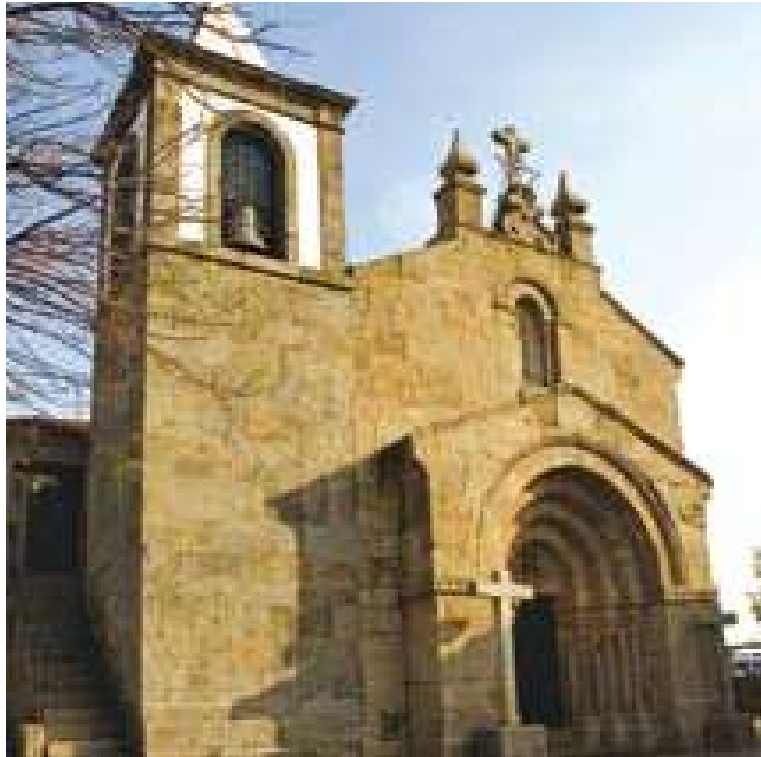




3.

## CHURCH OF THE SAVIOUR OF UNHÃO



Lugar da Igreja  
Unhão  
Felgueiras



41° 18' 43.701" N  
8° 14' 11.564" W



+351 918 116 488



Saturday, 6 pm (wint.)  
and 7 pm (sum.), Sunday  
and festive days, 8 am



Divine Saviour  
6<sup>th</sup> August



Public Interest Building  
1950



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The Church of the Saviour of Unhão is an outstanding legacy of Portuguese Romanesque architecture. The main portal, of an excellent quality, presents a series of botanic capitals considered some of the best Romanesque specimens in Northern Portugal.

Despite the transformations it underwent over time, which cunningly changed the Romanesque building, the epigraph that marks the dedication of the Church on January 28<sup>th</sup> 1165 was preserved. This inscription is the oldest evidence of its history, since the known documentary references only go as far back as 1220.

The mother Church of Unhão, with a longitudinal plan, still preserves the Romanesque nave, however the chancel corresponds to a renovation carried out during the Modern Period. The bell tower embedded in the main façade probably dates back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Although the upper part of the tower is clearly from that period, its construction may have resulted from the existence of a medieval bell tower already incorporated in the façade, much like the tower of the Monastery of Saint Peter of Cête (Paredes) (p. 78).



In this Church, built during the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, it is possible to see a combination of decorative solutions typical from this region with others from the Braga region. In fact, this feature is one of the characteristics of Romanesque art that better demonstrates how the models circulated and the teams of artists travelled around.

Despite the fact that the sculpture of the axial portal of the Saviour of Unhão has an essentially botanic nature, it still reveals the special attention given to its composition. The motif of the hollowed cross placed on the tympanum shows how much the presence of this type of signs, intended to protect temples, was appreciated.



## THE INSCRIPTION

Carved on the outer face of the nave's south wall, close to the angle with the west façade, the inscription mentioning the dedication of the Church shows the following record:  
 ERA MCC o III o DEDICATA / FUIT EC(c)LESIA ISTA o Per MANUS/  
 ARCHIEPISCOPI IOHaNNIS BRacHarENSIS / V° KaLeNdaS F(e)B(rua)RII  
 o IN IUDICIO o MAGISTER o SISALDIS[?].

This is an inscription that commemorates the dedication of the Church which, according to Mário Barroca, was already carved after the south wall was built and thus allows dating either that construction stage or the temple's completion.

The Church was dedicated by D. João Peculiar, who held the position of archbishop of Braga between 1138 and 1175.

The reference to the "Magister Sisaldis" and the existence of a series of initials with a large "S" seem to indicate the name of the master builder, a rare element within the panorama of Portuguese Romanesque architecture. However, the elevation of the west portal may not correspond to such an ancient date.



## OUR LADY OF THE MILK

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The image of Our Lady of the Milk, placed on the main altarpiece, is a very curious sculpture that surely deserves our attention. The absence of movement of the figure of Our Lady, the size of its head and hands - proportionally very large when compared with the body - seem to suggest that it dates back to the Romanesque period. This disproportion should not be considered merely as the result of an artist's lack of skill. It is often intentional. These images were designed to be seen from below, and so, their most expressive elements were highlighted.

With a fixed and absent gaze, Our Lady is not establishing any visual connection with Her Son, as usual in that period. However, the fact that the Infant is represented as a naked child looking at His Mother suggests an iconography typical from the Gothic period.

Although the origin of the representation of Our Lady of the Milk dates back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century, it is from the 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards that this iconographic type is more widely accepted and developed. The devotion to and worship of Our Lady witnessed an extraordinary growth in the Gothic period, following a trend for an increasing proximity between the sacred figures and the believers. It is within this context that several versions of the Virgin of Tenderness appear, including the representation of Our Lady breastfeeding Her Son.

The image from the Church of Unhão, made of polychrome limestone ("pedra de Ançã") and of unknown origin, is an interesting example of the persistence of Romanesque shapes well into the Gothic period.

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Portuguese Romanesque sculpture does not require figurative motifs for the programme to have an intention. Actually, and more accurately, we shouldn't talk of decorative sculpture when there are only geometric or botanic motifs. The fact that the sculpture focuses on the portals shows, in itself, the significance of the symbolic values assigned to the portal. This is one of the most fascinating features of the Portuguese Romanesque style that the Romanesque from the Sousa basin developed in a singular fashion.

