

## MOSTEIRINHO DE SÃO FRANCISCO IN PAUDALHO, BRAZIL: BUILDING TYPOLOGY ADAPTATION IN COLONIAL ARCHITECTURE

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### ABSTRACT

The *Mosteirinho de São Francisco*, in the city of Paudalho (Brazil), is a unique example of Franciscan religious architecture that reflects a very specific historical context of the area. It was built during the period of Dutch domination of Northeastern Brazil (1630-1654), characterized by territorial disputes and religious persecution between Dutch (Protestants) and Portuguese (Catholics). Designed in this emergency context, the building was conceived with a simple and compact layout, adapting the typology and spaces of a Franciscan convent to the site and specific circumstances. An example of this is the addition of two connected aisles to the nave, providing an architectural *promenade* around this main space: a modest but ingenious adaptation of the cloister concept. Nowadays the building is completely abandoned, in an advanced state of decay and in a judicial process regarding its property. Even its heritage protection is at risk. This paper presents the results of an architectural research about this building with the aim of claiming the importance of its preservation.

### KEYWORDS

Architectural heritage; religious heritage; building typology; Dutch Brazil; cloister.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Mosteirinho de São Francisco is located in the rural area of the city of Paudalho, in the province of Pernambuco, one of the first regions colonized by the Portuguese when they arrived in Brazil. The building is protected at a national level since 1966. It is included in the Municipal Master Plan as part of the Special Preservation Ensembles and Properties, and in the Zone of Historical and Cultural Interest since 2006. However, today it is abandoned, decayed, and its ownership is in dispute.

This paper presents the results of the analysis of its architectural typology, with the aim of enhancing the historical significance of the building and claiming its protection and preservation. It is part of the results of a broader study in which an exhaustive documentation of the building, and architectural and conservation analyses were performed to design a proposal for its adaptive reuse, taking into account the feasibility and with the purpose that this built heritage asset can contribute to the sustainable development of the area (Rolim, 2021).

### 2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

According to Wätjen (1938), during the 16th century the Dutch had a good commercial relationship with Portugal and its colony Brazil, but that started to change after the Portuguese

succession war in 1580, due to the strict restrictions imposed by the new monarch on Flemish traders. From that moment the Dutch began to look for new trade routes and identified Brazil as an opportunity to increase their wealth and territory.

In May 1624, the Dutch began attempts to invade Brazilian territory and gained control of San Salvador, the capital of the colony, although inefficient management and a reduced fleet allowed a counterattack and the Portuguese recovered the city in March 1625. Four years later, the Dutch returned to Brazil stronger economically and with greater knowledge of the colony's weaknesses (Boxer, 1961). This time their target was Pernambuco, a rich territory and the most productive province, based on sugar cane cultivation sustained by slave labor (Wätjen, 1938).

In 1630, the Dutch naval force arrived in Olinda, capital of the province, a city built on a hill by the sea with a strategic port: Recife. The site had a population of 2-3,000 people and sumptuous churches from where missionaries departed to propagate the Christian doctrine and evangelize the natives of the region. Aware that his troops would not withstand the invasion, the Pernambuco's governor set fire to his warehouses and ships and fled inland. From there, he gathered troops, resources and war materials, and organized constant attacks against the Dutch (Wätjen, 1938).

Due to the defensive fragility of Olinda and the lack of supplies, the Dutch decided to abandon and destroy the city, and focus their defensive forces in the town of Recife, transforming the old port facilities into new fortifications (Wätjen, 1938). There they established the capital of what is known as Dutch Brazil (1630-1654), from where they conquered almost half of the European area settled in Brazil at that time (Fig. 1).

Religious persecution of Catholics by Protestants during the period of Dutch domination of Northeastern Brazil is reported with different points of view according to the author's origin or confession, so sources

require careful consideration and using the least subjective data to obtain reliable conclusions. Jaboatam (1858) reports murders of Franciscans during the destruction of Olinda in November 1630, in the attempted invasion of the nearby province of Paraíba in December 1630, and in an attack to the Convent of São Francisco of Olinda in 1633. Wätjen (1938) states that when the Dutch settled in Recife they had orders to treat locals and especially clergy with kindness to avoid being labeled intolerant, and also relates that they did not try to impose Protestant doctrine or seize church property so that they would resume sugar production.

In 1634, Dutch authorities launched an amnesty for Catholics and Jewish to freely perform religious activities, which was not approved by Calvinists. Religious persecution continued and was further accentuated when the Dutch intercepted letters of support from Franciscans and Jesuits to the Portuguese governor, which led to the end of tolerance, the expulsion of the Jesuits and strict vigilance over the Franciscans as stated by Wätjen (1938).

The amnesty was reinstated during Count Maurício de Nassau-Siegen's government (1637-1644), until another alleged conspiracy of Franciscans, Carmelites and Benedictines was discovered in 1638, which led to arrest 40 friars and ban Catholic activities. After the Count's abdication in 1644, religious intolerance flared up: in 1645 Catholic leaders and parishioners were captured and killed in the massacres of Cunhaú and Uruaçu, conducted by Dutch troops with allied natives led by Jacob Rabbi (BBC, 2020; CRB Nacional, 2020).

Religious persecution continued until the expulsion of the Dutch in January 1654 and obviously affected religious architecture. When the Dutch arrived in Pernambuco in 1630, there were six Franciscan convents in the region: Convento de São Francisco, in Olinda; Convento de Santo Antônio, in Recife; Convento do Senhor Santo Cristo, in Ipojuca; Convento de São Francisco, in Sirinhaém; Convento de Santo Antônio, in Paraíba; and Convento de Santo Antônio, in Igarassu (Carvalho, 2009) (Fig. 1).

Most of them were abandoned, destroyed or transformed into defensive or military structures.

### 3. FRANCISCAN ARCHITECTURE IN NORTHEASTERN BRAZIL (1585-1630)

Franciscan convents of Northeastern Brazil are one of the most original examples of religious architecture in the country, since they combine Portuguese metropolitan models and construction standards spread by Jesuits. Logical but unprecedented solutions were used in their construction, seeking to adapt to the context and climate. As a result, a regional architectural school emerged whose knowledge spread through groups of specialized builders, as evidenced by homogeneous layouts and similar architectural elements (Bazin, 1956).

Topography and proximity to water sources played an important role in the selection of locations for the construction of convent complexes (Fernandes, 2013). It required long times, resulting in modifications and adaptations of the original projects. The initial core was generally the cloister, followed by the church and an exterior atrium with a distinctive cross that stood out in the landscape (Fig. 2). The construction of a convent began with the cloister (Fig. 2), where the friars' cells were located. According to Fernandes (2013), square cloisters in medieval religious architecture have their origin in the Roman domus, in which life developed around a central patio with fountains and vegetation. Over time, cloisters acquired a spiritual function linked to prayer, silence and reflection. Symbolically, they represent the transition between earthly and spiritual life, and were also a burial place for Franciscans (Fernandes, 2013).



Figure 1. Map of Dutch Brazil (1630-1654) with existing Franciscan convents



Figure 2. (left) Cross in front of the Olinda Convent, detail from "Views of Olinda and Recife" - Anonymous 1644. Source: (Koninklijke Bibliotheek 2022); (right) Cloister of the Olinda Convent in 1981. Source: (Rede de Arquivos IPHAN 2022)

In Northeastern Brazil, Franciscan cloisters of this period had two stories: the chapterhouse, and dining and study areas were on the ground or first floor, and the library and the friars' cells on the second floor (Bazin 1956). They were usually built in Renaissance style, although in many cases the classical columns were replaced by square pilasters supporting the arcades. All other buildings and spaces were located around the cloister. The church used to be on its left side, although there were some exceptions.

Churches have a single nave plan with a slightly narrower chancel (*capela-mor*) preceded by two side altars. The sacristy was located behind the church (Fig. 3), usually in a transverse direction spanning the width of the nave. According to Fernandes (2013), the sacristy was one of the most important places, where the priest prepared himself physically and spiritually before the ceremony and sometimes attended parishioners.

On the gospel side and running perpendicular to the nave was the chapel of the Third Order (Fig. 3), a brotherhood integrated by

distinguished members of society, such as nobles, military and merchants. Originally, this chapel was connected to the nave of the church by an arched opening, although later in many cases, a direct outward entrance was added. As a consequence of the strengthening of the Third Order, in some cases side aisles were added to the chancel to allow visitors to access the sacristy without walking through the church (Fernandes, 2013).

The atrium (Fig. 3) was an outdoor extension of the church where people used to congregate and official announcements, festivities and some ceremonies took place. It was also used as a scenic space due to the importance of the Christ's Passion for the Franciscans (Fernandes, 2013). On a stepped pedestal stood the above mentioned cross, initially made of wood, which could be seen from a distance.

The churches had a bell tower located on one side of the facade, which consisted of a low pediment preceded by a porch or gallery, a typical element of rural chapels that was frequently used from the 16th to the 18th century (Fig. 4).

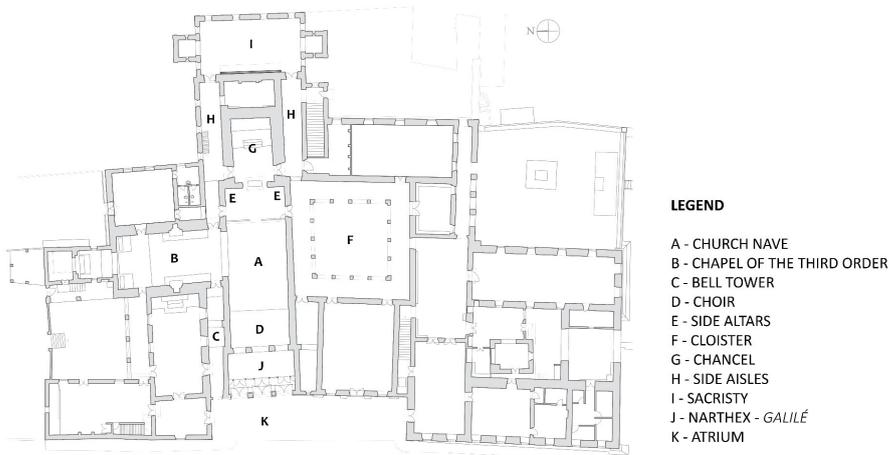


Figure 3. Ground floor plan of the Olinda Convent in its current state. Source: modified from (Aguiar 2009)



Figure 4. Igarassu Convent, detail of the painting by Frans Post, 1663. Source: (Thyssen-Bornemisza Museo Nacional 2019)

### 3.1. The Franciscan convents during the Dutch period

When the Dutch invaded Olinda in 1630, most of the friars of Convento de São Francisco fled with the Governor to the camp that the Portuguese resistance was building in Parnamirim. The convent was attacked after the destruction of the city and the friars who had remained there were killed or captured (Jaboatam, 1858). In 1635 the Parnamirim camp was seized by the Dutch and the friars

had to move further inland to seek refuge in Mussurepe, a sugar cane mill run by Benedictine monks (Mueller, 1949). It has not yet been possible to verify whether the friars who built the Mosteiroinho sheltered directly in Mussurepe after escaping from Olinda in 1630 or whether they all arrived after the attack on Parnamirim in 1635.

The friars of Recife also fled to the Parnamirim Camp (Jaboatam, 1858). The Dutch added walls and bastions to the abandoned convent and turned it into a fortress called Forte Ernesto,

and its church was used for Protestant worship until 1954 (Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional, 2010).

The Convent of Ipojuca was occupied and converted into military barracks, but the friars could stay in private homes in the town and some Catholic services were allowed in the church. Sirinhaém was active until 1635, when it was taken by the Dutch. The friars fled to Bahia and the convent remained empty until 1649 (Jaboatam, 1858).

The Convent of Paraíba was active until 1634, when the friars were expelled and they left with some parishioners to the Parnamirim camp. After 1635, the population returned to Paraíba and the friars remained dispersed in scattered mills or other Portuguese camps. Igarassu was active until 1632 and then the friars were expelled until 1635, when they were able to return, although in 1639 they were accused of conspiring with the Portuguese and deported, leaving the convent empty until 1654 (Jaboatam, 1858).

#### 4. THE MOSTEIRINHO DE SÃO FRANCISCO

When the friars from the Convent of Olinda were seeking shelter inland in the province, Bernardo Gonçalves Lobo, a mill owner devoted to St. Francis of Assisi, offered them part of his land to build a small hospice and chapel: The Mosteirinho de São Francisco. They remained there until 1654, when could return to Olinda after the Dutch expulsion from Brazil (Jaboatam, 1858).

The word *mosteiro* was used for Benedictine religious buildings, while Franciscan buildings were known as *convento* –or *conventinho*, in Portuguese diminutive. One of the probable causes of the anomalous name of the Mosteirinho de São Francisco could be its proximity to a Benedictine mill.

Mueller (1949) and Bazin (1956) suggest the Mosteirinho must have been part of a larger complex with similar characteristics to those of the Franciscan convents from the period

before the Dutch invasion. However, no record of other buildings or their demolition has been found, nor any traces of foundations in the surroundings of the existing building. In addition, there is no evidence that the Mosteirinho was ever connected to any other structure, and its features are those of an isolated building. Its diminutive name in all records also seems to confirm that it has always been a small structure.

Based on the above premise and the study of the building, it has been found that the architectural typology of Franciscan convent underwent adaptations and simplifications in the Mosteirinho de São Francisco which, in light of the historical context, indicates that it was an “emergency” construction made to house Franciscan friars in times of war and religious persecution.

##### 4.1. Building typology adaptation

The location of the Mosteirinho follows Franciscan principles: it is on top of a hill and very close to the Capibaribe river. Its plan is of a single nave, connected to a narrower chancel preceded by two side altars (Fig. 5), following the Franciscan standards influenced by the Jesuits (Fig. 5).

The main facade has a symmetrical composition with a triangular pediment and a central double wooden door. It faces a small atrium flanked by two buttresses with two attached benches (Fig. 6). According to Mueller (1949), the buttresses may be a vestige of an old front porch. Ahead of the atrium stood a wooden cross on a stepped masonry pedestal (Fig. 6). Beyond this standard Franciscan central axis, its distribution starts to be adapted in order to optimize and simplify spaces as much as possible.

While in other convents two aisles on the sides of the chancel served to access the sacristy, located behind the church, here they became primary spaces themselves: the sacristy on the gospel side and the consistory on the epistle side (Fig. 7).



Figure 5. (left) Main altar and side altars of the Mosteiro de São Francisco in 1955. (right) Main altar and side altars of the Igarassu Convent in 1955. Source: (Rede de Arquivos IPHAN 2022)



Figure 6. (left) Front facade of the Mosteiro de São Francisco in 1955. (right) Cross of the Mosteiro de São Francisco in 1984. Source: (Rede de Arquivos IPHAN 2022)

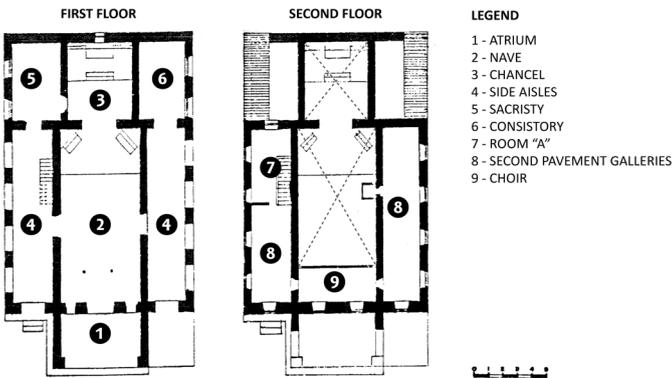


Figure 7. First floor and second floor of the Mosteiro de São Francisco. Source: modified from (Fundação de Desenvolvimento Municipal do Interior de Pernambuco 1982)

Two halls connected to the nave and opened to the exterior by arches, some of them with benches for seating (Fig. 8), work as a simplified version of a cloister. These spaces served at the same time as circulation areas, since they connect the nave with the other dependencies of the convent. As in traditional cloisters, these corridors had an upper floor where the most private rooms were located, but instead of facing a central patio, in this case they are opened outwards through arcades (Fig. 8), another indication that the building was an isolated structure. The typical bell tower of Franciscan convents of this period (Fig. 9), according to Bazin (1956), is replaced by a simpler bell gable,

although in this case located on the epistle side instead of on the gospel side. Today the Mosteirinho has two bell gambles, one on each side of the facade and over the arches opening the side "cloister-halls", but old photographs (Fig. 9) and some documents (Barros, 1949; Mueller, 1949) evidence that it originally had only one.

In 1954 the Diretoria do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional (DPHAN), now Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional (IPHAN), added another bell gamble on the gospel side to achieve a symmetrical facade and possibly influenced by Viollet-le-Duc's restoration theories, popular at the time (Silva, 2017).



Figure 8. (left) Benches in the lateral aisle of the Mosteirinho de São Francisco in 1966. (right) Lateral facade of the Mosteirinho de São Francisco in 1955. Source: (Rede de Arquivos IPHAN 2022)



Figure 9. (left) Igarassu Convent in 1637, detail of engraving no. 11 by Jan van Brosterhuyzen after drawing by Frans Post, 1645-1647. Source: (Rijksmuseum 2020); (right) Front facade of the Mosteirinho de São Francisco in 1954. Source: (Rede de Arquivos IPHAN 2022)

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The architectural layout of the *Mosteirinho de São Francisco* is the result of an ingenious adaptation of the Franciscan convent typology that reflects the convulsive historical context in which it was built. In its design, the basic components of the Franciscan convents of Northeastern Brazil of the late 16th and early 17th centuries are reduced and highly simplified. Only the essential parts remain and a very compact layout is achieved, allowing the main functions of a convent by using the minimum possible elements and optimizing the resources.

The current state of degradation of the building has already caused it to irreparably lose part of its values and threatens to completely lose a cultural heritage that is primary testimony of such a relevant historical period for the cultural development of the province and the country.

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