



monastery

MONASTERY OF SAINT MARY OF POMBEIRO



1. The Monastery in the Middle Ages

The Monastery of Saint Mary of Pombeiro, located in the municipality of Felgueiras, was one of the most important Benedictine monasteries of the lands between the Douro and Minho rivers, both in diversity and in building program. The choice of location still indicates how the monastic communities sought to build in the best farming lands, in plain areas, abundant in wet crops and in water.

The oldest documented reference known concerning Pombeiro is from 1099, recording the existence of a *Cenovio Palumbario*¹. However, it is even more significant for the understanding of this monastic house's history the document from February 10th 1102 regarding a donation made by founder D. Gomes Echiegues and his wife Gontroda in favor of their monastery of Pombeiro.



1. The Monastery of Saint Mary of Pombeiro was one of the most important Benedictine monasteries of the region between Douro and Minho rivers.

¹ MOREIRA, Padre Domingos A. – “Freguesias da Diocese do Porto. Elementos Onomásticos Altomedievais”. In *Boletim Cultural da Câmara Municipal do Porto*. 2^a Series, Vols. 5/6, Porto, 1987-88, p. 50.

The monastery's patron family was the Sousões, a powerful family of knights and noblemen, whose heads of lineage often fulfilled the duty of main court squire² and were the first donatories of the Lands of the Sousa, from D. Gomes Aciegas to Gonçalo de Garcia de Sousa (1250-1286), the last Sousão and governor of this Land.

On August 1st 1112, D. Teresa grants a Land Charter to the monastery, turning it into a privileged land with a judicial system of its own run by its abbot³.

An older foundation is traditionally attributed to Saint Mary of Pombeiro, backing the date to 1059. Although Alexandre Herculano considered this document to be false, it is still quoted as authentic. J. A. Coelho Dias has already clarified that the document was intentionally forged by the monastic community with the intent of certifying their monastery's ancient roots and the subsequent rights⁴.

Pombeiro is inserted in a territory where other Benedictine monasteries were built. In the same region, other monastic houses following the Rule of Saint Benedict were built during the Middle Ages, such as the Savior of Travanca (Amarante), Saint Michael of Bustelo (Penafiel), the Savior of Paço de Sousa (Penafiel), and Saint Peter of Cête (Paredes).

As it is known, it was in these monastic dwellings that kings and noblemen sojourned and pilgrims benefited from shelter and assistance. It is important to note that these buildings are located between important medieval roads – one went from Porto to Trás-os-Montes through the port of Amarante, and another departed from Beira, through Lamego, crossing the Douro river in Porto de Rei, and heading to Guimarães and Braga. "Therefore, the Monastery of Pombeiro was in the geographic epicenter of these roads, becoming a support center for travelers and pilgrims"⁵.

Thanks to the donations by its patron family and to contributions from worshippers, Pombeiro became a powerful nucleus, extending its property to Vila Real. So influent that it was endowed with real estate and patronages, achieving a total of 37 churches over which it had the right of presentation and to collect rents and taxes, attaining an annual income of 25.000 cruzados, a patrimony which made this institution a coveted potency⁶.

This wealth was decisive to the construction of such a monumental and majestic church. It seems to have been during the rule of Abbot D. Rodrigo (1252-1276) that the monastery attained its architectonic peak. This abbot is credited with the construction of the lost galilee where the arms of the old Portuguese aristocracy were painted, as Friar Agostinho de Santa Maria has recorded.

The construction of the Church as it is today, although highly renovated in the 17th and 18th centuries, corresponds to the work of the Romanesque period, probably initiated in the last quarter of the 12th century, but only finished in the first decades of the 13th century. So seem to indicate the typology of the rosette in the West façade and the West portal's sculpture and projection.



2. The Modern period restoration has not altered significantly the erected nucleus.



3. The Monastery's location indicates, to this day, how the monastic communities sought to build their monasteries in the best farming lands.

2 LENCART, JOANA – *O Costumeiro de Pombeiro. Uma comunidade Beneditina no século XIII*. Lisboa: Editorial Estampa, 1997, pp. 46-47.

3 DIAS; Geraldo J. A. Coelho – *O Mosteiro de Pombeiro e os beneditinos nas origens de Felgueiras*, "Felgueiras – Cidade". Felgueiras: Pelouro da Cultura da Câmara Municipal de Felgueiras. Year 1, No. 1, June 1993, p. 44.

4 IDEM, *ibidem*.

5 IDEM, *ibidem*.

6 LENCART, JOANA – *O Costumeiro de Pombeiro. Uma comunidade Beneditina no século XIII*. Lisboa: Editorial Estampa, 1997, p. 47.



5. In spite of the Modern period's restoration, the church's structure corresponds to the Romanesque construction, with the exception of the main chapel, erected in 1770.



6. Nave of the Epistle. The semi-circular apse at the end of the nave corresponds to the original Romanesque construction.

1568's *Inquiry* leaves no doubt regarding the existence of the galilee, but it might be appropriate to question its magnificent monumentality, suggested by Friar Leão de São Tomás' description, always very eulogistic about the monastic houses of his Order. The repetition of that description in other works from the Modern Period and its acceptance by some authors who have written about the subject have influenced our expectations regarding its size and apparatus.

There are many examples in Portuguese Romanesque architecture of traces or news regarding these ante-churches of funerary purpose. The Monastery of the Savior of Paço de Sousa (Penafiel) had a *corporal* attached to the church's North façade. In Saint Christine of Serzedelo (Guimarães) remains the totality of a funerary ante-church, and a similar covered space existed in Sanfins de Friestas (Valença), prior to the restoration that demolished it in 1935. There are traces of galilees in front of the façade in Saint Peter of Ferreira (Paços de Ferreira) and in Freixo de Baixo (Amarante). All these examples report to single nave churches, hence, with a less grandiose building program than Pombeiro, and only covering the transept with a stone vault, reserving the less expensive and skillful wood cover for the body of the church and the galilee.

In the Holy Cross of Coimbra, before the renovation from the Manueline period, D. Afonso Henriques and D. Sancho I were buried in the tower's porticated and vaulted narthex preceding the church portal of that monastery of Clerics Regular of Saint Augustine, founded in 1131.

In Saint Mary of Alcobça, the royal pantheon would also be built at the entrance to the temple, next to the main door. In J. C. Vieira da Silva's opinion, this situation with the funerary porticos was more usual in

the Benedictine monasteries, and the designation of galilee itself adopted in the Iberian Peninsula reports to its funerary purpose. This spot marked the end of the ritual procession in memory of the Passion and Resurrection of Christ conducted by monks on Sundays in the monasteries who adopted the Rule of Saint Benedict. After crossing the cloister's wings, they would exit through a communicating door to the portico in front of the church, where they would celebrate Christ's final apparition to the Apostles in a mountain in Galilee, before the Ascension. According to the same author, that porch was named *galilee* in clear rapport with the belief in Resurrection upon Final Judgment¹¹.

The exact location of the celebrated galilee of Pombeiro is therefore an open subject, particularly considering that recent archaeological excavations under the supervision of the IPPAR appear to have revealed traces of its existence.

It should be considered, however, that the space occupied by the towers in the longitudinal direction is an exact match to the size of the church's flights, which certifies the possibility that the former galilee dictated the size of the towers, with the possibility that these were built in the exact alignment of the narthex's foundations.

The construction of the towers between the late 16th century and the first quarter of the 17th century would lead to the renovation of the façade with the intent of providing more light to the temple and allowing the construction of a wide chancel and its organ. In the triennium of 1719/1722, the wall between the two towers and the respective rosette, framed in a large window as in the See of Porto, was moved forward, becoming aligned with the towers and thus structuring a new façade, with niches for the images of *Our Lady*, the church's devotional saint, and *Saint Benedict* and *Saint Scholastica*, patrons of the Benedictine Order. It was topped by a front in the fashion of the Baroque period.

Concerning the church transept, documentation assures that the main chapel was fully rebuilt in 1770. Nevertheless, what is most relevant here is the fact that we know that the Romanesque apse was semicircular, as the apsidioles. A previous renovation carried out around 1722 had demolished "*the half orange, in which the old main Chapel ended*"¹².



7. South apsidiole. The transepts with apse and step apsidioles, of semi-circular design, are common in the programs for churches bearing three naves in the region between Douro and Minho rivers.

The completely Romanesque transepts with semicircular chapels would have become frequent in the region between the Douro and Minho rivers in the second quarter of the 12th century. This current suits the theatrical taste of the new Roman liturgy, imprinting another depth in those spaces.

In the building programs of the three-nave churches from the 13th century, the system of transept with apse and apsidioles in platforms and of semicircular shape, internally and externally, is more frequent than that of the squared chapels.

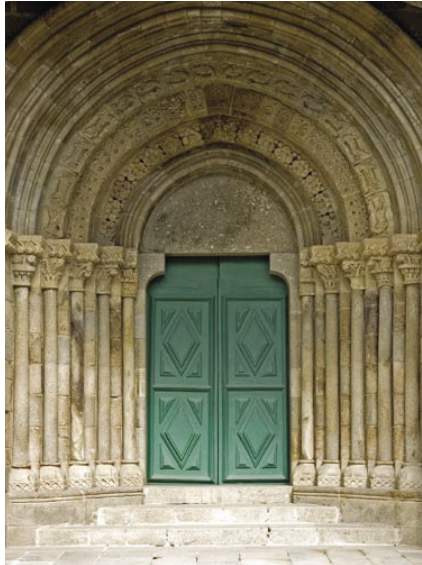
Between the Douro and Minho rivers, besides from the example of Saint Mary of Pombeiro, one finds that organization and transept covering system in the churches of the Benedictine monasteries of Saint Peter of Rates (Póvoa de Varzim), the Savior of Travanca (Amarante), the Savior of Paço de Sousa (Penafiel) and the Savior of Ganfei (Valença). The Old See of Coimbra and the Collegiate of Santiago in the same city also feature a similar arrangement, as the See of Lisbon would before the construction of a deambulatory in the 14th century following D. Afonso IV's orders, and the church of the Savior of Castro de Avelãs (Bragança), later on restored from ruin.

11 SILVA, José Custódio Vieira da – *O Panteão Régio do Mosteiro de Alcobaça*. Lisboa: IPPAR, 2003, p. 17.

12 MEIRELES, Fr. António da Assunção – *Memórias do Mosteiro de Pombeiro*. Lisboa: Academia Portuguesa da História, 1942, p. 66.



8. Apsiole. The arch cornice set in corbels finds parallels in the churches of the Monasteries of Saint Peter of Ferreira and the Savior of Paço de Sousa, among other Romanesque temples of the Sousa Valley.



9. West portal. This portal's construction projection and sculpture display a mix of several *dialects* of the Romanesque from between the Douro and Minho.

Just like in Pombeiro, Rates, Paço de Sousa, Travanca and Ganfei, the Romanesque apse was modified in the Modern Period, having kept the essential of the first straight flight in Rates, Travanca and Paço de Sousa only.

Since the single nave churches represent 90% of the Portuguese Romanesque churches¹³, the three nave temples whose Romanesque construction has reached our age are highly valued, and so they were in the chronicles from the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, where the greatness in their making is always praised. Between the Douro and Minho, besides from the Sees of Porto and Braga, the aforementioned specimens of Ganfei, Rates, Travanca, Paço de Sousa and Pombeiro feature three naves, also adopting the same solution in the transept, which, as we have seen, was aligned with the body of the naves. Therefore, the transept is only distinguished in height and/or in the length of the flight.

The cover of the naves displays two different approaches. In Ganfei, only wood is used, as in Saint Peter of Rates. Nonetheless, this church might have been primarily designed with diaphragm arches in mind, like the See of Braga, Travanca, Rates, Paço de Sousa and Pombeiro. In these, the transversal diaphragm arches structure the walls and serve as support for the roofing framework. The cruciform pillars, with adjacent half columns, hold the weight of the diaphragm arch and the forming arches.

This solution reaches the Gothic period from the North and has strong precedents in Pre-Romanesque architecture¹⁴. The cover with diaphragm arches further segments the flights, whether in height as visually, dividing the space and blocking the entrance of light. This is why it revives the visibly hierarchic and

13 ALMEIDA, Carlos Alberto Ferreira de – *O Românico. História da Arte em Portugal*. Lisboa: Editorial Presença, 2001, p. 79.

14 IDEM, *ibidem*, p. 79.



10. Composed of □
the monastic church of Paço de Sousa. The decoration from the Baroque period has not altered the naves' structure.

darkened space, usual in a mystery liturgy already visible in the Visigoth period and much emphasized in the construction of Mozarab temples.

The Church of the Monastery of Saint Mary of Pombeiro fits into a typology comprising three naves of three flights, platformed transept composed of stone vaulted apse and apsoles, semicircular on the inside and on the outside. The naves are covered with diaphragm arches and wood, divided with forming arches laid in cruciform pillars with adjacent columns. The transept is inscribed in the naves' planimetric, only noticeable in height and enhancing its exterior volumetric. It presents a higher central nave than the collateral ones, using a gabled roof in the first and a raised one in the latter.

Besides the example of Pombeiro, the monastic churches of Paço de Sousa (Penafiel) and Travanca (Amarante) correspond to this characterization. Note that they all belonged to Benedictine monasteries and are geographically close, displaying certain building and decorative features of a late Romanesque with traits of an already Proto-Gothic nature, namely in the size and in the framing of the rosettes of Pombeiro and Paço de Sousa, once the railing of the latter could not serve as a comparative model because it is a fruit of the restoration completed in 1939.

In Pombeiro, the axial portal is an example of outstanding sculpture concerning the archivolts, one of which adopting voussoirs with the sculpture usually used in capitals, following the portals of the See of Braga and Saint Peter of Rates, from whence this current is forged.

According to C. A. Ferreira de Almeida, Pombeiro is an imposing testimony of regional Romanesque architecture, featuring a mix of all the Romanesque *nuances* from Minho and the late variant from the South of the Lima river: archivolts and palms influenced in Braga and floral themes from the Proto-Gothic period. In spite of mutations suffered in time, the church of Pombeiro is still an excellent testimony of the Romanesque architecture where influences of the See of Braga and the Basin of the Sousa are conjugated.



The portal's columns are supported by a plinth, a common approach seen in other Romanesque churches in the Sousa Valley region. The superbly executed capitals of botanical inspiration show a highly crafted skill in granite sculpture and represent the best that was made in this region. There are similarities in the Churches of the Savior of Unhão (Felgueiras) and Saint Peter of Ferreira (Paços de Ferreira). The impost blocks, made of simplified palms, support six archivolts, three of which of Proto-Gothic framework; the remaining ones are characterized by the sculpted motives. In certain specimens we find confronting animals, as in Braga. Others feature palms and animal heads from whose mouths spring ribbons, identical to an exemplar from Veade (Celorico de Basto), and others feature quite salient floral decoration with highly detailed relief.

In the remaining portions of the Romanesque cornice, the arcatures supporting it, as well as some corbels, have similar examples in the Churches of Saint Vincent of Sousa (Felgueiras), the Savior of Fonte Arcada (Póvoa de Lanhoso) and of Saint Peter of Ferreira (Paços de Ferreira). The exterior organization of the lateral chapels also bears resemblance to these two churches.

The façade maintains the primitive rosette, rather wide and Proto-Gothic in style, with an identical structure to Paço de Sousa's and with a similar framework to the rosette of the See of Porto.

On the other hand, the lateral projections follow schemes from the Modern Period, that is, they show typical scenographic approaches from the schemes used in Rococo architecture and decoration.



12. West portal. Archivolts' capitals and voussoirs.



13. West portal. Capitals.



14. West portal. Voussoirs.



15. West portal. Voussoirs.



16. West portal. The theme from the first voussoir – to the right – depicts a figure on the piece's edge and two animals swallowing it by the feet, a characteristic theme for capitals adapted to voussoirs in Portugal.



17. West portal. Voussoirs.

1.1. The image of Saint Mary of Pombeiro

Currently framed in the church's main retable is the remarkable sculpture of the patron saint, *Saint Mary*, still a most devout image during the 17th and 18th centuries, as Friar Agostinho de Santa Maria assures. Back then, this image, also known as *Saint-Mary-the-Tall*, was in an individual altar in the body of the church, next to the Gospel.

It is a golden and polychrome wood sculpture of considerable proportion featuring *Our Lady* standing, holding the *Child* in her left arm and carrying a scepter (added in the 18th century, when the image was regilded) in her right hand. The *Child* is sitting on the Mother's arm as in a throne, revealing an almost adult physiognomy. This sculpture fits into the Gothic period, possibly in the late 14th century, definitively quite retouched in later periods.

Although documentation guarantees the existence of iconic sculpture in the 13th century, a phenomenon common to other European countries, in Portugal it was in the 14th century that this sort of Gothic sculpture reached its peak.

The wide spread of Gothic sculpture, whether iconic or altarpiece, should be considered in the devotional phenomenon of the time. If in the Romanesque period people would essentially pray in front of relics, these no longer satisfy the devotional needs in the Gothic period. Worshippers began to pray to sculpted or painted images.

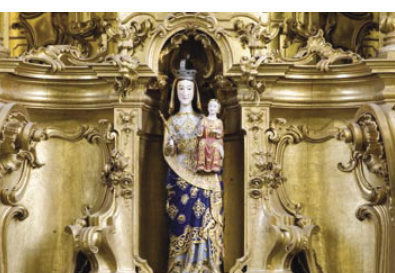
More accordingly to the Gothic period and the intent to draw the followers closer to the sacred figures of the time, we find the representation of *Our Lady* standing and holding the *Child*, usually on the left arm



18. The Chancel, inserted in the Romanesque architecture, is an element of remarkable quality from the Baroque Period.

– an iconographic type called *eleousa*, which will originate variants like *Our Lady of the Milk*, already included in the very Gothic variations of the *Virgin of the Tenderness*.

1.2. Funerary sculpture



19. Set in the church's main altarpiece, the image of Saint Mary of Pombeiro is framed in the typology of Gothic sculpture.

Funerary sculpture was a domain where deep innovation was recorded with the creation of items of great quality during the last centuries of the Middle Ages.

The presence of a tomb was seldom related to testamentary legacies dictating the practice of commemorative celebrations, that is, there was a commitment of the religious institution sheltering the tomb to insure its conservation. Well esteemed tombs and the remembrance of the deceased in dignified celebrations were a guarantee that the institution would keep being picked as a final address, thereby raising more and more testamentary legacies.

Friar Leão de S. Tomás refers the purpose of the Monastery of Saint Mary of Pombeiro: "*many illustrious people from those ancient times chose their grave in the Monastery of Pombeiro, some for the devotion they had for such a distinguished Monastery, others for the many suffrages that were conducted there every day for the Deceased & Benefactors*".

The tomb of a particularly renowned nobleman could insure the economic welfare of a monastic institution. The choice of the grave's location often coincided with interests carried out from generation to generation. The presence of the tombs of the ancestors in a certain monastic institution was also a legitimizing sign of the patrimonial rights, which is why the later generations would consider the preservation of the monuments with a renewed interest.

At the entrance of the Church of Pombeiro, in the area protected by the chancel, are two armoriated sarcophaguses covered with lying statues which, according to Mário Barroca, may be attributed to the late 13th century and the beginning of the following century.

The arks were part of an important funerary nucleus which used to be sheltered in the Monastery's galilee, a pantheon of the nobility of the lands between the Douro and Minho rivers, where some of its most illustrious peers rested. As stated above, this space was later on destroyed.

One of the sarcophaguses displays a coat of arms with four banners in the transept, occupying the section of the ark and the tombstone. On the right lateral is a rectangular relief with the iconography of a knight "on his battle horse covered with large barding" who "holds the combat escutcheon on his left arm" and "with his right hand brandishes the spear, from which hangs the insignia of kingdom's noblemen showing a coat of arms characterized by four banners". The same arms are also repeated in the sword's fist held by the statue and in the lower part of its sheath¹⁵. According to Armando de Mattos, these arms may belong to the Nóbrega, the Lima, or the Aragão family. Manuel Luís Real thinks that they might correspond to the Nóbregas or Limas. However, D. Luiz Gonzaga de Lencastre e Távora claims them as the arms of the Ribeiros. The tombstone also features a unique and original aspect, since the nobleman rests over a bed covered with a pleated sheet.

15 Cf. BARROCA, Mário Jorge – *Necrópoles e Sepulturas Medievais de Entre-Douro-e-Minho. (Séc. V a XV)*. Porto: Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto, 1987.

This address would only be used in the second lying statue of Pombeiro, the two cases being isolated in the panorama of Portuguese funerary sculpture and remembering examples from Galicia, from whence influences must have derived, in Mário Barroca's opinion.

The lying statue of the first tomb portrays a nobleman of a certain age, with long wavy hair and similar beard, whose head rests on a double pillow. This nobleman wears civilian outfit with tunic and cape, the first having vertical parallel pleats and the latter curvy pleats, denouncing a bigger concern with realism. He is wearing long spurs, in good medieval fashion. His feet are depicted in the same way, both facing the left side, accompanying the gabled volume where the statue was sculpted, and laid over the pillow. The center of the figure features a long sword held by the deceased's both hands. This weapon presents a small coat of arms in the terminal the fist's circle, a motive that is repeated in the sheath's metallic protection.

The second statue, of a later period, evinces the influence of the first, possibly carved by the same artist. A nobleman on horseback is sculpted in the ark, in a rectangular plaque and in bas-relief. The animal wears barding and the knight brandishes his spear with pendant. In spite of similarities with the first ark, this one differs in a few details. The pendant does not feature heraldry and the sculpted theme was repeated in the two lateral faces of the ark. In a similar approach to the other statue, this one presents a coat of arms featuring five fleur-de-lis in the transept and occupying the section of the sarcophagus and tombstone.

The lying statue was designed from a gabled tombstone, reminding the other exemplar of Pombeiro. The artist has portrayed once again the nobleman lying in a bed covered with a sheet, displaying the same kind of pleating. As seen before, there are common elements between the two works, leading us to think that they were designed by the same artist, albeit the presence of distinctive traits in this second statue.

The position of the statue is uncommon, since the nobleman is not lying in decubitus, as usual with most Portuguese lying statues, but resting on his left side. This statue is considered to be of lesser quality than the first, not featuring as many details nor such an intricate modulation.

The figure was portrayed with the head against a double pillow, wearing long civilian clothes, briefly pleated. The left arm is bending and the right hand holds a long sword by the sheath.

Another innovation in this statue is the fact that the weapon is not lying on top of the body but placed alongside, on the sheet covering the bed. Once again, the feet are wearing spurs and are both turned to the same side, accompanying the gabled volume of the piece where the statue was sculpted.

According to the author we have been following, the represented arms in this monument's transept section provide a positive identification of the deceased. According to Manuel Real, it is the sepulcher of D. João Afonso de Albuquerque, 1st Count of Barcelos who, as Assunção Meireles has recorded, would have chosen the Monastery of Saint Mary of Pombeiro as his final address, leaving a will from 1304. Since the arms of the Lords of Albuquerque are precisely five fleur-de-lis, everything seems to point to this tomb as that of the 1st Count of Barcelos.



20. Tumular and jacent ark.



21. Tumular and jacent ark of D. João Afonso de Albuquerque, 1st Count of Barcelos.

1.3. Epigraphies

D. Gonçalo's funerary inscription is from May 1199, engraved in a panel now embedded in the face of the Epistle, next to the cloister's access door, stating:

E(ra) M CC XXXVII [...] / MAII HIC REQUIESCE[t] [...] / GUNDISALVus Q (u) FUNDAV[it] [...]

Mário Barroca, the author of the reading and study of this inscription¹⁶, considers that the date in the epigraphy is fundamental to the identification of D. Gonçalo, excluding the possibility of it belonging to D. Gonçalo Mendes de Sousa I or his homonymous grandson. The epitaph from 1199 and its location in the temple's transept indicate that the aforementioned D. Gonçalo performed a fundamental role in the life of the monastery, having been one of its abbots.

Following the same author, the expression "*Qui Fundavit...*", used in the epitaph, helps to understand the importance D. Gonçalo would have had in the monastic community by having raised something. Considering the timeline provided with the inscription, it is likely that the author of the epitaph was referring to the opening of the Romanesque factory of Pombeiro, which completely reformed the High-Medieval temple. After this conjecture, the Romanesque work of Pombeiro would have been initiated a little sooner than some authors claim, having started in the late 12th century, aided by the donations given to the monastery. The oldest testimonies of the Romanesque renovation, following the initiative of Abbot D. Gonçalo, would reside in the main chapel area, which was destroyed by the modern renovation, circa 1722, with no known surviving elements. The Romanesque work of Pombeiro lasted a long time, reaching the first half of the 13th century as the rosette and the West portal testify.

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Engraved in two granite panels embedded in the transept's East wall, in the corner of the South apsidole, is the commemorative inscription of the deposition of Relics in the Church of the Monastery of Saint Mary of Pombeiro recording:

HEC / Sunt / RELIQUIE / QUE / HI (c) / SEDENt / PET(r)I / P(aul)I / ANDRE / IACOBI THOME

According to Mário Barroca, this inscription was supposedly engraved to commemorate and reveal the nature of the relics deposited in the Monastery altars¹⁷. Although the inscription is undated, the author considers that it suits a timeline of the late 12th century, probably associated to the Romanesque reconstruction initiated by Abbot D. Gonçalo.

The funerary inscription allusive to D. Vasco Mendes de Sousa, engraved in his tombstone is also noteworthy. Coming from the funerary galilee, it was put in the atrium by the portal upon of the demolition of the galilee. It was sheltered there in the 17th and 19th centuries. In the 20th century, it was moved to the church interior and is currently on the left side upon entering the temple, under the chancel and against the nave's North wall.

¹⁶ BARROCA, Mário Jorge – *Epigrafia Medieval Portuguesa (862-1422). Corpus Epigráfico Medieval Português*. Vol. II, T. I. Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian/Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, 2000, pp. 542-545.

¹⁷ IDEM, *ibidem*, pp. 578-579.

VI : IDUS : MARTII : OB(iit) : DO(m)NUS : VELASC[us] / MENE(n)DI : FILI(us) : COMITIS : DONNI [Sic] /
MENENDI : E(ra) : MCC 2XXX

D. Vasco Mendes de Sousa was the son of Count D. Mendo, the Sousão, and D. Maria Rodrigues Veloso, according to Mário Barroca, author of the reading and study of this inscription. D. Vasco Mendes de Sousa was not married, but begot illegitimate offspring. He held the tenancy of the Land of Jales in 1224 and of the Land of Bragança between 1233 and 1236.

Still according to the same author, the motives leading D. Vasco Mendes de Sousa to be the only one from his generation (at least from those who lived in Portugal) to be buried outside Alcobaça, in the *Pantheon* of the Sousas – as it happened with D. Gonçalo Mendes de Sousa II, deceased in 1243, D. Garcia Mendes de Sousa or de Eixo, deceased in 1239, and D. Rodrigo Mendes de Sousa, deceased in 1262, all present in Alcobaça by the Chapter Room – are unknown¹⁸.

1.4. Mural painting

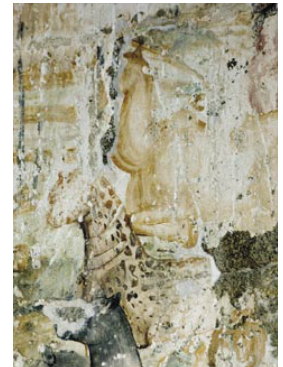
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Two mural painting programs may be witnessed in Pombeiro, whether in the apsiolate next to the Gospel, or in the apsiolate next to the Epistle, besides from the decorative bars painted in an uncovered arch in the nave, on the South side.

In spite of being attributed to the beginning of the 1530s, these mural paintings still display late Gothic treatment although they simultaneously show the adoption of new forms from the Renaissance.

The bad shape in which the paintings of the lateral chapel next to the Gospel have come to make it hard for a proper stylistic appreciation. Nevertheless, from what is left of the program, 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. Luís Urbano Afonso has a different opinion, considering this to be a representation of historic character, based in the Old Testament cycle referring to the *Sacrifice of Noah after the Flood*. The group of exotic animals to the right is accompanied by a group of human figures kneeling and holding candles to the left. In the same side, we may still observe two pig heads, one inside a basket and the other attached to the figure of Noah, which, according to the same author, is a reference to the animals sacrificed in the post-diluvium holocaust, in thanks giving for divine protection facing the destruction of the rest of mankind¹⁹, although Luís Afonso draws attention to the awkwardness of using pigs, considering that the animals usually sacrificed by Noah are pure animals like doves, ewes or lambs.

It is possible, however, that the representation of the pigs' heads refers to one of the miracles attributed to Saint Blaise. According to the legend narrating the life of this saint, a wolf took a pig from a poor woman, that animal being her only possession, and so the saint forced the wolf to return the prey. As a sign of



22. North apsiolate. Mural painting. 16th century. Albeit this painting's deteriorated state, the remaining traces seem to point to a scene allusive to Saint Blaise's life. The depiction of animals, to the right, is also worthy of note.

18 BARROCA, Mário Jorge – *Epigrafia Medieval Portuguesa (862-1422). Corpus Epigráfico Medieval Português*. Vol. II, T. I. Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian/Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, 2000, pp. 789-797.

19 AFONSO, Luís Urbano de Oliveira – *A Pintura Mural Portuguesa entre o Gótico Internacional e o Fim do Renascimento: Formas, Significados, Funções*. Lisboa: Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa, 2006, p. 310.

23. North apsiolate. Mural painting.





24 e 25. South a□
during D. António de Mello's abbacy (1526-1556).

thankfulness, the woman took the roasted pig's head and feet to the prison where Saint Blaise was incarcerated. We also add that the chapel where this mural is featured is dedicated to Saint Blaise, a highly revered saint since the Middle Ages for his miraculous healing powers.

In Paula Bessa's opinion, the paintings are most definitely from the 16th century, and it is possible to find stylistic parallels with others existing in the North of Portugal.

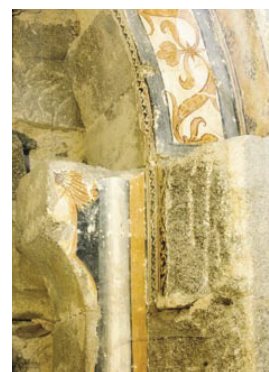
The paintings of the lateral chapel next to the Epistle are in better condition. Here, two Benedictine saints are represented and, judging from the hardly readable captions, they are *Saint Maurus* and *Saint Placid*. These two saints were disciples of Saint Benedict of Nursia, the founder of the Benedictine Order, which makes these suitable representations for a monastery of the Order.

The representation of *Saint Placid* is accompanied by a sign on the side which is also not entirely readable, however, it is possible to read the first line, albeit the lacunas: "(...) thousand (?).(?) XXX I(?)" and in the following lines "(...)sir dom/abbot dom amtonjo de Mello ordered the execution".

As the inscription indicates, the paintings representing the Benedictine saints were executed in the beginning of D. António de Mello's abbacy (1526-1556).

If only these traces remain, Friar Leão de S. Tomás, a Benedictine chronicler from the 17th century, refers in his *Benedictina Lusitana* the existence of other mural paintings lost in the meantime, namely in the chapter room allusive to Saint Gonzalo of Amarante, wearing a Benedictine habit.

Paula Bessa also stated that the paintings of Pombeiro are close in style to those of the Holy Savior of Bravães (Ponte da Barca), from 1501 or 1510, and the main chapel of the church of Saint Marinha of Vila Marim (Vila Real). In these exemplars, the succession of planes (a wall and, behind, tree silhouettes) working as indicators of spatial depth, the way of drawing and shadowing the faces, the brief drawing of the hands, the decorative framing and coiling bars are very similar.



26. South portal (partially covered).
Mural painting. The decorative bars find affinities with the churches of Vila Marim and Our Lady of Guadalupe, both patroned by the Monastery of Saint Mary of Pombeiro and located in the District of Vila Real.

However, in Pombeiro, there seems to be a more detailed treatment of the volumes. According to these stylistic parallels, it is likely that all of these mentioned paintings result from the labor of the same workshop. The remaining decorative bars in the partially uncovered portal of the nave also appear in the decoration of the main chapel of Vila Marim.

The resemblances between these items and those of Vila Marim (Vila Real), Guadalupe (Vila Real) and Saint Blaise (Vila Real) lead Paula Bessa to locate in the monastery of Saint Mary of Pombeiro as a source of mural painting made on order, also abridging the churches from the respective patronage²⁰. [LR]

2. The monastery in the Modern Period

The Monastery of Saint Mary of Pombeiro results from the strict harmonization of medieval architectonic structures with later structural or occasional additions from the Modern Period. Notice also the artistic renovations granted by the mural painting of the 16th century and the gilding craft of the 18th century. The whole presents the most emblematic and representative artistic expression of the character of the Romanesque monuments of the Sousa Valley: the aggregation and collage of new artistic repertoires to medieval structures.

The church façade, delimited by two majestic towers built in the 17th century²¹ and topped with the arms of the Benedictine Order, where the volutes, the pyramids and the coiling translate the Baroque dynamics, merges with the portal that translates the medieval heritage. A deeper transformation, from the Modern Period, is witnessed in the church's lateral projection, featuring the monumentalization and scenic apparatus as the key note. Here, a group of pilasters dictates the vertical rhythm of that façade, supporting an architectonic structure of curious design, whose purpose was to provide light to the chapels of the lateral nave. The light, the illumination of the space, was the demand that compelled the transformation of the medieval building systems. It is the best measure to evaluate the Baroque and Rococo architectonic renovations. That composition's most significant elements are the alternated curved and interrupted fronts, whose tympanum is shaped like a span, allowing sunlight to come in. The area of the false transept is witnessed in that façade with an elevation of the composition, as if defining an autonomous façade.

To the church façade's right flank is added the building that accesses the monastic dependencies, the Monastery Doorway, its main portal ennobled with a finishing that already denounces an artistic language from the Neoclassic. Composed of two floors, the upper floor opens a row of balconied windows, ennobled by the shift between curved and triangular fronts that allowed the monks to follow and participate in the festive and daily extra-cloister manifestations that took place in the Monastery's Courtyard.

20 BESSA, Paula – "Pintura mural em Santa Marinha de Vila Marim, S. Martinho de Penacova, Santa Maria de Pombeiro e na Capela Funerária Anexa à Igreja de S. Dinis de Vila real: Parentescos Pictóricos e Institucionais e as Encomendas do Abade D. António de Melo". Annex of *Cadernos do Noroeste*, 20 (1-2), Série História 3, 2003, pp. 67-95.

21 In the early 18th century, Friar Agostinho de Santa Maria already reported the existence of two towers in the façade: "*All the remaining workshops of that Monastery were rebuilt, which has not degenerated its former sumptuousity, as are the two extremely tall towers in both angles of the front, of tightly bonded masonry, regular proportion, and ordered correspondence*". See SANTA MARIA, Fr. Agostinho de – *Santuário Mariano e História das Imagens Milagrosas de Nossa Senhora, E das milagrosamente aparecidas, que se venerão em o Arcebispado Primas de Braga, & nos Bispados seus suffraganeos*. T. IV. Lisboa: Off. de António Pedrozo Galram, 1712, p. 70.



The Courtyard, or Clearing, is the open space in front of the church and Doorway. This entrance lead straight to the architectonic spaces that determined the monks' daily life: barn, chapter room, infirmary, library, refectory and dormitory, especially the Prior's quarters. These multiple edifications mirrored the monks' many duties whose organizing focal point was the cloister. The monastery's neuralgic center was also its symbolical nucleus, the true image of Earthly Paradise. The monks would roam around it in their domestic occupations, as during their spiritual practices and ascetic cleansing. The cloister is always the material and spiritual heart of the monastic unit.

In the first decade of the 19th century, Portuguese monasteries experienced troubled times due to the instability that affected Portugal upon the French invasions. These events had terrible consequences for the Religious Orders, and Pombeiro is an example, becoming one of the most affected Monasteries of the Congregation of Saint Benedict. The French troops set the Monastery on fire upon their passage through Pombeiro.

On May 13th 1809, the Monastery suffered a ravishing fire that would destroy a great part of the workshops in the monastic complex, leaving it to ruin and requiring heavy repair works concerning the architectonic structures that would never come to an end. The church was untouched. The most affected part comprehended the surroundings of the cloister.

The monks proceeded immediately to raising the decadent structures. But the times were already of decline to monastic institutions in Portugal. And although the friars of Pombeiro were still optimistic, as the building endeavor initiated in the cloister indicates, the evolution of the national panorama did not allow them to complete it. And so Pombeiro's cloister remains unfinished as a sign of times, which culminated with the extinction of the male religious orders in Portugal in 1834.

One of the four wings surrounding the cloister that was indeed finished bears witness to their commitment. Its architecture delves in the artistic repertoire of the Neoclassicism.

As a token of the extent of the post-fire restoration campaign, a record from the year of 1819 enlightens that: *"The chapter room, the Library, the Hostelry were made, a third of the cloister was made following a trace approved within four, in which seven thousand, six hundred and eighty seven thousand and five hundred, and forty reis were spent (...)*

The Receipt was fixed, lifting the Barns over three brick vaults, and opening three crevices in the wall to let air in, and around the Barns to remove the dampness that made the former Receipt useless"²².

The finished projection of the cloister is divided in two floors: the ground floor presents an arcade composed of nine spans in full arches and, in correspondence to the architectonic rhythm of the first floor, the second floor features the same number of balconied windows, finished by triangular and semicircular fronts. In the final level of the façade, an austere triangular front presents a coat of arms in the tympanum. Finishing the construction projection, a balustrade defines the alignment of the pilasters with urns.

A monastic unit like Pombeiro's, continuously inhabited by clerics since the Middle Ages till the 19th century, is an architectonic ensemble in constant mutation. The increase in the number of people living in the institution, as the structure of their economic power based in land owning and its exploration, contribute to strengthen the influence of the monastery's prestige in the underlying region. These factors justify the improvement or the artistic and liturgical renovations.

And in an institution that is aimed to serve God, the largest investment in improvement is witnessed in its church. It is important to note that the building of the monastic church of Pombeiro is the one that best articulates the medieval past that dictated the shape of the whole with three naves, false transept, apse and apsidioles, with the time in which the monastery lost its centennial purpose. Organically, the medieval space received new artistic repertoires, whether adapting it architectonically to the new liturgical rituals, or materializing transformations through the introduction of a more modern and updated visual image to the continuous evolution of the course of the arts.

2. 1. The monastery and the Order of Saint Benedict in Portugal

From the late Middle Ages, the monastic institutions witnessed a sense of a certain lassitude in the observance of the principles that governed conventual life, especially in institutions following the precepts of the Rules of Saint Benedict and Saint Augustine.

The monasteries were still active but the monks indulged in an existence without any moral and spiritual motivation. The economic prosperity attained by some houses dismissed the professed monks from the obligation of manual work imposed by the Rule, and some members of the communities even received

²² DIAS; Geraldo J. A. Coelho – *O Mosteiro de Pombeiro e os beneditinos nas origens de Felgueiras, "Felgueiras – Cidade"*. Felgueiras: Pelouro da Cultura da Câmara Municipal de Felgueiras. Year 1, No. 1, June 1993, pp. 41-52

personal income from privileges and rents. Abiding the Rule, Statutes and Constitutions was neglected, imposing a certain anarchy in daily monastic life. For example, the practices of Penance, Confession and Eucharist were not as frequent as they should, begetting a not so edifying image near the population who more closely dealt with the various monastic communities. The moral crisis of the religious orders was installed²³.

In this context, the Monastery of Saint Mary of Pombeiro was no exception: the late 14th century already brought frequent observations from visitors accusing the monks of undignified practices considering their status, namely visible in the absence of the observance of canonical hours and in the introduction of a doorman to prevent women from entering the enclosed universe. On the other hand, the abbots that cyclically took over the Monastery, scarcely committed in the management of its estate, lead the house to a certain economic stagnation, situations that plunged Pombeiro into a crisis scenario, as seen in other Benedictine houses.

Later, in the 15th and 16th centuries, another situation corroborates the dark picture of the religious orders: the placing of secular individuals foreign to the communities as chief managers, the so-called **commendatory abbots**, leading to a mismanagement of the institutions that originated deviations of the monastic patrimony and the twisting of the religious customs. Regarding the government of the institutions by commendatories, Pombeiro is particularly affected by the careless management of its physical patrimony, showing negligence in the repair and maintenance of the buildings and forcing the friars to inhabit "*low sheds covered with culm, close to the church to attend to the choir and Altar*". The management of this monastery by commendatories would have started around 1427, ending in the middle of the following century with the government of D. António, Prior of Crato²⁴.

The decadence of the Monastery as a material whole follows the decline of spiritual life. A description of the Monastery of Saint Mary of Pombeiro from 1568 conveys the state the institution's built patrimony was in²⁵. From the built complex, only the church featured a certain artistic nobilitation, since the *main chapel and the chapels of the cross are all vaulted and the remaining body is made of masonry stone*. The main chapel had a *very good and new* retable. The choir was under reconstruction. As for the sacristy, chapter room and cloister, they were *ruined and old*. Regarding the dormitory, refectory, hostelry and infirmary, these did not even exist.

According to the *Inquiry on the Life of the Monasteries in the Archdiocese of Braga conducted in 1568*, under Cardinal D. Henrique's orders, and supervised by the Archbishop of Braga, D. Friar Bartolomeu dos Mártires, this state of precariousness in the monastery is recorded.

The renovation of the monastic institutions was absolutely necessary: a situation that would occur in the mid 16th century. New religious institutions arise, and the old ones are compelled to renew their customs. In this sense, the Council of Trento assumed a decisive role, creating a set of guidelines that commanded the suppression of the commendatory abbots' rule over the houses, the total interdiction of monks to hold private property, the regulating of the monks' admission process, the abidance of absolute seclusion, among other things.

23 DIAS, José Sebastião da Silva – *Correntes de Sentimento Religioso em Portugal: Séculos XVI a XVIII*. Coimbra: Instituto de Estudos Filosóficos da Universidade de Coimbra, 1960, pp. 33-66.

24 Cf. LENCART, Joana – *O Costumeiro de Pombeiro. Uma Comunidade Beneditina no Século XIII*. Lisboa: Editorial Estampa, 1997, pp. 49-51.

25 Cf. FERRO, Adérito Gomes Ferreira Paulo – "Inquérito à vida dos Mosteiros na arquidiocese de Braga sob D. Fr. Bartolomeu dos Mártires." In *Actas do II Encontro sobre História Dominicana*. T. III. Porto: Arquivo Histórico Dominicano, 1987, pp. 161-206.

In the sense of reorganizing monastic life and following a centralizing administrative policy, the Congregation of the Black Monks of St. Benedict of Portugal is created in 1566, with headquarters in the Mother Abbey of Tibães. All Portuguese Benedictine monasteries depended directly of the resolutions made in that institution, through the General Chapter.

The Monastery of Saint Mary of Pombeiro is integrated in the Congregation on September 14th 1569, right after the Monastery of Redufe. It was the third to integrate the Congregation of St. Benedict. Its importance was then recognized in 1584, upon the fifth General Chapter. However, the election of the first triennial abbot, D. Fr. Bernardo de Braga, only took place in 1590. With this new statute, that of resident member of the Congregation, the main renovation works had to be determined and approved by the Congregation. And so they were started, from the late 16th century and during the 17th century, rebuilding the old structures and building the inexistent workshops, namely the cloister and dormitories, which granted a qualification of elements of the erected monastic unit, determining "a change in the building's design"²⁶. At the time, the community was composed of seven monks and became governed by priors elected every three years. Twenty years later, it had twenty clerics. In the 18th century, it had a population of around thirty monks. Nonetheless, from the end of that century on there is a decline in monastic life and a subsequent reduction in the number of residents. In the year of 1822 there were but eight friars. The Monastery walked steadily towards its extinction, which would take place in 1834.

Following this administrative reorganization from the 16th century, a strong rethinking of the monastic spaces runs through the entire Modern Period until the institution's extinction.

2. 2. Renovation of the monastery's church and sacristy

Three facts become decisive in the analysis of the church of the Monastery of Saint Mary of Pombeiro: the permanence of a planimetric inherited from the Middle Ages, with three naves, false transept and apsidioles; the gold and polychrome gilding populating that space; and finally, the artistic ambiance achieved through that articulation between architecture and interior arts.

Starting with the artistic ambiance, and after crossing the splendid Romanesque portal, one is confronted with an interior décor where the key notes are gold framed by a white light. The artistic ambiance one breathes is an eloquent messenger of the Portuguese and European aesthetics of the 18th century. There is a luminous interior, where the light that creates the ambiance is not used for a dramatic effect, illuminating this or that spot of the sacred space. Quite to the contrary, the three naves of this centennial building bear witness to the same key, corroborated by the main chapel. The medieval and veiled environment conveyed by the church at the time of its foundation received a new treatment. For that, spans were torn. On top of the walls surrounding the central nave, at the cornice level, a longitudinal crevice was opened, emphasized in the space's scenic composition with a wooden balustrade over a polychrome

26 DIAS; Geraldo J. A. Coelho – *O Mosteiro de Pombeiro e os beneditinos nas origens de Felgueiras*, "Felgueiras – Cidade". Felgueiras: Pelouro da Cultura da Câmara Municipal de Felgueiras. Year 1, No. 1, June 1993, pp. 41-52



28. The decoration, the altar and the illumination system date from the Modern period's restoration.

cornice. Intricately shaped oculi were opened in the false transept's back walls, and in the laterals of the main chapel are wide windows. The search for illumination was the key note guiding this intervention in the centennial architecture.

The sumptuousness with which the liturgical ceremonies were conducted in the Baroque period dictated the extension of the main stage for these acts: the main chapel. When, in 1726, Francisco Craesbeeck wrote about the Province of Entre Douro e Minho, he observed that the main chapel of the church of Pombeiro had been widened because its size was too small and it had gained two windows on each side to propitiate the entrance of light, because the "church was dark". To solve that problem crevices were opened in the naves and the temple was painted white, with the goal of making it similar to a See²⁷. Note that the See of Braga, also a medieval building, had already undergone a remodeling of its interior to adopt the Baroque scenery aesthetics in a process initiated circa 1710 by the will of its archbishop, D. Rodrigo de Moura Teles. Afterwards, in the 1720s, we witness the transformation of the main chapel of the Cathedral See of Porto, in a process that culminates in the dawn of the 1730s. This transformation of the main chapels was carried out in the major institutions of the North of Portugal.

This modernization process takes place in Pombeiro from 1719-1721 on, when the abbacy was taken by Friar Bento da Ascensão, and although interventions in the church are continued throughout the 18th century, two cycles stand out in the transformation of the church's image: in the first third of the 18th century, the adaptation of the church to the Baroque aesthetics; from 1760 onwards, the creation of the Rococo ambiance. The goal was clear: to promote the dignification of the cult and to update the artistic scenery of

27 CRAESBEECK, Francisco Xavier da Serra – *Memórias Ressuscitadas da Província de Entre Douro e Minho no ano de 1726*. Vol. II. Ponte de Lima: Edições Carvalhos de Basto, Lda., 1992, pp. 249-253.

the old medieval church. To start off the works in 1719, the Congregation of St. Benedict contributed with twenty gold pieces, that is, the beautiful sum of 96.000 reis²⁸. Profound works were expected.

It was through the artistic forms, with their ability to change the reading of the space, that the monks of Pombeiro particularly resorted to illusionist painting in the ceilings, which we may still observe in the lateral naves, and to gilding. Furthermore, gilding as a resource for modernizing and dignifying medieval sacred spaces is a much esteemed practice in the Post-Tridentine Portuguese panorama. For, as Natália Marinho Ferreira-Alves points out, “the Church will use art as one of the most powerful agents for promoting the Tridentine principles, aiming for the defense of Catholic faith and dogmas. Portugal stood no chance against other Catholic countries in the field of the so-called “greater arts” – neighboring Spain included – but it would find in the craft of gilding an original and strong way of adhering on one hand, to the new aesthetic formulas, and on the other, to the counter-reformists guidelines.

The gold-plated gilding, which will sometimes cover the entire church interior, thereby persuasively luring the senses of the follower, creates an unparalleled mystical atmosphere in which the connection between Man and God is something that becomes almost tangible”²⁹.

If during the first half of the 18th century the church of Saint Mary of Pombeiro updated its visual image to the most avant-garde artistic manifestations of the time, only a few painted panels in the ceilings of the lateral naves subsided from that transformation. Featuring religious, Christological and Marian themes, this pictorial set translates the aesthetics that guided the interventions, and is now the sole remaining testimony from that period. From the middle of the century onwards, the church adapts itself to the contemporary artistic vocabulary and will dress accordingly, a fact we may still fortunately witness, making it a reference in Rococo art on a national level. There is consistency in that transformation, running through the renovation of the illumination system, a new altarpiece set including the main chapel, lateral chapels and pulpits, as well as the construction of the chancel's gilded structure and railing, including organs and seats. Underlining this renovation are the pieces that currently integrate the church space, other noteworthy details subsided in the gilded inscription tablets and wreaths which, in a loose and free fashion, populate the church covers, as well as in the polychromatism itself, applied in architectural elements that frame the wood pieces.

Both the church's shape and polychromatism are testimonies of an intervention programmed by the clerics of Pombeiro when they intended to update their temple's image to the most avant-garde European artistic currents. The investment in works of art and the constant update is a glimpse of the intellectual elite that composed the upper crust of Pombeiro's clerics. A superior result in the Rococo ambience was achieved in Portugal with this renovation, carried out in the second half of the 18th century.

The most notorious artist of this metamorphosis was the reputed Friar José de Santo António Ferreira Vilaça³⁰, also a Benedictine monk. Son of carpenter Custódio Ferreira, he is initiated in woodcrafts in the

28 DIAS, Geraldo J. A. Coelho – *O Mosteiro de Pombeiro e os beneditinos nas origens de Felgueiras*, “Felgueiras – Cidade”. Felgueiras: Pelouro da Cultura da Câmara Municipal de Felgueiras. Year 1, No. 1, June 1993, pp. 41-52.

29 FERREIRA-ALVES, Natália Marinho – “De arquitecto a entalhador. Itinerário de um artista nos séculos XVII e XVIII”. In *I Congresso Internacional do Barroco. Actas*. Vol. I. Porto: Reitoria da Universidade do Porto; Governo Civil do Porto, 1991, pp. 355-369.

30 SMITH, Robert C. – *Frei José de Santo António Ferreira Vilaça, escultor beneditino do século XVIII*. Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian. Vols. I-II. Lisboa: Livros Horizonte, 1972.

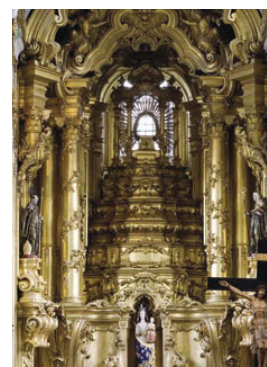
Monastery of St. Martin of Tibães from 1757 on, becoming a teacher there five years later. In Tibães, he had the opportunity to contact with the gilded work of the church projected by another great figure of the Rococo in Braga, André Ribeiro Soares da Silva³¹.

It was as a Benedictine monk who was consecrated an artist, namely a wood carver, sculptor and architect. He wrote an unusual diary where he recorded his life's main events, including all his activities, which he called the *Book of Rezam*.

His main focus was on designing retables for monasteries in the North of Portugal that belonged to the Congregation of St. Benedict. His artistic skill is strongly influenced by engravings and treatises promoting asymmetrically designed botanical ornaments, namely from France and Germany. He is described as the most skilled artist cultivating the Rococo expression in the North of Portugal. Being educated in the artistic environment of Braga, he absorbed that "modern" design and conception through his acquaintance with André Soares, the man who introduced that vocabulary in the city of the Archbishops, and his assimilation of printed works by Juste Auréle Meissonier, among others, showing illustrations that served as inspiration to the artist, making him one of "the greatest gilding carvers of Rococo inspiration"³².

The main retable of the church of Pombeiro, executed between 1770 and 1773, stands out over the top of the main chapel. It is an excellent chestnut wood piece, completely goldplated, with striking polychromatism in the upholstery of the images of the supported saints: *St. Benedict*, *Saint Scholastica*, and in the central niche, the medieval image of *Our Lady with Child*. In its structure, notice two columns on each side, supporting the entablature and finishing of the altarpiece ensemble, and framing the majestic Eucharist throne. Remember that the Eucharist throne, of platformed pyramidal shape, is exclusive to the Portuguese retable and it dominates the composition of the main retable since the early 18th century, stepping up as a concretization of the Tridentine ideology³³. The top of that structure, the retable's visual center, served to expose the Holy Sacrament. In the retable of Pombeiro, Friar José Vilaça enhances that nuclear point of the altarpiece ensemble, hollowing the wall and placing sunbeams against the light, allowing the worshipers to see the *Holy Sacrament* as if suspended in light. That highly resourceful composition is revealing of Vilaça's genius.

From the countless main chapels whose retable was designed by Friar José Vilaça, that of Saint Mary of Pombeiro strikes us for the brilliant balance between linear and sinuous shapes, Rococo decorative artifact and asymmetric shapes, resulting in a sober and elegant composition. Although smaller than the retable of the monastery of Refóios (Cabeceiras de Basto), it is considered by the artist himself as his best piece up until then. It corresponds to Vilaça's maturity stage. It is undoubtedly his most representative work from the so-called first stage, or first style of the artist. Its design stands as the depurated summary of his schooling: "the most intimate in composition, elegant in details, of a profound sense of linearity allowing him to end his first stage in grand style, in our opinion, with influences of the French (Meissonier) and German schools, besides from André Soares, of course, but especially his originality in an unequalled



29. Main chapel. The altarpiece, executed between 1770 and 1773, is by Friar José de Santo António Ferreira Vilaça.

31 FERREIRA-ALVES, Natália Marinho – Vilaça, Frei José de Santo António Ferreira, in *Dicionário da Arte Barroca em Portugal*. Lisboa: Editorial Presença. 1989, pp. 527-530.

32 FERREIRA-ALVES, Natália Marinho – De arquitecto a entalhador. Itinerário de um artista nos séculos XVII e XVIII. In *I Congresso Internacional do Barroco. Actas*. Vol. I, Porto: Reitoria da Universidade do Porto; Governo Civil do Porto, 1991, p. 366.

33 MARTINS, Fausto Sanches – Trono Eucarístico do Retábulo Barroco Português: Origem, Função, Forma e Simbolismo In *I Congresso Internacional do Barroco. Actas*. Vol. I. Porto: Reitoria da Universidade do Porto; Governo Civil do Porto, 1991, p. 20.

plasticity and dynamism”³⁴. The Rococo decoration of the main chapel is completed with the frames of the windows and the paintings of the *Annunciation* and of the *Visitation of Saint Isabel*, as with the spaulder of the seats and the two capricious thrones placed one on each side of that space.

According to Robert Smith, Friar José de Santo António Ferreira Vilaça sought to transform the main chapel of the church of Pombeiro into a sumptuous French-like salon, sided by elegant stools leaning against a boarding of polychrome wood, and whimsically framed on top, windows and paintings reminisce, according to the author, the mirrors of those salons³⁵. The source of inspiration, indeed taken from etchings that circulated in books, was images that recreated courtly environments. That observation is far from Vilaça’s intent. That type of decoration was originally employed in the exquisiteness of courtly salons, however, the architect-sculptor artist adapted that aesthetic refinement to the sacred space, forcing the main chapel to assume Rococo traits and become perhaps more frivolous and mundane than the majesty and sumptuousness of the Baroque, but in essence a sacred space.

From Friar José Vilaça’s second artistic stage, starting in the seventies, are the retables of the church’s lateral naves, where a more linear style and the enhancement of the architectonic elements are in order, although with decorative notes of the purest Rococo.

After the main retable’s completion, the monks of Pombeiro proceed with the transformation of their church, now replacing the retables in the naves. In 1776, they sold two retables from the body of the church, and in the following year, they placed four new retables of a more modern fashion.

The whole is formed by four retables, two pairs with different design, far from representing the best of this second stage of Friar José Vilaça’s work. The first two were done in the triennium of 1774-1777³⁶, the one next to the Gospel being dedicated to Our Lady and the corresponding one next to the Epistle to Saint Anthony. The other set was made in 1777-1778, and features the invocations of *Our Lady of Sorrows* and *Christ Crucified and Souls*, respectively. In these, a more classical language emerges, with columns imitating lapis-lazuli and marmored polychromatism. In 1786, the Statutes refer “*that the two Altars of the Lady of Sorrows, and Holy Christ will be gilded and painted as marble*”³⁷.

Two pulpits are finely integrated in the church space, vis-à-vis, on each side of the central nave. Two pieces in golden and polychrome wood, dating from 1776-1777, and following suit of the artistic climate of this Rococo interior, illustrate the weight of preaching in this monastery’s liturgical ritual.

At the church’s entrance, in the first flight of the central nave and facing the main chapel, is the chancel, another essential element in the monastic sacred space. The clerics would go there several times during the day to, and according to the postulate of the Rule of St. Benedict, pray the divine offices, contemplating the temple’s main chapel. The seats and organ are fundamental items in the choir.

A gold gilded structure of exquisite design covers the two pillars and ascends, defining a lacelike scallop,

34 RODRIGUES, José Carlos Meneses – *Retábulos no Baixo Tâmega e no Vale do Sousa (séculos XVII-XIX)*. Vol. I. Porto: Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto, 2004, pp. 330-337.

35 SMITH, Robert C. – *Frei José de Santo António Ferreira Vilaça, escultor beneditino do século XVIII*. Vol. II, p. 490.

36 IDEM, *ibidem*, pp. 416-417.

37 IDEM, *ibidem*, pp. 457-458.



30. Cloister. Adopting a Neoclassic taste, the cloister's restoration was still taking place in the first quarter of the 19th century.



31. Cloister.

where wavy botanical shapes and architectonic elements entwine with angels and translate the Rococo repertoire. The same unity in style is also found in the seats, witnessed in the spaulders of fine botanical decoration, as in the shelving.

Since the Middle Ages, music is associated with the liturgical practices of the monastic unit, from Gregorian singing to the polyphony that characterizes the Baroque age. In Portugal, as in the rest of Europe, the instrument that best describes the Baroque sonority is the organ, and since the formation of the Congregation of the Black Monks of St. Benedict in Portugal, all Benedictine monasteries are endowed with that musical instrument³⁸. If the monks became excellent professionals in the art of making organs, they were also reputed organists. Almost every monastic unit featured more than one monk with the duties of "organist monk". Pombeiro had two.

Naturally, this modernization of the old sacred space of Pombeiro also included the acquisition of a new organ for the monastic choir. In 1770, the *Statutes of the Monastery* record that "*The Box of the organ is being made and looks ready to start being laid. The organ is in Guimarães, almost done, thereby leaving some amount of money for adjustments*"³⁹. In 1783, the new organ was already installed and was considered "*one of the best in the order*".

The execution of the organ of Pombeiro is associated to the organ-maker of Guimarães, D. Francisco António Solla.

38 DIAS, Geraldo J. A. Coelho – *O Órgão do Mosteiro Beneditino de Pombeiro – (Felgueiras)*. Porto: Annex of *Revista de História*. Vol. XIII. Centro de História da Universidade do Porto, 1995, pp. 119-130.

39 IDEM, *ibidem*, pp. 119-130.



32. Monastery façade, reformed in the Modern period, and Cross.

The start of the Modern times is signaled with the reconstruction of the old sacristies. The sumptuousness with which the liturgical rituals were performed and the infinite amount of vestments and equipments of noble materials, synonym of the institution's economical and material welfare, justify the creation of wider spaces. On the other hand, the preparation of the liturgical ritual within the Tridentine norm demanded a previous preparation from the celebrant before going to the altar where the Eucharist was publicly celebrated. Therefore, besides the cabinets and arks to keep the cult objects, the sacristies acquire altars where the celebrant could, as an act of individual penance, prepare for the sacrifice of the mass. Pombeiro followed this same line tangential to the Portuguese sacred universe.

It is known that in 1568 the sacristy was a "small sacristy with old cabinets with drawers where some liturgical objects are found. Soon after, still prior to the turn of the 16th century, that antechamber of the Baroque liturgy was subject to reconstruction, which determined the current outlook. This explains the construction of a rectangular room and low ceiling, whose spatiality is punctuated by a set of five Ionic columns disposed over a slaking, corresponding, in the top wall, to the same number of pilasters of the same architectonic system. The purpose was to create a triple arcade in the wall, where retables were placed. In that room, which currently maintains the original spatiality, the decoration and the objects that compose the sacristy are already from the second decade of the 19th century, one of the ultimate interventions in the centenary monastic ensemble. The time for extinction was quickly drawing near. In 1819, the *Statutes* record the purchase of new filling for the sacristy: "three retables were made for the structure of the old sacristy so required, and two magnificent paintings by Gram Vasco were bought for them, and the third was made by Joaquim Rafael, as well as another to match the window"⁴⁰.

The three retables with Christological theme – the central *Christ in the Cross*, sided by the *Descent*, and *Christ on the way to the Calvary* – accuse a Neoclassic structure, as does the ark framing them.

Once again, the transformation articulates a depurated spatiality of Mannerist root, with a Neoclassic ambience provided by the interior arts.

Past and present in dialogue and harmony is the great lesson that the monks of Pombeiro passed on through the harmonization of architectures in renovated liturgical equipments, where more modern artistic vocabularies emerged.

In 1822, there were still works going on in the cloister, which was never finished, as well as the surrounding quarters. In the subsiding work there is evidence of a taste marked by the Neoclassic vocabulary. [MJMR]

3. The monastery and the fencing in the 19th century

After the extinction of the male Religious Orders in Portugal in 1834, an inventory of the entire monastic patrimony was carried out with the purpose of recording the existing property and estate. The conduction of inventories by the Ministry of Finance made it possible to have public auctions or confiscations for the benefit of the State.

In the Monastery of Saint Mary of Pombeiro, the unamortization process would put a stop in the reconstruction of the monastic space, initiated after the fire caused by the looting of the French invasions.

40 DIAS; Geraldo J. A. Coelho – *O Mosteiro de Pombeiro e os beneditinos nas origens de Felgueiras*, "Felgueiras – Cidade". Felgueiras: Pelouro da Cultura da Câmara Municipal de Felgueiras. Year 1, No. 1, June 1993, pp. 41-52.

This process originated the fragmentation of the religious patrimony in the hands of the Benedictines of Pombeiro, contributing to the fast dilapidation of libraries and records, to the ruin and/or transformation of the monastic quarters, changing the initial purpose of the building and altering the physical patrimony of the Monastery of Saint Mary of Pombeiro.

Based in the existing documental resources⁴¹, it was possible to recompose the memory of the monastic ensemble of Pombeiro and the properties attached to it.

The inventory of the movable property belonging to Pombeiro comprehends its various dependencies, namely the refectory, the hospice, the kitchen, the oven, the cloister, the cloister's woodhouse, the barn, the register, the linen wardrobe, the infirmary, the friars' refectory, the hostelry's refectory, the table and silverware, the supplies, the cellar's *logeas*, the farming tools, the active debts, the passive debts, the charges of the pious legacies, the convent house, the rustic and urban buildings, the inner and outer fencing.

The church of Saint Mary of Pombeiro, part of the monastic building and the orchard were solicited by the Municipality of Felgueiras⁴². A part was granted to the parish, and another given to the Priest to live there and explore the orchard's plantation. A large part of the movable property, like kitchen ware, tools, farming hardware, clothes, silverware, and others, was bought in public auction.

The library's extensive bibliographic resources were divided into categories (theology, sermonaries, books of law, sciences, canonic law and general history), then moving all the books, titles, parchments and further *papers* from this inventoried register to the extinct Convent of Saint Francis of Guimarães⁴³.

Another key element of inventory no. 312 of the Monastery of Saint Mary of Pombeiro is the information on the fencing, as well as the reference to farming products produced there.

The monastic fenced space is defined as a place for privacy, isolation, comfort of the body and spirit, where the feeling of collectivity of the Benedictine monks was preserved, away from the temptation and vice stimulated by the profane life in the outer world. It stands as a set of spaces built for work and leisure of the mind in the recreated nature.

The fence is a sectorial space, with different structured areas for farming exploration, like orchards, plantations, spaces for breeding animals (generally separated by draining ditches). There may also be other types of support constructions, like infirmaries, workshops, winepresses and dams. The recreation structure with small orchards, plantations and gardens, equipments related to the usage of water, as fountains, ornamental reservoirs, streams and wells, also featured other types of constructions and leisure equipments, as the refreshment houses, game houses and gazebos. Devotional buildings like chapels and oratories were included in the fenced area.

Besides these structures that composed the fencing of Pombeiro, the latter was divided in an inner fence and an outer fence. The first surrounded the monastic complex. It was smaller and characterized by composing an edified space where there was a floored house with porch, threshing floor, a silo and a hayloft. There was also a rural area occupied by an enclosed orchard, over the monastery's courtyard, with several kinds of fruit trees, vineyards, olive trees, gardens, flushes and meadows.

The outer fencing occupied a wider area, surrounded with walls, that comprehended farming lands, pine forest, chestnut trees, olive trees, wild fruit and vegetable orchards, olive presses, threshing floors and constructions destined for livestock breeding⁴⁴.

41 IAN/TT, MF/Finance, box 2244, inventory no. 312, Mosteiro de Santa Maria de Pombeiro. ADB – Congregação de S. Bento (CSB), Vols. 319 to 320.

42 IDEM.

43 IDEM.

44 IDEM.

3.1. Restoration and conservation

Classified as a National Monument in June 23rd 1910, the Monastery of Saint Mary of Pombeiro would be bestowed with various restoration campaigns, with two crucial moments reflecting different intervention policies. From 1958 to 1987, the works were under the guidance of the DGEMN; from 1993 to 2006, the works were supervised by the IPPAR. [MB]

- 1958 – Rebuilding the Church roofing;
- 1960 – Roofing repair;
- 1961 – Building the lantern cupola and repairing the covers;
- 1962 – Rebuilding the roof of the left lateral nave;
- 1963 – Rebuilding the roofing of the lateral naves;
- 1964 – Consolidating the vault in the main chapel;
- 1965 – Rebuilding the coating in several parts of the ceilings in the main chapel, nave and apses, and general roofing repairs;
- 1969 – Cover maintenance;
- 1971 – Disassembling, painting, restoring and assembling the weathervane in the South side tower and general cleaning and repair of the roofing;
- 1974 – Strutting the sacristy in danger of collapsing, and cleaning and repairing the roofing;
- 1975 – Preserving, disassembling and rebuilding the strutted walls in the East and West façades of the body of the sacristy, and repairing the cover;
- 1976 – Miscellaneous works;
- 1977 – New covers in the lantern and main chapel areas, and repairing doors;
- 1978 – Several repairs, draining and checking up casings, gutters and ceilings;
- 1979 – Ceiling repairs and maintenance works;
- 1981 – Repair of the cloister wing adjacent to the Church;
- 1982 – Miscellaneous recovery works;
- 1983 – Maintenance of covers and the cloister pavement;
- 1986 – Maintenance of the lantern;
- 1987 – Draining, insulating pavements and general maintenance;
- 1993 – Recovering the covers;
- 1994/1995/2006 – Rehabilitating and recovering the façades, covers of the church, chancel and bell towers; exterior draining;
- 1997/1998/1999 – Archaeological surveys;
- 1998/1999 – Restoration works in the oratory of the first floor of the monastic quarters, recovery works in the West wing and restoring the sacristy;
- 2004/2007 – Archaeological surveys.

Chronology

1059 – Foundation of the Monastery, according to tradition;

1099 – The oldest documented reference to the Monastery;

1102 – D. Gomes Echiegues and his wife Gontroda sign a donation charter in favor of the Monastery;

1112 – The Monastery of Saint Mary of Pombeiro is bestowed with a Land Charter;

1199 – Date engraved in an embedded panel by the Epistle, next to the cloister's access door. It is an epigraphy of funerary purpose reporting to D. Gonçalo, an abbot who performed an important part in the Monastery of Pombeiro, founding something [«Qui Fundavit...»]. This epitaph may indicate the start of the Romanesque factory of Pombeiro;

1252/1276 – Abbacy of D. Rodrigo, marking the architectonic peek of the monastery's medieval structure;

1427 – Commendatory abbots become responsible for the monasterial management;

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1526-1556 – Abbacy of D. António de Melo;

1500-1530 – Approximate date of the mural painting program filling part of the church interior. A few fragments remain from this campaign in the apses and also in an uncovered arch in the wall of the nave to the South side;

1566 – The Congregation of the Black Monks of Saint Benedict of Portugal is created;

1568 – The Monastery of Saint Mary of Pombeiro's main structures were severely ruined. Only the church featured a certain artistic nobilitation;

1569 – On September 14th the monastery is integrated in the Benedictine Congregation;

1584 – The 5th General Chapter of the Benedictine Congregation is held in Pombeiro;

1589 – A visit to the building is conducted, under Filipe II, leading to the renovation of the Monastery of Pombeiro;

1589 – Friar Bernardo de Braga is elected as the triennial abbot of the Monastery of Saint Mary of Pombeiro, a nomination which gave rise to the triennial abbacy election system;

1629 – According to documentation, the towers of the façade were already built;

1719 – In March this year, the first stone is laid to build the Chapel of Saint Quiteria, raised over the Hermitage of Saint Peter, in the dependency of the Monastery of Saint Mary of Pombeiro;

1719/1722 – Friar Bento da Ascensão's triennial rule takes place between 1719 and 1721, starting the renovation process that intended the monastery's Baroque modernization;

Works in the main façade and also in the transept of the monastery's church are carried out;

1760s – Start of the church's maintenance works that would grant a Rococo ambiance to it;

1770/1773 – During this triennium, the main chapel is totally rebuilt, the altarpiece ensemble corresponding to the main altar being made during this period;

According to documentation, in 1770 the box for the church organ was made, as the latter was then being finished in Guimarães;

Intervention of the artist Friar José de Sato António Ferreira Vilaça;

1776 – The church transformation ensues. The church's lateral retables are sold;

Beginning of the execution of the pulpits, placed face to face in the church's central nave, being completed in the following year;

1777/1780 – In 1777, new structures in the modern fashion replace the former retables.

Two other lateral retables are made during this period;

1783 – The church organ of the monastery was already placed, being considered as "one of the best in the order";

1809 – On May 13th, a great fire would destroy a large part of the Monastery of Saint Mary of Pombeiro's community area, the church being the sole building untouched by calamity;

1819 – In this year, and following the campaign initiated after the catastrophe that had hit the Monastery years earlier, the reconstruction of the monastery's community area takes place: the Chapter Room, the library, the hostelry, the barns, among others, are built;

Purchase of new filling for the sacristy;

1822 – Continuation of works in the cloister, which would never come to be completed;

1834 – Beginning of the process of extinction of the religious orders in Portugal;

1910 – On June 23rd, the Monastery of Saint Mary of Pombeiro is classified as National Monument;

1958/ 1987 – During these years, the DGEMN supervises the restoration of the various elements of the complex, particularly focusing on the church;

1993/2006 – Rehabilitation and recovery of several structures under the supervision of the IPPAR.