

Monastery of Santa Maria da Vitória – BATALHA



The Monastery of Santa Maria da Vitória was commissioned by King John I following the vow made on 14th August 1385 to Nossa Senhora (Our Lady), that a monastery would be built if the Portuguese army won the battle against the Castilian army. The battle, which took place that day in Aljubarrota, a bit to the south of Batalha led to the victory of the Portuguese King, who did not hesitate to stand by his promise.

Thus, from the very beginning, the Monastery stood as a symbol of Portuguese independence, legitimating the Avis dynasty that King John I was initiating.

The magnificence of the project, the novelty of the aesthetic solutions, the masters who were chosen reflect the importance this monastery had for its founder.

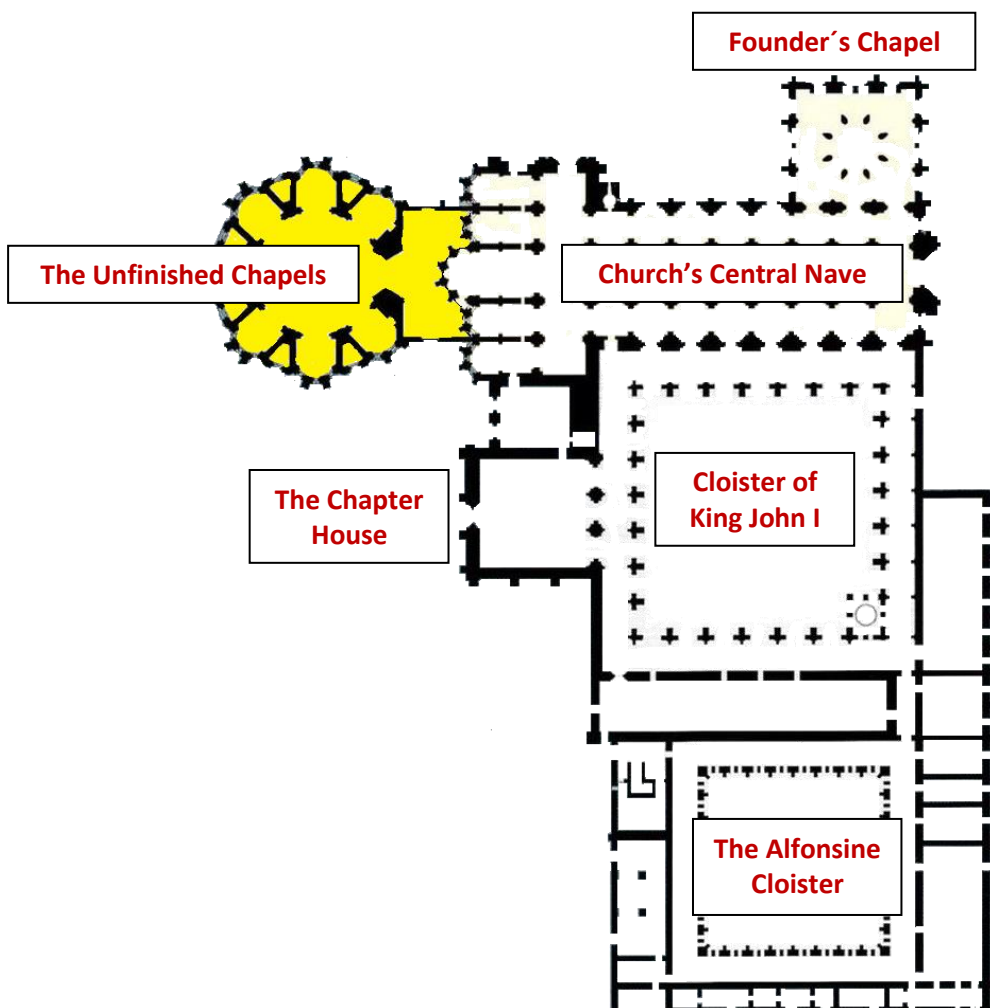
The construction works began around 1386, and the most significant interventions extended till the first two decades of the 16th Century, during the reign of King Manuel I. Meanwhile, in 1388, King John I had turned over the monastery to the Dominicans, who settled there till the extinction of all religious orders in the 19th Century. A school of theological studies was founded here by the Dominicans who took advantage of the comfort of the facilities and their relative isolation and contributed to enhancing the Monastery's importance.

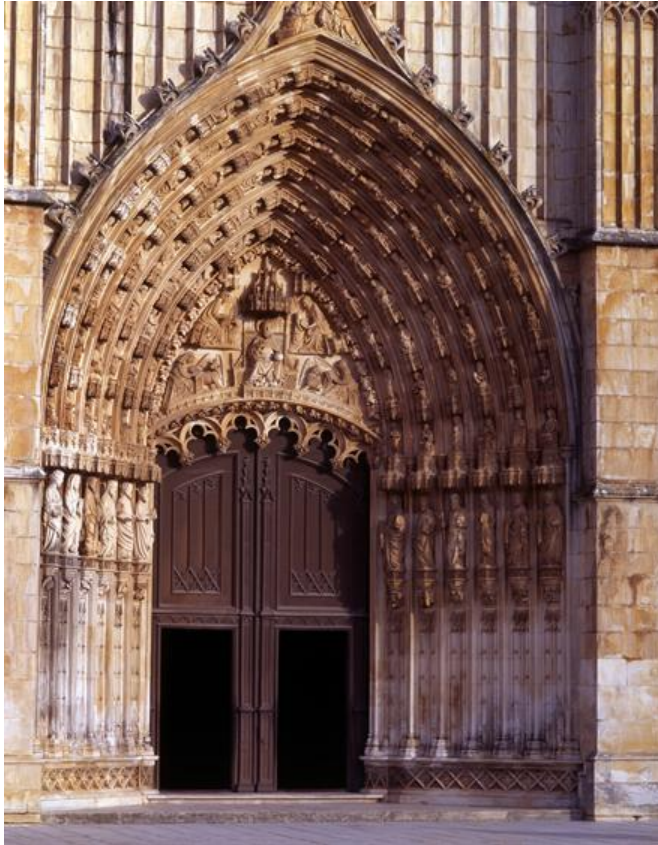
The programme of the Monastery of Batalha was outlined and executed by the two first architects, the Portuguese Afonso Domingues and the Catalan (?) Huguet. The first must have been the most renowned Portuguese architect at the time for King John I to have assigned such an important project to him. In addition to designing the entire project, he initiated the church, the chapter house and the galleries to the south and east of the Cloister of King John I. His aesthetical proposal complies with the plastic values in force at the time that were slightly

archaic contrasting with the intervention of the second architect who introduced late-Gothic lines and became head of the construction works of Batalha in 1402. He concluded the works that had been initiated by launching the vaults, he designed a programme for the main façade with a splendid iconographic portal, he completed the cloister and finished the roofing of the chapter house with a single vault with dimensions that reflect technical boldness. In the two burial chapels added to the initial project - the Founder's, commissioned by King John I, and the Unfinished Chapels, commissioned by his son, King Duarte - Huguet was able to unleash his creative side, erecting two high quality structures. However, the premature death of the King thwarted the completion of the Unfinished Chapels, thus triggering a last intervention by King Manuel I, in the beginning of the 16th Century, in order to complete them. Even though they were never finished, this last intervention transformed the Unfinished Chapels into one of the most creative momentums of Manueline art, particularly in its exquisite portal, designed in a moment of true inspiration by architect Mateus Fernandes.

In the second half of the 15th Century, the Batalha Monastery was extended with a second cloister - the King Afonso V cloister - built by architect Fernão de Évora, between 1448 and 1477. Its simplicity contrasts with the exuberance of the cloister of King John I, with a mysticism that indicated a need for change felt across Europe regarding the manner in which Christianity was experienced. The architectonic quality of the Batalha Monastery is also seen in the stained glass windows, produced for the first time in Portugal, by German stained glass artists. In 1983, it was added to UNESCO's World Heritage List.

In 2013 it was the second national monument most visited, with 290 000 visitors.





The church's Main Gate

The main gate was designed by Master Huguet and its iconographic richness may only be compared with that of other great European Gothic Cathedrals: the Apostles leading to Christ are on the doorposts; the figure of Christ is on the tympanum and is flanked by the Four Evangelists, while the archivolts contain virgins, martyrs, popes, bishops, kings of Judah, prophets and musical angels disposed according to celestial hierarchy.



The Church's Central Nave

The central nave of the Church of Batalha, one of the largest churches in Portugal, rises up to 32.5 metres, further amplified by the dense columns which enhance the verticality of the space and form a continuous visual wall. The ribbed vault was also created by the architect Huguet and possesses great ornamented keystones.



The Founder's Chapel

Built by Huguet as of 1426 on orders of King John I for the pantheon of his royal lineage. The square configuration leads to a central octagon rising up to great height, forming a canopy or baldachin to glorify the joint tomb of King John I and Queen Philippa of Lancaster. It is, for several reasons, an outstanding example of Portuguese architecture.

The joint tomb of King John I and Queen Philippa of Lancaster, it was the first joint tomb in Portugal built by orders of King John I who is represented with his full armour, depicting an innovative model of Portuguese medieval tombs.



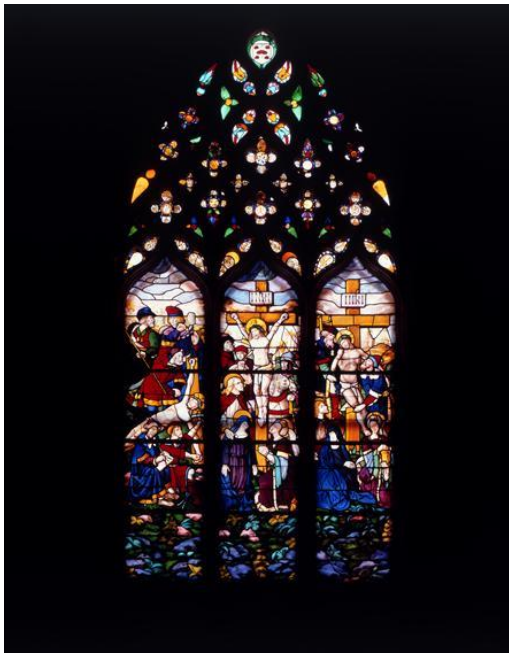
The Cloister of King John I

Initiated by Afonso Domingues and concluded by Huguet, it is one of the best examples of cloisters in Portuguese architecture due to the harmony of its proportions and great elegance of the architecture. The arcade screens which were built later on have motives and exuberance that depict the Manueline style.



The Chapter House

Initiated by Afonso Domingues and concluded by Huguet, who changed the initial project by designing a single vault, with no central support, which constituted an impressive technical challenge, the Chapter House is a reference of monastic living. In one of the angular corbels stands a figure of an architect (Huguet?) who still seems to demand from his visitors a tribute to his constructive boldness.



The Chapter House Stained Glass Window

The great window in the Chapter House has the best kept set of primitive stained glass artwork that coloured the windows of the Batalha Monastery. Dating back to the 16th Century, they constitute a great triptych devoted to the Passion of Christ



The Old Dorm/Interpretive Centre

It was a primitive dorm for friars. It is a vast room, covered by a Gothic barrel vault with powerful toral arches which enhance its bold appearance. The design of the dorm as a common area, similar to the one in Alcobaça, was inconsistent with the Dominican friars, whose lifestyle justified the existence of individual cells.

Former Refectory/Unknown Soldier Offerings Museum

The primitive canteen, occupied by the Unknown Soldier Offerings Museum since 1924, is a wide but quite austere space. This simplicity is depicted in the reader's pulpit (copy of the original), showing the coat of arms of King Duarte and his wife, the Queen Leonor of Aragon.



The Alfonsine Cloister

Built during the reign of King Afonso V, it is the first two-storey cloister ever to be erected and was destined for the day-to-day life of the Dominican friars. Its simplicity allows visitors to experience some of the mysticism that is felt in these cloistered spaces.



The Great Portal of the Unfinished Chapels

A magnificent triumphal arch, honouring King Manuel I, built by Mateus Fernandes and included in the monarch's ambitious programme to conclude the Unfinished Chapels, commissioned by King Duarte.



The Unfinished Chapels

Commissioned by King Duarte for his family pantheon, they were initiated by Huguet, who designed a large 8-sided roundabout with seven chapels. The premature death of the king and, soon after, of the architect himself, hindered the conclusion of the construction. One of the chapels houses the remains of King Duarte and his wife, since the beginning of the 20th Century.