

THE CONTEMPORARY ECHOES OF SÃO FRANCISCO DE REAL CONVENT: LEARNING FROM TERRITORIAL FRAGMENTS

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Abstract

This paper results of an investigation developed under the architectural design for the renovation of the Convent São Francisco de Real in Braga, Portugal. Arguing the remarkable resilience of the building over the thirteen centuries of its *long durée*, it is intended to present a broader interpretation of the monument within the scope of its territorial context.

The capuchin monastery was built in the sixteenth century, under the archbishop D. Diogo de Sousa, a very prominent Renaissance personage, and reused the VIIIth century preexisting mausoleum of the bishop São Frutuoso. Located on a small spur and oriented towards the river Cávado valley, the temple housed the Saint's remains. Protected by a small monastic community, it became greatly significant in the pilgrimage route Caminho de Santiago, until the relics were ransacked and taken to Santiago de Compostela, in 1102.

Together with the Basilica of São Martinho de Dume, which was built on the previous century at a similar elevation on a facing hill, São Frutuoso's mausoleum intentionally underlined, by its opposite and privileged location in the landscape framework, the medieval arrival to Braga by its most important north road, the Lucus Augusti road. Since their topographic position, framing the referred roman road (later Caminho de Santiago Route), and creating a unique visual axis towards Braga's Cathedral, we may affirm these two landmarks as a territorial representation of a remarkable city gate.

Over time, the mausoleum was subject to successive spatial reconfigurations, responding to contemporary catholic worship requests. The medieval, sixteenth and eighteenth century's fabric works adapted the Visigoth building to the exigencies of the Franciscan Order, and the enlargement of the convent included it, as a chapel, in the monastery complex. In the same

period, it is possible to note the development of the road network directly associated to the convent. A path between São Frutuoso and São Martinho temples, and another connecting São Frutuoso to the city – the Monk's Path – emerged, crossing the landscape and creating new territorial links.

In particular, under D. Rodrigo de Moura Telles, Braga's archbishop from 1704 till 1728, the conventual body was remarkably expanded, with manifest landscape resonances. The main changes included the construction of São Jerónimo, a new large church that noticeably echoed in the valley, and the *loggia*, a leisure balcony cropped in the main mass-building and oriented towards the city and the cathedral.

With the dissolution of religious orders in 1834, part of the Convent was sold to a private owner and converted into a farm. Finally, the intervention of the General Board for National Buildings and Monuments in the first half of the 20th century, in its attempt to restore the Visigoth mausoleum's initial integrity, severed the conventual body, stressing the difficulty to perceive its architectural history along the time.

Nowadays, due to an intense city growth over the convent surroundings, its relationship with the territory has profoundly changed. This fact obscured the principles that defined São Frutuoso's and São Francisco de Real Convent settlements.

On the other hand, several new road connections sliced the old medieval paths that connected the Convent to the city. These ancient routes almost disappeared and its remains were forgotten under a careless urban planning.

Despite these circumstances, it is still possible to recognize some of those territorial relationships and physical connections. Particularly, the research could identify some of its fragments, as well as parts of the primitive path linking São Francisco de Real and São Martinho de Dume. It is also possible, somehow rediscovering that the territorial prominence of these two sites still survives, to identify a specific place from where they both can be simultaneously seen. Remembering its former significance, we may retrieve on the rear side of São Jerónimo church, almost petrified, its original and impressive profile.

Considering such evidences, the architectural analysis claimed a wider approach to the heritage buildings under study. By transcending their physical boundaries and proposing a new understanding of the São Francisco de Real surrounding urban landscape, it was possible to *enlighten* the depth and importance of the territorial legacy. And thus demonstrate how critical is to conduct simultaneous researches at various scales, collecting complementary fragments and

rebuilding narratives that urban history faded.

Keywords: São Francisco de Real Convent, architectural heritage, territorial interpretation, multi-scale approach