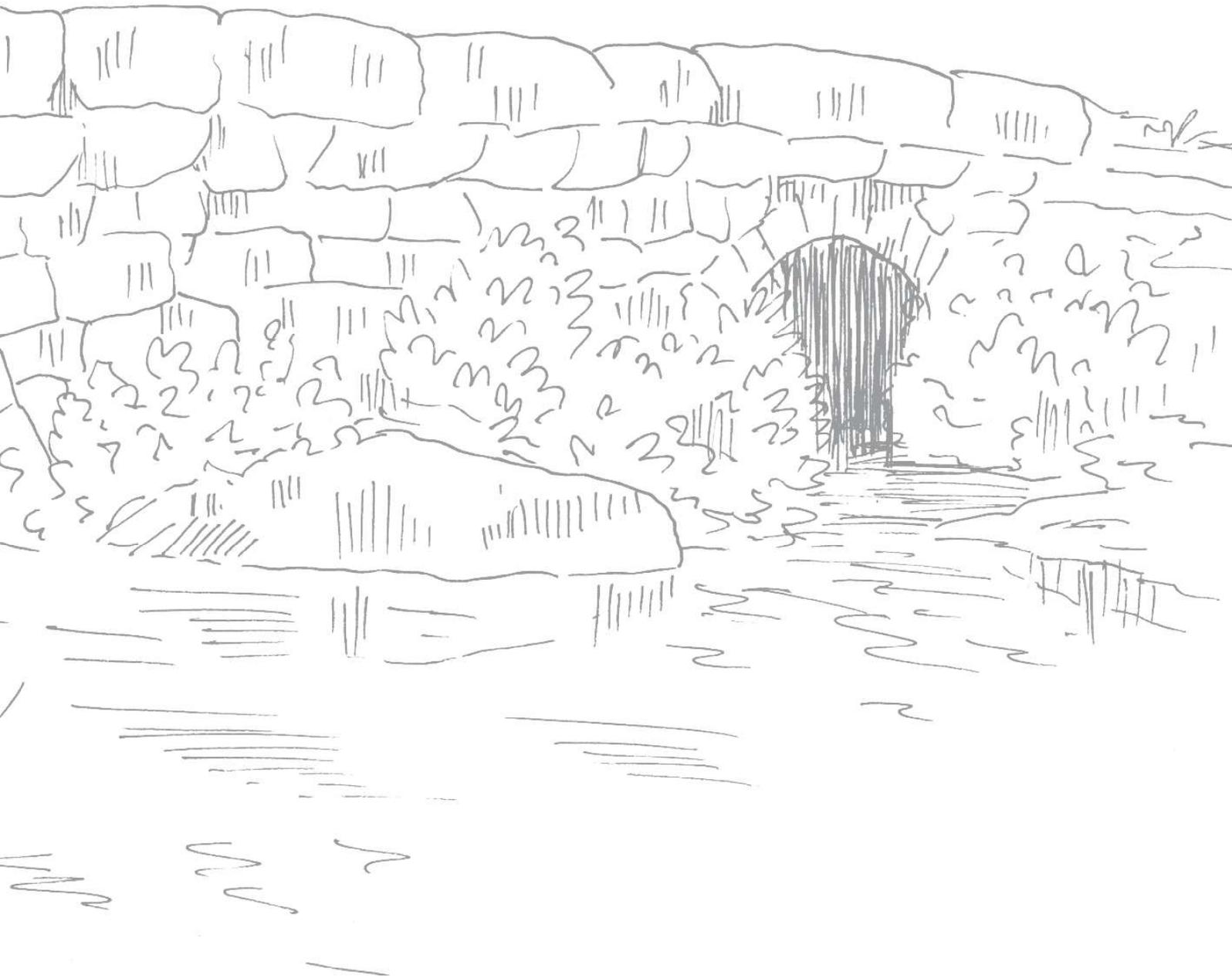


BRIDGE
OF PANCHORRA
RESENDE



BRIDGE

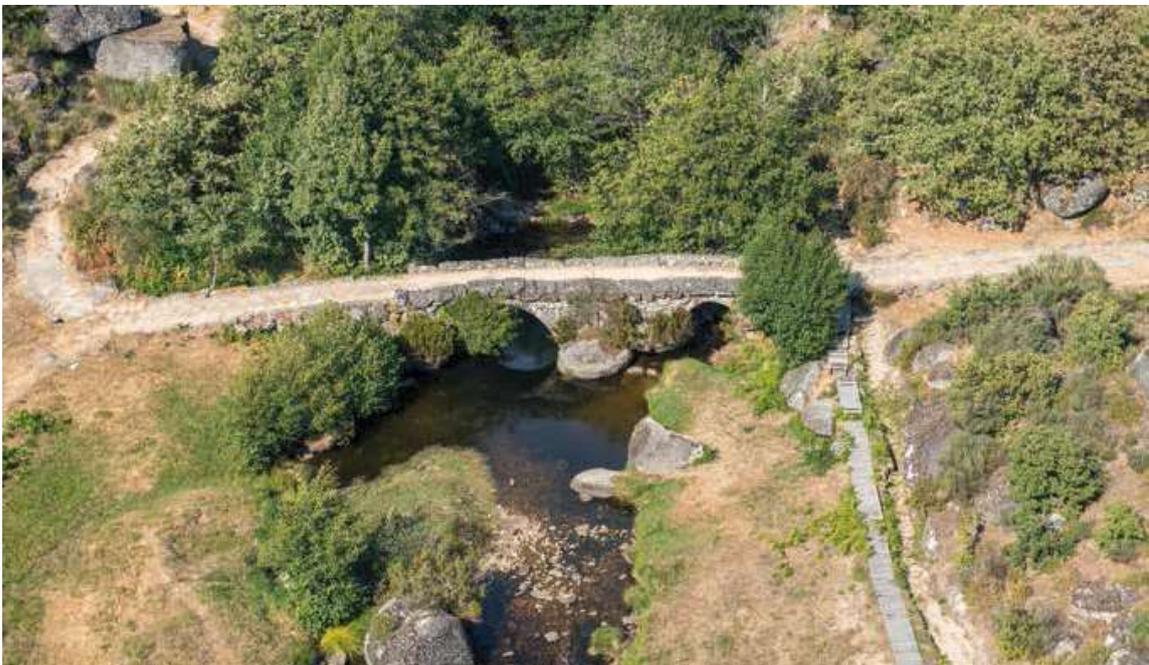
OF PANCHORRA

RESENDE

In Portugal, there aren't a sufficient number of studies about the issues associated with our road heritage, specifically paths and roads. Despite being related to archaeology, the theme of Roman and Medieval roads drew historiography's attention over the 20th century; we are able to say this based on the existing works that are supported by the scarce available sources and, more frequently, by a tradition that has always associated antiquity with local road infrastructures without ever relying on factual information. The lack of investment in a systematic archaeological study of circulations structures is combined with the scarce research regarding the vocabulary used in Medieval and Modern documents. And outside the chronological limits of Romanization and the Middle Ages, the construction of roads seems to have ceased or never existed. As we know, that is not true¹.

Bridges are associated with roads and circulation. The reputation of being ancient constructions also fell on the bridges, which were popularly ascribed to the "Moors" and the "Romans". In fact, within the context of local imagination, bridges (especially masonry bridges) created the idea of being structures whose existence was only possible thanks to the intervention of a superior culture from the past, formed by heroes or saints. Translated into paper by the monographers, the ascription of a Roman date to bridges became a common procedure. In order to do that, the existence of a crossing structure made of stone with one or more round arches would be enough, regardless of its location within the local and regional road context, or even its presence (or absence) in the available documentation.

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Aerial view.

¹ That was pointed out by Carlos Alberto Ferreira de Almeida (1968), the author of the only substantive work about circulation in the Middle Ages, which is often quoted.



Upstream view.

However, in this persistence of models lie both the fallacy and the explanation for the very common mistake of considering the Romans as authors of most of the Portuguese stone bridges. Later, this generalization passed on to the Romanesque style by the hand of scholars and academics, since it reproduces the structural model of the curved vault as support system, which was abundantly used by the civilization of the Lazio. The proliferation of Roman bridges was immediately followed by Romanesque bridges, again with a chronology that is decontextualized from the actual needs of the communities that would have supposedly commissioned them.

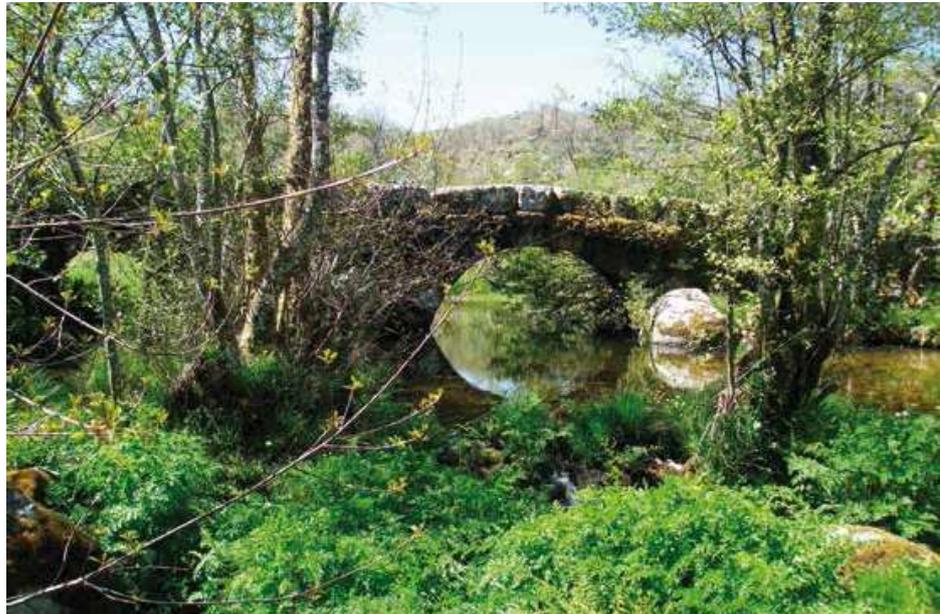
Indeed, one of the most common mistakes that are made while dating a bridge is to consider it as an isolated object, not associating its construction to the needs of the community or region it would serve at the time when it was built. A structure as complex as a bridge, which is as expensive today as it was in the past, would most certainly entail a properly thought-out project which could only be carried out by resorting to a budget that wasn't always available.

On a first stage, which includes the Romanization period, a bridge was a powerful aid in the conquest and development of the territory, standing as a work with an eminently public and political nature. Subsequently, the Middle Ages did not fail to assign the same purpose to the bridge, despite the fact that it was not framed within a national plan. With few exceptions (such as the Douro bridge, for whose construction King Afonso Henriques left an important legacy), the Medieval crossing is the result of institutional or individual conveniences at the

local or regional levels. Only in the Modern Period did the nation-state launch a construction plan to build bridges for political purposes².

But, in both cases and until a very late period, the arched bridge model characterized the building theme of river passages in Portugal and in Europe.

One example of misinterpretation and poor historical reading of the space and the territory which resulted in an incorrect dating is the case of the Bridge of Panchorra. We believe that the question of its classification as a Romanesque Bridge has only recently been raised, although it was locally regarded as a Roman Bridge³. Here we should note that, although the possibility of the existence of a Roman road that crossed the top of the mountain has been suggested, the available documentary and archaeological data refute that idea (Correia, Alves & Vaz, 1995). The main Roman roads avoided slopes and marshes: precisely what they would find to cross the massif of Montemuro in the north-south or northwest-southeast directions. We believe that, if there were any Roman roads, these would bypass the mountain instead of crossing it, thus giving expression to the theories that suggest three traffic areas that were possibly used during the Romanization period: along the banks of the Douro, of the Paiva and the natural corridor between the valleys of the Balsemão and the Teixeira brook⁴.



Downstream view.

² The aforementioned author refers that, "(...) in the Roman period, a road is an essentially strategic and administrative imperial route. In the Middle Ages, it was called public road and connected nearby villages, thus reflecting a closed and manorial economy. In the following period, it takes the name of royal road and expressed the political centralization" (Almeida, 1968: 4).

³ In the monograph of Resende, dated 1982, there is still no reference to this chronology. The author conscientiously says: "(...) there is a rustic bridge over the Cabrum which did not exist in 1758, as the Abbot of this year's Inquiries expressly states when responding to the questionnaire on bridges, "This parish has no bridge whatsoever"" (Pinto, 1982: 522).

⁴ We do not mean to say that there were three roads, but only circulation channels, spaces that allowed their existence. The routes intended for the circulation of cars sought to benefit from the contour lines, thus avoiding abrupt fluctuations in altitude and difficult crossings of the deepest river beds. About this matter, please read Resende (2011).

In the case of the Bridge of Panchorra, nothing indicates that it is in actually a Roman construction, or even a Medieval one. This was due to several reasons, as we'll see, but above all because its existence did not meet the needs of the communities that existed during those periods. Therefore, we are interested in learning about the origin and evolution of this parish and its boundaries.

The first reference to Panchorra dates back to 1258, when the inspectors visited Ovadas, to whose parish it belonged at the time. They heard the prelate João Garcia stating that the "villa" of Panchorra had been, together with Ovadas, a "honra" [a type of Portuguese administrative division] from Mendo Gonçalves that owed no lease to the king (Herculano, 1936: 989). Thirty years later, another witness assured that there were three residential properties; one belonged to the church of São Paio (and, therefore, to the parish church); another to São João de Tarouca, and a third one to the Monastery of Cárquere (Resende) (Duarte, 2001: 367). No royal major-domo entered Panchorra because, according to its residents, it was a "honra". Being sure about the royal condition of the land, the royal enquirers correct this irregularity in 1290, enforcing King Dinis' sentence which determined "that those [residential properties] must be inspected by the King's major-domo in all its rights"⁵. Indeed, in 1513, when the land charter was granted to the land of Aregos, it already mentioned all the taxes paid to the Crown.

In the 16th century, Panchorra became ecclesiastically independent from Ovadas, but was still a small village. In 1527, it had 17 residents, i.e., between 71 and 77 inhabitants (Collaço, 1931: 145). Its status as a chaplaincy or curacy confirms the connection to Ovadas which remained connected to Panchorra due to the patronage right. It is only natural that, in addition to the creation of the new parish, the main acts of the Christian life continued to take place in the valley, in the church of Saint Pelagius, the area's primary core of humanization and Christianization⁶.



Partial view of the village of Ovadas (Resende).

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General view of the village of Panchorra (Resende) from the village of Gralheira (Cinfães).

⁵ Statements concerning the inquiries of King Dinis in the "julgado" [a type of Portuguese administrative division] of Aregos (Duarte, 2001: 397).

⁶ In 1563 the existence of a tabernacle required a minimum of 30 residents, a number that Panchorra did not have (Diocese of Lamego, 1563: 43).



Stone path leading to the Bridge.

It is within this context that we may consider the need to build the Bridge of Panchorra, already at an advanced stage of the village's human and urban development. But, even in this case, the crossing did not provide a direct connection to the old parish seat. In order to reach Ovadas, an inhabitant of Panchorra should go north, directly down towards the course of the Cabrum river, which could be seen from the hilltop of Coelhoso (1141 meters). At a specific point of the river bed, perhaps on ford or on a filly, the traveller would begin climbing up towards the chapel of Saint Peter skirting the summit with the same name, a place from where he would already see the church of Ovadas. Now the Bridge is located to the west of Panchorra and was part of a route that went to Vale de Papas (Ramires, Cinfães), which was already part of the former municipality of Ferreiros de Tendais. This path, which is still visible on the landscape, is typologically characterized by the variability of its layout: an uneven pavement that alternates between the use of cobble stones, rocky massifs or outcrops and sections of dirt road. Could this road be part of the "old path" mentioned in the description of the boundaries of Gralheira (Cinfães) in 1258, which some authors consider as being Roman (Correia, Alves & Vaz, 1995: 113)?

Gralheira's current limits, which are heirs, if not a copy, of the division that took place in 1258, may shed light on the approximate location of that ancient path⁷. The fact that its importance and antiquity (no matter how vague and subjective this qualification is) would be enough to trigger the idea of that this was a georeferencing structure in the minds of the mountain inhabitants of the time, seems rather clear. However, the expression "path" is not necessarily associated with a road with an especially heavy traffic. Most likely, it was one of the first regional crossings that were later replaced by the more or less complex network that accompanied the clearing of land and the humanization of the mountain.



General view of the village of Gralheira (Cinfães) from the village of Panchorra (Resende).

⁷ "Martinus Menendi juratus et interrogatus dixit, quod villa e Graleyra cum totis suis terminis sicut dividit per rivulum de Cabruu per aquam, et vadi ad fontem de Teyxeura ad penedo de Cambo, et de inde venit per cume de Varzena Benefacta ad fontem de Episcopo de Ameygoadas, et vadit ad castellum de Aquilar, et ferit in cruce et per carreirum antiqum, et ferit in termino de Ovadas et in Cabrum, est tota regalenga" (Herculano, 1936: 984) [Description of the boundaries of the village of Gralheira, which opposed, across the Cabrum, the fountain of Teixeira, the Cambo rock, the summit of Campo Benfeito, the fountain of the Bishop, Ameijoadas, Castelo de Aguiar and an old path, in the land of Ovadas, thus being a property of the King].

Based on the current demarcation and following the description of the witness from 1258, we believe that this path was located to the west of Gralheira, given that the list of georeferencing points is done in two directions; one is clockwise: along the current of the Cabrum river until the source of the Teixeira, across the Cambo outcrop; the other is anticlockwise, mentioning the bridges of the “well-arranged”⁸ tilled plain, Fonte do Bispo, Ameijoadas and finally the castle of Aguiar – which may well be the Alrete castle, on the boundary between Bustelo, Ramires and Tendais (Cinfães)⁹. Close to this location, the boundary line crossed that ancient path until the limits of Ovadas, already above the Cabrum. Naturally, it does not mention its boundary with Panchorra due to the fact that the latter was still part of the terms of Ovadas.

Although it is virtually impossible to establish direct connections between the road network that existed in 1258 and the one represented by a contemporary topographic chart, we believe that this “old path” probably crossed the terms of Gralheira, in a east-west or southwest-northeast direction, thereby granting a greater expression to pathways which had recently used by the inhabitants of that village to reach the Paiva valley, through the Portas de Montemuro. However, we do not exclude the possibility that this was a primary route that expressed, through its orography, the chronological and spiritual bonds between Gralheira and Ferreiros de Tendais, which were preserved for a long time. So, the path, despite being ancient in the eyes of the deponents of 1258, was probably one of the many trails that already crossed the mountain back then, which were not associated with any particularly remarkable road or walkway within the regional context. And Panchorra was not necessarily included in their path either.

On the other hand, we cannot ignore the fact that there are already references to a toll tax – a sign of trade and traffic – in the 13th century. Aligned with Vale de Papas and Talhada, Panchorra probably stood at the intersection of the penetration channels of the Cabrum and the Balsemão. So, it is natural that, in an attempt to control the diverted (and, therefore, untaxed) traffic of the valley routes, the royal power set up a customs barrier in that village. However, this is still not enough to place the origin of its Bridge in the Middle Ages.

Indeed, the most important communication routes were located to the north of Panchorra, along the south bank of the Douro river, thus more important villages and serving a more significant area in terms of population. In that region, the number of stone crossings increases in the proportion of the obstacles it is necessary to overcome. In the current municipality of Cinfães and along the municipality of Resende there are several masonry bridges, the heiresses of old Medieval passageways that need forced to maintain, expand or rebuild. The bridge of Pias (over the Bestança river)¹⁰, the bridge over the Cabrum or the ones of Fontoura, over the São Martinho brook are some examples – virtually all of Medieval origin or rebuilt during a later period.

8 Currently Campo Benfeito, in the municipality of Castro Daire.

9 António Manuel Lima points out the Castles Velho and Novo [Old and New] in the parish of Ramires (Cinfães), near Vale de Papas (Pinho & Lima, 2000: 64).

10 The bridge of Pias is a crossing that underwent several interventions: around 1693 its reconstruction was commissioned by the majorat of Velude, who divided the administration of his vast heritage between both banks of the Bestança. According to Friar Teodoro de Melo, in 1733: “between this one [the municipality of Cinfães] and the municipality of Ferreiros we find the river Bestouça [sic, it is Bestança], and its flow is tamed by a beautiful masonry bridge which was recently rebuilt, because there was a flood that destroyed a bridge located in Pias, built about forty years earlier, urging its public utility the Majorat of Veludo, Manuel Carneiro de Melo, and being the ombudsman of Lamego Gaspar Leite Cabral, his wife’s uncle. Upstream there is an interesting example of a Medieval pastiche: the bridge of Covelas” (Duarte, 2004: 309). Although we don’t have any written documents about its foundation or construction, a Baroque medallion attached to the center of the bridge – between the parapets and facing the path – recalls the work’s patron and date of completion: 1762. For years it was considered by the local memoirists as Roman or Romanesque.



Downstream view. Detail.





Given that the communal terms of Panchorra spread way beyond the Bridge, ending to the west with Ramires and Vale de Papas (the former municipality of Ferreiros de Tendais, today Cinfães), the collection site could not have associated with the crossing, so it was probably located in the village itself. However, perhaps this demarcation will help us understand the need of investing in this crossing: to provide a safe access to the village's agricultural properties that extended beyond the rough course of the Cabrum river.

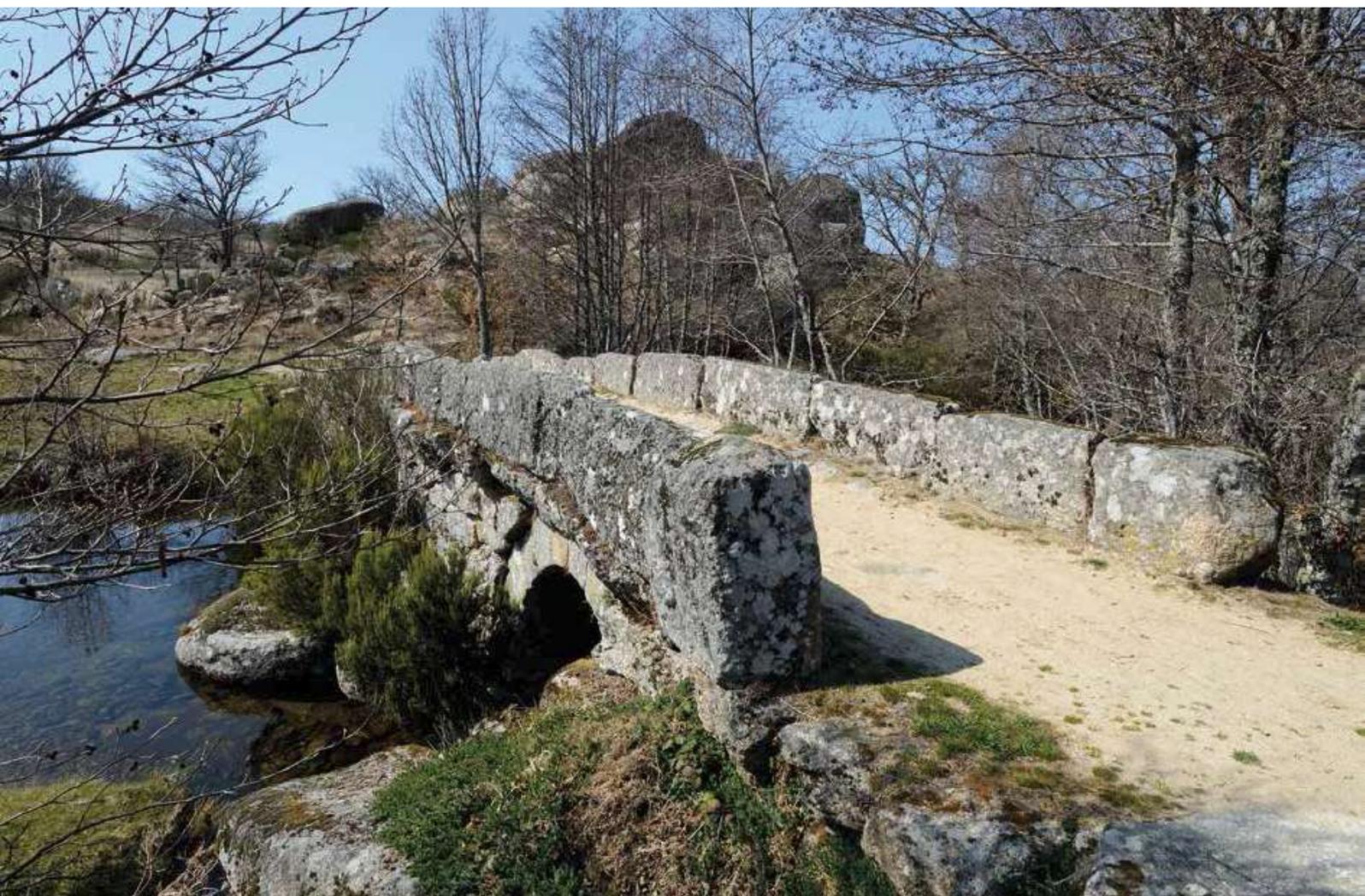
The heiress of ancient models applied to a modernity that did not go beyond the 17th century, the Bridge of Panchorra, with a double round arch (a larger one, standing high over the river flow, and a smaller one, still over the flood plain) contradicts the usual trestle shape that characterizes some Medieval bridges built in places where the valley is tighter. Moreover, the choice of location shows that the greatest concern was having an immediate access to the communal term rather than building a monumental structure, despite its size, which results from the use of the granite outcrop found on the riverbed – that allowed extending the structure with the addition of a smaller arch supported by the right bank. This asymmetry, together with the poor quality of the stone that was used reveals, on the one hand, the vernacular language of its authors and, on the other hand, the pragmatism of its mentors; it was certainly a communal or municipal work unlike, for example, the bridge of Lagariça – also over the Cabrum, but downstream – which was a private investment. What stands out in the Bridge of Panchorra is the extension of the walkway, consisting of large granite slabs laid on the Bridge, which is flanked by robust and roughly carved parapets designed to resist the strong wheels and the load of the oxcarts.



Voussoirs.



Stone path leading to the Bridge.



Platform and guards.

The source of the Cabrum river or brook, as it is often called, is located in Casa das Neves, near Gralheira and flows into the Douro river at the hamlet of Lampreeira, which is currently submerged due to the reservoir created by the Carrapatelo dam. The parish priests from 1758 give us some information about its flow, fish fauna, and fisheries and, of course, about its crossings.

The priests who pointed out the Cabrum as the river of the land were the ones from the parishes of São Cipriano (Sequeira, 1758), Ovadas (Bernardes, 1758), Panchorra and Gralheira (Rodrigues, 1758). The memoirists of Ermida do Douro (Lima, 1758), Oliveira, Ferreiros de Tendais and Ramires left us only a few elements because it was just one of many water courses worth describing. However, they all seem to agree that the Cabrum river had between 1.5 and 2 leagues in length, ran from the south to the north, was an impetuous, extremely impetuous or large-flowing course whose current was the driving force of many mill wheels. The parish priest of São Cipriano lists 25 mills within the circuit of his parish¹¹, the one of Ovadas lists six and the parish priests of Gralheira and Oliveira do Douro (Teixeira, 1758) merely mention “many mills”.

As for its fish fauna, there were trouts, orfes or ides and river eels; there were summer fisheries without any barriers like weirs or dams.

¹¹ There was also, in the hamlet of Matos, an oil mill, driven by the strength of oxen (Sequeira, 1758).

Regarding the bridges, the indication of the crossings is more or less complete according to their interest or to the knowledge about the valley's geography: some mentioned only those who were encompassed in their parish, others indicated all the crossings that existed over the Cabrum. In this regards, we could only find a contradiction, or rather, a strange reference, in the case of the Bridge of Panchorra.

Overall, we counted six crossings mentioned in the memoirs of 1758: five masonry or stone bridges and one wooden bridge. The masonry/stone bridges were located (from upstream to downstream) in Gralheira, Panchorra, Ovadas (Covelinhas), Lagariça and Ponte Nova; the wooden bridge served the parish of Ovadas¹². What is surprising is the unanimity of all the parish priests regarding the three masonry bridges (Ponte Nova, Lagariça and Covelinhas) and that only the parish priest of Gralheira makes reference to the one of Panchorra, considering it as a masonry work. No other memoirist, not even the priest of Panchorra, mentions this crossing. Was it under construction?

It is interesting to analyze the terminology which provides us with some of the information about the importance of the crossings and the investment that was made according to their need: stone and masonry. Next to the Douro we find the "Ponte Nova [New Bridge]", an old Medieval passage between the lands of Ferreiros de Tendais and Aregos, whose path is still partly followed by national road 222. Upstream, of the bridge of Lagariça, which could well be based on a Medieval pre-existence, marks the intervention of regional power in terms of territorial definition: it was commissioned in 1728 by the ombudsman of the district of Lamego¹³. A little further up, the bridge of Covelinhas provides, perhaps since the dawn of the Modern Period, a connection to the parish of Ovadas. These are all masonry bridges and reveal several, but considerable, investments given that they important crossing elements.

The crossings of Panchorra and Gralheira were located in the first section of the river. Although the priest of Gralheira considers the former as a stone bridge, we can hardly include it in the group mentioned above, which was built by more experienced craftsmen. To the north (downstream), the Cabrum required single-arched passages with a trestle-shaped platform to overcome the gaps between its steep banks.

Despite the fact that its chronology eccentric to the Medieval Period, the Bridge of Panchorra is an extraordinary, and fortunately, preserved example of vernacular engineering which, together with the types of paths and roads, are an endangered heritage, given their increasingly often destruction or replacement with Modern routes. [NR]

¹² Possibly connecting it to Ramires on the section located between the bridges of Lagariça and Covelinhas.

¹³ The contract for its construction was signed on June 14th 1728, in Lamego, between the ombudsman of Lamego and the master stonemasons Francisco Cardoso, from Nazes (Lamego), and Timóteo Calheiros, from São Pantaleão de Cornes (Vila Nova de Cerveira) (Alves, 2001: 150).

CHRONOLOGY

1258: first reference to Panchorra;

1288: reference to the existence of three farmhouses in Panchorra;

1513: the land charter of Aregos already refers all the taxes paid to the Crown;

1527: Panchorra had only 17 residents, that is, between 71 and 77 inhabitants;

1758: of all the clerics from the parishes of the Cabrum valley, only the one of Gralheira mentions the (masonry) Bridge of Panchorra;

2010: integration of the Bridge of Panchorra in the Route of the Romanesque;

2013: the Bridge of Panchorra is classified as a Public Interest Building.

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