



20.

CHURCH OF SAINT PETER OF ABRAGÃO



Rua Paçal
Abragão
Penafiel



41° 9' 26.601" N
8° 13' 20.889" W



+351 918 116 488



Saturday, 4 pm (winter)
or 6 pm (summer)
Sunday, 7 and 11 am



Saint Peter
29th June



National Monument
1977



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Yes

The only remain from the Romanesque period in the Church of Saint Peter of Abragão is its chevet. However, this chevet is a significant legacy of the region's Romanesque architecture. Outside, it bears a frieze composed of geometric motifs which recalls the decorative style of the churches from the Visigoth and Mozarabic periods and whose revival, in works from the 13th century, is one of the most interesting and peculiar phenomena in Portuguese Romanesque architecture. The Romanesque dialect of the Sousa and Baixo Tâmega valleys shows this phenomenon in a unique way.

In 1105, there is already reference to the existence of the Church of Abragão; that was the year when Paio Peres Romeu donated, in his will, a fourth of "Sancto Petro Auregam" to the Monastery of Paço de Sousa (Penafiel) (p. 90). However, this Church was not the one that included the Romanesque chevet that is still preserved today, given that the latter dates back to the second quarter of the 13th century, thus being part of a building that tradition ascribes to the initiative of Princess Mafalda (1195-1256), the daughter of King Sancho I (k. 1185-1211) and granddaughter of King Afonso



Henriques (k. 1143-1185), the first King of Portugal.

Both the main façade and the nave correspond to a reconstruction from the second half of the 17th century. The chevet and its corresponding chancel arch are the only Romanesque elements that have remained from the original building. The rectangular chevet is composed of two rhythmic bays and stepped buttresses, thus presenting a solution designed to reduce rainwater infiltrations.

Inside, the broken stone vault covers the entire structure of the chevet and shelters a Baroque altarpiece. The chancel features sculptural decorations with botanic themes, including the triumphal arch that is surmounted by a five-pointed star-shaped rosette, whose ornaments recall the traditional themes of the flamboyant swastika, the six-leaved rosettes and the bevelled palm leaves.

The bulb-shaped bases, the adorsed columns and the capitals - which are very bulky when compared to the low height of the chevet - depict decorative themes similar to those of the main portal of the Monastery of Travanca (Amarante) (p. 212).

The capitals are good examples of Romanesque sculpture techniques. One of them features atlantes supported by leaves on the corner and the other shows birds with intertwined necks. The distribution of the sculptures is well framed by the capitals' frustums. On the left capital, the atlas-shaped figures whose heads are placed on the frustum's angle, emphasise the supporting role of the column; on the right capital, the birds are facing each other on the angle, and the frustum's central face is occupied by an animal head that is devouring the birds' tails. This method of carving the capitals, while creating a close relationship between their



FINDINGS IN THE CHURCH OF ABRAGÃO

During the urban improvement works associated with the Civic Centre of Abragão, a significant number of Romanesque architectural elements that had once belonged to the Church were found in the Parish Council's support building. During the construction of the building - which was used as a blacksmith workshop - several pieces, some cut and others carved, which belonged to the old nave of the Church that was rebuilt in the second half of the 17th century were reused on the walls.

Until very recently, the chevet and the chancel arch were the only Romanesque elements that remained from the original building. This discovery has enriched the

heritage value of the Romanesque Church. The study and the planned display of these pieces in the Romanesque Sculpture Interpretive Centre will allow people to have a better knowledge about not only the Church of Abragão but also of the Romanesque style from the Tâmega and Sousa basins in general.

From the elements that were found, we highlight the capitals, bases, voussoirs and shafts that belonged to a portal. Their size and quantity suggest they might have been part of the Church's main portal. The capitals with affronted animals or bevelled palm leaves, as well as the carved voussoirs with secant circle motifs are similar to the sculpture in the Churches of Boelhe (p. 156) and Paço de Sousa (p. 90), both in the municipality of Penafiel.

The size and the sculptural quality of the rosette, which are proven by several elements, is even more surprising. This trace is valuable for two reasons. On the one hand, the rosettes of other Romanesque churches from the region, such as the ones from the Monasteries of Paço de Sousa and Pombeiro (Felgueiras) (p. 30), were subject to changes and, on the other hand, the size of the rosette from Abragão allows us to believe that the Church's nave was a lot larger than its chevet. Everything suggests that the Church of Abragão had a previously unsuspected monumentality.



shape and placement, is precisely one of the most typical and unique features of Romanesque sculpture.

The main façade and the nave date back to the 17th century, as proven by the inscriptions carved in the masonry work. The nave was rebuilt in 1668 and the work's patron was abbot Ambrósio Vaz Golias. Considering the state of ruin

shown by the Church's nave, the abbot began this reforming campaign in order to dignify the old temple.

The Church's façade and nave fit into the Mannerist style, depicting an austere and clean taste. Inside the Church there are Baroque elements on the altarpieces from the collateral altars and the main altar, as well as in the polychrome painting on stone we



find on the wall next to the triumphal arch and on the chancel's walls and ceiling. This Church was restored in 1845 at the expense of José António de Matos - a man who lived in Brazil and had been born in this parish - in an attitude that the press of the time classified as pious and patriotic. The building works carried out in the Church, which was about to collapse, were directed by Francisco Monteiro Guedes Meireles de Brito, who kept the building's primitive style and nature in its

reconstruction: a venerable Church which is almost as old as the "monarchy". Although it is not possible to know which elements were really affected by the works carried out in 1845, it is significant that they were guided by the idea of preserving the building's primitive style and nature; so, this was a restoration work, rather than a preservation or modernisation work, motivated by the prestige of the tradition that ascribes the Church's foundation to Princess Mafalda (p. 158).

