



21.

CHURCH OF SAINT GENESIUS OF BOELHE



Largo da Igreja
Boelhe
Penafiel



41° 8' 5.85" N
8° 14' 33.41" W



+351 918 116 488



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Saint Genesius
25th August



National Monument
1927



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The location of this Church - on a slope of the Tâmega valley with an enhanced scenic value -, the scale of the temple and the uniqueness of its sculpture are reasons asking for a visit to this peculiar Church from the former parish of São Gens de Boelhe.

The Church features a single nave and a rectangular chevet, according to the most common plan in Portuguese Romanesque architecture. However, despite its apparent simplicity, we should highlight the quality shown in the construction of the walls, on which we may see a significant number of geometric and alphabetic initials. The stonemasons' initials, present in Romanesque buildings since an early stage, became more common in rural churches, especially from the early 13th century onwards. Although little is known about work organization on building sites, in the Portuguese case the initials are also marks of the stonemasons' trade, since they correspond to a signature. The initials of Boelhe, frequent and repeated, suggest that the Church was built by half a dozen stonemasons.

The main portal bears similarities with the portals of the Churches of Sousa (p. 38), of Unhão (p. 42) and of Airães (p. 47), all in Felgueiras. We should highlight



the originality of the sculptural design of the portal's capitals that feature bevelled palm leaves - typical of the rural Romanesque style of the Sousa basin - and graffiti ornaments that include crosses inside circles; these are very ancient motifs that show a revival of traditional decorative techniques used in Pre-Romanesque architectures of the Visigoth and Mozarabic periods and turn this Church into one of the most accomplished decorative expressions of the rural Romanesque.

On the south side of the main façade's gable we may still find the arch of the belfry or bell tower, which housed the bell. On the south façade the corbels have less sculptures, while, on the north side, probably because this face was not intended to be hidden by other buildings, the series of corbels shows motifs that include bull heads, men carrying stones, or even geometric elements. The sculptural exuberance of these corbels shows two of the most typical features of Romanesque sculpture: keenness for variety and the will to impress.

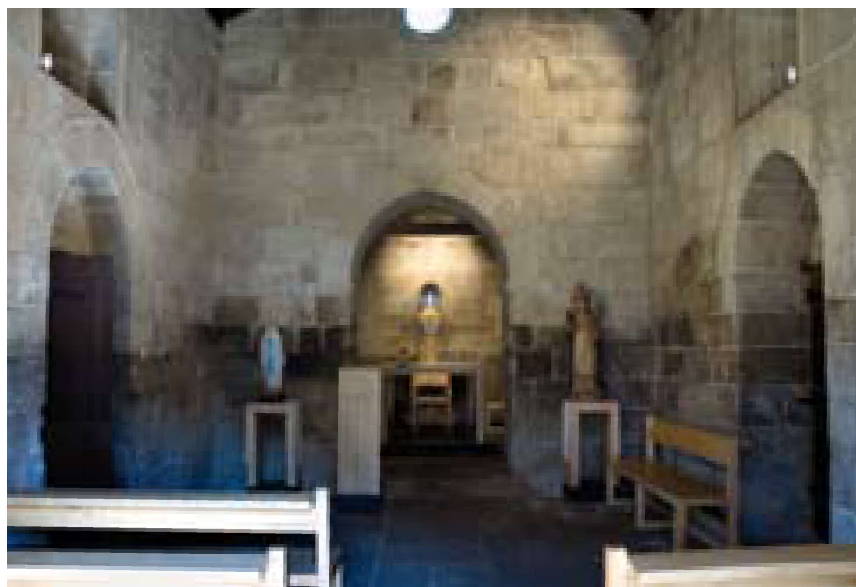
The frames of the crevices and the main portal, together with the large number of

alphabetic or geometric initials carved, internally and externally, on the walls, suggest that this Church probably dates back to the mid- or late 13th century.

The current state of the Church of Saint Genesius of Boelhe is also the result of the restoration campaign carried out between 1929 and 1948.

From these restoration works we should highlight the reduction of the chancel according to the Romanesque mind-set, the reconstruction of the south façade in order to correct its irregularities, the demolition of the bell tower and the choir and the reconstruction of the belfry in the Church's front. During these building works, the north door was reopened, the main altar was replaced and the remaining altars from the Modern Period were removed. These restoration interventions were completed with the construction of the main altar, made of stone, the installation of stained glass panels, the replacement of the roofing system, the improvement of the churchyard and the change in the cemetery's location.





BLESSED MAFALDA OF PORTUGAL

Tradition ascribes the foundation of the Church of Saint Genesius of Boelhe, either to the daughter of King Sancho I (k. 1185-1211), the Blessed Mafalda (1195-1256), or to her grandmother, Queen Mafalda (1125-1157), the wife of King Afonso Henriques (k. 1143-1185), the first king of Portugal.

Queen Mafalda became rather famous for ordering the construction of inns and bridges, actions that were considered as works of piety and penance in the Middle Ages. She founded an inn in Marco de Canaveses that received and treated poor travellers, and tradition says she was also behind the construction of a bridge over the river Douro, in Barqueiros (Mesão Frio), and another bridge over the Tâmega, as well as the free "por Deus" [by God] passage boats of Moledo (Mesão Frio) and Porto de Rei (Resende). The foundation of the Church of Abragão (p. 152), which is also located in Penafiel, is also ascribed, either to Queen Mafalda, or to the daughter of Sancho I.

The truth is that the Blessed Mafalda was probably raised by Urraca Viegas de Ribadouro, the patroness of the monastery of Tuías (Marco de Canaveses), which was owned by her schoolmaster. This fact must have contributed to consolidate the tradition that ascribes the foundation of the Churches of Boelhe and Abragão to the Blessed Mafalda. The will of the daughter of Sancho I distributed her assets among churches and monasteries, including the assets left to the Monastery of Paço de Sousa (Penafiel) (p. 90).
