

26.

CHURCH OF SAINT MARY MAJOR OF TAROUQUELA



Lugar do Mosteiro
Tarouquela
Cinfães



41° 4' 10.83" N
8° 11' 16.55" W



+351 918 116 488



Sat., 3.30 pm (winter)
or 5.30 pm (summer);
Sun., 9 am



Saint Mary Major
5th August



National Monument
1945



P. 25



P. 25



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The historical importance of the Church of Tarouquela, in Cinfães, is singly marked today in the remaining Church of what was once one of the first female Benedictine monasteries to the south of the Douro. Its origin, in the mid-12th century, associates this monastic house to a couple, Ramiro Gonçalves and his wife Ouruana Nunes, who purchased a property that used to belong to Egas Moniz (1080-1146), the so-called Governor and Schoolmaster, and his wife. There they founded a new monastery that was recognised by the bishop of Lamego in 1171 and confirmed by their descendants. Although, initially, Tarouquela followed the Rule of Saint Augustine; with Urraca Viegas, the daughter of Egas Moniz de Ortigosa, the habit was changed and the nuns began professing the Rule of Saint Benedict. The history of this monastery, which was run by dynasties of abbesses, crosses its path with that of one of the region's most notable families. The influence of the Resendes ceased to be felt almost simultaneously in the Church of Tarouquela and in the Monastery of Cárquere (Resende) (p. 121), where Vasco Martins de Resende, the nephew of the abbess Aldonça, was buried;

she is mentioned in the transition from the 13th to the 14th century and was one of the most active abbesses with a long ruling period that allowed her to make use of assets within her family circle. It is natural that, with the end of the Resendes's influence, the office fell into the hands of relatives and patrons of the monastery, even if only temporarily. In the 14th century, we find the Church of Tarouquela in the hands of the Pintos



family, from Ferreiros de Tendais. From the 15th century onwards, the nieces succeed their aunts, keeping the power within a family that was closely related to Porto's urban elites.

It is within this context that we should understand the half-relief sculpture of the enthroned Virgin breastfeeding the Infant Jesus, which dates back around 1500 and was manufactured in a workshop from Bruxelles (or Malines).

This representation of Saint Mary Major, placed on a corbel in the main altarpiece, on the Gospel side, combines the medieval hieratism of the majestic pose and a virtuosity that seems to appeal to modern piety. The 15th century is already the period of the monastery's swan song. In addition to its intrinsically family-related nature, physical isolation and size, there were some noticeable signs of neglect by the Tarouquela nuns. The abbesses often



THE ABBESSES OF TAROUQUELA

Among the list of possible abbesses of Tarouquela we present below, we know that there were more or less active periods due to the available documents and to their connection to the local and regional elites (who always conditioned the relationships between the monastery and different types of power). In this context, we can almost perceive the different stages in which Tarouquela was dominated by certain lineages from the abbesses' surnames.

Urraca Viegas (referred with certainty until 1198); Maior Mendes (referred between 1255-1278); Aldonça Martins de Resende (referred between 1291-1349); Maria Martins de Moreira (referred in 1357); Brites Gonçalves Pinto (referred in 1445); Catarina Pinto (referred between 1473-1495); Leonor Pinto (referred between 1497-1506); Beatriz Pinto (referred between 1507-1531); Maria Ribeiro (referred between 1534-1536) and Maria de Melo (the last abbess of the Church of Tarouquela and the first one of the monastery of Saint Benedict of Hail-Mary in Porto).

ALDONÇA MARTINS DE RESENDE

The most blatant case is that of Aldonça Martins de Resende, referred between the late 13th century and the early 14th century. The nobility accuse her of having two love affairs, one with Vasco Pinto (which does not seem to be more than a rumour) and another with Rui Martins do Casal, a troubadour, with whom she had two daughters who were legitimised by King Dinis (k. 1279-1325).

broke their celibacy vows and acted according to their own personal interests. In 1535, an alderwoman (the abbess of Arouca, Maria de Melo) moved to Tarouquela to calm the turmoil resulting from the royal will to extinguish the monastery and prepare the transition to the monastery of Saint Benedict of Hail-Mary, in Porto. This monastery, founded in 1514 by King Manuel I (k. 1495-1521), was built to gather nuns from different female institutes in a single place.

The history of Tarouquela provides an excellent insight into the artistic traces left by the different periods in this once monastic Church. Although the foundation of the monastery of Tarouquela dates back to the 12th century, the Romanesque traces that still remain in the Church lead us to a later chronology, probably from the early 13th century. Besides, an in-

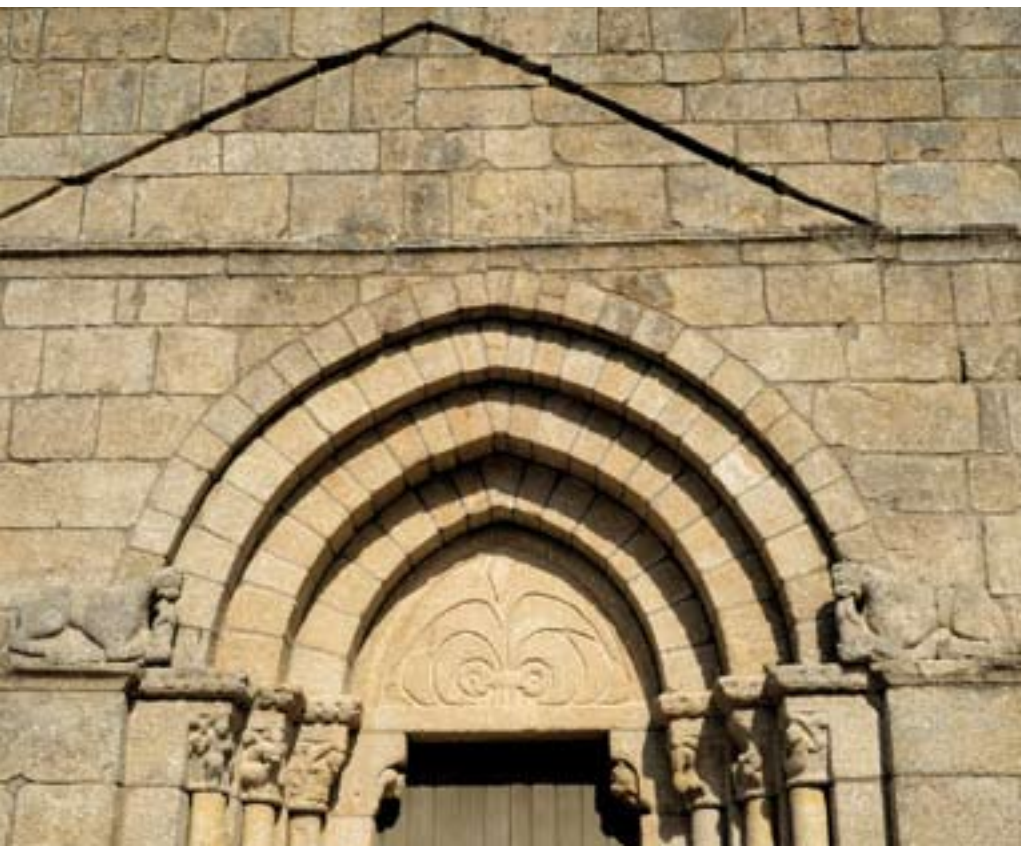
scription reused on the southeast corner of the bell tower mentions the Caesar Era of 1252 (i.e. 1214), which corroborates this chronology. It is thought that it was initially placed in the chancel, where it is still possible to see an "E" in the space between the first buttress on the north side and the beginning of the nave's wall.

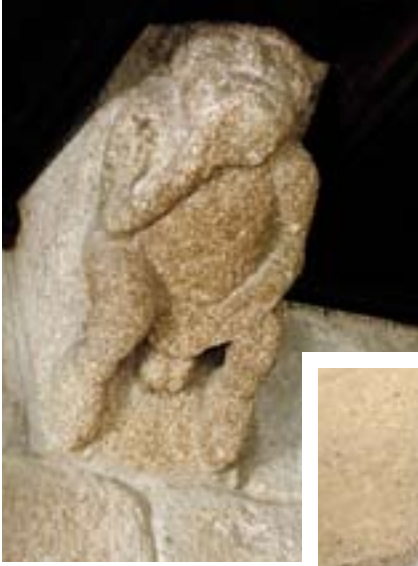
The construction of the Romanesque Church was possibly initiated by the abbess who introduced the Rule of Saint Benedict in Tarouquela. This Church's chancel tells us of a consolidated Romanesque style. It combines different artistic movements that embody one of the best examples of Romanesque architecture in Portuguese territory. Despite the addition built in the 17th or 18th century (to accommodate the main altarpiece) in which the Romanesque ashlar were reused, as proven by the initials visible on the outside, the

remaining dense Romanesque ornamentation is a good example of the indigenous, dense and bulky decorative richness with the Baroque-style aspects that our Romanesque style achieved.

Inside, the church has two ornamentation levels, composed of blind arcades. The crevices are decorated both inside and outside. The decoration is dominated by Benedictine themes: antithetical animals, two men with a single head, snakes, the theme of the mermaid and the theme of the man between two birds, in addition, of course, to the palmettes from Braga and to a whole range of geometric motifs. These themes, which were absorbed and represented by indigenous artists, take on a clear regional flavour. From this period we may also admire the consecration altar

with its corresponding tabernacle placed on the upper part, on one of the blind Romanesque arcades, on the Epistle side. We should highlight the theme found on the triumphal arch: animals, not quite modelled and loaded with graphic elements, are represented facing forward on each of the voussours. This is the first time that the theme of the *beak-heads* appears on a triumphal arch and, instead of the traditional bird heads, here we see wolf heads. Considering this was the House of God, the mentors of this monastic Church sought to represent the human weaknesses through the modillions, as we can see in one of the apse's modillion, which is sheltered by the Gothic chapel of Saint John the Baptist. This modillion shows the theme of the *exhibitionist*, a





squatting man who is holding his genitals, while on the opposite elevation there is a female figure who is highlighting her genitals (we find the same model on a modillion in the Chapel of Fandinhães (Marco de Canaveses) (p. 143)).

The nave was built almost at the same time. There are consecration crosses along its walls. While the aesthetic of its lateral portals is simpler, the same cannot be said about the composition of the main portal, which is considered as one of the most curious Portuguese specimens. More than its capitals or the Herculean figure that shaped as an atlas, results in a corbel that supports a tympanum with a grooved fleur-de-lys (a Marian symbol), the so-called *Tarouquela dogs* are the ones that have drawn most attention. They are placed on the impostos, on each side of the portal and may be

described as a pair of four-legged animals with nude human bodies hanging from their jaws, attached by the legs. With a clear protective nature, they show a will to ward off the evil forces.

The funerary chapel of Saint John the Baptist was founded by Vasco Lourenço between 1481 and 1495, at the time of King João II (k. 1481-1495). Despite having frontal corbels supporting the cornice and a main portal with decorated archivolt, it still fits into the so-called "rural Gothic" style. Because it is a funerary chapel, it has shallow graves in the pavement and, until 1980, it kept three sepulchral chests that may currently be seen on the outside. These are monolithic granite sarcophagi with gabled lids. Despite having no inscription, they do show symbols that allude to the people

BENEDICTINE SCULPTURE

The south portal shows a similar structure to that of the main portal, although it features a flat tympanum supported by two birds (an owl and a pelican). The most well-preserved capitals were excellently manufactured. Their motifs were extracted from the repertoire of the Benedictine Romanesque art and simplified: two birds pecking from the same bowl on the capital's corner, two intertwined serpents or, alternatively, a pair of four-legged animals fighting against a serpent. On the imposts we find the motif identified by Joaquim de Vasconcelos with "No. 6 - ellipses and circles with a double movement; rope" in his book *The Romanesque art in Portugal...*



who were buried in them: a sword, corn stalks and an abess staff. After the monastic complex was abandoned, Tarouquela became simply a Church from the patronage of Saint Benedict of Hail-Mary. The Church is the only surviving element of the old complex. Although the current image of the Church's interior is mainly a result of a restoration intervention

carried out in the 1970s, the truth is that the Church once counted five altars. Today, we can only see the main altar and another one, on the nave's left side, both fitting into the Baroque aesthetics. As a memory of the other three altars we have, in addition to the documentary sources, the images displayed on simple altar tables which we may classify as collateral altar tables.

