

47.

## CHURCH OF SAINT MARY OF GONDAR



Lugar do Mosteiro  
Gondar  
Amarante



41° 15' 48.73" N  
8° 1' 53.19" W



+351 918 116 488



x



Saint Mary  
15<sup>th</sup> August



Public Interest Building  
1978



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Located halfway up a hill, the small Church of Gondar, dedicated to the Virgin Mary, is the symbol of a long and complex historical background common to most parish temples from the medieval period. Its foundation is associated with the Gundar lineage. This lineage, which controlled a significant geographic and social perimeter within the surrounding region, used the Marian abbey to shelter its daughters and turned it into a family pantheon. For centuries, the surname of this lineage was a symbol of domination and power. However, despite this connection, the female abbey was extinct early in the Modern Period, in 1455, by the bishop of Porto, Fernando da Guerra (episc. 1416-1418), when he decided to take forward the moralisation and rehabilitation of the decaying monasteries. When it became secular, its first parish priest was Pedro Afonso. In 1470, he was responsible for offering the sculpture that became a totemic element for the community: the sitting Virgin breastfeeding Her Son (which is currently in the new parish church). This image is locally known as Our Lady of the Chair. Surely built in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, if not in the following century, the Romanesque Church of Gondar still shows its

## SAINT MARY OF GONDAR

The image of the sitting Virgin Mary breastfeeding the Son she is holding in her arms, according to Mário Barroca's study "it is part of the small number of Portuguese 15<sup>th</sup>-century images with inscriptions identifying the benefactor". On the right side of the chair where the Virgin is sitting we find the following engraving: Pero Afonso mandou fazer [na Era de M] CCCC LXX Anos [Pero Afonso commissioned in the year [M] CCCC LXX].

The inscription has a double importance: it allows identifying the donor (Pedro Afonso) and it associates the piece with a manufacturing date (Era of 1470).

This image marks the transition between the extinction of monastic space and its transformation into a secular church, and also the intersection of different aesthetic senses, feelings and sensitivities: from the Romanesque sitting and hieratic Virgins (in majestic poses) to the standing Mother who is breastfeeding her Son, a naturalistic expression of from the Gothic period.



originally monastic nature: the corbels that punctuate its external walls prove the existence of structures attached to both sides of the Church. Anyway, given the scale of the Church that we see today, we are quite sure that the monastic complex of Gondar was a small one. We stand, therefore, before a Church composed of a single nave and a rectangular chancel. The Romanesque design was almost entirely preserved, despite the transformations it underwent throughout the Modern Period.

It was canonically oriented (chevet to the east and front to the west) and its main façade is extremely simple. The portal reveals the late nature of the building: it has no columns, the archivolt rests on the walls and the tympanum is plain. The portal's only decorative element is precisely the outer archivolt where we may appreciate the chequered motif that was so well-loved by the Por-

tuguese Romanesque style. The portal is surmounted by a small oculus with a grid composed of five circles placed according to the arms of a cross. So, these two elements tell us of a late chronology that was already closer to the upcoming Gothic period than to the full-blown Romanesque style, so we should understand this Church of Gondar as one of those buildings that have been identified using the peripheral designations of "resistance Romanesque", "rural Gothic", or even "Proto-Gothic" style.

The structure of the lateral portals, which are identical, confirms this chronology. On both elevations, in addition to the two narrow crevices that interrupt the walls, thus allowing the interior lighting of the sacred space, we are still able to see a series of rather well-preserved modillions supporting a cornice with two volumes. The modillions have predominantly square



profiles and are either plain or have simple decorations from which we highlight the rolls and the multiplicity of spheres.

Over the end of the south elevation, close to the western façade, the belfry follows the model of Romanesque bell towers: two perfectly round arches shelter the bells. The only decorative elements we find there are the impostes - which are composed of a simple torus and extend along the entire structure - and the terminal pinnacles that, shaped as pyramids, surmount the building's angles.

Although we know that there were several altarpieces and mural painting ensembles in this space during the Modern Period, the truth is that today its walls and floors are dominated by granite. We can sense its simplicity. This is due to the fact that this Church was no longer used for worshipping purposes after the construction of the new parish church in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, which led to a gradual abandonment that was only hindered by a deep restoration intervention carried out in the second half of the 1980's, which sought to restore the architectural integrity and the legibility of the Church of Gondar as a monument and a sacred space.

Regarding the altarpieces, we only know the one that used to be the main altarpiece, which is currently kept in the new parish church. It is a woodwork structure that fits into the so-called National Style [1690-1725]. Regarding the mural paintings, the only one that survived is decorating the intradorsum of the niche on the apse's back wall, in the section





added to it in order to accommodate the back part of the altarpiece. Here we are still able to admire traces of paintings where we can identify grotesque figures surrounding the cartouches. The triumphal arch may have been a result of the same 18<sup>th</sup>-century campaign, taking into account its Tuscan pilasters, as well as the rectangular window with an iron grille that was opened on the chevet's south elevation. The pulpit, of which only the access stairs and the classicist console supporting its base remain, was probably completed with a wooden parapet. To-

day, this pulpit has a sculpture of Saint Francis of Assisi.

Inside, to the left of the nave's main entrance, we see the font whose polygonal granite bowl is supported by an also polygonal base. There are several granite pieces deposited here: fragments of tombstones, a holy water font with a budded bowl that, perhaps, already belongs to the Baroque period. On the Epistle side, next to the portal, there is a round arch niche embedded in the wall. It probably accommodated an altarpiece. Today, it has a granite copy of a sculpture of Saint Mary of Gondar.

## OVELHINHA – "ALDEIA DE PORTUGAL"

In Gondar, just over two km away from the Romanesque church, discover Ovelhinha, which is classified as Village of Portugal. During the French invasion, this village was torched, and today it is still possible to find the ruins of some of the houses that were destroyed at the time. In Ovelhinha, on the bank of the river Fornelo, we highlight the granite houses, the manor houses, and the chapel of Saint Amarus.

