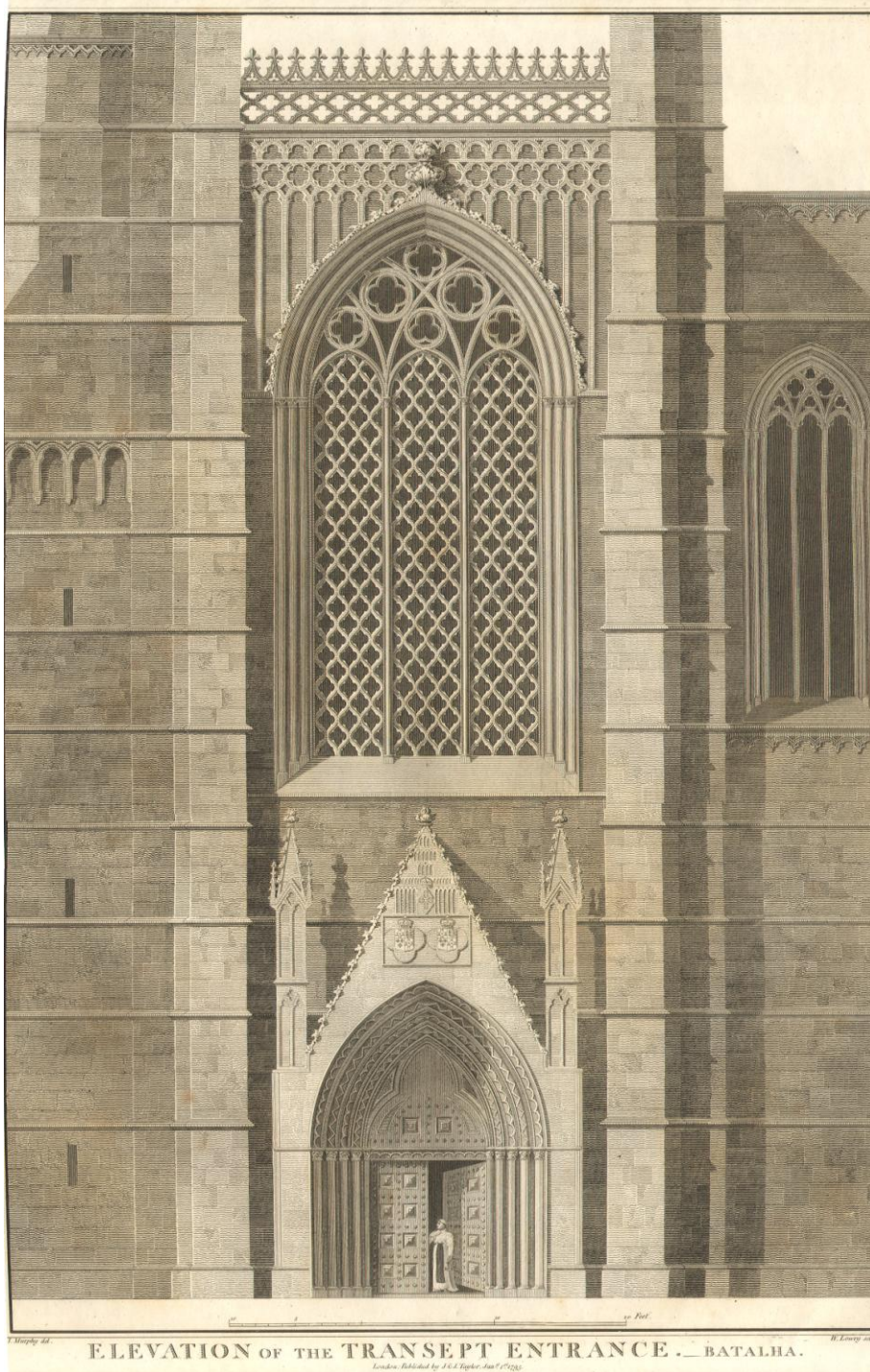


Visitor's guide to the Monastery of Batalha





## **Introduction:**

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The objective of this guide is not to be an exhaustive factsheet of this World Heritage Monument, but rather to give all the necessary information to the public so that when they explore the Monastery, they can experience feeling part of the space and, this way, live their visit.

Only this way shall they be able to picture it in detail and understand how it was run.

Essentially this guide shall be a summary of the main historical and artistic events of the Monastery, one of the greatest showcases of gothic art in Portugal where, furthermore, the Manueline Style was born.

Whenever we write about a Monument, it is also our intention to inspire people to other aspects than the history. In this case, our goal is precisely to encourage people to develop respect for the conservation and restoration of our ancestral legacy, being as this is a site of National Architectural Heritage.



## How it all began...

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It was in the year 1385 on August 14th, eve of the day of the Assumption of Mary as the Portuguese and Castilians were getting ready for battle to claim the Portuguese throne, that King João, Master of Aviz Order, made a vow to the Virgin – if he won this battle, he would build a grand monument in her honour.

Through their sheer skill and superior weaponry, the Portuguese won.

That being the case, King João I kept his promise, having built the Monastery of Santa Maria da Vitória, or more commonly known as The Monastery of Batalha.

The precise starting date of its construction is unknown, although it is believed that the works began around 1386 or 1387 under the leadership of architect Afonso Domingues, since the ongoing wars with Castile and the purchase of suitable land (the battleground lacking essential materials for construction, abundant water, wood and stone, which had to be transported from afar – more precisely oolitic limestone, a type of rock found throughout the area) delayed the starting date of construction.

Soon after the building of the Monument got under way, the King entrusted its religious tutelage to the Order of Saint Dominic – a state-sanctioned Order dedicated to preaching and the salvation of souls. As a mendicant Order, it encouraged study and advocated renouncing ownership of worldly goods for a life of strict poverty dependent on the charity of others.

Key to this code of conduct were the confessor Lourenço Lampreia, a Dominican friar, and the chancellor João das Regras, who had great admiration for the Order. The Monastery was to be donated to the Order with all rights and belongings, under the auspices of the friar Lourenço Lampreia.

The site chosen for construction, about 3 km from the battlefield, was the so-called Quinta do Pinhal estate, an area of about 14 hectares, bought from Egas Coelho, supporter of the king and his companion in arms at the time, and his mother, Maria Fernandes de Meira. This location was also situated close to the main communication routes, which gave access to the most important points of the region as well as Lisbon.

Being an unpopulated area, the Town that today goes by the name of Batalha grew as the Monastery was being built, as the workers needed a place to settle.

From just a small cluster of dwellings, streets, roads and more began to emerge, and as time went by, it was granted the designation of Town on March 18, 1500 by King Manuel I.



## The Monastery: a journey across six centuries

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The Monument that stands before us today is not exactly the same as the 15th or 16th century Monastery. Many disparities can be observed, whether in terms of the building and spaces or the purposes for which they were intended.

There are 3 major factors which must be taken into account for the effect they had:

1. The earthquake in 1755,
2. The French invasions (in 1808 and 1810),
3. The extinction of the Religious Orders, with the consequent abandonment of the conventual space itself and its confiscation by the State.

And so, first of all the earthquake struck and destroyed many parts of the Monastery, some of which were never rebuilt.

After the French invasions, a trail of severe destruction took place, followed by pillaging, fires, etc., which resulted in a great physical damage. But worse still was the destruction of a third and a fourth cloister, which had begun to be built in around 1551 and was reduced to a few walls. Lastly, the disappearance of the Religious Orders in Portugal was also a factor which did not help to put a stop to the devastation.

Moreover, in this post-liberal period the State's urgent need for further income coincided with a wave of anti-clerical feeling. The Monastery was even put up for sale at public auction, but the amount asked was too high for anyone to afford.

As a result, this patrimony, having been left to rot, began to deteriorate more and more, while the friars' absence resulted in the arrival of other unwanted „visitors“, people who, with the space now unoccupied, felt free to take whatever they liked.

The Monastery continued in a state of disrepair until 1840, when the great campaigns to restore the National Monuments began.

This Landmark was lucky to be the first Portuguese Monument to be restored, by Luís da Silva Mouzinho de Albuquerque, Inspector General of Public Works of the Kingdom and in charge of the project.

This restoration, inspired by the romantic mood prevailing in Portugal, was part of a reevaluation of the gothic style which had been felt a little throughout Europe since the end of the 18th century.

In 1836, King Fernando II came to Portugal to marry Queen Maria II, and in one of his voyages around the country, he happened upon the Monastery in its current dilapidated state. Moved by what he saw, on returning to Lisbon he began to lobby the Government, using his influence to achieve the restoration which he stated was “for this monument with which I am so obsessed”.

As the restoration progressed, the monument began to have a new life, but much had already been lost by then.

Later on, the incorporation of various institutions within some of the spaces would also result in certain alterations to parts of the actual Monument. It should not be forgotten that it has been the stage for a wide variety of events and uses: it was once a school, a prison, a fire station, a post office, a tax office, and so on.

Nonetheless, one thing remains true!... It is still the Epitome of the Gothic Style and one of the most gigantic medieval convents ever built in Portugal, and finally it is the Monument where, in the words of Afonso Lopes Vieira, “our nation is best represented”.

Due to its significance, in 1907 it was declared a National Heritage site.

In 1980 it was created the “Museu do Mosteiro”, according to Law 559/80 of December 4, and its staffing announced the following year, as part of the Portuguese Institute of Cultural Heritage (IPPC). In 1983 it was included in the group of monuments classified as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO.



## The Architectural Styles represented in the Monastery:

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The Monastery of Santa Maria da Vitória is the most significant Gothic monument on Portuguese soil. To a certain extent, of equal importance is the sculpture, whether in terms of its decorative imagination or, more importantly, as examples of tomb architecture.

Originally, the Monastery's first architect Afonso Domingues imposed a simpler style known as Radiant Gothic, but later Huguet introduced vastly richer Flaming Gothic elements, which can be noticed in the Founder's Chapel and in the Monastery's Main Façade.

Often, great cavities are incorporated into the walls, atypical for Portuguese architecture, as well as certain elements which highlight the adoption of techniques learned abroad and adapted to the Portuguese style.

The vaulting ceilings are less heavy. The emphasis is on vertical lines with pointed archways, gables, pinnacles and so on.

As we pass by on the road, we notice the main façade, which looks just like a church with three emphatic vertical naves, the main one taller than its flanking naves due to the height of its supporting buttresses on either side, essential as supports and decorative elements. The entire surface of the Monastery is finely worked in detail. This sacred ensemble is then embellished by stone gargoyles.

On entering the Monument, we notice the vaulted surface decoration of mainly crisscross and starry patterns, and tall windows fitted with stained glass, mostly to be found in the Apse of the Church and the Founder's Chapel.

The Manueline style can also be seen within the Monument, namely in the Royal Cloister and the Unfinished Chapels.

The pointed ogive arches are held up by an innovative system of ribbed nervures. In addition the Monument has been exuberantly decorated with maritime symbols and stylized vegetable forms, armillary spheres, crosses, lotus flowers and so on.

Finally, the Renaissance Style is represented in the round arches of the balcony found above the gateway to the Unfinished Chapels. Its decoration is inspired by Greco-roman religious motifs, which took their inspiration from the human form. It appears thus, sandwiched somewhat incongruously between the Manueline style of this space. It dates from 1533 and is attributed to Miguel de Arruda, a true Renaissance architect.



## Who were the Architects of the Monastery?

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The construction of the Monastery of Santa Maria da Vitória took a long time to be „completed“.

During this time, a variety of Architects were put in charge of the construction, some more than once while others barely had time to take stock of the work up to that point. But some managed to stand out from the others, such as:

Afonso Domingues (first Architect of the Monastery) – from the start of construction to about 1401.

Huguet (second Architect of the Monastery, of foreign nationality) – appearing for the first time in 1401/2 until 1437; apparently his death was in early 1438.

Martim Vasques – from 1438, until his death somewhere between September 1447 and August 1448.

Fernão de Évora – nephew of Martim Vasques, Architect between 1448 until his death in 1477.

Guilherme – from 1477, length of service as Architect unknown.

Mateus Fernandes – appearing for the first time in 1480, but subsequently removed by the King to be replaced by João Rodrigues. He reappears again in 1490 and remains until 1515, the date of his death. It is during this second period that he is the dominant force of the building“s construction.

João Rodrigues – from 1480 to date unknown, also known as Master of the stain glass windows.

João de Arruda – from 1485 to date unknown.

João de Castilho – from 1528 to 1532

Miguel de Arruda – from 1533 to date unknown.



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## The Monastery: spaces and the life lived therein

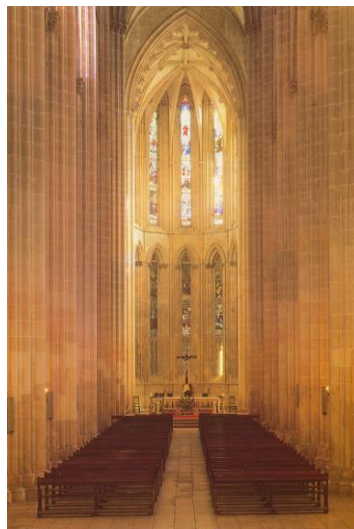
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As we approach the Main Façade, we notice a highly carved doorway, defined by an arch of curving and counter-curving lines (called an ogee arch) coming together in a high point where the coat of arms of King João I and Queen Philippa of Lancaster are carved. At the top, we see Christ crowning the Virgin with further carving found on the inside edge of the archway itself.

This arch represents the Celestial Court, consisting of six archivolts of pointed arches which at the uppermost point form the tympanum, where the four evangelists and Christ in Majesty can be seen. The archivolts contain 78 effigies separated by baldachins and as we get closer to the centre, they begin to represent ever higher ranks within the Church hierarchy. They consist of the following: Saints and Martyrs, in the final two archivolts, the Kings of Israel next, then the prophets, while musical angels carry medieval musical instruments in the second such as the portative organ, medieval flute, psaltery and viola, and in the first there are the seraphim, represented by their three pairs of wings and symbolizing the highest level of angelic hierarchy.

Flanking the doorway are twelve figures notable for their size, much larger than the others, these being the twelve Apostles and as such representing pillars of the Church, „supporting” as they do all the other figures and therefore clearly indicating the symbolism of “go ye into all the world...”





As we enter the monument, we see we are inside a church laid out simply in the shape of the Latin cross, as is typical of Portuguese churches. Before us is the unmarked tomb of Mateus Fernandes and at our right that of the Knight Diogo Gonçalves de Travaços, present at the conquest of Ceuta and advisor to the Infante Pedro, Lord of his realm and tutor to his children.

Buried next to the Founder's Chapel, which today continues to hold the Royal Pantheon, is the tomb of Martim Gonçalves de Maçada, who saved the life of King João I, in the Battle of Aljubarrota.

The building of the church started in the apse, continued along the naves and was concluded with the doorway and main façade.

It is composed of three naves (the main, higher nave, and one more on each side), and four apsidal chapels.

The naves' windows contain the oldest and most famous stained glass of the entire Monastery, also recognised as the oldest known in Portugal, dating from the 15th century. To these we can add the stained glass windows of the Main Chapel, which depict important scenes from the Bible and date from two different time periods, the second decade of the 16th century (mostly 1514-1517), during the reign of King Manuel, such as the Annunciation and Visitation, the Three

Kings and the Exodus from Egypt, and from the 20th century, designed by Ricardo Leone, perhaps to substitute lost or permanently damaged panels.

Above the side door of the church is found the effigy of the Patron Saint, Our Lady of Victory, and in front, at the northern end, Our Lady of Suffering. (Being the place where, once upon a time, the Altar of Jesus was found, and now located in the Chapel of Trinas in Lisbon.

The church is completely vaulted, with 32 large openings in its main section, a rarity in Portuguese gothic architecture which shows how influential the latest ideas from Europe had become. A further example of this is the vaulted ceiling of the main chapel, never before seen in Portugal.

In the main chapel, the high altar was once found here – later relocated to the crossing – as was the choir where once the holy canticles were recited and of which there remains no trace.

The apsidal chapels were for the most part decorated in gold leaf or inlaid marble, and during some 400 years set apart if at times only temporarily for the tombs destined for the Pantheon of King Duarte.

In the north end of the Church the Sacristy can still be found, with a small annex called the Silver House, where the Monastery's Treasures were kept (both closed to the general public for renovation).

The church underwent some changes around 1425, the year in which the Founder's Chapel was added to the plan by express order of the King and intended as a resting place for the "children and grandchildren of Kings", accessed directly by the nave on the right side. And so for the first time in Portugal, a space exclusively for the royal lineage was built.



The Founder's Chapel is square-shaped with an octagonal head, measuring 19.8 meters on each side, and it is where the royal mausoleum is situated.

Construction would have begun around 1425 and concluded in 1434, the year in which King João I and Queen Philippa of Lancaster were buried there. Aside from the dome, whose gothic keystone is carved with the coat of arms of King João I, there are eight smaller trapezoid arched ridges, all decorated with vegetable motifs. On the inside, it is held aloft by irregular arches arranged at an angle to the walls and set in columns decorated at the top with foliage. The underside of each one is decorated in a variety of colours.

The exterior was at first finished in the shape of a pyramid but when this fell during the earthquake of 1755, it was never replaced.

There are also eighteen windows, all stained glass. Much of the stained glass is modern, though in some strips there are small fragments from the 15th century with coats of arms, insignia, emblems and so on.

At the centre is the shared tomb of the founder king, João I, with his queen Philippa of Lancaster that rests on eight lions. This is an example of a new „style“ of burial tomb that, in emphasizing greater naturalism, was part of an ever-increasing obsession with how the human form was depicted and thus shows the adjacent statues of king and queen as if seen from above.

The king is shown wearing his battle armor with sword in hand, and the queen in a cape, Bible in hand and holding her husband's hand in the other (representing simultaneously the Christian, devout mother and the dedicated wife). This kind of conjugal tomb was directly influenced by the English.

This imposing tomb does not, contrary to tradition, have sides covered with effigies of saints or biblical scenes, but instead, on each respective flank, the king and queen's epitaphs are inscribed in Latin, detailing their merits and deeds. Positioned at the top, in line with the heads of the sovereigns, are two baldachin canopies depicting the royal coats of arms, once upon a time in colour, and the cross of the Order of the Garter with the inscription "honny soit qui mal y pense".

A frieze decorated with stylized foliage runs all around the edge in which the insignia of King João I can be read "Pour bien", and that of his wife "Il me plait".

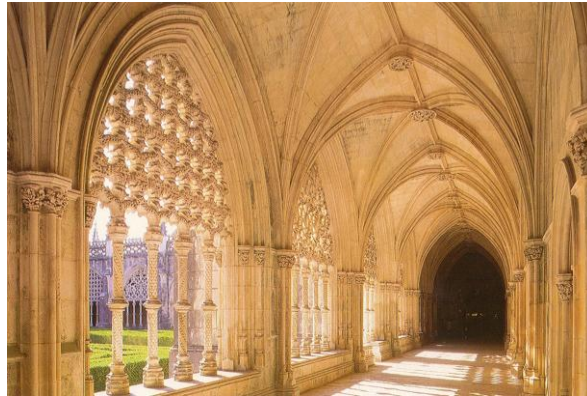
Flanking the tomb on the south side and from left to right are the tombs of their children, inserted into arcosoliums (architectural frames of a similar design to the main façade of the church) and showing their respective mottos and escutcheons: the Infantes Fernando, the Martyr of Fez, João, Master of the Order of Santiago and his wife Isabel of Barcelos, Henry the Navigator (D. Henrique o Navegador,).

Duke of Viseu and Master of the Order of Christ, the only one with a statue at its side, Pedro, Duke of Coimbra, Regent of his nephew the boy king Afonso V, who later died in Alfarrobeira, and wife, Isabel of Aragon.

To the left are the tombs of kings Afonso V, the African, and wife Isabel of Coimbra, King João II, the Perfect Prince and finally his son, Prince Afonso, who died at an early age when he fell from his horse. This space erroneously hosts these neo-gothic tombs from the end of the 19th century, which were supposed to be placed next to King Duarte in the Unfinished Chapels. On the other walls of the Chapel to the right there used to be found altars for each respective Infante, painted with their religious saints, which disappeared without a trace during the French invasions, while on the left there apparently used to exist closets where the liturgical vestments and implements intended for the religious services were kept.

Next to the tomb of King João I, there also used to be an altar, with the apostolate.

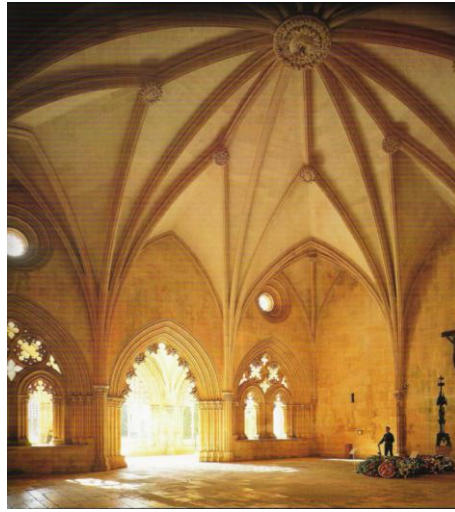
Today nothing remains to remind us of how the Chapel first looked, with its wealth of vestments, paintings, jewels and armory.



Besides the Church and the Founder's Chapel, there are two Cloisters, or in other words two covered quadrangular galleries around a patio which facilitated quick access between various points, as well as serving for monastic activities or simply sheltering from the wind and rain and taking a walk. The first is the so-called Royal Cloister or the Cloister of King João I. It measures about 55 meters from side to side, with four galleries with seven sections in each, and a further four at the corners. It was originally built in the Gothic style with just one floor, as was common during this period, meaning that the roof functions also as a terrace running round each gallery. It is cross vaulted throughout and the central-facing section is heavily buttressed and finished with gargoyles. This cloister was begun at the same time as the church, in the final years of the 14th century and continued to be built, from 1402 onwards, by Huguet.

The pointed arches are from the time of King João I, but it was during the reign of King Manuel that the „final touches“ were applied, where the spaces were filled with flags. This way, Mateus Fernandes decorated the entire interior with fine Manueline vegetable motifs (trunks, branches, leaves and fruit), crosses and armillary spheres. All of them supported by columns.

The top of the columns are all encrusted with vegetable motifs, except for one representing two pairs of friars, clearly Dominican, who are holding open large books. At the centre of the Cloister, facing east, we look up at a pointed structure resembling a cone or arrow, which is called the Spire of the Stork and further to its left a small bell tower.



Facing the interior, we see the ribbed doorway which leads to the Chapter House, flanked by pairs of large windows. It is carved from floor to ceiling with vegetable motifs, small heads, and human figures.

The friars come together at the Chapter House, presided over by the prior. All meetings would be held here, especially whenever it was important to come to a decision on something concerning the convent.

In the case of The Monastery of Batalha, it is a square space about 19 meters wide, unadorned and somber but grandiose and architecturally surprising. Its only archway is in the shape of an eight-pointed star, with sixteen ridges radiating outwards and no pillar or column there to support it. The keystone is carved with the arms of King João I. Encircling it are eight secondary keystones, decorated with vegetable motifs. Such is the audacious quality of its construction that it inspired the historian and Portuguese novelist from the 19th century, Alexandre Herculano, to create a legend – the so-called „Legend of the Vault, in which it is said that “the vault did not fall. The vault will not fall”.

On the corbel, in a corner of the room is a figure wearing a hat with a hanging cloth, holding a ruler in hand that supposedly symbolizes the architect in charge of construction, nevertheless being already dead by the time the room was completed.

Set into the end wall is a large stained glass window representing Scenes from the Passion of Christ, dating from 1514.

Within this space is also found the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, with its mortal remains brought to Batalha in 1921 and entombed in 1924. A permanently lit cast-iron candelabrum called the “Flame of the Motherland” emits a steady light, its wick dipped in olive oil. This work by the Architect Lourenço de Almeida, given by the 5th Military Division of Coimbra, is a piece of revivalist art representing the soldiers of all times.

Above the unmarked tomb can also be seen the effigy of the Christ of the Trenches who was taken by the Portuguese troops onto the battlefields of World War I.

On the gravestone of the unknown soldier are written the following words. *“Portugal eternal by sea by land by and by races to the unknown soldier who died for the Motherland”*.

On leaving this room, if we head to our right, we find a beautiful Manueline doorway which gives onto the ancient dormitory of the friars. This is a large open space, rectangular, about 50metres long by 10 metres wide. It is nonetheless an appealing space with a large barrel vaulted ceiling defined by its generous gothic arches.

This area has come to be known these days as the “Monk’s Cellar”, maybe for having had various functions every time there was the need to do some additions or remodeling (namely serving as a storeroom for fruit and a cellar). Today it is the Interpretation Centre of the Monastery of Batalha.

In the northern corner is the washroom pavilion, vaulted in two sections and with tall windows richly decorated by Boutaca. The Manueline washroom is comprised of various strategically placed basins, decorated with carved figures and still working with running water from the Jardoeira spring. It was here that the friars did their ablutions before and after meals.



Next, we enter the old refectory, about 30 meters long by 7 meters wide with barrel-vaulted ceilings, where the friars would eat together. These days the space is designated the Museum of Offerings to the Unknown Soldier and it is where all the tributes of nations, public figures or ex-combatants to the Unknown Soldier are held.

Nothing remains of this primitive refectory, except a pulpit or rostrum attached to one of the walls from where a friar would read sacred texts during mealtimes. Plates and other utensils would be passed through openings communicating with the kitchen, of which traces in the wall still can be seen.



In the communicating passageway between the Royal Cloister and the Cloister of King Afonso V, there is the old kitchen where to this day one can see remains of the primitive chimney, and openings in the walls which served as spaces to keep cooking utensils.



To the north of the Royal Cloister can be found the Cloister of King Afonso V, somewhat smaller (not reaching 45 metres in width) and much more simple architecturally. This cloister, being more austere, was faithful to the ideals of the mendicant orders. It was built in the second half of the 15th century, under the direction of Martim Vasques and Fernão de Évora, and was one of the first in Portugal to have two floors, which for then was ahead of its time.

It also contains four galleries with seven sections in each, and a further four at the corners, vaulted simply but decisively at two points. Emanating from the centre are paired and pointed arches. The keystones of the vaults are smaller, having lost the ornaments of the previous cloister and now bearing the royal shields of King Afonso V (the wheel of Saint Catherine, always depicted between teardrops) and that of King Duarte (rings of interlacing tree trunks).

On the upper floor roof, stone has been substituted by tiling and wood (on the interior). No longer is there a terrace and instead we find a roof, sloping in a single direction.

This Cloister was the setting for various monastic dependencies, distributed equally between the first and second floors and dedicated to the daily business of the Dominican friars. And so, on the first floor the kitchen, the woodhouse, olive oil store, the larder and a small refectory (used only on special occasions) could be found, the winery, workshops for the handymen and the so called “cloaca”, which were primitive latrines. On the second floor were the dormitories, the infirmary, the library and the Monastery’s notary.

Two more Cloisters were built sometime during the 16<sup>th</sup> century.. These Cloisters by all accounts were the largest, with an untold number of dependencies (two cloisters – one for the Servants and the other for Laymen – and three patios). They housed more dormitories, the guest houses, infirmary, the school, the servants’ room, barns, haylofts, stables, the granary, the livery and so on. These cloisters were connected directly to that of King Afonso V, and were so big that reached as far as the actual door of the Unfinished Chapels.



Unfortunately, at the time of the French invasions, these Cloisters suffered no end of atrocities at the hands of Napoleon's soldiers, who watched them burn as the flames reached as far as the Cloister of King Afonso V. Later, they were completely demolished.



If we move on a little, we reach the Unfinished Chapels, a space that shares a wall with the apse of the church, linked by a rectangular patio built during the Manueline period. King Duarte ordered its construction to serve as a private pantheon for himself, his family and descendants.

Octagonal in shape, it contains seven chapels radiating outwards, all linked by a smaller trapezoid chamber originally used as a sacristy where all the liturgical vestments and implements intended for the celebration of the Eucharist were kept, while the eighth side is filled by a magnificent Manueline doorway from which they were all accessed.

Each Chapel shows the coat of arms and emblems of those for whom it was intended as a resting place.

The Manueline doorway we previously mentioned is a delightfully carved piece about 15 meters tall by 7.5 meters wide, built at the start of the 15th century by Mateus Fernandes. It is worked in its entirety with endless trilobated and keel-shaped archivolts.

Its decoration is mostly composed of vegetable motifs (branches, stems, trunks, leaves, and so on), so minutely worked that some historians have drawn parallels with Moorish art.

The constant reliance on graphic motifs, here at Batalha, is reiterated in this doorway, which also bears the mottos of King Duarte, “leauté faray”, and “tã ya serey”. This inscription appears repeatedly on the first four archivolts of the door, the first phrase appearing three times and the last some 204 times as a sign-off.

Over the doorway we see an architectural feature that stands out from the rest, a verandah or balcony – an attempt, during the reign of King João III, to continue and finish construction of this space. This verandah of typical Renaissance style, structurally and decoratively of Italian inspiration, is a joy of classical architecture, designed by Miguel of Arruda, and dating from 1533.

King Duarte is today buried in the lengthwise chapel, facing the magnificent Manueline doorway which grants access to the central space of this section of the building.

The chapel to the right of King Duarte was intended for King João II, since it bears his insignia and arms, the following for King Manuel. The space to the left was supposedly reserved for King Afonso V (actually containing the smaller tomb of his first-born son, João). In the remaining two chapels are tombs placed there during the restoration of the space that had been up till then in the Church of the Monastery, one belonging to family members of the Counts of Miranda and the other of indeterminate origin since the coat of arms is chipped away.

Besides this Pantheon, there was once other monastic construction adjoining the Monastery that has since disappeared. Such was the case with the convent wall, along which a stream once ran that fed onto all the agricultural land and vineyards, its woodland and orchards – since sold at public auction in 1835.

Also gone is the small gothic church of Santa Maria a Velha, active while construction of the Monastery took place and where some Architects were buried.