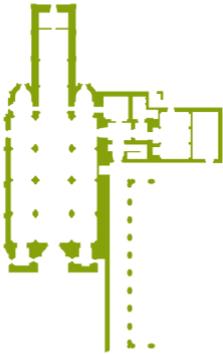


1.

MONASTERY OF SAINT MARY OF POMBEIRO



Lugar do Mosteiro
Pombeiro de Ribavizela
Felgueiras



41° 22' 58.091" N
8° 13' 32.597" W



+351 918 116 488



Sunday
8 and 10.45 am



Saint Mary Major
5th August



National Monument
1910



P. 25



P. 25



Yes

A visit to the Monastery of Saint Mary of Pombeiro should begin in a place overlooking the valley, so we can fully appreciate the location of one of the most important Benedictine monasteries of the Entre-Douro-e-Minho region, both in terms of wealth and building programme. The choice of its implementation site shows, even today, how monastic communities sought to have their buildings in the best agricultural lands, in low areas, where there was plenty of water.

The earliest documentary reference to Pombeiro dates back to 1099 and records the existence of a cenoby. However, there is a document, dated February 10th 1102, which is more important for us to learn about the history of this monastic house. This document states that the Monastery was founded by Gomes Echiegues (1024-1102) and his wife Gontroda. On August 1st 1112, the Countess Teresa (1080-1130), mother of Afonso Henriques (k. 1143-1185), the first king of Portugal, granted a land charter to the Monastery, thus turning it into a privileged land with its own legal system ruled by its abbot.

The building of the Church as we see it today - despite the fact that it underwent major renovations in the

17th and 18th centuries - corresponds to the works carried out during the Romanesque period, which probably began in the last quarter of the 12th century, but was only completed in the first decades of the 13th century. That is what the rosette on the west façade, as well as the sculpture and the elevation of the main portal, seem to suggest.

Two towers were added to the west façade, which had already been built in 1629. This change may be related to the decay of the galilee, a construction used as a funerary space, which included the coats of arms of the old Portuguese nobility. The exact location of this famous galilee is an issue open to debate, all the more because the archaeological excavations (1993-2006) do seem to show signs of its existence. The construction of the towers between the late 16th century and the first quarter of the 17th century led to the redesigning of the façade in order to provide the temple with more light and to allow the construction of the large high choir and its organ.

In the period between 1719 and 1722, the wall located between the two towers and its rosette – which is surrounded by a large frame window resembling the Porto cathedral – were moved forward to the alignment of the towers; so, a new façade was structured, with niches for the statues of Our Lady, the Church's patron saint, as well as Saint Benedict and Saint Scholastic, the Benedictine order's patron saints. Regarding the Church's chevet, the documents assure that the chancel was completely rebuilt in 1770. Its original plan had a semi-circular shape, just like the apses that still stand today.

The Church features three naves with three bays each, which are covered by diaphragm arches and wood. The transept is only noticeable due to its height and its volume is highlighted on the outside.

The main portal is a remarkable example of Romanesque sculpture. The capitals, of botanic inspiration and with magnificent carvings, prove they were the work of an artisan savvy in granite sculpture and are some of the best sculptures in the region,





showing similarities with the Churches of the Saviour of Unhão (Felgueiras) (p. 42) and Saint Peter of Ferreira (Paços de Ferreira) (p. 66). The impostos, consisting of simplified palmettes, support six archivolt, three of which depicting proto-Gothic frames. There are voussoirs

with affronted animals from the Braga type. Others show palmettes and animal heads with ribbons coming out of their mouths, similar to a specimen found in the Church of Veade (Celorico de Basto) (p. 240), while some have rather protruding floral decorations carved in a very refined fashion.

The façade still features its primitive rosette, which is rather large and already proto-Gothic, with a structure similar to the one found in the Church of the Monastery of Paço de Sousa (Penafiel) (p. 90). On the other hand, the lateral façades are developed according to schemes from the Modern Period, i.e., they present scenic solutions typical from the Rococo architectural and decorative schemes.

At the entrance of the Church of Pombeiro, in the area protected by the high choir, there are two armorial sarcophagi covered by lying statues, which are probably from the late 13th century or early 14th century.





MURAL PAINTINGS

In Pombeiro there are still two mural painting programmes: one in the apse on the Gospel side and one in the apse on the Epistle side. In the arch of the portal there are also traces of mural paintings, composed of a decorative bar.

Despite the fact that they belong to the early 1730's, these paintings still show solutions from the late Gothic period, though simultaneously revealing the acceptance of new shapes, whose origin lies in the Renaissance.

The poor condition of the painting from the apse located on the Gospel side does not allow us to conduct a proper stylistic assessment. Nevertheless, from what is left of the programme, the theme may report to a scene of the life of *Saint Blaise* since, according to legend, the saint was found in the jungle by hunters, living with wild animals like bears, lions and tigers he had domesticated.

The representation of pig heads is probably associated with one of the miracles ascribed to Saint Blaise. According to the legend that narrates this saint's life, once there was a wolf that stole a pig from a poor woman, an animal that was her only asset, and Saint Blaise forced the wolf to return its prey. As recognition of this good deed, the woman took the pig's roasted head and feet to the prison where Saint Blaise was being held captive; he was intensely worshipped since the Middle Ages because he was a healing saint and a thaumaturge.

A different opinion considers that this is a depiction of a historical character inspired by the cycle of the Old Testament and associated with the *sacrifice of Noah* after the flood. The group of exotic animals located to the observer's right is joined, on the left, by a group of human figures who are kneeling and holding candles.

The painting from the apse on the Epistle side is in a better state of repair. Here we find the depictions of two Benedictine saints who, according to the inscriptions, should be *Saint Maurus* and *Saint Placid*. These saints were disciples of Saint Benedict of Nursia, the founder of the Benedictine Order.

The depiction of Saint Placid features a lateral inscription, which is also not completely discernible. It is possible to read the following: "(...) mill (?).(?) XXX I (?)"; and on the following lines: "(...) sñor dom/abade dom amtonjo de Mello a mādou fazer" [(...) lord/abbot António de Mello commissioned it].

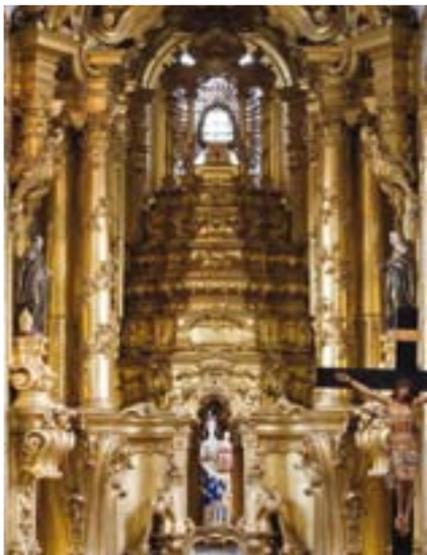
SAINT MARY OF POMBEIRO

The sculpture of Saint Mary, the patron saint, which currently stands on the Church's main altarpiece, is worthy of our attention; according to Friar Agostinho de Santa Maria, it was still an object of extreme devotion in the 17th and 18th centuries. At that time, the image, also known as Saint Mary the High, was placed in its own altar located in the Church's body, on the Gospel side.

It is a gilded and polychrome wood sculpture of considerable proportions that shows Our Lady standing, holding the Child in her left arm and carrying a sceptre (which was added in the 18th century) in her right hand.

The Child is sitting on His Mother's arm as in a throne, revealing an almost adult physiognomy. This sculpture may be framed within the Gothic period, possibly to the late 14th century, and was most certainly repainted in later periods.

It was in the 14th century that Gothic sculpture reached its peak in Portugal. The increase in the production of Gothic sculpture 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 satisfied their devotional needs. So, from then onwards, people prayed before sculpted or painted images. The representation of Our Lady standing and holding the Child, usually on Her left arm, is typical of the Gothic period and provides evidence of the closeness between the devotees and holy figures; this iconographic type, also known as "Eleouosa" [type of depiction of the Virgin of "Tenderness" in icons in which the infant Jesus Christ is nestled against her cheek], will originate variants such as Our Lady of Milk, which is already within the typically Gothic variations of the Virgin of Tenderness.



The chests were part of the important funerary ensemble that was once sheltered by the Monastery's galilee, the pantheon from the nobility of the Entre-Douro-e-Minho region.

The commemorative inscription related to the deposition of relics in the Church of the Monastery of Saint Mary of Pombeiro is carved in two granite ashlar embedded on the transept's east wall, on the angle with the south apse.

After 1719-1721, when Friar Bento da Ascensão held the position of abbot, the Church underwent a series of renovations. Although these interventions were continuous throughout the entire 18th century, we should highlight two cycles: the adaptation of the Church to the Baroque grammar in the first third of the 18th century; the creation of a Rococo atmosphere after 1760.

The goal was clear: promote the dignity of worship and update the artistic language of the old medieval Church. The most prominent artist associated with this metamorphosis was the renowned Friar José de Santo António Ferreira Vilaça, an engraver, sculptor and architect.

The altarpiece of Pombeiro, manufactured between 1770 and 1773, dominates the entire upper section of the chancel. It is an excellent piece made entirely of gilded chestnut wood; the most impressive element is the polychromy in the upholstery of the images of the saints it supports: Saint Benedict, Saint Scholastica and, in the central niche, the medieval image of the Madonna and Child.

The Eucharistic throne, shaped like a stepped pyramid, is an exclusive element of the Portuguese altarpiece which dominated the composition of the main altarpiece since the early 18th century, emerging as

the materialization of the Tridentine ideology. The structure's upper area, the altarpiece's visual centre, was used to display the Blessed Sacrament. In the altarpiece, Friar José Vilaça emphasizes this crucial point of the altarpiece by piercing the wall and allowing the Blessed Sacrament to stand against the sun beams, standing before the devotees as if it was suspended in light. After the extinction of male religious orders in Portugal (1834), all monastic properties were inventoried with the goal of drawing up records of their movable and immovable assets. In the Monastery of Saint Mary of Pombeiro, the confiscation process hindered the reconstruction of the monastic space, which had begun after the fire caused by the looting of the French invasions. This process led to the fragmentation of the entire religious heritage that was in the hands of the Benedictine monks of Pombeiro.





BURGO – "ALDEIA DE PORTUGAL"

In the area surrounding the Monastery of Pombeiro there are many reasons of cultural and scenic interest that, undoubtedly, justify a stroll.

Near the Monastery, the aqueduct of Pombeiro deserves special attention. It was built between 1704 and 1707 and it is an architectural element that stands out for its round arched structure.

Then, heading towards the Núcleo Rural do Burgo, you will soon discover the fountain of Saint Barbara. It was built by the Benedictine monks of the Monastery of Pombeiro in 1754. It embellished the Via Sacra and quenched the thirst of the pilgrims who visited the Monastery and, probably, of those who were on their way to Compostela (Spain), by the road to Guimarães. Between 2008 and 2010, this fountain was subject to major restoration works.



Very close to the fountain, there is a small section of a Roman road, a cruise and the interpretative centre of the Rural House of the Churchyard of the Monastery of Pombeiro. We have reached the Núcleo Rural do Burgo. Located about 800 meters away from the Monastery, it was classified as "Aldeia de Portugal" [Village of Portugal]. This village, whose atmosphere is almost medieval, is dominated by traditional granite buildings. Among these, we highlight the Paço de Pombeiro, now converted into a guest house, the former seminary of Saint Therese and the Casa das Portas. Then you can follow one of the marked footpaths ("Medieval Paths" or "Green Paths" (p. 312)), that begin on the campsite. You will surely discover a few more small treasures: the bridge of Arco, over the river Vizela, featuring a stone from 1724 related to the "coutho" [a type of Portuguese administrative division] of the Monastery of Pombeiro; a mill that is still in operation; a section of a Roman road; the village of Talhós, among others.

Our final reference goes to the existence, in Felgueiras, parish of Sendim, of another "Aldeia de Portugal": Codeçais.



River Vizela | Felgueiras. Bridge of Arco



DON'T MISS OUT

- 4.1 km: "Pão de Ló de Margaride" House (p. 252)
- 5.8 km: Sanctuary of Saint Quiteria (p. 253)
- 7.7 km: Roman *Villa* of Sendim (p. 253)