

Arouca

Mosteiro de Arouca



Monastery of Arouca

House of aristocratic nuns ruled by a princess



The size of the monument is the first thing to impress and tells us important things. It is the testimony of an institution whose origins date back to the 10th century, before Portugal was a country, but what we see is an imposing building with an eighteenth-century outline. This means that, after seven centuries, the Monastery of Santa Maria de Arouca remained very powerful. It was already powerful since medieval times, especially after the admission of the daughter of a king, whose presence still hovers everywhere.

In 1220, when D. Sancho I donated this monastery of Arouca to his daughter Mafalda, because it belonged to his patronage, the community was already exclusively female. Mafalda, on her turn, became the most celebrated resident of the monastery but she never got to profess. But, at first, the community wasn't exclusively female. Primarily dedicated to St. Peter and St. Paul, it became a dou-



Various circumstances contributed to the unusual good preservation of the building, but also of the artistic collection currently in the custody of the Museum of Sacred Art

Monastery of Arouca ↑

ble Benedictine institution, but the monks were removed from it in 1154. The Portuguese princess, who was married to Henry I of Castile (he was king at the age of 10 and died at the age of 13), a marriage annulled by the Pope, was about 25 years old when she joined the community of Arouca, which contributed to the magnification of the monastery and its adhesion to the Cistercian reform, confirmed by the papal bull of 1226. Even as a missing person, D. Mafalda increased the fame of Arouca. When she died on 1 May 1256, she was at the Monastery of Tuías (Marco de Canaveses), dealing with matters connected with her possessions, and the body arrived at Arouca the next day, to be buried. The legend, however, points to a distinct place of death and tells the miracle of a mule that decided to head for Arouca with the corpse. It is then that the cult of Santa Mafalda is born, intensified when it was reported that the body was pristine. She was beatified in 1792 by Pope Pius VI, but she never canonized.

Carlo Gimach, a Maltese architect who wandered through the North of



Baroque altarpiece of the main chapel, that rules over the church designed by Carlo Gimach



The tomb of Blessed Mafalda Sanches is still a space of special devotion



Portugal in the early 18th century, is considered to be responsible for the layout of the church, built from 1704 to 1730 and formed by three different spaces (choir, nave and main chapel). We must highlight the choir of the nuns and its imposing chair, built in 1725 by two carvers of Porto (António Gomes and Filipe da Silva). Its rich back of gilded carving shows 30 paintings depicting scenes from the life of Mafalda and other saints. The richness of this space reserved for religious women, along with aspects such as the size of the cells and the numerous locutories (ten, all of them with a wheel that allowed the exchange of objects with visitors), are all signs of the aristocratic origin of the religious women there, who maintained privileged practices, despite the vow of poverty.

The remaining art inside the temple also boasts high artistic value, from the main altarpiece, a beautiful example of Joanine baroque carved by Luís Vieira da Cruz (from Braga), to the tomb of Queen Mafalda, the subject of intense devotion to this day. The latter neoclassical cloister (started in 1781) has two floors, and it articulates conventual areas of interest, such as the kitchen, the dining hall or the chapter room. The cloister, the “civic center” of the monastery, was unfinished, and it was closed in the 1960s, along with the north and west wings.

Despite many difficulties through the ages, not only political, but also the consequence of three fires, the last in 1935, the monastery resisted, by merit of the Royal Brotherhood of Blessed Queen Mafalda, which preserved its precious collection of painting, sculpture, furniture and silverware. This was the origin of the collection at the Museum of Sacred Art, installed in the monument itself, which still has a rare musical bibliographic archive, with manuscript codices and printed books from the 13th to the 19th centuries.



The nuns' choir, with its majestic chair and an imposing Iberian organ, is one of several signs suggesting that this was monastery attended by ladies of the aristocracy





To the death of the last professed nun

The extinction of religious orders by liberalism, in 1834, earned the minister responsible, Joaquim António de Aguiar, the nickname of “friar-killer”. This is because, at first, only the male institutions of regular clergy were extinguished, transferring their goods, with small exceptions, to the State. The female orders, which could not admit novices nor allow the vows of existing ones, would only be dismantled after the death of the last professed nun. The last nun of Santa Maria de Arouca died in 1886, thus transferring the goods to the people, but the wholeness of the collection was eventually preserved. Many of the Portuguese religious buildings were sold at public auctions, which resulted in rapid degradation, especially because there is no use for such large buildings. Others have been adapted to new functions: State bodies, libraries, museums, barracks or even the seat of the Portuguese Parliament.

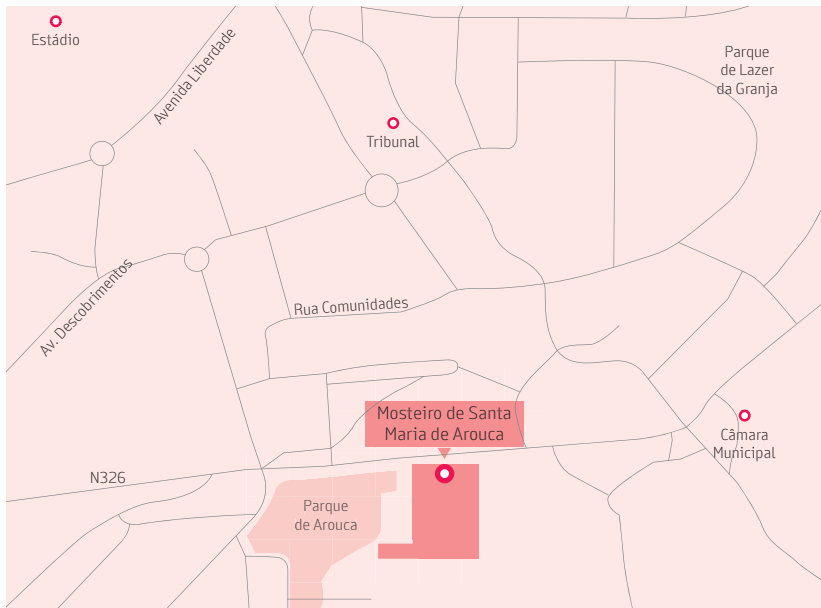






→ Monastery of Arouca





→ Mosteiro de Arouca

Monastery of Arouca



COFINANCIAMENTO



PROMOTOR



CO-PROMOTORES

