

Miranda do Douro

Concatedral de Miranda do Douro



Co-cathedral of Miranda do Douro

Powerful and sober diocesan seat created by D. João III



The enormous mass of the temple and the visual impact of the façade, in a border town that has always been so far from the decision centers, always impresses and arouses the curiosity of those who arrive there. The answers are in the sixteenth century and in the reign of D. João III, who obtained the authorization from Pope Paul III in 1545 for creating two dioceses in Miranda do Douro and Leiria (five years later, another would be founded in Portalegre, and the same monarch had previously obtained new dioceses in Angra [Angra do Heroísmo, since 1837], in the Azores, and in Goa, India – this also explains why he was called “The Pious”).

The reference to so many dioceses is due not only to the need for historical framing, but also to the fact that such monuments (which are called “Joanine sees” – not to be confused with the Joanine Baroque of the



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eighteenth century) are signs of a time of changes in art, and are also linked to the temporal coincidence with the Council of Trent (1545-1563) and the Catholic Reformation. That is, if the king intended to remake the map of ecclesiastical jurisdictions for better management of the territory (he took advantage of the deaths of the bishops of Braga, Coimbra and Guarda, within five years, for extracting the new three dioceses from the existing ones), the need for erecting cathedrals in the chosen cities arose at a time of change in artistic and religious paradigms. Usually described as based on Mannerist and Baroque elements, the cathedral of Miranda do Douro is also pointed out by art historians as one of the first signs of the *chã* architecture (a concept created for the Portuguese case by the North-American George Kubler in 1972), marked by sobriety and stripping, but also by the accuracy of the mathematical weighting of spaces. This period corresponded to the presence of military engineers/architects in civil and religious projects. And, among the men who designed the new



The main retable, by Gregory Fernández, and the Iberian organ rule over the ends of the church



cathedral of Miranda do Douro was Miguel de Arruda, a Portuguese military engineer, along with others, such as Gonalo de Torralva (brother of the famous Diogo de Torralva, author of the Mannerist cloister of the Convent of Christ in Tomar), who outlined the original project.

The design of the church dates from 1549, and the works began in 1552. The great visual impact of the faade, harmonic and surrounded by two imposing bell towers, follows the grandness of the interior of three naves, in which the ribbed vaults are a Gothic reminiscence maintaining the feeling of wonder, in particular if we remember that the city never became the great population core that the

diocesan seat condition seemed to advocate. All the carving is of high quality, especially the sumptuous retable of the main chapel, of the first quarter of the 17th century, or the one that frames the Iberian organ, from 1696, in whose structure there is an austere face (frown) to which, over generations, Mirandese mothers alluded while scolding their boys. We should also mention the museum center where we can see several artistic pieces, with emphasis on the “calendar,” a precious set of 12 small Flemish paintings, from the end of the 16th century, depicting the months of the year.

A National Monument since 1910, the Cathedral erected by orders of D. João III received the status of Co-cathedral of the diocese of Bragança-Miranda in 1996. Until then, it was a parish church, as it declined since, in 1764 (definitely in 1780), the bishop, fleeing the insecurity of the border, moved to Bragança, diocesan seat since that moment. The new designation was an attempt to appease the people of Miranda do Douro, who still feel the loss of about 250 years ago.





The image of the Baby Jesus of Cartolinha is from the 18th century, but the iconic hat is more recent



Legend and worship of the Baby Jesus of Cartolinha

Portugal's involvement in the War of the Succession of Spain (1701-1713) made the border territories prone to combat. This explains the attack on Miranda do Douro in 1711 by party troops of the Bourbons (Portugal then supported the claims of the Habsburgs). Legend has it that, in a moment of dismay for lack of reinforcements, a boy dressed as a nobleman appeared on top of the wall, encouraging the Mirandese to fight, and he was seen several times along the fray and never appeared again after the Spaniards were defeated. What a miracle! It could only be the Baby Jesus. From this legend came the famous image in which, perhaps in the late 19th century, someone put on the high hat that became iconic. The Baby Jesus of Cartolinha, whose robes are changed throughout the year, depending on the colors of the liturgy, is the target of special devotion, receiving tailor-made clothes of all sorts, from football equipment to military uniforms.

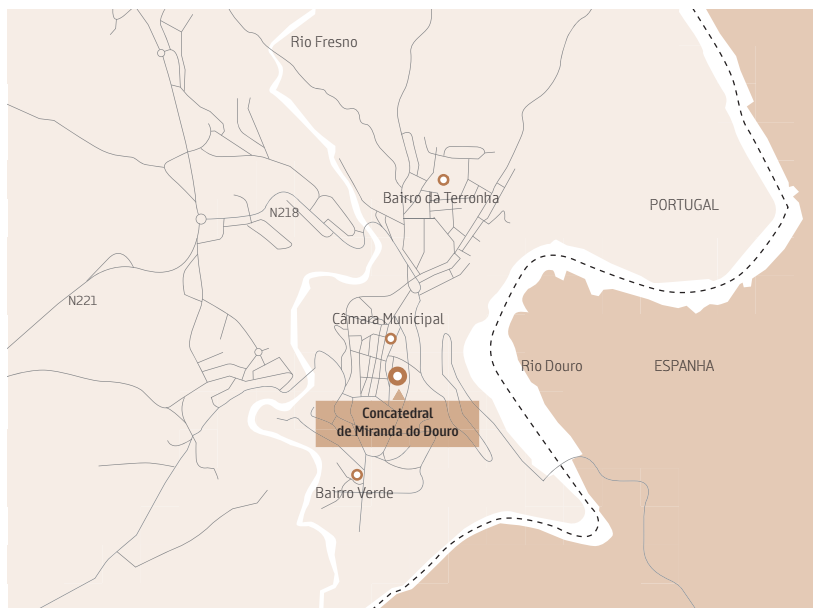






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