church

CHURCH OF THE SAVIOR OF CABEÇA SANTA

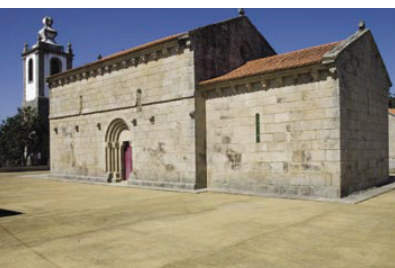CHURCH OF THE SAVIOR OF CABEÇA SANTA
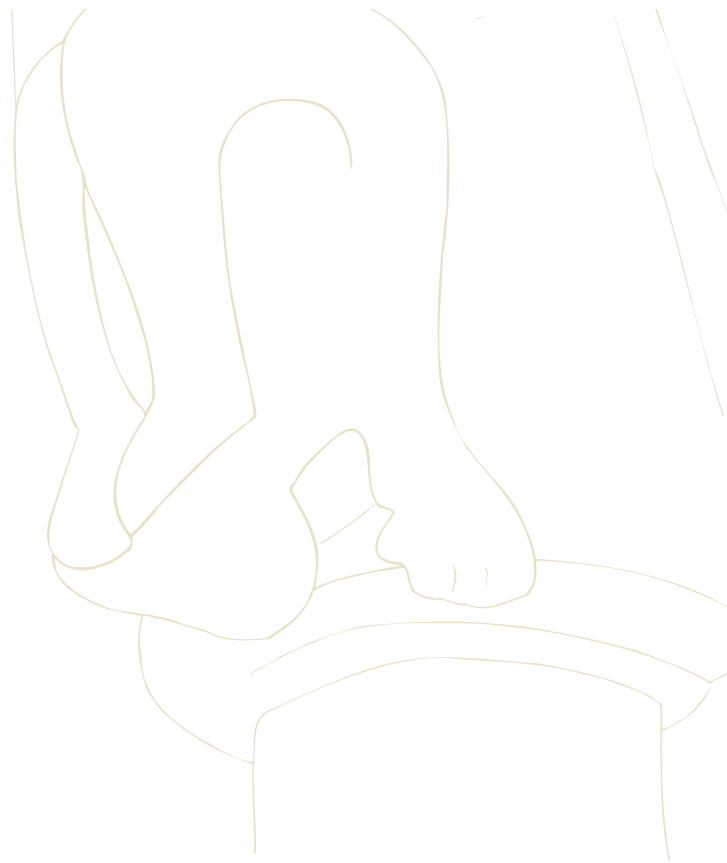
1. The church in the Middle Ages

The Church of the Savior of Cabeça Santa, located in the municipality of Penafiel, constitutes an excellent testimony of the Portuguese Romanesque architecture. The solutions adopted in this church accuse the influences of the See of Porto and of the church of Saint Martin of Cedofeita, in the same city, proving how much the artists' itinerancy favored the *journey of the forms*.

In 1258's *Inquiries*, the church is already mentioned under the designation of the Savior of the Gândara, a designation maintained until the 17th century, when it also starts to be referred to as Cabeça Santa (Holy Head), alluding to a skull kept in a silver reliquary exposed in an altar built for the purpose, in the church's nave.

Although there is no reference to the deity to whom the relic belonged, truth is that a reputation of a miracle worker, preventing several diseases and raging dog bites lured the devotion and pilgrimage of the pious, who worshiped this saint in the same day of Saint John Baptist, praying or thanking the miracles.

Jorge Cardoso, in *Portuguese Hagiology*, published in 1666 and meant to record the lives of saints and illustrious men from the kingdom of Portugal and its conquests, refers the following episode with the intention of enlightening the relic's *true* attribution:

"The name carried by the celestial man was hidden in time, but the devil has recently disclosed it. It so happened that when this worshipped relic was applied to a possessed soul, saying it belonged to the glorious Baptist, the enemy replied through his mouth: You are wrong, 'tis not his, but of another holy man who bore the same name. And although the devil is the father of lies, he seldom speaks the truth in such cases, through divine authorization"[1].

1. Formed by a single nave and a rectangular transept, the church of the Savior of Cabeça Santa epitomizes the type of temples most commonly built in Portugal during the Romanesque period.
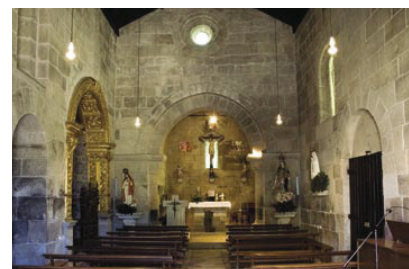

2. Nave and transept. South façades.

---

1 CARDOSO, Jorge – *Agiológio Lusitano*. (Organization, survey and indexes by Maria de Lurdes Correia Fernandes). T. III. Porto: Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto, p. 800. (original edition from 1666).

The same author records the existence and worship of thirty seven *holy heads* existing in Portugal in the 17th century. In the Middle Ages, the skulls attributed to martyrs and saints, presumed or true, were one of the most revered relics, a phenomenon that lasted throughout the entire Modern Period.

The Church of Cabeça Santa is a fine example of Portuguese Romanesque architecture. Formed by a single nave and a rectangular transept, both covered with wooden roofs, it corresponds to the most common type of temples built in Portugal in the Romanesque period.

It is also a significant testimony to the existence of teams of itinerant artists. The disposition of this church's portals and the capitals' sculpture, in the portals as in the arch separating the nave from the transept, is very similar to that of the church of Saint Martin of Cedofeita in Porto, which, in turn, presents decorative solutions very close to the ones used in the Romanesque construction of the See of Porto.

In the latter, the influence of French Romanesque from the Limoges region is visible in the capitals' sculpture, as in the way of organizing the illumination spans, and as in the design it originally featured. The transept, altered in the 18th century, was composed of a gallery with three radiating chapels and two polygonal apsioles, much in the fashion of the churches from the Limoges region, like Beaulieu, Souillac and Le Dorat. The commercial relations the city of Porto maintained, from the 12th century, with the French port of La Rochelle, as well as the existence of population centers from Limoges in that commercial city of the Southeast of France, explain the arrival of artists from that region to Portugal.

3. Both the nave and transept are covered in wood, the most common solution in the Romanesque architecture of the region between Douro and Minho.

4. West façade. The tympanum by the portal is supported by bovine heads. The desire to protect the churches' entrances, as well as the cemetery space, which sometimes occupied the space ahead, converged into sculpted figures of frightening or powerful beasts, capable of defending the entry.
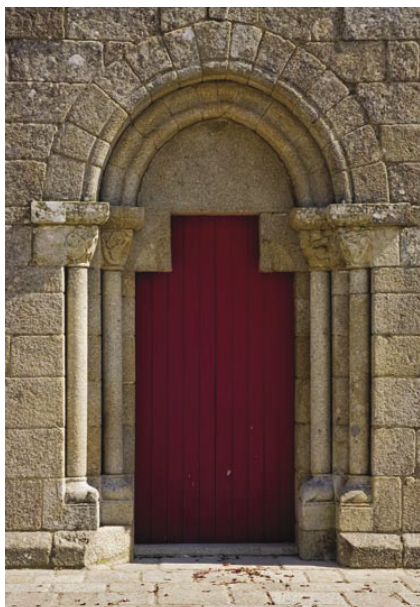
5. West portal. The capitals, very similar to those of the church of Saint Martin de Cedofeita (Porto), are a proof of the itinerancy of the artist groups working in the Romanesque workshops.

Since the mason-sculptor was guided by molds, provided to him by the master craftsman, the *magister operis*, the aforementioned itinerant character of the groups of artists has allowed a journey of the forms, clearly present in the sculpture of the Church of Cabeça Santa, which, simultaneously, features capitals as those of the cross arch, identical in everything to those of the church of Saint Martin of Cedofeita. The architectonic sculpture of the parish church of Cabeça Santa therefore results from the combination of models directly influenced by the French with typical models from the region of Porto, inspired and influenced by Pre-Romanesque sculpture.

Cabeça Santa's main portal is facing West since, as a rule of thumb, Romanesque churches were built in such a way that the transept and the top crevice illuminating it are turned east, for liturgical and symbolic reasons.
The lateral portals to the South and North, presented by almost all Portuguese Romanesque churches, had a much higher usage value than the main portal. The lateral portals served as entrance and exit in the daily services. The main portal, wider and more monumental, where a larger concentration of sculpture occurs, was mostly destined to the entrance and exit of processions, rarer and more solemn moments in the liturgical calendar.
In the religious construction of the Romanesque period, the West portal was devised as the *Gate of Heaven* or the *Portico of Glory*. The intention of protecting the church entrances as well as the cemetery
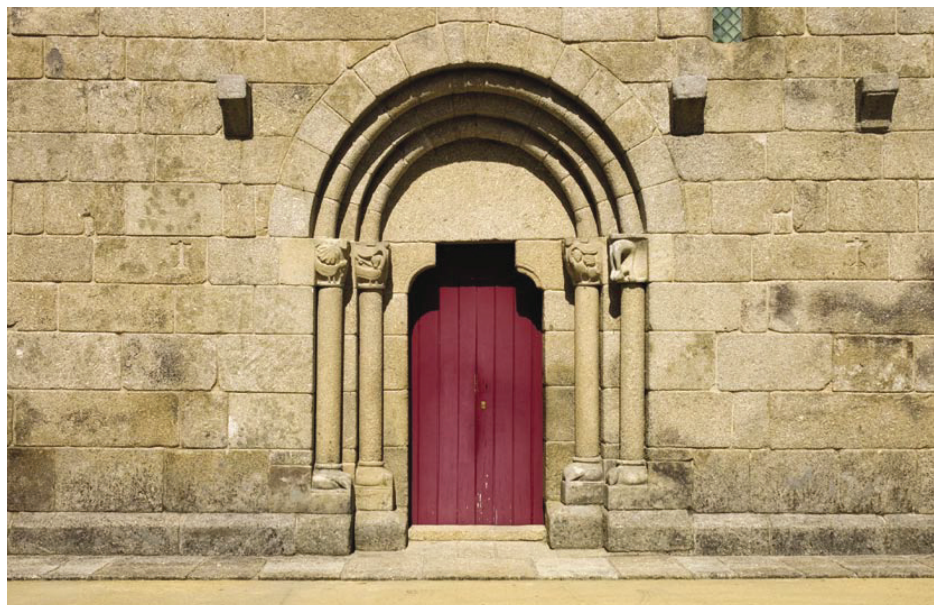
6. South portal.!
solutions ad!
region of!
La Rochelle since the 12th century.

space, often located in front, gave rise to the representation of sacred themes in the portals, but also to the inclusion of other elements, as the sculpture of frightening or powerful animals and signs of magical value, that is, sculpture motives like crosses and sun wheels, capable of defending the entrances and protecting the church from all evil.

In this context, the Church of Cabeça Santa's West portal features a tympanum with bovine heads. In other capitals there are disputing birds, in a scheme well to the Romanesque taste, adapting figure to architecture, that is, to the capital's echinus. In one of the capitals is a lying character, trapped by an animal's mouth, reporting to the idea of man entrapped by sin.

The bell tower, in the space in front of the church, in the edge of the parvis, was rebuilt there under the restoration campaigns endeavored by the DGEMN in the mid 20th century. It used to be included to the North, in the main façade's line-up, and its volumetric evolved towards the north façade.

In spite of presenting a medieval construction in the lower part, the tower's upper part matched an arrangement from the Modern Period, a factor which dictated its demolition. However, to avoid conflict with the population, the restoration team chose to rebuild the tower.

Bell towers, which, in the Romanesque period either border one or both façades, or are placed over the main façade, or as an autonomous belfry, laterally or facing the church, have a symbolic and practical value. They indicate from afar that the territory in which the churches are built is occupied and taken, granting prestige and safety, and furthermore housing the bells, whose toll is of utmost importance in the lives of the communities.

7. South portal. Capitals without abacus.
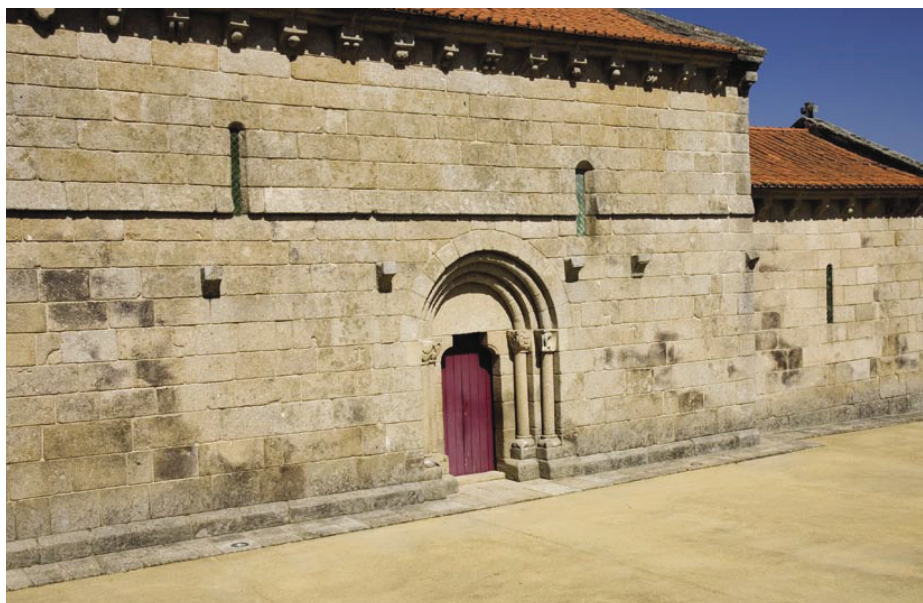
9. South façal

8. South portal. Capitals. The depiction of acrobats is frequent in Romanesque sculpture. Since sculpture is performed in architectural pieces, this theme fits the occupied space very well.

In the *Parish Memories*, written in 1758, there is mention to a tower that is "*quite tall and thick made of stone*". In this period, the tower fulfilled the duty of a bell tower, and was already in a somewhat decadent state. Presumably, the lower part of a masonry construction located next to the South side of the parvis, currently adapted to a residential house, constitutes the remains of the aforementioned tower.

The South façade still features corbels and a drip course, destined to draining rain water, testifying to the presence of a one-story high roofed porch. These porches, adjacent to the churches' lateral façades and, sometimes, the main façade, as in the case of the church of Saint Peter of Ferreira (Paços de Ferreira), were meant for various purposes. These were spaces destined for cemeteries and the celebration of funerary rites, as well for assemblies and shelter. In the Romanesque period, church was usually the parish's noblest building. Asides from its sacred and liturgical duties, the church, being the parish's focal point, was the scenery for many of the population's daily activities, namely meetings, notarial acts and commercial trade, taking place in the porches.

In the church's parvis, in granite flourishing, there are three graves excavated in the rock. One of the graves, individual, presents a trapezoidal head and ends, at the feet, in a rounded shape (it was meant for an adult). The other two graves are contiguous. One is severely mutilated in its upper half, making it impossible to establish the typology of the head, while the other shows a horseshoe transept arch[2].

Against the wall, to the south of the Church of Cabeça Santa, there are also three medieval sarcophaguses with their respective lids[3].

Influences from the See of Porto and the church of Saint Martin of Cedofeita, aforementioned, indicate that this parish church is probably dated from the first decades of the 13th century[4].

The interior of the Church of Cabeça Santa is currently almost devoid of color, altars, paintings, images or any other type of liturgical and devotional furniture.

In the cross arch, the capitals, also very similar to those of Saint Martin of Cedofeita, are the sole decorative aspect. What is most outstanding, in the nave, as in the transept, is the fine quality granite apparel, as is usual in Portuguese Romanesque. Nevertheless, one should observe that this air of total sobriety results from the restoration campaign of the 20th century, a subject we will approach later.

The nave's single wide room, in a renovated church, is highly distant from the specialized - and even cramped – space of the medieval temples. The uniform expression of Portuguese medieval churches and their closed character, giving the idea of a construction started and finished with the same formal consistency, corresponds, for the most part, to the result of restoration works, methodologically centered in recovering the *original* form. The construction materials *replaced* during the works from the second half of the 19th and in the first half of the 20th century, tended to standardize the monuments, in their texture and finishing.

A restored Romanesque or Gothic church presents a systematic and uniform usage of granite (or limestone) in the walls, covering and pavement. The famous cult of visible stone, highly valued in those restorations, and still dominant in many renovation works, especially in parish churches and residences,

10. The triumph arch's capitals adopt models from the church of Saint Martin of Cedofeita (Porto).

2 BARROCA, Mário Jorge – *Necrópoles e sepulturas medievais de Entre-Douro-e-Minho*. Porto: Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto, 1987, p. 166.
3 IDEM, *ibidem*, p. 377.
4 ALMEIDA, Carlos Alberto Ferreira de – *História da Arte em Portugal. O Românico*. Lisboa: Publicações Alfa, 1986, p. 95.

11. The church of Cal
throughout the Modern Period.

stems from the cherishing and general admiration for the quality of the masonry, the walls' isodomics, the panels' apparel, in an exaltation of the masonry work and its eternity.

We know, however, through documentation, that the materials used in one same church were very diversified, whether regarding construction materials or coatings, thus explaining their chromatic diversity. Altars, baptismal fonts, tombs, among others, presented a variety of solutions in the chosen raw material and decorative coatings, giving the churches' interior a rather different look from the one presented today.

Constant maintenance, replacement and renovation works in the various parcels of churches, whose motivation is quite varied, either restricted to the necessary construction maintenance, or driven by devotional and catechistic reasons, are elements that turned the church (or chapel) into an object in permanent mutation.

There is frequent record of partially unfinished buildings, works extending throughout many years, as is frequent the mention to churches and chapels in very poor condition, where it rained due to the many problems deriving from lack of roof maintenance and where the pavements, in raw rock or in dirt, were easily degraded.

The altarpieces, the funerary chapels or the mere arcosolia housing a tomb, the individual and family chapels founded inside the churches and doted with altars in time, paintings and liturgical vestments, the space that is prepared and solemnized to better emphasize the baptismal font make the church's nave a space for a series of spots destined to several devotions.

It is not easy to recreate the interior of a Romanesque church, since most of the elements that have survived so far, such as altars, images, paintings, coatings, among others, are a fruit of changes in cult and devotion introduced during the long period that separates us from the Middle Ages. Only the documentation and a few of the rare remaining traces provide a clue on how the churches' interiors were not as bare as they currently are.

The altar, as the sacred core it always was, in the Romanesque period was usually in the transept's first flight, allowing people to circulate around it. We know that in the Old See of Coimbra the main altar was enhanced and covered by a baldachin and a canopy sustained by four columns, from which a silver dove hung to watch over the Eucharist reserve[5].

Over the altar table[6] and in a contrary tendency to what was seen in the High Middle Ages, there are small retables, the cross and chandeliers. In the altar face turned towards the nave, frontals were placed in an outstanding variety. They could present a sculpted slab of stone, coated and painted wood slabs with iconographic programs or botanical and geometric decoration, as the examples of the Catalan Romanesque churches show, or a coating in silver or rich fabrics like silk.

The multiplication of altars is a usual phenomenon from the Romanesque period, signaling a tendency from earlier periods. The number of private and daily masses tends to grow along the 12th and 13th centuries, with the subsequent increase of new altars and even chapels inside the church, which in turn led to the multiplication of the amount and shape of chalices, liturgical books, reliquaries, images and crosses.

Another important issue is the presence of color the temples' interior and exterior. As C. A. Ferreira de Almeida wrote, the Middle Ages adored color in church walls, since color profusion was part of the manifestation of the sacred. The portals' figures and the decorative motives gained strong hues, enhancing the themes, as a few traces in the See of Braga and in the church of Saint Mary of Ermelo (Arcos de Valdevez) testify. The colorful tapestries often covered the walls[7].

Whitewash also, frequently mentioned in late medieval documentation, would seldom cover the churches' walls, as well as architectonic sculpture itself, because it is white, luminous, and prophylactic and protects the construction materials.

Erroneously, the medieval church's archetype is always associated, in contemporary culture, to sobriety, absence of color, love of visible stone. Nevertheless, this idea is deeply wrong. The bare and monochromatic churches are, mentally and devotionally, inconceivable in the Middle Ages. [LR]
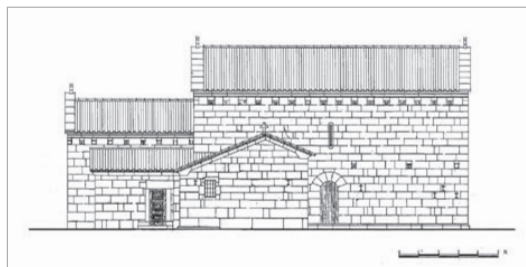
12. North side construction projections of the church of Cabeça Santa.

5 ALMEIDA, Carlos Alberto Ferreira de – *História da Arte em Portugal. O Românico*. Lisboa: Publicações Alfa, 1986, p. 48.

6 IDEM, *ibidem*, p. 48.

7 IDEM, *ibidem*, p. 49.

13. Church interior before restoration.

2. The church in the Modern Period

According to the tradition written in the 17th century, the designation Cabeça Santa (Holy Head) was due to the cult rendered "from the dawn of time" to the relic of a saint's head, whose invocation was unknown. It was kept in a sacrarium that existed in the parish church's collateral altar, next to the Gospel[8].

This relic, expression of the collective symbolism, jumpstarted great worship by the devotees of the neighboring parishes, by the successive miracles granted to those begging for its protection.

This church being annexed to the Convent of Lóios in Porto, the religious folk from this institution have collected a fragment of the Relic and took it to the city of Porto, where it was publicly exhibited in the chapel of Good Jesus belonging to the monastic church. On June 24th it was exposed to public worship and highly sought by the population.[9] The association between the liturgical calendar's date and a fragment of the human body, a head, is reminiscent of the cult of Saint John the Baptist. A fact from the traditional imaginary substantiated by the hagiographical writings of the 17th century and still testified in the following century, introduces the church of the Savior in the cult rendered to relics that delivers Portugal back to the medieval universe, the time of the church's foundation. These cults to medieval relics are recovered in the period following the Tridentine reforms, and stand as an expression of the Portuguese Baroque's religiousness. The dynamics of the collective symbolism, the cult to Cabeça Santa (the Holy Head), serves as a toponymical identity to the Savior of Gândara, the parish being named after the invocation's title (Salvador da Gândara). Currently, nothing remains as a material support to this expression of the collective imaginary. However, in 1758 the church still kept "its ancient holy Relic by the name of Cabeça Santa".

8 Cf. COELHO, Manuel Ferreira – "O Concelho de Penafiel nas Memórias Paroquiais de 1758". In *Penafiel – Boletim Municipal de Cultura*. 3rd Series. Nos. 4-5. Penafiel: Câmara Municipal de Penafiel, 1989.

9 SANTA MARIA, Francisco – *O Ceo aberto na terra. Historia das Sagradas Congregações dos Cónegos Seculares de S. Jorge em Alga de Venesa e de S. João Evangelista em Portugal*. Lisboa: Officina de Manoel Lopes Ferreyra.

2.1. Chapel of Our Lady of the Rosary

The currently known Chapel of Our Lady of the Rosary, whose access is made through the church's nave, defines an autonomous space of rectangular design and stands as a distinctive landmark of the medieval structure's transformation caused by the Post-Tridentine alteration of the liturgical ritual. According to documentation from 1758, it is known that it was then called Chapel of the Holy Sacrament, an invocation that largely explains its edification in this church's nave. In fact, the treasuring and dignification of the cult of the Holy Sacrament, as that of the Lausperene, in 17th and 18th century Portugal, has justified this autonomous construction.

14. Chapel of Our Lady of the Rosary before restoration.

15. Chapel of Our Lady of the Rosary. 17th century.

From the decorative point of view, this space presents itself as rather balanced and refined as far as the adopted language goes: the *sui generis* aesthetic taste of the Portuguese Baroque is omnipresent, particularly in the peculiar association between gilding, tiling and blackwood with applications of yellow metal to the lathed railings defining this chapel's separation from the church's nave.
Stylistically, the gilding pertains to the national current, especially regarding the adopted language, where botanical motives of vine leaves and grapes, reminding the Eucharist Liturgy, are mixed with birds, symbol of the Mystery of Resurrection, and children. However, there still is a certain attachment to a structure of Mannerist taste for the low depth of the retable structure and, mostly, for the carving of niches to include imagery. From the imagery exposed in the retable, our particular attention goes to the image of *Our Lady with Child*, in upholsted and polychrome wood. It is a fine piece from the 17th century.

16. Chapel of Our Lady of the Rosary. Detail of the sectioned roof.
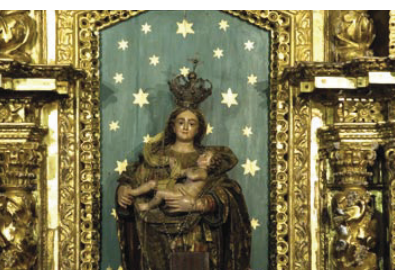
17. Our Lady of the Rosary. Upholsted and polychrome wood sculpure. 17th century.

The golden surface spreads throughout the ceiling, according to a sectioned structure in embossed gilding, covering the perfect arch that signals the entrance to this space.

Articulated with the gilding is the glazed tile that fills the remaining surfaces. Thus, this space's lateral projections are totally coated by a ceramic tiling in a patterned composition, the repetition motive being a 4x4 pattern, dating from the mid 17th century[10]. The composition grows over a blue background, and has as main rotation axis a cross painted in blue and white with acanthuses placed in the diagonal, between its arms, united by an orange field. A white ribbon frames the cruciform element, bordering it with a perfect circle which, in turn, derives to a secondary repetition motive consisting in a diamond filled with the representation of an open flower. Yellow interlocking establishes the connection between repeated modules. In both projections, a border of yellow and blue flowers painted over a white background confines the *tapestry*.

Likewise, the basing of the retable structure is also covered with polychrome tiles in a 2x2 pattern: the motive is drawn over a blue background, consisting of a play between white lacing effects with yellow botanical motives. This module's design is identical to that of the tiles existing in the Convent of Saint Mary of the Coast in Guimarães, and probably appeared from 1650 onwards[11]. As for the garnish, the surfaces feature a border of acanthuses within the same color scheme.

All the artistic elements turn the space into a particularly fetching ambiance to the pious, resulting in an ensemble of good design and aesthetic consistency. The ensemble's exuberance can be partly unraveled if we consider that this space is associated to the Brotherhood of the Holy Sacrament: generally, this brotherhood was, in Portuguese parishes, one of the most financially powerful, since it usually gathered the most illustrious members of the population, allowing this sort of works.

A micro-space of the Portuguese Baroque that outlived the intervention of the DGEMN, and stands out for its harmony and the articulation of several complementary arts. [MJMR/DGS]

153

3. Restoration and conservation

Following the conceptual restoration line used for Portuguese medieval religious spaces, the Church of Cabeça Santa's restoration was also based in returning the temple to its primitive trace, altered in the Modern Period by the tutors of its patronage, the congregation of the Secular Clergymen of St. John the Preacher.

This church's restoration occurred between 1936-1950, having Rogério de Azevedo and Joaquim Areal as the responsible architects[12].

The initial project developed by the DGEMN's technical team comprehended the extraction of the bell tower adjacent to the building, but its demolition collided with the interests of the local population, the architects choosing to disassemble and rebuild it by edge of the parvis. The same project also intended for the demolition of the Chapel of Our Lady of the Rosary, attached to the body of the church. Although this chapel was an element dating from the Modern Period, as the bell tower, its maintenance was

10 Identified by Santos Simões as P-462. See SIMÕES, J.M. dos Santos – *Azulejaria em Portugal no Século XVII*. 2nd Edition. T. I. Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1997, p. 85.

11 Identified by Santos Simões as P-342, p. 55.

12 *Boletim da Direcção Geral dos Edifícios e Monumentos Nacionais*. No. 64, Lisboa: DGEMN, June 1951.

18. Church of Saint the Savior of Cabeça Santa before restoration.

preferred, since it represented a testimony of the people's building effort and an element of identity and local memory. The chapel's restoration focused on the repair of the gilding and its re-gilding, replacing the glazed tiles, restoring the pieces in blackwood, replacing the missing gilded elements and building the arch pilasters.

In the sacristy the pavement in lowered tile was built, coating was made, the ceiling was repaired and the covering built.

Inside, the North door and the main chapel's crevice were uncovered, the pavement's tiling and flooring, as well as the baptismal font were built, the masonry altar and the crevice's stained glass windows were made. The choir, next to the main portico, was removed due to the lack of harmony with the remaining elements. The altars built in the Modern Period were equally removed, with the recycling and conservation of some of its carved wood decorative motives.

Recently, the Church of the Savior of Cabeça Santa was subject to maintenance works, the roofing removed and rebuilt, and the exterior leveled in the parvis, with tiled pathways. [MB]
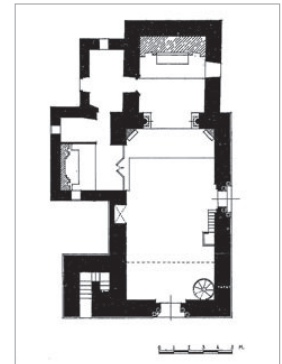
19. Map of the church before the restoration conducted between 1936 and 1950.
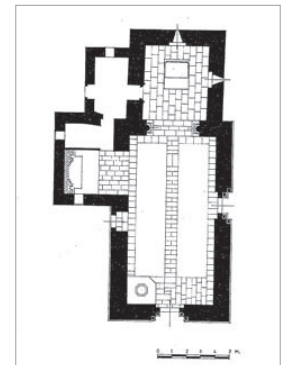
20. Map of the church after the restoration conducted between 1936 and 1950.

Chronology

10th-11th century (?) – Original construction (lost);

13th century – Edification of the Romanesque church;

16th-17th century – Construction of the lateral chapel, with tile decoration and gilded retable;

17th-18th century – Construction of the bell tower;

1937 – Restoration promoted by the DGEMN, comprehending: complete removal of exterior walls and its reconstruction, covering crevices with paneling, restoring two crevices with spiked masonry;

1938 – Cleaning and rebuilding the covering, repairing wall joints, laying masonry pavement;

1939 – Conclusion of the restoration: cleaning masonry, closing joints, rebuilding crevices, door, assembling the roof, covering, disassembling the altar;

1940 – Several works in the main chapel's covering, doors and tiling;

1942 – Restoration comprehending: general renovation of the sacristy and the lateral chapel's arch, and placing the 17th century railing; transferring the main altar to Saint Vincent of Irivo;

1950 – Restoration works: laying new floor in the church's two lateral bodies, repairing the guard spaces, restoring the lateral chapel, sacristy and façades; moving the bell tower; electrical installation and general repair to the parvis;

1951 – Modification of the electric system, maintenance of the covering;

1966 – Transferring the main altar;

1973 – Conservation in the roofing, doors, window joineries and sound electrical installation;

1985 – Repairing the covering;

2003/2004 – Conservation and enhancement of the building within the *Route of the Romanesque of the Sousa Valley* project.