

CONSTRUCTIVE, STYLISTICAL AND ICONOGRAPHIC CHARACTERIZATION OF A NEO-GOTHIC MAUSOLEUM OF CONCHADA CEMETERY

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ABSTRACT: The deep belief in the Resurrection by Christians motivated burials in Portugal, since the Middle Ages, to be carried out inside or next to religious buildings. Due to poor hygienic practices that facilitated the spread of epidemics, thus resulting in population mortality increase, legislation was published in 1835 that prohibited burials in churches and within towns, giving rise to the first cemeteries. The wealthiest families built mausoleums in the form of small chapels, adopting varied architectural styles, from neo-Egyptian, neoclassical, neo-

Romanesque, neo-Gothic, neo-baroque, neo-Manueline, to new art, beaux art, etc. In Coimbra, the definitive construction process of the Conchada cemetery began in 1856, according to a plan outlined by the physician Raymundo Venâncio Rodrigues, then mayor. In the 70s and 80s of the 19th century, a large part of the most interesting monuments of this cemetery was built, and it was during this period that a clear specificity of Coimbra funerary art emerged. The typology of the small mausoleum in the form of a chapel – the narrow tombs, constitutes one of the most specific and interesting aspects of the funerary architecture of the Conchada cemetery, in this period. As part of a vast study of this cemetery, all narrow chapel tombs are being analyzed. In methodological terms, the oldest part of the cemetery was selected and subjected to a complete photogrammetric survey. Afterwards, the mausoleums were carefully identified and dated, through burial records. In the next phase, each mausoleum was deeply studied in terms of its architectural style, iconography, and construction process. The work carried out so far, confirmed the presence of a wide variety of architectural styles, decorated with a wealth of complex iconographic elements and

different constructive forms. This communication presents, by way of example, the study of a narrow chapel mausoleum, with a very expressive architecture in the neo-Gothic style and a rich iconography of Brazilian influence.

KEYWORDS: Funerary art, Cemetery, Iconography, Mausoleum, Neo-Gothic

CARACTERIZACIÓN CONSTRUCTIVA, ESTILÍSTICA E ICONOGRÁFICA DE UN MAUSOLEO NEOGÓTICO DEL CEMENTERIO DE LA CONCHADA

RESUMEN: La profunda creencia en la Resurrección por parte de los cristianos motivó que los enterramientos en Portugal, desde la Edad Media, se realizaran en el interior o junto a edificios religiosos. Debido a las malas prácticas higiénicas que facilitaban la propagación de epidemias, con el consiguiente aumento de la mortalidad de la población, en 1835 se publicó una legislación que prohibía los enterramientos en las iglesias y en el interior de las ciudades, dando origen a los primeros cementerios. Las familias más adineradas construyeron mausoleos en forma de pequeñas capillas, adoptando estilos arquitectónicos variados, desde neoejipcio, neoclásico, neorrománico, neogótico, neobarroco, neomanuelino, hasta arte nuevo, beaux art, etc. En Coimbra, la construcción definitiva del cementerio de la Conchada comenzó en 1856, siguiendo un plan elaborado por el médico Raymundo Venâncio Rodrigues, que era alcalde en aquella época. En los años 70 y 80 se construyeron gran parte de los monumentos más interesantes del cementerio, y fue en este periodo cuando surgió una clara especificidad del arte funerario de Coimbra. La tipología del pequeño mausoleo en forma de capilla -las tumbas estrechas- es uno de los aspectos más específicos e interesantes de la arquitectura funeraria del Cementerio de la Conchada en este periodo. En el marco de un amplio estudio de este cementerio, se están analizando todas las tumbas de capilla estrecha. Desde el punto de vista metodológico, se seleccionó la parte más antigua del cementerio, sobre la que se realizó un levantamiento fotogramétrico completo. A continuación, se identificaron y dataron cuidadosamente las tumbas utilizando los registros funerarios. En la fase siguiente, se estudió cada tumba desde el punto de vista de su estilo arquitectónico, iconografía y proceso de construcción. Los trabajos realizados hasta ahora confirman la existencia de una gran variedad de estilos arquitectónicos, decorados con una gran riqueza de elementos iconográficos de gran complejidad y diferentes formas constructivas. Esta comunicación presenta, a título de ejemplo, el estudio de una tumba de capilla estrecha, con una arquitectura de estilo neogótico muy expresiva y una rica iconografía de influencia brasileña.

PALABRAS-CLAVE: Arte funerario, Cementerio, Iconografía, Panteones, Neogótico

1 | INTRODUCTION

The word cemetery comes from the Greek term *koimetérion*, “dormitory” and the Latin *coemeteriu*, that initially designated, the place where one sleeps - dormitory. Under Christian influence, the term acquired the meaning of a resting place after death.

Since the Middle Ages, the dead were buried in the vicinity or inside churches, monasteries, and convents, in the ground, or in stone tombs, depending on their social status. At the end of the 18th century, due to public health concerns, burials in temples were

banned. It was argued that the ideal location for cemeteries was outside the cities, on airy land, far from water sources and where the winds did not blow towards the cities [1]. Thus, by Decree of 1835 burials began to be carried out in places far from urban agglomerations, similar to what already happened in France.

In Portugal, in addition to the largest cemeteries located in Lisbon and Porto, others were built on a regional scale, of which the Conchada Cemetery stands out, which exerted an aesthetic influence on the cemeteries of the Baixo- Mondego region.

2 | THE MAUSOLEUMS

Unable to bury their loved ones inside churches, and inspired by the pioneering French cemetery, Père-Lachaise [2,3], wealthy families throughout the country built stone structures in cemeteries - mausoleums, to deposit their families there.

The mausoleums had different typologies such as: chapel, obelisk, temple, column, sarcophagus, tombstone, statuary, ossuary, portico, cross, mausoleum and logia (Figure 1).

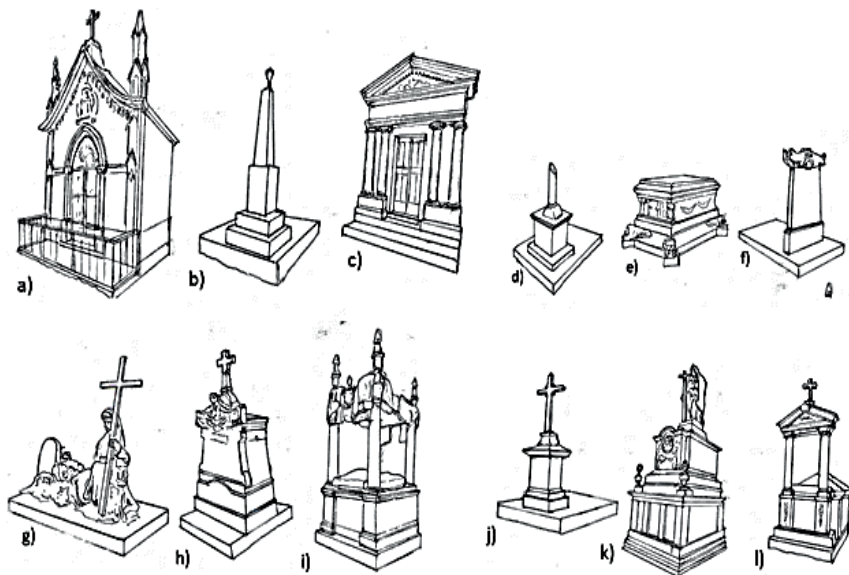


Figure 1: Types of tombs/mausoleums, a) Chapel; b) Obelisk; c) Temple; d) Column; e) Sarcophagus; f) Tombstone; g) Jacent; h) Ossuary i) Portico, j) Cruzeiro; k) Mausoleum; l) Logia (drawings by the author)

In Portugal, the zenith of mausoleums construction occurred in the 70s and 80s of the 19th century. This period coincides with the end of two important concepts in 19th century art: Romanticism, a movement characterized by the freedom of creation, in which sentimentality, fantasy and nostalgia were valued; the Victorian period, in which moral or sentimental values were valued (Victorian morality) which accentuated the material expression of feelings towards death [4]. The artistic materialization of these feelings

and defense of values in the deposits is facilitated by the full development of the steam engine, which made it possible to work stone and iron in an easier and more accessible way. In Portuguese cemeteries, the wealthiest families tried to bury their loved ones inside architectural mausoleums, which could take on different forms and styles: neo-Egyptian, neo-Romanesque, neo-Gothic, neo-Manueline, neoclassical, neo-baroque, beaux-arts, new art, art deco and Portuguese house (Figure 2) [5,6].

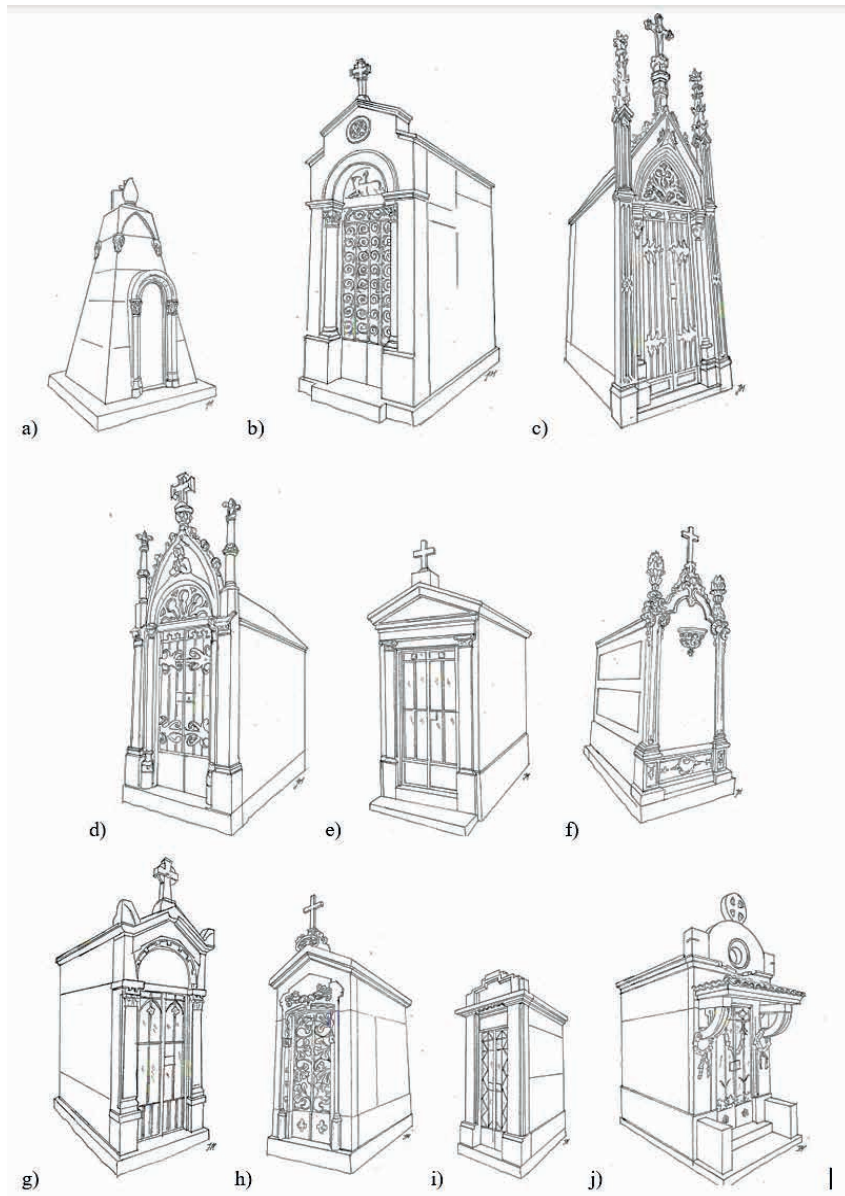


Figure 2: Architectural styles of the mausoleums: a) Neo-Egyptian; b) Neo-Romanesque; c) Neo-Gothic; d) Neo Manueline; e) Neoclassical; f) Neo baroque; g) Beaux-arts; h) Art Nouveau; i) Art Deco; j) Portuguese House (drawings by the author)

Many families prefer to build mausoleums in the form of a miniature church – the chapel mausoleums, mainly due to three main reasons:

Religious - a mausoleum built in the form of a chapel reinforced the deceased's belief in faith and the immortality of the soul, which seemed to guarantee a place in heaven; Familiar - the mausoleum would be a “home” for the dead of the family, turning into a meeting place with the deceased - “the dead stop at the cemetery”. Built like a stone enclosure, the mausoleum protected the coffin from the weather, safeguarded the bodies decay, in addition to avoiding burial in the dark underworld of the dead [7]; Social - in social terms, through differentiation, an attempt was made to perpetuate the memory and collective importance of the deceased.

3 | CONCHADA CEMETERY

The cholera epidemic of 1855-56 strongly propelled the construction of cemeteries, and Coimbra was no exception. The Conchada Cemetery is located in Alto da Conchada. This location was chosen at the time for meeting the necessary conditions for establishing a cemetery: it was located at a reasonable distance from the urban center; it was positioned to the north, which provided protection from “eastern, southern, and western winds saturated with cadaveric emanations”; geologically, it possesses ideal conditions for corpses decomposition, and its size allowed for a large number of graves [8].

Coimbra has always been considered an illustrious city, associated to one of the oldest and most important universities in Europe, where the most important personalities in the country existed and were trained. For this reason, some of them had mausoleums erected with some avant-garde and complexity for the time. Conchada Cemetery, being the cemetery of an “Illustrious City”, will be filled with mausoleums of a great variety and richness of architectural styles, decorated with complex iconographic elements, exposed through careful work of stonework and metalwork. The number of mausoleums built in this cemetery was greater, especially at the end of the 19th century, due to the proliferation of workshops that worked the soft limestone in the region. Of these workshops, the one by João Machado stands out. Works produced in this workshop were disseminated by some national cemeteries. Conchada Cemetery may have received some influences from work carried out in the main national cemeteries – Lisbon and Porto. However, it kept a unique aesthetic, both in stone and ironwork, and became one of the most important and interesting cemeteries regarding funerary art.

3.1 The cemetery construction

The construction of the Cemetery began in 1854, according to the outline of physician Raymundo Venâncio Rodrigues [9]. The layout consisted of a vast hexagon measuring

11,750 m², divided into four sectors following a cross, whose quadrants were in turn divided into four rows. The project foresaw the construction of 200 mausoleums arranged around the perimeter of the sectors, inside which shallow graves were located (Figure 3). The oldest nucleus of the Conchada cemetery, built between 1856 and 1918, has a rich and expressive set of aerial tombs (mausoleums), chapel type, almost all built with limestone from the region - Pedra de Ançã, which constitutes a clear specificity in Coimbra funerary art [10,11]. The presence of stonework workshops in the region, utilizing the locally abundant Ançã limestone, contributed to the proliferation of these structures. Moreover, renowned artists such as João de Ruão and João Machado left their distinctive mark on the funerary art of the time, further fueling the development of these avant-garde mausoleums.

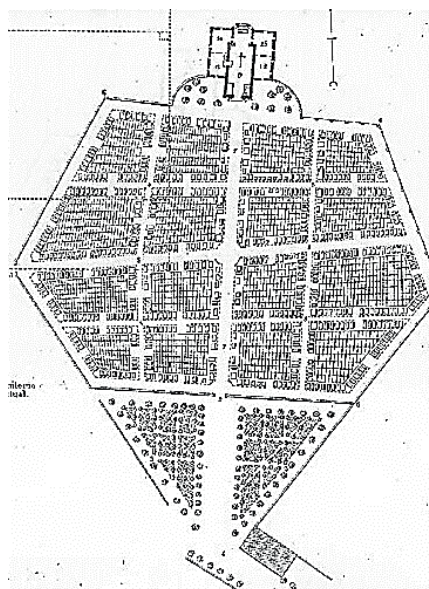


Figure 3: Primitive plan of Conchada Cemetery [12]

According to their economic possibilities, families built, in this cemetery, two types of mausoleums and chapels. The first type featured tombs with a limited interior space that allowed family members to gather, offering a closer proximity to the deceased and the opportunity to pray beside the coffins. The second type, referred to as “narrow mausoleums”, was more modest in design.

These tombs lacked the possibility for families to remain inside, instead utilizing the small interior space for shelves to accommodate coffins. The coffins could be introduced either through the front doors or through small hatches located at the rear of the tomb (Figure 4).

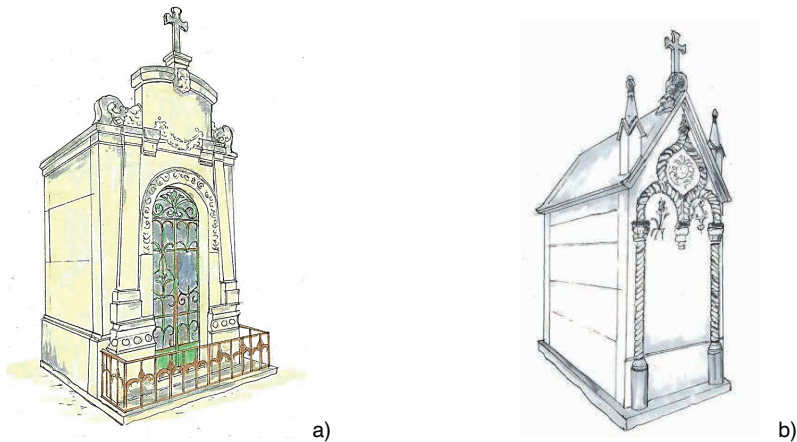


Figure 4. Mausoleums: a) With space for visitors to access inside; b) Narrow tomb with no possibility of access for visitors to its interior.

The narrow mausoleums are relatively compact in size, with a width ranging from 1.2m to 1.5m and a length of approximately 2.5m.

The choice of burial styles sometimes revealed family political beliefs. For example, families linked to the nobility preferred the neo-Gothic style, while the freemasons, due to enlightenment influence, preferred the Neoclassical (Palladian) style.

After the 1890 English Ultimatum, a more Portuguese late Gothic, the Neo-Manueline, replaces the Neo-Gothic style. At the turn of the century, as a challenge to the nobility in power, the most convicted republicans chose a style that was very popular in republican France, Art Nouveau [13,14].

3.2 The Mausoleum No. 40 of sector 10

This paper presents a more in-depth study of mausoleum No. 40, belonging to sector 10, regarding the constructive system, architecture, composition, and iconographic decoration. It is a narrow tomb with entrance on the back, in neo-Gothic style, built in 1882, containing an iron railing at the front, for flower placement.

3.2.1 Constructive and architectural characterization

Chapel-type mausoleums have a unique construction system. For hygienic reasons they were entirely built with stone slabs interconnected by metallic brass bolts. This tomb possesses access from the back, thus has its front made up of a very thick slab of stone, on which the arches and columns, as well as various decorative elements, were carved.

To support the interior shelves, an ingenious lateral beam support system was designed (Figure 5). Interestingly, the wimpier (also called ornamental gable) has rounded

lower sides, typical of 19th century romantic chalets.

In architectural terms, this mausoleum fits into the neo-Gothic style (Figure 5), as it has a steeply inclined gable and a “portico” with several pointed arches, in addition to two pinnacles. This architectural style was usually chosen by noble families. Access to the interior is possible via metal doors in the back [15].

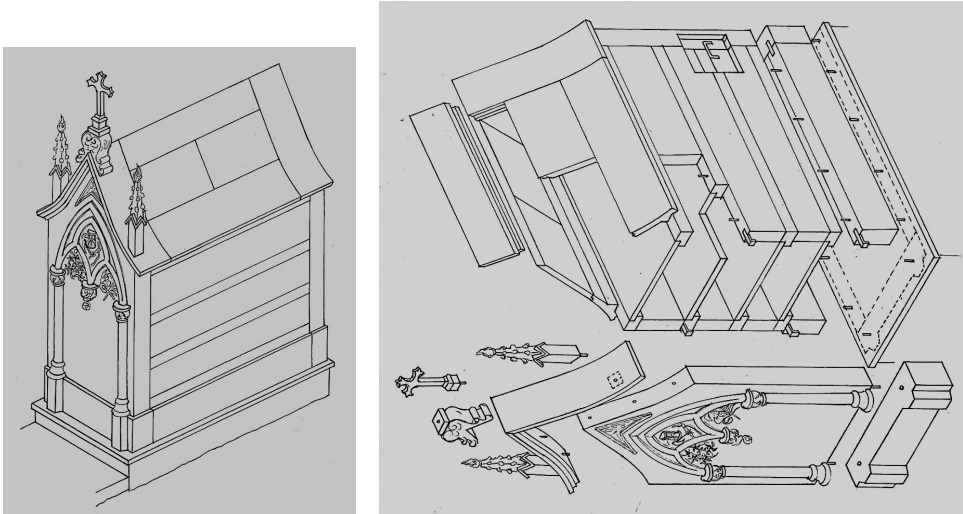


Figure 5: Constructive system of the tomb (original drawings from the author)

The architectural composition was based on two squares, possessing a side size equal to the root of five, and a rectangle. One of the squares encompasses the columns with their respective bases and capitals, while the other surrounds the ogives and pinnacles (Figure 6). The height of the small rectangle, where the plinths of the columns fit, was established by folding the diagonal of the square.

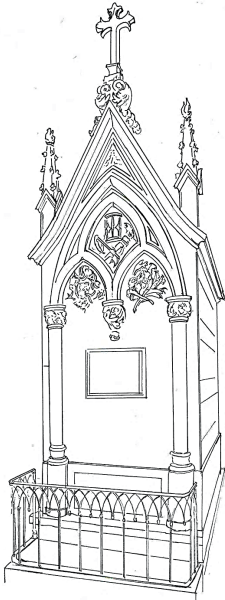


Figure 6: Neo-gothic mausoleum

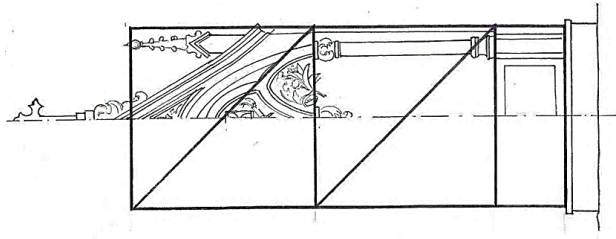


Figure 7: Mausoleum Architectonic composition

(original drawings from the author)

3.2.2 Iconographic decoration

The three-lobed arch contains three ogival arches, a reference to the Trinity (Figure 8). The three-lobed arch is surmounted by a stylized lily, in the shape of a Liz flower, identifying the tomb owner as a noble family (Figure 9).

The highest pointed arch contains three symbols very common in Portuguese tombs (Figure 10): an hourglass with wings – which means the inevitability of the passage of time; a scythe - symbol of death and a torch [16].



Figure 8: Three-lobed arch



Figure 9: Liz flower



Figure 10: Hourglass

(original photos from the author)

Usually the torches appear inverted, meaning death. In this specific case, as the torch is upright, the meaning of resurrection can be attributed. The acanthus leaves on the capitals, which in Greek military camps indicated the faithful depositary of weapons, are twisted, and inverted, indicating mourning and grief [17].

In the right-side ogive (Figure 11), there are two flowers with their respective branches intertwined: one is the flower of longing and the other the perpetual flower, which reveals a “perpetual longing” for the deceased. In the ogive on the left side (Figure 12) there is a passionflower (passion fruit), surrounded by a branch with leaves and tendrils.

The passionflower has this name because it has a series of morphological elements that can be associated with the events of Christ’s last hours.



Figure 11: Flower of longing and perpetual
(images from the author)



Figure 12: Passionflower

The European missionaries, when they arrived in America, were enchanted by the exuberance of the passionflower, and immediately associated some of its elements with the Calvary of Christ, attributing great religious importance to it.

The symbolism of the passionflower flower can be related as follows (see Figure 12): the ten petals (“pétalas”) would represent the ten apostles, excluding Judas, who betrayed Jesus, and Peter, who denied Him three times; the three stigmata (“estigmas”) corresponded to the three nails that nailed Christ to the cross; the five stamens (“estames”) represent Christ five wounds; the tendrils (“gavinhas”) were the whips used to martyr Him; the shape of the floral crown, completely filled with filaments, became the very image of the crown of thorns carried by Christ, for the act of crucifixion; the leaves would represent the spear that pierced His body. The shades of purple that give color to the flower symbolize the blood spilled by Jesus Christ [18].

The Figure 13 illustrates the symbology of the passion fruit flower. As passion fruit is a typically Brazilian fruit, and as at that time, a few years after Brazil’s Independence, many Portuguese returned from Brazil, the so-called “Rich Brazilians”, it may indicate that this tomb belongs to a family returned or with interests in Brazil [19].

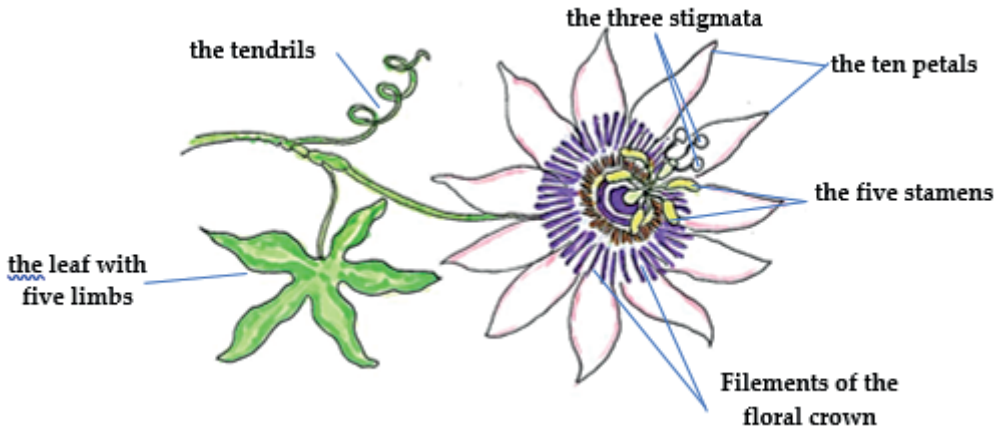


Figure 13: Symbology of passionflower (drawing from the author)

4 | CONCLUSIONS

Conchada Cemetery, a 19th century cemetery, boasts a relevant history of the city of Coimbra. It is important to reference and make known the very particular funerary art that exists there and show how tombs and mausoleums can be seen as art forms.

The tomb under study is a narrow chapel tomb in the neo-Gothic style, which belonged to a noble family. It follows the iconographic patterns in vogue at the end of the 19th century, but with influence from Brazil as it features a tropical plant, the passion fruit, in its decoration.

Given the importance of the Conchada Cemetery as a reference for funerary art of its own, extensive research is being carried out on the chapel tombs built at the end of the 19th century. It intends to study and make known the current architectural styles, the symbolism of the iconography with which they are richly decorated and associate the construction process of the tombs with their architectural style. Cemeteries are not just a place of pain, but they are also open-air museums that can be visited and allow sculpture, architecture, and history to be observed, given that cemeteries are testimonies of political, social and artistic events of other times. It is therefore important to study and preserve this funerary heritage.

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