
Belmonte

ABOUT



All roads in this ancient settlement - its first charter was granted by king Sancho I in 1199- lead up to the hilltop granite castle. A document dated 1258 describes the construction: the lofty donjon, walls, bulwarks and the noble residence. Breaking this austere design, on the western wall, there is a fine twinned Manueline window finished with the symbols of Manuel, the armillary sphere and the shield of the Cabral family with its two goats. The family's most famous son is undoubtedly Pedro Álvares Cabral. Discovering Brazil in 1500, he had been born in Belmonte in 1467.

Next to the castle, there is the small, Roman-gothic church dedicated to St. James. Inside, a granite statue of Piety is impressive for its crude beauty, fitting well into the harmonious simplicity of this church. A church annex houses the Cabral pantheon although the remains of Pedro Álvares Cabral are to be found in the Church of Graça, in Santarém.

An important Jewish community settled in Belmonte, substantially increasing in size when the Catholic Monarchs of Spain issued a decree ordering the expulsion of all Jews in 1492, with the king of Portugal following suit in 1496. During this period, many Jews originating from Spain settled in towns and villages close to the border, such as Belmonte. Their houses are located, as was the rule, beyond the castle walls in the Bairro de Marrocos (Morocco Neighbourhood). There, it is possible to make out, engraved in stone by the sides of the doors, the resident's professions with scissors depicting the tailor, for instance.

Belmonte retains much of the medieval atmosphere of times when the Jewish community would have to practice its prayers, traditions and customs in secrecy even if Belmonte is now more than proud to be home to the Bet Eliahu synagogue.

On the road to Guarda, there is the Centum Cellas Tower. The origins of this odd construction have never been fully determined.