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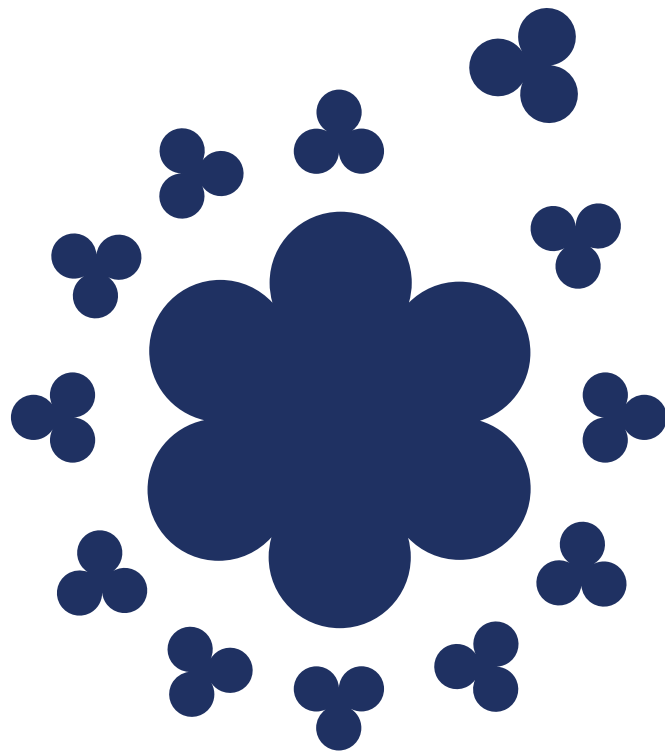
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HOW MEDIEVAL IS PORTO CATHEDRAL? THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY RESTORATIONS AS A MOMENT IN A CATHEDRAL'S HISTORY

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ABSTRACT

Barral i Altet criticised the nineteenth and twentieth centuries restoration works for having adulterated the image of Romanesque architecture, eventually considering them to be the actual makers of the monuments we see today. These interventions in architecture ended up creating an image of Romanesque and conditioned the result of its study and approach. This paper follows this assumption, focusing on the restoration interventions that, from 1927 to 1946, were carried out in Porto Cathedral under the now-extinct Directorate-General for National Buildings and Monuments (DGEMN), which aimed at recovering what was understood to be its primitive language, that is, that of the Romanesque period. The Cathedral and its surroundings were then profoundly transformed, reconfiguring into a 'sacred acropolis' (one of the main objectives pursued on the occasion of the official celebrations of the nation's 'double anniversary', held in 1940) and highlighting its visibility from various points in the city. Aware that the restoration work carried out in this period has definitively conditioned the legibility and apprehension of what is originally Romanesque in Porto Cathedral and what results of the restoration, we seek to demonstrate how this moment has to be a part of the cathedral's history. Thus, we might ask: what is truly Romanesque when we study a church, such as Porto Cathedral, whose historiographic production tends to classify as Romanesque? Starting from this, we highlight the importance of confronting several documental and visual sources produced at the time of the restoration work, in order to understand the architectural structure we see today. We, therefore, intend to underline the importance of studying this moment in the history of a cathedral, which is fundamental for its safeguarding and heritage management.

1. INTRODUCTION: HOW MEDIEVAL IS A SO-CALLED MEDIEVAL CATHEDRAL?

Barral i Altet criticised the restoration yards for having adulterated the image of Romanesque architecture (Barral i Altet, 2006, p. 9). For this author, the architect-restorers of the nineteenth century (and we can also add those of the first half of the twentieth century) ended up being the actual makers of the monuments of medieval origin that we see today (Barral i Altet, 2006, p. 12). Intervened Romanesque architecture ended up creating an idea of Romanesque art, also conditioning the result of its studies.

In Portugal, the restoration of medieval heritage is widely studied¹. It is important to recognise that medieval buildings, besides having been greatly transformed over the centuries, were subject to profound restoration interventions during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We can, then, ask: how medieval is a medieval building? And, more specifically, what is *truly Romanesque* about a cathedral, such as Porto Cathedral, whose historiographic approach tends to classify as Romanesque?

2. THE MEDIEVAL PORTO CATHEDRAL

The particular case of Porto Cathedral demonstrates the stratigraphic reality present in many Portuguese cathedrals of medieval origin, such as those of Lisbon, Coimbra or Braga.

Placed on the so-called *Morro da Sé* (cathedral hill), Porto Cathedral stands out in the urban landscape due to its volumetry and scale. The apparent seclusion of this building from the urban fabric is relatively recent, resulting of a profound transformation undertaken by the architect Arménio Losa (1908-1988), who, through a very substantial urban arrangement following the demolition of the surroundings in 1939, gave new visibility to the Cathedral (Coelho, 2001). This urban arrangement and the opening of the *Terreiro da Sé* should be understood in the scope of the 1940 celebrations of the ‘two centenaries of the foundation and of the restoration of independence of Portugal’ (1140 and 1640) (Botelho, 2006, p. 104-106; 125-129).



Fig. 1: Porto Cathedral and surroundings. Jaime Nuño González (2021)

¹ Lúcia Rosas (Rosas, 1995) and Maria João Neto (Neto, 1995 and 2001) were authors of the first major studies on the scope of restoration work carried out in Portugal and, therefore, of the awareness of this reality. Miguel Tomé is another reference author in this field (Tomé, 2002).

Several arguments prove that the construction of Porto Cathedral date from the second half, or even the end, of the twelfth century. In his testament, King Afonso Henriques (1128-1185) donated 500 maravedis to the construction of the cathedral, as did his son King Sancho I (1185-1211), who bequeathed 1000 maravedis to the building of the cathedral. The erection of Porto Cathedral extended into the thirteenth century, hence the early presence of Gothic elements (the rose window and the archobutants), which combine with a Romanesque-style spatiality marked by the solid polystyle pillars that mark out the three naves, delimiting their sections and supporting the broken barrel vaults with the help of tracery and tower arches. The church building was only concluded on 5 June 1557, when the stone bishopric was built to finish off the transept, which means that the last stage of the construction of the Porto Cathedral is coetaneous with Manueline architecture (Botelho, 2006, pp. 13-61).

Porto Cathedral was a unique case in the Portuguese Romanesque period in what concerns the organisation of its chancel. Magalhães Basto (Basto, 1934) published important documental sources that demonstrate that it was composed of an apse surrounded by three radiating chapels, devoted to the invocation of the Saviour, to Saint Jerome and to Saint Margaret, and two polygonal apsidiole - of which one still stands, St. Peter's chapel. Above the ambulatory, there was a roofed gallery, which was accessed by a spiral staircase next to the apsidiole (where the organ worked), which helped to support the weight of the high vaulted ceiling. Because this upper gallery had a structural function, it is possible that this chancel may not have had flying buttresses. This chancel, unique in Portugal at the time, shows clear similarities with others from the Limoges region (Almeida, 2001, pp. 114-116).

The side chapel of St. Peter, placed on the south arm of the transept, stands out as one of the few remains of the early chancel. This polygonal structure has a blind arcade inside, which was uncovered in a 1964 intervention (Botelho, 2006, pp. 190-194) aiming to clean the plasters that followed an operation sponsored by Bishop D. António Ferreira Gomes (1952-1982). It is possible

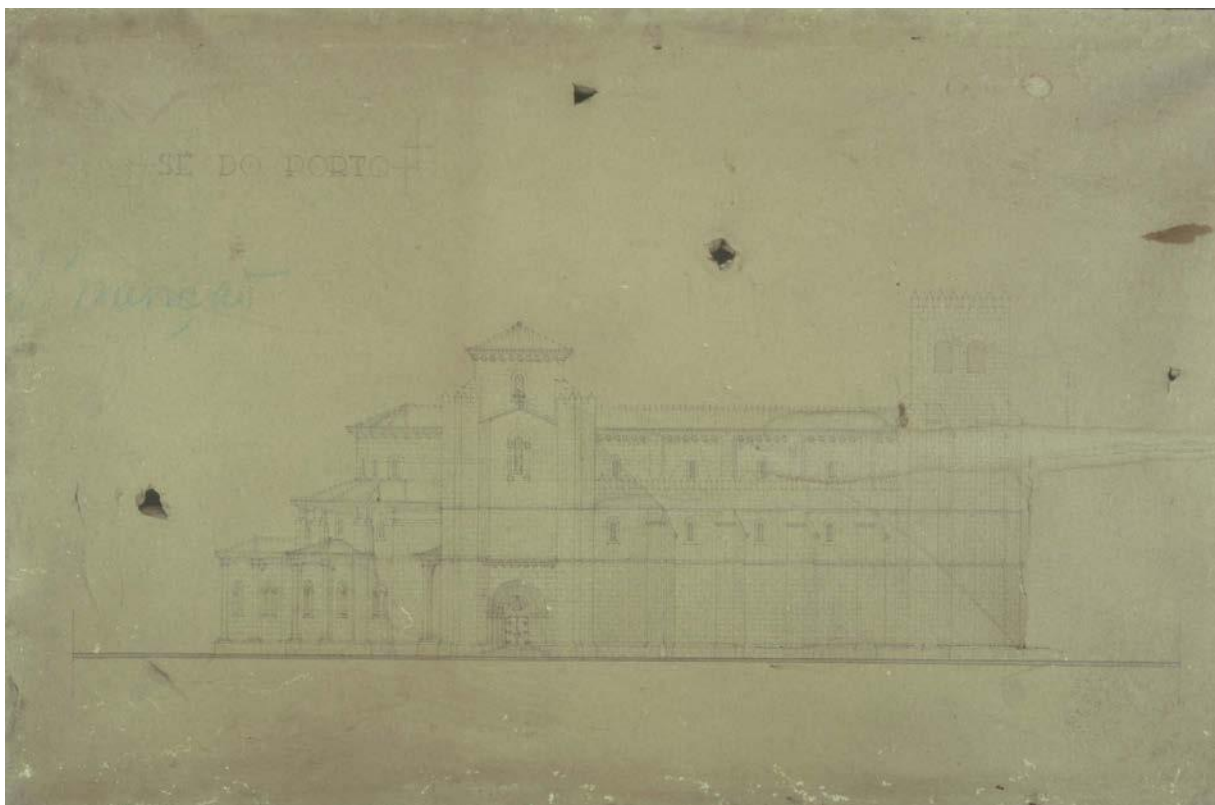


Fig. 2: *Porto Cathedral. North façade.* António Filomeno da Rocha Carneiro, July 1943. Drawing © FAUP/ Centre for the Documentation of Urbanism and Architecture.

that the radiating chapels and the apses of the primitive chancel presented similar structural and decorative characteristics. In the walls of the transept, collateral to the main chapel, two blind arches belonging to the upper gallery of the chancel were also uncovered during the above-mentioned interventions.

António Filomeno da Rocha Carneiro's (1919-2002) academic proposal, developed within the scope of the competition for the Archaeology Project of the Architecture Course of Porto's School of Fine Arts in 'July 943' (according to the date inscribed on the original drawing) was based on the documentation published by Magalhães Basto (Botelho, 2006, p. 121-125). Among the studies carried out, we were only able to find one of his original drawings, which is exactly the project for the north side façade. It is, therefore, based on the material vestiges that remain, and which the restoration work has uncovered, and on the publication of documentary sources and their interpretation through drawing, that we can imagine what the original Cathedral's chancel would be like (Afonso and Botelho, 2005).

This earlier chancel was demolished and replaced by the present one, built between 1606 and 1610 by Bishop D. Frei Gonçalo de Morais (1603-1617). It is a rectangular structure with a classicist layout that was transformed during the *sede vacante* of 1717-1741 through the addition of a distinctive main altarpiece in carved wood of the Joanine Baroque style, a painting by the Italian Nicolau Nasoni (1691-1773) (Tedesco, 2011), the remarkable choir stalls and other elements of apparatus.

The historiographic production focusing on the various transformative moments of the Porto cathedral complex's history is immense (Botelho, 2006, p. 13-15), from which we highlight the period of *sede vacante* (1717-1741). Although many authors have dedicated themselves to the artistic study of the building, they have never approached it in a global manner, treating its various constructive and artistic phases holistically and critically. Several texts of a descriptive nature, particularly chronological, and various specialized studies of this monument exist, focusing on a given period, a given artist, or a given element, because they were developed around the publication of a significant documentary source, without, however, providing a comparative reading of the overall complex. More recently, the publication of sources of another nature has contributed to a review of knowledge around the Cathedral and the Diocese of Porto (Afonso and Botelho, 2005, Morujão, 2010 and Silva, 2013).

Our research, which sought to understand the attempt to recover the medieval facies of Porto Cathedral during the twentieth century, is worth mention (Botelho, 2006). In fact, the transformations undergone by the medieval Porto Cathedral complex and its adjacent structures have significantly contributed to its alterity over the centuries, constantly impacting on its legibility. As mentioned above, in addition to the replacement of the chancel in the early seventeenth century, the first half of the eighteenth century turned the cathedral into an intense architectural and artistic construction site, in line with post-Tridentine principles. Furthermore, we recall the in-depth restoration work carried out between 1927 and 1946 under the former DGEMN, aimed at retrieving what was understood to be its pristine language, that is, that of the 'Romanesque period'.

Joaquim de Vasconcelos (1849-1936) early understood this building as a curious patchwork (Vasconcelos in Brütt and Moraes, 1908, s.p.). And, as we will see throughout this paper, only a wider and more attentive set of studies will allow us to assess what is *really* Romanesque in a building stylistically classified as such. What was a church like in Portugal during the Romanesque period? What is *truly Romanesque* when we study a church, or even a castle that is stylistically 'classified' as Romanesque?

Beyond the historical-artistic approach of any building, we increasingly emphasize the importance of also developing a deep critical evaluation of the restoration interventions that it has undergone

over time. Besides leaving deep marks in the building, and sometimes even radically transforming it, these interventions have also contributed to making it undergo structural changes that are usually not visible to the naked eye but that have effective impacts on its material legacy (Lacerda, 2004). Following the views of Barral i Altet, but also from our own findings as we have been working on other case studies, we can say that it is indeed fundamental to integrate the History of Conservation and Restoration within the History of Art, in order to achieve a global understanding and greater comprehension of our object of study. And, particularly with regard to buildings of medieval origin, we cannot neglect the study of the interventions made during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries because they definitively had an impact on the transformation of the image and of the architecture of numerous churches, among which the cathedrals and, in this case, Porto Cathedral.

3. THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY RESTORATIONS AS A MOMENT IN A CATHEDRAL'S HISTORY

It is certain that the options taken during the interventions in some of the buildings of medieval origin result, naturally, from a particular and peculiar interpretation of this architecture in its time and space. Nevertheless, the knowledge of it in terms of its historiography, on the one hand, as well as alleged intentionality on the other, definitely contributed to the results reached (Botelho, 2013a). At a historiographical level, there were several stages of knowledge that reflect the approaches, themes and problems that follow the international discussion on the subject and that, in turn, have shaped the present understanding of medieval architecture in Portugal (Botelho, 2013b). The image that has been built of the Romanesque, in particular, accompanies the evolution of the writing on this most representative moment of Portuguese architecture, associated with the formation of the kingdom and the reign of King Afonso Henriques. This conception had much influence on the way in which the architecture of the Romanesque period was restored during the first half of the twentieth century - a context that is illustrated by the intervention carried out between 1927 and 1946. This is all the more significant given the current perception of Romanesque architecture as we understand it today, of which the Cathedral is a clear example.

Research around the principles of DGEMN intervention in medieval buildings tends to identify an orientation that, in line with the stylistic reintegration followed in restoration interventions of national monuments, aiming at their revival (Salazar, 1946), ultimately points to adequacy of the *restoration theory* and the concepts of *unity of style* developed by the French architect Viollet-le-Duc (1814-1879) (Viollet-le-Duc, 2002, vol. III, pp. 14-34).

In the search for the *primaeval* image of the intervened architecture, compromised by a given artistic culture and imbued with evident historicist values (Botelho, 2021), it ended up materializing in a uniformity that may be identified in a significant set of Romanesque buildings. This uniformity, guided by the restoration interventions, sedimented an 'idea' of Romanesque architecture that remains in the buildings we visited and studied.

Through the figure of the Director-General of DGEMN who took office between 1929 and 1960, the engineer Henrique Gomes da Silva (Neto, 2010), the 'restorationist' and 'nationalist' narrative was not only established as an institution but also materialised in practice (Silva, 1935).

The DGEMN's criteria for selecting the buildings to be restored did not always respond to their real necessities and artistic aspects (Rosas, 1988). Lúcia Rosas notes that these restorations carried out under the DGEMN responded to historical motivations (because they were linked to important figures or events), religious and devotional (as justified by the 'appearance' of a miraculous image). The unity that restoration interventions attributed to Portuguese architecture, particularly

noticeable during the first decades of DGEMN's activities, is not in tune with the Romanesque way of building. Recent studies have shown how the architectural space of cathedrals was a living and constantly changing space (Carrero Santamaría, 2019). The proliferation of altars is a very particular phenomenon of the Romanesque period and can be explained by the increase of private and daily masses documented in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Hence, we know that in the Romanesque period, small altarpieces, crosses and candlesticks already took place on altars. Moreover, from the twelfth century onwards, worship before carved devotional images is all too evident (Rosas, 2012).

This interpretation of the medieval sacred space, particularly of the Romanesque, was lost over the centuries. Let us demonstrate. We have already alluded to the replacement of the Romanesque chancel during the seventeenth century, which unequivocally altered the spatiality of Porto Cathedral. Added to this, the existence of altarpieces attached to the pillars of the naves has been documented in the seventeenth century. In the eighteenth century, as documented about the works undertaken between 1717-1741 and confirmed by the *Memórias Paroquiais* of 1758, these altarpieces were replaced by others (Rosas and Sousa, 2019), fitted into new openings in the walls of the nave. Aesthetically and plastically, the church was also renovated with plasterwork on the walls and vaults, and was endowed with pelmets and capitals in gilded woodcarving, with a pulpit and with balconies in the windows that were added to the North and South façades of the church. The photographs published before the DGEMN restorations on Porto Cathedral and other churches are fundamental sources for understanding what these buildings were like before the interventions and of their state of preservation (Botelho, 2013, pp. 356-431). As regards Porto Cathedral, we should note the fundamental contribution of photographers such as Emílio Bïel (1838-1915), José Antunes Marques Abreu (1879-1958), Domingos Alvão (1872-1946) or Guilherme Bonfim Barreiros (1894-1973), whose images allow us to glimpse a church that is very different from the one we know today.



Fig. 3: Main Nave and Pulpits. Marques Abreu, 1928. In FERREIRA, J. Augusto - Porto: *Origens históricas e seus principais monumentos. Cathedral, Santa Clara, S. Francisco e Cedofeita. A Arte em Portugal*. Porto: Imprensa Marques Abreu, 1928.

Thus, the image of Porto Cathedral reflects the ‘medievalism’ that marked the moment of its restoration (Botelho, 2006). The intervention carried out between 1927 and 1946 aimed at the stylistic reintegration of the church and cloister; the main façade was altered and its medieval character was emphasised by the placement of battlements in its central section, which was extended to the side façades; the large baroque windows gave way to loopholes, totally or partially rebuilt from pre-existing elements and following the earlier style; the pelmets, capitals and side altarpieces in gilded woodwork were removed; the plaster of the walls and vaults was peeled off, as were the pillars, which were rebuilt; the granite was left exposed after the side walls were rebuilt; the pulpit was removed. If until this moment the nave presented a significant set of devotional apparatus, it now appears unclothed, standing out the granite and the materiality of the walls and buttresses. The contrast between the medieval-style nave and the Baroque chancel is quite evident.



Fig. 4: Porto Cathedral - general perspective of the church from the west. Jaime Nuño González (2021).

This intervention responded not only to the material needs of the church’s architecture but essentially to an understanding of its primal character and a clear desire to enhance the idyllic sobriety of the Romanesque style. Again, this is not unique and exclusive to Porto Cathedral, as it can be found in other cathedrals and churches from the same period. Through this understanding of the intervention, a stylistic unity was affirmed between buildings that probably never had one between them. The reintegrations carried out during the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century tended to standardise the texture of the monuments, replacing elements that emerged with later interventions or inspired by monuments considered to be similar. This is why restorations ended up underlining the similarity between distinct buildings (Rosas, 1988, p. 49). The aesthetic coherence that was intended to be restored for a given building was thus associated with the search for style similarity between different buildings, especially in their decoration (Rosas, 1988, p. 50). An ‘idea of Romanesque’ was thus created and generalized.

That of Porto Cathedral was crystallised in the DGEMN Bulletin No. 40-43 (1946) on the restoration of the monument. In our view, this publication, as well as being a fundamental document for understanding what the cathedral is today, is a chronological reference point for one of the most significant restoration interventions carried out on cathedrals. It contains an (indirect) compilation of the most relevant options taken and of the ideals and theories they embodied, marking a milestone on its intervention history.



Fig. 5: Cover of the DGEMN Bulletin no. 40-43

4. CLOSING REMARKS

In view of all this, it is pertinent to question whether what we know as Portuguese Romanesque has features similar to those of its pristine origin or whether it is the result of the transformations it has undergone over the centuries; if the Romanesque architecture we know today is a long way from its original appearance, a result of what Carlos de Passos called the ‘*patusco estilo românico* (sic) do século XX’ (Passos, 1935, p. 14). We can then understand why Barral i Altet questions, in a rather more radical view, whether when we study Romanesque architecture today, we are dealing with truly medieval buildings or contemporary architecture with a revivalist feel (Barral i Altet, 2006, pp. 31-44).

As far as the Portuguese context is concerned, although in 1933 it was predicted that ten years would be enough for all National Monuments to be properly restored, we know that not all of them underwent reintegration interventions during this period (Botelho, 2013, p. 401). Some churches, either because they were in a reasonable state of preservation, or because they were apparently not related with any significant historical figure or event, ended up only being the target of interventions at a later date and when other criteria were already being applied, taking into account the Venice Charter (ICOMOS, 1964) and tending towards conservation through the acknowledgement of the historical importance of the transformations monuments experienced over time, which should be progressively maintained for the benefit of the monument’s ‘historical authenticity’.

Monographic research on the interventions that have been carried out on monuments over the course of their existence is an increasing need. These studies have proven to be a very useful tool for the actions and practices in monuments that have already been greatly transformed by restoration work. And, by combining different sources, they enable substantive knowledge to be produced on the architectural, liturgical and artistic stratigraphy of the sacred spaces in question. As we have seen, the transformations made by the DGEMN in Porto Cathedral in the twentieth century were so profound that they resulted in what we comprehend as the church’s image and configuration. And it is precisely on this cathedral, greatly transformed in a still recent past, that current and future actions will focus for its safeguarding and patrimonial valorization.

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