





39.


CHURCH
OF SAINT
ISIDORE OF
CANAVESES




-  Largo P. Manuel R. Gomes, Santo Isidoro Marco de Canaveses

-  41° 12' 27.49" N
8° 8' 39.07" W


-  +351 918 116 488


-  Saturday, 5 pm
Sunday (summer), 8 am

-  Saint Isidore
4th April

-  National Monument
2013

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Having as patron Saint Isidore, the bishop of Seville (Spain), whose remains were transferred to the Andalusian city in 1063, this small Romanesque Church is currently quite well preserved. We may fit it into the most common model of Portuguese Romanesque churches: composed by the juxtaposition of two rectangles (the nave and the chancel), its decorative elements are shown around the openings and on the modillions. Although it is contained and closed in on itself (being only illuminated by narrow crevices, much to the Romanesque taste), the Church of Saint Isidore proudly shows an elaborate portal. The tori on the archivolt associate it with the Romanesque style from Porto, the rhythm created by the cylindrical and prismatic shafts that support them bring it closer to the Romanesque style that emerged around the Sousa basin and the palmettes on the impostes (which are extended along the façade) remind us of the Benedictine Romanesque style developed along the Braga-Rates axis. Considering the remaining Romanesque traces, this is an example of the combination of different influences and a reflection of the circulation of artists and archetypes clearly felt in the



second half of the 13th century, the period in which this temple was probably built. The existence of corbels on the lateral façades proves that there were porch-like structures on both sides of the Church, which were surely made of wood and sheltered the portals. While on the north



PAGAN-INSPIRED MOTIFS

On the second corbel counting from the main façade, Fernando Pamplona intended to identify a phallic motif, an ornament he considers rare and “a reminiscence of the paganism that persisted in a few medieval temples, following the phallic cult celebrated in the Greek Dionysians that honoured Dionysus and Priapus and in the Roman Bacchanalia that praised Bacchus and Venus”.

Alluding to the representations of the solitary phallus within the sexual iconography of the Romanesque sculpture,

Jaime Nuño González recalls precisely the preventive nature that the male sexual organ had for such a long time, following the path of Roman tradition.

Besides the representation of heroes, the display of nudity also took on a somewhat insolent nature in the Classical world, as proven by certain representations of Bacchus or Silenus. In the Roman period, the representation of the phallus appears with an unusual profusion, on street intersections, on the corners of houses or, even, as a pendant. Centuries later, in the High Middle Ages, we find iconographic specimens where the representation of the body still adopts essentially Classical shapes.





façade the corbels are plain and square, on the opposite façade some of them show ornamental motifs.

Inside, in addition to the plain exposed granite wall faces livened up by narrow crevices, there is a simple and slightly broken triumphal arch with no ornamental elements. Deprived of its altarpiece ensemble, this Church appears nowadays in the eyes of the visitor as a bare space due to the deep restoration works it underwent in 1977, which uncovered a series of high-quality mural paintings located on the chancel's back wall and on the ones that stand right next to it.

We are standing before a pictorial ensemble that, besides dating back to 1536, was signed by the painter Moraes, thus reflecting a clear awareness of his individualized status as an artist. We know very little or almost nothing about this artist; he surely took advantage of the influence exerted by the Renaissance atmosphere being experienced in the geographically close milieu of Porto during the period when the bishop of Viseu, Miguel da Silva (1480-1556), developed his sponsoring activities.

Located on the back wall, the painting presents itself as a triptych, divided by two yellow columns. The central panel showed, naturally, the figure of the patron saint of the Church, Saint Isidore; nowadays, around the Romanesque crevice, we are only able to see the ends of his mitre and crozier and the lower part of his mantle. We find the saint's head on a stone fragment, which is displayed in the chancel. The patron saint was once flanked by elegant female figures wearing in courtly clothes: *the Virgin and Child* and *Saint Catherine of Alexandria*, the latter holding the sword and the wheel of her martyrdom, having the severed head of the pagan emperor responsible for her death at her feet. In the adjacent walls, on the Gospel side, we see *Saint Michael weighing souls and defeating the dragon* and, on the Epistle side, we see *Saint James* depicted as a pilgrim.

We should also highlight two oil paintings, one on wood and another on canvas. The former, made in the 17th century, depicts the scene of the *Calvary*, while the other one, made in the 19th century, shows a well-known model of the *Immaculate Virgin*.

