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MOBILITY ROUTES AND URBAN HIERARCHY IN NORTH-EASTERN ALENTEJO AT THE END OF THE MIDDLE AGES: ROAD NETWORK AND SUPPORT STRUCTURES FOR TRAVELLERS*

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Abstract

In Portugal, some medievalists have considered the road network and the support structures for travellers, such as inns, among their main areas of interest. The studies carried out have provided information about these elements more in the region north of the Tagus than to the south. On the other hand, there is still a need for studies that address the role of these urban centres in the circulation between the two kingdoms and their area of influence, as well as the contribution of these elements to the definition and evolution of the urban hierarchy on both realms. Thus, we intend to contribute to a better understanding of the role of small Portuguese border towns in the circulation within and beyond the realm through the study of a set of cases from one region (the present-day Alto Alentejo). We will begin by presenting the towns under research and reflecting on the available sources for the study of circulation, exploring the limitations and potentialities posed by the existing data. Subsequently, we will reconstruct the road network and the buildings and institutions that supported travellers.

Keywords: Urban History, Socio-economic History, Transport, Mobility, Medieval Portugal.

VÍAS DE CIRCULACIÓN Y JERARQUÍA URBANA EN EL NORDESTE ALENTEJANO A FINALES DE LA EDAD MEDIA: RED VIARIA Y ESPACIOS DE ACOGIDA

Resumen

En Portugal, algunos medievalistas definieron la red viaria y las estructuras de apoyo a los viajeros, como las posadas, como una de sus principales áreas de interés. Actualmente, los estudios realizados permiten conocer estos elementos más en la región al norte del Tajo que al sur. Por otro lado, aún son necesarios estudios sobre el papel de estos centros en la circulación entre los dos reinos y su área de influencia en este dominio, así como la contribución de estos elementos a la definición y evolución de la jerarquía urbana en ambos reinos. Así, pretendemos contribuir a una mejor comprensión del papel de las pequeñas villas y ciudades fronterizas portuguesas en la circulación dentro y fuera del reino, a través del estudio de un conjunto de casos de una región (hoy Alto Alentejo). En este sentido, comenzaremos presentando las villas objeto de estudio y reflexionando sobre las fuentes disponibles para el estudio de la circulación, explorando las limitaciones y potencialidades que plantean los datos existentes. A continuación, reconstruiremos la red viaria y los edificios e instituciones de apoyo a los viajeros.

Palabras clave: historia urbana, historia socioeconómica, transporte, movilidad, Portugal medieval.

INTRODUCTION

In Portugal, some medievalists defined the road network, the support structures for travelers, such as inns, *aposentadoria* and the agents involved in land transport as one of their main areas of interest[1]. Furthermore, historians who focused on a locality and/or region[2], pilgrimage routes (MORENO, 1986a: 78-89, 1992: 75-83, 2000: 41-52), the itineraries of kings and their officials (Freitas, 2004: 316-330), journeys (Coelho and Santos, 1990a: 5-12; Gonçalves, 1988: 193-194), and the domains of major monastic institutions (Gonçalves, 1989: 380-386), usually had as one of their concerns to reconstruct, analyze, or at least describe the road network, the buildings and institutions supporting travelers, and means of circulation and transport such as ferry boats[3].

The studies carried out have provided information about the road network, accommodation structures, and professionals associated with land and river transport, especially in areas located north of the Tagus. This is particularly evident with the *Estrada da Beira* (Beira Road) (Monteiro, 2012), which was one of the main routes that connected the coast to the interior, facilitating circulation between Portugal and Castile. Conversely, knowledge about these topics in regions south of the Tagus remains much scarcer, with a few exceptions, such as the surrounding areas of Évora, Elvas, the Setúbal Peninsula, Setúbal, and the Algarve. Furthermore, despite the interest of Portuguese historians in border towns[4] and those of small and medium size[5], there is a need for studies that address the role of these settlements in the circulation between Portugal and Castile. That would include evaluating the sphere

[1] For example, the authors Carlos Alberto Ferreira, Humberto Baquero Moreno, Iria Gonçalves, Maria da Luz Barros, Helena Monteiro e João Romão: Almeida, 1968; Moreno, 1979, 1982; Gonçalves, 1988a, 2003, 2005-2006, 2013; Barros, 1995; Monteiro, 2012; Romão, 2012. Also see, Freitas, 2003, 2004, 2006b, 2010, 2019; Medrano Fernández, 20006, 2007, 2008, 2010.

[2] Considering the extensive bibliography on these subjects, and the impossibility of citing every contribution, we only mention some examples: Coelho, 1989, vol. 1: 400-424; Rodrigues, 1995: 330-340; Conde, 2000, vol. 1: 333-344; Oliveira, 2013: 212-215; Vicente, 2014: 274-289; Silva, vol. 1: 42-43, vol. 2: 46.

[3] On this subject, see: Braga, 1993: 373-388; Oliveira, 2013: 202-210; Duarte e Barros, 1997: 77-118; D' Abreu, 2006: 45-75.

[4] For a historiographic overview on this subject, see: Costa, 2020: 259-286.

[5] Considering the extensive bibliography on these subjects, and the impossibility of citing every contribution, we only mention the more recent historiographical overviews and theoretical framework studies: (Coelho, 2011; Andrade, Costa, 2011; Costa, 2013, 2016, 2018; Costa, Andrade, Tente, 2017; Silva, 2021a).

of influence of the towns, as well as determining how these elements contributed to the establishment and evolution of the urban hierarchy on both the Portuguese and Castilian sides.

The scenario for the Alentejo is somewhat surprising, particularly regarding the northwestern region situated on the border, with two urban constellations with centers in the Serra de São Mamede (Portalegre, Castelo de Vide, and Arronches) and Elvas. Interestingly, after the Beira frontier, this area was the main natural entry route from Castile and, in the 15th century was one of the main gateways for Castilian textiles and other products into Portugal (Ferreira, 1983: 43, 54, 56; Fernandes, 2011: 566-567).

With this article we aim to shed light on the role of small Portuguese border towns in the circulation both within and beyond the kingdom, by examining a group of urban centers located north of Elvas, mentioned in Fig. 1. We will begin by presenting the towns under study and reflecting on the documentation associated with circulation, exploring the limitations and potentialities posed by the existing data. Next, we will identify and reconstruct the road network and support structures in order to understand the role towns played in shaping the urban hierarchy in the area under study.

1. THE SMALL FRONTEIR TOWNS OF THE ALTO ALENTEJO AND MOBILITY: CHALLENGES FOR THEIR STUDY

In the 14th and 15th centuries, the northeastern border of the Alentejo encompassed thirteen towns located along the frontier with Castile: Montalvão, Nisa, Alpalhão, Castelo de Vide, Marvão, Portalegre, Alegrete, Assumar, Arronches, Monforte, Ouguela, Campo Maior, and Elvas. Elvas, however, is not considered in this text, as it was larger, and has already been analyzed[6]. Although the *Numeramento* (census) of 1527-1532 pertains to a later period, it revealed that these towns were small communities, except for Portalegre which was medium-sized in the context of the Portuguese kingdom (Fig. 1). Portalegre, Castelo de Vide, and Arronches were the most populated, with 1419, 911, and 832 dwellings (*fogos*), respectively, followed by Campo Maior, Monforte, and Marvão, with 664, 660, and 495. The last group included Nisa (349), Montalvão (181), Alegrete (263), Ouguela (163), and Assumar (159) (Dias, 1996: 540, 544).

The thirteen urban centers under study remained almost always under royal rule and, in the cases of Montalvão, Nisa, and Alpalhão, under the control of the Order of Christ. Nevertheless, at certain times, comparable to what occurred in other regions[7], the Crown granted the lordship of some towns to members of the nobility

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[6] On this town see: Correia, 2013.
[7] For example, for the region south of the Tagus see: Silva, 2021, vol. 1, pp. 136-147; Coelho, 2023.

as a reward for services rendered and/or to reinforce control over the border during times of heightened tension with Castile, especially in the late 14th century. For example, in the context of the wars of King Fernando (1367-1383) and King João I (1385-1433), Póvoa e Meadas were donated to Gonçalo Martins of Cáceres (1371) (Oliveira, 2011: 95) and Ouguela was donated to Friar Álvaro Gonçalves Camelo, Prior of the Order of the Hospital and Marshal of the royal host (1391[8]) and to Martim Afonso de Melo (1399[9]). The Portuguese monarchs managed to recover the lordships of these towns some years later[10], with the exception of Monforte (1455-1483, and again after 1501[11]). Assumar (1371-1483) remained for longer periods within the sphere of influence of the House of Braganza. (Coelho, 2023: 309-310, 316-317, 323-324, 338-339, 380, 382; 426, 432).

Between the 14th and 16th centuries, the economy of the thirteen towns under study was based on agriculture and livestock farming, which, as seen in the better documented cases of Nisa, Castelo de Vide, Portalegre, and Arronches, were combined with activities related to the production and processing of raw materials, such as textiles (Oliveira, 2011: 70-88; Fernandes, 2011: 571-572). These activities, together with the towns' geographical location, and annual fairs (e.g. Arronches and Ouguela), helped foment trade with other Portuguese urban centers, particularly with those of the Entre-Tejo-e-Odiana region (e.g. Avis, Estremoz, and Évora), and with Castilian towns along the border (e.g. Valencia de Alcántara and Albuquerque)[12]. Finally, these circumstances led to five of the towns under study – Castelo de Vide, Marvão, Arronches, Alegrete, and Montalvão – being considered by the kings as "dry ports (*portos secos*)[13].

The documentary *corpus* compiled within the scope of the Frontowns project is considerable, comprising nearly 4,000 records collected from district archives (Portalegre) and municipal archives, such as those of Castelo de Vide and Portalegre[14], and central archives (Torre do Tombo and the National Library of Portugal). However, the information available for the study of these localities presents certain

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[8] *Chancelaria de D. João I*, vol. 2, tomo 1: 260.

[9] *Chancelaria de D. João I*, vol. 2, tomo 3: 122.

[10] An example of that is the case of Castelo de Vide and Póvoas e Meadas. In 1384, the master of the Order of Avis rewarded Gonçalo Eanes de Abreu, his follower, by donating to him two towns, with full jurisdiction, and complete judicial authority, but bought the lordship back prior to 1395, claiming that a location situated on the border should belong to the Crown. *Chancelaria de D. João I*, vol. 1, tomo 1: 256; Oliveira, 2011: 114-115.

[11] Unlike Monforte, Assumar does not seem to have been reintegrated in the House of Braganza. ANTT, *Ch. de D. Manuel*, liv. 35, fl. 140v.

[12] Read about the professional activities in these towns in another article published in this number.

[13] These were settlements located along the land border with Castile that served as the main points of entry and exit for people and goods, as well as where taxes were collected on circulation and on imported and exported goods. Ferreira, 1983: 48, 52-55. On this subject, please refer to the article by Marcelo Andrade submitted in this thematic dossier.

[14] A more detailed view of the availability of documentary sources for this region will be published in: Silva, 2025, in press.

challenges that are well known to medievalists, and mentioned in relation to other regions (Andrade, 1994: 19-24; Silva, 2021, vol. 1: 17-39). First and foremost, the documentation reveals spatial and temporal asymmetries, with a greater volume of data for more prominent centers such as Castelo de Vide and Portalegre, and most of it dating to the 15th and 16th centuries. Similarly, documents produced by the kings far outnumber those issued by other municipal authorities, such as ecclesiastical and lay lords and municipal councils, accounting for about 90% of the collected records.

Comparable to what has been identified for other regions such as Beira, Baixo Mondego, and Trás-os-Montes[15], our vision of the road network is further hindered by other factors, such as the fact that roads are usually only mentioned in the sources to delimit properties or as points of reference. In some cases, especially for earlier periods, such as the second half of the 13th century, the terminology used is limited to words like *caminho* ("road"), *caminho público* ("public road"), or *estrada* ("highway"), without mentioning the destination they led to, which makes it difficult (or impossible) to accurately locate and reconstruct the road network. The same occurs when the route is referred to only by the name of an individual, such as the *caminho de Brás Afonso* (road of Brás Afonso) in Campo Maior in 1534 (Freitas, 2003: 118), or by adjectives like "new" and "old". Examples include references to the *old road* mentioned in the jurisdiction of Alegrete in 1401 and in that of Ouguela in 1440[16]. In fact, as other researchers have pointed out (Coelho, 1989, vol. 1: 407-408; Conde, 2000, vol. 1: 334, nota 252; Conde e Vieira, 2005: 70-71; Gonçalves, 2003: 476; Monteiro, 2012: 50), mapping a stretch of road can prove impossible, even when we know its function, (especially smaller roads). This is the case, for example, with roads leading to certain structures and facilities located in the outskirts, such as windmills[17], fountains[18], and places whose location is now unknown[19].

Likewise, the study of the movement of individuals and goods, the duration, the routes, travel expenses, and the impact of certain adverse circumstances on travel (e.g. wars and plagues) also becomes difficult due to the loss of notaries' records, tax payment registers – especially those related to circulation, such as tolls (Gonçalves, 1979a: 9) and customs duties (portage and tithe) (Gonçalves, 1979b: 122-123; Rosa, 2020: 73-83, 86-95) – as well as account books, council meeting minutes, and notebooks with itinerary notes. In fact, the travel notes of Duarte de Armas dating to the early 16th century, are the only known example records in which the

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[15] See, for example, Coelho, 1989, vol. 1: 407-408; Conde, 2000, vol. 1: 334, nota 252; Conde e Vieira, 2005: 70-71; Gonçalves, 2003: 476; Monteiro, 2012: 50.

[16] ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv. 20, fl. 111v.

[17] An example of that is the *caminho de Campo Maior até o Moinho del Barranco*. ANTT, *Gavetas, Gaveta XIV*, m. 5, n.º 3.

[18] Evidence of that is the case of the *caminho que vai para fonte do choncho* in the municipality of Alegrete in 1401. *Chancelaria de D. João I*, liv. 3, tomo 2: 243.

[19] An example of that is the *vereda do Salgueiro* in Ouguela, in 1439, and the *vereda do Prego da Bamba*, located close to the Cabeça dos Homiziados, in the municipality of Arronches, in 1505. *As Gavetas da Torre do Tombo*, vol. IX: 570 (Ouguela, 1439); ANTT, *Gavetas, Gaveta XIV*, m. 5, n.º 17 (Arronches, 1505).

author provides information about the distance between the towns he visited, and the features and conditions of the roads and bridges connecting them (Gonçalves, 2005-2006: 97-100).

Despite these lacunae, other types of documents have survived in significant numbers and sometimes provide data on the road network and, above all, on mobility, i.e. the letters of pardon[20]. In fact, in the royal chanceries, the letters of pardon account for a large portion of the documentation collected for the towns under study in the 15th and 16th centuries. For example, in the Chancery of King Afonso V (1438-1481), they represent around 41% of the documents found (Silva, in press). The narrative presented by a criminal often allows us to learn a bit more about mobility, such as the journeys undertaken to request instruments of pardon from a victim's relatives, the pardon letters themselves, and, in some cases, the flight to Castile to escape royal and municipal justice[21]. A few of the letters of pardon also mention some of the dangers that could befall travelers, as well as certain trade routes often associated with illegal activities.

In view of the challenges posed by the available information, we and other researchers (Coelho, 1989, vol. 1: 408-415; Conde e Vieira, 2005: 70-72; Gonçalves, 2003: 476-477) consider that a proper systematization of these sources and cross-referencing them with other data, for example that obtained from archeological examinations of Roman roads and bridges (Carvalho, 2001/2002: 69-84; Carneiro, 2009)[22], as well as medieval[23] and modern ones (Matos, 1980), enables us to largely address the objectives of this article.

2. CIRCULATION ROUTES: ROADS, BRIDGES AND FERRY CROSSINGS

The road network is usually denser in regions with a higher population density. Thus, it is not surprising that in the area under study, the best-connected towns were Castelo de Vide, Campo Maior, Arronches, Monforte, and, above all, Portalegre, as shown in fig. 2.

Although it is not always possible to determine exactly when the circulation routes originated, we do know that medieval communities, including in the Alentejo, used many roads and bridges from earlier times, especially those built in the Roman

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[20] On this documentary typology and its potential to provide knowledge about land travel read: Duarte, 1999a: 36-63; Duarte, 1998: 451-474; Duarte, 2006: 81-102.

[21] There are several studies published in this number that benefited from these sources.

[22] See also the cartographic materials produced by the project *Mercator-e*: http://fabricadesites.fcsh.unl.pt/mercator-e/home-2/ [Consulted on 20/07/2023].

[23] The road network was reconstructed by other researchers for nine of the thirteen urban centers under study, especially with information found in the archives of the Order of Christ and the royal chanceries. Conde e Vieira, 2004: 264-286; Leitão, 2022: 46-63. The circulation routes of Assumar, Monforte, Campo Maior and Ouguela have not yet been studied.

era[24] (Carvalho, 2001/2002: 69-84; Carneiro, 2009: 47-70, 89-98), as evidenced in Fig. 2. In fact, two of the three main Roman roads connecting Lisbon to Augusta Emerita passed close to the outskirts of some of the towns under study: Portalegre, Assumar, Arronches, and Campo Maior. Data indicates that the medieval road network used at least part of the Roman road that went from Portalegre to Badajoz, passing through Arronches and Assumar, as well as the stretch that ran from Assumar to Campo Maior via Arronches. Furthermore, some urban centers of the Alentejo also benefited from secondary (Roman) routes, notably the old road that linked Évora to Idanha. This route, starting in Estremoz and Veiros, passed through Monforte, Assumar, Portalegre, Marvão, Castelo de Vide, Póvoa e Meadas, and Montalvão before reaching the Tagus (river). Medieval roads followed, at times very closely, the original (Roman) paths. On the other hand, the roads departing from Marvão likely date back to the Islamic period, as the town was founded during that time[25].

The roads that departed from the urban centers presented a clear hierarchy in the eyes of residents and travelers, based on various factors, as revealed by the terminology used[26]. The term *estrada* seems to have been used to designate the old Roman roads and those that connected two settlements, although other times the word *caminho* was employed[27]. Such is the case, for example, with the road connecting Arronches and Monforte. In 1473 that same road appears referred to as the *Caminho para Monforte*[28], whereas in 1486 it is mentioned as the *Estrada que vai da dita vila (Arronches) pera a vila de Monforte*[29]. *Caminho* was the most common term for roads that departed from urban centers toward other towns and nearby villages, something already seen, for example, in the Beira region (Monteiro, 2012: 54-55). On the other hand, the terms *vereda* and *azinhaga* were used to describe narrower paths that led to secondary locations (Gonçalves, 2003: 476, 2013: 170-171), such as certain farms, pastures, or forests. For example, in 1462, during the delimitation of the boundaries between Ouguela and Albuquerque, there is mention of a *vereda* leading to the hill of Dona Alda[30].

The importance of medieval roads was also determined by topography and the state of the road. Although there is little available data on the physical features of the roads, we know that they almost always had a dirt surface, which could quickly turn into mud during periods of rain, especially in winter. Some routes could be steep, rugged, and stony (Moreno, 1979: 9-10; Conde and Vieira, 2005: 82; Monteiro, 2012: 22; Gonçalves, 2005-2006: 81-89). However, when the squire Duarte de Armas

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[24] Some examples can be found in: Coelho, 1989, vol. 1: 407-408; Conde, 2000, vol. 1: 336-340; Conde e Vieira, 2004: 78-79, 92; Monteiro, 2012: 33-41; Oliveira, 2013: 199.

[25] On this town, read: Vilar, 2014: 184-199.

[26] For the Portuguese case, read: Monteiro, 2012: 49-56; Gonçalves, 2013: 167-178.

[27] Monteiro, 2012: 51-55. The ambiguity between *estrada* and *caminho* was also found in Beira: Gonçalves, 2013: 168.

[28] ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv. 33, fl. 115.

[29] ANTT, *Ch. de D. João II*, liv. 8, fl. 117v.

[30] ANTT, *Gavetas, Gaveta XIV*, m. 5, n.º 5.

visited some of the towns under study in the 16th century, he described most of the roads he traveled on as reasonable, flat (*chãos*), and good, except for the stretches between Elvas and Campo Maior, Alpalhão and Castelo de Vide, Nisa to Montalvão, and from Montalvão to Castelo Branco (Fig. 3). The roads leading out of Castelo de Vide appear to have been the most rugged (Gonçalves, 2005-2006: 98), which is understandable considering the town's topography. It is likely that the same was true for other towns in the Serra de São Mamede that Duarte de Armas did not visit, and that have equally, or even steeper terrain, such as Marvão.

Nonetheless, in the towns of the Alentejo, residents and travelers, probably assessed the importance of the roads mainly based on the destination they led to, the traffic that used them, and the purposes they served (Conde, 2000, vol. 1: 338-341; Gonçalves, 2003: 475-484; Conde and Vieira, 2005: 75-82; Monteiro, 2012: 17-19). According to other researchers, such as Iria Gonçalves (2003: 475), the roads documented appear to fall roughly into three categories. Firstly, there were the routes that provided access to major regional and interregional itineraries, such as Évora-Castelo Branco and Lisbon-Cáceres. The second group included the roads that led to nearby urban centers; we find, for example, in Alpalhão, Arronches, and Ouguela, respectively, *caminho que vai para Castelo de Vide* ("the road to Castelo de Vide". *Tombos da Ordem de Cristo*, 2002: 33); *caminho de Arronches para Elvas* ("the road from Arronches to Elvas")[31] and *caminho de Albuquerque* ("the road to Albuquerque")[32]. Lastly, and particularly important for the local communities, were the roads that provided access to specific places in the outskirts of the town, but within the municipality, such as farmland, pasturelands, and forested areas, as evidenced, for example, by *caminho velho de Assumar que vai até às comeadas da herdade de Ouguela* ("the old road from Assumar that leads to the boundaries of the Ouguela estate")[33].

The Alentejo road network intersected with a number of watercourses, with at least eight streams mentioned in the documentation we collected (Nisa, Vide, Lixosa, Ninho do Açor, Ouguela, Abrilongo, Assumar, and Grande), and four rivers: the Tagus, Sever, Caia, and Xévora. In the 14th and 15th centuries the Crown, the municipal councils and other authorities sought to combine land transportation routes with the fluvial ones[34], an endeavor that proved difficult, since the Tagus appears to have been the only river that could be used. Despite being one of the most important transportation routes in Portugal until the advent of the railway, the section of the Tagus River from Abrantes to Castile, particularly between Vila Velha de Ródão and Montalvão, posed the greatest challenges to navigation due to

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[31] ANTT, *Ch. de D. Fernando,* liv. 1, fl. 71 (1371); Arquivo Distrital de Portalegre, *Convento de Santa Clara de Portalegre*, Caixa 6, m. 4, n.º 1 (1505).

[32] *As Gavetas da Torre do Tombo.* Vol. IX: 572 (1439); ANTT, *Gavetas, Gaveta XIV*, m. 5, n.º 5 (1462).

[33] *Chancelaria de D. João I*, liv. 2, tomo 1: 174 (1388).

[34] For examples, see: Gaspar, 1970: 153-215; Coelho, 1989, vol. 1: 402-405; Braga, 1993: 373-388; Conde, 2000, vol. 1: 341-342; Gonçalves, 2003: 477; Conde e Vieira, 2005: 88; Oliveira, 2013: 202-210; Duarte e Barros, 1997, 77-118; D' Abreu, 2006: 45-75.

the river's flow volume (Gaspar, 1970: 153-215; Matos, 1980: 279-295, 435-437; Gomes, 2011: 8). In fact, in the region under study, contact between the two banks of the Tagus seems to have been provided only by two ferryboats, both belonging to the Order of Christ and leased out. While the first operated at the port of Montalvão near the mouth of the River Sever, the second provided service in Pego do Bispo, in the municipality of Nisa (Gonçalves, 2003: 479-480; *Tombos da Ordem de Cristo,* 2002: 18, 57)[35].

Conversely, the remaining waterways that intersected the road network in the area under study appear to have been easier to cross. It was common in many places for streams to be forded, especially in summer when the water flow was low (Coelho, 1989, vol. 1: 418; Gonçalves, 2003: 477; Conde and Vieira, 2005: 81, 83; Monteiro, 2012: 29, 123). In other cases, it was often necessary to build more effective and longer-lasting solutions in the form of bridges (Coelho, 1989, vol. 1: 405-407; Conde, 2000, vol. 1: 339-342; Conde and Vieira, 2005: 81, 83; Monteiro, 2012: 21-23, 29-31, 37, 70, 76, 89-90; Conceição, 2022: 373-391). According to the data collected, the towns under study had at least nine bridges: the *ponte velha* (old bridge)[36] and the two that served the town[37], in Arronches; the bridge of Caia[38] in the municipality of Portalegre; the bridge of Monforte (Armas, 2015: 363); the bridge over the Caia, in Campo Maior (Gonçalves, 2005-2006: 98); and the bridges known today as the old bridge *da Portagem*[39], the bridge of Madalena (Oliveira, 1992: 126; Carvalho, 2001/2002: 70) and the bridge of the Ribeira das Trutas, in Marvão. Only five of those bridges survive[40]. While those of Monforte and Madalena were built during the Roman period, the others appear to have been erected at least since the 14th and 15th centuries. As was practice throughout the Portuguese kingdom, the Crown and the municipalities were probably responsible for the construction and maintenance of these bridges (Conceição, 2022: 373-391).

We know that the medieval bridges of the northeastern Alentejo were built in stone. For the bridge over the Ribeira das Trutas in Marvão, Roman materials were used, probably sourced from the old town of *Ammaia* located nearby (Carvalho, 2001/2002: 81). These bridges had a similar architecture to others built in Portugal and Castile (Arenas De Pablo, 1996: 115-117), but their size and features varied depending on their importance and the rivers they crossed, as shown in Fig. 4. In

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[35] On the typology of the ferry boats, see: Macedo e Figueiredo, 1966; Chaves, 1958: 32; Lameiras, 1988: 81-107.

[36] *Chancelaria de D. João I*, liv. 1, tomo 2: 179 (1385).

[37] ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V,* liv. 11, fl. 95v. (1450); *Chancelaria de D. Afonso IV*, liv. 1: 164-166 (1323); Armas, 2015: 362. Although the locality had two bridges, only the one known as the Crato (bridge) currently maintains vestiges from the Medieval period.

[38] *Chancelaria de D. João I*, liv. 2, tomo 1: 174 (1388).

[39] The bridge that existed in the medieval period was destroyed at the end of the 16th century, and a new one was built a bit further down. This one still exists and is known as the Ponte da Portagem. Oliveira, 1992: 121-130, sobretudo 123-125; Carvalho, 2001/2002: 81.

[40] The bridges of Monforte and Crato in Arronches, and of Madalena and the Ribeira das Trutas, in Marvão.

Arronches, the Crato bridge features a gently arched structure and a narrow deck, supported by six catenary arches. These gave it greater stability to better bear not only its own weight but also that of people, animals, carts, and goods passing over it. The piers are robust, reinforced by triangular *talha-mares* (tide-cutters) placed upstream, reaching almost to the deck/roadway of the bridge. The triangular shape of the *talha-mares* split the force of the water and reduced water resistance, helping to protect and prevent the erosion of the piers, especially in winter when floods could occur. In contrast, the bridge over the Ribeira da Trutas in Marvão is far more modest, with only three arches and no *talha-mares*.

The bridges of Monforte and Crato, in Arronches, and possibly the old Portagem bridge in Marvão were the largest, since they provided access to settlements and main routes. In fact, the bridge in Marvão appears to have been the only one to feature a nearby tower, built at an unknown date outside the urban area to better control the route to Castile and manage tax collection (Carvalho, 2001/2002: 81).

3. BETWEEN CHARITY AND REMUNERATION: SPACES OF HOSPITALITY FOR TRAVELERS

At nightfall, travelers who found themselves in the town needed a place where they could get a meal and some rest, as well having their animals looked after. While some travelers could retreat to properties they owned within the urban space, others had to seek lodging in public establishments (Gonçalves, 2021: 23-43). The royal family, its officials with regional jurisdiction, major lords, and clergy could request *aposentadoria* – that is, the right to lodge and rest in one of the houses located in the towns they passed through, receiving food, clothing, and bedding free of charge during their stay (Barros, 1995: 25-26). Among the towns under study, Assumar was the only one exempt from the *aposentadoria* service, having received this privilege during the reign of King João I in order to encourage the settlement of the town[41]. The *aposentadoria* was almost always borne by the non-privileged, for whom it constituted a heavy burden, and a practice that was frequently prone to abuse. As such, it regularly resulted in complaints from those who could not circumvent it[42]. This is illustrated by the case of Afonso Lopes in Monforte, who in 1500 was asked to provide towels for the accommodation of the regional *ouvidor* (royal magistrate), to which he replied that he did not have any, as he was poor, and added a blasphemy:

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[41] ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv. 20, fl. 99v-100 (1440). In Portugal there were other urban centers, such as Porto and Portimão, and certain streets, as seen in Guimarães, that were exempt from the *aposentaria* duty: Barros, 1995: 55-56; Silva, 2021, vol. 1: 128.

[42] On the *aposentadoria* and the subsequent grievances of the councils: Sousa, 1990, Vol. 1: 178, 519, 526, 529; Coelho, 1990b: 267, 268, 280, 285, 286, 288; Barros, 1995; Coelho, 1996: 23, 32-33; Monteiro, 2012: 100-102.

não creio em Deus se eu o vosso cargo tivera, se vós eu tal injúria fizera ("I don't believe in God. If I had your position, I would never have done such insult to you")[43].

Clerics and nobles could also seek lodging in convents, monasteries, and hermitages (Barros, 1995: 78-105; Fontes, 2012: 189), but in the region under study, the number of monastic houses was limited (no more than six), as shown in Fig. 5[44]. One was associated with the Hermits – the Hermitage of Vale de Flores (Portalegre, 1385[45]), and most were linked to the mendicant orders, namely the Franciscans and the Poor Clares, almost always belonging to the Observant branch: the Convent of São Francisco in Portalegre (founded between 1226 and 1266)[46], Convent of Santa Clara (1370) (Sousa, 2005: 323-324; Andrade, 2011: 107-108), Convent of Nossa Senhora da Estrela in Marvão (1448[47]), Convent of Santo António in Campo Maior (1494)[48], Convent of Bom Jesus in Monforte (1513[49]). Moreover, the monastic network experienced a late and limited development, like what is observed in other regions south of the Tagus[50]. Of the thirteen selected towns in the Alentejo, monastic institutions existed in only four, Marvão, Campo Maior, Monforte, and most of all, in Portalegre, partly because it was the urban center with the greatest capacity to support them. In fact, until 1448, Portalegre was the only town in the region under study that had convents.

During the period under study, these conventual houses were located within the urban space, with the sole exception of the Hermitage of Vale de Flores which was situated in the outskirts of Portalegre. As was common practice, the mendicant religious communities were in the suburbs, near the main roads leading into the urban centers. This is exemplified by monastery of São Francisco in Portalegre, located near the road that connected that town to Alegrete, and that of Santo António in Campo Maior, situated near the routes to Elvas and Badajoz. The convents of Santa Clara in Portalegre and Bom Jesus in Monforte appear to have been the only ones established

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[43] ANTT, *Ch. de D. Manuel*, liv. 46, fl. 33v (Monforte, 1501).

[44] On the monastic houses outside the towns under study and depicted in the map, see: Sousa, 2005: 138 (Elvas), 308-309, 324 (Estremoz), 348-349, 382-383 (Elvas), 471-472 (Crato).

[45] Consult for these and similar hermitages: Fontes, 2012: 22, 41, 79, 93, 123, 128, 130, 591-593.

[46] A male convent that only joined the Observance in 1542. This change led to the transfer of the monastery's properties, including pious legacies, to the Convent of Santa Clara in Portalegre, which explains why the archive of this institution preserves documents from the Franciscan house. Sousa, 2005: 309. The collection of Santa Clara of Portalegre in the Portalegre District Archive contains five documents related to the Convent of São Francisco, covering the period from 1442 to 1508. Arquivo Distrital de Portalegre, *Convento de Santa Clara de Portalegre*, Caixa 7, m. 11, n.ºs 07/01 (1508), 07/03 (1497), 07/04 (1442), 07/05 (1464), 07/08 (1491). In the collection of Santa Clara in the Torre do Tombo, there is one other, dating to 1511. ANTT, *Convento de Santa Clara de Portalegre*, m. 1, m. E, doc. 6.

[47] A male convent. Sousa, 2005: 311-312. It only has one Medieval document in the collection. ANTT, *Convento Estrela de Marvão*, m. 1, n.º 1 (1481).

[48] A male convent. Sousa, 2005: 316-317.

[49] A female convent. Sousa, 2005: 329-330.

[50] On the relation of the Church of Évora with the regular clergy, see: Vilar, 1999: 281-300. For the diocese of Silves, see: Silva, 2021, vol. 1: 105-120, 297-302.

within the town walls, as they were given the property for that purpose (Sousa, 2005: 329-330; Andrade, 2011: 107). Their buildings were also positioned near the main access routes into the towns, as illustrated by the case of Santa Clara in Portalegre, located on Rua de Elvas and near the Elvas Gate, both of which provided the connection to the second most populous urban center in the *comarca*[51] of Entre-Tejo-e-Odiana.

Poorer individuals and pilgrims, on the other hand, could resort to *albergarias* (similar to hospitals) or hospitals that were scattered along the routes leading to the most important sanctuaries in Portugal and across the Iberian Peninsula. (Marques, 1989: 15, 18, 28, 31-33, 50)[52]. Between 1304 and 1521, the region under study had at least seven *albergarias* and hospitals, most of which were founded in the 14th century: the Albergaria of São Martinho (1304) and that of São Vicente (1304), both in Portalegre (Viana, 1991: 67-74), the Albergaria of Santa Maria in Castelo de Vide (1311) (Oliveira, 2011: 38), Albergaria of Rui Gonçalves in Arronches (1369[53]), Albergaria of Santa Maria and of São Domingos in Alegrete (1389[54]), Albergaria of São Domingos in Castelo de Vide (1469[55]), Chapel and Hospital belonging to João Vicente, and his wife, Maria Eanes in Campo Maior (1514[56]). Of the thirteeen towns in the Alentejo only five appeared to have *albergarias* and hospitals: Arronches, Alegrete, Campo Maior, and particularly, Castelo de Vide and Portalegre, the two largest towns of those under study. As mentioned above for other cases, the documentary information which is available to us[57] reveals only the existence of these institutions in the urban centers of the Alentejo. It is thus difficult to ascertain other aspects, such as their founders, their evolution, extinctions, mergers, and changes in patron saints.

However, we do know that the majority of *albergarias* and hospitals were already established by the 14th century. Between 1401 and 1521 their number seem to have declined, with only three still in operation during that period, as shown in Fig. 5[58]. The apparent decrease in charitable institutions may result partly from the scarcity of information about these establishments. As for their founders, we know that two *albergarias* and the hospital were established by private individuals[59], and

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[51] Major judicial and administrative circumscription in Portugal.

[52] On accommodations for pilgrims in the south of Portugal, see: Falcão, 2012.

[53] ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V,* liv. 19, fl. 88v (1369, 1439).

[54] *Chancelaria de D. João I*, vol. 2, tomo 1: 105.

[55] ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv. 17, fl. 55 (1469, 1475).

[56] ANTT, *Ch. de D. Manuel*, liv. 15, fl. 59.

[57] These difficulties are, in fact, quite common in the study of Portuguese charitable institutions. See: Coelho, 1999: 150-151.

[58] According to the *Portugaliae monumenta misericordiarum*, we know of the existence of at least six *hospitals* and *albergarias* in other municipalities that figure in the map: the Hospital de Santa Maria das Mercês de Estremoz and the Albergarias of Espírito Santo and *São João* in Vimieiro, the Corpo de Deus in Elvas e de Santa Maria do Crato. Paiva, Rosa e Gomes, 2003: 146 (Estremoz), 173 (Elvas, Crato), 304-314 (Vimieiro). In addition, there was a hospital in Cano, mentioned in the visitation of the Order of Avis in 1519.

[59] Albergaria of Rui Gonçalves in Arronches, and of São Domingos in Castelo de Vide and the Chapel and Hospital of João Vicente and Maria Eanes, his wife, in Campo Maior. ANTT, *Ch. de*

two of them – the albergaria of Arronches and that of São Domingos in Castelo de Vide – eventually came under municipal administration. It is likely that the size and features of these buildings were modest, considering what is known from other, better-documented cases (Gonçalves, 2021: 21-23).

When travelers did not own property in the town and could not benefit from lodging through *aposentadoria*, religious institutions, or the homes of friends and family, they either opted (or were forced) to turn to inns. There, in exchange for payment, they could find accommodation, feed their mounts, drink, eat, gamble, sleep, or even, at times, find female company to brighten their night. (Gonçalves, 1988a: 143-158; Beirante, 1986: 229, 232, 233, 235, 236, 237). Although inns existed in Portugal during the 13th and 14th centuries, they experienced a phase of growth and expansion in the following century, especially in the more densely populated and better-connected areas, such as the regions covered by the Estrada da Beira. In the regions south of the Tagus, inns had a more scattered geographical distribution, following the patterns of settlement. (Gonçalves, 1988a: 149, 154-156; Gonçalves, 2021: 30-31).

During the 15th century the urban centers under study had at least six inns, as seen in Fig. 5[60]. However, the actual number of inns was probably somewhat higher, as it seems unlikely that, for example, Portalegre, the third most populated town in the entire region of what is now Alto Alentejo, would have had only one inn[61]. The north-eastern Alentejo inns followed a common trend across the Portuguese kingdom (Gonçalves, 1988a: 143-144, 152-153), appearing to proliferate particularly from the second half of the 15th century onwards. This growth probably accompanied urban economic development and the increasing influx of people resulting from the establishment and consolidation of commercial routes, particularly those connecting Castelo de Vide-Valencia de Alcántara, and Estremoz-Nisa. Of the thirteen towns that were selected for this study, only four had inns: Nisa[62], Monforte[63], Castelo de Vide[64] and Portalegre[65]. The number of these establishments per town seems to broadly reflect their demographic and socioeconomic size, except for Portalegre. In more prominent localities, such as Castelo de Vide, three inns are recorded, whereas in more modest towns, only one is known, e.g. Monforte and Nisa.

D. Afonso V, liv. 17, fl. 55 (Castelo de Vide 1469, 1475), liv. 19, fl. 88v (Arronches, 1369, 1439); *Ch. de D. Manuel*, liv. 15, fl. 59 (Campo Maior, 1514).

[60] According to Iria Gonçalves, privileges were granted to inn-keepers and individuals from other municipalities that figure in the map: Vimioso, Crato (1), Cano (1), Sousel (1), Estremoz (3), Elvas (1) and Fronteira (1). Gonçalves, 1988a: 154. We were able to ascertain that the Crown had an inn in Sousel in 1501. ANTT, *Ch. de D. Manuel*, liv. 38, fl. 80v.

[61] The same seems to apply to Elvas, the largest town in present day Alto Alentjo, where we only know of one inn.

[62] ANTT, *Ch. de D. João II*, liv. 12, fl. 101 (1490).

[63] *Cortes Portuguesas: Reinado de D. Afonso V (Cortes de 1439)*, 2016: 334.

[64] ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv. 11, fl. 72 (1451), liv. 28, fl. 26 (1468); *Ch. de D. João II*, liv. 4, fl. 10v (1486).

[65] ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv. 28, fl. 55v (1468).

Private individuals were the main agents behind the establishment of inns, requesting and obtaining royal authorization to convert their homes into lodging houses. Only in Monforte do we find an inn founded by municipal initiative, although this situation was more common throughout other parts of the kingdom (Gonçalves, 1988a: 146-147). As would be expected, the owners of these inns probably chose to build them along the busiest thoroughfares of the towns and, if possible, near their main economic centers[66], as demonstrated, for example, by the case of Monforte. In 1439, at the *Cortes* of Lisbon, the municipal council (of Monforte) managed to obtain from the monarch the land where the old butcher shops had stood, to build an inn, claiming it was needed for foreigners. The property was located at the edge of the town, possibly near one of the town's gates.[67]

The network of urban inns may have been complemented by other lodgings located outside the urban areas, at certain points along the roads and paths that crisscrossed the region, providing rest and safety for travelers, their mounts, and their goods. However, as in other regions, the documents reviewed do not allow us to identify those inns (Gonçalves, 1988a: 155, 2021: 34).

4. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The towns along the northeastern border of the Alentejo benefited from the Roman road network and provided materials for the construction of new structures, as demonstrated by the bridge of Marvão. In fact, this practice was common in southern Europe. Although some changes were made to the routes, the main hub from the Roman period, Lisbon/Cáceres and Idanha/Évora, continued to influence the 14th and 15th centuries, as shown in Fig. 6. The hierarchy of the road network, and consequently the role of the urban centers therein, becomes evident when we consider elements such as the road-related vocabulary, the destinations of the routes, the presence of bridges and ferry crossings, circulation conditions, hospitality spaces, and the towns that served as *portos secos* ("dry ports"). We found some supplementary information on the journeys of individuals who came from more distant places, which enhanced this study. For example, the case of Maria Gonçalves, a native of Seville, and her husband, who travelled from Nisa to Castelo de Vide in 1454[68], and three German pilgrims who were assaulted between Castelo de Vide and Nisa on their way to Santiago de Compostela (Moreno, 1986a: 82, 86).

Following a common pattern, the reconstructed routes are organized into three groups: those that provide access to locations on the outskirts of a town and within municipal boundaries; those that connect with neighboring urban centers; and those that link the major regional and inter-regional routes, particularly those

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[66] See on this subject, for example: Monteiro, 2012: 95-96.
[67] *Cortes Portuguesas: Reinado de D. Afonso V (Cortes de 1439)*, 2016: 335.
[68] ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv. 10, fl. 128.

from Lisbon to Cáceres and from Castelo Branco to Évora. In 1439, two of the four chapters presented from Monforte at the Lisbon *Cortes* reveal how the representatives considered the latter route crucial for the well-being of the community. First of all, the town council alleged that, since the reign of King Afonso[69], [Monforte] had held a privilege whereby all individuals traveling along the Algarve/Beja-Beira route were required to pass through the town. They got the king to consider all those who failed to comply with this rule to be *descaminhados* ("route violators"), especially those who traveled along roads located within municipalities' county (*termo*), notably one that had recently appeared and was known as the *caminho dos homiziados* ("path of the men sentenced to banishment"). The municipality further requested, and obtained, the king's support for the construction of an inn[70]. Along the frontier, moving from north to south, the connection was provided, broadly speaking, by seven routes: Montalvão/Herrea de Alcántara; Castelo de Vide and Marvão/Valencia de Alcántara; Alegrete/La Codesera; Arronches/La Codesera; Arronches/Albuquerque; Ouguela/Albuquerque and Campo Maior/Badajoz. Of these, the most important routes were Montalvão/Herrera de Alcántara; Arronches/La Codesera and Albuquerque, but especially Castelo de Vide and Marvão/Valencia de Alcántara. In reality, despite the more rugged topography described by Duarte de Armas, the Castelo de Vide and Marvão/Valencia de Alcántara route became the main thoroughfare along the border between the Tagus River and Elvas, with Castelo de Vide as the center on the Portuguese side. This fact can be explained, in part, by the route's location between the river Tagus and Elvas and, unlike Arronches, by its greater distance from Elvas, which some historians consider was Portugal's main inland customs post (Ferreira, 1983: 48).

A comparison of the data for other nearby towns further inland (Avis, Crato, Vimieiro and Sousel) with the records of religious houses, charitable institutions, and inns in the towns under study, provides two important insights. Firstly, the majority of institutions and accommodations for travelers were located in the main hubs along the border, such as Castelo de Vide and Portalegre, with their numbers diminishing as we move westward toward settlements like Chancelaria, Amieira, Seda, and Tolosa. Secondly, by the end of the period under study, places for accommodating wayfarers along the two main routes were generally spaced about a day's journey apart, as demonstrated by the cases of Nisa, Castelo de Vide, Portalegre, Monforte, and Estremoz along the Castelo Branco-Évora route.

In short, geographical location, the road network, and the institutions that provided shelter for travelers were among the factors that contributed to the growth of towns, such as Monforte, Arronches, Portalegre, and especially Castelo de Vide, within the urban hierarchy of the region and the kingdom of Portugal.

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[69] We were not able to identify which.
[70] *Cortes Portuguesas: Reinado de D. Afonso V (Cortes de 1439)*, 2016: 334-335.

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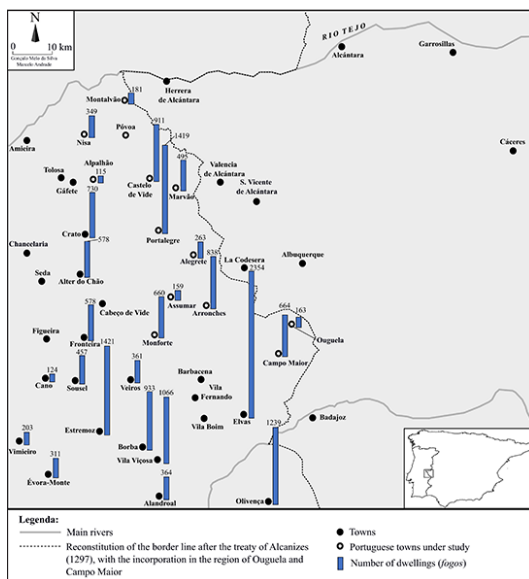
FIGURES

Fig. 1. Number of dwellings (*fogos*) in the towns under study
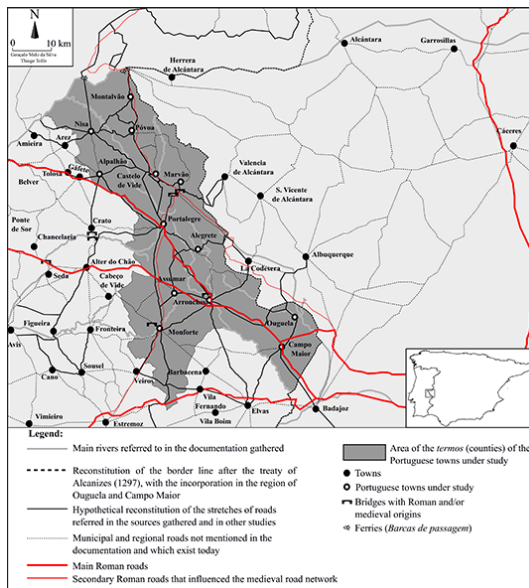according to the *Numeramento* (1527-1532).

Fig. 2. Roman and medieval roads in the road network of the towns
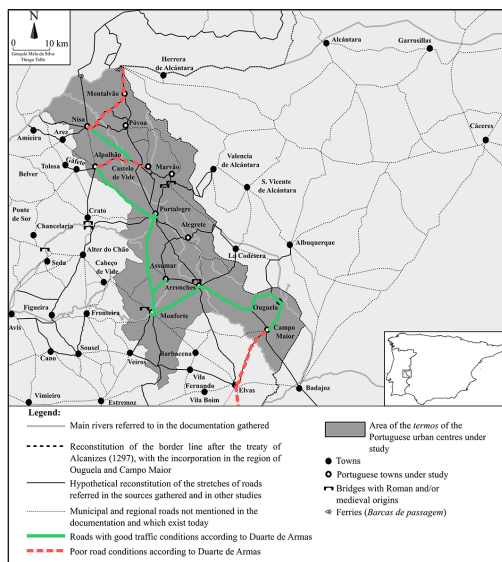of north-eastern Alentejo at the end of the Middle Ages.

Fig. 3. Reconstruction of the route taken by Duarte de Armas through the towns under study at the beginning of the 16th century.
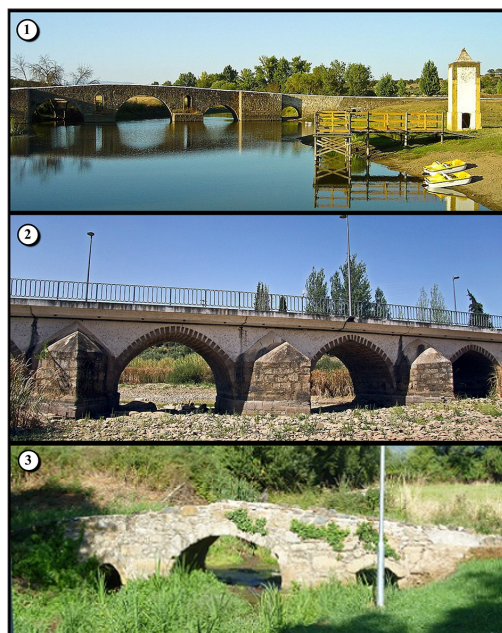

Fig. 4. Roman bridge in Monforte (1), Crato bridge in Arronches (14th and 20th centuries) (2) and Ribeiro das Trutas bridge in Marvão (medieval) (3).
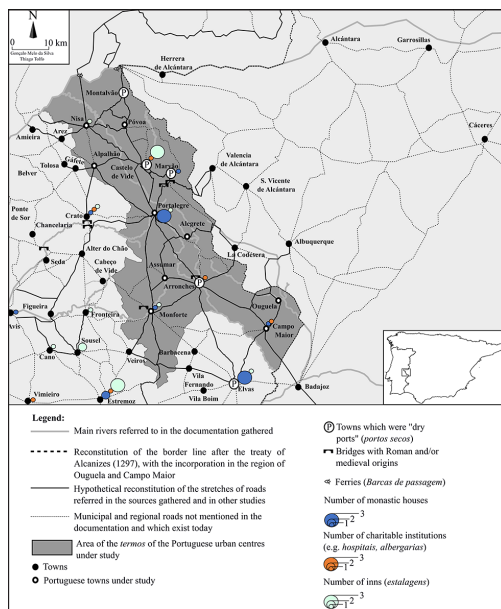
Fig. 5. Network of monasteries and convents, charitable institutions and inns in north-eastern Alentejo at the end of the Middle Ages.
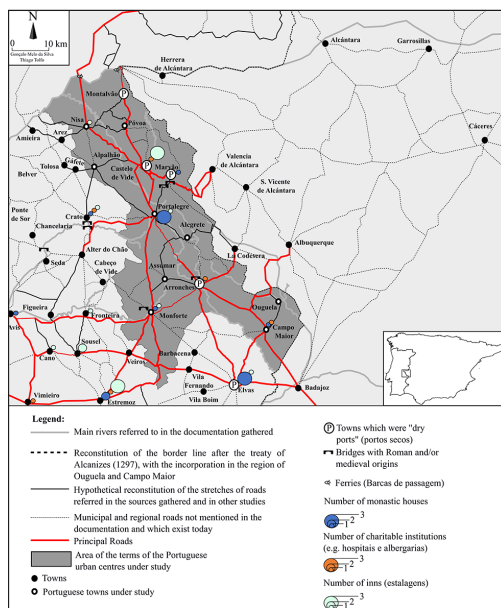

Fig. 6. Systematisation of the road network in north-eastern Alentejo at the end of the Middle Ages.