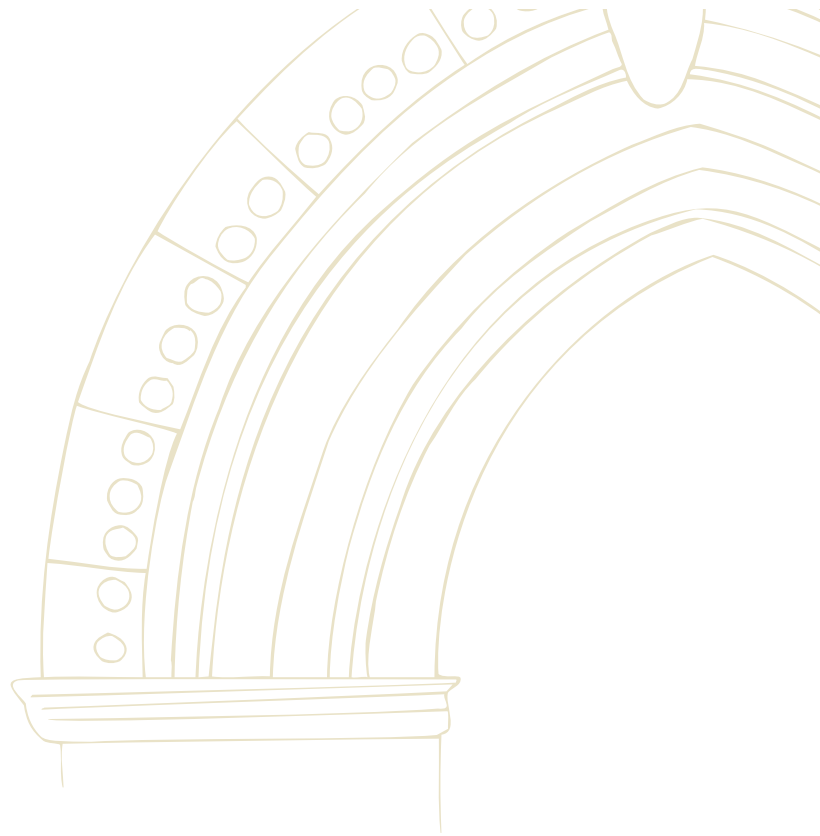




hermitage

HERMITAGE OF OUR LADY OF THE VALLEY



The Hermitage of Our Lady of the Valley is in the parish of Cête, in the municipality of Paredes. It is built on a hillside facing east, over the valley, between Ribeira de Baltar and another riverbank flowing into the Sousa river. Its location, where a creek flows in a plain and open valley, presently occupied by arable and vine cultures, is probably attached to the invocation of Our Lady of the Valley, showing how much this Hermitage is connected to the local population's farming interests.

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The motivation behind building small hermitages is usually associated not only to the hermit's secluded practices but, and more importantly, to devotion and the itineraries of sanctity. Located in isolated sites, they're frequently found in the parishes' outskirts as poles for the devotion of the surrounding population.

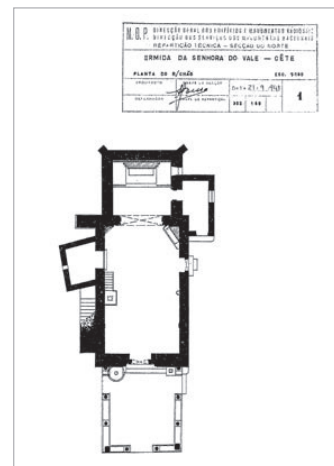


1. The construction of the Hermitage of Our Lady of the Valley, set on a hillside, should be viewed within the agricultural interests of the valley's population.

The Hermitage's design is oriented east-west, composed of a rectangular nave and quadrangular transept, both connected by the triumph arch. The nave's cover is made of wood, while the transept's, currently also made of wood, was initially made of stone with a Gothic cross vault, whose ribbing was supported by corbels of Manueline cut. In the exterior, the corner buttresses testify to a common construction fashion from the late 15th and the first quarter of the 16th century, as well as the quadrangular planimetric featured in this transept. The span leading to the sacristy presents a frame equally traceable to the Manueline period. The porch adjacent to the main façade is of a later period, although the presence of corbels in an upper level of the same façade indicates the existence of an older porch. The presence of the pulpit outside the chapel is probably related to pilgrimage liturgical acts, since the large affluence of devotees compelled to an open air celebration. The porch, as the pulpit in the exterior, is common to this type of devotional chapels.

Armando de Mattos has pointed out the affinities between the Hermitage and the church of the Monastery of Saint Peter of Cête, concerning the coats of arms and the architecture itself. The stone coat of arms, presently found in the transept's North wall, has the same heraldry symbology as the shields present in that monastery, one in the chapel of Saint Nicholas, the funerary chapel, and another in the first *banner* of the arms in the main façade. That said, the author suggests it was the same entity ordering the Manueline works in Saint Peter of Cête and the construction of the transept in the Hermitage of Our Lady of the Valley¹.

According to the same author, the main portals from both temples point to similarities in the archivolt as well as in the triumph arches, and since the Hermitage is from the same period of Gothic reconstruction as that of the church of the Monastery of Cête in the 14th century and suffered its influence, both constructions may have even had the same craftsmen.



2. Map of the Hermitage.

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3. Transept. The corbels and the Manueline framework point to a construction, or reconstruction, traceable to the late 15th or early 16th century.



4. Transept. Corbel.

1 MATTOS, Armando de – *A ermida românico-ogival da Senhora do Vale*. In *Douro-Litoral*. 2nd Series. Vol. VIII. Porto: Junta da Provincia do Douro-Litoral, 1947, pp. 42-51.



5. Porch or narthex. The presence of a pulpit on the outside is connected with pilgrimage cult rituals.

This Hermitage's construction may be dated from the early 16th century, as the transept indicates, or the late 15th century. This portal's disposition and its sculpture show, however, how the Romanesque motives have lingered in time, this being one of the most interesting aspects of this chapel, in the context of the religious architecture of the Sousa Valley, although this is a common phenomenon to the entire North and Center of Portugal.



6. Transept. The angles' buttresses are usual in constructions from the late 15th and early 16th century.

In the transept's front wall subside, albeit fragmentary, traces of mural painting. In this wall remains a perfect-arched niche displaying the image of *Our Lady*. Originally, the mural painting bordered the entire niche area, framing the image of the patron saint.

Also visible are the representations of musician angels, some playing harps and others playing trumpets, revealing a great plastic quality and the use of gold, white and blue.

According to a recent study by Luís Urbano Afonso "the author of this intervention knew how to explore the specificity of the architectonic structure to create a work where the illusion of spatial depth was substantially increased, using the different planes to work the mural painting's visual effects"².

The remaining painting is attributed to a workshop of great quality, whether for its bidimensional figures as for the design of the angels' faces that the aforementioned author draws near to the figures painted by Arnaus in the church of Saint Paio of Midões (Barcelos), dating from 1535, and to traces of an angel represented in the South wall (in covered arch) of the church of the Monastery of Saint Mary of Pombeiro (Felgueiras).

² AFONSO, Luís 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. 211



7. Transept. Traces of angels are visible.



8. Transept. Mural painting.



9. Transept. Mural painting.

This program's authorship may be claimed by Arnaus' workshop, whose painting activity is known in this region, namely in the church of Saint Mammes of Vila Verde (Felgueiras), its dating being attributed to somewhere between 1530 and 1540.

The painter Arnaus is probably, according to Luís Afonso, the most interesting fresco artist in Portuguese Renaissance, with known works mastering plastic effects of great technical skill³.

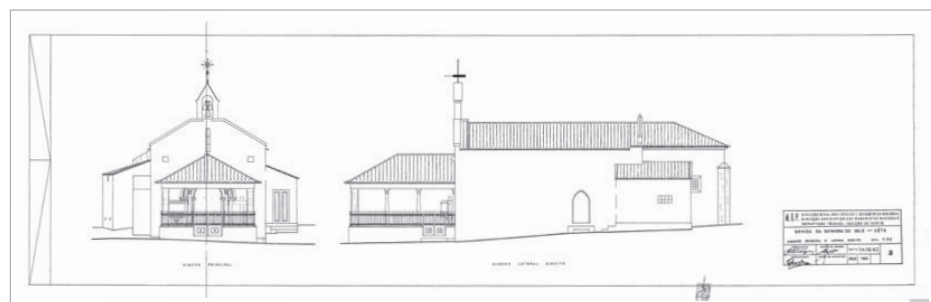
Note that, as in the church of Saint Mammes of Vila Verde, the persistence of Romanesque solutions, also present in the architecture of the Hermitage of Our Lady of the Valley, does not fit in the *modernity* and quality of the pictorial program, clearly indicating how the persistence of forms and the painting's currency are not contradictory factors. The mural painting framing and emphasizing *Our Lady's* image, glorified it as a testimony of the powerful devotional motivations behind the artistic order.

The most popular festivities and pilgrimages, and where we find the most expressive and notorious samples of popular religiousness, are celebrated, according to C. A. Ferreira de Almeida, not in cathedrals or parish churches but systematically in chapels, hermitages or sanctuaries. None better than this author has understood and studied these devotional practices and their relation to the implantation site for chapels and hermitages, hence we chose to quote his impressions on this widely vast subject.

"The reasons why hermitages are preferred to parish churches for religious pilgrimages and paying promises are forcefully powerful, multiple and complex. It is certainly not because the chapels can have a better response to newer devotions for, albeit the difficulty in changing a parish's patron, it is not hard to add a lateral altar in a parish church, as common practice demonstrates.

A series of reasons concerns the landscape of the site chosen for implementing the chapel, picked for its amenity, dominance or unusual character. We systematically find hermitages in the most dazzling or pleasant sites and this is not random"⁴.

According to the same author, it seems certain that this marginal position of the sanctuaries or hermitages regarding parish churches favors them. Greater festivity and recreational liberties are allowed, and sometimes even erotic and sacred rites as well. The ecclesiastic control is much smaller than in parish churches and it is up to the pilgrim to perform almost the entirety of the ritual of his promise, without requiring a priest.



10. Main and lateral construction projections.

3 AFONSO, Luís 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. 178

4 ALMEIDA, Carlos Alberto Ferreira de – "Religiosidade Popular e Ermidas." In *Studium Generale. Estudos Contemporâneos. Religiosidade Popular*. No. 6. Porto, 1984, p. 78.

The isolated chapels are far more suitable than the parish ones for pilgrimage practices, which consist of departing, making a journey, ideally by foot to have the sensation of meeting a sacred space where they greet the local saint, surrounding the chapel, entering, praying, touching or kissing the image and leaving alms⁵.

The cult to Our Lady is a phenomenon that has largely spread since the Gothic period, as the countless sculpted and painted images demonstrate, as well as the increasing amount of Marian chapels and sanctuaries. The various invocations of Our Lady, such as Our Lady of the Milk, Our Lady of Health or Our Lady of Victory tend to replace those of the patron saints of cattle and milk, like Saint Mammes, anti-plague saints, like Saint Sebastian and Saint Roch, and warrior and triumphant saints, like Saint George. It is true that these saints continued to be highly worshiped in the Modern Period, but there is no doubt that the devotion to Our Lady tends to overwhelm them.

The Marian cult, growing since the late Middle Ages, had a great development in Portugal in the 16th to 18th centuries, and was the preferential target for popular religiousness, justifying frequent foundations of chapels and hermitages, public and private, bearing Our Lady's name in the most diverse prerogatives, through which the people, in begging for protection, found support in sickness and in the challenges of their daily lives. Lady of Health, Lady of Miracles, Lady of Navigators, Lady of Light, Lady of the Milk or Lady of Remedies are some of these invocations. This phenomenon is of such significance that, in the North of Portugal, the cult paid to Mary overcomes that of the saints.

On another scale, this current of the modern Marian religious sentiment originates the construction of large pilgrimage centers throughout the country, particularly in the North of Portugal. An example from the region of Braga is the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Porto de Ave. In the region of Viana do Castelo, the Sanctuaries of Our Lady of Sorrows and Our Lady of Peneda, and, in Ponte de Lima, the Sanctuary of Our Lady of the Good Death. The most monumental ensemble is undoubtedly the Sanctuary of Our Lady of the Remedies, in Lamego. Of smaller proportions but equally a reflex of this national phenomenon in this region is the Sanctuary of Pedra Maria, in the municipality of Felgueiras.

In the geographic context of the parish's territorial unit, sanctuaries and hermitages almost always assume a peripheral situation towards urban clusters, escaping the stricter militancy experienced in the midst of the parish church. If its location in isolated and uninhabited places like hilltops assumes a function of consecrating the space and protecting and overseeing the parish, it is also true that pilgrims coming from afar in days of their healing saint's festivity felt freer in their religious practice because the ecclesiastic control was more diluted. They would arrive to the sanctuary space, head to the altar of the saint from whom they had received a service, pay their tribute and then gather in the front yard, where they would eat their meals with other pilgrims, to peacefully return, late in the day, to their daily life. After fulfilling their religious duty, by sacred rituals, the recreational feeling came more spontaneously and freely. And in the same sacred space, the spiritual and recreational dimensions of the Baroque man emerged without clashing.

5 ALMEIDA, Carlos Alberto Ferreira de – "Religiosidade Popular e Ermidas." In *Studium Generale. Estudos Contemporâneos. Religiosidade Popular*. No. 6. Porto, 1984, pp. 75-83.

11. Transept. Mural painting.



This intimate relation between the healing saint and the believer, strengthened by the experience of the festivity ritual, serves as an explanation of the devotion deposited by the emigrants in their homeland's saint. When the locals emigrated to Brazil or the African colonies, when facing adversity, they would address a prayer to the patron of their parish's sanctuary, whereto they would return, even if just to pay a promise and expiate their devotion. The saint would become a sort of an amulet and relic, and a relic must be touched to work as a talisman.

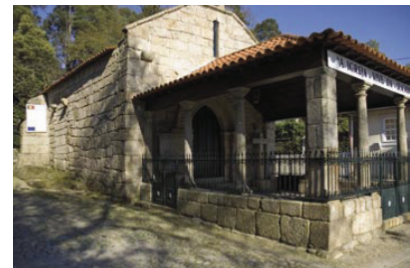
On the other hand, the sanctuary or hermitage is the house of the saint. It was there, and not elsewhere, that the saint has revealed his or her nature through the manifestation of the inexplicable, the miracle. And it is there, in that specific place and none other, that the distant believer addresses his prayer. There is a physical appropriation of the believer regarding the site to where his request is sent in his time of need. The weather and the landscape are thus carried in the traveler's memory.

For these reasons and others, as C. A. Ferreira de Almeida explains, there is a "radical relation between the saint and his chapel and its location in the popular belief. It was there that the apparition took place, he/she lives there, it is his/her fountain, his/her footprint, etc. The belief in miracles that prove the image's intention of being worshiped in that location – because when moved to the parish church, it would return at night or cry – enriches the site's sacredness and its meaning, turning the saint into, besides from a powerful intercessor, a *genius loci*. The hierophanies transfigure the place of their sacred occurrence, but also individualize it. The relation between the place and the image appeared or revered there is so intimate and anthropomorphized that it becomes unique and a relic"⁶.

The Hermitage of Our Lady of the Valley could have received a galilee in the 16th-17th centuries, in response to the importance received by this cult from the local populations. The festivity in honor of Our Lady of the Valley drew pilgrims from several places that went there to address their vows to the Virgin.

The miracle, omnipresent in man's religious imaginary, was seldom performed by Our Lady of the Valley. The two 18th century ex-votos exposed inside the building, in the nave's wall by the Gospel, thus testify. The oldest, allusive to a miracle occurred in 1747, tells the episode of a Portuguese emigrant in Brazil who was presumably saved in the wilderness of Paraná through the interference of the Virgin of the Valley, after hours siege by a group of indigenas. This oil on wood ex-voto presents a rather simple composition, displaying some ingenuity in the drawing of the depicted forms.

In the middle of the painting is the alluded saved by the miracle, on horse, holding a firearm and surrounded by other characters, the natives, placed to the left and to the right of the composition, armed with arches and arrows shooting in his direction. The victim of the assault is represented in profile, oriented towards the composition's left upper corner, where the image of Our Lady of the Valley was drawn, surrounded with clouds, a sign of the manifestation of the divine.



12. North façade.



13. Interior of the Hermitage of Our Lady of the Valley.

6 ALMEIDA, Carlos Alberto Ferreira de – "Religiosidade Popular e Ermidas." In *Studium Generale. Estudos Contemporâneos. Religiosidade Popular*. No. 6. Porto, 1984, p. 79.

Another ex-voto, dating from 1796, depicts the storm that assailed the ship where Custódio Coelho Ferraz Moreira, from Cête, was when he was heading to Brazil. In distress in high sea, he resorts to the miraculous virtues of Our Lady of the Valley, who saves him from the shipwreck. Similarly to the *miracle table* mentioned before, the represented forms assume some ingenuity, resuming the scene to the episode's main elements. One can see a maritime landscape, with a raging sea shrouded by a dark ambiance, where the shipwreck is, practically occupying the composition's left side, and the castaway saved by the Virgin of the Valley, represented on the composition's right side, in an upper level and surrounded by clouds.

These pieces, in a first glance, are essentially the reflection of the individual's religious imaginary, associated with a profoundly devoted attitude, shown by the representation of a personal experience. Therefore, its effect is sensed in a much broader level for, to the community, they certify the effectiveness of the Virgin's protective powers. The narrative ex-voto elects as a preferential exhibition sites the sanctuary and also the hermitage for telling an episode through the use of imagery and of a small explaining text (see boxes with the captions' transcriptions) referring the intervenients (protector and protégé), the event, the place, the date, among other facts. It is, therefore, not odd that this hermitage keeps, in the whole of its artistic patrimony, this type of pieces⁷.

Analyzing the building's exterior, the rectangular galilee, added in the Modern Period, immediately stands out, having been built against the plane corresponding to the main projection of the nave's body. This space evinces the building's primeval purpose during that period, being a place for sporadic cult and pilgrimage in times of festivity. Its design is defined by two strong pillars of quadrangular section, placed in the advanced angles of the structure, so as to support the cover's larger weight. Over the walls delimiting its area, eight Tuscan columns are placed, three on each side and two in the frontal projection. On the portal's left side, under tiles, is an interesting circular stone pulpit, indicating the place for preaching in the festivities in honor of the patron saint, since, due to the high number of pilgrims, the religious ceremonies would have to be conducted outside. In the opposite side, a stone cross reinforces the indication that that is a sacred place.

The building's interior furnishing, from the chronological interval between the 16th and the 18th centuries, features several artistic elements that enrich the whole.

In the nave, by the Epistle, is a gilded retable, whose current polychromatism, in grey, blue and gold hues, derives from a repainting that must have buried the original gilding. The structure is composed of two main portions, one consisting in the recycling of the body of a Mannerist retable and another corresponding to the altar table, in Neoclassic fashion, both portions juxtaposed over a rectangular paneled surface. The Mannerist body is composed of two columns of composite capital and striated frustum, with the first third decorated, supported by pedestals that sustain an entablature of classic matrix. The structure's

7 To further explore this subject there are a few studies to be consulted, among which we suggest the following: ARAÚJO, Agostinho – "A pintura popular votiva no Século XVIII: algumas reflexões a partir da colecção de Matosinhos". In *Revista de História da Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto*. No. 2. Porto: Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto, 1979, pp. 27-41; CATÁLOGO – *Do Gesto à Memória: Ex-Votos*. Lisboa: IPM, 1998; SOALHEIRO, João – «Ex-Voto». In *Dicionário de História da Igreja em Portugal*. Vol. II. Lisboa: Circulo de Leitores, 2000, pp. 236-238.

central area features a painting, with the same height as the columns, where *Saint Roch* is represented. The decoration, present in the face of the pedestals, in the first third of the columns' frustum and in the entablature's frieze, is made of elegant botanical motives, among which appear, here and there, winged angel heads and small birds.

CAPTION OF LUÍS COELHO FURTADO'S EX-VOTO

*"Mercy that Our Lady of the Valley showed for Luis Coellho Furtado, who surrounded by/
heathens in the wilderness of Paraná since seven o'clock in the morning to four
o'clock in the afternoon without any further hope/
of escaping alive and summoning Our Lady of the Valley [...]ously, the heathens were gone/
and to remember this grace he ordered this miracle table in the year of 1747"*

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CAPTION OF CUSTÓDIO COELHO FERRAZ MOREIRA'S EX-VOTO

*"Miracle that O. Lady of the Valley performed for Custodio Coelho Ferraz
Moreira, son of António Moreira, from Alem of the Parish of S. Pedro of Cette,
who willing to travel to America and the/
Sea suddenly rising through the winds' mighty fury, saw the Embarkation ship-
wrecked, leaving him and part of his company adrift in the waves, without any
further help and assistance/
than that of the Divine Until finally, almost drowned with no spirit nor breath
remembering in a very brief moment the high value of the Virgin O. Lady of his
parish, and begging for her assistance with/
voices from the heart, immediately felt the merciful effects of her protection,
seeing that the waves brought to him a fragment of the Mast over which he
drifted for long, from seven o'clock to ten in the morning/
he was then found and saved by the Pilot of the Bar of the Port of Figueira [not
very far from where the aforementioned Shipwreck occurred] being the last of
the number of those Companions who also escaped alive/
This Miracle took place in the year of 1796 in the [...] of July, and was here de-
picted to eternally remember the affluence of Miracles with which the Mother
of God favors those who devoutly seek her Aid."*



14. Image of the patron saint.

In 1967 the porch railing is placed and the main chapel's altar is then moved to the cloister of the Monastery of Cête. In the late 1970s, roofing repair ensues after a storm, also restoring the Hermitage's interior. During this restoration campaign, the choir's staircase and the chapel adjacent to the North façade are demolished. The temple receives an altar from the parish church of Gatão, also removing the pulpit and replacing the floor's tiling. In the year of 1981, the main chapel's altar is removed. In the 1990s, the autarchy conducts a campaign to improve the surrounding area, also endeavoring to clean and consolidate the cross at the hermitage's parvis.

Between 2004 and 2007, general conservation works were conducted within the *Route of the Romanesque of the Sousa Valley* project. [LR/MJMR/DGS/MB]

Chronology

15th/16th century – Original edification of the Hermitage;

16th century – Construction of the porch;

1530 and 1540 – Mural painting program;

17th century – Retable by the Epistle;

1979/80 – Repairs in the covering; removing the inner and outer coatings; cleaning faces and joints; demolishing the exterior staircase to the choir; demolishing the chapel in the North façade and reclosing the inner span leading to it; placing the altar from Gatão; removing the pulpit; tiling;

2004/2007 – General conservation of the building within the *Route of the Romanesque of the Sousa Valley* project: covering, batters, exterior spans, ceilings, interior pavements and electrical installation; conservation of the mural paintings and decorative elements.