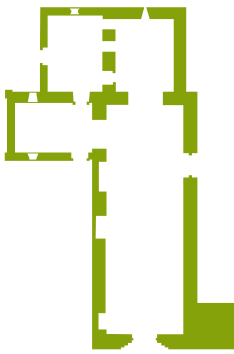




10.

## CHURCH OF SAINT MARY OF MEINEDO



Rua da Igreja, 137  
Meinedo  
Lousada



41° 14' 54.789" N  
8° 15' 26.908" W



+351 918 116 488



Tuesday  
to Saturday, 7 pm



Our Lady of the Snows  
5<sup>th</sup> August



Public Interest Building  
1945



P. 25



P. 25



x

The Church of Saint Mary of Meinedo presents an architectural programme very attached to the “rural Romanesque” style. The temple was probably built between the late 13<sup>th</sup> century and the early 14<sup>th</sup> century, although it perpetuates decorative schemes and building solutions that follow Romanesque models. Despite its late construction, the Church’s prestige is very significant, given that Meinedo was the seat of a bishopric in the 6<sup>th</sup> century.

Just to the north of the Church and, possibly, on the site of a Roman “villa” [a type of Portuguese administrative division], there are traces of walls and a few capitals that probably belonged to a basilica.

The archaeological excavation campaign conducted between 1991 and 1993 allowed identifying the apse of a building with a cross-shaped plan that may belong to the Suebi period, when “Magnetum” was the seat of a bishopric.

The bishop of Meinedo, Viator, attended the second Council of Braga, which was held in 572 and was presided over by Saint Martin of Dume. Shortly afterwards, the basilica of “Magnetum” was turned into a parish church



as mentioned in its reference in the *Parochiale Suevicum*, a document that recorded the number of parishes that belonged to each diocese, whose development resulted from the parish organization promoted by Saint Martin of Dume.

At the time, Meinedo was a “vicus” [a type of Portuguese administrative division], which implied the existence of a village partially organized according to a street network. The remaining elements of the basilica, such as capitals and imposts, reveal a construction that was relatively grand and ostentatious.

In 1113, the bishop of Porto, Hugo (episc. 1113-1136), received the “couto” [a type of Portuguese administrative division] of the monastery of Saint Thyrsus of Meinedo from King Afonso Henriques

(k. 1143-1185), the first king of Portugal. The monastery’s foundation date remains unknown, although the legend in the book *Agiologio lusitano...* claims that it was the father-in-law of the Visigoth King Recaredo who brought Saint Thyrsus’ body from Constantinople (now Istanbul, Turkey) and founded the monastery under his invocation.





The temple's plan features a single nave and a rectangular chevet, both with wooden gabled roofs, much like most Portuguese Romanesque churches. The main portal, without a tympanum or columns, is shaped like a pointed arch and its archivolts are decorated with pearls, a typical "rural Gothic" composition.

The chevet is surmounted by a cornice supported by plain modillions, while the nave bears similar elements but includes a few sculpted modillions. The south portal has no decoration and the north portal is walled up.

Combining these elements, it is possible to suggest that this building already belongs to the late 13<sup>th</sup> century or to the early 14<sup>th</sup> century, although we should highlight that the Church of Meinedo is an

interesting example within the context of the medieval architecture from the Sousa basin that, for a long time, still applied solutions that were typically Romanesque.

From the Church's interior - a space that was subject to building works that gave it a purified appearance - the element that stands out is the gilded woodwork that covers the entire surface of the wall located next to the triumphal arch; such structure also includes the collateral altars that frame the chancel. Considering its combination between architecture and wall coatings - which include woodworks, tiles and paintings -, as well as the structure of the three altarpieces that make up an ensemble, the chancel of Meinedo stands out as a remarkable example of the late 17<sup>th</sup>-century aesthetic unity.





## OUR LADY OF MEINEDO

---

The image of Our Lady of Meinedo or Our Lady of the Snows features traces of polychromy, which are in line with the description made by the author of the book *Marian sanctuary...* when he mentions that it was painted in colour and gold.

This is a full-body sculpture from the Gothic period, whose great devotion is well documented in the Modern Period. The sculpture was hollowed on the back side, a rather usual practice intended to make the images lighter so they could be carried in processions.

An archaeological excavation campaign conducted in the 1990's led to the discovery of another Gothic image in Meinedo; this time it was a broken limestone representation of Saint Anthony with traces of polychromy. It was buried in the north side of the churchyard. Its elimination is in line with the synodal decisions which ordered that old sculptures in a bad state of repair should be broken and buried in sacred grounds, in chevets or churchyards.

The significant increase in the production of Gothic sculpture, both in terms of full-bodied images and altarpieces, should be framed within the devotional phenomenon of the period. While in the Romanesque period people prayed, essentially, before relics, in the Gothic period these no longer satisfy their devotional needs. So, from then onwards, people prayed before sculpted or painted images.

Inside churches, there was a significant increase in the number of altars, either commissioned by confraternities, or integrated in chapels founded with the purpose of celebrating suffrages, a circumstance that followed the growing belief in the Purgatory, thus forcing people to plan countless masses in their wills. In the Gothic period, seeing is an increasingly radical process. People need to see the saint, touch it, pray before the image, scrape the sculpture or painting because its material is sacred and has thaumaturgic powers. Saints are seen as the most important mediators between Men and God and have multiple skills. They heal, convert, perform miracles and trigger strong emotions.

The value of a saint's images or of a narrative cycle is not limited to its miraculous power. The images should also have the ability to enchant people and cause admiration. These should be beautiful, colourful, rich, expressive and dramatic in order to cause fascination on the observer. In addition to the images of saints, the Gothic period was also particularly fond of the image of Our Lady, while represented as the Mother of Christ.

The image of Meinedo was probably manufactured in Coimbra and, considering the way the clothes are shaped and the relationship between Our Lady and the Child, we believe it may already been produced in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. However, the almost total disappearance of its polychromy gives it a slightly archaic aspect, which makes it hard to date.

---

