

WORKERS IN THE ALTO ALENTEJO BORDER TOWNS (14TH-16TH CENTURIES): ACTIVITIES, SPECIALISATION AND MOBILITY*

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ABSTRACT

Although Portuguese medieval historiography includes works that have made a notable contribution to understanding professional activities since at least the mid-20th century, it has only been in recent years that their study and themes, especially in the field of craftsmen, have taken centre stage in research. The work carried out has made it possible to increase our knowledge of these workers at a spatial level and from various perspectives, but it has been rare to find studies on the *mesteres* in the borderlands, the relationship between the frontier and professional activities and their role in defining the urban hierarchy, partly due to the difficulty in finding sources. Based on an analysis of some northeastern Alentejo towns, this paper aims to contribute to understanding the professional activities that existed in small and medium-sized frontier towns in Medieval Portugal, distinguishing between those that were common to all and those that could only be found in certain localities, reflecting on the signs of specialisation, hierarchisation and complementarity between the different towns and also the mobility of professionals.

KEYWORDS: Urban History, Labour History, Small Towns, Craftsman, Trade and smuggling.

TRABAJADORES EN LAS VILLAS FRONTERIZAS DEL ALTO ALENTEJO (SIGLOS XV-XVI):
JERARQUÍA, ESPECIALIZACIÓN Y MOVILIDAD

RESUMEN

Aunque la historiografía medieval portuguesa cuenta con trabajos que han contribuido notablemente al conocimiento de las actividades profesionales desde al menos mediados del siglo xx, solo en los últimos años su estudio y su temática, especialmente en el ámbito de los artesanos, han ocupado un lugar central en la investigación. Los trabajos realizados han permitido ampliar nuestro conocimiento de estos trabajadores a nivel espacial y desde diversas perspectivas, pero han sido escasos los estudios sobre los *mesteres* en las tierras fronterizas, la relación entre la frontera y las actividades profesionales y su papel en la definición de la jerarquía urbana, en parte debido a la dificultad de encontrar fuentes. A partir del análisis de algunas villas del nordeste alentejano, pretendemos contribuir al conocimiento de las actividades profesionales que podían existir en las pequeñas y medianas villas fronterizas del Portugal medieval, distinguiendo entre las que eran comunes a todas y las que solo podían encontrarse en determinadas localidades, reflexionando sobre los signos de especialización, jerarquización y complementariedad entre las distintas villas y también sobre la movilidad de los profesionales.

PALABRAS CLAVE: historia urbana, historia del trabajo, pequeñas ciudades, artesanos, comercio y contrabando.

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INTRODUCTION

According to Franz-Paul de Almeida Langhans, A.H. de Oliveira Marques, and Arnaldo Melo, in Medieval Portugal the terms *mesteirais* and *mesteres* were used to refer, respectively, to artisans and trades, crafts, or mechanical professions that required training and specialization. However, in the 15th century, both concepts could be used in a broader sense, encompassing workers and professions from other economic sectors, such as *almuinheiros* (alms collectors), *regatões* (street vendors), or fishermen (Marques 1984, vol. iv: 280-282; Langhans 1984, vol. iv: 282-283; Melo, 2022: 63-65). Throughout the following pages, the word *mesteiral* will be used in its broader sense. Although Portuguese Medieval historiography includes works that have contributed notably to the knowledge of these professionals since at least the mid-20th century¹, it is in recent years that their study and related issues, especially artisans, have assumed a prominent place in research, largely driven by the Medcrafts project, which brought together specialists from six universities and research centers.

Some historians have analyzed manufacturing activities within a single urban center, (and in rare cases, more than one), as well as focusing on specific economic sectors. These sectors include trades related to food, metals, construction (both civil and naval), leatherworking, and textiles. Among the published studies, moving from north to south of the Portuguese kingdom, the following cities and towns were selected as case studies: Braga, Guimarães, Porto, Coimbra, Lisbon, Setúbal, Évora, and the Algarve². These studies complemented information found in earlier studies on other urban centers such as Alenquer, Castelo de Vide, Elvas, Montemor-o-Novo, Torres Vedras, and Tomar, as well as regional studies which focused on the Baixo Mondego, Médio Tejo, and the area between the Zêzere and Tagus rivers (Coelho, 1989; Rodrigues, 1995; Ferro, 1996; Fonseca, 1998; Conde, 2000; Oliveira, 2012; Correia, 2013; Vicente, 2015). This has led to a significant extension of the space for understanding of the trades, though it still does not cover certain areas, nor does it offer a full perspective of the kingdom.

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¹ Given the extensive bibliography on this subject, we refer here, by way of example, to a few key studies and historiographical overviews where further references may be found, without claiming to be exhaustive. Cruz, 1940; Caetano, 1943, 1958; Langhans, 1943, 1948; Coelho, 1990; Rodrigues, 1993; Gonçalves, 2007; Melo, 2009; Barata, Henriques, 2011.

² See, among others, the studies published in: Melo, Campos, Sequeira, 2021; Melo, Sequeira, 2022-2023.



The geographical framework that was chosen herein focused on the main towns and cities of the Portuguese kingdom, giving greater emphasis to those located along the coast rather than the interior, as well as those situated on, or north of the Tagus River. Studies that focused on trades in frontier settlements, or that provided data about the existence of trades in such places have been rare, and are largely limited to monographs, such as the ones on Elvas and Castelo de Vide. The dearth of works on this subject is not due to a lack of interest on the part of Portuguese historiography³, but rather to a limited output on artisans in these regions, which can be explained, in part, by the scarcity and brevity of the sources available for their study, such as regulations governing trade activities (e.g. municipal bylaws and council meeting records).

Along with the increase in space covered, medievalists adopted approaches that focused on, or intersected with many different aspects, such as identifying the presence of trades, signs of specialization and professional hierarchization, their forms of organization, especially guilds, political representation (e.g. in municipal councils), and the role of women in the workplace. Similarly, and in line with developments in other historiographies, such as the French one⁴, there has been renewed interest in and questioning of the regulations governing trades, i.e., their origins, types, the authorities involved (especially the Crown and municipal councils), the agents responsible for drafting and enforcing them, and regulatory aspects (Melo, Campos, Sequeira, 2021; Melo, Sequeira, 2022-2023).

Although less frequently, some research has also focused on ecclesiastical taxation imposed on the trades (Campos, 2021: 287-303), and the relationship between urban centers, professional occupations, mobility, and urban hierarchies (Silva, 2021b: 58-76). Further studies of the role of professional activities in defining the economies of small and medium-sized settlements and their areas of influence, are still lacking. These studies are also necessary for the characterization and hierarchization of the urban network at both regional and national levels. Lastly, considering the aforementioned spatial distribution, it is worth reflecting on the impact the frontier had on shaping professional activities in urban centers, and its sphere of influence.

We therefore hope to provide a better understanding of professional activities and the mobility of professionals in frontier towns in Medieval Portugal by focusing on a group of towns located in the northeastern part of the *comarca*⁵ of Entre-Tejo-e-Odiana. In terms of structure, we will begin by describing the area, the documentation that is available for studying the professionals who worked there, and exploring the challenges posed by those sources. Next, we will identify the main occupational activities in the Alentejan urban centers, distinguishing between those that were common to all the towns and those that could only be found in specific localities.

³ Current historiographic status of the towns and cities of the Portuguese border, see: Costa, 2020: 259-286.

⁴ See works resulting from the project: *Les formes de réglementation des métiers dans l'Europe médiévale et moderne, créations et renouvellements*, for example: Carvais et al. (2025).

⁵ Major judicial and administrative circumscription in Portugal.

Finally, we will focus on the strategies employed by the authorities, i.e. the Crown and the municipal councils, to attract and retain certain trades and the mobility of professionals. This will help identify signs of specialization and hierarchy among the different localities.

1. FRONTIER TOWNS OF THE NORTHEASTERN ALENTEJO AND THE PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITY OF THEIR INHABITANTS: CHALLENGES POSED BY DOCUMENTATION FOR THEIR STUDY

In the 14th and 15th centuries, the northeastern part of the *comarca* of Entre-Tejo-e-Odiana comprised thirteen towns located along the border with Castile: Montalvão, Nisa, Alpalhão, Castelo de Vide, Marvão, Portalegre, Alegrete, Assumar, Arronches, Monforte, Ouguela, Campo Maior, and Elvas (the latter was not considered in this study due to its comparatively larger size) (Correia, 2013)⁶. We will not present the group of towns under study, as this was done previously by us and other historians in more detail in other texts published in this dossier, and elsewhere. We would like to point out that all these towns were, by European standards, considered small urban centers, though in the context of the Portuguese kingdom, Portalegre appears to have attained a medium size by the end of the period under study, with around 1,419 *fogos* (dwellings) in the *Numeramento*⁷ of 1527-1532, a figure well above those of the main towns nearby, i.e. Castelo de Vide and Arronches, with 911 and 832 *fogos*, respectively. Most of the selected towns were under royal jurisdiction and situated along one of the main natural entry routes from Castile, which in the 15th century was one of the principal gateways into Portugal for Castilian textiles and other goods (Ferreira, 1983: 43, 54, 56; Fernandes, 2011: 566-567).

The documentation gathered by our team for the study of the towns in what is now the Alto Alentejo is revealing. It comprises around 4,000 documents from central archives, such as the Torre do Tombo and the National Library of Portugal, and, to a lesser extent, from district and local archives like the District Archive of Portalegre and the Laranjo Coelho Library in Castelo de Vide. However, these records tend to be mostly from the latter centuries of the Middle Ages, particularly the 15th century.

Regarding the origin of our sources, there is a predominance of royal documentation (over 90%), something already well known to Portuguese medievalists for other urban centres. Sources of ecclesiastical origin, with the exception of those produced by the military orders of Christ and, to a lesser extent, Santiago and Avis (Silva, in press), are scarce, both for the conventual network and for the parish churches of the region, whose medieval archives have largely been lost. The

⁶ See Fig. 1 to identify the towns under study in the region and in the context of the kingdom, although the map includes information that will be discussed only later in the article.

⁷ The first recorded census of the Portuguese population.

convent of Santa Clara in Portalegre appears to be the only monastic house to escape this scenario. Likewise, we have no documentation from charitable institutions, including those connected to trades, which differs from what is known for other cities and towns, such as Porto (Melo, 2009), Guimarães (Ferreira, 2010), and Coimbra (Rocha, 2021: 21-45). In fact, comparable to other southern towns such as Setúbal (Silveira, 2022) and those of the Algarve (Silva, 2021b: 58-76)⁸, we find no references to such associations in the region, which may explain the absence of written records about them. In turn, municipal sources are limited to a single agreement established between Portalegre and Crato in the 14th century, and the municipal cartulary (tombo) of Castelo de Vide, drawn up in the 16th century. The available data also differs in geographical terms, providing more information on the most relevant towns, i.e. Portalegre and Castelo de Vide, at the expense of the others, e.g. Ouguela and Assumar.

Apart from these documentary asymmetries, our perception of professional occupations is limited by other factors which have also been observed in better-documented urban centers such as Torres Vedras (Rodrigues, 1995: 282), Porto (Melo 2009, vol. 1, 45-46), and those in the Algarve (Silva, 2021b: 58-76). These factors make it difficult to determine the chronology, diversity, importance of economic activities, their impact on the socio-professional makeup of local populations, and, consequently, the role of craftsmen (*mesteres*) within the community. Comparable to Porto and the Algarve, the data collected for the towns under study are at times limited to generic references to certain professions, without providing further detail about the number or identity of those engaged in them. For example, generic references to weavers in the royal letters of appointment of officials with jurisdiction over the textile trade in Alpalhão and Castelo de Vide, and regulatory guidelines (such as those concerning oil press workers and millers) included in the visitations of Nisa⁹. Such information does not allow us to identify the names of the professionals or to assess their weight within the overall population. The reverse, that is, the omission of the professional occupation, position, or function performed by a significant portion of the individuals mentioned in the documentation, is also frequent, especially in more modest population centers. For example, for the period between 1444 and 1521, we were only able to find two men whose professions were mentioned in Alegrete, three in Alpalhão, five in Assumar¹⁰. Moreover, the recurrence of homonymy, always so prevalent (Gonçalves 2010), sometimes makes it difficult to accurately identify the individuals under study.

⁸ In these settlements we only find confraternities of seafarers.

⁹ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Manuel*, liv. 1, fl. 52v (Alpalhão, 1502); liv. 24, fl. 166 (Castelo de Vide, 1515); liv. 44, fl. 84v (Castelo de Vide, 1518). *Tombo da Ordem de Cristo*, 2002: 18, 20, 21, 24 (Nisa, 1505).

¹⁰ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv. 24, fl. 20v (Alegrete, 1444), liv. 25, fl. 19 (Alpalhão, 1444), liv. 30, fl. 146 (Alegrete, 1474); *Ch. de D. João II*, liv. 6, fl. 137 (Alegrete, 1482), liv. 20, fl. 59 (Assumar, 1487); *Ch. de D. Manuel*, liv. 26, fl. 8 (Alpalhão, 1498); *Gavetas, Gaveta XX*, m. 13, n.º 103 (Assumar). *Tombo da Ordem de Cristo*, 2002: 35 (Alpalhão, 1505).



Moreover, as demonstrated previously for other places, it is important to bear in mind that even individuals with a specific profession may have combined that occupation with other remunerated activities in different economic sectors, either as a way of securing their livelihood, or increasing their income. In fact, this scenario of multi-activity was common both within the Portuguese kingdom and beyond (Bernardi, 2023: 23-40); in 1509, for example, minutes of the visitation of the Order of Christ to Nisa and Portalegre reveal the presence of weavers, cloth (wool) weavers, millers, blacksmiths, ironsmith, muleteers, and merchants¹¹, investing in land, vineyards, and olive groves – either owned or leased from the military order – located in the peri-urban area and surrounding territory. Meanwhile, the geographic location, as in other towns near the border, allowed some men to try their luck in illicit economic activities, particularly smuggling prohibited goods like grain and, above all, livestock into Castile. At the end of the 15th century, we find examples such as a farmer from Alpalhão and a miller from Castelo de Vide¹².

The frontier towns selected for this study share additional challenges, which the available documentation shows more clearly than in other previously analyzed localities. Firstly, for the period between 1387 and 1521, the data showed only about 285 individuals with a profession – 226 residents in the towns, 5 who traveled from their land to practice their trades in the towns, and 53 who were forced to serve sentences (of exile) in Castelo de Vide, Ouguela, and especially Marvão and Arronches. These numbers are extremely scarce compared to those collected for other groups of towns and cities; for the Algarve more than 900 individuals with occupations were identified (Silva, 2021b: 58-76), and represent a very small sample of professionals when considering the number of urban centers under study, the population figures recorded in 1527, and the time span covered.

Moreover, as previously mentioned, the collected documentation displays a strong spatial and temporal asymmetry, with most of the information dating from the 15th and early 16th centuries. This situation hinders the study of the growth and specialization of certain economic and professional sectors, especially in the more modest localities and among workers living in the outskirts, particularly craftsmen. This scenario resembles what has been observed in the urban centers of the Algarve, but contrasts with what has been seen in other towns, such as Torres Vedras (Rodrigues 1995, 289-305). The compiled data also show an imbalance in information concerning various economic activities. For example, while we know almost nothing about the actual weight of trades in the area of food production in most of the towns under study, e.g. Campo Maior and Marvão, the documentation gives particular prominence to occupations related to agriculture and trade, especially in the more dynamic towns like Castelo de Vide and Portalegre. Finally, it should be noted that the scarce data on professional mobility comes to us almost exclusively

¹¹ *Tombos da Ordem de Cristo*, 2002: 10, 12, 15 (Nisa), 194, 195, 198 (Portalegre).

¹² ANTT, *Ch. de D. João II*, liv. 1, fl. 151 (Castelo de Vide, 1487); liv. 4, fl. 21 (Castelo de Vide, 1487); *Ch. de D. Manuel*, liv. 26, fl. 8 (Alpalhão, 1495).

through a few charters granted to carters and, primarily, letters of pardon. Although this scenario allows us to identify some professionals who relocated due to exile sentences, it reveals far less about those who chose to move to, or work in another urban center of their own accord.

Given the scarce and fragmented information, and the late and limited chronology of the empirical data provided by the sources, we should regard them as more indicative than representative of a complex reality. Nevertheless, like other researchers (i.e. Ana Maria Rodrigues and Arnaldo Melo (Rodrigues, 1995: 282, 305-313; Beirante, 1995: 404-439; Conde, 2000, vol. 1: 515-520; Melo, 2009, vol. 1: 48-65; Silva, 2021b: 58-76), we believe that if properly contextualized, the data enables us to make some reflections.

2. OCCUPATIONAL ACTIVITIES: RECONSTRUCTION, SPECIALIZATION AND HIERARCHY

Between 1387 and 1521 we identified 60 professional activities in the border towns of northeastern Alentejo, of which the majority were linked to the processing of raw materials (approximately 60%). When compared with towns in other regions, such as those in the Algarve, the number of occupational activities is lower, but the percentage of artisanal activities is higher (Silva, 2021b: 58-76). This can be explained by the limited presence of the maritime and river sector. According to historiography of the organization of Medieval Portuguese labor (Rodrigues, 1995: 282; Melo, 2009, vol. II: 13-345; Silva, 2021b: 58-76; Melo, Sequeira, 2022-2023), the professions identified can be broadly grouped into ten economic sectors, with the commercial sector, showing the greatest variety of professional occupations (Table 1).

TABLE 1: PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES FOUND IN THE FRONTIER TOWNS OF NORTHEASTERN ALENTEJO (1387-1521)*	
SECTORS	PROFESSIONS
Sector 1: Agro-pastoral and Forest Management	Market gardener (<i>Hortelão</i>)
	Farmer (<i>Lavrador</i>)
	Pruner (<i>Podador</i>)
	Swiner (<i>Porcarico</i>)
	Shepherd (<i>Pastor</i>)
	Warrener (<i>Coelheiro</i>)
	Sheep herder (<i>Ovelheiro</i>)
	Vintager (<i>Vinhateiro</i>)
Sector 2: Sea and river	Boatman (<i>Barqueiro</i>)
Sector 3: Food production	Miller (<i>Moleiro</i>)
	Female bread baker (<i>Padeira</i>)
	Oil mill worker (<i>Lagareiro</i>)
	Grinder (<i>Moedor</i>)
	Bread oven worker (<i>Forneiro(a)</i>) (<i>do pão</i>)

Continúa



TABLE 1: PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES FOUND IN THE FRONTIER TOWNS OF NORTHEASTERN ALENTEJO (1387-1521)*	
SECTORS	PROFESSIONS
Sector 4: Leather and hides	Currier (<i>Surrador</i>) Saddler (<i>Albardeiro</i>) Shoemaker (<i>Sapateiro</i>) “Maker of leather straps” (<i>Ataqueiro</i>)** Scabbard maker (<i>Bainheiro</i>)
Sector 5: Textiles and clothing	Fuller (<i>Pisoeiro</i>) Sheep shearer (<i>Tosador</i>) Rag dealer (<i>Trapeiro</i>) Weaver (<i>Tecelão</i>) Cloth (wool) weaver (<i>Tecelão de panos</i>) Tailor (<i>Alfaiate</i>) Tailor specialised in doublets (<i>Gibiteiro</i>) Dyer (<i>Tintureiro</i>)
Sector 6: Construction	Sawyer (<i>Serrador</i>) Carpenter (<i>Carpinteiro</i>) Metal worker (<i>Serralheiro</i>) Brocklayer (<i>Alvanel</i>) Stonemason (<i>Pedreiro</i>) Tiler/roof tile maker (<i>Telheiro</i>)
Sector 7: Metals and weapons	Farrier (<i>Ferrador</i>) Blacksmith (<i>Ferreiro</i>) Ironsmith specialized in spearheads (<i>Ferreiro de Ferras de Lança</i>) <i>Coronheiro</i> *** Armorer (<i>Armeiro</i>) Turner (<i>Torneiro</i>) Coppersmith (<i>Caldeireiro</i>) Spindler (<i>Fuseiro</i>) Goldsmith (<i>Ourives</i>)
Sector 8: Other artesanal trades	Potter (<i>Oleiro(a)</i>) Tile maker (<i>Telheiro</i>) Cooper (<i>Tanoeiro</i>) Wineskin maker (<i>Borracheiro</i>) Candle maker (<i>Cerieiro(a)</i>)
Sector 9: “Liberal professions”	Animal health attendant (<i>Alveitar</i>) Healer (<i>Curador</i>) Surgeon (<i>Cirurgião</i>) Physician (<i>Físico</i>) Barber (<i>Barbeiro</i>)
Sector 10: Commerce	Butcher (<i>Carniceiro</i>) Female grain seller (<i>Fangueira</i>) Haberdasher (<i>Marceiro</i>) Apothecary (<i>Boticário</i>) Peddler (<i>Regatão/Regateira</i>) Wagoner (<i>Carreteiro</i>) Muleteer (<i>Almocreve</i>) Merchant (<i>Mercador</i>) Innkeeper (<i>Estalajadeiro</i>)

* We have placed the Portuguese designation of certain professions in parentheses, as it is not always easy to find an exact equivalent in the English language. The sources and the locations in which the crafts were recorded are indicated in the footnotes of the text.

** The *ataqueiro* was the craftsman who made *atacas*, that is, small leather or cloth straps used to fasten pieces of armour, garments, loads on pack animals.

*** Craftsman who carved the wooden parts of weapons.

According to the compiled documentation, several professional occupations could be found both in the region's more important urban centers (e.g. Arronches, Castelo de Vide and Portalegre), and in the smaller ones (e.g. Ouguela, Assumar and Alpalhão). Examples include farmers¹³, sheep herders¹⁴, shoemakers¹⁵, ironsmith¹⁶ and in the 15th century, wagoner¹⁷. Some of the professions were only mentioned in the sources for more dynamic urban centers, but they did actually exist in the other towns. For example, we found references to urban and peri urban facilities such as ovens¹⁸, mills and water mills¹⁹, fulling mills²⁰ and soap production sites (*saboarias*)²¹, land with vegetable gardens and buildings where they worked, such as tanning pits²² and butcher shops²³.

Many professions were probably part of normal life in the border towns of what is now the Alto Alentejo, either for their connection to the rural world (market

¹³ There are several documentary references to individuals that practiced this activity, and for the others we only refer to the first documentary reference to each urban center. ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv. 3, fl. 54v (Campo Maior, 1453), liv. 10, fl. 108 (Ouguela, 1454), liv. 16, fl. 66 (Arronches, 1471), liv. 31, fl. 4 (Monforte, 1469), liv. 33, fl. 99 (Castelo de Vide, 1473); *Ch. de D. João II*, liv. 20, fl. 59 (Assumar, 1487); *Ch. de D. Manuel*, liv. 7, fl. 3v (Marvão, 1511), liv. 26, fl. 8 (Alpalhão, 1498), liv. 28, fl. 1 (Montalvão, século XV); liv. 45, fl. 86v (Nisa, 1501). *Chancelarias Portuguesas: D. Duarte*, Vol. 1, Tomo 2: 453 (Portalegre, 1436).

¹⁴ ANTT, *Ch. de D. João II*, liv. 15, fl. 72 (Campo Maior, 1488); *Gavetas, Gaveta XIV*, m. 5, n.º 5 (Ouguela, 1462).

¹⁵ *Chancelarias Portuguesas: D. Duarte*, vol. 1, tomo 2: 316-317 (Portalegre, 1436); *Tombos da Ordem de Cristo*, 2002: 35 (Alpalhão, 1505); *Gavetas, Gaveta XX*, m. 13, n.º 103. (Assumar, sem data); ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv. 14, fl. 65v (Marvão, 1466); *Ch. de D. Manuel*, liv. 45, fl. 116v (Castelo de Vide, 1501).

¹⁶ *Tombos da Ordem de Cristo*, 2002: 195 (Portalegre, 1509); ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv. 12, fl. 124 (Arronches, reign of D. João I), liv. 21, fl. 90v-91 (Marvão, 1471), liv. 24, fl. 20v (Alegrete, 1444), liv. 28, fl. 48 (Castelo de Vide, 1468); *Ch. de D. João II*, liv. 3, fl. 77 (Montalvão, 1482); *Ch. de D. Manuel*, liv. 11, fl. 125 (Campo Maior, 1515); *Corpo Cronológico, Parte II*, m. 82, n.º 104, fl. 4v (Nisa, 1520).

¹⁷ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv. 1, fl. 123 (Assumar, 1463), liv. 30, fl. 145v (Castelo de Vide, 1475); *Ch. de D. João II*, liv. 1, fl. 151 (Portalegre, 1486); *Ch. de D. Manuel*, liv. 6, fl. 110 (Nisa, 1502), liv. 7, fl. 45 (Arronches, 1511), liv. 35, fl. 93 (Campo Maior, 1521).

¹⁸ ANTT, *Ch. de D. João II*, liv. 12, fl. 54 (Castelo de Vide, before 1490); *Ch. de D. Manuel*, liv. 40, fl. 62-63 (Castelo de Vide e Monforte, 1496).

¹⁹ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv. 11, fl. 19 (Castelo de Vide, 1451), 95v (Arronches, 1450), liv. 19, fl. 88v (Arronches, 1450), liv. 20, fl. 111v (Portalegre, 1440), liv. 30, fl. 114 (Marvão, 1475); *Tombos da Ordem de Cristo*, 2002: 37, 58 (Alpalhão, Montalvão, 1505).

²⁰ *Tombos da Ordem de Cristo*, 2002: 57 (Nisa, 1505).

²¹ Between 1496 and 1497, black soap production sites are mentioned in Portalegre, Arronches, Alegrete, Castelo de Vide, Nisa, Marvão and Campo Maior, as well as other neighboring settlements, i.e. Amieira, Alter do Chão, Crato, Vila Viçosa e Borba. ANTT, *Chancelaria de D. Manuel*, liv. 29, fl. 51 (1496), 60v (1497); Oliveira, 2011: 85.

²² ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv. 4, fl. 37 (Monforte, before 1433), liv. 20, fl. 30v (Portalegre, 1440).

²³ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv. 29, fls. 256-256v (Arronches, 1472); *Cortes Portuguesas: Reinado de D. Afonso V (Cortes de 1439)*, 2016: 335 (Monforte, 1439).



gardeners²⁴, swinerds²⁵ and sheep herders²⁶), or those associated with food production – the olive mill worker²⁷, miller²⁸, female bread baker²⁹ and bread oven worker. The same applied to construction, i.e. carpenter³⁰, stonemason³¹ and potter³² and to textiles, i.e. wool weaver³³, and fuller³⁴. In the area of commerce there was no lack of vendors³⁵, but it is more difficult to determine if all the towns had muleteers³⁶ and merchants³⁷. Boatsmen were only found in Nisa and Montalvão, (Gonçalves, 2003: 479-480; *Tombos da Ordem de Cristo*, 2002: 18, 57). In the early 16th century, we know that in more modest localities, like Monforte, Nisa and Ouguela, there were already physicians and/or surgeons³⁸, which was a result of the demographic growth, demonstrated by the number of licenses issued by the Crown during this period³⁹. In Campo Maior, we know that there was a ironsmith specialized in spearheads⁴⁰.

²⁴ ANTT, *Ch. de D. João II*, liv. 7, fl. 122v (Arronches, 1492).

²⁵ ANTT, *Ch. de D. João II*, liv. 22, fl. 64v-65 (Portalegre, 1484).

²⁶ ANTT, *Ch. de D. João II*, liv. 15, fl. 72 (Campo Maior, 1488); *Gavetas, Gaveta XIV*, m. 5, n.º 5 (Ouguela, 1462).

²⁷ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv. 25, fl. 19 (Alpalhão, 1440).

²⁸ ANTT, *Ch. de D. João II*, liv. 1, fl. 151 (Marvão, Castelo de Vide, 1484); *Tombos da Ordem de Cristo*, 2002: 195 (Portalegre, 1505).

²⁹ Biblioteca Laranjo Coelho, *Tombo de Castelo de Vide de 1807*, fls. 174v-181 (Castelo de Vide, 1512).

³⁰ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Manuel*, liv. 36, fl. 23 (Castelo de Vide, 1509); *Corpo Cronológico, Parte II*, m. 82, n.º 104, fl. 5 (Nisa, 1520); ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv. 2, fl. 110 (Ouguela, 1441); liv. 31, fl. 17v (Arronches, 1469); *Convento de Santa Clara de Portalegre*, m. F, doc. 6 (Portalegre, 1423).

³¹ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv. 29, fl. 60 (Marvão, 1472); *Corpo Cronológico, Parte II*, m. 82, n.º 104, fl. 4v (Castelo de Vide, 1520); ANTT, *Convento de Santa Clara de Portalegre*, m. F, doc. 7 (Portalegre, 1412).

³² ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv. 14, fl. 59 (Portalegre, 1466), liv. 29, fl. 256-256v (Arronches, 1472); *Ch. de D. João II*, liv. 9, fl. 61 (Marvão, 1491); *Corpo Cronológico, Parte II*, m. 82, n.º 104, fl. 4 (Nisa, 1520).

³³ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv. 21, fl. 80-80v (Castelo de Vide, 1471); *Ch. de D. João II*, liv. 13, fl. 104 (Arronches, before 1490); *Ch. de D. Manuel*, liv. 28, fl. 92 (Campo Maior, 1497); *Gavetas, Gaveta XX*, m. 13, n.º 103 (Montalvão, s.d.); *Chancelarias Portuguesas: D. Duarte* vol. 1, tomo 2: 318 (Portalegre, 1436); *Tombos da Ordem de Cristo*, 2002: 198 (Portalegre, 1509). Tavares, 1984: 12 (Arronches, 1442), 37 (Campo Maior, 1442), 45 (Castelo de Vide 1442), 96 (Nisa, 1442), 270 (Monforte, 1442), 290-294 (Portalegre, 1441-1442).

³⁴ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Manuel*, liv. 36, fl. 47 (Portalegre, 1509), liv. 44, fl. 84v (Castelo de Vide, 1518).

³⁵ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv. 36, fl. 142 (Portalegre, 1476).

³⁶ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv. 3, fl. 53 (Monforte, 1453); TT, *Convento de Santa Clara de Portalegre*, m. B, doc. 4 (Portalegre, 1387). Moreno, 1986: 105, 109 (Marvão, em 1431, e Arronches, 1436). *Tombos da Ordem de Cristo*, 2002: 10 (Nisa, 1505).

³⁷ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv. 2, fl. 57 (Castelo de Vide, 1441); *Tombos da Ordem de Cristo*, 2002: 10 (Nisa, 1505); Degredo: ANTT, *Ch. de D. João II*, liv. 5, fl. 55 (Marvão, 1492).

³⁸ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Manuel*, liv. 2, fl. 4v (Nisa, 1502), liv. 12, fl. 12 (Monforte, 1500), liv. 25, fl. 35 (Ouguela, 1516).

³⁹ Sobre este tema, consulte-se: Gonçalves, 1988: 9-52; Moisés, 2018.

⁴⁰ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Manuel*, liv. 11, fl. 125 (1515).



However, it was in the region's main urban centers, (Arronches and, above all, Castelo de Vide and Portalegre) that the most diverse and specialized range of economic activities could be observed. These towns, more populous and commercially dynamic, were located on, and actively participated in the main trade routes connecting the region to other towns in Portugal and along the Castilian border. They benefited from the road networks linking Lisbon to Cáceres/Badajoz and Évora to Castelo Branco/Guarda, as we have described in another text submitted in this dossier.

In these towns we find, in the sector of leatherworks and hides, saddlers⁴¹ and in textiles and clothing, tailors⁴², tailors specialised in doublets⁴³ and dyers (Oliveira, 2011: 84). In the construction sector, metal workers⁴⁴, wood cutters⁴⁵ and tiler/roof tile maker⁴⁶, in the field of metals and weapons, ironsmiths⁴⁷ and “master ironsmith skilled in making crossbows, muskets, and weapons”⁴⁸ and turners⁴⁹. Other professions include healers⁵⁰, surgeons⁵¹, physicians⁵². However, of all the urban centres, Portalegre appears to have had, by far, the most professions that are not documented in the other towns, such as animal health attendants⁵³, *coronheiros*⁵⁴, coppersmith⁵⁵, armorers⁵⁶, goldsmiths (Tavares, 1984: 290-294) and apothecaries⁵⁷. This scenario is more noticeable in the leatherworks sector, i.e. “maker

⁴¹ ANTT, *Corpo Cronológico da Torre do Tombo*, Parte 2, m. 84, n.º 72 (Portalegre, 1519).

⁴² ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv. 2, fl. 55 (Monforte, 1441), liv. 17, fl. 86v (Nisa, 1471); *Ch. de D. Manuel*, liv. 37, fl. 71v (Castelo de Vide, 1497); TT, *Convento de Santa Clara de Portalegre*, m. B, doc. 4, (Portalegre, 1387); Tavares, 1984: 12 (Arronches, 1442), 96 (Nisa, 1442), 270 (Monforte, 1441), 45 (Castelo de Vide, 1442), 290-294 (Portalegre, 1441).

⁴³ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv. 2, fl. 55 (Portalegre, 1441); Tavares, 1984: 12 e 290-294 (Arronches, 1442; Portalegre, 1441).

⁴⁴ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Manuel*, liv. 7, fl. 30v (Portalegre, 1512); *Corpo Cronológico, Parte II*, m. 82, n.º 104, fl. 6 (Nisa, 1520).

⁴⁵ ANTT, *Convento de Santa Clara de Portalegre*, m. A, doc. 1 (Portalegre, 1510).

⁴⁶ *Gavetas, Gaveta XX*, m. 13, n.º 103. (Montalvão, s.d.).

⁴⁷ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv. 29, fl. 253v (Arronches, 1470), liv. 31, fl. 6v (Portalegre, 1469). *Tombo da Ordem de Cristo*, 2002: 12 (Nisa, 1505).

⁴⁸ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv. 29, fl. 253v (Arronches, 1470); Tavares, 1984: 12 (Arronches (1442).

⁴⁹ ANTT, *Ch. de D. João II*, liv. 7, fl. 4v (Castelo de Vide, 1491).

⁵⁰ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Manuel*, liv. 42, fl. 75 (Castelo de Vide, 1513), liv. 44, fl. 82v (Arronches, 1518).

⁵¹ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv. 17, fl. 15 (Portalegre, 1471); ANTT, *Ch. de D. Manuel*, liv. 2, fl. 4v (Nisa, 1502), 26 (Castelo de Vide, 1502), liv. 12, fl. 12 (Monforte, 1500); liv. 31, fl. 141 (Arronches, 1498).

⁵² ANTT, *Ch. de D. Manuel*, liv. 2, fl. 4v (Nisa, 1502), 26 (Castelo de Vide, 1502), liv. 12, fl. 12 (Monforte, 1500).

⁵³ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv. 10, fl. 95 (Portalegre, 1454).

⁵⁴ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Manuel*, liv. 7, fl. 51v (Portalegre, 1512).

⁵⁵ *Chancelarias Portuguesas: D. Duarte*, vol. 1, tomo 2: 314 (Portalegre, 1436).

⁵⁶ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Manuel*, liv. 41, fl. 1v (Portalegre, 1511).

⁵⁷ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Manuel*, liv. 24, fl. 90v (Portalegre, 1515).



of leather straps⁵⁸, and scabbard makers⁵⁹, and in the textile sector, i.e. sheep shearer (Tavares, 1984: 292, Portalegre, 1442), dealers in rags⁶⁰ and the number of and tailors specialised in doublets⁶¹, which is quite understandable given the fact that livestock farming and textiles were the two main economic activities of the region, particularly in Portalegre.

Indeed, in this latter sector, in 1441, we know that three *gibiteiros* were working in the town, all of them Jews, just as we find one working in Arronches. This leads us to emphasise two aspects. On the one hand, the presence of *gibiteiros* in Arronches and, especially, Portalegre is a clear sign of craft specialisation, which would only appear in more developed urban areas. A common tailor could produce *gibões* (doublets), but the existence of a tailor or more specialising exclusively in this type of garment suggests that there was sufficient demand to justify such a degree of specialisation. On the other hand, in the 15th century, these and other professionals associated with the textile sector were Jews, at times constituting the only documented workers in this field (such as tailors in Campo Maior) and in others (such as goldsmiths in Portalegre) (Tavares, 1984: 37, 290-294; 1989: 41, 43-45).

Building on the studies of Maria José Ferro Tavares, among the thirteen communities under study, one commune is documented in Portalegre in the 14th century, to which five more were added in the following century in Arronches, Campo Maior, Castelo de Vide, Monforte, and Nisa. The growth of these communes, the demographic increase of the Jewish population, and the advantages of their frontier locations are well established. The Jewish communities of Alto Alentejo were primarily engaged in textiles and commerce, yet their ranks also included professionals linked to the iron and arms trades, such as blacksmiths and ironsmiths, and to leatherworking, such as shoemakers (Tavares, 1989: 37-53).

Considering a broader context, throughout the 14th and 15th centuries the towns in the Serra de São Mamede took advantage of the region's natural resources and pasturelands for raising livestock, mainly cattle and sheep. In addition, this area had an abundance of small watercourses that flowed into the Tagus and Guadiana rivers, which could, among other things, power milling facilities, i.e. watermills and fulling mills. The combination of favorable conditions fomented the development of the area as a center for production of wool textiles and *burel* (a coarser woolen cloth). In the first two decades of the 16th century, comparable to the manufacture of *panos meirinhos* in the Beira region⁶², the textile industry became so profitable that the monarch assigned several officials to reinforce tax revenue collection and regulate activity. The positions included that of *escrivão da sisa dos panos da terra* (clerk

⁵⁸ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Manuel*, liv. 7, fl. 11v (Portalegre, 1510).

⁵⁹ *Chancelarias Portuguesas: D. Duarte*, vol. 1, tomo 2: 313 (Portalegre, 1436).

⁶⁰ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Manuel*, liv. 3, fl. 7 (Portalegre, 1510), liv. 44, fl. 84v (Castelo de Vide, 1518).

⁶¹ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv. 2, fl. 55 (Portalegre, 1441). Tavares, 1984: 290-294 (Portalegre, 1441).

⁶² Cloth made of merino wool (Sequeira, 2014: 268).

responsible for recording the sisa on locally produced textiles)⁶³, *selador dos panos da terra* (sealer of locally produced cloth)⁶⁴ and *vedor dos panos da terra* or *vedor dos panos e buréis que se vierem a fazer* (overseer of local textiles)⁶⁵. In 1515, the *vedor dos panos* had its responsibilities defined in a regulation, the contents of which are unknown to us, but which required the official to visit the “house of the weavers” every eight days to *ferrar* (stamp and seal) the cloths and check if they were well woven before the artisans took them to the fullers⁶⁶.

The officials concerned with the taxation of textiles produced locally can be identified both in more modest towns, such as Alegrete, Alpalhão, Marvão, and Montalvão, and in more dynamic ones, such as Arronches, Castelo de Vide, Monforte, and, somewhat earlier, in Portalegre, which reveals the growth and widespread nature of textile activity in the region and highlights the prominent role of the latter town in this process.

3. THE KING, THE MUNICIPALITIES AND THE SHORTAGE AND RECRUITMENT OF *MESTERAIS*

Even after considering the limitations of the samples, we find that the townships of northeastern Alentejo sometimes considered the number of men available for agriculture, crafts, commerce, and other activities to be insufficient. From the mid-14th century onwards, and especially throughout the following century, when we examine the correspondence between the municipalities under study and the kings, we come across narratives that echo complaints about this issue – arguments that were common to other municipalities⁶⁷. The communities complained about the lack of labor and maintained that there was a need to retain and attract certain professionals, citing depopulation, wars, famine, and, at times, the small size of the settlement as the main causes⁶⁸. This situation is particularly evident in the more modest towns under study, such as Campo Maior and Ouguela⁶⁹, as well as in the towns that were in a phase of decline throughout the entire period under study, like

⁶³ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Manuel*, liv. 1, fl. 60v (Portalegre, 1501).

⁶⁴ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Manuel*, liv. 1, fl. 23 (Castelo de Vide, 1501) e 57 (Alpalhão, 1502), liv. 2, fl. 52v (Arronches, 1501), liv. 6, fl. 121 (Portalegre, 1502), liv. 15, fl. 186v (Monforte, 1514), liv. 42, fl. 5v (Portalegre, 1513) e 21 (Alegrete, 1513).

⁶⁵ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Manuel*, liv. 25, fl. 156v (Montalvão, 1517), liv. 37, fl. 63v (Arronches, 1516), liv. 39, fl. 39v (Marvão, 1521), liv. 44, fl. 84v (Castelo de Vide, 1518).

⁶⁶ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Manuel*, liv. 24, fl. 166v (Castelo de Vide).

⁶⁷ Among others, see, for example: Sousa, 1990, Vol. 1: 507, 512, 513; Coelho, 2001: 72-80.

⁶⁸ In 1439, in the *Cortes* of Lisbon, the procurators of Monforte lamented on the scarcity of artisans, such as butchers and ironsmiths, claiming that the place was so small that individuals who worked in those professions could not earn a livelihood. *Cortes Portuguesas: Reinado de D. Afonso V (Cortes de 1439)*, 2016: 334 (1439).

⁶⁹ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Manuel*, liv. 11, fl. 125v (Campo Maior, 1515), liv. 25, fl. 35 (Ouguela, 1516).





Marvão (Vilar, 2014: 193-194), and in those that were most affected by military conflicts, (Alegrete, Arronches, Campo Maior, Castelo de Vide, Monforte, Portalegre, and Ouguela)⁷⁰.

Although the discourse and arguments used at the Court, and in the *Cortes*, were often tailored to obtain privileges and benefits more easily from the king, the truth is that the involvement of the northeastern Alentejo towns in the war effort affected their communities. In fact, during the various internal and external conflicts that took place in Portugal between 1281 and 1479, the towns under study were important battlegrounds in at least twelve confrontations: Dinis against Infante Afonso (1281, 1287, 1299), between Afonso IV and his half-brother, Afonso Sanches (1325) and with Alfonso XI (1336-1339), in the wars of Ferdinand I (1369-1370, 1372-1373, 1381-1382), João I (1383-1389, 1396-1402), and Afonso V (1475-1479) against Castile. Throughout the 15th century, it is likely that the towns of northeastern Alentejo also felt the repercussions of unrest in nearby Castilian towns, e.g. the turmoil caused by the Infantes of Aragon (1429-1432), the periods of instability during the reigns of John II (1406-1454) and Henry IV (1454-1474), and Alonso de Monroy's attempts to take control of the Order of Alcántara (1457-1480) (Rodríguez Casillas, 2013: 47-65; 2019: 66-134). However, it was the wars of João I and Afonso V that had the greatest impact on the Portuguese region, which suffered sieges, occupation of towns by Castilian troops (Monforte, Arronches, and Alegrete), destruction of property and farming and manufacturing equipment, theft of livestock, abuses, and disruption of daily life and professional activity.

During the *Cortes* of Santarém in 1482 after the Luso-Castilian war of 1475-1479, the procurators of Castelo de Vide recalled that: "the inhabitants of this town suffered as much or even more harm than any other place in the region of Entre-Tejoe-Odiana during the past wars, both in terms of loss of lives and ransoms, as there were few in this town who were not taken prisoner (...). And likewise, all our livestock holdings, which were the main wealth of this place were lost"⁷¹. Among the towns analyzed, Ouguela, Arronches, and Alegrete were perhaps the most affected by this conflict. While Ouguela was conquered by Francisco de Solís and later reclaimed by Prince João in 1475 (Encarnação, 2014: 260-262), the other two towns were taken by Alonso de Monroy, with Alegrete being used as a base for military operations against Portuguese territory in 1476. In 1477, it was besieged and bombarded by Prince João II for two months⁷². Nonetheless, like in the previous conflicts, the towns managed to recover.

Apart from general references to a shortage of men to work, the correspondence exchanged between the municipalities of the Alentejo and the kings

⁷⁰ See, among others: Lopes, 1997: cap. xcv, pp. 149-151, 158-162; 281-282; Tavares, 1983: 45-89; Barroca, 2003: 66-68; Monteiro, 2003: 245-246; Encarnação, 2014: 260-262; Maldonado, 1978: cap. xxxix, p. 136; Rodríguez Casillas, 2013: 127; 2019: 66-134.

⁷¹ ANTT, *Ch. de D. João II*, liv. 3, fl. 100.

⁷² ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv. 32, fl. 153v. Maldonado, 1978: cap. xxxix, p. 136; Rodríguez Casillas, 2013: 127.



also reveals a concern with maintaining, and attracting certain professionals and specific types of labor considered essential for the survival and functioning of the community. These included muleteers⁷³, *alveitaires*⁷⁴, physicians⁷⁵ and artisans like butchers⁷⁶, and especially, those associated with the sector of metals and weapons, such as ironsmiths⁷⁷, ironsmith specialised in spearheads⁷⁸ and turners⁷⁹. The preference for trades associated with this field is well-documented in different towns throughout the 15th century, from coastal towns like Coimbra, Óbidos and Tavira, to others located on the border (i.e. Elvas) (Barros, 1992, tomo 4: 163-168; Monteiro, 2001: 15-17).

In the case of some physicians and ironsmiths, as documented for other towns and regions of the kingdom (Barros, 1992, vol. 4: 163-168; Silva, 2021b: 69-70), both the kings and municipal councils justified the support and privileges granted to these professionals by underscoring the good reputation they had already established in the town and the quality of their work, their provenance from more distant, populous, and sometimes foreign lands, such as Cáceres⁸⁰, and the distance they had to travel to find someone of comparable skill. In 1516, for example, Ouguela petitioned the king to authorize a certain *Mestre* Diogo to practice as a physician in the town, since the inhabitants had to travel seven to eight leagues to find a qualified professional, and he provided “good treatments,” even to towns and villages in Castile⁸¹.

In the 15th and 16th centuries, the strategy of municipal councils in northeastern Alentejo, such as Monforte and Portalegre, consisted in granting stipends and wages to artisans⁸² and in requesting privileges from the king exempting them from: participating in municipal duties and obligations, from escorting prisoners and funds, providing lodging, assuming responsibilities such as guardianships, keeping arms and horses, and paying taxes, levies, and extraordinary contributions⁸³. We are unaware of the adoption of other measures, namely the granting of houses to craftsmen, as observed in Tavira (Silva, 2021b: 70). In the case of physicians, when they went to the Court to request a license authorizing them to practice their profession, the municipalities issued to the physicians letters to present to the

⁷³ *Cortes Portuguesas: Reinado de D. Afonso V (Cortes de 1439)*, 2016: 334 (Monforte, 1439), Moreno, 1986: 105 (Marvão, 1431), 109 (Arronches, 1436).

⁷⁴ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv.10, fl. 95 (Portalegre, 1454).

⁷⁵ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Manuel*, liv. 11, fl. 125v (Campo Maior, 1515), liv. 25, fl. 35 (Ouguela, 1516).

⁷⁶ *Cortes Portuguesas: Reinado de D. Afonso V (Cortes de 1439)*, 2016: 334 (Monforte, 1439).

⁷⁷ *Cortes Portuguesas: Reinado de D. Afonso V (Cortes de 1439)*, 2016: 334 (Monforte, 1439).

⁷⁸ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Manuel*, liv. 11, fl. 125v (Campo Maior, 1515).

⁷⁹ ANTT, *Ch. de D. João II*, liv. 7, fl. 4v (Castelo de Vide, 1491).

⁸⁰ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv.10, fl. 95 (Portalegre, 1454). In 1474, D. Afonso V grants to Diogo Nunes, ironsmith and resident in Alegrete, a *tença* (royal stipend), claiming that he was “a man who know his profession”. ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv. 30, fl. 146.

⁸¹ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Manuel*, liv. 25, fl. 35.

⁸² In 1439, Alcáçovas, in the Alentejo, and Monsanto, in Beira, also mention doing the same thing. *Cortes Portuguesas: Reinado de D. Afonso V (Cortes de 1439)*, 2016: 150, 334, 340.

⁸³ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv.10, fl. 95 (Portalegre, 1454).

monarch, in which the council requested a favorable ruling and sought to justify its relevance⁸⁴. It is possible that the municipalities even financed the journey of a physician to obtain royal permission, comparable to what is known to have occurred in other localities (Gonçalves, 1983: 16; Silva, 2021b: 70).

Likewise, and more palpably from the second half of the 15th century onwards, the Crown granted pensions and the aforementioned privileges to certain artisans in Alegrete, Campo Maior, and Portalegre, particularly to those associated with the iron and weapons sector⁸⁵. In 1470, King Afonso V even exempted Bemrey Juda, a Jewish farrier and master in making crossbows, firearms, and weapons, residing in Alegrete, from paying tithes and tolls on steel, iron, and other metals, tools, and any goods necessary for his trade. In addition, he was allowed to transport and sell his products both in Castile and in Portugal⁸⁶. This situation, which as far as we know was quite rare, may have resulted from the town's proximity to Albuquerque, where supporters and opponents of Enrique IV of Castile clashed, and where Afonso V had an interest in intervening and acted as a mediator (Rodríguez Villa, 1881: 93).

Note, however, that almost all the measures described were not unique to the region, and were already well known in various parts of the kingdom, although perhaps most frequent in the more dynamic towns, e.g. Coimbra and Lisbon (Barros, 1992, vol. 4: 163-168; Monteiro, 2001: 15-17). One of the decisions that had repercussions in this domain, was the creation of *coutos de homiziados* (places where criminals were required to serve exile), and common to several localities situated along the border. In the region under study, there were five such places: Marvão (1378) and Arronches (1385), each with capacity to accommodate 200 individuals; Ouguela (1420), with capacity for 50 individuals; and Monforte (1440) and Meadas (1476), with only four and ten respectively (Moreno, 1986: 106-106, 109-110, 114-115, 120-121, 124).

In the 15th century, the towns of northeastern Alentejo considered it advantageous for some of their craftsmen and those from other places to serve their exile (*degredo*) in their lands (Monteiro, 2001: 16-17). In 1431 and 1436, during discussions with the king, the councils of Marvão and Arronches succeeded in extending the privileges of their *coutos*, including the ability to select five exiled criminals (*homiziados*) as muleteers to ensure the supply of provisions, e.g. meat and fish (Moreno, 1986b: 105, 109). Shortly after, in 1439, at the Lisbon *Cortes*, the representatives of Monforte even asked permission from the king to create a *couto* for 10 or 12 exiled craftsmen, arguing that it was more advantageous than assigning salaries to maintain ironsmiths, butchers, and other professionals. The monarch authorized a *couto* for four craftsmen and granted it the privileges of the *couto* of

⁸⁴ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Manuel*, liv. 11, fl. 125v (Campo Maior, 1515), liv. 25, fl. 35 (Ouguela, 1516).

⁸⁵ ANTT, *Ch. de D. João II*, liv. 6, fl. 137 (Alegrete, 1482); *Ch. de D. Manuel*, liv. 11, fl. 125v (Campo Maior, 1515), liv. 41, fl. 1v (Portalegre, 1511).

⁸⁶ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv. 29, fl. 253v.



Arronches.⁸⁷ In turn, in 1491, the council of Castelo de Vide requested that a turner residing in the town be allowed to serve his exile (*degredo*) there, partly because his trade was considered “very necessary”⁸⁸.

While in the cases of Arronches, Meadas, Monforte, and Ouguela we have no testimonies of the exiled professionals about the *coutos* and its features, for Marvão we do know that the town and its privileges were sometimes insufficient to entice these individuals to stay. In 1407, the monarch authorized *homiziados* with professions to cultivate land or raise livestock in neighboring towns, i.e. Nisa, Castelo de Vide, Crato, and Portalegre, since the territory of the municipality was considered small. However, in 1435, Marvão complained to the monarch that some of the exiles were residing with their wives in Portalegre and not in the town (Moreno, 1986b: 105). At the end of the century, in 1496, Gonçalo Alvares, a cart driver (*carreteiro*) and resident of Barcelos, solicited permission from the king to transfer his sentence from Marvão to Caminha, arguing that he was sick, poor, and did not know how to farm like the locals; he even went as far as to claim that he could “do nothing of his trade” in the town⁸⁹. This grievance is indicative of the decline in population in Marvão, and the lack of appeal caused by its difficult access and peripheral location in relation to other large urban centers of the Portuguese kingdom (Vilar, 2014: 193-194).

Conversely to other parts of the kingdom, such as the Algarve, Alcácer do Sal, Porto, and Évora (Beirante, 1995: 174-183; Gonçalves, 1996: 139-152; Pereira, 2000: 170-172; Silva, 2021a, vol. 1: 188-191), documentation regarding the settlement of professionals from other regions is much scarcer (except for the *homiziados* (exiles) as will be examined further on), of whom we were able to identify just under a dozen between 1440 and 1516⁹⁰. We find them both in the main towns, such as Monforte, Castelo de Vide, and especially Portalegre, as well as in more modest ones, i.e. Nisa, Montalvão, and Assumar. This group of workers from other regions includes farmers, ironsmiths, *alveitaires*, cart drivers, turners, and above all, physicians and surgeons. While in one case their origin can be traced back to Leiria⁹¹, all the others came from Castile, which was understandable given the proximity and daily interaction with communities from the neighboring kingdom. Although we have identified the passage of individuals from other realms, such as the Holy Roman Empire (Moreno, 1986a: 82, 86), through northeastern Alentejo, we are not aware of any who were working in the towns under study, something that contrasts, for example, with what is observed in similarly sized port towns such as those in the Algarve, Setúbal, and

⁸⁷ *Cortes Portuguesas: Reinado de D. Afonso V (Cortes de 1439)*, 2016: 334 (Monforte, 1439).

⁸⁸ ANTT, *Ch. de D. João II*, liv. 7, fl. 4v.

⁸⁹ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Manuel*, liv. 32, fl. 62.

⁹⁰ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv. 1, fl. 123 (Portalegre, 1463), liv. 10, fl. 95 (Assumar, 1454), liv. 13, fl. 72v (Portalegre, 1456), liv. 25, fl. 77v (Portalegre, 1445); *Ch. de D. João II*, liv. 7, fl. 4v (Castelo de Vide, 1491); *Ch. de D. Manuel*, liv. 2, fl. 4v (Nisa, 1502), liv. 12, fl. 12 (Monforte, 1500), liv. 25, fl. 122v (Monforte, 1516), liv. 28, fl. 1 (Montalvão, 14??).

⁹¹ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv. 13, fl. 72v (Portalegre, 1456).

Alcácer do Sal (Silva, 2021a, vol. 1: 191-192; Pereira, 2000: 171-172; Braga, 1998: 67-71), which were better connected with other European regions.

For the period between 1441 and 1496, we found at least 32 individuals associated with a profession and serving a sentence (exile) in the *coutos* of Ouguela, Marvão e Arronches⁹². The latter town shows the majority of known cases, followed by far by Marvão. For Ouguela, the numbers are minimal, possibly because the *couto* had fewer individuals. Among the *homiziados* we find gardeners, farmers, stone masons, carpenters, ironsmiths, shoemakers, potters, and innkeepers, but the number of artisans is lower than that of professionals in the sectors of agriculture and livestock farming, which accounts for more than half of the registered individuals. This distribution can be explained partly by the important role that agriculture played in the Medieval economy. As for the geographic origin of the *homiziados*, although in 1406 the king considered that Marvão should be used for individuals from Estremadura, the majority of the exiles came from settlements in the Entre-Tejo-e-Odiana region, probably due to the geographic proximity. The second largest number of *homiziados* came from Estremadura, and were followed, in minimal numbers, by individuals from the Algarve, Beira, and Entre-Douro-e-Minho. We are unaware of any cases of *homiziados* from Trás-os-Montes. The geographic distribution can largely be explained by the distance between the *coutos* in northeastern Alentejo and the settlements located in these other regions.

4. MOBILITY BETWEEN LEGALITY AND CRIMINALITY: THE CASE OF AGENTS INVOLVED IN TRANSPORT AND TRADE

Although there is little data on the mobility of farmers and artisans from the towns of northeastern Alentejo, it is certain that some of them traveled to specific locations within their municipality or to neighboring towns to carry out their trade and supplement their income. While some cultivated land and raised livestock, (i.e. Marvão), others sought to provide services and goods in places where these were lacking, and where greater profit could be obtained, as seen in the construction work on the church of Nisa. In 1519, in the register of expenses, the only two stonemasons and candle maker found working were recruited from Castelo de Vide⁹³. Much more numerous and interesting are the pieces of information regarding individuals involved

⁹² ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv. 1, fl. 109 (1462) e 113 (1462), liv. 2, fl. 110 (1441), liv. 11 fl. 23v (1451) e 16 (1451), liv. 12, fl. 53 (1452), liv. 13, fl. 20 (1456) e 171 (1456), liv. 15, fl. 68 (1455), 76v (1455), 84 (1455), liv. 25, fl. 52 (1445), liv. 27, fl. 102v (1443), liv. 31, fl. 17v (1469), liv. 32, fl. 115 (1480), liv. 33, fl. 197 (1473), liv. 34, fl. 7v-8 (1450) e 114 (1450); *Ch. de D. João II*, liv. 3, fl. 1 (1482) e 34 (1482); liv. 5, fl. 1 (1492); liv. 7, fl. 51v (1492) e 122v (1492); liv. 9, fl. 61 (1491); liv. 13, fl. 41v-42 (1490) e 126 (1490); liv. 16, fl. 36v (1490); liv. 20, fl. 74-74v (1487); liv. 25, fl. 78 (1491); *Ch. de D. Manuel*, liv. 43, fl. 37v (1496).

⁹³ ANTT, *Corpo Cronológico da Torre do Tombo*, Parte 2, m. 84, n.º 72, fl. 4, 4v.

in the transport and trade of goods, and their movement. Let us focus on this group, starting with those who operated within the boundaries of legality.

The available data does not allow for a quantitative overview of professionals involved in transport, with the only exceptions being the muleteers in Marvão and Arronches, and boatmen in Nisa and Montalvão. In the first case, between 1431 and 1436, each town was required to have at least five muleteers, a number not very different from those recorded in other frontier towns, e.g. Mourão⁹⁴ and Noudar, or in similarly sized settlements like Arruda (Moreno, 1979: 15-17). In Nisa and Montalvão, there appear to have normally been two boatmen associated with the ferry service.

According to our sources, in the late 14th century and in the centuries that followed, muleteers and cart drivers (*carreteiros*) appear to have been the only ones able to obtain privileges from the monarch, partly as a way to offset the dangers posed by travel and prolonged absences from home. While muleteers were able to secure these benefits as early as the late 1300s, cart drivers were only granted them in the second half of the 15th century, as seen in Évora (Beirante, 1995: 445-447). The reasons for this different treatment remain unclear for now. The muleteers, as has been well documented (Moreno, 1979: 25-27), managed to obtain personal exemptions from the payment of extraordinary fiscal levies (such as *fintas*, *talhas*, *pedidos*, loans). They were also exempt from the obligation to provide lodging, escort prisoners, transport money, attend military displays (*alardos*), and serve the king in war. In 1382, while the Court was in Elvas, Afonso Eanes, a muleteer and resident of Portalegre⁹⁵, like the other residents of the town⁹⁶ and of Arronches⁹⁷, also obtained authorization and privileges for being an itinerant merchant at the service of the Court, which included exemption from the *fintas* and *talhas* taxes and guard duty⁹⁸. In the 15th century, in Marvão and Arronches, the muleteers recruited from the *coutos de homiziados* were authorized to leave in search of provisions, as long as they did not go to the places where they had committed crimes. In the case of Arronches this authorization did not apply to *homiziados* who had committed treachery (*aleive*), treason or slept with the women of those with whom they lived⁹⁹. The cart drivers received, broadly speaking, the same benefits as the muleteers, such as exemption from escorting prisoners and transporting money and paying municipal taxes. However, their royal charters mention additional privileges; the cart drivers were authorized to lodge in *coutos* and *coutadas* (enclaves under special jurisdiction) provided they caused no damage, they were not subject to certain local ordinances,

⁹⁴ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv. 25, fl. 28v (1445).

⁹⁵ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Fernando*, liv. 3, fl. 14v.

⁹⁶ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Fernando*, liv. 3, fl. 14.

⁹⁷ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Fernando*, liv. 3, fl. 13v.

⁹⁸ On this matter, see: Barroca, 2003: 86-87.

⁹⁹ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv. 25, fl. 28v (1445); Moreno, 1986: 105, 109.





for example, those that prohibited the cutting of firewood,¹⁰⁰ and they could travel along any roads and paths, including through protected areas (*defesas*). In 1520, we know that Pedro Vaz, a resident of Nisa, was also authorized by the king to acquire wood to repair his carts wherever he needed¹⁰¹.

The available data gives us a picture, albeit somewhat impressionistic, of the routes and range of activity of the cart drivers, muleteers, and merchants. This group operated on two levels. Firstly, at a regional level, they ensured connections between their towns and nearby settlements, both in Portugal, e.g. Crato and Alter do Chão, and Castile, e.g. Valencia de Alcántara and Albuquerque. Although it pertains to a later period, the 1533 customs record from Marvão reflects a much older reality, revealing that inhabitants of Portalegre and Castelo de Vide transported and sold textiles, namely linen and *judeia* cloth¹⁰², to Castile. João da Orta even transported 5,500 *varas* of linen and three of *judeia*. On the return trip, the merchants brought back wool, and sumac (Manso, 1989: 78-80). The latter was an important raw material for the textile manufacturing, but its use was even more significant in leatherworking (Melo, 2021: 88-91).

At a more inter-regional level, the agents involved in transportation established contacts and economic connections with other localities in the regions of *Entre-Tejo-e-Odiana*, *Estremadura*, and *Beira*, where they likely sought goods that were scarce in their own lands, such as salt and fish¹⁰³, as well as more profitable markets. For example, from the second half of the 15th century onwards we find inhabitants of Castelo de Vide selling yearling cattle at the fairs of Guarda and Trancoso – the most important ones in the region (Oliveira, 2011: 85), as well as agents from Castelo de Vide and Portalegre participating in the supply of meat to Lisbon. In 1505, Francisco Vaz and Martim Duarte promised to deliver 10 head of cattle to the city's slaughter house in the winter and 500 sheep in the summer (Melo, 2017: 203). In fact, throughout the 15th century, the role of professionals involved in transport and trade, connecting the towns with the rest of the Alentejo and Lisbon, was recognized by the individuals themselves; some cart drivers actually highlighted this contribution when requesting privileges from the king¹⁰⁴.

The transport and sale of goods were not carried out solely by the aforementioned professionals; it is also possible to find individuals who operated

¹⁰⁰ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv. 10, fl. 31 (Assumar, Portalegre, 1454), liv. 30, fl. 145v (Castelo de Vide, 1475), liv. 31, fl. 20v (Arronches, 1459); *Ch. de D. João II*, liv. 10, fl. 49 (Castelo de Vide, 1491), liv. 11, fl. 119v (Portalegre, 1491); *Ch. de D. Manuel*, liv. 6, fl. 110 (Nisa, 1502), liv. 7, fl. 45 (Arronches, 1512), liv. 28, fl. 40 (Portalegre, 1497), liv. 35, fl. 81 e 127v (Nisa, 1520).

¹⁰¹ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Manuel*, liv. 35, fl. 127v.

¹⁰² Unfortunately, it was not possible to identify the type of clothing to which it refers.

¹⁰³ In 1421, when there is reference to the fact that the muleteers of Riba de Odiana and Castile went to Setúbal to sell wheat and buy fish and salt (Moreno, 1979: 53), it is possible that some of the localities under study were included.

¹⁰⁴ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv. 10, fl. 31 (Castelo de Vide, 1454); *Ch. de D. João II*, liv. 10, fl. 49 (Castelo de vide, 1491), liv. 11, fl. 119v (Portalegre, 1491); *Ch. de D. Manuel*, liv. 6, fl. 110 (Portalegre, 1502), liv. 7, fl. 45 (Arronches, 1502), liv. 35, fl. 127v (Nisa, 1520).



outside the law, i.e. smugglers and traffickers of prohibited goods. While smuggling involved transporting products to avoid paying taxes, the trafficking of banned items implied the export of goods prohibited by the Crown, which were essential for the kingdom's survival and could potentially strengthen its rivals and enemies. The list of prohibited goods, although subject to adjustments and changes depending on the period, typically included livestock, currency, precious metals, leather, cloth, and wheat (Braga, 1992: 1057-1072; Duarte, 1998: 451-452).

In turn, determining the number of such offenses committed proves to be much more difficult, as we are only aware of those that were identified and mentioned in letters of pardon and in royal appointment letters. According to the consulted documentation, between 1443 and 1516, we know of at least two cases of smuggling¹⁰⁵ and 44 cases of trafficking prohibited goods in the towns of the Alto Alentejo¹⁰⁶. This sampling might be considered small given the number of localities under study, their population size, and the time period covered. However, we will take a closer look at the data for a glimpse of illegal trade.

In fact, 45 men involved in the trafficking of prohibited goods were found, most of them Portuguese. Only four Castilians are known, residents of Albuquerque and Valencia de Alcántara¹⁰⁷, and two others whose geographical origin could not be determined. On the Portuguese side, in nearly all the urban centers under study we find men who tried their luck in this illicit trade, apparently with a higher frequency in Castelo de Vide, as shown in Fig. 1. This situation in Castelo de Vide resulted from a combination of factors: its proximity to the border, its status as the second most populous urban center in the area under study, and the disadvantages of Marvão in terms of settlement and accessibility (Vilar, 2014: 193-196). Despite limited data, the evidence gathered seems to highlight the influence of Castelo de Vide over Marvão along the route leading to Valencia de Alcántara and, consequently, linking Portugal and Castile.

¹⁰⁵ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv. 13, fl. 74v (Arronches, 1456), liv. 15, fl. 88 (Campo Maior, 1453).

¹⁰⁶ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv. 1, fl. 3 (Marvão, c. 1454) e 24 (Portalegre, 1462), liv. 8, fl. 94 (Marvão, 1464), liv. 14, fl. 57 (Castelo de Vide, 1466), liv. 16, fl. 100v (Arronches, 1468), liv. 17, fl. 89 (Castelo de Vide, 1471), 22v (Castelo de Vide, 1471), liv. 22, fl. 117-117v (Castelo de Vide, 1471), 118v (Valência de Alcántara, 1471), 119v (Marvão, 1471), liv. 27, fl. 93v (Ouguela, 1443), liv. 28, fl. 45v (Castelo de Vide, 1468), liv. 29, fl. 75-75v (Castelo de Vide, 1472), liv. 30, fl. 79 (Portalegre, 1475), 87 (Castelo de Vide, 1475), 160v (Alegrete, 1475), liv. 31, fl. 112 (Albuquerque, 1469), liv. 32, fl. 73 (Castelo de Vide, 1480), liv. 33, fl. 69 (Castelo de Vide, c. 1462); *Ch. de D. João II*, liv. 2, fl. 70v (Campo Maior, 1482), liv. 1, fl. 13 (Castelo de Vide, 1486) e 151 (Castelo de Vide, c. 1485), liv. 4, fl. 21 (Castelo de Vide, c. 1485) e 93v (Castelo de Vide, 1486), liv. 12, fl. 31 (Castelo de Vide, 1489), liv. 19, fl. 96 (Marvão, 1487), liv. 20, fl. 21 (Nisa, 1487), 23v-24 (Monforte, 1487), 180v (Albuquerque, 1487), liv. 23, fl. 1v (Castelo de Vide, 1484), liv. 24, fl. 94 (Castelo de Vide, 1483), liv. 25, fl. 50 (Castelo de Vide, 1483), liv. 26, fl. 73-73v (Castelo de Vide, 1483), liv. 27, fl. 63 (Arronches, 1489); *Ch. de D. Manuel*, liv. 16, fl. 74 (Monforte, 1499), liv. 25, fl. 89 (Montalvão, 1516), liv. 26, fl. 8 (Alpalhão, 1495), liv. 35, fl. 44v e 46v (1503), liv. 45, fl. 25v (Monforte, 1501) e 43v (Portalegre, 1501).

¹⁰⁷ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv. 22, fl. 118v, liv. 31, fl. 112; *Ch. de D. João II*, liv. 20, fl. 180v.



The offenders that were identified were mostly Christians, with only two cases involving Jews. Their range of occupations and social status, comparable to other regions (Duarte, 1998), proved to be diverse. We encountered farmers, artisans such as ironsmiths and millers, members of the local minor nobility, such as squires and gentlemen (*fidalgos*), and even some royal officials responsible for preventing the illegal trade of goods, including the *alcaide das sacas*¹⁰⁸ and the port clerk.

The most traded product by the Portuguese was livestock – hogs, sheep, goats, cattle, and horses. It is common knowledge that these were often stolen, since the region was an area of livestock farming, and selling to Castile yielded higher profits because prices were higher in the neighboring kingdom (Oliveira, 2013: 76-83, 87; Duarte, 1999b: 125). Considering the number of animals that we know were traded, it is tempting to believe that the quantities varied depending on the type of livestock. The sale of cattle, horses, and pigs appears to never have exceeded around twenty heads, but this was not the case for sheep and goats, for which we know much higher figures. In 1480 and 1483, Vasco Peres and Gonalo Mendes, both from Castelo de Vide, respectively smuggled 45 goats and 200 sheep¹⁰⁹. In sharp contrast, the sale of other prohibited goods, such as cloth, currency, and precious metals (gold and silver), appears to have been much less frequent. The consulted documentation indicates that these items were sent to Castile, though it almost always fails to specify the exact destinations. When such destinations are known and/or the route the offenders might have taken is indicated, they correspond to Albuquerque and, especially, Valencia de Alcntara. In 1486, Ferno Loureno, a resident of Castelo de Vide, appears to be the only known case of someone who traveled to Valladolid¹¹⁰.

5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In the late Middle Ages, the medium-sized towns of northeastern Alentejo, Castelo de Vide and Portalegre, showed greater economic vigor, with intense agricultural and pastoral activity, textile production, and the transport and sale of goods, whether within or outside legal boundaries. These towns exhibit a higher degree of specialization and hierarchy in the trades and occupations carried out by their inhabitants, offering more specialized products and services on two levels. Firstly, on a more local scale, the professions served the more modest settlements of the region under study, e.g. Nisa and Marvo, and, dissipating the role of the border, the neighboring Castilian towns, such as Valencia de Alcntara and Albuquerque. Secondly, on a broader scale, individuals with specialized occupations were active in the trade routes that connected the Alentejo, Beira, and Lisbon, and in Castile, could extended as far as Trujillo and Valladolid. The economic relations and

¹⁰⁸ Royal officer in charge of supervising the export of prohibited goods.

¹⁰⁹ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Afonso V*, liv. 32, fl. 73v (1480); *Ch. de D. Joo II*, liv. 25, fl. 50 (1483).

¹¹⁰ ANTT, *Ch. de D. Joo II*, liv. 4, fl. 93v.

complementarity appear to be most evident, within the studied group, among those located in the Serra de São Mamede, while Campo Maior and Ouguela were more closely linked to another urban center – Elvas (Fernandes, 2011: 567).

The complementarity and specialization of some of the urban centers analyzed, combined with the growth, stimulation, and capacity to absorb local, regional, and international trade, led to a more intense occupation and exploitation of the surrounding lands and resources. This gradually reinforced the specialization of each urban center, boosted the textile sector, and required tighter control over certain economic activities¹¹¹.

As in other urban centers located along the borders, whether maritime or inland, the proximity to the frontier encouraged the granting of privileges to trades linked to the metals and arms sectors, e.g. Alegrete and Portalegre, which were important for their defense. It also fostered the presence of artisans and other professionals such as foreign physicians and highlighted the role of towns like Castelo de Vide in facilitating commercial ties between the two kingdoms. However, during periods of conflict between the Portuguese and Castilian monarchs, the geographical location negatively impacted the socioeconomic fabric of the towns in northeastern Alentejo, and the process of recovery was not equal in all of them, as the case of Marvão reveals.

In summary, the case of northeastern Alentejo helps us to better understand the types of labor activities that could be found in small and medium-sized frontier towns in Portugal, as well as their role in defining urban hierarchies and regional influence. Finally, it highlights how the border, along with other elements, such as soil type and water availability, played an important role in shaping the economy and life in the region, for better or for worse.

RECIBIDO: 5/5/25; ACEPTADO: 14/9/25

¹¹¹ Read about this subject, for example, the case of Castelo de Vide: Oliveira, 2011: 70-89.

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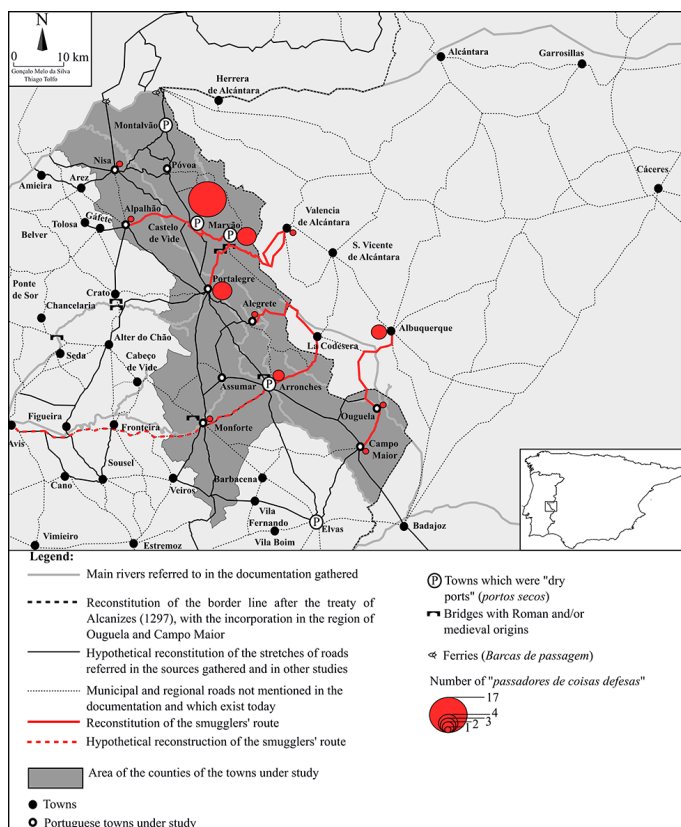


Fig. 1. "Passadores de coisas defesas" (Illicit traders in prohibited commodities) in the towns of north-eastern Alentejo (1443 and 1516).