

27.

## CHURCH OF SAINT CHRISTOPHER OF NOGUEIRA



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de Nogueira, Cinfães



41° 4' 24.69" N  
8° 7' 44.53" W



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Sunday  
10.30 am



Saint Christopher  
25<sup>th</sup> July



Submitted to  
classification



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With its façade facing the Douro valley, the Church of Saint Christopher is representative of the parish organization and morphology in the Late Middle Ages (1000-1453). According to tradition, the castle of Sampaio, a small conical hill to the south, on the mountain slope, was the seat of the primitive parish and Church, which was later transferred to the hamlet of Nogueira by powerful Moors.

This narrative may actually help us understand, not the transfer of the Church, but rather the division of the two parishes that were initially subject to the castle located in Sampaio and where the Saviour was probably worshipped, considering that this was the hagiotoponym given to the territory. It was probably still during the 12<sup>th</sup> century that the land was sectioned into two parishes: São João Baptista de Cinfães (from whose Romanesque church only a disassembled tympanum placed next to the existing Baroque church remains) and São Cristóvão de Nogueira. Deeply modified in the Modern Period - when the chancel (late 18<sup>th</sup> century) was rebuilt, large windows were opened and buildings were attached to it -, the Church of Saint Christopher, from the extinct municipality of



Nogueira, is structurally a medieval building that fits into the so-called “resistance Romanesque” style, which combines persistent Romanesque elements with early Gothic signs. The construction of this Church should be understood within the context of the creation of the new parish; therefore, we may date the remaining Romanesque traces back to the transition from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Among these traces, the late main portal stands out as an especially significant element; it is carved in the thickness of the wall and does not feature any columns; however, its chamfered archivolt is decorated with the pearl motif, which was quite popular in the surrounding region. On the impostes there are rope-shaped motifs. The south side portal is rather curious, given the originality of the motifs carved on the voussoirs’ base. On both impostes we find a fist holding a key (?). Along the walls, which are defined by a bevelled edge, there are also curious decorative motifs,

among which we highlight a lizard placed to the observer’s right. Besides, both the remaining voussoirs of the archivolt and the impostes, as well as the walls are dominated by intertwined botanic and phytomorphic motifs carved in relief. The portal features a single archivolt dominated by its surrounding arch; on the keystone we see an inscription that is quite faded, which may be translated as IHS, an allusion to Christ as the Saviour of Men.

In terms of the nave’s side elevations, we should highlight the reuse of a frieze decorated with palmettes typical from Braga (north side, next to the bell tower, halfway up the nave) and of several fragments of a cornice depicting zigzag motifs carved in relief. Were these persistent or reused elements?

The series of corbels located along the nave is quite rich in terms of carved imagery. Their human figures and several animal muzzles remind us that, particularly during the Romanesque period, corbels were



seen as a crucial element within the architectural composition.

Inside, another character stands out, almost showing a "horror vacui". Given the regularity of the Romanesque buildings' wall faces, these became important receivers of the new post-Tridentine aesthetics,



## THE REUSE OF MATERIALS

We find it more likely that the fragments of friezes found on the nave's north side elevation are a result of the reuse of a pre-existing building which may have existed on this very site or, alternatively, we could be standing before the reuse of sculptural elements from a primitive church dedicated to the Saviour which was relocated, thus giving factual expression to the narrative associated with this Church.

The reuse of materials was a very common practice throughout the entire History of Art. Although there have been frequent attempts to justify the reuse of ashlars while alleging a supposed prestige associated with the antiquity value, this practice was most likely the result of a pragmatic need. Reusing what is already made (and well made) is much simpler than starting from scratch. And the choice of the building's location was not always the result of elaborate notions about the sacred/profane dichotomy, but rather of the reuse of outcrops on which it was possible to safely build the new structure.



of which the Church of Saint Christopher of Nogueira is a fine specimen. The nave's ceiling shows rich Baroque coffered wood and painting works, where 57 panels created an authentic book of sermons: male and female saints related to the Catholic Reformation, bishops, apostles, martyrs and other well-known intercessors from popular prayer books. Despite having received a polychrome layer in a later period, which even involved some marbled works, this Church's woodwork represents the two periods that marked its design during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. On the collateral altarpieces, we find the National Style [1690-1725], and, on the main altarpiece, from which a grand Eucharistic throne stands out, we find the Johannine Baroque style [style

which develops during the reign of King João V (k. 1706-1750)]. In the Church of Saint Christopher of Nogueira, the use of this typically Portuguese artistic style included the triumphal arch, created the pulpit's parapet, decorated the two altarpieces embedded into the nave's walls, facing one another, and designed an extravagant high choir.

Besides the chancel's extension, the Modern Period left us the bell tower addorsed to the north side of the main façade, the pinnacles placed on top of the Church's angles and the large window that surmounts the main portal.

The Church of Saint Christopher is a good example of stylistic hybridity, which is the result of a rich combination of artistic and aesthetic diversities.



#### DON'T MISS OUT

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- 7.5 km: Belvedere of Teixeiraô (p. 268)
- 11.4 km: Boassas – "Aldeia de Portugal" (p. 267)