

Filipe González
(edited by)

Cultural Migrations

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The convent of São Francisco do Monte in Viana do Castelo (Portugal): an integrated digital survey for the understanding of the architecture and its landscape

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Abstract This paper deals with the first results of one of the significant case studies to be deepened within the European project “F-ATLAS, Franciscan Landscapes: the Observance between Italy, Portugal and Spain”. The project aims to study the Italian-Spanish-Portuguese Franciscan Observance network to define an “Atlas” of documentation and knowledge for conservation, protection, and promotion of this Cultural Heritage. The convent of São Francisco do Monte in Viana do Castelo is one of the first three convents funded by the *Ordo fratrum minorum* in Portugal. The analyses aimed at investigate the evolution of the religious settlement to build a three-dimensional database. The case study has been deepened by an integrated digital survey: Aerial Photogrammetry and Terrestrial Laser Scanning and Photogrammetry, to document the current state of conservation and to investigate the traces of the past and the relationship between the complex and the surrounding landscape.

1. Introduction

The research is part of the three-year European project F-ATLAS (Franciscan Landscapes: the Observance between Italy, Portugal and Spain), winner of the JPI-CH 2019 call and started in July 2020. The project aims to develop methodological protocols for the management and dissemination of the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the Franciscan Observance settlements (Bertocci, 2021).

Franciscan Observance architecture is chosen as an emblematic example of coexistence between architecture and territory, reflecting an essential part of European culture. In particular, through the study of bibliographic and archival sources, the inspection and census of each complex, and the creation of integrated digital survey campaigns, the project aims to investigate the close link between the architecture of the Observance and the territory, underlining how the places of the Franciscan presence have marked cities and countryside, “forming an inseparable part of history, of civil life and have an impact on the physi-

cal image of the territory” (Pellegrini, Paciocco, 2001, p. 124).

The preliminary investigations, which began in July 2020, aimed at identifying a series of case studies in Italy, Spain and Portugal, which constitute an essential testimony of the connection between architecture and the ‘Franciscan landscape’.

The project, now halfway through its three-year program, has led to numerous survey campaigns and the documentation of ten convents. In Italy, the convents of San Bartolomeo in Foligno (Bertocci, Cioli, Ferrari, 2022), the Sacro Speco in Narni (Cioli, Lumini, 2021), the Eremo delle Carceri in Assisi (Bertocci, Cioli, Cottini, 2020), the Basilica of Santa Maria degli Angeli and the Romita di Cesi have been detected. In Spain, the convent of Castell Monestir de Sant Miquel d’Escornalbou in Tarragona was surveyed. Furthermore, in Portugal the survey concerned the convent of Santa Maria da Insua in Caminha, Santa Maria de Mosteirò in Valença and Sao Francisco do Monte in Viana do Castelo.

These surveys are aimed at developing the two-dimensional drawings and three-

dimensional models necessary for the subsequent phases of investigation concerning the definition of invariants in the architectural typology, the study of the state of conservation, and the evolutionary stages concerning the dynamics of historical-political affairs that have affected the three countries and religious orders.

2. The convent of São Francisco do Monte: history and development

The Convent of São Francisco do Monte, located in the municipality of Viana do Castelo in Portugal, dates back to the end of the fourteenth century and was one of the first convents of the *Ordo fratrum minorum* in the country. The foundation dates back to 1392 (Gomes Texeira, 2010 p. 165), with the construction of a primitive oratory, on the initiative of the friar Gonçalo Marinho (†1400), near a source of water. The building was subsequently enlarged with a small convent area, and in 1568 the complex was integrated into the Capucha Province of Santo António, becoming a convent in

which a novitiate was established. In 1584 work began to construct a new wing of the convent, making a cloister and a dormitory. In 1590 the original church was rebuilt with a high choir. The complex was interested in several extensions that followed one another until 1612, when the friars were transferred to the more central Convent of Santo António dos Capuchos (Viana do Castelo), thus reducing the site to its original function as an oratory. However, this did not stop the evolution of the complex, which through significant donations was continually enriched with works of art and awards. In 1759, the construction of twenty dormitory cells, a library, and an inn were completed, and on 22 December 1752, the building took back the title of 'convent'. In 1785 the chapel of São Pedro de Alcântara and the access galilee to the church were built. In 1834, the convent was abandoned with the extinction of religious orders and the alienation of church property by the liberal state. In 1850 the church was donated to the Parish of Santa Maria Maior, while the convent was bought at public auction by the Viscount of Carreira. In the 1920s, the complex was



Figure 1 - Aerial view from drone of the monastery of São Francisco do Monte

inherited by Maria Luisa De Castro Feijó, who hired a custodian to take care of the place until 1966, its definitive abandonment. During this period, the convent entered a long period of decay. In 1987, the last owner donated the convent's property to the Santa Casa da Misericórdia in Viana do Castelo, which sold it in 2001 to the Polytechnic of Viana do Castelo. Despite the interest in this critical monastic complex, which led to some structural consolidation and safety measures in 2007, the building is nowadays in a state of neglect (SIPA).

The ruin, part of a large wooded area of pines and eucalyptus crossed by hiking trails, strongly characterises the landscape, transforming the entire environment into a 'mental landscape', highlighting its historical depth and temporal dimension (Fiorino, R. Pila, E. 2014).

Access to the complex is through a high arched portal with a cornice based on two Doric columns, surmounted by three statues: San Francesco, San Pedro de Alcántara, and Sant'Antonio. Two chapels on the left overlook the entrance patio (fig. 2-1), one dedicated to Santa Maria Madalena (fig. 2-2) and the second to São Pedro de Alcântara (fig. 2-3). Both in poor condition, they had a gable facade with a round-arched portal supported by Tuscan pilasters. On the opposite side, along the church wall, is the small chapel do Senhor da Prisão (fig. 2-4) (Torres Monteiro, 2018). Based on the historical documentation, the territory owned by the convent was characterised initially by the presence of numerous seventeenth-century chapels inserted within a path marked by fountains and drinking troughs.

The two main entrances to the complex also overlook the patio. The first in Galilee (fig. 2-5), where the Senhor dos Passos chapel (fig. 2-6) is located, leads to the church through a door built in the 18th century, and the second entrance with a monumental arch leads the convent. There are three other secondary entrances along the perimeter of the building. One on the back, probably intended for horses, given the presence of metal hooks



Figure 2 - Functional diagram of the convent. The arrows indicate the main and secondary entrances. The numbers with the description of the functions are given in the text

on the wall and several drinking troughs, one on the side of the refectory and one on the western side of the complex.

The church (fig. 2-7), with a longitudinal plan with a single nave, has four shallow side chapels – framed by round arches supported by Tuscan pilasters – and a presbytery (fig. 2-8) narrower than the nave and of older construction. The two chapels closest to the triumphal arch, dedicated to the Senhora do Rosário and to São Boaventura, were decommissioned and replaced by wooden structures with the angled altarpiece, the two devoted to São Gonçalo (Gospel), and Sant'Antonio (Epistola) remain. The main facade on the western front is flanked on the left side by the quadrangular bell tower (fig. 2-9) built in the eighteenth century and is completely covered with vegetation; the large arched window of the high choir remains visible.

The convent develops around a quadrangular cloister (fig. 2-10). Some smooth pilasters with Ionic capitals and a portion of the

balcony on the upper floor remain today. The confessional room (fig. 2-11) and the ancient chapter house (fig. 2-12) are located on the west side of the cloister. On the east side, along a corridor called '*via sacra*', is the sacristy (fig. 2-13), the presbytery, and the morning staircase that led to the dormitory on the upper floor. Further east is the new chapter house (fig. 2-14), connected through a large atrium to the outdoor patio. Further north is a large room that served as a refectory (fig. 2-15) and the kitchen (fig. 2-16), characterised by a high fireplace and various rooms used as warehouses and washbasins. On the left is the '*De Profundis*' room (fig. 2-17), connected to an entrance area with the hooks for tying the horses (fig. 2-18). Towards the south, there is a corridor with a small chapel and the 'regular' staircase (fig. 2-19), which led to the upper floor where the dormitory was located. All the second floor and the rooftop are disappeared, but it is still possible to figure them out by investigating the historical sources and the traces on the masonry.

3. Digital survey campaign

To understand the connection between the monastic complexes and the surrounding landscape, the F-ATLAS project's provides accurate digital surveying operations, obtaining metric and morphological data and information about their conditions. The methodology foresees the integration of aerial and terrestrial instruments such as laser scanners, drones, and reflex cameras. The laser-scanners data provide a 3D point-cloud with morphological and dimensional characteristics of the architectural objects and the landscapes; drones and reflex cameras are useful to obtain complete photographic documentation of the conventual complexes and for the application of photogrammetry techniques, such as Structure from Motion (SfM), to obtain textured 3D mesh models.

In this specific case study, the ruinous state of the convent required a methodo-

logy to acquire the architecture and the surrounding landscape, avoiding the obstacles of the vegetation and high altitudes. The survey was carried out integrating different techniques: Aerial Photogrammetry (with a DJI Mavic Mini drone), Terrestrial Laser Scanning (with a Faro Focus M70) and Photogrammetry (with a Nikon D610 reflex camera). The aerial acquisition enabled the identification of structures and vestiges – wholly or partially hidden by the vegetation – from a high point of view, and give a global view of the entire complex and its surroundings; the terrestrial acquisition allowed a closer survey of the existing structures and the surviving decorative system. The integration of these techniques provided accurate and reliable metric data, which are helpful for bidimensional drawings and 3D models with different scales (e.g., technical drawings, virtual tours, etc...) and for further analyses on wall stratigraphy and construction phases.

3.1. Laser-scanner survey

The convent of São Francisco do Monte, together with its landscaped surroundings, as well as other monastic complexes of the Observance, can be defined as a 'cultural landscape' (UNESCO, 2021, p. 22), a union between the work of nature and humankind, where culture acts through natural elements to define a place that is a well-balanced synthesis of these two elements, expressing a long and intimate relationship between peoples and their natural environment.

The laser-scanner survey campaign was carried out in June 2021 and covered all the main internal areas of the convent and the external perimeter. The total acquisition of the complex required 122 scans made with a Faro Focus M70 with the given RGB colour overlay through the HDR cameras equipped by the instrument (fig. 3). The result of the documentation campaign is a highly descriptive 3D point cloud



Figure 3 - General plan from point-cloud with indication of the stations of the laser-scanner survey

that, integrated with the photogrammetric models obtained from high-altitude photogrammetry, returns the image of the convent of São Francisco do Monte, allowing the development of further in-depth investigations also related to the evolution of architecture and landscape.

The survey campaign took place over two days. For this reason, it was necessary to plan the number of scans concerning the acquisition resolution and the related times. The outdoor environments were acquired with a 6.1mm / 10m, while the indoor scans were 15.3mm / 10m. The acquisition was designed to ensure the closure of a fundamental polygonal to control reliabil-

ity and secondary polygons to verify the internal environments, freeing the architectural complex and its sub-components from the landscape system. The purpose of this documentation campaign is to create the canonical 2D graphic drawings at a scale of 1:50 necessary to develop the subsequent investigations envisaged by the project and to define, through the representation, a framework of metric and morphological knowledge helpful in understanding the complex and to the development of comparisons and links with other investigated case studies, through the analysis of the masonry stratigraphy and of the evolutionary phases.

3.2. Photogrammetric survey with Structure from Motion technique

Parallel to the laser-scanner survey, ground and aerial photographic acquisitions were made. For the former a Nikon D610 SLR camera with 12-24mm lens was used, for the latter a DJI Mavic Mini drone. As highlighted in the previous paragraph, the time available for survey operations was two days – so attempts were made to concentrate the photographic campaigns in the hours of the day with more favorable lighting conditions. To obtain good results it is appropriate that the photographs used for photogrammetry with SfM technique (Structure from Motion) do not present shadows too sharp and have an exposure that allows to use appropriate parameters for shooting (low ISO, low focal ratio, short exposure time). The conventual complex is positioned with the west side facing upstream and the east side downstream, and is surrounded by a forest with high vegetation along the north, west and south sides. The vegetation on the east side is lower, while the walls of the entire complex, without any roof, are mostly covered with climbing plants. In light of these considerations, it was decided to concentrate the photographic operations in the first half of the day, preferably at times when the sky was covered and global lighting was therefore widespread. Due to the short time available, some acquisitions with reflex instrumentation were completed shortly before sunset – the lighting conditions, while not allowing to keep the ISO values and the focal ratio low, were however favorable in terms of softness of the shadows.

The photographs taken from ground and air were aimed at capturing sequences of images to be used with specific software for SfM technique. In particular, the photographic sets acquired from the ground were concentrated on the outer perimeter of the complex and inside the cloister and the church. An attempt was made to take photographs that framed the walls in their entirety, approaching as closely as possible, even

though the dense vegetation was an obstacle. The photos acquired from the ground have also served to document some significant details of the convent, such as the capitals of the cloister, the coat of arms of the entrance patio and more generally the vestiges of the decorative apparatus – which would hardly have been acquired with sufficient detail through laser-scanner or photogrammetric survey. Using the photos taken from the ground it will also be possible to elaborate assessments on the state of conservation of the walls of the convent. The photographic acquisitions from drone have allowed to obtain information on all those parts of the convent complex not reachable through the ground photographs alone, both because of the strong presence of vegetation and the height of the walls. With the drone it was also possible to obtain general images and videos of the conventual complex and the surrounding landscape, useful to analyze the relationship between the architectural object and the environment in which it fits.

In total, around 530 ground photos and around 1300 aerial photos were taken.

4. Data elaboration

The acquired data were processed separately in a first phase, and where necessary integrated with each other in a second phase, in accordance with the research objectives. As stated in the initial paragraphs, the objectives of the F-ATLAS project are in fact linked to the documentation, management and enhancement of the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the Franciscan Observance. In this context, the tools offered by integrated digital survey are a valuable support for the graphic representation – two-dimensional and three-dimensional, at various scales of detail – of architectural complexes and the surrounding landscape. These representations of the selected case studies will serve as a basis for further analyses of architectural typologies, the state of conservation of buildings and

stratigraphy, and will also be used for promotional purposes.

In the specific case-study, the collected data were processed in order to obtain a 3D coloured point-cloud and 3D textured mesh models to be used for two-dimensional and three-dimensional graphicisations, and some images and short videos to be used in the website and social media of F-ATLAS project.

4.1. Data elaboration for architectural analyses

122 single scans were obtained from the laser-scanner survey, which were recorded in a single point-cloud through the Leica Cyclone software. The point-cloud provides reliable metric data and features the colour data acquired by the integrated camera of the laser-scanner instrument.

The cloud can be cleared of superfluous data such as tree foliages or other elements not belonging to the architectural object, to obtain a view as clean as possible of the wall surfaces. The point-cloud can also be used to obtain 2D drawings of plants, sections, elevations and axonometric cutaways. These images are imported into drawing and modeling software, such as Autodesk Autocad or Rhinoceros, to provide metrically reliable

support for creating dimensioned technical drawings or 3D NURBS models. The former may have a scale of representation ranging from that of landscape to a more detailed as the 1:50 – are for example used to represent distributive plans and maps of degradation and superficial lesions. The latter are an effective way to visualise the conventual complex in three dimensions and to break it down into its essential volumes to represent, for example, the construction phases of buildings.

At the same time as the processing of the data obtained from the laser-scanner survey, photographic data from reflex and drone were processed. The photographs were catalogued according to the environment in which they were taken (e.g. aerial photos, external patio, cloister, south facade, ...) and imported into the Agisoft Metashape software. The individual sets were processed separately within the same file: the software recognises the shooting positions of the photographs, aligns the images, creates a point-cloud and three-dimensional textured mesh models. Mesh models are referenced based on the laser-scanner point-cloud, so that they have the same scale and orientation in space. Three well recognisable points are identified on the mesh model, to which are assigned “markers”, whose coordinates are modified in order to be equal to those of the three homologous points belonging to the laser-scanner point-cloud. Mesh models are then combined into a single overall model.

From mesh models it is possible to obtain orthomosaics of the facades of the architectural object, that is orthorectified images of the walls. These images are used together with point-cloud data to create two-dimensional representations of plants, elevations and sections, adding information about the colour and texture of facade surfaces.

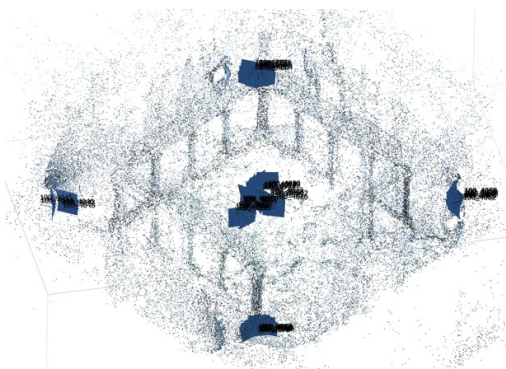


Figure 4 - Data elaboration with Agisoft Metashape software: first alignment of the images taken inside the cloister – point-cloud and mesh have not been calculated yet. The shooting positions are visible, a Nikon D610 with 12mm focal was used

4.1.1. Data integration

When necessary, the processed data can be integrated with each other to obtain further products.

In the specific case-study, the laser-scanner point-cloud was combined with the photogrammetric models in a single three-dimensional model: the laser-scanner point cloud, after being decimated with the Autodesk Recap software in order to reduce the number of points, was imported into Agisoft Metashape. Here, using the “markers”, it was aligned with the point-clouds obtained from photogrammetry and the overall point-cloud was subsequently processed in order to obtain a textured mesh model. The resulting model, combining data from laser-scanner, reflex and drone, has a much smaller number of gaps than the previous models and is therefore a three-dimensional accurate representation of the convent and the outbuildings. It will be used to obtain a 3D printing of the architectural object and can be uploaded to specific web platforms for the display of 3D content.

4.2. Data elaboration for dissemination

As stated above, some of the images and videos acquired during the in situ survey phases are used for dissemination and advertising purposes on the F-ATLAS project's website and social media channels. For this purpose, part of the two-dimensional and three-dimensional elaborations are also used, since they present a certain communicative immediacy as well as being supportive of architectural analysis.

The aim of the dissemination of this Cultural Heritage is to make it known to the non-academic public, as it represents a significant heritage in both religious and landscape terms. The advertising of this Heritage – which in this specific case is in a state of ruin and is accessible only through paths not indicated by the local billboard – can lead to its enhancement through adequate conservation and inclusion in the tourist and religious routes that connect the Franciscan places in Europe.

5. Conclusions

The use of integrated digital survey techniques, combined with the study of bibliographic and archive sources, provides a reliable support for the architectural analysis of historic buildings. The data collected in the convent of São Francisco do Monte have been included in the database of information related to the research project F-ATLAS and will constitute a database accessible and updated over time. The data of this database are of different nature and large in terms of digital space, it is therefore essential to establish *a priori* the purpose of use and discretise accordingly the data.

In the specific case, the aim is to obtain two-dimensional and three-dimensional metrically reliable representations that are to support further studies on the conservation status of the surfaces and more generally of the conventual complex, and that can be taken as a reference for the study of the construction phases, also through comparison with archival graphic sources.

The images, photographs and videos produced are also used for the purpose of dissemination and advertising on the website and social media of the project, so as to draw the attention of the non-academic public and tourists to this Heritage that, in this specific case, is in a state of ruin and is difficult to access.

Credits

Paragraphs 1, 2, 3 and 3.1 are due to Federico Cioli. Paragraphs 3.2, 4 and 5 are due to Anastasia Cottini.

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University of Barcelona (PI Maria Soler Sala), and the Portuguese Catholic University of Lisbon (PI Maria Filomena Andrade).

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The RIPAM, an acronym for “*Rencontres Internationales sur le Patrimoine Architectural Méditerranéen*”, has evolved into an informal organization of professors, researchers, and professionals who, since the first edition, have come together to form a group that has organized and continues to organize meetings in various Mediterranean countries. The initiative relies exclusively on the goodwill of each participant to carry out high-level scientific events.

The principle is simple: to organize very low-cost meetings, avoiding unnecessary expenses, while granting full freedom to the host institution to decide on the structure of its event and to add new members to the *steering committee*.

RIPAM meetings are held every two years, lasting three days, with the possibility of an intermediate one-day meeting focused on more specific themes.

RIPAM has a website, hosted at ripam.org, which is periodically updated with contributions from participating members.

The ninth meeting was dedicated to *cultural migrations*, bringing together 99 participants with presentations. This publication gathers the articles that were selected and whose authors consented to their publication.

The areas of discussion range from architecture to urban planning, rehabilitation, heritage studies, geology, geography, chemistry, physics, art history, fine arts, and engineering – in short, all fields that, in one way or another, contribute to the knowledge and understanding of Mediterranean heritage.

RIPAM itself is also a form of cultural migration.