



23.

CHURCH OF SAINT MICHAEL OF ENTRE- -OS-RIOS



Lugar de Entre-os-Rios
Eja
Penafiel



41° 5' 0.12" N
8° 17' 57.94" W



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Saturday
6 pm



Saint Michael
29th September



National Monument
1927



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Visiting the Church of Saint Michael of Entre-os-Rios, located on the right bank of the river Tâmega, and enjoying the surrounding landscape, are excellent excuses to understand how the location of a temple is a remarkable proof of civilization.

This Church is located in an area rather important at the time of the Reconquest, which fits into the political and military reorganization led by King Alfonso III of Asturias in order to create safety conditions that allowed the settlement of people in the Douro valley.

In the early days of the Reconquest, the Baixo Tâmega belonged, to a large extent, to the territory of the “civitas” [a type of Portuguese administrative division] of Anegia. According to Carlos Alberto Ferreira de Almeida, the Douro river was, by then, already an important waterway. This territory was also crossed by two major roads that connected the North to the South.

The documents place the creation of the territory of Anegia around 870, meaning it was coeval with the conquests of Portucale (868) and Coimbra (878). Within the context of these conquests, strategic points were selected to build fortresses and the “comites” were defined, which



represented the kings of Asturias and León in order to ensure the safety and settlement of populations in bordering areas, always under the threat of the Muslim raids.

The territory of the “civitas” of Anegia corresponds to a natural northwest-southeast corridor which is defined, to the east, by Marão and Montemuro mountains, to the south by the massif of the Freita mountain and, to the west, by a mountain ridge known as Serra Sicca in the Middle Ages. This natural barrier was fortified over the river Douro by the Monte do Castelo, in Broalhos, and by the Alto do Castelo, in Medas (Gondomar). The river Sousa was dominated by the Castle of Aguiar de Sousa (Paredes) (p. 84), which was taken by Almanzor in 995, and, the river Ferreira, by the Alto do Castelo, in Campo (Valongo).

Between the early and the mid-11th century, there was the fragmentation of the territory as a result of a reduction in the number of

Muslim attacks and the social pressure of the families of noblemen, who were eager for a greater share of military, administrative and judicial powers. This led to the division of the territory into a series of “terras” [a type of Portuguese administrative division], each one headed by a castle. These were powerful reasons that gave the region an important strategic position. It was dominated by one of the most famous families in Portucale: the Ribadouros.

The first documentary reference to the Church of Saint Michael is included in the *Book of Wills of Paço de Sousa*. The document, which probably dates back to 1095, mentions a donation of part of the Church to that Monastery (Penafiel) (p. 90).

The choice of Saint Michael as patron saint was surely associated with the atmosphere felt during the Reconquest and the reorganization of the territory. The warrior and triumphant saints, like the archangel Saint Michael, the head of the Celestial Army,





were intensely worshipped and evoked in this period. However, the current Church does not correspond to such a late period. It was probably subject to renovation during the 14th century.

This example fits into the “resistance Romanesque” style, a characteristic that is so typical of other Romanesque churches in the region of the Baixo Tâmega. This temple uses solutions from the “rural Gothic” style - as we can see in the type of botanic decoration, both of the chancel arch and of the north portal - together with building solutions typical of the Romanesque period.

The portals do not feature any columns or tympana and the arches are systematically broken. The Church does not feature any capitals and the use of impostas as support for the arches, as well as the use of decorative elements with geometric and bevelled foliage, such as vine leaves (so often used in the late Romanesque style), are other traits that pinpoint this Church in a chronology that is close to the Gothic period, despite the fact that it still shows a persistence of Romanesque shapes.

The plan follows the usual scheme of the single nave with a rectangular chevet. The original chevet was extended within the

scope of the renovations carried out in the liturgical space during the 18th century, and it was also made higher because, usually, medieval chevets are lower than the naves. In fact, because the original chancel arch was kept, the chevet is rather reserved when compared to the nave, thus creating a peculiar sense of space that is emphasised by the magnificent main altarpiece. The Church is built with cut granite blocks arranged in pseudo-isodomic rows. We should highlight the curious fact that, in this Church, there are almost no initials on the granite blocks, considering that it was usual to find a significant number of stonemasons’ initials and position marks in buildings from this period. It was only possible to find one stonemason’s initial on one of the wall blocks of the main façade.

The main façade features a rather simplified portal, surmounted by a pointed arch and supported by impostas. The entire top of the façade is shaped as a gable with a cross on the apex and it is crowned by two 18th-century pinnacles on the sides. This gable probably included the medieval belfry, as shown by the marks left by the bell-ringing rope or chain visible on the main portal. The lateral façades show



a series of corbels that support the roof's eave which, given their shape, large size and absence of sculptures, announce a late construction method while suggesting remembrances of the Romanesque style.

The north portal, with a broken arch, received richer decorations than the ones of the main portal; it is framed by an archivolt decorated with diamond-shaped motifs and geometric bevelled eight-leaved petals, which are similar to the ones found inside the Church, on the chancel arch, and are elements that fit it into the late Romanesque and the regional Gothic styles.

The interior of the Church features a nave with a wooden roof, separated from the chevet by a broken chancel arch that allows accessing the chancel; the arch rests

on imposts without any columns and is decorated with botanic elements.

On the chancel's north wall there is still an arcossolium from the medieval Church, which was intended to shelter a tomb and was partially cut by the opening of a door during the building works carried out in the Modern Period. Inside there are other elements that reveal interventions carried out in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, such as the altars, the pulpit and the windows.

The campaign for the restoration of the Church of Entre-os-Rios began in 1936 and included repairing the roofs, cleaning the plasters, replacing windows and crevices, flagging floors, reducing the chancel by moving the main altar, walling-up a door, reopening crevices and demolishing the bell tower and the access stairs.



LATE ROMANESQUE ARCHITECTURE

This Church, which is also known as Church of Eja, is part of a large group of peculiar examples of late Romanesque architecture that dot the landscape of the Baixo Tâmega basin, such as the Churches of Abrugão (p. 152), Boelhe (p. 156) and Cabeça Santa (p. 159), in Penafiel, Saint Isidore (p. 173), Tabuado (p. 188), Vila Boa de Quires (p. 168), Sobretâmega (p. 176), Saint Nicholas (p. 179) and Vila Boa do Bispo (p. 163), in Marco de Canaveses.
