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Short-Term Tuna Fishing Community: The Dwellings in the 30s and 60s

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Abstract. This article describes the dwellings of a short-term tuna fishing community settled in Faro beach, Algarve, Portugal, between the 30s and 60s, that already disappeared. It is related how the change from the reed houses to the wooden sheds took place and how was the day-by-day of fishermen and their families during the tuna fishing season, from March to June. In the course of this research it was discovered that such fishing community took place in Faro beach for long decades, involved a large group of fishermen and their families that lived there, in a structured way. The main results we hope to achieve are the general awareness of this heritage and its dissemination. This research was based on documentary analysis, photographic and bibliographic research but, more importantly, interviews with people involved in this art, that still remains. During the development of this research, limitations were found due to the scarcity of available information and to the advanced age of the people involved, now with around 90 years old. That's why there's an urgency to make an adequate registration and disclosure of this heritage. This paper is original because there aren't many works about this theme under this point of view, taking Faro beach as object of study. As a vernacular heritage, it must be valued, so, publishing such work would influence the society in general, but primarily, the region's society, to alert them to a value that has been forgotten and, at the same time, clarify the future generations, helping to preserve the collective memory of a professional art that disappeared from the Algarve.

1. Introduction

Algarve, in continental Portugal, almost at the entrance to the Mediterranean Sea, was the only Portuguese region where the tuna fishing occurred, during the 30s and 60s of the last century, since remote times (Figure 1).





Figure 1. An image of the relative location of the Algarve in southern Portugal and the Mediterranean Sea [1]

In fact, Northern Bluefin tuna (*Thunnus thynnus* LINNAEUS 1758) passes in a migratory cycle from the Atlantic Ocean to the warmer waters of the Mediterranean Sea to spawn, called *atum de direito* and later, after spawning, in the reverse direction, called *atum de revés*.

The fishing system captured the tuna, *atum de direito*, in Faro and was composed by *Almadrava*, located in the sea, that was supported by the *Arraial*, located onshore, which consisted of the dwellings of the fishermen and their families, forming the *Armação*, a short-term fishing community. This article intends to describe the dwellings settled in Faro beach, Algarve, Portugal, from the reed houses, in the 30s, to the wooden sheds, which were inhabited from March to June during the fishing season.

Almadrava was a labyrinth system of nets fixed to the seabed, which required a daily supervision. *Arraial* was strategically placed as close to the *Almadrava* as possible, in the sand of the island of Encão (currently called beach of Faro), included the zone designated as Cabo de Santa Maria (Figure 2). The constant mutation that the coast line has suffered due to the movement of sand dunes, was responsible for many changes of location of the *Arraial* in the most convenient way, sources referred 1935 as one of those moments. This *Arraial* had the peculiarity of being located in an island between *ria* and the sea, in *Ria Formosa*, classified as Natural Park and Ramsar site [2].



Figure 2. “Hydrographic Plan of the bars and ports of Faro and Olhão of 1885”, highlighting the city of Faro (black circle) and the location of the *Arraial* (red star) [3]

This research was based on documentary analysis, photographic and bibliographic research but, also in interviews with people involved in the tuna fishing, that still remains. During the development of this research, limitations were found due to the scarcity of available information and to the advanced age of the people involved, now with around 90 years old. That is why there is an urgency to make an adequate registration and disclosure of this - vernacular architectural and engineering heritage.

2. Organization of *Arraial*

2.1. Introduction

The *Arraial* was composed of an organizational hierarchy due to the salary received, which was directly proportional to the required responsibility and skills of the fishermen.

At the top of the hierarchy there was the Master, *Mandador*, who controlled the whole team and was in charge for the execution and orientation of all operations. He was also responsible for the daily life of the community. Below the *Mandador* was the clerk, *Escrivão*, in charge of the daily written record of all that was going on in the *Armação*. His tasks were to handle all the administrative parts, the count of the tuna caught and he was also responsible for the weekly payments of the fishermen’s salaries. The *Companheiros* were all the fishermen and the work force of the *Armação*, divided in small teams [4].

Being a fishing system that already existed in the Algarve when the territory was reconquered from the Muslims in 1249 [5] and having as first known written reference to an *Armação* on the coast of Cabo de Santa Maria (Faro) in the XVI century [6], it is important to clarify future generations about this fishing tradition that has been lost in this region.

2.2. The dwellings before 1936

In 1935 the *Arraial* was on an island and incorporated 144 *Companheiros* and their families [7]. It consisted of the house of the *Mandador*, of the *Escrivão* and the director, all in wood structure. There were also about 30 houses for *Companheiros*, all made in reeds (*junco* or *barrão*) with wooden doors and without windows. The reed was collected in the sand dunes and in *Ria Formosa* [4].

Primitive as for the materials and technique of construction this type of houses had rectangular shape, with walls and cover composed of vegetal materials, due to the scarcity of wood. The structure of these houses was formed by several props in which they supported the *espeques*, (a kind of beams), forming a grid, connected to each other by ropes of *cairo* (vegetal ropes). The cladding of the walls and cover was made with reed or *barrão*, superimposed in layers, from the level of the ground, slightly buried in the sand [8] – Figure 3. These were reed houses with two or three doors, each of them corresponding to a division where a fisherman and his family lived.

In its inside the floor was made with thick rope rolled forming a kind of carpet. They also used thin ropes and cork to make suspended shelves hanging at the inside walls of reed's structure to make the most of the available space, which was reduced. It also existed a grocery store and a bar (*venda* and *bar*) or canteen where it was possible to purchase food [4].

The public lightning system in Faro city was still recent, and the island was 10 kilometers apart, consequently there was no electricity in the island where the *Arraial* existed. There was also no drinkable water or sanitary infrastructures. In this part of the island there was freshwater but that was only used to wash the dishes. Water to drink and firewood to be able to cook were provided from the Faro city. Some families cooked outside of their homes in a view of the safety aspect, as the houses were of reed [4].

Before 1910 a wooden chapel existed in the *Arraial*. It has a wooden altar and the image of Santo António (St. Anthony), also in wood, was destroyed by political motivations resulting from the establishment of the republic in Portugal, in that year [4, 7, 9].

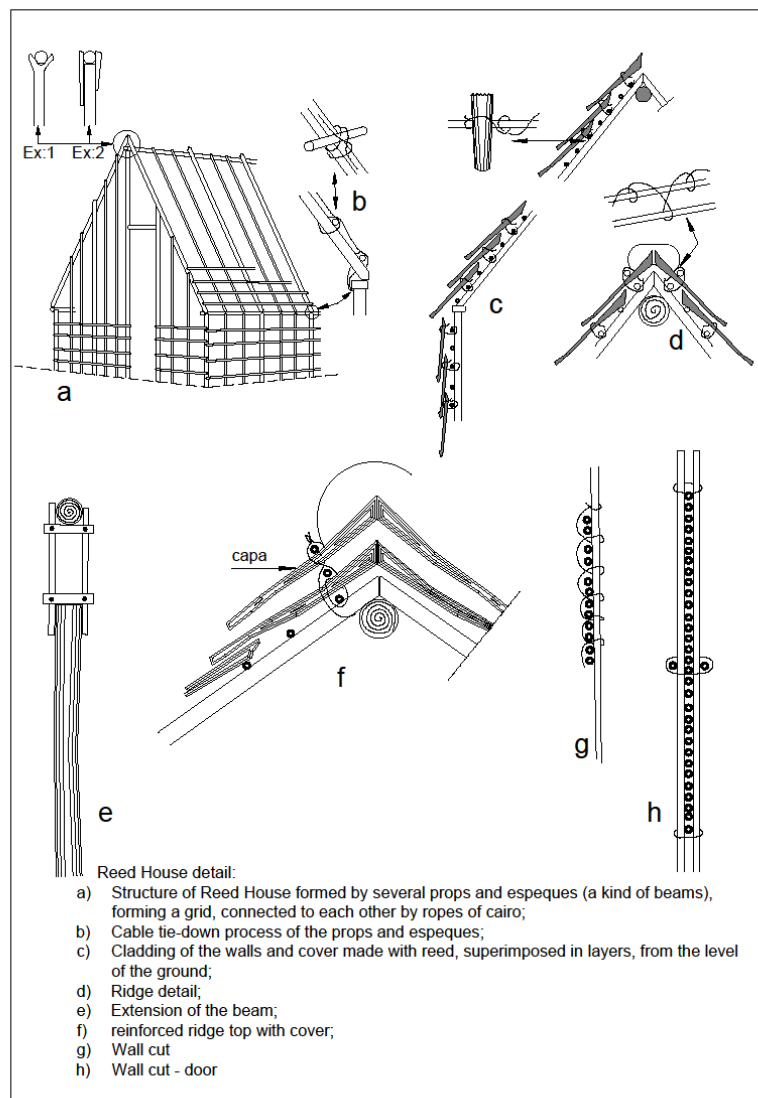


Figure 3. A scheme with details of a reed house in the *Arraial*

2.3. The dwellings after 1936

Later, in 1936, there was a strategical change in the location of the *Arraial*, and the reed houses were replaced by the wooden sheds due to the easiest access to wood. They were parallel to each other, perpendicular to the coastline, alphabetically ordered from A to F. Were composed by wooden structure and walls. The roof's cladding was in zinc plates (Figure 4).



Figure 4. A scheme of the implantation of the *Arraial* in 1936: 1 - House of the *Mandador*; 2 - House of the *Escrivão*; 3 - House of the Directors; 4 - Bar and small market; 5 - Warehouse; A, B, C, D, E, F – Sheds of *Companheiros*. Between 1,2,3 and 5 – working area

These constructions were divided lengthwise into twenty to twenty-four compartments ordered numerically, from the East to the West. Each compartment possessed a single outside shuttered door just like the old reed houses (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Two *Companheiros* and a child in front of one of the sheds' shuttered doors

There was also a small grocery store and a bar (*venda* and *bar*) located on the East side of the *Arraial* and warehouse to store all the nets and floating buoys during the winter located on the West side [4], both built with the same materials as the sheds.

The importance of the houses was attributed in accordance with the hierarchical position of each one in the *Arraial*. The *Companheiros* lived in shared and reduced spaces. The *Mandador* and the *Escrivão*

lived separately in isolated and large spaces and their houses were in front of the working area where the nets, cables, floating buoys and iron anchors were handled, between the sheds and the warehouse, which was the ideal location to control all the works in the *Arraial* (Figure 6).



Figure 6. The warehouse

The house of the director was the most isolated and largest, used only when the director visited the *Arraial* or for the priest to prepare himself to the blessing mass of the nets. After 1936 until the last year of tuna fishing in this place (1967), this arrangement was maintained, without further changes.

3. Results and discussions

This paper is original because there are not many works about this theme under this point of view, taking Faro beach as object of study.

The main results are the general awareness of this heritage and its dissemination of this specific vernacular architecture and engineering.

As a vernacular heritage, it must be valued, so, publishing such work would influence the society in general, but primarily, the region's society, to alert them to a value that has been forgotten and, at the same time, clarify the future generations, helping to preserve the collective memory of a professional art that disappeared from the Algarve.

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