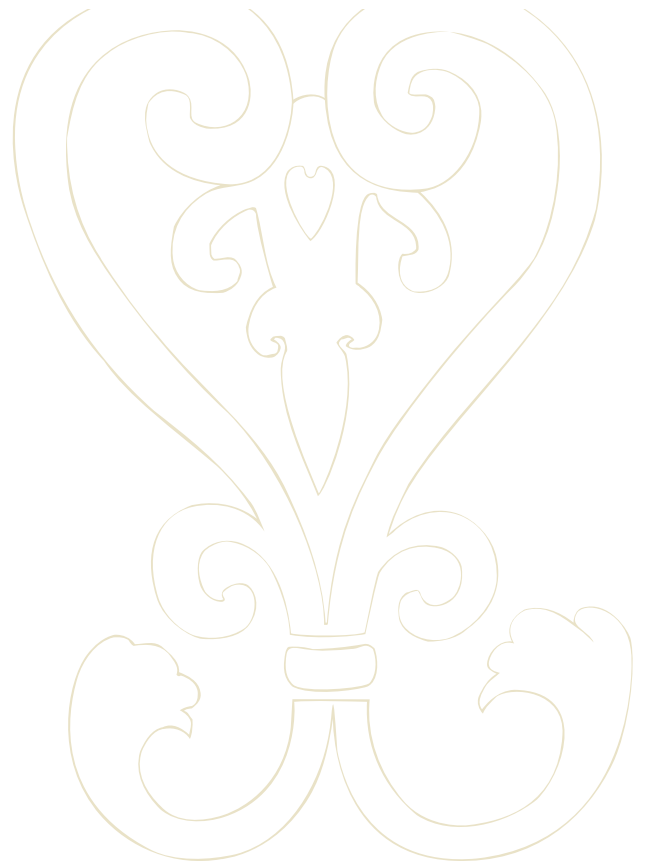




church

CHURCH OF SAINT MAMMES OF VILA VERDE



1. The church in the Middle Ages

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The best way of understanding the signs of the population's historical changes and the economic conditions of this mountainous place once dedicated to shepherding is to visit the church of St. Mammes, located in Serrinha and integrated in the parish of Vila Verde (Felgueiras), to consider the patron saint's function as a protector of livestock, and to observe the church's surrounding landscape.

The church stands over a majestic landscape, dominating the extensive valley of Vila Verde and proving that church location would follow the *habitat* of the populations in the Romanesque period, overlooking the fens in the plain areas, or the slopes in more mountainous areas.

1. The place for the edification of the Old Church of Saint Mammes is a testimonial to this former parish's economic resources, based on grazing and breeding cattle. Its abandonment and subsequent ruin are a reflexion of the historic changes in the *habitat*, which has progressively become closer to the valley.





2. Built in a location of clear scenic value, overlooking the extensive valley, the church of Saint Mammes of Vila Verde shows how church location in the Romanesque period follows the population's habitat, setting the building either overlooking the fens, in the more plain areas, or the hilltops, on the more mountainous regions.



3. The church of Saint Mammes is composed of rectangular single nave and altar, following the most usual scheme in Romanesque and Late-Romanesque architecture in Portugal.

The oldest documented reference to the Church of Saint Mammes is found in 1220's *Inquiries*, where it is already mentioned as *Sancto Mamete de Villa Verde*, a church that integrated the patronage of the Monastery of Saint Mary of Pombeiro. In 1258's *Inquiries* there is record of the parish and church of *Sancti Mametis Ville Verde* as being left in *Comitis Menendi's* will to that monastic house¹. Although these references already certify the existence of the parish and the church in the 13th century, the current temple corresponds to a later renovation, as we shall see later on.

For a better understanding of this church's location, the parish's territorial organization and its population's economic interests, we should point that its patron saint, Saint Mammes, is a saint whose reverence has deep roots in Portugal. In the 10th century, it is already very frequent to invoke this Saint in parish churches and chapels located in hills or next to the castles from this period of the Reconquest. This fact demonstrates the economic interest showed by animal husbandry and stock breeding.

According to legend, Saint Mammes was a shepherd and a martyr in Caesarea, Cappadocia. He built an oratory in the desert where he preached the Gospel to wild animals. With the milk from the animals he made cheese, which an angel ordered him to give to the poor. Pursued by emperor Aurelian, Mammes was sentenced to being devoured by a leopard, a lion and a bear. Instead, they refused to attack him and knelt at his feet. After having suffered terrible torture, his relics were taken from Cappadocia to Italy, Germany and especially France. Because of his name and for having been fed by the milk of wild animals, Saint Mammes became the patron saint of milk nurses. The martyrs he was subjected to also

¹ P.H.M – *Inquisitiones*. 1220, 72, 165, 208 and P.H.M – *Inquisitiones*. 1258, 557.

turned him into a protector against bowel diseases. Nevertheless, his popularity is especially due to his reputation as a protector of livestock.

The old parish church of Vila Verde is canonically oriented, that is, the transept is faced to the East and the main façade to the West. It is composed of a single nave and transept, both rectangular. The transept is narrower and shorter than the nave, following the most common scheme in Portuguese medieval architecture for parish constructions. The main chapel is on a higher level than the nave because the building is in the slope's tilted plane. The existing difference in height between the transept and the nave (which is lower) is compensated by three steps.

The temple is built following the Romanesque current, that is, it uses the typical building techniques, design and projections of Romanesque architecture, even though it corresponds to a period in which Gothic architecture was long prevailing. In fact, it is a construction from the 14th century that replaced the edification documented in the first quarter of the 13th century, as suggested by several elements, notably the disposition of the portals and the predominant use of plain corbels. The placing of sculpture in the corbels and their geometric shape are important to create a timeline for Romanesque churches. The oldest specimens are usually rectangular and their sculpture is very well adjusted to the shape. However, as Romanesque evolved in time, the frequent repetition of the models steered from this initial scheme, which is more cultivated and in accordance with the original Romanesque style and its branching.

In later Romanesque churches and in the exemplars from the Gothic period where solutions from the Romanesque period still linger, the corbels are usually squared, showing less theme variety and a less achieved adaptation of the sculpture.

These building and decorative elements make the Church of Saint Mammes an excellent example of the regional and peripheral flavor shown by Portuguese Romanesque architecture in several religious buildings, variations derived from its prolonged presence. It also bears witness of the adaptability of the Romanesque style, whose models arrived from France between the late 11th century and the early 12th century, to local traditions and circumstances. The prolonged permanence of this building method, reaching the 14th century and sometimes even the 16th century, leads to the classification of this type of church as *resistance Romanesque*.



4. In the Romanesque period, a church and its belfry were an insurance of physical and psychological safety to the parish's inhabitants.

Little is known about the history of this church, although its integration in the patronage of the Monastery of Saint Mary of Pombeiro, a powerful Benedictine house in this region, explains the mural painting programs received by Saint Mammes of Vila Verde in the 16th century.

In recent years, a considerable number of traces or sets of painting was *discovered* and/or restored within thorough conservation and restoration campaigns. Under layers of whitewash or hidden by parietal structures and retables from the Baroque period, these *new* specimens perfectly demonstrate the colorful interiors of Portuguese churches, in an environment that is much different from the bare walls we may presently see.

In the late 15th century and in the first quarter of the 16th century, the interior of the temples is endowed with countless sets of mural painting to furnish the main altar and the nave's altars, which evoke an increasingly higher number of saints with the powers to protect against the plague and other ailments, like Saint Sebastian, Saint Roch and Saint Anton, or to clear the path of Heaven for the souls, like Saint Christopher, Saint Barbara and Saint Catherine.

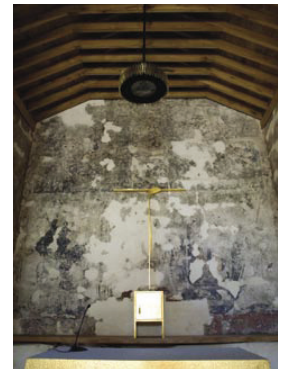


5. The triu□ intervention are examples of how the church space is an element in constant change

According to regular usage in the conservation of churches and respective furnishing, it was up to the priests or the commendataries to watch over the transept, sacristy and the priest's house. In the main chapel, it was their duty to order the maintenance, decoration and acquisition of liturgical equipments. The parishioners, i.e., the parish's inhabitants, were obliged to cater to the maintenance, renovation and reconstruction of the nave and to see to the maintenance and renovation of its contents, like the *altarpieces* and the ornaments and devotional objects.

This period also corresponds to the alteration of the main altar's position. There are several documents ordering to have the altar moved to the main chapel's East wall, indicating that it used to be isolated, that is, in the middle of the transept, allowing people to circulate around it. The altar's size is increased, and it is laid against the wall of the East end, as seen in the Church of Vila Verde, where this alteration is clear. This new altar arrangement is maintained in several temples, although we cannot quite see it because the majority present retables from the 17th and 18th centuries that cover the entire space of the apse wall. Nevertheless, the knowledge of this alteration is all the more important as it enlightens us on the distribution and framing of mural painting in the apse's East wall.

Contrary to what happened in the Romanesque period, in the Gothic period, the crucial moment in mass was the Elevation of the Host, the most appreciated stage in the evolution of the liturgical ritual. This devotion to the *Eucharist* increased largely during the Low Middle Ages. Its cult awoke a great number of miracles destined to prove the real presence of Christ in the host. Confronted with a priest's disbelief regarding transmutation, or the action of a sacrilegious Jew, the blood of Christ would spring from the host, convincing the miscreants of the truth in the *Holy Sacrament*. It is after the Counter-Reform that the liturgical and iconographical staging of the triumph of the *Eucharist* attains its peak, though its manifestation is much older, as demonstrated by the iconography of the 15th and early 16th centuries.



6. Mural painting. A program of mural painting, composed as an altarpiece, where the depictions of Saint Benedict – to the left – and Saint Bernard (?) – to the right – can still be admired on the East wall of the altar. Crowning the composition, the coat of arms of the Melos.

7. Mural painting. Although the traces of painting are very residual, the decorative pattern used in the altar walls is still visible.



The cult of the *Eucharist* and its solemnization should be related to the change of the altar's disposition which, as mentioned before, is laid against the main chapel's East wall. In the 15th and 16th centuries, the altar is endowed with mural painting in the upper and lateral surfaces.

The multiplication of secondary altars towards the end of the Middle Ages explains the enormous development of the altarpiece crafts, usually combining Painting and Sculpture. The amount of commissions turns the retable into one of the most creative artistic forms between the 13th and 16th centuries, associating techniques, creating countless types and serving as support for numerous iconographical formulations. Mural painting is a less expensive way of replying to the same liturgical, devotional and iconographical motivation.

In Saint Mammes of Vila Verde the traces of mural painting, nowadays only residual, are enough to conclude that the main chapel's lateral walls were painted with a botanical and geometrical decorative pattern, as seen in the *suspended tapestry panels*. In the East end wall, painted as a retable, we may also identify the figures of two saints as being *Saint Benedict* and *Saint Bernard*, because one of them is wearing a black habit and the other wears a white habit. Both are holding crosiers.

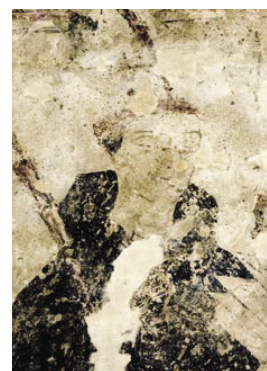
The decorative patterns and the figures' formal characteristics establish a parallel between this program and others from 1510, like the Savior of Bravães (Ponte da Barca), São Cristovão de Lordelo (Felgueiras; there are only photographic records of it left), Saint Martin of Penacova (Felgueiras), the Savior of Freixo de Baixo (Amarante), Saint Nicholas of Marco de Canaveses and Saint Marinha of Vila Marim (Vila Real). Still in the main chapel's East wall, the presence of a coat of arms belonging to the Melo family reinforces the idea of the commission of this program by the commendatory abbots of the Monastery of Saint Mary of Pombeiro, equally responsible for the mural painting campaigns in the churches of Saint Marinha of Vila Marim and Saint Martin of Penacova. These churches belonged to the same patronage. The paintings of the church nave are probably from the same period.

There is another mural painting campaign in the main chapel, overlapping the one previously mentioned, which is probably from 1530/1550. Very faint traces from this period were identified by a recent study based on photographic documentation from the 1920s or 30s² as the representation of *Saint Mammes*, the church's patron saint. Next to the Saint's feet were depicted two cheeses and a mug, along with a sheep, a clear reference to the legend of his life, as well as his quality as patron of livestock and milk.

Once again, this campaign is comparable to others, namely the church of Vila Marim's, whose inscription dates from 1549, or the church of the Monastery of Saint Mary of Pombeiro's, presenting the same decorative motive in the frame of a covered door that used to lead to the cloister, and to one of the programs of the church of Saint Eulalia of Arnoso (Famalicão). There are other examples from that monastery's patronage, and again from orders by the commendatory abbots, as Paula Bessa has pointed out, in this case, by D. António de Melo, referenced in documents as the abbot of Pombeiro between 1526 and 1556³.



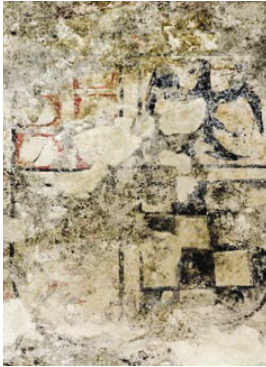
8. Mural painting. Decorative frame.



9. Mural painting. East wall of the altar. Depiction of Saint Benedict.

2 AFONSO, Luis Urbano de Oliveira – *A Pintura Mural Portuguesa entre o Gótico Internacional e o Fim do Renascimento: Formas, Significados, Funções. Corpora da Pintura Mural Portuguesa (c. 1400-c. 1550)*. Annex A. Lisboa: Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa, 2006, p. 843.

3 BESSA, Paula – *Pintura mural em Santa Marinha de Vila Marim, S. Martinho de Penacova, Santa Maria de Pombeiro e na Capela Funerária Anexa à Igreja de S. Dinis de Vila Real: Parentescos Pictóricos e Institucionais e as Encomendas do Abade D. António de Melo*. Annex of *Cadernos do Noroeste*, 20 (1-2), Série História 3, 2003, pp. 67-95.



10. Mural painting. East wall of the altar. Coat of arms of the Melos, commendatory abbots from the Monastery of Saint Mary of Pombeiro (Felgueiras). The church of Saint Mammes of Vila Verde was patroned by this Monastery. The two mural painting campaigns for the church of Saint Mammes result from those abbots' orders, one from the 1st decade and another from the mid 16th century.

According to Luís Afonso, this pictorial campaign may be attributed to the painter Arnaus who signs the frescos in the church of Saint Paio of Midões (Barcelos), dated in an inscription from 1535. This painter, whom the author considers as a particularly imaginative artist with technical capacities set way above his peers', is equally credited with the aforementioned mural painting campaigns in Vila Marim, dating from 1549, in São Romão de Arões (Fafe), Saint James of Folhadela (Vila Real), the Savior of Fonte Arcada (Póvoa de Lanhoso), Saint Leocadia of Geraz do Lima (Viana do Castelo), Saint Mary of Ermelo (Arcos de Valdevez), Saint Mary of Pombeiro (the painting of the South apside), Our Lady of the Valley (Paredes) and probably Saint Eulalia of Arnoso (Famalicão)⁴.

In Luís Afonso's opinion, Arnaus is the most interestingly recognized fresco artist of the Portuguese Renaissance, mastering plastic effects of great technical virtuosity⁵.

The mural painting of the Church of Vila Verde shows how, sometimes, top quality artists would work in churches of little architectonic apparatus. It also demonstrates how the entity commissioning the works was decisive in the choice of the artists and pictorial programs, and how erroneous some analyses can be when they consider that the artistic programs in these rural churches correspond to peripheral and atavistic works. It is curious to notice that the Church of Saint Mammes of Vila Verde both presents a late architectonic solution, still repeating Romanesque forms in the 14th century, and is an example of *modernity* concerning mural painting. In this sense, it is an enlightened lesson in Art History. [LR]

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2. The church in the Modern Period

Since the Middle Ages, the Church of Saint Mammes of Vila Verde integrates the patronage of the Monastery of Saint Mary of Pombeiro, responsible for presenting the parish priest. In this capacity, the monastery was responsible for the execution of the main chapel, as well as granting it with its artistic patrimony.

In the old parish church, the main artistic element from the Modern Period resides in the main chapel, in its architectonic arrangement, and especially in the aforementioned fragments of mural painting from the 16th century.

The transformation of the medieval space into a space adapted to the modern liturgical practices is also perceptible in the rectangular spans, torn in the building's lateral projections, both in the nave and in the main chapel. Likewise, the perfect triumph arch marking the separation between the body of the nave and that of the narrower and lowered main chapel already indicates an intervention posterior to the Medieval Period.

The scarceness of artistic references from the 17th and 18th centuries is evident and it can be explained by the prolonged abandonment suffered by this building, leading it to a profound state of ruin. From the mid 19th century on, cult was transferred to the New Church of Vila Verde, a new and bigger building with more favorable access for the population.



11. Mural painting. Frame. This frame's decorative motive is similar to one used in the Monastery of Saint Mary of Pombeiro.

⁴ AFONSO, Luís Urbano de Oliveira – *A Pintura Mural Portuguesa entre o Gótico Internacional e o Fim do Renascimento: Formas, Significados, Funções*. Lisboa: Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa, 2006, pp. 178-188.

⁵ IDEM, *ibidem*, p. 178.

The new temple was solemnly inaugurated in 1866⁶. This cult transfer, denouncing a change in the territory's occupation, condemned the former temple to oblivion, and the lack of use originated the irreparable loss of its main artistic components. Doomed to forgetfulness, the old church lost the cover, falling prey to the ruinous effects of Nature's elements and invasion and causing the degradation of its artistic furnishing. From its movable patrimony, however, a few pieces survived and are currently found in the New Church, namely, the 17th-century image of *Our Lady of the Rosary* and an interesting *Nativity Scene* in clay from the 18th century.

In spite of the current bareness shown by this building's interior, we know that in 1726 it featured relevant artistic elements that characterized it as a heterogeneous space with the coexistence of pieces, coatings and architectonic elements from different periods. The main chapel had an altarpiece structure that displayed the image of the dedicatee, and the nave had three altars that sheltered the images of *Our Lady of Grace*, *Our Lady of the Rosary*, *God Child* and *Saint Roch*.⁷

The description of the altars was recorded in 1758: "The church's patron saint, is the glorious Saint Mammes; it has four altars, namely, the main altar, the altar of the Holy Name of Jesus, the altar of Our Lady of Grace, and the altar of Saint Anthony; it does not have brotherhoods; it has two guilds, one of the Name of God, and another of Our Lady, directed by Doctor Ombudsman of the District of Guimarães"⁸.

In Baroque times, and a synonym of the counter-reformist religious collectivism, the population of Vila Verde supported two Guilds, each having the *God Child* and *Our Lady* as patrons. These two laic collectives were represented in the nave altars of the parish church. The brethren of each guild were responsible for the acquisition and maintenance of the artistic patrimony of their private altar. [MJMR/DGS]

3. Conservation and requalification

The Church of Saint Mammes was progressively abandoned since the second half of the 19th century, following the construction of the new parish church of Vila Verde, located in the village center.

Carlos Alberto F. de Almeida describes the residential nucleus of Vila Verde: "With two excellent residences from the 18th century, one of them with a chapel devoted the saint, and some others from the 19th century, the small place of Rua, with its bonded houses, is a rich patrimonial estate that should be preserved. Only the collaboration between neighbors and a relative economic ease, resulting from stock breeding and corn production, could have achieved these results of such improved rural houses. It is therefore an historic complex to cherish"⁹.

The new church, from 1866, features an architecture marked by the distinctive simplicity, building rigor and sobriety of the 19th century. Nevertheless, what is most striking is its movable patrimony. The statuary from the 17th and 18th centuries belonging to the older church was transferred to the new temple.



12. Mural painting. East wall of the altar. Depiction of Saint Bernard (?).

6 FERNANDES, M. António – *Felgueiras de Ontem e de Hoje*. Felgueiras: Câmara Municipal de Felgueiras, 1989, p. 128.

7 CRAESBEECK, Francisco Xavier da Serra – *Memórias Ressuscitadas da Província de Entre-Douro-e-Minho no anno de 1726*. Vol. II. Ponte de Lima: Edições Carvalhos de Basto Lda., 1992, p.194.

8 Torre do Tombo National Archive Institute – *Memórias Paroquiais de 1758*. www.iannt.pt

9 ALMEIDA, Carlos Alberto Ferreira – *Inventário das Terras do Sousa. Patrimonium*. Porto: Etnos, Lda., 1995.

In the 1940s, the graves are translocated to the new parish cemetery, further sentencing the old church to ruin.

In the last decades, the abandonment of the temple of Saint Mammes contributed to the transformation of the surrounding landscape. This way, the old pastures succumbed to new constructions, both residential and structural, changing the reading of the landscape and its relation to the valley. However, it is still possible to find vernacular constructions reporting to farming and husbandry activities in the vicinity of the Old Church of Saint Mammes.

Between 2004 and 2007, conservation and requalification works were conducted in the church, under the supervision of the DGEMN, within the *Route of the Romanesque of the Sousa Valley* project. From the old temple of Saint Mammes, only the walls of the nave and the main chapel survived. Inside, the walls of the triumph arch and of the sacristy adjacent to the transept remained, whereas the entire covering had vanished. [MB]

Chronology

1220 – Record of the existence of the parish and of the Church of Saint Mammes of Vila Verde;

14th century – Church reedification;

16th century – Remodeling the interior, moving the transept; mural painting campaigns;

18th century – Construction of the sacristy;

19th century – Abandonment of the temple;

20th century (1940s) – Transferring the graves to the new parish cemetery;

2005/2007 – Repairs within the *Route of the Romanesque of the Sousa Valley* project: stratigraphic study of projections and archaeological excavations, replacing the covering, coating the walls, paving, preserving the church frescos, organization of the ceremonial space, interior illumination and landscaping the surrounding area.

