

BRIEF HISTORICAL MEMORY

CHURCH OF THE HOLY CHRIST OUTEIRO – BRAGANÇA



The Church of the Holy Christ has been declared a National Monument by the decree nr. 14615, published on the Government Journal nr. 260 - I series, on the 24th November 1927.

«The Church of the Holy Christ of Outeiro is located in the village centre, in a place called “*the threshing-floor*”, next to the Bragança – Miranda road. Rare is the visitor or foreigner who expects to find such a magnificent and artistic monument at this place. None of the current and the former county seats of the Northeast of Trás-os-Montes, except for the city of Miranda do Douro, not even the city of Bragança, have the honour of holding such a gorgeous building, with such an exquisite, consonant and symmetrical architecture».

Mourinho, António Rodrigues, *Religious Architecture from the Diocese of Miranda do Douro – Bragança*, Sendim, 1995.

The Temple of the Holy Christ of Outeiro had by precedent the little chapel of the Holy Cross, today called *Capelinha* (little chapel), and located in the oriental side of the sanctuary.



CHAPEL OF THE HOLY CROSS -----
Today known by *Capelinha* (little chapel), it is located in the oriental side of the temple.

According to Mourinho (1995), this chapel had been abandoned for many years, cattle entering there and being almost desecrated. Stones had been removed from the porch, as well as fineries and religious ornaments, and the figure of Christ was full of dust and cobwebs.

On the 26th April 1698, during the celebration of the Eucharist, the Carmelite priest Luís de Sousa Joseph saw the Christ of the *Capelinha* “sweating drops of water”. This fact had also probably been observed by the Judge António Moreira da Cunha, and the bishop of Miranda, D. Manuel de Moura Manuel, had also taken notice of the phenomenon.

This event is witnessed by the inscription on the top of the door, where it can be read: “In this Chapel sweated the Holy Christ on the 26th April 1698”. It must have been this event that

led to the astonishment from what hope was born. Sufferers appeared from a thousand places and they get cured by touching the image.

This news soon went through all the dioceses of Miranda, Braga and the Spanish provinces of Galicia, Castile and Leon. On the 3rd May of that same year 1698, such a large crowd joined in Outeiro, and they had to pray the Eucharist outside the chapel, and alert the authorities to avoid any disorders.

The chapel became small to receive so many faithful, so the construction of the Temple began in that year 1698, and it was opened for worship on the 3rd May 1713, still unfinished as, according to Mourinho (1995), the works continued until 1740.

In 1722, the altarpiece of the high altar was built in Baroque carving, and it is «one of the most majestic and artistic in the churches of Trás-os-Montes» (Lourenço *et al*, 1999).

There are references to works in arches, still in 1726, and in the slab, between 1726 and 1728. Pulpits were painted in the year 1732. The choir, porticoes and, definitely, vaults were executed in the period between 1726 and 1738. In 1740, the two altarpieces placed in the arms of the transept were built.

Later in 1767, coffered walls and ceiling of the sacristy were painted, and those paintings were assigned to Damian de Bustamante, a Castilian painter and master born in Valladolid in 1713.

According to Lourenço *et al* (1999), this great work «was made using the materials of the region: shale masonry, granitic rock coating from the neighbour provinces of Castile and Leon, lime and wood», being visible the masonry used as a structural skeleton on not towed areas of the church, such as the interior of the towers and roofing.

In structure, the temple has a cross shaped plan and it comprises three naves, transept, main chapel, sacristy and storages. The main façade is surrounded by two towers of square shaped plan, with corners and padded bells, divided in four registers of different dimensions by frieze and cornices, and finished on top with pyramids laid with tiles.

The main body, in stonework, has two Doric columns adorsed on either side of the portal, on a high socle. These columns are topped by other two Salomonic columns which frame empty corners, finished by an interrupted pediment.



ROSETTE -----
Architectural element on top of the portal.



DOOR OF THE TABERNACLE ----
A detail from the altarpiece of the high altar in Baroque carving.

These corners sheltered bronze-molded saints plundered during the Napoleonic invasions. Today they are part of the estate of the Louvre Museum in Paris, being considered Mankind Heritage.

The mullioned double-framed portal is topped by a laboriously-framed large rosette, in which the effects of the 1755 earthquake are visible, because of the obvious misalignment of the stonework blocks.

A balustrade finishes this central body.

The North and South side elevations, cadenced with pilasters crowned by spires on the roofs, show a three-branched porch with a ribbed vault. Each branch has a different window.

The inside presents the main nave with low arches and the side naves with rampant arches. Crossed ogives were made on top.

The area of the transept presents a ring-shaped vault with fake nerves.

The choir is sustained by three arches of granite masonry, arranged perpendicularly to the nave, sustained by slender Doric columns.

The main altar is slightly upper-semicircular and the altarpiece is richly decorated with Baroque carving.

The sacristy has a chest of drawers ribbed with borders of golden cords and the ceiling and walls are coated by richly decorated panels with paintings, particularly noting the *Pietá* (the Virgin Mary with the body of Jesus in her arms after the crucifixion) and the «Invention of the Holy Cross» by the Empress Saint Helena.

Flavia Iulia Helena, later known by Saint Helena, was probably born in Bithynia in 249 to a humble family.



CRUZEIRO DE OUTEIRO -----

Erguido frente ao portal do templo em 1732 para assinalar os duzentos anos do foral atribuído à vila de Outeiro por D. Manuel I em 11 de novembro de 1514.

Foi declarado imóvel de interesse público pelo Decreto n.º 40361, publicado no Diário do Governo n.º 228 – Série I, em 20 de outubro de 1955.

Still very young, she married Constantius Chlorus, an ambitious officer of the Roman army who reached Caesar's dignity in 293. Constantine was born of this union and after his father's death he was proclaimed emperor and appointed his mother empress.

In 324, Constantine declared Christianity the only official religion of the Roman Empire.

As a zealous follower of Christianity, Helena decided (325-326) to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in search for the cross where Christ had been crucified.

There, she ordered to do excavations in a land near Golgotha's Hill, known among the inhabitants of Jerusalem by "*Locus Calvariae*", The Place of the Skull.

On the 3rd May 326, three crosses were found but it wasn't known in which one Christ was crucified, because there wasn't any identification on them. As suggested by St. Macarius, bishop of Jerusalem, each one of them was placed on a deceased. When the cross in which Christ was crucified was placed on the dead person, he resurrected.

After that date, the "*Invention of the Holy Cross*", which had been hidden for three centuries, has been celebrated on every 3rd May. "*Invention*" comes from the Latin word "*inventio*", which means to detect something, to find, to discover.

Credits:

Text: César Garrido

Photos: Luís Ferreira

Editing: Brotherhood of the Holy Christ of Outeiro

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Translation: Sónia Marques

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