

Our Lady of Health in Longa

According to tradition, in the early 16th century, Lisbon faced a devastating epidemic, particularly affecting the military class. The Court's artillerymen, fearing the dreadful disease, invoked the aid of Saint Sebastian, a Roman soldier venerated as a protector against plague, famine and war.

Their prayers were answered, and in 1505, the Brotherhood of Saint Sebastian was founded, constructing a chapel near the Mouraria Gate.

For decades, the military kept the devotion alive, financing the ceremonies through mandatory contributions from their wages.

In 1569, another epidemic ravaged Lisbon, claiming between 50,000 and 60,000 lives in a city of approximately 120,000 inhabitants.

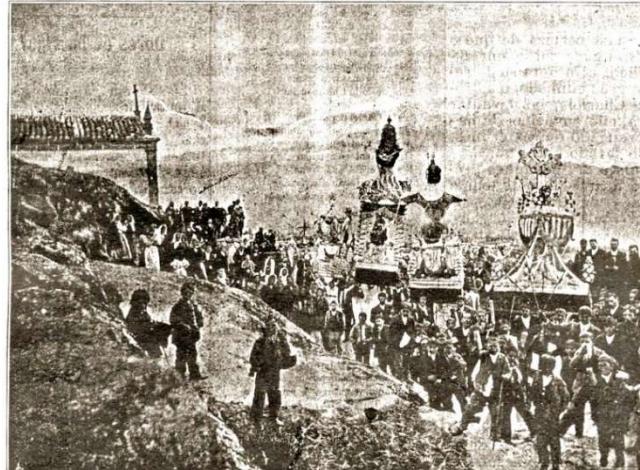
Amidst the calamity, both commoners and nobility turned to the Virgin Mary, commissioning a statue of Our Lady of Health, which was blessed and placed in the chapel of the College of Jesus of the Orphaned Boys.

The first procession in her honor took place in 1570, and it was decreed two years later to be celebrated annually.

The devotion quickly spread to numerous locations across Portugal, including Longa, where, until 1930, Our Lady of Health was venerated in the Chapel of Saint Sebastian the Martyr.



Original image of Our Lady of Health in Longa



Celebrations in Honor of Our Lady of Health in 1910 at the Chapel of Saint Sebastian the Martyr (Photo by Alberto Ribeiro, in *Correio de Taboço*)



Procession in the Late 1920s, descending Rua da Calçada, with the construction of the Chapel of Our Lady of Health in the background (Unknown author)

The New Temple: Faith and Art

In 1930, devotion in Longa culminated with the inauguration of a new temple dedicated to Our Lady of Health. This project was made possible through the generosity of the people and benefactors, notably Mr. Boaventura José de Carvalho, whose name remains part of the parish's history, and the family of Mrs. Natália Gomes Leal, who donated the land and financed the reconstruction of the small chapel of Our Lady of Guia, now located south of the sanctuary.



Interior of the Temple

The Sanctuary of Our Lady of Health, designed by master stonemasons José António de Sousa and Luís de Sousa, features revivalist architecture with neoclassical design. At the time, the parish council president, Manuel Vicente da Cruz, played a crucial role in realizing the project and was also a prominent figure in the Tabuaço municipality.

The sanctuary's interior is a true masterpiece. The high altar was carved in chestnut wood by master artisans from Oporto. It features large Corinthian-inspired columns framing the throne that holds the statue of Our Lady of Health, a 20th-century polychrome clay sculpture. The original statue, dating from the 18th century, is kept in the Abbot's House.



High altar of the Sanctuary

A Well-Preserved Sanctuary

Over the years, the community of Longa has contributed to the preservation and enhancement of the sanctuary. The improvements include:



- Creation of gardens and picnic areas.
- Installation of tile panels depicting scenes from the lives of the Virgin Mary and Christ.
- Partial gilding of the altar's retable.
- Renovation of the choir loft and decorative coffered ceilings in the nave and chancel.
- Addition of Italian stained glass windows, donated by Vasco Ferreira Cardoso.

Situated atop a hill, the sanctuary offers a stunning view of the Tabuaço region. Visitors can see Monte do Muro to the north, the village of Longa and the valleys of the Tedo and Tedinho Rivers to the west, along with nearby locations such as Castelo, Nagosa, and Arcos.



Whether for faith or the scenery, the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Health is a place to connect with history, spirituality, and serenity.

Visit Longa and discover the richness of tradition, architectural beauty, and the natural charm of the Douro region.



Location: R. da Senhora da Saúde, Longa



Credits: Editing and Printing: Civil Parish Council of Longa, 2024 | Texts and Photos: Gustavo Monteiro de Almeida, 2024 | Acknowledgements: Civil Parish Council of Longa; Rectory of the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Health.



Sanctuary of Our Lady of Health in Longa

A legacy of faith, history, and natural beauty