**Beat: Arts**

# The Birth of a Monastery

**A Voyage Immortalised in Stone**

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**USPA NEWS -** Lisbon . Late autumn . I find myself in the historic district of Alfama , delighted to discover fragments. of the city `s remarkable history and art .I climb the stone steps winding up the hill and stop before the ruins of the Paço da Alcaçova , the former Royal Palace within the walls of São Jorge Castle . From these ancient ruins , I gaze upon the magnificent panorama of the Tangus River .This medieval fortification was built by Moors in the eleventh century .After Lisbon was conquered in 1147 , Alfonso Henriques , the first King of Portugal , established his Royal Court here and transformed the Alcaçova into a Royal Residence .Centuries later , when Manuel I ascended the Portuguese throne in 1495 , the Palace entered one of the most remarkable periods in its history .Only one year earlier , on 7 June 1494 , Portugal and Spain had signed the Treaty of Tordesillas .The agreement divided the newly discovered and yet unexplored territories along an imaginary line drawn 370 leagues west of the Cape Verde Islands at approximately 46 ° 30 ' west of Greenwich . The lands lying east of the line were assigned to Portugal , while those to the west claimed by Spain .

In 1497 , King Manuel I summoned Vasco da Gama to the Royal Palace and entrusted him with a historic mission : to find a new maritime route to the East Indies by sailing around Africa . On 8 July 1497 , Vasco da Gama departed from Lisbon at the head of a fleet of four ships .After more than ten months at sea , having rounded the Cape of Good Hope , sailed along the eastern coat of Africa and crosses the Indian Ocean , the Portuguese expedition reached Malabar Coast . On 20 May 1498 , Vasco da Gama arrived at Calicut , today `s Kozhikode , opening the first maritime route between Europe and India ..In 1499 , Vasco da Gama returned triumphantly to Lisbon , bringing with him pepper , cinnamon and other precious spices from the East . Following the discovery of the sea route to India , King Manuel I ordered the construction of the Jeronimos Monastery at Belém , near the place from which Vasco da Gama `s expedition had deported. Construction began on 6 January 1501 .Under the direction of the architect Diogo de Boitaca , the first outlines of an extraordinary architectural vision began to emerge . It is become known as the Manueline style , a distinctly Portuguese from of late Gothic .

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