

Bragança

Sé Velha de Bragança



Old Cathedral of Bragança

A stopover for Jesuits, bishops and several architectures

They call it the Old Cathedral of Bragança, not only because there is a new one, but also because, in 1780, it became the head of the diocese that had been established in Miranda do Douro since 1545. Before that, it had other uses, and today it is the centre of the parish of St. John the Baptist. In the first half of the 16th century, a convent for Poor Clare nuns started to be built there, but as early as 1561, the City Council expressed the will for hosting a school for the Society of Jesus, thus offering the building for such purpose. That is how this complex, classified as a Monument of Public Interest since 2012 (church and cloister), became the Holy Name of Jesus School. In 1759, it became vacant due to the expulsion of the Jesuits by the Marquis of Pombal, and so it was a natural choice upon the transfer of the diocesan seat, decisive for cementing the definitive affir-



mation of the city of Bragança as the heart of the entire Northeast Transmontano.

Constituting a second urban centrality outside the citadel, especially after the bishop had moved there to escape the border instability that was happening near Miranda do Douro, the building was mostly completed long before the Jesuits arrived there, as evidenced by documentation from 1545. By order of both D. Teodósio, the fifth duke of Bragança, and the City Council, the work was delivered to the masters Pedro de la Faya and Fernão Pires, and it was carried out on land then belonging to the monastery of Castro de Avelãs (the remains of this medieval structure can be found ten minutes by car away from the Old Cathedral). It was, however, the target of deep interventions over the years, still boasting traces of mannerism, typical of the Renaissance, and the baroque. However, typical elements of a late-Gothic language are still visible, the beginning of the sixteenth century being a moment of transition: that is the case of the lierne vault of the chan-



Imposing square bell tower, on an area that, around the Cathedral, became the civic centre of the city

Main portal (sculpture of the Virgin on the right), displaced laterally when the temple was enlarged





cel, with a clear Manueline inspiration, the ogival ribs on the roof of the nave, or the buttresses visible on the outer walls of the temple.

When we enter, or before we do so, is when we clearly find the first signs of a Renaissance language with baroque influences, in particular the main portal (perfect arch of two archivolts, on which, among other elements, a niche with the image of the Virgin and the Child stands out) or the gallery of Tuscan columns that precedes the imposing square bell tower. The double-decker cloister is also a clear sign of the Renaissance architectural grammar.

Inside the single nave church, with



Coexisting styles in the church,
from the elements of baroque
carvings to Gothic reminiscences
on the roof of the nave





a narrower chancel preceded by a Renaissance arch surmounted by the city's weapons, the scenic dimension of the Baroque fulfils its purpose: to impress above anything else. Worthy of reference are the pulpit, the extended high choir in L that embraces the organ, or the impressive altarpiece in gilded carving attributed to the master carver Manuel Gomes da Silva.

Moving on to the sacristy, perhaps the imposing ark, with a nineteenth-century construction, is the element that stands out the most. But we just need to look above the furniture to enjoy 12 canvases depicting scenes from the lives of Saint Francis Xavier and Saint Ignatius of Loyola. The latter, founder of the Society of Jesus, remains very present when we raise our field of vision even further, glimpsing the ceiling of coffers where you can appreciate 48 paintings depicting emblematic moments of his life.

The expulsion of the Jesuits in the 18th century did not completely banish them. They lingered in iconography and, above all, in memory.



A milestone in the lives of many generations

The conventual (or collegiate) facilities of the monument have a privileged seat in the memory of the people of Bragança, because it is where they have always spent their lives since the Jesuits founded a small school (compared to those of Coimbra or Évora, for example). With the Ignatians expelled from the kingdom, the diocesan seminary was installed there in 1766. However, it is after the second half of the 19th century that the connection of people to that space has seen a greater increase, as Liceu Nacional de Bragança (1853–1968) and Escola Preparatória Augusto Moreno (1968–1995) operated there (they were meanwhile transferred to facilities created from scratch). In 2004, the City Council recovered the property to receive the library, the music academy, and the municipal cultural centre, which bring the current dynamics of the city and the region together with the heritage, harnessing the identification of the communities with their history and with the associated material testimonies.



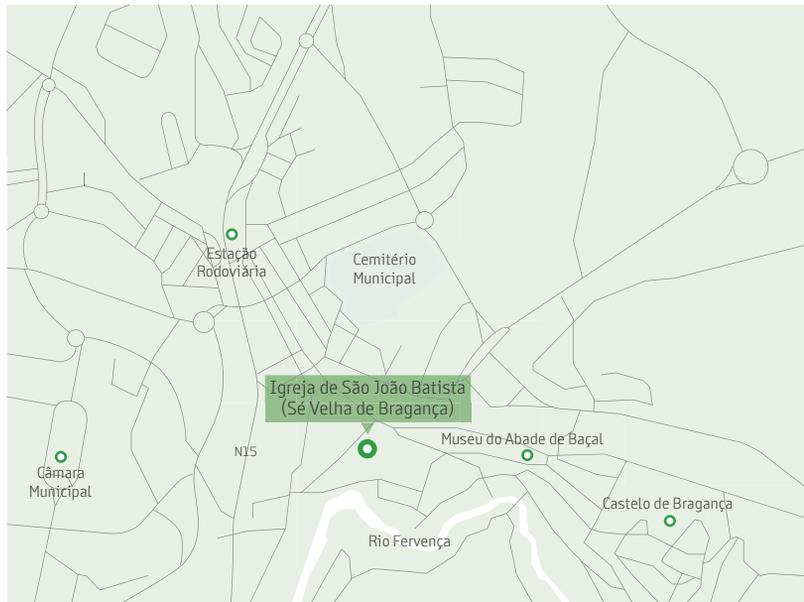


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