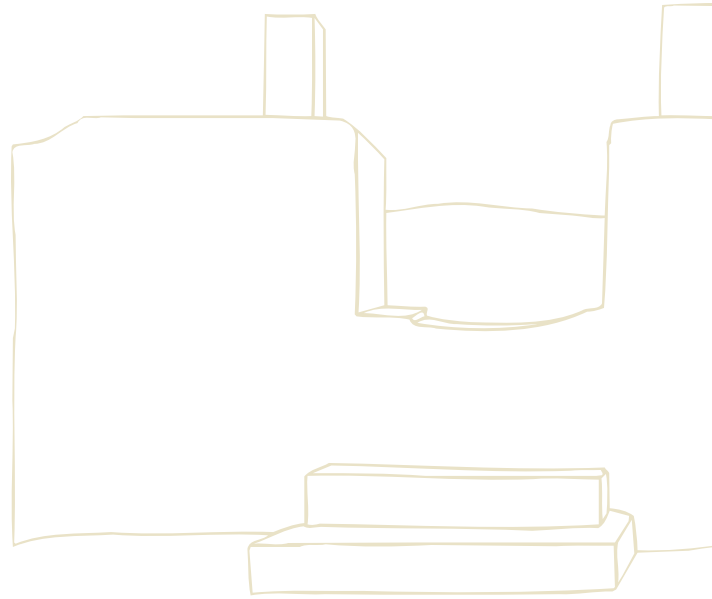


tower

CASTLE TOWER OF AGUIAR DE SOUSA





Located in the place of Vila, parish of Aguiar de Sousa and municipality of Paredes, the Castle of Aguiar has been quite cherished in the region's collective memory, not so much for the few remaining traces of the construction, but for symbolic and historic reasons.

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The Castle of Aguiar was attacked by Al-Mansur in 995, during the Reconquest wars, later on heading a *land* in the territorial reorganization process occurred throughout the 11<sup>th</sup> century. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, it was already an important Jurisdiction.



1. The Castle of Aguiar is highly cherished in the region's collective memory for symbolic and historic reasons.

The location of what is left of this ancient fortified structure evinces a concern with the territory's defense. The *Castle* of Aguiar de Sousa was hard to reach and surrounded by higher mountains that covered its visibility. Set in the territory's defensive network, it was a particular concern for the Asturian kings. 1258's *Inquiries* refer the *Jurisdiction of Aguiar de Sousa*, integrated in the parish of *Castelo de Aguiar*, mentioning that its inhabitants had to insure the castle's safekeeping when the king was at war. However, the construction of this Castle should be viewed within the *castling* phenomenon that occurred earlier, since the mid 11<sup>th</sup> century, replacing the older structuring of the peninsular territory in *civitates*. According to C. A. Ferreira de Almeida, the frequent invasions that affected most of Western Europe since the 8<sup>th</sup> century caused temporary or even definitive migrations. Nevertheless, since the mid 11<sup>th</sup> century, communities began to build castles and fortified precincts intended to defend the place where they lived. Between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, the entire Western Europe was covered with a dense network of strongholds, a phenomenon known as *castling*<sup>1</sup>.

In the North of Portugal, after the Reconquest, king Afonso III of the Asturias implemented the system of *civitates*, units of the territory's reorganization delivered to the leadership of counts or commissaries. Starting in the mid 11<sup>th</sup> century, and following the growth and affirmation of the rural and regional aristocracy, as well as the progress of the feudal regime, a territorial organization of smaller units, the *lands*, is developed. The core was the castle and its *lord*, who progressively acquired judicial and tax rights. The implantation of the *lands* of Aguiar de Sousa, Penafiel, Benviver, Baião and Castelo de Paiva, previously encompassed by the former territory of the *civitas* of Eja, is a highly significant example of this evolution<sup>2</sup>.

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2. The Castle was set in the territory's defensive network.

1 ALMEIDA, C. A. Ferreira de – *O Românico. História da Arte em Portugal*. Lisboa: Editorial Presença, 2001. p. 143.

2 ALMEIDA, Carlos Alberto Ferreira de – "Castelos Medievais do Noroeste de Portugal". In *Finis Terrae – Estudos em Lembrança do Prof. Dr. Alberto Balil*. Santiago de Compostela: Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, 1992, pp. 380-381.





3. The base of the tower evinces a squared structure.

Also throughout the 11<sup>th</sup> century, several monasteries were endowed with a defensive precinct, as in the cases of the monasteries of Saint Peter of Cête (Paredes), owning the Castle of Vandoma, and the Holy Savior of Paço de Sousa (Penafiel), defended by the Fortified Village of Ordins.

The majority of these defensive sites, the *rural castles*, was very elementary in construction, profiting from rough natural conditions, in high locations and with granite flourishings. In the case of Vandoma, the defensive precinct was composed of a wall, without towers, serving as a fencing that surrounded a rather wide area<sup>3</sup>.

As C. A. Ferreira de Almeida states, stockbreeding for the feudal lords, which could be done in distant lands, had a great importance in the economy of yore. One of the most pressing chores facing news of an attack was to gather the cattle, which explains the extensive perimeter of the stone fencing to keep them, as testified by the case of Vandoma<sup>4</sup>.

The hill in which the Castle of Aguiar is settled is a conical elevation in shale, whose upper part, facing Northwest-Southeast, must have been flattened. To the West, where we find platforms, there seems to have been a slope with a defensive wall. Access to the top is done through a helicoidal course. Although the site is lower than the remaining hills surrounding it, its position and shape allow an “easy defensive disposition and assure defense”<sup>5</sup>.

It is not odd that these defense and refuge sites, especially considering their complex path, became consecrated and folklorized, frequently being surrounded by legends and sayings. The existence of forti-

3 ALMEIDA, Carlos Alberto Ferreira de – “Castelos Medievais do Noroeste de Portugal”. In *Finis Terrae – Estudos em Lembrança do Prof. Dr. Alberto Bailil*. Santiago de Compostela: Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, 1992, pp. 383-384.

4 ALMEIDA, C. A. Ferreira de – *O Românico. História da Arte em Portugal*. Lisboa: Editorial Presença, 2001. p. 142.

5 ALMEIDA, Carlos Alberto Ferreira de – “Os Castelos de Aguiar de Sousa e de Vandoma/Baltar”. In *O Concelho de Paredes. Boletim Municipal*. Paredes: Câmara Municipal de Paredes, Vol. 3, 1980, pp. 15-17.

fied chapels to protect the site is documented from a very early time. They often became the focus for devotion and pilgrimage. It is curious to notice that the hills where these consecrated castles were (highly connected to the populations around them) were chosen to signal the end of the processions and litanies, especially the litanies of May. This is why there are hilltops with castles known as Ladderies or Laddery<sup>6</sup>.

In a natural environment, the base of the tower presents a squared structure, out of center in relation to the traces of the wall's outline, which was oval-shaped.

In the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the Castle of Aguiar probably did not have the tower, although it is very common for a Romanesque castle to have a watchtower inside the upper fortified fencing.

The Romanesque castle is characterized by fencing with a reduced flanking and a central tower, the watchtower, symbol of the lord of the castle. The fencing walls mainly sought to prevent access to the inside and the subsequent assault to the watchtower, which was isolated in the middle of the precinct and served as a temporary residence to its lordship<sup>7</sup>.

Aguiar de Sousa performed, from earlier times, an important part in the region, presenting itself as one of the most powerful Jurisdictions of Between the Douro and Minho rivers and enjoying considerable authority and wealth.

In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the territory of Aguiar de Sousa was divided in two geographic areas: a rougher one to the North, and another to the South corresponding to the plain. In 1220's *Inquiries*, the rivers Ferreira and Sousa and the effluents Eiriz and Mezio delimited the Jurisdiction.

The territory covered by this Jurisdiction was very vast, spanning from Porto to the vicinities of Penafiel, comprehending all the parishes of the present municipality of Paredes (except for Recarei)<sup>8</sup>. Another 42 parishes from the peripheral municipalities were also comprised, including 8 from Gondomar<sup>9</sup> and 6 from the municipality of Lousada<sup>10</sup>. From the municipality of Paços de Ferreira, 14 parishes were found in the territory of the Jurisdiction of Aguiar de Sousa, except for Frazão, Penamaior and Seroa, which belonged to the extinct municipality of Refoios de Riba d'Ave. The remaining 13 were from the municipality of Aguiar de Sousa. That is, almost the entire municipality that now composes Paços de Ferreira, as well as the three parishes of the municipality of Valongo<sup>11</sup>.

The Jurisdiction of Aguiar de Sousa's economy was eminently agricultural and pastoral, a fact certified both in 1220 and 1258's *Inquiries*, which mentions the taxes (in kind) owed to the King and the existence of mills, meaning the economical exploration of the water resources.

The region where the Jurisdiction was found presents a population growth in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. In the late 13<sup>th</sup> century, it is one of the most populated and densely clustered areas<sup>12</sup>. The population's ethnic and socio-geographic composition featured a Moorish kernel, relatively well defined in space, a kernel of descendants from foreign settlers – both Frank settlers and friars from the Order of the Hospital, which

6 ALMEIDA, Carlos Alberto Ferreira de – “Castelos e Cercas Medievais. Séculos X a XIII. In MOREIRA, Rafael (dir.), *História das Fortificações Portuguesas no Mundo*. Lisboa: Edições Alfa, 1989, pp. 41-42.

7 ALMEIDA, C. A. Ferreira de – *O Românico. História da Arte em Portugal*. Lisboa: Editorial Presença, 2001, pp. 142-143.

8 This parish was created after the extinction of the Jurisdiction of Aguiar de Sousa.

9 Covelo, Fânzeres, Jovim Medas, Rio Tinto, S. Pedro da Cova, Foz do Sousa and Valbom.

10 Casais Covas, Figueiras, Lustosa, Nevogilde, Ordem and Sousela.

11 Campo, Sobrado and the parish of the head of the municipality.

12 MATTOSO, José, KRUS, Luis and BETTENCOURT, Olga – “As Inquirições de 1258 como Fonte da História da Nobreza – O Julgado de Aguiar de Sousa”. In *Revista de História Económica e Social*, No. 9, January–June, Lisboa: Sá da Costa, p. 27.

owned property in the region – and a kernel from Porto and Guimarães, with economic interests in the Jurisdiction, as shown in the investigation developed by José Mattoso, Luís Krus and Olga Bettencourt<sup>13</sup>.

In this region Between the Douro and Minho rivers, the family of the Sousas was one of the oldest families settled in the Jurisdiction. Its first representative, Gonçalo Mendes de Sousa, owned property to the South, which he donated to the monasteries of Saint Stephen of Vilela (Paredes) and Saint Peter of Ferreira (Paços de Ferreira). To the North, its patrimony was in the high lands and in the valleys of the Eiriz and Mezio effluents<sup>14</sup>.

The Maia family, also settled in Aguiar de Sousa for a long time, and whose oldest representative in the Jurisdiction was Soeiro Mendes from Maia, the *Good*, owned an honor in the middle valley of the Ferreira river. According to the aforementioned authors, this territorial settlement did not correspond to the patrimonial kernel of those families, the Sousas' being in the Land of Basto, and the Maias' in the Land of Maia. The existence of patrimony of the two families in the Jurisdiction is related to the territory's defensive needs against the Moors, as the Castle of Aguiar exemplifies<sup>15</sup>.

In the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the great noble landowners that did not belong to the most important families become related by marriage. Among them, we refer Gil Vasques de Severosa, Gil Martins de Riba Vizela and Rodrigo Froiaz de Leão. The latter married Châmoa Gomes de Tougues and would thereby inherit and administrate the family's entire patrimony. Rodrigo Froiaz de Leão became the lord of the patrimony of the Tougues and of the Barbosas, extending through Aguiar de Sousa, Felgueiras, Penafiel, Marco de Canaveses and Foz do Douro<sup>16</sup>.

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On November 25<sup>th</sup> 1513, in Lisbon, D. Manuel granted a land charter to Aguiar de Sousa, comprehending the following lands: Bairros, Besteiros, Castelões e Cepeda, Crastomil, Cristelo, Cunha, Figueiró, Gandra, Gondalães, Guidaxe, Madalena, Mouriz, Nevogilde, Parada, Pegueiros, Rebordosa, Recarei, São Paio de Casais, Sanjomil, Santa Marta, S. Martinho do Campo, Sobrado, Souza, Vandoma, Vila Cova de Carros and Bitarães.

As certain testimonies assure, as well as local tradition, the Castle Tower of Aguiar de Sousa was subject to a restoration campaign during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as shown by traces of cement found in the walls. More recently, the recovery of the Castle Tower of Aguiar de Sousa consisted in the architectonic and landscape interventions of conservation and enhancement carried out within the *Route of the Romanesque of the Sousa Valley* project. [LR/MB]

## Chronology

10<sup>th</sup> century – Original edification;

14<sup>th</sup> century – Construction of the tower (?);

20<sup>th</sup> century (first half) – Partial restoration.

13 MATTOSO, José, KRUS, Luis and BETTENCOURT, Olga – “As Inquirições de 1258 como Fonte da História da Nobreza – O Julgado de Aguiar de Sousa”. In *Revista de História Económica e Social*, No. 9, January–June, Lisboa: Sá da Costa, p. 29.

14 IDEM, *ibidem*, p. 39.

15 IDEM, *ibidem*, p. 39.

16 IDEM, *ibidem*, p. 43.