





**CHURCH**  
OF SAINT  
ISIDORE  
OF CANAVESES

MARCO DE CANAVESES

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Plan.

## HISTORICAL SUMMARY

Having integrated the “*jugado*” [a type of Portuguese administrative division] of Santa Cruz, the parish of Santo Isidoro grew around a cult that became hagio-toponymic, revealing both its venerability and its importance during the progress of local Christianization (or of resistance, in times of occupation). Saint Isidore of Seville was a Hispanic bishop of the 7<sup>th</sup> century and if, as Pierre David refers<sup>1</sup>, the fact of not being a martyr places him as the patron of churches built after the 9<sup>th</sup> century, the presence of this invocation along the banks of the Tâmega, so close to the paths of the Reconquest, is nonetheless revealing<sup>2</sup>.

The transference of Saint Isidore’s mortal remains from Seville to León in 1603 surely stimulated the veneration of such a valuable treasure, spreading the fame of the holy bishop across several northern areas of the Iberian Peninsula (Garcia Rodrigues, 1966: 344). Almost coinciding with the “*translatio*”, there were already news in about the dedication of a cenoby in 1059, in the Vouga valley and another reference from the surroundings of Porto in 1102<sup>3</sup>. For the time being, the first known mention to Saint Isidore of Ribatâmega dates back to 1115, as documented by Domingos Moreira in his work *Elementos onomásticos*. It’s a reference to the “monastery Vilar [...] Sanctum Isidorum of Vilar” (Moreira, 1989-1990: 23). The introduction of the monastic worship way may indicate that the primitive community followed the Visigothic rite and tradition, despite the fact that it was later reformed by the Clunians<sup>4</sup>. But this was an ephemeral situation, since it was no longer mentioned in the 12<sup>th</sup> century<sup>5</sup>.

The patron saint also went through a few changes. While there were news echoing in the Middle Ages on the Holy Bishop, the symbol of a temporal power, truth is that the transposition of the erudite devotion from the monastic space to the parish community that grew around it may have meant that the episcopal entity was shaped in order to become more appealing in view of the collective needs. Saint Isidore’s very name lent itself to useful misunderstandings: opposing the intellectual prelate from Seville there was a Castilian farmer born around 1070, whose miracles became famous in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. So, despite the persistence of the image of the Sevillian prelate in the mural pictorial composition of the chevet, it is not

1 “We know that after the 9<sup>th</sup> century there was an increasing habit to dedicate churches to patron saints who hadn’t been martyrs” (David, 1947: 35).

2 The expression is not metaphorical, since, quite close to Santo Isidoro, there are records of one of the many battles between Christians and Muslims which gave rise to the Monastery of Vila Boa do Bispo (Marco de Canaveses). Running parallel to the Tâmega river was a road that Carlos Alberto Ferreira de Almeida (1968) describes as going down from Caldas de Vizela to Entre-os-Rios (Penafiel). Although we have certain reservations regarding the path of this road and its Roman origin, it seems plausible that along the Tâmega there was, at least, one important road, as proven by the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century charts. The one made by Lourenço Homem da Cunha (1808) highlights the road that, on the right bank went down to the mouth of the Douro, and the *Mapa da província de Entre Douro e Minho*, by Custódio Villasboas (1794-1795), emphasises the connection made along the left bank, from Vila Boa do Bispo to Santa Clara do Torrão (Soeiro, 2009) (see Churches of Sobretâmega and Saint Nicholas of Canaveses, Marco de Canaveses). In fact, Saint Isidore was located on the route from Amarante to Sobretâmega, where the road turned East, crossing the bridge of Canaveses or towards Penafiel, in the opposite direction.

3 The indications are from Pierre David (1947).

4 As José Mattoso (2002: 98, 105) refers, given the insufficient documentation on this monastery (that the author accepts as being the one in Ribatâmega), it is only possible speculate about this path.

5 In 1168: “sanctum Isidorum of Villar” (Moreira, 1989-1990: 23).



Aerial view.

surprising that, in 1520, the parish is considered as being dedicated to “Santo Ysydro”<sup>6</sup>. It is likely for the homophony to have given rise, at some point, to a few mistakes, opposing the vigilant figure of a distant bishop to that of a farmer among farmers<sup>7</sup>.

However, unlike the majority of the patron saints bound with the Early Middle Ages, the worship of this patron saint does not seem to have raised the fervour and devotions that the men from the Late Middle Ages and from the Modern Period dedicated to the virgin and to certain hagiotherapists. We shall see this further ahead, when we deal with the entities that were venerated within the ecclesial space. Nevertheless, it left a mark within the territory strong enough to prevail in it as a landmark.

12 In fact, although the parish is sometimes called Riba-Tãmega, or Cima-Tãmega, the patron saint has always persisted. However, this nominal instability led the authors to become somewhat confused about its history, a confusion for which the fact that the parish stands not very far from Santo Isidoro de Sanche, municipality of Amarante, has also contributed.

Father António Carvalho da Costa locates it in the “couto” [a type of Portuguese administrative division] of Travanca, in 1706; this was a regular abbey with an income of approximately 250 thousand “réis” [former Portuguese currency unit] (Costa, 1706-1712: 131). Twenty years later, the scholar Francisco Craesbeeck confirms the patronage, saying it was an “ancient and sacred” church, but had no tabernacle. Abbot João de Freitas Peixoto who, in 1758, provides us with a more detailed description of his parish, shows more confidence in his assertions.

It belonged to the archbishopric of Braga and reported, spiritually and ecclesiastically, to the province of Entre-Douro-e-Minho and to the municipality of Santa Cruz do Tãmega, of which the Count of Óbidos was the donee. For secular issues it resorted to Guimarães, since it was part of its “comarca” [a type of Portuguese administrative and judicial division] (Peixoto, 1758).

Within the reorganizing impulse of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the parish became part of the judicial district of Amarante, of the municipality of Marco de Canaveses and of the diocese of Porto, being transferred to its territory in 1882 (Moreira, 1989-1990: 23)<sup>8</sup>.

6 The image of the Holy Bishop was maimed by the crevice that goes through the chevet’s wall. From the original representation it is only possible to see part of the crozier, an element that is quite enough to identify the saint to which it corresponded. However, we should not forget that, whether they were made under the responsibility of the abbot or of the Church’s patron, the commissions intended to decorate the larger chapels were part of erudite schemes for the promotion of nobility or catechization.

7 In the case of Santo Isidoro, despite having no information on the fame of the holy farmer (Saint Ysidro), the parish memoirs of 1758 contribute to document the devotion paid to the Castilian thaumaturge-farmer, at that time. In Gulpilhares (currently near Vila Nova de Gaia) the farming day was celebrated close to the chapel of Saint Isidore, where plenty of people gathered on the day of his pilgrimage (Capela, Matos & Borralheiro, 2009: 321).

8 On the administrative reorganization of Marco de Canaveses, please read Alves & Soeiro (2009).

## THE MONUMENT IN THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

“**A**midst an undulating valley of the region of Entre Douro e Minho, interrupted by meadows and pine forests with a sometimes moist and soft, other times deep and sombre, lush green, we find the small village of Santo Isidoro, which is fairly proud of its parish church, which invokes the same saint. It is a Romanesque temple from the 12<sup>th</sup> century or from the dawn of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, of rustic nature but replenished with purity and personality...” (Pamplona, 1976b: 31). It is with these words that Fernando de Pamplona – one of the first authors to take an interest in the Church of Saint Isidore of Canaveses – began his short note on this small Romanesque temple of Ribatãmega in 1976.

Built on the right bank of the Tãmega river, this Church stands out by the fact that its Romanesque-flavoured structure is very well preserved. With a single nave and a rectangular chancel, this is a good example of the repetition of a “module” that we already consider as very typical of our Romanesque architecture, taking into account its simple implementation<sup>9</sup>, which is precisely the result of the juxtaposition of two rectangles or of the “geometric alliance between a rectangle and a semicircle”, including its variations, to use an expression by Manuel Monteiro (1908; 1980: 135).

In fact, except for the Romanesque cathedrals and a few Benedictine monasteries whose churches feature three naves (we may refer the example of Pombeiro, in Felgueiras, or of Paço de Sousa and Travanca, in Penafiel and Amarante, respectively), most of the remaining specimens are characterised by the persistence of a small-sized scale. The old Coimbra cathedral, which, according to many authors, follows the traditional *canon* of the so-called pilgrimage

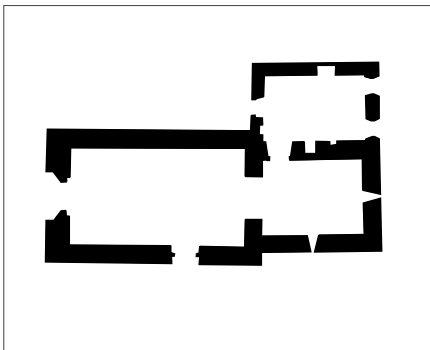
13



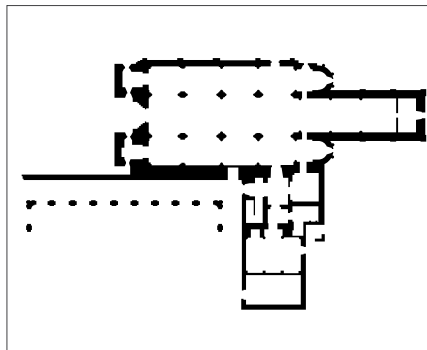
General view.

<sup>9</sup> About this subject, please read Botelho (2010: 387-388).

churches with its *triphorium*; the Porto cathedral, which had the only known chevet featuring an ambulatory and radiating chapels in Portugal up till now, or the Braga cathedral, which rivalled with Santiago de Compostela (Spain) for so long, are remarkable exceptions within the Portuguese architectural panorama of the period and show clear foreign influences and artistic movements.



Plan.



Monastery of Pombeiro (Felgueiras). Plan.

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Already sensing a vernacularisation of the architecture built within the Portuguese territory during the Romanesque Period, Manuel Monteiro concluded that:

“(…) almost all of our rural or inland churches from that period actually feature a plan based on the juxtaposition of two rectangles, which constituted the cheapest and quickest way to build them, and was most convenient to the immediate spreading and consequent settling of the faith within the organism of the nationality that was in its dawn” (Monteiro, 1945: 10).

Besides, another feature that characterises Portuguese Romanesque architecture is precisely its decorative containment. Either due to issues related to the economy of time and means, or as a result of purely technical issues that were associated with the nature of the materials or with the training skills of Romanesque builders, the obvious fact is that Portuguese Romanesque architecture concentrates its sculptural decorative elements in specific areas: in the portals, around openings for lighting purposes, in the modillions that support cornices (usually plain) or in friezes. The containment that characterised the architecture from this period and which, in a certain way, was repeated over the following periods of our architecture, led Reinaldo dos Santos, in his constant search for “the spirit and the essence of Portuguese art, to assert that Portugal always spoke the Romanesque language, since the dawn of its nationality to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century”<sup>10</sup>.

Saint Isidore of Canaveses is a good example of this widespread idea that a specific moment in the historiography on this subject tried to see in the Portuguese architecture of the Roman-

<sup>10</sup> This subject was discussed in a lecture he gave at the Sociedade Martins Sarmiento (Pina, 1926: 260). For a deeper development of this matter, please read Botelho (2010: 237).

esque Period. However, this architectural specimen naturally stands out for its good state of preservation, as we have mentioned before.

On the main façade, an elaborated portal, composed of three torus-shaped and slightly broken archivolt, shows a surrounding arch made up of billets. In terms of the impost, we see a motif originated in Braga that we also find in other buildings in the Douro basin (such as Tarouquela and Saint Christopher of Nogueira, in Cinfães) or in the Sousa basin (such as Pombeiro, Sousa or Unhão, in Felgueiras) that, in this case, extends itself along the entire façade, like a frieze. Carved in a deep relief, the palmettes from Braga appear in pairs joined by loops<sup>11</sup>. This drawing, of Classical origin, is a result of the palmette's simplification, only depicting its external outline. We find it on the south portal of the Braga cathedral.

The two internal archivolt are supported by columns with capitals, since the external one is resting directly on the walls. The external column to the observer's left is prismatic, while the other three have a plain cylindrical shaft, proving how this model spread across the region of the Tâmega; originated in Coimbra, it was hugely welcomed in the buildings of the Sousa basin. The capitals are all different and show a refined design that combines phytomorphic motifs with others of botanic nature, that were described by Fernando Pamplona as follows: "some have coarse reminiscences of the Corinthian acanthus leaf translated into the granite's harshness, other have geometric stylizations – bent and intertwined curvilinear shapes of botanic inspiration" (Pamplona, 1976b: 31). The somewhat naturalist traits of their shapes – flat and attached to the echinus – tells us about a late Romanesque style that fits into a chronology later than 1250, as several authors have been suggesting (Pamplona, 1976b: 32; Almeida, 1986: 97). The tympanum, resting on a lintel with its corresponding corbels, shows a cross "pattée". Over the portal, a small four-lobed oculus brings light into the nave.

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West façade. Portal. Capitals and impost.

<sup>11</sup> The wear of the upper edge does not allow us to define whether it was composed of ropes or of loose beads, thus forming motif no. 8 or motif no. 20 from the inventory drawn up by Joaquim de Vasconcelos (Vasconcelos & Abreu, 1918: 69-70).







South façade.



South façade. Nave. Corbel.

It is likely that there were porch-like structures on both side façades, a feature corroborated by the existence of corbels set halfway up the corresponding wall faces. If, on the north façade, these are smooth and square, on the opposite façade a few feature ornamental motifs. On the second corbel counting from the main façade, Fernando Pamplona intended to identify a phallic motif, an ornament he considers as being rare and “a reminiscence of the paganism that persisted in a few Medieval temples, following the phallic cult celebrated by the Greek Dionysians in honour of Dionysus and Priapus and in the Roman Bacchanalia that praised Bacchus and Venus” (Pamplona, 1976b: 32).

Referring to the representations of the “solitary phallus” within the sexual iconography of the sculpture from the Romanesque Period, the researcher Jaime Nuño González (2006: 211-212) reminds precisely the prophylactic nature that the male sexual organ had for so long, following the path of Roman tradition.

Besides the representation of heroes, the display of nudity also took on a somewhat insolent nature in the Classical world, as shown by certain representations of Bacchus or Silenus. In the Roman period, the representation of the phallus appears with an uncommon profusion, on street intersection, on the corners of houses or, even, as a pendant (Nuño González, 2006: 195-196). Centuries later, in the High Middle Ages, we find iconographic specimens where the representation of the body still adopts essentially Classical shapes. That is what happens in the Romanesque Period and that is the case of the “phallus” represented in Saint Isidore.

On the south façade, the presence of an eave over the corbel level confirms the existence of a porch-like structure on this side of the Church. The side portal would be sheltered under this porch, with an apparently simpler structure than the one of the main portal, pointing us to a later chronology: two slightly broken archivolt with sharp edges fall within the thickness of the wall itself, resting directly on their walls. Were it not for the presence of a tympanum with a hollow cross, identical to the one on the main façade, and we could say that this was a typical example of a portal framed within what has been called as “resistance Romanesque” style. However, the obvious colour difference that exists between the granite in this tympanum and in the remaining ensemble leads us to believe that we stand before a tympanum built on a significantly later period than the one under study; we might even call this period as “neo-Romanesque”, corresponding to a construction date which is extremely hard to specify. We leave this as a possibility.



South façade. Nave. Portal.

West façade. Portal.



South façade. Nave. Corbels.



North façade. Nave. Corbels.

The Church's interior is illuminated by narrow crevices that open up the walls of the nave and the chancel, including also the back wall. In both of the bodies that shape this Church, there are series of corbels, which are more elaborate on the south side, that remind us of the north façade of the monastery of Roriz (Santo Tirso) and of the main façade of Paço de Sousa, despite the fact that, here in Canaveses, these are not supporting any cornice on little arches. On the north side, the corbels are simpler, mostly flat and rectangular, corresponding to a model which is more common in the Tâmega basin.

18 Inside, in addition to the smooth exposed granite wall faces livened up by narrow crevices, there is a simple triumphal arch, slightly broken, without any ornamental elements. But it is on the main chapel's back wall and on the contiguous walls that we find one of the most remarkable elements of this Romanesque building. It is a rich, high-quality mural painting ensemble. We should not forget how easy it was for these buildings to receive mural painting campaigns. Due to the fact that their interior wall faces were flat, in other words, they did not bear any element that would create an obstacle to the practice of mural painting in terms of the depiction of hagiographies of saints or biblical scenes, the Romanesque churches eventually became flexible and appealing buildings for the practice of mural painting in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries and, later, for the installation of large-scaled tile sets (we can immediately recall the case of Soalhães, Marco de Canaveses).

Like in Saint Mammes of Vila Verde (Felgueiras)<sup>12</sup>, the mural paintings of Saint Isidore “show us how, sometimes, high-quality artists worked in churches with little architectural pomp, how the commissioner can be decisive in choosing the artists and the pictorial programmes and how wrong can the analyses considering that, in these rural churches, the artistic programmes correspond to peripheral and atavist works, can be” (Rosas, 2008: 365). This opinion also corresponds to the possibility put across by Paula Bessa, which associated the taste shown in the frescoes from Saint Isidore with the impact and influence of Miguel da Silva (1480-1556) in the geographically close urban area of Porto (Bessa, 2008: 328). Luís Urbano Afonso is also of the opinion that this Church of Saint Isidore preserves one of the most interesting mural paintings produced within a Classicist language (Afonso, 2009: 643). Let us consider the following.

12 For further development on this matter, please read Rosas (2008: 66).



General interior view from the nave.



Chancel. Back wall. Mural painting.

Their discovery was only revealed to the scientific community in 1976. According to the explanations given by Fernando de Pamplona, “when they proceeded with the restoration of the old church, carried out at the expense of the parishioners, while they were removing the white and golden altars from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and cleaning the walls from the plaster covering them in order to expose the granite’s majesty, a few semi-destroyed frescoes appeared on the apse’s front and side walls, serving as a background for the stone altar that is now rebuilt, which were possible to be rescued to a great extent” (Pamplona, 1976b: 32-33). Despite being long, this quote clarifies, not just the context of the discovery of the mural painting that is still visible in Saint Isidore nowadays, but it also gives us a clear description of the way the interior of this Church looked like until the 1970’s. Like in many Romanesque churches of the region, its interior showed white wall faces and featured altarpieces that, despite being dated back to the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries by the author, because they were “white and golden”, we most easily believe that they were of Neoclassical nature. In an interview with *O Comércio do Porto* newspaper, Fernando Pamplona (1976b: 5) confirmed that these were “absolutely common 19<sup>th</sup> century altars”. We shall return to this topic.

This pictorial ensemble bears the date 1536 and is signed by painter Moraes in two cartouches inserted into the grotesque panels that are located on both ends of the composition; the date appears on the lateral wall, on the Gospel side, and the signature emerges on the apse’s back wall, on the Epistle side. For Luís Urbano Afonso, the simple fact that we are standing before a painting which is dated and signed reflects its author’s personality as an artist and the fact that he is aware of his artistic status (Afonso, 2009: 645). Around that same period, the Classicist values were asserting themselves among us and the author of these frescoes had perfect knowledge of these avant-garde languages.

Paula Bessa highlights the reference made by Artur de Magalhães Basto to a painter – “bastiã de Moraes” – who had been paid “nine-hundred and eighty “réis””, on June 6<sup>th</sup> 1537 (Bessa, 2008: 327-328), to paint the image of Our Lady in the altarpiece of the Porto cathedral. Although little is known about this painter Moraes, the truth is that he was living in Porto at the time when he developed the programme for Saint Isidore; besides, his work was good enough to justify a commission from the bishop Friar Baltasar Limpo (episc. 1537-1550) for the Porto cathedral. So, the same author considers as very enticing the possibility that this Bastiam de Moraes, a painter who was living in Porto in 1537 and worked for the city’s cathedral by order of the bishop, is the same Moraes that signs Saint Isidore’s ensemble (Bessa, 2008: 327-328). According to Luís Urbano Afonso, the plastic features shown in this ensemble were not repeated in any other work in Portugal; furthermore, its high quality also proves that it was the result of a commission by an important patron who remains unidentified (Afonso, 2009: 645). Taking into account its location, the commissioner of Saint Isidore’s ensemble was probably either the responsible for the patronage, should the Church have merely a chaplain, or the abbot (Bessa, 2008: 328).

A Classicist training or, at best, the real knowledge of a Classicist language is understandable, and plausible, in an artist that, at the time, was, hypothetically, living in Porto. Paula Bessa reminds us that the patronising action of the bishop of Viseu, Miguel da Silva, had begun in 1527 with the construction of the church of Saint John of Foz (Porto), which is considered as the oldest known Renaissance building in Portuguese territory, a work directed and monitored



Chancel. Wall on the Gospel side.  
Mural painting. Detail of the date.

Chancel. Back wall on the Epistle side.  
Mural painting.  
Detail of the author’s signature.



by the Italian architect Francesco de Cremona who, in 1514, had worked under the guidance of Bramante in the construction of Saint Peter of Rome (Italy). This is the reason why the same author questions whether the taste shown in the frescoes from Saint Isidore could be a consequence of the impact and influence of Miguel da Silva in the urban area of Porto (Bessa, 2008: 328).

Located on the back wall, the painting presents itself as a triptych, divided by two yellow columns. The central panel showed, naturally, the figure of the patron saint of the Church, *Saint Isidore*; nowadays, around the Romanesque crevice, we are only able to see the ends of his mitre and crosier and the lower part of his mantle. We find the saint's head in a stone fragment, which is displayed in the chancel.



Chancel. Back wall. Crevice.



Chancel. Stone highlighted with a mural painting.  
*Saint Isidore*.

The patron saint was flanked by the *Virgin and Child* and by *Saint Catherine of Alexandria*, the latter holding her sword and her wheel of martyrdom; at her feet, we see the decapitated head of the pagan emperor who was responsible for her martyrdom. These female figures are elegant representations wearing courtly clothes, which proves the contact that their author had with more dynamic urban centres (Afonso, 2009: 646). He was knowledgeable of the most recent trends, as proven by the grotesque decorations and plastic shapes, but his figures also show an already Mannerist attitude, since they were uniformly treated; both these facts are in line with the theory that we are standing before a leading artist.

While revealing an urge to intervene on the architectural support he takes advantage of and disclosing a true scenographical sense, Moraes sought to give cohesion to the three depicted figures, certainly chosen by the commissioner, faking the existence of a large window, opened towards a landscape full of trees. To make the space uniform, behind the saints there is the line of a wall and, behind it, we see tree tops with full-bodied foliage, which was treated in an "impressionist" (Bessa, 2008: 326) fashion. The background of *Saint Michael, who is weighing the souls and defeating the dragon* – located on the wall adjacent the back one, on the Gospel side –, and *Saint James*, who is depicted as a pilgrim, were summarily treated, merely indicating the ground level.



Chancel. Back wall on the Gospel side. Mural painting. *Virgin and the Child.*



Chancel. Back wall on the Epistle side. Mural painting. *Saint Catherine of Alexandria.*

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Chancel. Wall on the Gospel side. Mural painting. *Saint Michael* and dating of the painting (1536).



Chancel. Wall on the Epistle side. Mural painting. *Saint James.*



On the back wall, the triptych is limited by a vertical strip of grotesques, simulating bas-reliefs placed on each of its ends. The background colours – red alternating with yellow –, as well as the motifs chosen to fill the vertical grotesque axes – in which armours, daggers and paddles are combined with the more usual *putti*, ribbon twistings, foliages or cartouches – are very rare within the context of the Portuguese mural painting of the time (Afonso, 2009: 644). Using a reddish shade, Moraes created a rather credible perspective, as proven by the empty armour placed on the Gospel side (Afonso, 2009: 644). According to Paula Bessa, the source of inspiration for the “hanging” armour of Saint Isidore may have been the engraving dated from 1534, which is also used in the frontispiece of the *Constituições Sinodais*, drawn up by the archbishop Prince Henrique from the archdiocese of Braga (Bessa, 2008: 327) that, at the time, as we have seen, held the patronage of this Church (Bessa, 2008: 328, note 27). Moraes, the painter of Saint Isidore, was, indeed, very up-to-date.



Chancel. Back wall on the Gospel side. Mural painting. Hanging armour.



Chancel. Back wall on the Epistle side. Mural painting. Hanging armour.

## THE MONUMENT IN THE MODERN PERIOD

Currently deprived of its altarpiece set, the Church of Saint Isidore presents itself as a bare space in the eyes of the visitor. Although this is a result of the interventions carried out in the Contemporary Period, the austere nature of its decoration may have something to do with the parish's population that, in 1758, was distributed by 81 housing units. Now, since the parishioners were responsible for the management of the nave's structure and for all its assets and associated furnishings, we may speculate that, in the Baroque Period, both the budget and the workforce wouldn't be enough to perform complex artistic campaigns, such as the one of Soalhães (Marco de Canaveses), for example, which was not very far from Saint Isidore.

From the remaining structures mentioned in 1758 by abbot João de Freitas Peixoto – the large altarpiece and two collateral ones – only the images that lend them their names remain: Saint Isidore, Virgin of the Rosary and the Infant Jesus.

The Virgin of the Rosary, which is currently resting on a granite plinth on the right side of the nave, is a 17<sup>th</sup> century work that still reflects the Mannerist spirit, but shows clear plastic formulations leaning towards the Baroque. It stands out, in iconographic terms, by the fact that the Infant Jesus is holding a small rose and that His Mother is grabbing a berry between the thumb and the index finger of Her right hand. In fact, the rosary, non-existent, would be hanging from this hand.

The sacristy was used to display the sculptures that were removed from the collateral altars; from its ensemble we highlight an image of Saint Joseph (1<sup>st</sup> half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century) and an image of Our Lady of Sorrows (19<sup>th</sup> century)<sup>13</sup>.

In terms of painting, excluding the reference that has already been developed regarding the affresco pictorial composition, two oil paintings on wood stand out; one from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, depicting the *Calvary*, and a later one, from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, depicting the *Immaculate Virgin*.

The first one captures the final moments of the crucifixion: before the almost expressionless look of the Virgin, John and Magdalene, keeling at the foot of the cross (which she's embracing), Christ expires hanging from the wooden beam, the instrument of his hardest suffering. This could be a reused element, detached from one of the altarpieces. Despite the fact that this iconography is not mentioned by the abbot of 1758, and the piece is not mentioned in the inventory of 1927, it could be on display in one of the altarpieces<sup>14</sup>. Besides, this was a much-loved subject among the Baroque men.



Triumphal arch. Wall on the Epistle side.  
Plinth. Sculpture. Virgin of the Rosary.

<sup>13</sup> Other images, listed chronologically: unidentified martyr (17<sup>th</sup> century; may this be the image of Saint Lucia mentioned in 1927?), Saint Sebastian (17<sup>th</sup> century), Saint Anthony of Lisbon (18<sup>th</sup> century), Holy Heart of Mary (20<sup>th</sup> century). The chancel now houses the devotion to a Contemporary image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. In general, the entire ensemble is damaged by major changes in terms of its polychromy, both due to poorly-applied repaintings, and to incorrect handling procedures. We must highlight the absence of the sculptures of Saint Catherine or Saint Michael, entities that are both depicted in the frescoes. That fact may have to do with the lack of interest of the faithful in such devotions associated with supralocal powers, which were actually the ones that commissioned those representations. In the inventory from 1927 there are also references to other images: one of the Infant Jesus and one of Saint Joseph (PORTUGAL. Ministério das Finanças – Secretaria-geral – Arquivo – CASTRO, José Monteiro Soares de – *Auto de arrolamento*. [1927, abril, 4], Liv. 70, fl. 76-76v, available online ACMF/Arquivo/CJBC/PTO/MDC/ARROL/019).

<sup>14</sup> PORTUGAL. Ministério das Finanças – Secretaria-geral – Arquivo – CASTRO, José Monteiro Soares de – *Auto de arrolamento*. [1927, abril, 4], Liv. 70, fl. 76-76v, available online ACMF/Arquivo/CJBC/PTO/MDC/ARROL/019.

The image that is currently placed directly over the north wall of Saint Isidore's nave that, through its size, colours and figurative treatment, praises the Classical figure of the *Immaculate Virgin* is in a similar situation, preventing us from knowing its origin and initial context. Being the work of an experienced artist, the subject refers us to the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, proclaimed on December 8<sup>th</sup> 1854 by Pope Pius IX (through the Bull *Ineffabilis Deus*).



Sacristy. Picture. Calvary.

## CONTEMPORARY INTERVENTIONS

In reply to the Survey sent to all the parish priests of the parishes from the bishopric of Porto<sup>15</sup>, the abbot Gonçalo Tomás de Queirós, the parish priest of Santo Isidoro, informed that the parish church was “in a very good state of repair”<sup>16</sup> at the time. The same parish priest also stated that it was a Church built according to the “Romano-Gothic” taste, which had “artistic objects that were worth preserving”.

In 2013 the Church of Saint Isidore of Canaveses is classified as a National Monument<sup>17</sup>. This is the reason why the interventions it was subject to during the 20<sup>th</sup> century were carried out under its Building Commission’s responsibility (Serenó, 2006). As we’ve already mentioned, it was during a restoration intervention that was seeking to restore the “primitive purity” (Pamplona, 1976a: 5) of this Romanesque Church that the mural painting which makes it so remarkable was discovered. The fact that in the mid-1970’s there was the intention to apply here an intervention practice that was usual in the first half of the century, purposely removing elements that were considered uncharacteristic of the Church’s construction period is extremely curious. So, it is within this context that we see Saint Isidore being deprived of its 19<sup>th</sup> century altars, which were considered “absolutely common”, and stripped “of the thick crust of stucco and plaster that was concealing the nobility of its granite walls” (Pamplona, 1976a: 5). Therefore, it is with enthusiasm that the journalist that tells us the “Novidades em Marco de Canaveses” in *O Comércio do Porto* newspaper, states that after this major intervention we feel “like we’re right in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, which means eight hundred years younger! This is indeed a rare thing that is worth witnessing” (Pamplona, 1976a: 5). Although this intervention was financed by the parish, Fernando de Pamplona tells us that the restoration works were carried out under the architect Sola Campos’s responsibility and monitored by the auxiliary bishop of Porto, Domingos de Pinho Brandão, “who is an expert in art history” (Pamplona, 1976b: 35, note 1; 1976a: 5). In the 1990’s, preservation works were carried out occasionally (Serenó, 2006: 2).

In 2010 the Church of Saint Isidore of Canaveses became part of the Route of the Romanesque and it already has a project for the preservation and restoration of its mural paintings that will include, besides research works, a detailed study and documentation in terms of the pigments and techniques used. The intervention proposal comprises several tasks, from which we highlight the cleaning and consolidation of the remaining ensemble (Pestana, 2012: 11).

[MLB / NR]

<sup>15</sup> Victor Le Cocq, through an order issued by the Minister of Public Works, had been commissioned to draw up a map of the preservation state, corresponding repairs and authorized expenses of all the buildings that were under that Ministry’s management. These buildings included those that were considered monuments, parish churches and public chapels, among others (Rosas, 1995: 511).

<sup>16</sup> Queirós, Gonçalo Thomaz – Missiva, 10 de outubro de 1864. IRHU/Arquivo ex-DGEMN/DREM N 1706/14 (Igrejas do bispado do Porto. Concelhos de Lousada e Marco de Canaveses).

<sup>17</sup> DECREE no. 23. O.G. [Official Gazette] *Series I*. 142 (2013-07-25) 4387.

## CHRONOLOGY

1115: first reference to Saint Isidore of Ribatãmega;

13<sup>th</sup> century (2<sup>nd</sup> half): possible construction of the Church of Saint Isidore of Canaveses, according to the remaining Romanesque traces;

1520: the parish is documented as being dedicated to "Saint Isidro";

1536: date inscribed on the remaining mural painting panel of Saint Isidore, accompanied by the signature "Moraes";

18<sup>th</sup> century: Saint Isidore is shown as belonging to the patronage of Travanca (Amarante);

1976: discovery of the mural painting of Saint Isidore;

1990s: documentation regarding several conservation works;

2010: the Church of Saint Isidore integrates the Route of the Romanesque;

2013: the building is classified as a National Monument.

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