



**BRIDGE**  
**OF FUNDO**  
**DE RUA**

AMARANTE



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“Fundo da Rua”, a toponym that comes before or after (as the visitor moves from east or west) the crossing over the river Ovelha, in Aboadela<sup>1</sup>, is enough to confirm the unilinear type of this settlement and the importance of its position within the road network of the territory of Amarante. However, if we had no information about the location of the Bridge of Fundo de Rua, we would only need to look at its ancient structure to assume its preponderance. However, since when may we consider this crossing as one of the main bridges built on the transition between the Entre-Douro-e-Minho and the Trás-os-Montes regions?



Aerial view.



Upstream view.

<sup>1</sup> The name of the parish replaced the former "honra" [a type of Portuguese administrative division] and municipality of Ovelha do Marão. Also called Bobadela (Costa, 1706-1712).

The available cartography regarding the kingdom of Portugal after Álvaro Seco's map from 1561, especially the one that represents, albeit schematically, the main road structure, shows three crossing points towards the interior of the Trás-os-Montes and the Beira regions on the banks of the Douro, which currently seem obvious and would have been particularly important in the Middle Ages: Canaveses, Amarante and Cavês<sup>2</sup>. The traffic from the coast converges to these three locations where a crossing was built, since it was absolutely necessary to overcome a watercourse as impetuous and mighty as the Tâmega used to be before the dams. From these crossings, whose building complexity increases from the north to the south (i.e., depending on the flow increase and on the width of the river bed), there were routes that headed from the west to the east.

From Canaveses the road headed across the mountain of Aboboreira through Venda da Giesta, Fonte do Mel and Carrasqueira, joining the road to Amarante near Padrões da Teixeira. In Amarante, a village with a unilinear plan<sup>3</sup>, the traveller who came, either from Porto, or from Braga or Guimarães, crossed the bridge of Saint Gonçalo and took the road towards Ovelha, Carneiro, Padrões de Teixeira, Mesão Frio and Moledo.

Upstream, the bridge of Cavês and, later, the one of Mondim ensured the crossing of men, animals and vehicles between the province of Minho – and its capital Braga – and the Trás-os-Montes region, especially the town of Chaves.



Bridge of Canaveses (missing) (Marco de Canaveses). Source: IHRU archive.

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Bridge of Saint Gonçalo (Amarante). Downstream view.

<sup>2</sup> We did not include the crossing of Chaves, despite its remarkable Roman origin, because we consider that, from a Medieval point of view, the main crossings between the Minho and the Trás-os-Montes regions were those we mentioned, which were located to the south of the old *Aquae Flaviae*, whose importance declined in favour of Vila Real or even Canaveses. Chaves, important for its location between *Bracara Augusta* and *Asturica*, on the path of a well-known route associated with the mining industry, ceased to take on the role it played when, in 104 AD, Trajan ordered the completion of the ancient crossing. Furthermore, a study about the evolution of the communication routes located to the north of the Douro is yet to be made. As referred by Humberto Baquero Moreno (1982: 193): "it is still necessary to ascertain to which extent did this network [of Roman roads] reach the term of the Portuguese Middle Ages in perfect working conditions".

<sup>3</sup> The description included in the *Numeramento* from 1527 is particularly expressive: "This village features a long street, with no walls, where São Gonçalo stands, close to a bridge over the river Tâmega, facing Gouveia and Covelo" (Freire, 1905: 241-273).

However, although the Medieval man undertook the construction of several bridges, this kind of works was still quite expensive, laborious to maintain and, above all, a powerful aid to the dissemination of dangers and enemies, among which were the plague and people who weren't part of the community. In this difficult balance between need and prophylaxis, the policy that was already practiced by the Romans prevailed: that it would be better to avoid the stronger flows than to cross them. So, in many places, the paid or "pro deo" crossing boats persisted. The bridges were works left for the great, such as kings, queens or saints.

Once modernity arrived, even before of the first economic theories, bridges became a crucial element for development purposes and was no longer a mere instrument of individual piety to aid those who had to travel along the paths and roads, among the living – such as pilgrims and traders – and the dead – such as the tormented "souls" for whom prayers were said at the crossroads. Although it is not known as well as it should be, it is assumed that the regulatory and building process that characterized certain local and regional (and even private) institutions, such as the Church and the Town Councils, was intensified over the Modern Period, promoting the repair and improvement of several communication channels and their corresponding crossings.

We believe that the construction of the Bridge of Fundo de Rua, over the Ovelha river, falls within this sphere of competences and sensitivities. Although it is classified as Romanesque, this crossing can only be considered as an heir to the Medieval models that might have inspired the builders, for example the one of Canaveses, despite the distance and the difference between the watercourses and their flows. Indeed, the small river Ovelha did not require the technical complexity and monumentality of the vanished crossing over the Tâmega. Nevertheless, the Bridge of Fundo de Rua takes on a meaning that is revealed by its dimensions, as we've already mentioned.

The fact that the date 1630 is associated with the Bridge of Aboadela, or Ovelha do Marão – since it is epigraphed on the foot of the cruise built at the entrance of the Bridge, on the left bank – seems to suggest it was a reconstruction or, at least, a structure built from scratch in the location of an older crossing, probably by ford.

So, we are dealing with a specimen of a stone Bridge supported by four round arches with different sizes, on which there is a platform that is slightly raised above the larger arch. The pillars are protected by sharp cut-waters upstream and by buttresses downstream.

We have some similar examples in the central and northern regions of Portugal, namely the bridge of Meimoa, in the existing municipality of Penamacor, an outcome of the collective efforts of many people from the Beira regions. It was commissioned in 1607 by Filipe II, and, therefore, it is contemporary to the one from Aboadela<sup>4</sup>. In fact, these are similar structures despite having different sizes (the bridge of Meimoa has nine arches): a ramped platform, a pseudo-isodomic masonry work and round arches whose spans have different sizes.



Cruise.

<sup>4</sup> José Cornide, a noble Spaniard from the Enlightenment period who travelled the peninsula in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, left us a note about the bridge of Meimoa and the issue of river silting, which caused the destruction and abandonment of certain bridges: "After having a poor meal at a terrible inn, I left Fundão; up the valley, about a league away, I passed a fine stone bridge over a river called Meymoa [Meimoa creek], which springs from the Mountain of Gardunha and that, little further down, joins the Zêzere; another league ahead I passed by another fine stone bridge with 9 arches; but both this and the previous will soon be clogged with the many sands carried by these rivers, which, at that time, one could pretty much walk over" (Manuel Abascal & Cebrián: 2009: 705).





Bridge of the Meimoa creek (Penamacor). Upstream view. Source: IHRU archive.

If the construction of the bridge of Meimoa may be understood in the light of a policy of political centralization of the territory by the dual monarchy, the old crossing of Ovelha could also have benefited from the same political need, within the sphere of its lordship. We should not forget the role of the old “beetria” [a type of Portuguese administrative division], and later “honra” [a type of Portuguese administrative division] and municipality of Ovelha do Marão, which went through so many vicissitudes over the 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. The details of these vicissitudes were narrated by the author of its corresponding entry in the *Grande enciclopédia portuguesa e brasileira*, which are summarized below.

In the 14<sup>th</sup> century Ovelha do Marão was a “beetria” – “a sort of lordship where the vassals elected as lord a person who pleased them” (Correia et al., 1963a: 417-418)<sup>5</sup> – which belonged to Martim Afonso de Sousa; he sold it to Martim Lourenço Corvo, thus outraging the vassals, who had already complained of the maltreatment inflicted by their first lord. Seeking royal protection, and refusing the domain imposed by the sale, the residents invited prince Afonso, the bastard son of King João I and the first duke of Bragança, to be their lord. After the duke accepted the request and granted protection according to terms that led the residents of Ovelha to place themselves under the perpetual protection of the House of Bragança, the lordship seemed to have enough stability, were it not for the beheading of Fernando by King João II. Despite the tragic outcome of the pursuit for the young ducal house, the residents of the zealous “beetria” of Ovelha sought in the executioner’s son, Afonso, the protection against, perhaps, cunning aristocratic desires. Again bad luck struck the lord of Ovelha who, having died at an early age in 1491, vacated the lordship located on the slopes of the Marão.

The domain was finally handed over to Jorge, the half-brother of King Afonso who, until a certain point in time, was the only and last hope to take his father’s place on the throne. Because Jorge de Lencastre died in 1550 and the lordship of the “beetria” was being disputed by Teodósio, a duke from the House of Bragança, King João III orders its seize, thus uniting it to the Crown (Correia et al., 1963b: 834-835).

<sup>5</sup> On this subject, please read the textes about the Churches of Saint Mary of Sobretâmega and Saint Nicholas of Canaveses, Marco de Canaveses.



So, in 1630 the lord of Ovelha do Marão was King Filipe III of Portugal (k. 1621-1640), one of the monarchs who favoured the building of bridges and roads the most, in a period that was particularly troubled and, therefore, eager for communications (Uriol Salcedo, 2001: 189). Given the privileged position of Aboadela within the peninsular road network – connecting the west coast to the interior of the peninsula – it is likely that this work became, not only a local and regional plan, but also a national undertaking.

On the other hand, since Amarante was the epicentre of different routes due to its status as a spiritual centre that was particularly famous in the Modern Period, we cannot ignore the need to provide safe and fast accesses to pilgrims and devotees. Due to the strength of the “mythology” that had recently emerged around the roads to Compostela (Spain), the religious itineraries with a local or regional scope were forgotten, like the ones that headed to Saint Gonçalo of Amarante, Saint Senhorinha of Basto (Cabeceiras de Basto) or, beyond the Douro, to Our Lady of Lapa (Sernancelhe), one of the most important Marian sanctuaries in Portugal.

The description of the sanctuary of Amarante made by Father Luiz Cardoso in his *Diccionario geografico...* is particularly expressive:

78 “It is one of the most crowded pilgrimage Sanctuaries in the Kingdom; because it is visited every single day of the year. On January 10<sup>th</sup>, Saint Gonçalo’s Day, a huge crowd attends the celebrations: on the eve of the Holy Spirit, many are those who come from Guimarães: in the first week after the celebrations, the Marquisate of Vila Real – each parish with its specific prayers – and all the men and women bring wax candles to offer as alms and, in the middle of the processions, they bring some wax chestnut trees, which are also offered on the same day: the Municipality of Mondim de Basto comes in a procession: in a similar way, on the first Monday of June come the Municipalities of Santa Cruz, Tuyas, and Canavezes; on the eleventh of the same month the Municipality of Felgueiras, and on the thirteenth the one of Unhão; on the second of July comes the parish of Soalhães: in the same month come the ones of Grillo, Vila-Marim, Teixeira, Sedielos, and Modroens: in August, come the Municipality of Monte-Longo, and the Parishes of Santa Marinha do Zezere, Tizouras, Pena-Joya, Fontes, Rezende, Viaris, and Gestaço: in September comes the Parish of Barro, São Martinho de Mouros, São Pedro de Paos, and São João de Ovil; in October comes the parish of Lobrigos: on Saturdays during this month, and in November come those from the land of Feira, and the Municipalities of Maya which are ten, twelve and fifteen leagues away” (Cardoso, 1747-1751: 423).

A period that was particularly prone to travelling, either for business or spiritual reasons, stimulated the allocation of “sisas” [type of tax], “sobras” [type of tax] and extraordinary “fintas” [type of tax] to the construction and maintenance of roads and, of course, bridges<sup>6</sup>. Unfortunately there are few written accounts of the proceedings related to these works<sup>7</sup>.

6 In 1605, the monarch ordered the issue of a provision to put an end to the “major disorders” that occurred while collecting the “sisa” [type of tax] which was intended for the construction of bridges (Silva, 1854: 132-133).

7 In this regard, please read Serrão (2000: 358-361).

So, only documents that we weren't able to find could clarify the reason or reasons behind such an expensive structure. The fact that it was built along a route that was particularly sensitive in terms of regional circulation could make it the result of a collective work, as the aforementioned bridge of Meimoa and other similar crossings, which demanded considerable manual or monetary efforts from the populations. Taking advantage of "sisas", "sobejos" [type of tax] or extraordinary "fintas", as well as of the community's effort (a process that was quite usual in the Iberian world) allowed the construction of large structures, and that is what might have happened in the case of the Bridge of Fundo de Rua.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the old "honra" of Ovelha was handed over to the majorats of Mateus, certainly to reward the military and political achievements of Luís António de Sousa Botelho Mourão (1722-1798). In spiritual terms, the rectory of Aboadela was subject to the Monastery of Pombeiro (Felgueiras), which presented the priests and collected the tithes. In fact, it is in 1758 that we learn a little bit more about the parish of Aboadela and its economy, which always relied on the Ovelha river and its crossing.

According to the rector Alexandre da Silva, the parish was located "between the Mountain of Marão and another mountain called Ladayro, near a very fertile Brook (...)" that was crossed by the "Ovelha river, with its quiet course that began in "the hamlet of Covelo and ended in the Tãmega". It was a league long and it was used to breed fish, especially trouts. Across the entire tilled plain nourished by the Ovelha river grew up cereals, wine, chestnuts and some olive oil; its margins were edged by vines and chestnut trees. So, the Bridge located on Rua da Ovelha was built over the river showing "a very good masonry work" (Silva, 1758).

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the economy of Ovelha do Marão still relied on the land; shepherding was a complementary and also quite relevant occupation within an economy deeply marked by the tripartite micro-agro-forestry system mentioned by Carlos Alberto Ferreira de Almeida (1978). Considering that much of its term was a mountainous territory, it provided the required materials to meet the needs of the intensive use of flat irrigated areas, as pasture for cattle or roots for the production of charcoal. In a demographic study about Aboadela developed over the first two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, António Barros Cardoso speaks of "a deeply rural society whose life [was] dictated by the pulse of nature" (1986: 75-100). This stability was probably only disturbed by the French troops in 1809. As a place of passage, both Ovelha and Ovelhinha (Gondar) were plundered by Soult's men (1769-1851) who ended up seizing Amarante on May 3<sup>rd</sup> that year. Those are the accounts, for example, of friar Tomás de Santa Teresa (2009) or of the author of the feuilleton "João de Deos: história de um engeitado" [João de Deos: the story of an outcast], published in the magazine *Arquivo Rural*<sup>8</sup>. Moreover, Camilo Castelo Branco (2010) poured, both the memories of the events occurred in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and the account of his own experience as a traveller along the road to Vila Real into some of his novels.

Once peace and prosperity returned, the old circulation corridor remained as the only route between the coast and the Trás-os-Montes region; in one way or another it has always been used until our days, although engineering (despite being based on experience) dares crossing what once could only be bypassed. [NR]

8 [S.a.] – João de Deos: história de um engeitado. *Arquivo Rural*. N. ° 6 (1863) and following years. The novel, published in instalments, describes the political and social atmosphere of northern Portugal during the first French invasion, mentioning the routes covered by the troops along the Marão, either through Ovelha or Padrões da Teixeira.

## CHRONOLOGY

1258: the patronage of the church of Saint Mary of Aboadela was property of the Monastery of Pombeiro;

14<sup>th</sup> century: Ovelha do Marão, term which included the parishes of Aboadela and Canadelo, was a Medieval "beetria";

1550: on the death of Jorge de Lencastre, the Medieval "beetria" becomes the property of the Crown, by order of King João III;

1630: construction date of the cruise at the east entrance of the Bridge;

17<sup>th</sup> century: construction period of the Bridge of Fundo de Rua;

18<sup>th</sup> century: the term of Ovelha do Marão is transferred to the jurisdiction of the master grantees and barons of Mateus;

2010: integration of the Bridge of Fundo de Rua in the Route of the Romanesque.

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