

## Article

# The Narrow Mausolea at Conchada Cemetery as Part of Portuguese and European Architectural Heritage

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**Abstract:** Over millennia, death was the origin of great funerary constructions that have come down to us. These constructions aimed at ensuring eternity and perpetuating memory. Funeral art thus appears not in the service of death, but in the service of memory. In the modern age, funerary constructions do not have the dimensions and grandeur they did in ancient times, but there are still constructions with relevant architectural interest, built to perpetuate the memory of important families. In Conchada Cemetery, located in Coimbra, Portugal, a vast and diverse funeral heritage exists. Possessing various architectural styles, almost all built with limestone from the region, the narrow mausoleums stand out from this heritage. This work presents a study carried out on the architecture and construction of two types of narrow mausoleums, existing in the Conchada Cemetery, both of the Neo-Gothic style: one with an entrance from the front, and another from the back. As it is not possible to present the photographs of the burial vaults, since it would represent an intrusive approach to the families, the authors have resorted to representing them through Indian ink and watercolor illustrations.



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**Keywords:** funeral heritage; mausoleum; architecture; construction; architectural styles

## 1. Introduction

Secular cemetery spaces are usually spaces of great historical, architectural, artistic, symbolic, and social value. They are also a testimony to the heritage of collective memory and to trends and traditions associated with the cult of death throughout the ages. The perception of death depends on the historical moment, as well as the social and cultural context in which it is inserted. During the Middle Ages, there was a proximity between the dead and the living, in which the living usually shared the space with the dead. During this period, burials were carried out in churches, a period that preceded burial in public cemeteries and which followed burial in necropolises outside the cities.

The word “cemetery” comes from the Greek verb *Krimao*, meaning “I rest, I sleep”, and, thus, the word *Krimeterium* means “dormitory”. The corresponding Latin word, *Coemeterium*, expresses the idea of “place to sleep and rest”. For Christians, the “last place of rest” (the cemetery) is also a present relationship of continuity between the community of the living and that of their dead, indispensable to the cultural identity of people, from the individual to the family and to the nations. The cemetery, an element of landscape and basic heritage of culture and history, is one of the most significant links that connect rural and urban culture within the same community.

Burial places emerged as a way of maintaining the memory of the dead [1]. This objective, allied with the needs for preventive actions against contagious diseases, improvement of hygiene conditions, and population increase in urban centers, demanded the

development of structures that could simultaneously attend to all these objectives at once. Thus, public cemeteries located in the cities' outskirts started to be designed.

Père Lachaise cemetery, in Paris, was the first to be built outside the city [2]. It was inaugurated in 1804 by Napoleon Bonaparte and designed by Alexandre Théodore Brongniart. Père Lachaise is the largest cemetery in the city and one of the most visited cemeteries in the world. It is a true open-air museum that houses many architectural and sculptural works of funerary art. Burial structures are built in several art styles, including Gothic, Romanesque, Neoclassical, Italian Renaissance, and Art Nouveau crypts, alongside Egyptian Renaissance pyramids and obelisks.

It is important to stress that, in the Catholic world, there was a strong concern with ensuring resurrection. Thus, every person desired to be buried inside a church, and close to the altar. As burial inside churches along Europe started to be prohibited due to health requirements, the solution of burial in a chapel-shaped tomb that appears for the first time in the Père Lachaise cemetery comforted people's religious concerns. Soon, this practice was followed in cemeteries along Europe.

In Portugal, cemeteries as public burial spaces have a short time span in historical memory. Until the beginning of the 19th century, burials were carried out in religious spaces. This practice was not bearable with the increase in population, as well as with times of great mortality caused by epidemics. Already in the 18th century there were attempts to impose cemetery legislation. However, only in the 19th century did the laws effectively gain force. The implementation of such legislation did not take place peacefully. The population offered great resistance to these changes, giving rise to revolts, namely the well-known Maria da Fonte revolt [1], which will go down in national history as the revolt of the "Minho women". This revolt, as well as its influence on posterior burial rites, is eloquently described by the Portuguese writer Camilo Castelo Branco, contemporary to the events, in his novel "Maria da Fonte" [3]. The Portuguese population, deeply marked by traditions of a strongly religious nature, did not want to bury their people outside the churches and, consequently, away from the sacred [4]. Despite all the riots and protests, public cemeteries in Portugal became a reality in 1835. While in the rest of Europe these spaces were secular, in Portugal, it was still mandatory for the cemetery ground to be blessed and possess an appropriate space for worship [5]. In this way, an attempt was carried out to attend to some of the demands of a fundamentally Catholic people.

Through the way in which the dead are remembered and the buildings that are constructed, the cemetery is a space that shows the existing stratifications of social order. In this sense, death accentuates social differences. The tomb layout existing in a sacred field reflects social hierarchies, as well as other forms of segmentation. Funerary art also became another differentiating element of social classes. The tomb became a physical and manifest place for memories and property, which guaranteed the perpetuity of the deceased.

The graves, individualized through their architecture, sculptures, and symbols, demonstrate the desire to perpetuate the identity of the dead, seeking to preserve the memory of the deceased from the richest classes, and also to confirm and sacralize their historical and social positions.

In Portugal, a vast existing cemetery heritage contains important and diversified tomb art. This paper is part of a vast study of the chapel-like mausoleums of the Conchada Cemetery, located in Coimbra. Some of the narrow mausoleums have their entrance in the front, while others have it in the back. The back façade is practically an exclusive form of construction of this cemetery. Some studies have been carried out on Conchada Cemetery, comparing it with other European cemeteries [6]. However, although the Conchada Cemetery has a rich set of narrow mausoleums, there is no detailed study on them. This paper aims at describing and characterizing the existing mausoleums in Conchada Cemetery, describing the architectural types they can assume.

In carrying out this work, some constraints were experienced. The first one has to do with the impossibility of accessing the archive of the graves' design projects, as its location, or even its possible existence, is unknown. This would be important in order to establish

a chronology of the mausoleums' construction. This fact limited the study of the tombs to the oldest nucleus of the cemetery, built between 1856 and 1918. The second constraint resided in the impossibility of obtaining photographic records. This situation was circumvented through representations drawn in Indian ink and watercolors, a more consensual solution, taking care not to identify the vaults by the families' names. The recognition of the constructive system in a non-intrusive way is not difficult, as the mausoleums studied possess a single compartment, and they were built without a differentiated structure. The coating of thin stones is interconnected by metallic pieces, constituting the walls and roofs, thus making the construction process easily understandable.

## 2. The Conchada Cemetery

On September 21, 1835, on the initiative of Rodrigo da Fonseca Magalhães, a national legislative document (Decree-Law No. 442205) in defense of public health and the need to observe sanitary standards was published [7]. This law prohibited burials inside religious buildings and their surroundings, thus leading to the need to create public cemeteries in all villages of the country.

The Conchada Cemetery, in Coimbra, is part of this panorama. In 1835, the mayor, Visconde das Canas, had already asked for land on which to build a cemetery. For some years, the construction of the cemetery was stopped, justified by the supposed lack of a place for its implantation. For a long time, a plot of land located in the "Cerca do Colégio de Tomar" was assigned for the cemetery. Nowadays, this is the place where the city prison is located. It was only in 1851 that the cemetery was definitively established in the place where it stands today, Conchada. The Conchada was chosen, to the detriment of the "Cerca do Colégio de Tomar", since it met the necessary conditions for the implantation of a cemetery. The Conchada was located at a reasonable distance from the urban core. Its location was northward from the city, which made it possible to protect the city from east, south, and west winds, impregnated with cadaverous emanations. At the geological level, it had ideal conditions for the putrefaction of corpses, and its extension allowed for the location of a large number of graves [8].

The oldest nucleus of the Conchada Cemetery was built between 1856 and 1918. It contains a rich and expressive set of mausoleums. These structures are chapel-type constructions, almost all built with limestone from the region, the Ançã stone (Figure 1). Ançã stone punctuates the space because of its ease of cutting and working and for its abundance in the region.



**Figure 1.** Partial view of a sector at the Conchada Cemetery.

Construction work on the Conchada Cemetery began in 1854, following the design of physician Raymundo Venâncio Rodrigues [9]. This design consisted of a vast hexagon with

11,750 m<sup>2</sup>, divided into four sectors. These sectors were, in turn, divided into four lots each. The 200 mausoleums were planned, arranged on the perimeter of the pillars, inside which the space was reserved for 4511 graves (Figure 2) [6].



**Figure 2.** Conchada Cemetery, according to Raymundo Venâncio Rodrigues design, 1857 [6].

In 1855, Portugal was hit by a cholera epidemic. The Conchada Cemetery construction was not complete, and it was necessary to create a temporary cemetery. This fact explains the existence in Conchada of graves with death dates prior to the entry into operation of the cemetery. Wealthier families also had their deceased moved to Conchada, due to the social prestige of having a mausoleum.

The cemetery was opened and subjected to Catholic blessing rites on 1 October 1860. Official burials began on October 22 of the same year. This work was embargoed for 25 years, and, even after being open to the public, improvements were deemed necessary. The construction of the existing chapel was only completed between 1868 and 1869.

The peak of the construction of the tombs in this cemetery occurred in the 1870s and 1880s, that is, in the final period of Romanticism [9,10]. This cemetery is, therefore, one of the most important and interesting cemeteries in the country in terms of funerary art. The cemetery presents very specific aesthetics in the art of stonework and metalwork, constituting an authentic open-air museum space.

Later, in 1918, to meet the needs of the growing city population, the cemetery was expanded to the adjacent lands belonging to the Coimbra Santa Casa da Misericórdia [11].

Coimbra funerary art was already well-known during the Middle Ages. With the construction of the Conchada Cemetery, this activity regained its importance, and the number of commissions and artists increased greatly. These small-scale constructions represent a type of city of the dead, also divided by streets and avenues. The typology of the “small chapel” was the most used, followed by small-scale revivalisms, especially Neo-Romanesque, Neo-Gothic, and Neo-Manueline. The characteristics of these architectonic styles are briefly presented in Section 4 of the present paper. These artistic revivals were the most used because 19th century Portuguese society dedicated a great effort and investment to restore medieval and Manueline works. The restoration work revived a passion for the past, which is reflected in the final resting place chosen by many. When observing these small monuments, it is still possible to identify the traditions left by great names of Coimbra, such as Hodarte and João de Ruão [10].

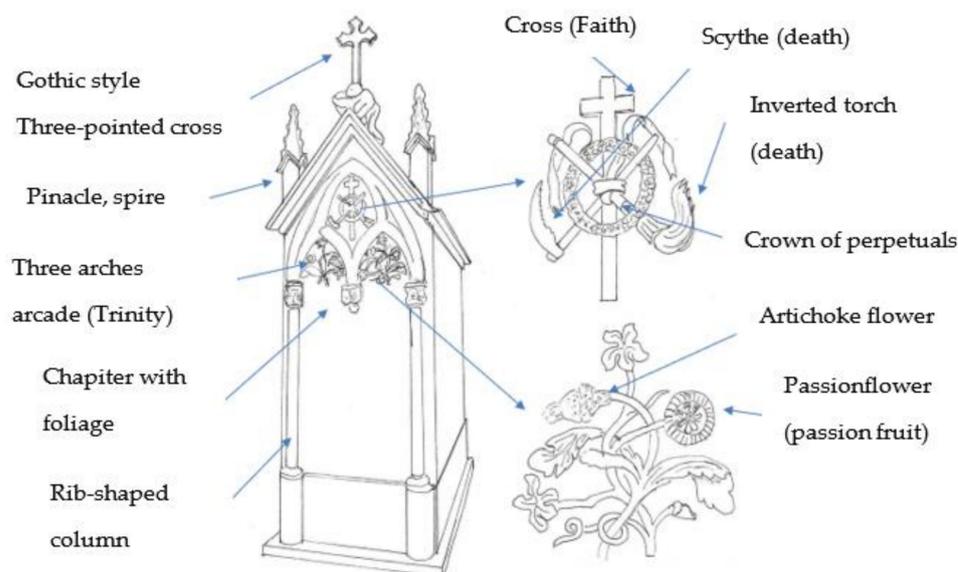
In addition to the “chapel” typology or revivalisms, in Conchada Cemetery, there are other artistic manifestations. One may observe examples such as bas-reliefs. The lamenting woman is a common theme, in addition to small architectures that seem, effectively, to be inhabited houses. In this last typology, ironwork stands out, and it is possible to observe that some mausoleums “conquer” land around them with a railing that resembles a porch, which delimits the space of each family or individual.

The cemetery space of Conchada, still functional nowadays, resembles an open-air museum, where artistic manifestations proliferate and, even after life, continue to distinguish individuals. The final destination may be the same, but the place of eternal rest can be quite different—a place that urgently needs to receive the protection and the respect it deserves.

### 3. The Mausoleums

In the Conchada Cemetery, mausoleums are buildings that seek to reproduce, in smaller dimension, chapels. In constructive terms, they do not have a support structure; they are built with just stone plates, interconnected by metal clamps, possessing only one compartment, inside which the coffins, sealed with sheets of lead or tin, are deposited. Access to the interior of the mausoleums is usually made through small wickets or via an iron gate.

The mausoleums were built in a period when a new wealthy industrial bourgeoisie sought to assert itself in relation to the aristocracy at the end of the Romantic period [12]. This age was characterized by sentimentality and fantasy; the burial structures were conceived with an exuberant architecture enriched by exquisite iconography, as illustrated in Figure 3 [13].



**Figure 3.** Example of mausoleum iconography.

The cemetery is eminently a symbolic space. The stonework decorations on the tombs and mausoleums create symbols, essential elements in the process of communicating feelings and desires.

The flowers, leaves, and fruits that represent the victory of the human soul over sin and death are symbols of life and of eternal life. They are often associated with nobility and beauty, but also with fragility. The perpetual flower, together with the artichoke, is the most represented flower in many cemeteries, representing perpetual longing. The perpetual is originally an herbaceous plant with purple flowers, and its representation in burial structures is directly related to its name. The artichoke is also known as “Saudade” (“longing”): it is a cyclically regenerated plant. Its design represents absence and permanent nostalgia. The acanthus leaf is the symbol of immortality.

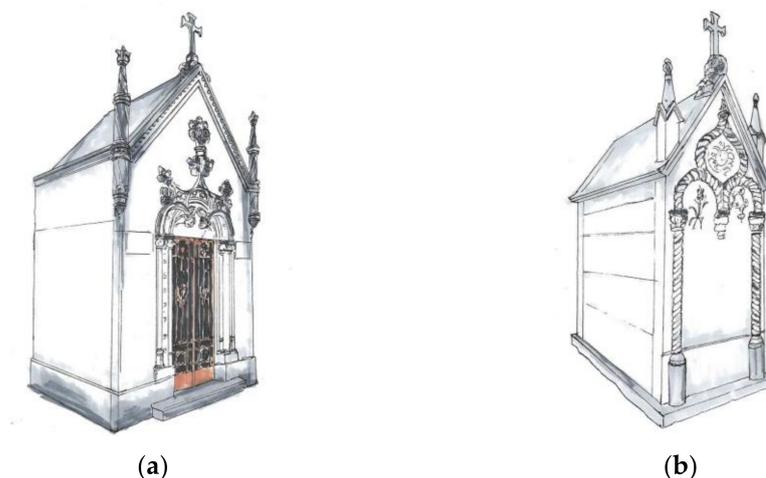
Among other symbols, the crown stands out. The symbol pays homage to the deceased and, due to its shape, without beginning or end, symbolizes eternity. The vessel, which is usually represented as being empty, symbolizes the body separated from the soul. The globe symbolizes the use and end of the terrestrial life span. The palms or branches prefigure the resurrection of Christ, after the Calvary drama. The angel, when the hand

points to heaven, means that the deceased was taken as a good person and is expected to go straight to paradise. The casket symbolizes separation, mortality, and the spoils of life. The scythe is the instrument that death, personified in the reaper, uses to harvest souls.

The Cross is also a frequent symbol. The Cross is the symbol of Christianity. With different shapes and sizes of arms, wanting to represent a diversity of meanings, this symbol is used by a multitude of Christian-based cultures. The Christian Cross, also called the Latin cross, has a vertical arm that is longer than the crossed one. The Romans used this type of cross to execute criminals, and Jesus Christ was, thus, sacrificed upon one. This symbol represents resurrection and eternal life. The Trinity Cross, or clover, represents the suffering of Jesus Christ in his crucifixion, in which the ends of three intersecting circles represent the Trinity. The Passion Cross, which is the Latin cross with pointed ends, represents the suffering of Jesus Christ in his crucifixion.

Another aspect of funerary symbology refers to professional symbols that are associated with a varied set of professions or the branch of business practiced by the mausoleum family owner.

Usually in Portugal, chapel-type tombs have a small space for gathering inside, where family members can have some proximity to their deceased (Figure 4a). In the Conchada Cemetery, in addition to traditional mausoleums, there are narrow tombs with no possibility of staying inside, and their small interior space is completely filled with shelves for the accommodation of coffins or urns (Figure 4a,b). These are introduced through the metal gate at the front, or through small hatches at the back.



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

#### 4. Narrow Mausoleums and Their Architectural Styles

The narrow mausoleums constitute “small chapel-shaped mausoleums”. They have a width of only 1.2 to 1.5 m and a length of about 2.5 m. Funerary structures this wide are not very common in Portuguese cemeteries, especially those with an entrance from the back, so it is believed that it could be a regional form of burial [14].

These mausoleums form remarkable sets, characterized by having a very diverse and rich stylistic and iconographic expressiveness (Figure 5).

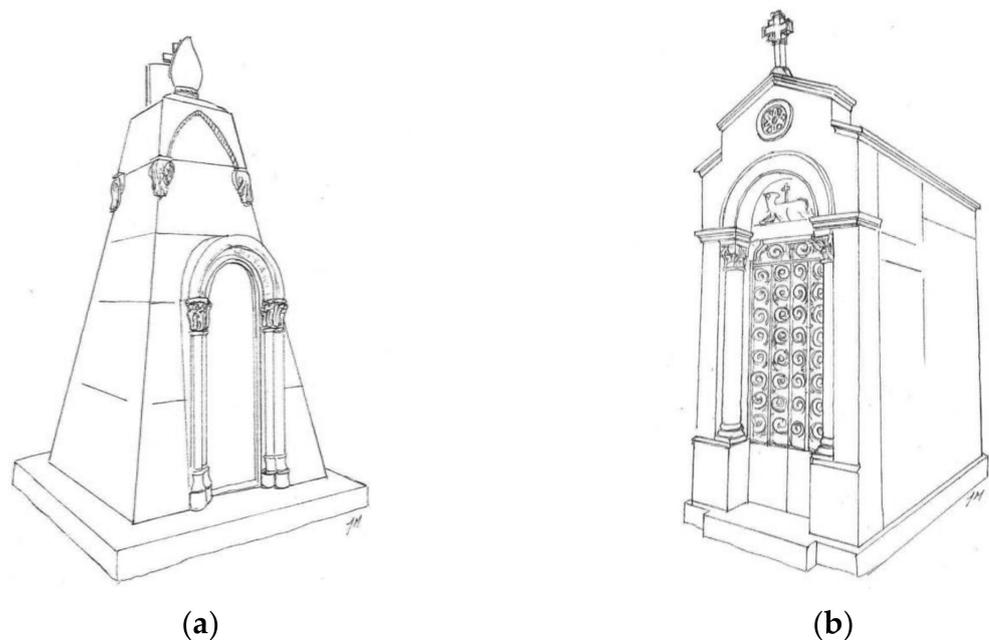
All architectural expressions and forms reflect different moments of society, translating the way of life of different groups that make up that society. These architectural expressions are materialized in buildings and spaces built by the ruling classes, who use them as landmarks of passage and dominion over others. As an integral part of this scenario, cemeteries are no exception to the rule, becoming places for demonstrations of wealth and social power, and showing a clear hierarchy of spaces. Thus, the funerary buildings of the wealthiest people and those with greater social power adopted the architectural styles that were the fashion at the time of construction, in terms of execution and artistic

decoration of their tombs. Architectural styles are therefore excellent sociocultural markers and important chronological markers.

In Conchada Cemetery, the narrow mausoleum assumes, in a very creative way, different styles, such as the Neo-Egyptian, the Neo-Romanian, the Neo-Gothic, the Neo-Manueline, the Neo-Classical, the Neo-Baroque, the Beaux-Arts, Art Nouveau, Art Deco, and even Casa Portuguesa (Portuguese House), which coexist randomly throughout the cemetery (Figures 6–10). An interesting curiosity is that the narrow mausoleum, being a local typology, does not follow the French models widely disseminated through architectural manuals [12].



**Figure 5.** View of a set of narrow mausoleums.

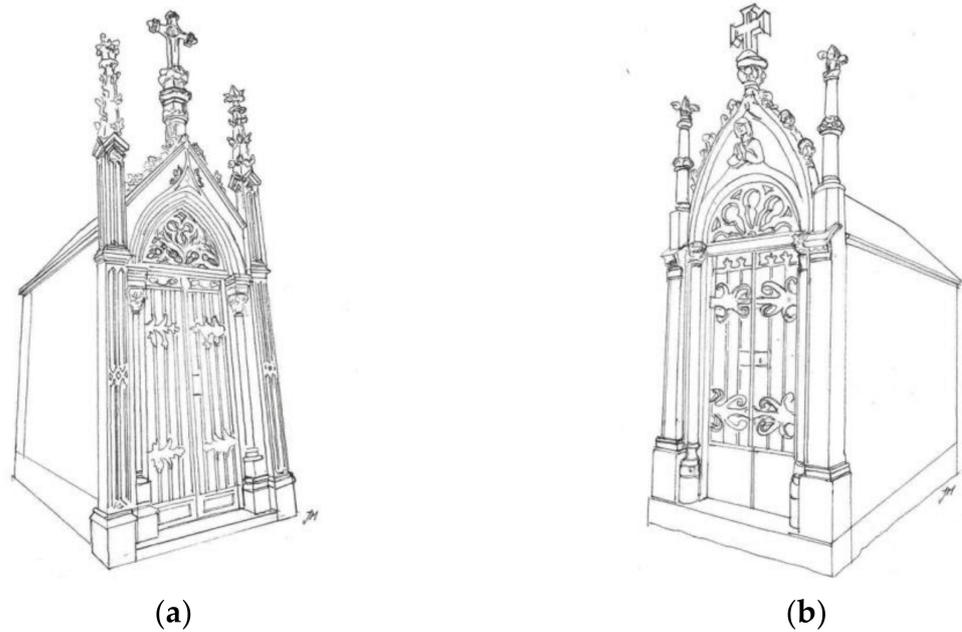


**Figure 6.** Examples of architectural styles of the narrow mausoleums: (a) Neo-Egyptian and (b) Neo-Romanesque.

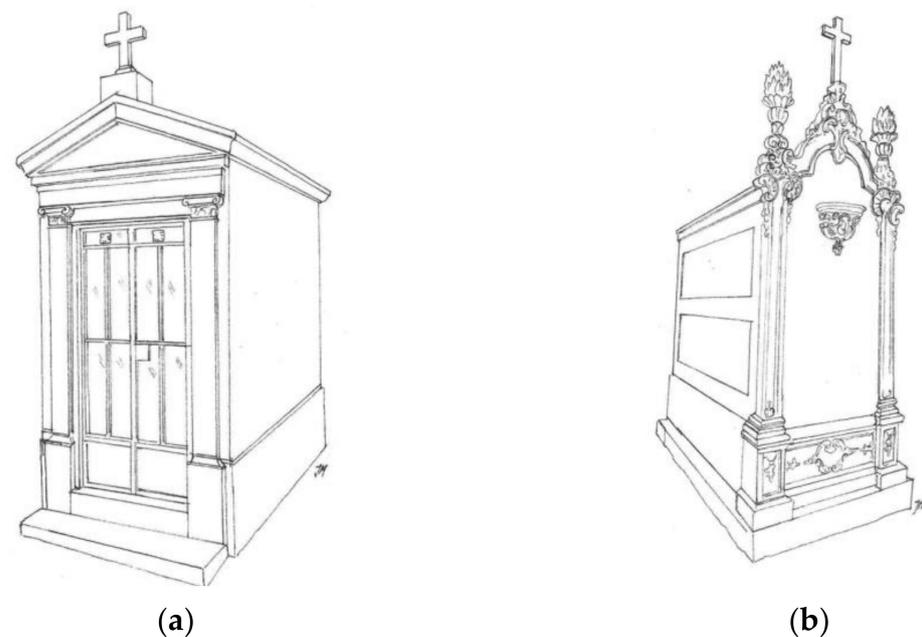
The different styles displayed by the narrow mausoleums are well identified and are recognized by the artistic and architectural symbols, techniques, and materials characteristic of the time in which they were built.

The Neo-Egyptian-style narrow mausoleums present the foundations of Egyptian architecture, containing porticos with sloping walls, reminiscent of the pyramids, with elements alluding to Egyptian art, such as the winged sun (Figure 6a).

In Neo-Romanesque structures, one may see a set of characteristic symbols. The most used ones are certain flowers and plant wreaths, allegorical figures (namely those representing Christian virtues), certain animals (such as the dog, to demonstrate fidelity), the cross (as a symbol of the Christian faith), inverted torches, hourglasses and genies of death (inspired by the tombs of Classical Antiquity), and angels (of different types), among many others (Figure 6b).



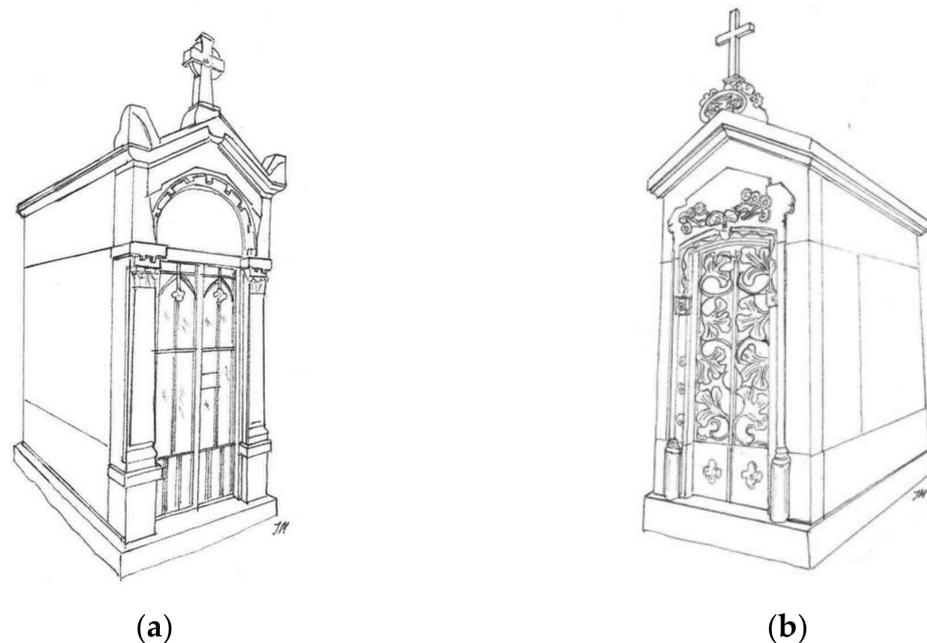
**Figure 7.** Examples of architectural styles of the narrow mausoleums: (a) Neo-Gothic and (b) Neo-Manueline.



**Figure 8.** Examples of architectural styles of the narrow mausoleums: (a) Neoclassical and (b) Neo-Baroque.

The Neo-Gothic style, in the 19th century, contains elements that allude to the architecture of the late Middle Ages. There is a reinterpretation of the Gothic style: verticality, pointed arches, spires, pointed and slender towers, slope of the roof, battlements, stained glass windows, and glasses. The characteristic constructive system consists of stone masonry, as well as the use of iron in the structure (Figure 7a).

Neo-Manueline was a revival architecture and decorative arts style developed in Portugal between the mid-19th and early 20th centuries. The style adopted the characteristics of Manueline (or Portuguese late Gothic) of the 16th century. The Neo-Manueline is a revivalist architecture, typically romantic, which copies the most superficial aspects of the Manueline decoration, applied in buildings adapted to the needs of its time. It is based on the technical advances that came with the industrial revolution, both in terms of materials and machines, hiding modern constructions, often with metallic structures (the vanguard of the time). It uses all kinds of innovations, such as bricks or industrial ceramics, preserving, whenever possible, basic issues developed in Neoclassicism, such as the functionality and profitability of architecture, simply adapted to other aesthetics [15].



**Figure 9.** Examples of architectural styles of the narrow mausoleums: (a) Beaux-Arts and (b) Art Nouveau.

In the Neoclassical style (Figure 8a), the following elements of Greco-Roman architecture, Renaissance, and Mannerism appear: full arches, triangular pediments, entablatures, architectural orders (Doric, Ionic, Corinthian, Tuscan, and Composite), podiums, and domes. The construction system is based in stone masonry, with marble or granite finishing. Whitewash and even tiles could be used.

The narrow mausoleums from the Neo-Baroque period (Figure 8b) have volutes on the pediment and pillars (not columns), alluding to the Ionic architectural order.

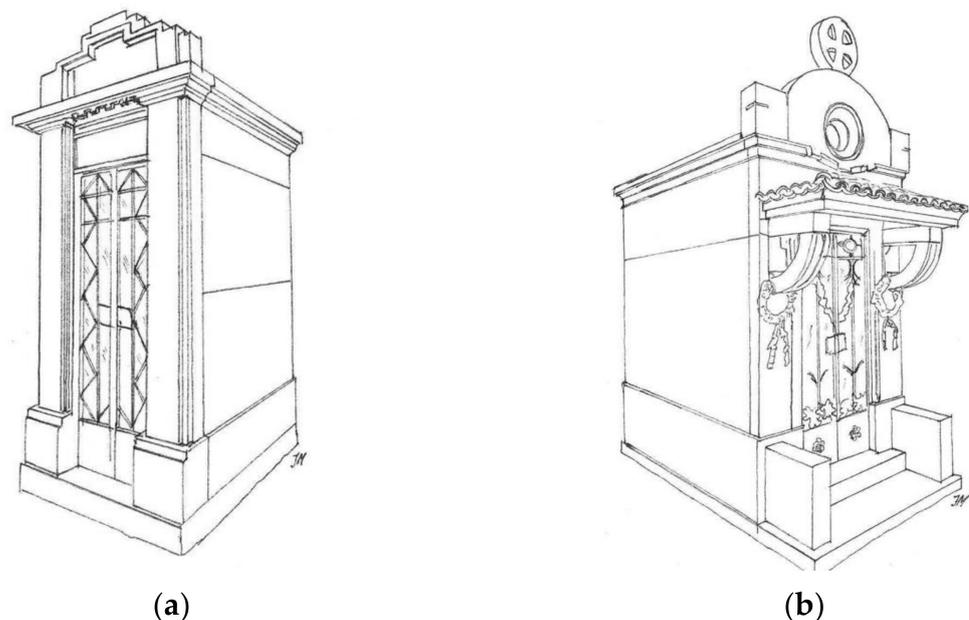
Beaux-Arts (Figure 9a) relied on sculptural decoration along modern, conservative lines, employing French and Italian Baroque and Rococo formulas combined with an Impressionist finish and realism. Slightly over-scaled details, bold sculptural support consoles, cornices rich in depth, garlands, and sculptural enrichments in the brightest finish the client could give. Features of Beaux-Arts architecture include the following: flat roof, arched windows, and arched and gabled doors. The classical details include the following: references to a synthesis of historicist styles and a tendency toward eclecticism; symmetry, sculptures (bas-relief panels, figurative sculptures, and sculptural groups), murals, mosaics, and other works of art, all coordinated in the theme to affirm the building's identity. Classi-

cal architectural details include the following: balustrades, pilasters, garlands, cartouches, and acroteria, with a prominent display of richly detailed brackets (staples), brackets, and support consoles; moreover, subtle polychromy is also included.

In the Art Nouveau period in Portugal, funeral art contains floral motifs (palm leaves, roses, etc.) and curvilinear lines, glasses, and stained glass. The materials used consist of iron, concrete, bronze, and glass [16]. These motifs are implemented in the railing, in the door frames of the mausoleums, and also carved into the statues and pedestals and even in the mausoleum structure (Figure 9b).

From the beginning of the 20th century to the period between the two world wars, Art Deco [17] appears (Figure 10a). The characteristics of this style are symmetry, geometric figures, the predominance of straight lines, scaling, superimposed planes, curves, friezes giving the idea of movement, and stylized nature (flowers, animals). The construction system makes use of reinforced concrete. The finishings include the following: marble, granite, and stone powder. In the first half of the 20th century, the modernist period emerged, characterized by the absence of ornaments, wide openings, and the use of reinforced concrete.

The aesthetics of the Portuguese House style (Figure 10b), according to Raul Lino's formulation, merge the imagery of the family house (balconies, arcades, porches, flower beds and flower boxes, sloping roofs, eaves, spires, weathervanes, and panels of tiles) with that of a village church, including bell towers and a finishing cross [18].

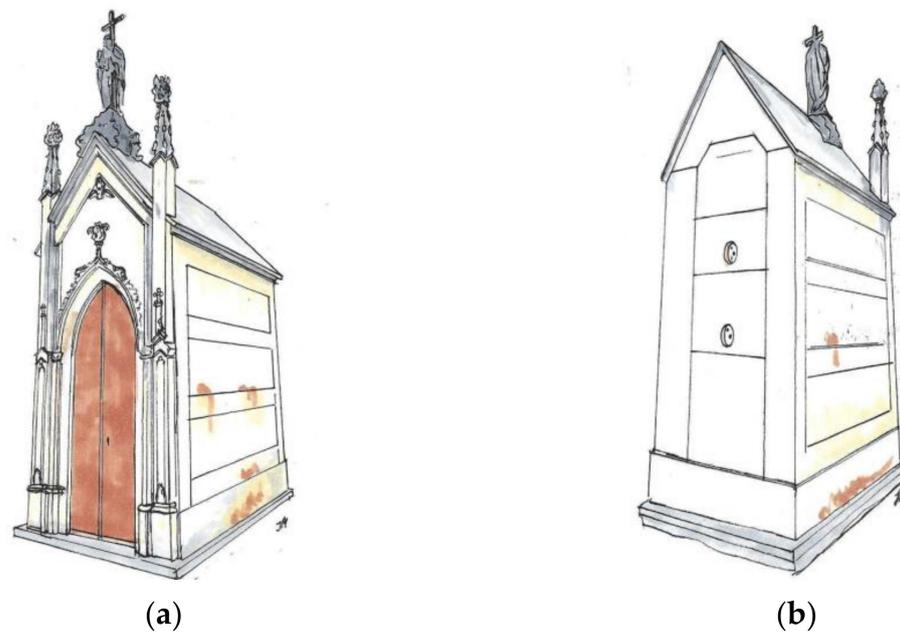


**Figure 10.** Examples of architectural styles of the narrow mausoleums: (a) Art Deco and (b) Portuguese House.

### 5. Access to the Interior of the Mausoleums

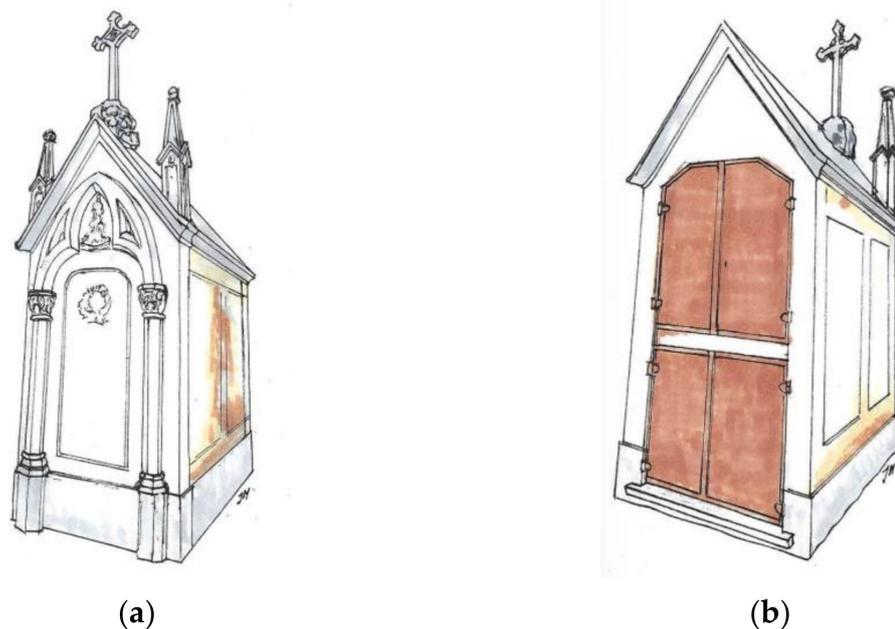
As previously mentioned, there are two ways of accessing the interior of the narrow mausoleums: from the front of the structure and from the back.

Narrow mausoleums that have the entrance located in the front are usually higher and may have a conditioned access from the back, materialized through removable stone slabs, thus making it possible to take advantage of the upper part of the deposit (Figure 11a,b).



**Figure 11.** Perspectives of a Neo-Gothic tomb with access from the front: (a) view from the front and (b) view from the back.

The mausoleums with access via the back are lower, and the main façade, in the area where the access gate would be, is filled with iconographic symbols (Figure 12a,b). The entrance through the back made this type of mausoleum less expensive, as it did not possess a decorative metalwork gate.



**Figure 12.** Perspectives of a Neo-Gothic mausoleum with access from the back: (a) view from the front and (b) view from the back.

## 6. Conclusions

The narrow mausoleum typology, despite having a generic construction form similar to that of traditional mausoleums, has a very unique visual character that is characteristic of the Conchada Cemetery. This type of mausoleum assumes a wide variety of architectural styles and is presented in two types: one in which the entrance is made at the front and the

other with the entrance at the back. The narrow mausoleums with an entrance from the back would be more economical, as they do not have a door made of decorative metalwork; however, they still have a rich and varied iconography.

The narrow mausoleums form remarkable groups which distinguish the Conchada Cemetery from others spread across the country. Considering this fact, it would be important to deepen its study and promote its protection and classification as a differentiated funeral heritage in the European panorama.

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