by the Route of the Romanesque (2013).

The main altarpiece, despite the fact that it was changed in subsequent periods⁶, reveals the topics of the pre-Baroque altarpiece: it is a parietal composition based on sober lines, whose volume and three-dimensionality are only provided by its four columns. Francisco Craesbeeck calls it the “old-fashion golden altarpiece” and describes it virtually as we know it today: two full-body paintings draw the devotee’s attention; the one, on the Gospel side, represents Saint Peter, while the other, on the Epistle side, represents Saint Paul – both are depicted with the usual iconography, turned to each other in a composition that complements the altarpiece’s symmetry⁷. The paintings, showing poorly retouched features, can be understood in the light of the Tridentine desire for sobriety and catechization through art. Despite a later attempt to

⁶ In 1707, as Francisco Craesbeeck (1992: 59) states, it didn’t have a tabernacle; it was probably placed there at a much later date, as proven by the additions made to the altarpiece: tabernacle and throne from the late 18th century or the early 19th century.

⁷ The chronicler also mentions that, surmounting the altarpiece, there was a painted image of the “Eternal Father” which no longer exists (Craesbeeck, 1992: 59).



Chancel. Main altarpiece on the Gospel side. Painting. *Saint Peter*.



Chancel. Main altarpiece on the Epistle side. Painting. *Saint Paul*.



Sacristy. Sculpture. The Saviour.

conceal the two-dimensional images of *Saint Peter* and *Saint Paul* with full-body sculptures, the commissioners of the 17th-century altarpiece most certainly had the intention of educating through images, enhancing the role of the Church's two major figures and, somehow, hiding the image of the *Saviour*, which was commonly known as Saint⁸.

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The image that is currently displayed in front of the painting of the apostle *Peter* is a 17th-century work and it is not part of the primitive altar, but it may be the one that, in 1726, “was on a rock [sic] in the middle of the altarpiece” (Calado, 2008). Moreover, although the Tridentine guidelines sought to ward off names and representations that defied theology, the Baroque wasted no time when it came to humanizing the Saviour, bringing Him closer to the devotees together with the other entities – mostly male and female saints displayed for worship in the Church, thus replacing mural and altarpiece paintings.

As soon as we pass through the chancel arch, the difference between the volumes of the chancel and the nave is quite remarkable, but that was not enough to make the investment in integrated assets match the vertical nature of the space. The two collateral altarpieces lean discreetly against the angles of the north, east and south walls. They are both from the Mannerist period.

The altarpiece on the north wall, currently dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, invoked the Virgin of the Rosary in 1726 and 1758⁹. In the attic there is a bas-relief panel showing the scene of the *Annunciation*: the angel Gabriel, kneeling on a cloud, is giving Mary the good news (symbolized by a lily), who receives it while praying, with gestures of wonder and delight. Above the Virgin there is a winged figure that seems to be shaping a canopy to protect the Chosen one using its wings. The scene is surmounted by the Holy Spirit that emanates a few light beams over Mary and the Angel.

A central painting depicting *Saint John the Baptist* and *Saint John the Evangelist* dominates the entire structure of the opposite altarpiece. Between them there is an empty space and under

⁸ Regarding the name Saint Saviour, Saviour or Divine Saviour, please read what we wrote in the Church of Tabuado (Marco de Canaveses).

⁹ In 1726, this image was clothed with a dress, in other words, a dress with stripes on its sleeves (Craesbeeck, 1992: 59).

it there is a corbel indicating the former presence of a full-body sculpture that completed the composition. This sculpture was removed, but it could have been the image of Saint Sebastian to whom this altarpiece was dedicated in the first half of the 18th century. This conjecture is corroborated by the painting on the attic: an open crown whose interior is pierced by three crossed arrows, the symbols of the martyrdom and the power of the Prince of Martyrs. The fact that we find the two namesakes together, the Baptist and the Evangelist, may suggest that one of the work's patrons have wished to remember them along with Saint Sebastian. Moreover, both the presence of the Marian patron saint and of the holy martyr are common within the repertoire of parish churches, as elements of a devotion that is influenced both by preaching and by the collective desire of protection against natural elements and pathologies (Resende, 2011).



Nave. Collateral altarpiece on the Gospel side before the intervention carried out by the Route of the Romanesque. (2013).



Nave. Collateral altarpiece on the Epistle side before the intervention carried out by the Route of the Romanesque. (2013).

CONTEMPORARY INTERVENTIONS

In 1864, the parish priest of Lufrei, Francisco Feliciano Roiz, informed the Director of Public Works of Porto that “the Church of the Saint Saviour of Lufrei, in the municipality of Amarante, is extremely old; its foundation dates back to the period of the Goths, as evidenced by the building’s wall. It was once a Monastery of Benedictine Nuns”¹⁰. At the time, the parish priest considered that this Church was “in a perfect state of repair [sic] and, in addition to other improvements, it has a fine masonry cemetery around it with the necessary capacity for its purposes”.

However, almost a century later, another parish priest of Lufrei expressed a different opinion. On October 27th, 1967, Father António da Silva Ribeiro Peixoto addressed the Head of the DGEMN – Direção-Geral dos Edifícios e Monumentos Nacionais [General Directorate for Buildings and National Monuments] in order to request that institution’s support to “gain some internal space that would be occupied by the devotees” in the then parish Church of Lufrei, “a very old and small church with unique and markedly Romanesque features”¹¹. So, the parish priest suggested liberating the Church from “additions that are very different from its style”. That fact was then justified by a significant population growth.

In the following year the DGEMN’s technicians visited Lufrei and learned that the parish priest intended to carry out some “expansion works in the Church”, by building “two lateral volumes connected to the existing chancel and planning to move it back beyond its front wall”¹². In order to protect this legacy “of great archaeological interest”, it was deemed appropriate to propose its classification as a Public Interest Building, “which would prevent its destruction by the implementation of any potential construction plans that, like this one, would not only destroy the proportions of its original layout, but also its architectural features”¹³. In November 1971 the Church of the Saviour of Lufrei was classified as a Public Interest Building¹⁴.

Considering the parish Church’s new status of classified monument, in 1972, the parish priest of Lufrei asked for DGEMN’s technical support to carry out a study and provide its assistance in the works he then intended to carry out¹⁵. The monuments’ services considered it was opportune to accept the request¹⁶. We were not able to confirm if the works were actually carried out but, if they were, their goal was certainly the Church’s preservation. What we know is that the construction of the new parish church of Lufrei between 1991 and 2001 (Figueiredo, 2012) condemned the old and small Romanesque Church to oblivion. [MLB / NR]



New church of Lufrei.

10 Roiz, Francisco Feliciano – Missiva de 26 de outubro de 1864. IRHU/Arquivo ex-DGEMN/DREM, Cx. 3216/3 – Correspondência igrejas do concelho de Amarante. 1864-1867.

11 Peixoto, António da Silva Ribeiro – Missiva de 27 de outubro de 1967 [SIPA.TXT.00671387] PT DGEMN:DSID-001/013-004-1979/1 [Online]. Available at [www: <URL: http://www.monumentos.pt>](http://www.monumentos.pt) [Nº IPA PT0011301210010].

12 Ofício n.º 222 de 9 de março de 1968 [SIPA.TXT.00671388]. In Idem.

13 Idem.

14 DECEE no. 516. O.G. [Official Gazette] *Series I*, 274 (71-11-22) 1798-1799.

15 Peixoto, António da Silva Ribeiro – Missiva de 25 de agosto de 1972 [SIPA.TXT.00901112] PT DGEMN:DSARH-010/026-0108 [Online]. Available at [www: <URL: http://www.monumentos.pt>](http://www.monumentos.pt). [Nº IPA PT0011301210010].

16 Ofício n.º 878 de 3 de setembro de 1972 [SIPA.TXT.00671398] PT DGEMN:DSID-001/013-004-1979/1 [Online]. Available at [www: <URL: http://www.monumentos.pt>](http://www.monumentos.pt). [Nº IPA PT0011301210010].

Already as part of the Route of the Romanesque, in 2010, the Church of Lufrei was subject to a protection, conservation and enhancement intervention. The project execution aimed at the general preservation of the Church's roofs, at the level of ceramic tiles, woodwork, waterproofing systems, zinc protections and gutters (Costa, 2010).

In 2013, the conservation and restoration works of the panels of the chancel and nave of the Church began, including the built-in statuary, namely the images of Saint James, which is currently in the sacristy, and the Saviour, stored in new parish church of Lufrei.

After the removal of the panels it became possible to proceed with the conservation of the wall paintings of the Church, having been discovered, behind the altarpiece of the north wall of the nave, an image of *Saint Andrew*, as the legend identifies him. This intervention intended to “ensure the proper conservation of the visible mural paintings and those that shall be placed uncovered after removing the existing overlapping layers, to improve their overall reading and aesthetic presentation” (Pestana, 2010: 3).

Once the first phase of interventions is completed, the Route of the Romanesque shall resume, even in 2014, the conservation and protection interventions in the Church of Lufrei. The second phase of the project will focus on “the building's “envelope” – outer vestments, access doors and lighting and ventilation openings – including the strengthening of its protection



Nave. North wall. Mural painting. *Saint Andrew*.



Nave and chancel, during the intervention carried out by the Route of the Romanesque (2013).

against moisture through a perimeter drainage ditch, and still (taking advantage of the current possibility of access to the inside of the roofing, the early work stage, and the fact that one proposes to excavate its perimeter) the pre-installation of basic infrastructure” (Costa, 2012: 9). Meanwhile, a conservation and restoration project of the chancel’s ceiling has also been developed (Duarte, 2012). [RR]

CHRONOLOGY

1258: the witnesses of the royal inquiry mention the family of Gonalo Joo da Pedreira as founders (and patrons) of the monastery of Lufrei;

1455: the monastic Church is reduced to a secular Church by archbishop Fernando da Guerra;

1726: Francisco Craesbeeck describes the Church with its “ancient-style altarpiece”, just like we know it today;

1882: the parish of Lufrei is transferred from the archdiocese of Braga to the diocese of Porto;

1971: classification of the Church of Lufrei as Public Interest Building;

2001: abandonment of the Church of Lufrei, whose worship was transferred to a new temple;

2010: the Church of Lufrei becomes part of the Route of the Romanesque;

2013: general conservation of the roofing and conservation and restoration of altarpieces and mural paintings;

2014-2015: general conservation of the Church of Lufrei at the level of the outer vestments, access doors and lighting and ventilation openings.

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