



41.

CHURCH
OF SAINT
NICHOLAS OF
CANAVESES



-  Rua de São Nicolau
São Nicolau
Marco de Canaveses

-  41° 11' 33.14" N
8° 9' 41.05" W

-  +351 918 116 488

-  Saturday
6 pm

-  Saint Nicholas
6th December

-  Public Interest Building
1971

-  P. 25

-  P. 25

-  *i* ×

Built on the left bank of the river Tâmega, near the medieval bridge that once existed in Canaveses, the location of the Church of Saint Nicholas cannot be understood without referring to this road element and to the temple built close to it on the opposite bank, the Church of Sobretâmega (Marco de Canaveses) (p. 176). The path of the old road (possibly a Roman route and later a medieval road) is part of the explanation for the location of both this Church and the one of Sobretâmega, separated only by the river.

In fact, the town of Canaveses grew around this bridge; the settlement had a unilinear shape despite the fact that it was divided into two parishes: Canaveses and Sobretâmega. One of the entrance channels that connected the western coast of the peninsula to its interior emerged across this town and, therefore, across this bridge, thus complementing the entrance in the Douro valley in the east-west direction.

The town, despite being divided into two parishes and its scarce population, managed to achieve an importance that was still significant enough to accommodate the presence of a royal delegation in the 14th century, either



due to the memory of the previous kings who had honoured it with their legacies, or because it was a passage between the Douro and Minho regions. The truth is that here, in the town of Canaveses, peace was declared between father and son, King Afonso IV (k. 1325-1357) and King Pedro I (k. 1357-1367), on August 5th 1355.

Built after 1320, the Church of Saint Nicholas is a good example of how the Romanesque style created strong roots in Portugal. Being part of the family of churches identified as “resistance Romanesque” buildings, it is externally very similar to the Church of Sobretâmega. The chronology of both Churches is also very close.

THE PRIMITIVE BRIDGE OF CANAVESES

There are many stories that associate the construction of the bridge of Canaveses with Mafalda, and historiography has been trying to identify if the pious work is due to Mafalda of Savoy (1125-1157), the wife of the first king of Portugal, King Afonso Henriques (k. 1143-1185), or to her granddaughter, the blessed Mafalda (1195-1256) from Arouca. According to the tradition, the former had ordered the construction of the bridge of Canaveses, providing São Nicolau with a hospital and an inn to support poor people and travellers. However, there are no concrete evidences to prove the legendary narratives that were put down in writing by memoirists who wished to praise the antiquity and importance of their land and heritage.



Bridge of Canaveses (missing)



The small temple whose patron saint is Saint Nicholas features a single nave and a rectangular chancel. Although it is very closed in on itself, the truth is that the Modern Period left its careful mark on the light that enters the temple by opening large rectangular windows in the chancel (on both sides) and in the nave (on the south side).

However, it is in terms of the composition of the main and north portals, which are carved in the thickness of the walls, that we find the most obvious legacies of the Church's late chronology, proven by the absence of columns and capitals. Above the north portal, there is a tomb stone with an inscription difficult to read. The Church dedicated to the bishop Saint Nicholas of Bari (Italy) stands out by the absence of sculpted decorative elements, which is also related to the late nature of its Romanesque construction. The façade is surmounted by a belfry and, even though the bell is no longer there, its

presence will endure due to the scars left by its strokes on the wall.

The Church's interior is dominated by granite walls. The elements that characterise it tell us about several campaigns carried out after the Middle Ages. Considering the classicist language of their composition, the triumphal arch and the arch of the baptistery are surely coeval of the opening of the large rectangular windows. We should highlight the remains of the mural painting accidentally discovered in 1973 during an intervention related to the electrification of the Church. Despite being truncated, there are still some significant panels: *Saint Anthony the Great* and the remains of an inscription that clarifies the particular nature of the commission (on the north side of the nave's wall); fragments of an *Annunciation* (above the triumphal arch, on the same side); *Saint Catherine of Alexandria* and an inscription that seems to indicate that this panel, with a devotional nature,



might have been the result of a commission by Maria Ribeiro and Gonçalo Madeira (on the south side of the nave's wall); a *Holy Benedictine abbot* (on the area closest to the triumphal arch, on the south side) and traces of an *Annunciation*, on an overlapping layer (on the same side of the nave). Besides its significant number, the series of mural paintings of Saint Nicholas stands out because its different campaigns show obvious stylistic similarities with examples found in other geographically close Churches: Valadares

(Baião) (p. 133), Gatão (Amarante) (p. 232) and Vila Verde (Felgueiras) (p. 49). A large arch opened on the nave's south wall houses, not only a large window, but also a tomb chest with a 17th-century inscription belonging to Álvaro de Carvalho - who had himself buried there in 1565 - and his heirs.

The main altarpiece is National Style [1690-1725] woodwork piece. Its space is built around the Eucharistic throne and, on the lateral axes, we are still able to see Saint Nicholas and Saint Sebastian.

CANAVESES – "ALDEIA DE PORTUGAL"

The village of Canaveses has two parts, separated by the river Tâmega, but united by history through the missing bridge of Canaveses. Classified as "Aldeia de Portugal" [Village of Portugal], there are multiple reasons for its interest: on the north bank, in Sobretâmega, the Church of Saint Mary (p. 176), the "Direita" street, the chapel of Saint Sebastian, the river park and the pedestrian route "Caminhos de Canaveses" (8 km); on the south bank, in São Nicolau, in addition to the Church, the chapel of Saint Lazarus, the cross of the Good Passage and the pillory of Canaveses, among others.



Pillory of Canaveses



PROTECTIVE DEVOTIONS AND INVOCATIONS

Close to the bridges or crossing places it was usual to find infrastructures like the inn of Canaveses, of which only the memory remains, but also devotional spaces with invocations associated with an appeal for protection.

Although they are not in their original locations, both the chapel of Saint Lazarus and the cross of the Good Passage are good examples of the association between certain worships and the act of travelling, which naturally implied currently unimaginable risks. Lazarus, associated with one of Christ's most important miracles in the parable of the Holy Scriptures and identified as the bishop of Marseille (France) within the context of the medieval hagiography, was supposed to provide assistance to travellers, especially to lepers who, due to their pathological condition, were forced to wander. The invocation of the Good Passage expressed through the 18th-century cross also pleads for a journey without troubles. The submergence of the structure that replaced the medieval bridge in the 1940's a few meters downstream, led to the relocation of these two elements in 1988; they were moved to a location that was as close as possible to the original one, thus avoiding their submergence due to the Torrão dam (Penafiel/Marco de Canaveses).



Chapel of Saint Lazarus



Cross of the Good Passage



DON'T MISS OUT

- 1.7 km: Church of Saint Mary (p. 275)
- 1.9 km: Carmen Miranda Municipal Museum (p. 274)
- 4.5 km: Roman City of Tongobriga (p. 275)