



Saint Lawrence Church

Almancil



Paróquia de São João Baptista de Almancil

Igreja de São Lourenço

P - 8135-027 ALMANCIL—PORTUGAL

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Church of Saint Lawrence of Almancil, whose date of origin is the lost, seems to have been in existence prior to the sixteenth Century. According to the visitors book of the Order of St. James, located in the archives of the mother church of Loulé, the shrine of Saint Lawrence of Almancil was reconstructed in 1565 by testament of Rui Barreto de Mascarenhas. This book also notes the fact in 1565 the Shrine was already old and in need of repairs. There is also an entry, dated 1518, referring to this church being a simple chapel. We are, therefore, led to believe that despite having undergone substantial repairs throughout the ages, this church originated in the fifteenth Century.

On the 22nd September 1722 the habitants of this place were in despair for lack of water and while digging a well they implored the patronage of the saint, vowing to build a new temple. Perhaps "through the will of the saint", they were so amply rewarded that immediately "an abundant gush of water was produced".

From then onwards the brotherhood of St. Lourenço dos Matos gained prominence, having as Judge Protector one of the highest dignitaries of the region of Algarve, Dr. Manuel de Sousa Teixeira, General Vicar of the Bishopric. With the offerings of the worshippers the construction of "a beautiful temple - not due to its enormosity but due to its decor, neatness and magnificence", was begun by the implementation of vernacular architectural elements compensated for, in the interior, by an exuberant ornamentation.



As the notarial deed which was signed on the 16th November 1729 determined that the glazed tiles be completely placed in the following Spring of 1730, it seems obvious that the brothers Manuel and Antão Borges, well versed in the Lisbon artistic world, purchasers most of them from Policarpo de Oliveira Bernardes and the rest probably from another glazed tile manufacturer working in the vicinity of the artist in question.

THE PARISH OF ALMANCIL

The Church of Saint Lawrence, is the centre of the parish of Saint John the Baptist of Almancil.

The parish of Almancil was created by Decree of Queen Mary the Second of Portugal on January 3, 1849. This eliminated the parish of Saint John the Baptist of Venda, also known as Saint John of Venda dos Matos, whose lands were incorporated in the new parish along with those of saint Clement of Loulé. This action was taken because there were so few residents in the saint John parish.

In order to carry out the decree mentioned above, the purveyor Manuel Rasquinho, by order of Bishop D. António Bernardo da Fonseca Moniz, declared the elimination of the Parish of Saint John the Baptist of Venda on February, 10, 1849. The Parish of Almancil, having its seat in Saint John the Baptist of Venda was transferred to the Church of Saint Lawrence of Matos which as later to be known as the Parish of Saint John the Baptist of Almancil.

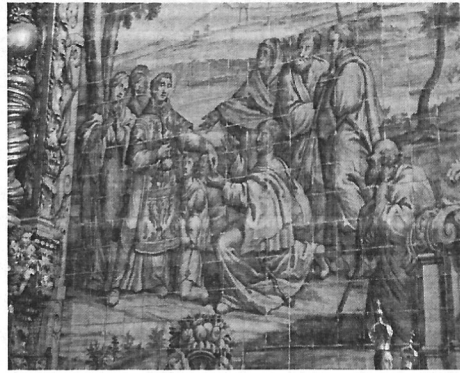
The Church of Saint Lawrence of Almancil was classified as "Monument of Public Interest" on January, 2, 1946.



THE TILES

tile paintings throughout the church detail the life of Saint Lawrence.

ng the main altar, the panel on the side has an inscription at the bottom reads: “ET THESAUROS ECCLESIAE DEDIT PAUPERIBUS”. This tile depicts Saint Lawrence handing the wealth of the Church to the poor which had been entrusted to him for that purpose.



posite the above mentioned painting on reads:

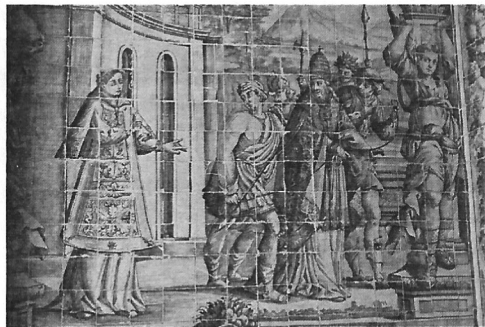
“LAURENTIUS BONUM OPUS OPERATUS EST, QUI PER SIGNUM CRUCIS COECOS ILLUMINAVIT”. Here Saint Lawrence, cross in hand, by the Tiber river, performs a miracle by restoring the eyesight of two blind men.



THE ARCHS IN THE NAVE.

Descending from the main altar, the top of the first arch on the left, reads: “NON EGO TE DESERO FILI POST TRIDUUM ME SEQUERIS”. This painting describes

dialogue between Saint Lawrence and Pope Saint Sixtus at the time the Pope was to become a martyr. The Pope comforted Saint Lawrence, his son, telling him that within three days he too would become a martyr.



The second arch on the left has this inscription: “CIRCUNDIDERUT ME OMNIBUS LATERIBUS ET NON ERAT QUI ADYUVARET”. This panel represents the imprisonment of Saint Lawrence who, on orders of the Pope Saint Sixtus, distributed the treasures of the Church among the poor. For distributing the treasures that were entrusted to him, he was accused by Emperor Valeriano of being the possessor of great wealth. For this reason he was imprisoned

with no one to defend him.

In the arch, where the font of Holy Water is located, on reads: “HI SUNT THESAURI ECCLESIAE IN QUIBUS CHRISTUS EST”. Depicted in this tile is Saint Lawrence presenting the Roman Emperor with the treasures of the church: the poor.



Upon entering the church from the main portal, the first arch on the left

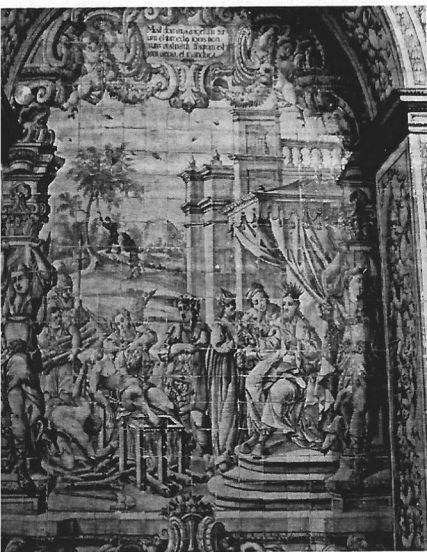


has this inscription: “DEUM MEUM COLO ILLI SOLI SERVIO ET IDEO NON TIMEO TORMENTA TUA”. This deals with the threat to Saint Lawrence to force him to renounce his faith and adore the false gods of the

Empire. Saint Lawrence refused, saying that the gods of the Empire did not merit the honours which belonged to the true God whom saint Lawrence loved and served.



The next arch reads: “IN CRATICULA TE DEUM NON NEGAVI”. Saint Lawrence refused to renounce his faith and so his body is



placed upon a giant griddle to be slowly burned by fire. His tormentors hoped his great suffering would make him renounce his faith, but saint Lawrence resisted tenaciously. In the midst of such cruel torment, Saint Lawrence, thinking he was already roasted on one side, asked the Roman prefect to turn him over on other side and them to eat him. During his horrible suffering God sent an Angel to comfort him in his pain and bring his soul to heaven. Smiling, despite his pain, Saint Lawrence gave up

spirit to God.

Saint Lawrence died on August 10th, in the year 258 AD. He was a martyr who fell on earth and ascended to heaven as a saint. He was born in Compostela, a city of Spain, in the Kingdom of Aragon.

THE GLAZED TILES

The glazed tiles of the vault of the nave and the Main Chapel, including the dome, were made in 1730 by Policarpo de Oliveira Bernardes. Nevertheless, the notarial deed was celebrated between the Judge of the Brotherhood and the brothers Manuel and Antão Borges, the latter having agreed to "give, at their expense, all glazed tiles necessary for the tiling of the Chapel of the Saint, both for the wall and the apse and to place the said tiles with the utmost perfection and with the best paint work available.

On the theme of the central Panel of the vault of the nave, the coronation of Saint Lawrence, one can note a technique characteristic of the artist Policarpo in which the "shadows and darkest parts painted in blue were achieved by perceptible distinct strokes of the brush" (José Meco).

In the opinion of José Meco, the panels of the nave of the church which include this scene of the martyrdom of Saint Lawrence were not painted by Policarpo de Oliveira Bernardes. According to him, they were the work of an only collaborator of the Joanino Cycle who followed the teachings of the referred master artist.

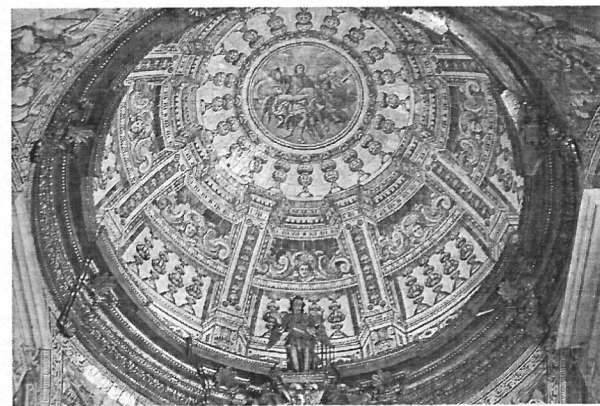
The two Borges brothers, both born in Lisbon, mister Antão, master bricklayer residing in Faro and mister Manuel, master tilemaker, living in Lisbon, are thought to have started the construction of the church already planning to decorate it with the famous Portuguese glazed tiles known as "azulejos". These two artists are responsible for the construction of various buildings in the Algarve, amongst which the glazed tiling of the Church of the 3rd Order of St. Francisco and the construction of the high choir of the Cathedral, both in Faro. In November 1729 these masters promised the already mentioned Dr. Manuel de Sousa Teixeira to purchase the glazed tiles for the new temple and to place them as soon as possible.

The altarpiece and the remaining woodwork is believed to have been conceived and carried out around the year of 1735 by the best artist of the region, master Manuel Martins.



The gilding was only started on the 16th February 1742 by the Algarvian painters, Clemente Velho de Sarre and Francisco Correia.

The earthquake of the 1755 hardly affected the building and only five glazed tiles fell from the top of the vault.



The Cupola is of such beauty that, according to the book "*Artistic Treasures of Portugal*", it is considered one of the most beautiful in the nation and in all of Europe, being comparable only to those found in Rome. The vaulted ceiling is, according

to Dr. Santos Simões, second only to the cupola in this notable assemblage.