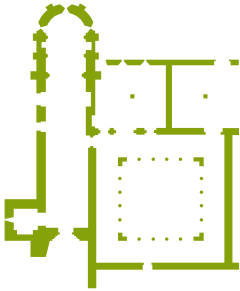


15.

MONASTERY OF SAINT PETER OF CÊTE



Largo do Mosteiro
Cête
Paredes



41° 10' 50.790" N
8° 22' 0.456" W



+351 918 116 488



Sunday
11 am



Saint Peter
29th June



National Monument
1910



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The location of the Monastery of Saint Peter of Cête, amidst the best agricultural lands, is an attractive history lesson. A visit to this Monastery still shows how ancient the roots of this parish's territorial organization are. It also clarifies the important role that religious orders played in the Portuguese kingdom's formation and consolidation.

In the 10th and 11th centuries, the period of the Reconquest and territorial reorganization, the presence of a church was the best sign that such territory was organized and inhabited. At that time, it was the best evidence of the Christian ownership and occupation of a given territory, and a physical, religious and psychological guarantee to the inhabitants of that region.

The foundation of the Monastery of Cête, which tradition ascribes to Gonçalo Oveques (1067-1113) - who is buried in the chapel located on the ground level of the main façade's tower - dates back to the 10th century. In 924, the documents already evidence its existence by mentioning, in 985, a basilica dedicated to Saint Peter; in this period, the Monastery was under the protection of the Leoderigo Gondesendes family.

His descendants were united in marriage to the lords of Moreira, one of whom - Guterre Mendes - was buried in the Monastery of Cête. The lords of Moreira, who achieved important political positions, also held the patronage over the monasteries of Moreira da Maia (Maia), Rio Tinto (Gondomar) and Refojos de Leça (Santo Tirso).

Nonetheless, the Church, as it currently stands, does not correspond to such ancient periods. Its construction dates from the Gothic period as evidenced by the façade's composition, the relationship between the Church's length and width, the relationship between the heights of the chevet and the nave and the sculpture of its capitals and corbels.

This Gothic construction campaign, which may be dated back to a period between the late 13th century and the first quarter of the 14th century, is well docu-

mented in the funerary inscription of abbot Estêvão Anes, embedded in the inner face of the chancel's north wall, together with his sarcophagus.

The Church's interior space really depicts a typically Gothic sense of space. The first rows of the nave and, probably, the south portal leading to the cloister were reused from an older building. In the construction campaign of the 13th-14th centuries, the chancel was again rebuilt, the nave was extended both in height and length, and the main façade was completely renovated. On the Church's walls there is a significant number of initials, almost all of them geometrical.

The chevet's elevation is typically Romanesque, by showing the use of blind arcades to mark the wall's rhythm and animate it. On the other hand, the frontal modillions that support the cornice on the outside are clearly Gothic, as well





as the relationship between the heights of the nave and the chevet. Despite the fact that the narrow crevices emphasize the enclosed nature of the walls - a feature that is usually associated with Romanesque architecture -, we should note that Portuguese Gothic architecture has many examples, both of parish and monastic architecture, which feature walls similar to those of the Monastery of Cête.

Despite the Gothic renovation it underwent and, as it often occurs in the history of Portuguese medieval architecture, this Church is a beautiful example of the acceptance of Romanesque models and of how much they were bound to religious conceptions. While the north side portal should be considered Gothic, the main portal incorporates features from an epigonic Romanesque style. For all this, the Church of Cête is a key-monument for establishing dates within the context of the region's late Romanesque style.

The tower of Cête, which accommodates the funerary chapel of Gonalo Oveques, besides serving as a bell tower, has a symbolic meaning that we should emphasize. Embedded in the aade, it is certainly not

a residential tower. However, it is also associated with a lordship because, in the medieval period, the abbot of a given monastery was usually a nobleman. So, the robust and defensive appearance of the tower features an essentially symbolic motivation.

In the medieval period, a monastic complex was composed of a series of buildings whose location was largely determined by the space taken up by the church's structure. Usually, the cloister and other quarters were placed against the south aade, because it faced the sun and was, therefore, warmer. But there are several exceptions that may be explained by historical or topographical reasons, or due to the availability of land around the church. In the Monastery of Cête, the cloister and the chapter house - currently private properties -, which were built to the south of the Church, are some of those outbuildings that were part of the monastic ensembles, despite corresponding to a renovation carried out during the Manueline period [style also known as Portuguese late Gothic, which develops during the reign of King Manuel I (k. 1495-1521)].

During the same period, the Church underwent other renovations evidenced by the main façade's buttress - that reinforces the tower - and, internally, by the composition of the funerary chapel's vault and the arcosolium framed by an ogee arch that accommodates the tomb chest of Gonçalo Oveques, decorated with botanic motifs. The arcosolium fits into a common typology for the composition of these funerary spaces, which was typical of the second half of the 15th century and the first quarter of the 16th century. The chapel's interior was also ennobled with polychrome tile panels.

In Portugal, from the late 15th century and early 16th century onwards, it became usual to use tile linings as a way to artistically improve architectural spaces. The durability of this material, together with the strong decorative expression it gives to the sites where it is applied, explain its widespread use.

The chapel of Gonçalo Oveques preserves good examples of Spanish-Moorish tiles. Its architectural composition dates back to the late 15th century or early 16th century, and the tile lining probably belongs to the same period. The ensemble is made up of pieces with different patterns - phytomorphic, geometrical and bow-shaped motifs -, coloured in blue, green and brown over a white background, covering different parts of the chapel. These panels are framed by frames of a simplified geometric design.

The tomb of abbot Estêvão Anes, with a lying statue, was carved in granite. It was manufactured locally and features a static nature due to the characteristics of the granite - a rock which is hard to carve - and to the artist's lack of skill. The abbot's head bears a miter and is resting on two pillows. He is wearing ecclesiastical clothes - whose straight pleats show a



very conventional plastic treatment - and holding a crosier in his right hand. The face shows a hard and stereotyped representation, which is very distant from what was already being produced in Portugal at the time, both in the Central region - from Coimbra to Lisbon, where artists took advantage of various types of limestone - and in Évora - where marble allowed achieving much more refined results.

Between 1881 and 1882, the Monastery's Church was subject to restoration works that showed its deplorable state of repair at the time. The restoration works that began in the 1930s, gave the monastic ensemble the appearance it currently has. These works began with the demolition of all the architectural elements that were concealing the primitive building, namely: the

demolition of the sacristy and storerooms; the removal of the stone staircases that led to the building's first floor; the destruction of one of the tower's floors; the reopening of the primitive north façade's door; the repair of the medieval tombs, which were moved to the cloister; the demolition of housing quarters that had been built above the chapter house. Inside the Church, the works included: the removal of the pulpit and the four altars that were obstructing the nave; the reconstitution of the chancel's small columns, frames and two crevices, based on the model of the only crevice that had remained intact; the reduction and reconstruction of the high choir; the consolidation of the corresponding walls; the restoration of the buttress of the tower's north façade and its crowning.





SAINT SEBASTIAN

Inside the Church's nave, on the south side and inside an arcosolium, there are still traces of a mural painting depicting *Saint Sebastian* shot by arrows. It probably dates back to the second quarter of the 16th century. This painting, despite its residual condition, deserves to be mentioned within the framework of the devotions from the late Middle Ages and the first half of the 16th century. In a survey conducted on Portuguese mural paintings from the above mentioned periods, it was found that the most depicted saint is precisely Saint Sebastian, matching the large number of full-body sculptures of the saint manufactured during the same period which managed to reach our days. Saint Sebastian, whose martyrdom probably occurred in 288, was considered Rome's third patron saint and was, undoubtedly, one of the most popular saints in Portugal, as well as across Europe, during the Middle Ages. This huge popularity is mainly due to the anti-plague powers that he supposedly had, although the origin of these powers are not completely clear yet. Anyway, the belief is that, like the arrows that were shot by his executors did not manage to kill Sebastian, also the plague and other diseases, which were seen as arrows that penetrated the body from the outside, would not manage to introduce plague in people's bodies.

The saint's protection - in a period of so many endemic epidemics -, as well as its invocation and devotion were seen as an effective protection against diseases. This protection and prophylactic value were extended to the diseases that raided agricultural crops. It is curious noticing that, in the 19th century, Saint Sebastian would be invoked as the protector of vines against phylloxera, the vineyard's plague, thus showing how much his anti-plague powers were a well-rooted belief.



DON'T MISS OUT

- 4.8 km: Castromil Gold Mines (p. 259)