

# Legend and History of the Arrábida Convent



## Legends and myths

The story goes that on arriving in the Serra da Arrábida in 1539, Friar Martinho said: "If I'm not in heaven, I'm in its suburbs". Since time immemorial, the Serra has been a spiritual place and undoubtedly one of the national territories with the greatest symbolic presence in the collective consciousness. Legend has it that in 1215 the merchant Hildebrant left England for Lisbon. He had been sailing for days when a storm arose and the ship was lost. It was a dark night, a violent storm, and at every moment the sailors feared they would be smashed on a rock. Hildebrant, who was particularly devoted to Our Lady, ran to his cabin to pray to the image he was carrying but couldn't find it. He didn't give up and the whole crew prayed to Our Lady to help them. A flash of light appears, night becomes day and the storm subsides. Guided by the light, they sail safely to the coast of Arrábida. In the morning, Hildebrant and his companions climb the mountains in search of the place where they had seen the light that had saved them. With astonishment, they discovered the image of Our Lady that Hildebrant had taken on board the ship.

They thanked God for his intervention and believed that when Our Lady appeared there, she had chosen him and wanted to be venerated there. The merchant built a hermitage and a house for him to live in, becoming the first hermit monk. The Ermida da Memória became a place of pilgrimage and worship.



With its natural degradation, the Old Convent was founded during the reign of King João III (1542). Thanks to the intervention of the Duke of Aveiro, João de Lencastre, Friar Martinho de Santa Maria settled there and a Franciscan convent was established. The first four Arrábidos friars - Friar Martinho, Diogo de Lisboa, Francisco Pedraita and São Pedro de Alcântara - lived there in cells

carved out of the rock in very austere conditions. During Friar Martinho's time, D. Jorge de Lencastre (son of Duke João) began work on the convent, which was suspended out of respect for the friar, who felt that greater austerity was necessary. After his death, work resumed on the so-called New Convent. The work continued - D. Álvaro (cousin of D. Jorge) had the guesthouse built and the guardhouses designed; his daughter-in-law had two chapels built, while his son D. António had the Sanctuary of Bom Jesus built in 1650.

The family of the 1st Duke of Aveiro successively sponsored this work. The legend of Hildebrant was the starting point for the cult of Our Lady of Arrábida and has not been forgotten in this New Convent - above the main altar we find a painting alluding to it (it was probably painted by José do Avelar Rebelo around 1650). The construction of the New Convent was not always consensual and it is said that after the move, the image of Our Lady of Arrábida was not happy and "fled" back to the Hermitage (the place she had originally chosen). The legend and cult of Our Lady of Arrábida gave rise to the Círio - in the Círio Box in the Convent you can read that it began in 1258.

The hermits always lived in caves, higher up in the mountains, in the so-called "Old Convent". These Franciscans were known as the "Spirituals" and, unlike the other friars of the Order, they lived only for prayer, refusing worldly things. For this reason, they always considered the New Convent a luxury and kept to their caves. In this New Convent, the monks were "on a waiting list", waiting for a brother to die so that they could occupy his cave. In 1834, with the extinction of the Religious Orders, the convent passed to the Palmela house. In 1990, it passed to the Fundação Oriente, which restored it and uses it mainly for conferences and colloquia.

