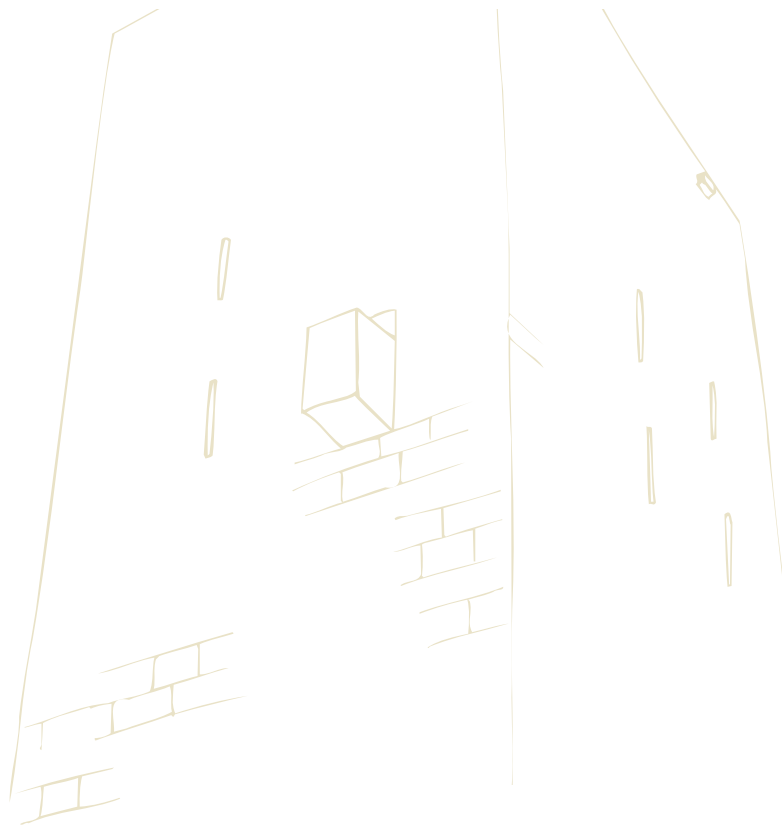




tower
TOWER OF VILAR



Raised in the place of Torre, in the limit of the parish of Vilar do Torno e Alentém, in the municipality of Lou-sada, the Tower of Vilar is over 45 feet tall, on the top of a fen overlooking a fertile and well irrigated valley. According to 1258's *Inquiries*, *Sancte Marie* of Vilar was an Honor of D. Gil Martins and his descendants, of the Riba Vizela lineage. Gil Martins is the nobleman referred in those *Inquiries* as the owner of four farming estates in the *collation* of Santa Maria de Vilar. Married to one of the most important heiresses of the Lords of Maia, Maria Anes da Maia, he is credited with the construction of this Tower. In 1367, king D. Fernando donates Vilar do Torno, Unhão and Meinedo to Aires Gomes da Silva, and the possession of the Tower remained in the same family throughout the 15th century. As the documentation from the chancellery of D. Duarte states, the king makes a concession to his grand-nephew Aires Gomes da Silva in 1434, explicitly referring the Tower of Vilar¹.

1. Built on a hilltop, the Tower of Vilar rules over a fertile and well irrigated valley. It epitomizes the way in which stately towers were erected: either at the center of Feudal Estates or at the outskirts of farmed lands.



1 Cf. documentation quoted in Various Authors – "Torre de Vilar". In *Estudo de Valorização e Salvaguarda das Envolventes aos Monumentos da Rota do Românico do Vale do Sousa. 2ª Fase. Vol. 2*, Porto, 2005, p. 251.



2. The Tower's walls are laid directly over the granite rock.



3. The Tower of Vilar rises over a granite layer crowning a small elevation.

The Tower of Vilar, probably built between the second half of the 13th century and the early 14th century, is more than a military construction – it is a symbol of lordly power over the territory.

Mário Barroca, who dedicated an in-depth study to this subject, points out that these stately towers were mainly set either in the middle of the Honors, in fertile valleys of farming wet crops, or in the vicinity of those farmed patches. It is also frequent to see them close to woods and mountains, picking more recently cleared lands with the purpose of steering from the more densely occupied lands from the feudal point of view. In these lands, the new lineages faced bigger difficulties in their craving for affirmation, due to the former establishment of older families with a more rooted dominion.

Tower of Vilar is an example of this sort of implementation, as Mário Barroca states, along with the Tower of Pousada (Azurém – Guimarães), the Tower of Dornelas (Amares), the Tower of Oriz (Vila Verde), the Palace of Giela (Arcos de Valdevez), the Palace of Curutelo (Ponte de Lima), the Tower of Lourosa do Campo (Arouca) and the Tower of Quintela (Vila Marim – Vila Real)².

The Tower of Vilar raises its rectangular shape over a granite flourishing that tops a small elevation.

As explained in a study by the DREM, the forty-inch thick walls are directly laid in the granite rock.

The Tower is built with excellent bonding of granite masonry, showing the mason's initials. Furthermore, the height corresponding to five stories is maintained. The façades feature several merlons and two rectangular windows, without any surviving structures or secondary elements in wood. However, various levels of projecting corbels remain, composing the supports for the roofing frameworks of four stories.

² BARROCA, Mário Jorge – "Torres, Casas-Torres ou Casas-Fortes. A Concepção do Espaço de Habitação da Pequena e Média Nobreza na Baixa Idade Média (Sécs. XII-XV)". In *Revista de História das Ideias. A Cultura da Nobreza*. Vol. 19. Coimbra: Instituto de História das Ideias. Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Coimbra, 1998, p. 67.

⁴ Built in excellent apparel, the Tower of Vilar is 45 feet tall.



Inside, there are embedded niches, taking advantage of the walls' thickness and testifying this tower's residential purpose.

The Southeast façade presents a rectangular door span at the level of the second floor, opened after the original construction, whose access was made through a wooden staircase. Inside, there are traces on the walls, such as corbels and balk crevices, corresponding to the roofing frameworks for four stories.

A fifth and final floor would correspond to the fortified wall surrounding the top, finishing in a narrower crenelated wall which would support merlons, lost in the meantime³.

According to the investigation carried out in the last years by Mário Barroca, the North of Portugal presents two types of feudal residence in the Gothic period: the noble palace and the *domus fortis*⁴. If the noble palace, usually associated to high and middle nobility, does not follow a typological architectural structure, frequently being composed of various autonomous buildings, the *domus fortis* follows a model related to castle architecture, corresponding to a fortified stately residence, whose origin would be close to the last quarter of the 12th century, although its model is widely spread in the 13th and 14th centuries. This model was mainly adopted by small lineages, highly motivated in their social rise next to the local communities⁵ and in displaying their pedigree. This process que occurred between the late 12th century and the first half of the 13th century, and was spread throughout the 14th century⁶.

The *domus fortis* is composed of several elements. Nevertheless, it is the squared tower that bestows upon this dwelling a sense of physical and symbolical fortification. It is usually composed of four stories, each corresponding to a single room. As with the Watchtowers, it was at the first floor and not at the ground floor level that one would find the main entrance. The latter was destined to the Room or *Court*, progressively saving the upper floors for more private spaces. The tower was topped with battlements, an element of high symbolic character, whose existence granted the tower the judicial quality of a fortified construction. Besides from the tower, it was also usual to add a squared building with two stories to the *domus fortis*, either adjacent to it or isolated. In some cases, there is also a chapel, as is the case of the Tower of Vasconcelos (Amares-Braga). However, part of the fortified feudal residence were other structures like the kitchen which, for safety reasons, was usually set in an autonomous building, close to water sources or small streams. There is no trace left from this element, in spite of documented reference to its existence⁷. The majority of the exemplars of *domus fortis* is in the North and Center of Portugal, consecrating the territories of former feudal estates. Some were maintained as a symbol of the lineages' ancient roots, along with completely renovated manors from later periods, as the Tower of Aguiã (Arcos de Valdevez), the Tower of Refóios (Ponte de Lima), the Tower of Gomariz (Vila Verde), the Tower of Castro (Amares) or the Honors of Faralães (Barcelos) and Barbosa (Penafiel), among others. In other cases, the towers were kept isolated, like the Tower of Silva (Vila Nova de Cerveira), the Tower of Quintela (Vila Marim –Vila Real), the Tower of Oriz and the Tower of Penegate (Vila Verde), among other examples⁸.

3 Various Authors – "Torre de Vilar". *Estudo de Valorização e Salvaguarda das Envolventes aos Monumentos da Rota do Românico do Vale do Sousa. 2ª Fase*. Vol. 2. Porto, 2005, p. 252.

4 ALMEIDA, C. A. Ferreira de and BARROCA, Mário Jorge – *O Gótico. História da Arte em Portugal*. Lisboa: Editorial Presença, 2002, pp. 124-128.

5 IDEM, *ibidem*, p. 103.

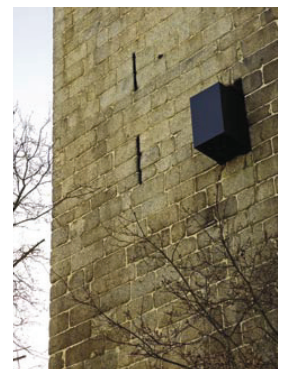
6 IDEM, *ibidem*, p. 105.

7 BARROCA, Mário Jorge – "Torres, Casas-Torres ou Casas-Fortes. A Concepção do Espaço de Habitação da Pequena e Média Nobreza na Baixa Idade Média (Sécs. XII-XV)". In *Revista de História das Ideias. A Cultura da Nobreza*. Vol. 19. Coimbra: Instituto de História das Ideias. Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Coimbra, 1998, p. 82.

8 ALMEIDA, C. A. Ferreira de and BARROCA, Mário Jorge – *O Gótico. História da Arte em Portugal*. Lisboa: Editorial Presença, 2002, p. 108.



5. Projecting corbels subsist inside the Tower. They used to be the supports for the four stories high roofing framework.



6. Entrance span, opened later on, from which the exterior was accessed through a wooden staircase.



7. The *domus fortis* tower was usually composed of four stories. The *Room or Classroom* was in the first floor, the upper floors being reserved for more private spaces.



8. The Tower of Vilar is a very expressive element of the way territory was occupied in the Middle Age. To this day, despite all transformations, its location shows how ancient the Sousa Valley's *habitat* structure is.

The Tower of Vilar is, therefore, a highly esteemed testimony of the existence of *domus fortis* in the territory of the Sousa Valley. Consecrating a former feudal estate, this very well built and kept Tower is also an excellent example of the quality of the Portuguese medieval architecture with civil function, of the symbolic value evinced by architecture and of the patrimonial landscape of the Portuguese Middle Ages.

Among the monastic complexes, parish churches, bridges, roads, fountains and castles, the *domus fortis* is yet another expressive element of the territorial occupation that, to this day, shows the remoteness of its *habitat* and how it was structured in the Medieval Period.

The recovery of the Medieval Tower of Vilar consisted in the architectonic and landscaping interventions of conservation and enhancement conducted within the *Route of the Romanesque of the Sousa Valley* project between 2005 and 2006. [LR/MB]

Chronology

13th century (2nd half) / Early 14th century – Original construction;

2005/2006 – Repairs under the DGEMN within the *Route of the Romanesque of the Sousa Valley*.