

ESPARRAGOSA DE LARES HERMITAGE OF THE VIRGEN DE LA CUEVA – ELEVATED AREA ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE URBAN CENTER – ESPARRAGOSA DE LARES (BADAJOZ)

DESCRIPTION

Religious building located on the outskirts of Esparragosa de Lares, on an elevated area of the Sierra de Lares, known as the Ermita de la Virgen de la Cueva. The sanctuary constitutes one of the town's main religious and landscape landmarks, visually dominating much of the surroundings of La Serena and the La Serena reservoir.

The hermitage houses the image of the Virgen de la Cueva, patron saint of Esparragosa de Lares and Honorary Mayoress of the town. Access can be made from the municipality itself via an ascending hillside path or by the road located to the right of the castle of Puebla de Alcocer. Next to the sanctuary stands the so-called Casa del Santero, a building historically linked to the control and maintenance of the religious enclosure.

HISTORY

The exact date of construction of the hermitage is unknown, although its historical origins are related to the Castilian conquest of Puebla de Alcocer and Lares during the 13th century. Popular tradition places the devotional origin of the sanctuary in a Marian apparition that occurred in a cave in the surrounding area. According to the legend, the image of the Virgen was taken to the town, but miraculously returned to the place of apparition, a circumstance that ultimately led to the construction of the hermitage on this site. The original image of the Virgen disappeared during the Civil War and was later replaced by the current sculpture venerated in the temple.

Below the hermitage stands the Casa del Santero, a building constructed by the Order of Alcántara to guard the sanctuary and control this strategic area of the mountains. The building is currently undergoing restoration to be used as a Nature Classroom.

HISTORICAL AND ARTISTIC DESCRIPTION

The hermitage is located in an elevated site of great landscape value, described by Pascual Madoz as a true "eagle's nest". From this enclave there are extensive panoramic views over the La Serena region, the La Serena reservoir and other landscape landmarks in the surroundings.

The building has a simple configuration, organised into two sections and a covered porch. Its architecture follows traditional mountain sanctuary models linked to pilgrimage spaces and popular devotion. Inside, the Baroque altarpiece and the image of the Virgen de la Cueva, patron saint of Esparragosa de Lares, stand out. The current sculpture replaced the one that disappeared during the Civil War.

The ensemble maintains a close visual and territorial relationship with the castle of Puebla de Alcocer and with the ancient historical roads that crossed this area of the region.

FIGURES AND ENTITIES RELATED TO THE POI

The hermitage is linked to the devotion of the Virgen de la Cueva, patron saint and Honorary Mayoress of Esparragosa de Lares. The sanctuary historically maintained a relationship with the Order of Alcántara, responsible for the construction of the Casa del Santero located beneath the temple.

Likewise, the building constitutes the canonical and social headquarters of the Hermandad de la Santísima Virgen de la Cueva, officially registered in the Register of Religious Entities of the Ministry of the Interior.

MOVABLE HERITAGE

Inside the sanctuary, the Baroque altarpiece and the image of the Virgen de la Cueva, patron saint of Esparragosa de Lares, are preserved. The current image replaces the original sculpture that disappeared during the Civil War.

INTANGIBLE HERITAGE

The Ermita de la Virgen de la Cueva constitutes the main centre of popular devotion in Esparragosa de Lares and one of the most significant religious spaces in the region.

The legendary tradition of the Marian apparition in a cave and the miraculous return of the image to its place of origin form an essential part of the local collective memory.

The sanctuary maintains a strong connection with the religious celebrations and pilgrimages dedicated to the patron saint, as well as with the activities of the Hermandad de la Santísima Virgen de la Cueva.

GRAPHIC DOCUMENTATION



Above, access to the hermitage from the Casa del Santero. Below, general view of the hermitage.





Image of the Virgen in her hermitage.



Access to the hermitage from the Casa del Santero.



Access gate from the road to the castle of Puebla de Alcocer.



Views of Esparragosa de Lares and the surrounding region from the hermitage.