



30.

## CHURCH OF SAINT MARTIN OF MOUROS



Lugar de Sub-Adro  
São Martinho de Mouros  
Resende



41° 6' 6.90" N  
7° 53' 54.92" W



+351 918 116 488



Sunday, 8.30 am (winter)  
or 8 am (summer)



Saint Martin  
11<sup>th</sup> November



National Monument  
1922



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The imposing Church of Saint Martin of Mouros stands halfway up a hillside, over the final section of the river Bestança, on its way towards the river Douro. Its silhouette, which emerges away from the houses, immediately stands out. The turriform massif that shapes its main façade makes this Romanesque Church truly unique, both by its unprecedented nature within the context of the Portuguese Romanesque style and by its alleged military character. This aspect is emphasised by the narrow crevices that illuminate the nave. On the upper area there is a cornice supported by a Lombard band, a motif that was frequently used in the Romanesque style from the Sousa and Tâmega basins; its little arches are supported by modillions with zoomorphic decorations shaped as bovine heads, some of which have a more finished look, while others are more sketched or worn out.

In turn, this tower-shaped façade that takes up the entire width of the Church frames a portal whose three archivolt rest on elegant capitals with animal and botanic themes; their sculpture is already attached to the frustum, announcing the Gothic times that were about to come.



The ensemble is surrounded by a chequered frieze and its impost extends itself along the entire façade. Just above the portal we also see four corbels that prove the prior existence of a porch-like structure. The late nature of the building is indicated by an inscription announcing the year of 1217 that, for being carved on the external face of the chancel (north side, first row above the footing and fifth stone

from the right), is either associated with the beginning of the construction of this Romanesque Church or commemorates the completion of the first building stage, i.e., the construction of the chevet. So, the Church of Saint Martin of Mouros, which was already built in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, fits into a chronology close to that of its counterparts from the Sousa, Tâmega and Douro valleys.

## THE FORTRESS-CHURCH

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We should not forget that, generally speaking, the atmosphere of the Christian Reconquest was reflected in the Portuguese Romanesque architecture; this was the context in which this new architectural style found an atmosphere and its very own expression space for development, asserting itself as the territorial reorganization promoted by the Christian kings progressed.

The expression "fortress-church" is used too many times in the Portuguese works dedicated to the Romanesque style, especially the ones that were written in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The fact that many churches feature merlons and that there are a few towers with military traits associated with monuments with a religious nature (although these are mainly from the Gothic period), like the one of the Monastery of Travanca (Amarante) (p. 212), are enough for many authors to defend the existence of a typically Portuguese typology that shows an obvious military nature, despite the fact that this trend is more rhetorical than actually military. We should highlight the fact that this is the only Church treated with equal importance in the list of "Castles from the 1<sup>st</sup> medieval period" in the monumental work by Damião Peres published in 1969 and entitled *The glorious history of the most beautiful castles of Portugal*.

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The earliest documentary references that mention the building are surely from the 13<sup>th</sup> century. From then onwards, they become more regular. From a royal patronage, according to the information provided by the royal inquiries of 1258, the Church was handed over to the House of Marialva (15<sup>th</sup> century) and to the University of Coimbra (16<sup>th</sup> century).

Let us go inside. The wide space of the single nave of this Church consecrated to the bishop of Tours (France) contrasts with spatial organization of the first quarter of the Church, which corresponds to the turriform massif. Here we are faced with three narrow naves crowned by parallel stone vaults resting on two high and robust square pillars that have half columns attached to three of their sides. This ensemble is completed by sculpted capitals: we see botanic and anthropomorphic themes in which we highlight the representation of a man being swallowed by the legs by monstrous figures, a theme that is repeated on a capital from the triumphal arch and on one of the capitals from the main portal.

Surely from a later period, the triumphal arch, which is pointed and surmounted

by a framed oculus, comprises three archivolts resting on colonnettes embedded in the wall, whose capitals are also decorated; these were carved using granite with a finer grain than the one that was used in the rest of the Church, which also allowed giving a more refined and defined treatment to the sculpted shapes. On the archivolts, we see denticulate motifs.

The liturgical furniture and other elements kept in the Church of Saint Martin of Mouros were designed during the Modern Period. The Church's patron was responsible for the manufacture of the chancel's assets, from which we highlight the coffered ceiling with hagiographic and allegoric themes, probably dating back to the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which reveals the Counter-Reformist spirituality and catechism, closely associated with the Jesuitical intervention. The National Style [1690-1725] altarpiece stands out by its Eucharistic throne surmounted by a representation of the Ascension of Christ. In the chancel, there are two oil paintings on wood, painted around 1530 and representing scenes from the life of a charitable and mystical *Saint Martin*, which have been erroneously ascribed to



Grão Vasco's school. Instead, these works were made by the Masters of Ferreirim. The nave's altarpieces, which were the parishioners' responsibility, were also manufactured according to the so-called National Baroque style [style which develops during the reign of King João V (k. 1706-1750)], but they are simpler than the main one. The collateral altarpieces are consecrated to the Lord of the Stigmata and to Our Lady of the Rosary, and the lateral one (on the nave's right side) to Our Lady of the Exile. Although these are not the patrons' responsibility, since they are located on the nave's collateral walls (therefore, under the parishioners' responsibility), the paintings (currently concealed by the altarpieces), from which only the depictions of *Saint Martin* and of an unknown female figure wearing a Benedictine habit remain, may belong to the last few years of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. We should also note the presence, in different altars and on a number of corbels, imagery pieces of good artistic quality, from which

we highlight the one representing Saint Martin of Tours, the patron saint. During the 1940's the Church of Saint Martin of Mouros was subject to a deep restoration intervention that sought to emphasise its military appearance in a rhetorical way, by isolating the bell tower and turning it into a sort of sentry-house and demolishing a few buildings in the Church's surroundings to provide the latter with a more intentional and nobler legibility. Inside, the plaster was removed and the high choir located in the turri-form massif was disassembled. The curious three-centred arch decorated with pearls we see in the chancel was reopened in the 1960's.

