





CHURCH
OF THE SAVIOUR
OF REAL
AMARANTE

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Plan.

Built on a hillside area overlooking the fields that flank the water course, the Church of the Saviour of Real is currently isolated and stands at a slightly higher level than the path that lead us to it. The construction of the new parish church, in 1938¹, led to the abandonment of the former, whose building still shows significant Romanesque sections, especially on the main façade and on the south elevation, despite the major transformation it underwent between 1750 and 1760.



Aerial view.

At first sight, what stands out on the main façade is the coexistence of two different ashlar typologies. On the lower half, roughly, we notice the presence of rectangular and well-cut right-angled ashlars that, despite their different sizes, form rows of stones with approximately the same height. This type of ashlar also stretches along the lateral façades, thus confirming the fact that it was preserved here in order to operate as a counterfort for the Church's southeast and southwest corners. While the upper half of the main façade seem to be made up of filling ashlars (irregular, with small and different shapes, joined with mortar), on the lateral walls we already feel improvements in terms of their quality; however, this does not mean that they are more regular. Note that we are not excluding the possibility of a reuse of the Romanesque ashlars in this area during the transformation undertaken in the 18th century. On the contrary. Knowing that the reuse of ashlar from previous periods was very common (and practical), it is quite possible that something similar has occurred in this old Church of Real.

¹ Informação n.º 1234 de 18 de setembro de 1963. IRHU/Arquivo ex-DGEMN/DREM N 2494/10.



West façade.

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But it is on the portal that we find the most significant surviving Romanesque elements of this Church; its taste suggests a late chronology, already closer to the Gothic period. Composed of two broken archivolts with tori – an adaptation of the influence the city of Porto had on the region of Amarante, surely through Travanca (Amarante)² – it no longer shows a tympanum, which confirms its late appearance. The columns are thin and slender; the outer ones feature cylindrical shafts and the inner ones have prismatic shafts. The capitals are decorated with low-volume sculptures, attached to the delicate echini: intertwined phytomorphic motifs, botanic motifs and a mask on the corner of one of the capitals. The impost also suggests that this portal was built in a late period: composed of overlapping rounded elements, it presents a compositive scheme that is identical to the one in its counterpart of Mancelos (Amarante). So, it is based on the remaining elements that we consider the design of the portal from Real as belonging to the first quarter of the 14th century; therefore, taking into account the historic data on this parish, this late Romanesque construction probably replaced a previous building.

Still, within its Romanesque traits, we should notice an arcosolium with a sarcophagus cut on the external south wall, at the level of the nave. Its lid features an engraved sword, suggesting the social status of the person buried in it. Taking into account their positioning, as well as the scar of an arch that subsists above the existing lateral portal, with a clear Classicist connotation, we are led to consider that the portal has kept its original position, being spared as a proof of antiquity and also as a sign of respect for the person who was buried in it³. On the opposite



North façade.



South façade.

² In 1706, the Church of Real was an abbey belonging to the patronage of Travanca (Amarante); later, it became an alternative to that Monastery and the bishopric of Braga (Costa, 1706-1712: 131; Niza, 1767: 159).

³ It might have been a relative of the founder of the Church. We find it odd that Francisco Craesbeeck (1992: 163) did not include this tomb in his note on Real, where he says that the Church didn't have any tabernacle, or labels, or tombs.



West façade. Portal.

façade, we find a few subsisting voussours from an arch on the wall that, taking into account its positioning, should have corresponded to a portal, which was closed perhaps due to the silting of the contiguous plot of land; inside, the portal is identifiable by the persistence of a niche, despite its flat lintel.

Otherwise, what we can admire in this Church of Real is a result of the 18th century transformation mentioned above. The new large-sized openings for lighting that were opened on the walls are in line with the transformation intervention carried out in the upper part of the Church.

DGEMN – Direção-Geral dos Edifícios e Monumentos Nacionais [General Directorate for Buildings and National Monuments]’s technicians went over the books related to the inspections conducted on this Church and transcribed a few significant passages for a better understanding of this building and, more specifically, to date the transformations carried out between 1750 and 1760⁴. Besides deeming necessary the opening of “a crevice on the church’s frontispiece, as the choir did not receive enough light, they ordered the repair of the cut-stone cornice with pyramids on the sides and a cross at the centre and of a similar cornice found on the church’s wall, located above the chancel’s arch, with similar pyramids on the sides and a cross at the centre”⁵.

4 Informação n.º 1234, de 18 de setembro de 1963. Idem.

5 Idem. In this document there aren’t any references to the documentary sources that were used, besides the inspection books.



South façade. Nave. Arcosolium. Sarcophagus.

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Therefore, we find an oculus surmounting the remaining Romanesque portal on the main façade while, on the lateral façades, two wide rectangular large windows, slightly sloped, with an iron grid were opened, despite the fact that the “modernised” memory of a Medieval crevice located on the south façade, above the portal, was kept. This portal, opened over the scar of a previous one, as we have already mentioned, is composed of a framed lintel that defines an arch with a slight three-centred shape. There are tassels adjacent to the walls hanging from the portal’s ends. It was also considered that it would be necessary to open “a larger crevice than the one on the Gospel side, with its iron grid and glass pane”, in addition to the corresponding “pyramids and cross at the centre above the stone cornice” surmounting the wall⁶.

On the outside, we should also highlight the cross adjacent to the south façade, which was certainly an element from a *Via Crucis* [Way to the Cross]. Besides this cross, the bell tower which stands perpendicularly adjacent to the southeast corner of the chancel is also noteworthy. It is composed by a massive rectangular stone volume with a Romanesque flavour, surmounted by a double belfry ending with a gable and topped with a simple cross. We do not believe that this element is related to the decision made in 1757 to install “the bells on the left side of its (the church’s) frontispiece, since it was the wider area”, a work that was considered simple if there was a reuse of “the same belfry stones”⁷.

The bare nature of the Church’s interior is surely emphasised by the stucco coating that covers it almost entirely. The inspector that visited the building in 1760 praised the most “Rev.

⁶ Idem.

⁷ Idem.

Abbot” of Real “for the fervent zeal with which he strived for the care of his church”⁸. The work was already considered as finished and was only missing the plaster. Inside, we are only able to see granite on the triumphal arch, which features a high opening. The arch is composed of two broken archivolts free of any decorative motifs that rest directly on the walls, thus confirming, once more, the late nature of the Romanesque construction of Real. Only its joints were painted in white, thus connecting it with the ensemble it is part of.



General interior view from the nave.

We should highlight the pattée consecration crosses that, inscribed in circles, permeate the walls of the nave and chancel. The plaster applied on the inside respected these elements, highlighting them as a sort of restoration windows in which granite contrasts with the white coating. The font also seems to belong to the Romanesque Period; its circular granite bowl, much in line with the Romanesque taste, rests on a cylindrical pedestal supported by a cubic plinth. The font is protected by a wrought-iron railing painted in green.

Armando de Mattos (1953: 24-32) tells us that there was a visible “painting with a naïve style”, which served as background for the baptistery, located close to the Church’s entrance, on the left. The painting, which depicted Christ being baptised by his cousin Saint John in the moment when he was coming out of the Jordan’s purifying waters, was an “unrefined composition with vibrant and mannered colours”. This author dated the painting as belonging to the 18th century or perhaps to the early 19th century.

This almost bare look that the Church of the Saviour of Real’s interior shows us today is, substantially, the result of the construction of a new parish church in the 1930’s. The main



New church of Real. Chancel.
Main altarpiece.

⁸ Idem.

altarpiece that belonged to the Church under study was transferred to that new church⁹. Its monumentality clearly contrasts with the simple altarpiece that is currently worshipped in the chancel of the old Church. The one that used to stand there and can now be admired in the new church of Real, besides being organised around a bulky Eucharistic throne surmounted by a representation related to the Blessed Sacrament, shows a pelmet with full-body cherubs leaning against it. Here, its polychromy, which defines marbled contrasts, is matching clearly *rocaille* motifs. The ambon and the pulpit parapet that surrounds it, located on the Gospel side of the old Church's chancel, match the altarpiece we have just described, meaning they were surely manufactured by the same workshop. The main altarpiece that replaces the one that had been transferred contrasts with these two richly elaborate elements. With no large volumes, giving great emphasis to the architectural structure, and it only establishes a connection with the other elements of the chancel by resorting to a similar polychromy.

However, taking into account the rather late nature of these woodwork specimens, we believe that they cannot be the ones mentioned in 1758: "the main altarpiece of the patron saint and collateral altarpieces; the one on the Epistle side is dedicated to the God Child, the one of the Gospel side is dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary and is also known as the altarpiece of Saint Catherine" (Garcia, Cunha & Pinto, 1758 *apud* Capela, Matos & Borralheiro, 2009: 174). Years before, Francisco Craesbeeck told us nothing about this, referring only the Church's side chapels (Craesbeeck, 1992: 163).



Chancel. Main altarpiece.

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Nave. High choir.

⁹ Informação n.º 1234, de 18 de setembro de 1963. Idem.



Chancel. Back wall on the Gospel side.
Pedestal. Sculpture. Saint Anthony.

In the Modern Period there was also the integration of the pulpit and a choir in the Church's body, giving voice to the need to stimulate spoken or sung word as essential elements of the liturgy, which had been reviewed by Pope Pius V (p. 1566-1572). However, the existing structures are more recent than the original ones; the choir's balustrade and lower frieze are decorated with motifs very common in the Romantic period (floral braids and bows); therefore, this is a minor 19th century work, of vernacular taste by local artisans.

From its collection of images, non-expressive, we highlight the image of Saint Anthony already mentioned in the Anthonian route. This is a 19th century sculpture that represents the thaumaturge from Lisbon wearing the Franciscan habit and carrying the Infant Jesus, Who is gracefully sitting on the book. This piece probably integrates the series of objects which were inventoried in 1924, following the regulations resulting from the Separation Law. At the time, the inventory included the images of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Virgin of the Rosary, the Virgin of Piety, Saint Sebastian, Saint Anthony and the Holy Saviour (names provided by the document)¹⁰.

From the 19th century inspections, we only got the information that in 1831 it was not usual for the deceased to be accompanied to their grave and that "many times nobody showed up even to carry them". The inspectors also warned that the proper signal should be given for the people to hear mass on weekdays, "when such was missing". José Guedes de Carvalho e Menezes was the parish priest at the time¹¹.

Considering the recent nature of the great transformation that the Romanesque Church of Real had underwent, Father Jozé de Mesquita Costa e Mello informs the Director of Public Works of Porto that, in 1864, the "Parish church", which "seems to be very old", is in "a good state of preservation and well repaired"¹². The same informant adds that this Church "doesn't have any artistic objects worth mentioning".

Nearly six decades later, as a result of the construction of the new parish church, the old Church was "practically abandoned on a corner of the parish and, so to speak, caged within a farm that was the magnificent property of the prelate"¹³. And because, in the opinion of the parish priest António Marinho Novais, it was "consigned to ruin due to the parishioners' complete lack of interest, the suffocation instigated by the utilitarian interests of the Farm's owners and the continuous decay caused by the inexorable passage of time", he appeals to the DGEMN to take the necessary action in order to preserve it and, therefore, avoid the beginning of its collapse¹⁴. Since its state of preservation was indeed considered "precarious", due to the "abandonment it was consigned to", the technical services thought that this building was not valuable enough "to be ascribed with any kind of classification"¹⁵. However, they do not exclude the possibility of carrying out general repair works in order to preserve it as an element of local interest, despite proven to be rather expensive.

10 SGMF – Comissão Jurisdicional dos Bens Culturais, Porto, Amarante, Arrolamentos dos bens culturais, freguesia de Real, Liv. 67, fl. 126-129v. ACMF/Arquivo/CJBC/PTO/AMA/ARROL/032.

11 ADB – Devassas, Sousa & Ferreira, 2.^a parte, n.º 123, fl. 6.

12 Mello, Jozé de Mesquita Costa e – Missiva de [ilegível] de outubro de 1864. IRHU/ Arquivo ex-DGEMN/DREM, Cx. 3216/3. Correspondência igrejas do concelho de Amarante. 1864-1867.

13 Novais, António Marinho – Cópia de Missiva, 12 de agosto de 1963. IRHU/ Arquivo ex-DGEMN/DREM 2494/10.

14 Idem.

15 Informação n.º 1234 de 18 de setembro de 1963. Idem.



General view.

As far as we could assess, the conduction of preservation works in this old Church of Real were only carried out in the late 1980's, on the initiative of the local Building Commission¹⁶. At the time, the eaves of the nave and the roof of the chancel and vestry were rebuilt. However, the DGEMN's technicians recognised the importance of this kind of restoration works to be carried out "in a correct way, thus contributing to the improvement of the building that, despite with modest value, should be preserved"¹⁷.

This Church became part of the Route of the Romanesque in 2010 and now there are plans for its preservation, safeguarding and promotion, following up the maintenance works that the parish has already been carrying out¹⁸ and, thus, extend its fruition to visitors (Malheiro, 2012: 3). After diagnosing the main pathologies, there was a definition of the intervention priorities: roofs, external walls, external openings and ceilings, among others (Malheiro, 2012: 17). [MLB / NR]

16 Ofício n.º 66443 de 29 de maio de 1987. Idem.

17 It was considered that the roof tiles used in this intervention weren't the most appropriate; "they used "Marseille" tiles, in "National double" eaves and "ridged" roof tops". Idem.

18 These include, among others, the painting of the internal wall faces and of the doors (Malheiro, 2012: 10).

CHRONOLOGY

14th century: construction of the Church of Real;

1726: there was no sacarium and its abbot was Tomás Pereira do Lago;

Mid-18th century: large-scale building campaigns change the Medieval construction;

1768: period of an alternating patronage between the bishopric of Braga and the Monastery of Travanca (Amarante);

1864: the Church was in a good state of preservation;

1938: construction of a new parish church of Real;

2010: integration of the Church of Real in the Route of the Romanesque.

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