



Medieval Heart of Portugal

Romanesque and Gothic architecture

16–22 May 2022 (M1 357)

7 days • £2,460

Lecturer: John McNeill

A journey through central Portugal bringing together a superb group of Romanesque and Gothic buildings.

From Coimbra to Évora, we cover historic cities, fortified towns, and much beautiful landscape.

Major Roman sites widen the theme.

Combine with *Polyphony in Portugal, 22–27 May 2022*.

The area consists of a ribbon of land between the river Mondego at Coimbra and the Alentejo, the region south of the Tagus. The Alentejo is low-lying and fertile, while the land north of the Tagus is hilly, well-wooded and scoured by numerous narrow valleys.

Roman colonisation responded to this geography by creating a province for western Iberia (Lusitania) with a magnificent port at the mouth of the Tagus (Lisbon), a provincial capital at Mérida, and substantial cities to the north and south at Conimbriga and Évora. Rather remarkably, much of Roman Conimbriga is still there, albeit revealed through excavation, likewise Évora.

Notwithstanding these Roman survivals, the core of the tour is medieval. After the Islamic conquest of Iberia, initial steps towards the Christian resettlement of Coimbra and the land north of the Mondego were taken around 1100. The decisive advance, however, was made in the 1130s under Afonso Henriques. Afonso loosened ties with the neighbouring kingdoms of Spain, wrested control of Lisbon and Santarém from the Moors and elevated Portugal from a county to a kingdom.

To consolidate his victories, Afonso founded churches and new towns – thus the cathedrals of Coimbra and Lisbon, the fortified town of Santarém and the dazzling new military complex at Tomar del Cristo. These are the decisive, and very splendid, Romanesque buildings of Portugal. In their wake came the great essays in early Gothic – of the new Cistercian monastery of Alcobaça and the stunning cathedral of Évora.

The second of the tour's themes is the extraordinarily inventive, almost fanciful architecture of the later Middle Ages – climaxed in the architectural style known as Manueline. One might see this at a number

of levels – in the traceried cloisters at Batalha and Belém, the airy elevations of the Carmelite monastery in Lisbon, the fanciful façades of Coimbra or the dazzling arrangement of royal tombs at Alcobaça.

Itinerary

Day 1. Fly at c. 12.00 noon from London Gatwick (TAP Portugal) to Porto. Drive south to Coimbra. First of two nights in Coimbra.

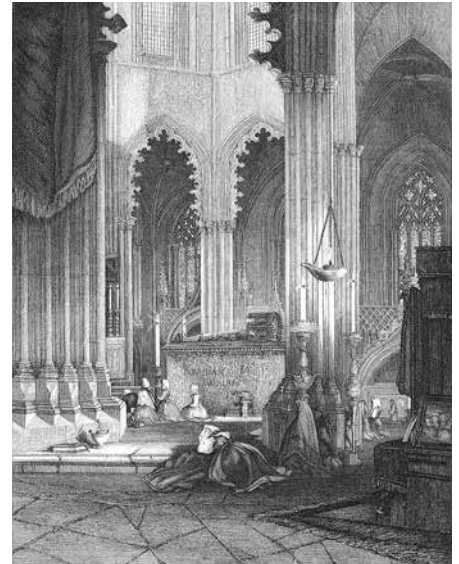
Day 2: Coimbra. The 12th-century 'old cathedral' is the earliest and best-preserved Romanesque great church in Portugal, with an elevation related to the major monuments of north-western Spain, the cathedral of Santiago above all. Above is the Machado de Castro museum, housing a superb collection of medieval sculpture, while across the river are the former royal Clarissine convents of Santa Clara-a-Velha and Santa Clara-a-Nova.

Day 3: Conimbriga, Alcobaça, Batalha, Tomar. Initial drive south to Roman Conimbriga before continuing to two monasteries of exceptional beauty. Alcobaça is the pre-eminent early Gothic monument of Portugal, architecture of breathtaking lucidity. Batalha was founded by King Joan I in 1385 to commemorate his victory over the Castilians – and boasts the greatest set of medieval tombs in Portugal, plus extraordinarily inventive, and English-looking, tracery windows. First of two nights in Tomar.

Day 4: Tomar. Crowning a hill above the town, the mighty Templar Convento del Cristo is one of the most important medieval military-religious sites to survive in western Europe. Its octagonal Romanesque sanctuary stands at the centre of a record-breaking seven cloisters and courtyards – heaven for anyone interested in cloister design. Free afternoon in Tomar.

Day 5: Santarém, Lisbon, Évora. Continue south to glorious, fortified Santarém, home to the striking early 15th-century church of Nossa Senhora de Graça. Thence Lisbon – the airy and roofless arcades of Lisbon's late 14th-century Carmelite church, damaged and shored up to act as a memorial to the infamous 1755 earthquake. A visit to the great Manueline monastery at Belém before driving east into the Alentejo to Évora for the first of two nights.

Day 6: Évora. A day to savour one of Iberia's most beautiful small cities; including Portugal's best-preserved Roman Temple, the battlemented early Gothic cathedral, grand



Batalha, steel engraving c. 1850.

14th-century cloister and treasury, the royal church of São Francisco and the city museum – home to the stunning remnants of the cathedral's Netherlandish late medieval high altarpiece.

Day 7: Évora. Visit the tiled interiors of São João Evangelista before continuing to Lisbon airport. Fly from Lisbon to London Heathrow, arriving c. 6.45pm.

For those joining *Polyphony in Portugal*: in the early afternoon, travel by coach to your chosen festival hotel. The festival begins this evening.

Day 12, 27th May, final day of the festival. By coach to Lisbon for the flight to London, arriving Heathrow c. 5.45pm.

Lecturer

John McNeill. Specialist in the Middle Ages and Renaissance – John lectures for Oxford University's Department of Continuing Education. He is Honorary Secretary of the British Archaeological Association, for whom he has edited and contributed to collections of essays on medieval cloisters, chantries, Anjou, and King's Lynn and the Fens. In 2010 he established a biennial series of international conferences on Romanesque visual culture. His most recent effort in this field – *Romanesque Patrons and Processes* – was published in 2018.

Medieval Heart of Portugal
continued

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £2,460 or £2,340 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £2,760 or £2,640 without flights.

By train: London – Paris – Hendaye – Coimbra: c. 20 hours, overnight. Contact us for more information.

Included: flights (economy class) with TAP Portugal (Airbus 319/321); travel by private coach; hotel accommodation as described below; breakfasts; 5 dinners with wine, water, coffee; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

Accommodation. Quinta das Lagrimas, Coimbra (quintadaslagrimas.pt): 5-star hotel in a former 18th-cent. palace. **Hotel Dos Templários, Tomar** (hoteldostemplarios.com): 4-star, modern business hotel. **Pousada dos Loios, Evora** (pousadas.pt): 4-star, installed in a former monastery. *Single rooms throughout are doubles for sole use.*

How strenuous? The tour involves a lot of walking in historic centres, where coach access is restricted, and a lot of standing. Streets and sites are roughly paved. A good level of fitness is essential. Average distance by coach per day: 76 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.