

## Water, wells, wheels and wealth

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**ABSTRACT:** Water, essential to life, is also fundamental to the economy of the rural territories, originating innumerable vernacular heritage. Throughout the investigation carried out on the heritage of the parish of Cernache do Bonjardim, Portugal, it was verified that its water-related heritage was numerous and diversified, having a lot of potential in several ways. The paper's scope is the description and dissemination of this type of vernacular heritage, recording this information so that it can be used for later actions. Often, the attitude of the inhabitants became proactive, as they didn't wait for local power's initiatives to carry out maintenance of some places, demonstrating pride and social responsibility. This paper also enables the knowing of this subject, making it an element of work for decision makers, allowing the improvement of several aspects of the Planning of this Territory.

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Beyond being essential to life, water has a fundamental role in the economy of rural territories. Therefore, the water-related heritage of the parish of Cernache do Bonjardim (Portugal) is numerous and diversified; its great potential may be useful for several purposes.

The objectives of this work were achieved through heritage statements and the dissemination of this heritage. The methodology used consisted of field surveys, interspersed with bibliographic, iconographic and photographic research and exchange of information with the local people.

The authors of this paper pretend to describe and disseminate this type of vernacular heritage in order to record this information for its use in further actions. There's a lack of works about this subject and this territory, which became a limitation, as well as the fact that the younger people don't know about this heritage's existence in their own villages, making its location difficult.

Practical implications of this work have already been felt when, for example, the local authorities ordered a clean-up of springs, which were completely covered with weeds. This shows that the inhabitants' attitude often became proactive. Because they did not want to wait for local power's initiative to maintain these places, they demonstrated pride and social responsibility.

The impact of this research on the community was gradual and positive because, due to the existence of a high sense of identity, the population began to appreciate something to which

they formerly attributed no value, neither cultural nor economic. There aren't many works about this territory, not even under the same point of view, which gives originality to this work. It also spreads the knowledge of this subject, provides an element for decision makers, and allows to improve several aspects of the Planning of this Territory.

The washerwomen of the villages went to wash their clothes in the river. The millers took advantage of the strength of the river flow to drive the mills' wheel and the farmers to their irrigations. The banks of the river were covered with greenery, the water was bright reflecting the sky and the grove (Janeiro de Cima, n.d.).

## 2 WATER

### 2.1 *Water resources in the parish of Cernache do Bonjardim*

The parish of Cernache do Bonjardim is located in the hydrographic sub-basin of the Zêzere River, which belongs to the basin of the Tagus River. The main surface water masses are the reservoir of the Castelo de Bode dam (Zêzere River) in the north and west of the parish, the Sertã creek in the south and the Cerdeira creek which flows through the parish from east to west and ends at the reservoir.

The Castelo de Bode dam, the most important water resource of the region, was inaugurated in 1951 and flooded a large agricultural area in the Zêzere valley. It covers an area of 32,91km<sup>2</sup> and has an effective storage of 900,5 × 10<sup>6</sup>m<sup>3</sup>. Its normal water level lies at 121 meters above sea level. With a mean annual rainfall of 1200mm, the area is relatively humid when compared with other regions in the center of Portugal (Agência Portuguesa do Ambiente, n.d.).

The surface water masses in the sub-basin of the Zêzere river show a positive quantitative balance, as their availability is superior to the demand. They are subject to environmental pressure caused mainly by agricultural and forest activities, as well as urban water consumption. Nevertheless, the chemical state of the surface water in the region is good, as well as its ecological state and potential (AA.VV., 2012b Maps 19, 20, 50, 70, 72).

The subsurface water in the area of Cernache do Bonjardim is part of the groundwater mass "Undifferentiated Ancient Massive of the Tagus Basin", which has an extension of 14 208,13km<sup>2</sup> (AA.VV., 2012a). As the Ancient Massive is built up by Paleozoic and older rocks (mainly metasedimentary rocks, granites), the groundwater circulates in open cracks or in porous altered rock masses (Almeida, Mendonça, Jesus, & Gomes, 2000). The water is usually explored by water springs at the surface and by water wells up to a depth of about 100 meters. The groundwater level follows the topography, and its flow is mostly directed to the main surface water lines (*ib.*).

Although this groundwater mass shows usually poor water resources, it has an important role in the water supply for human consumption and agriculture as there are a lot of private and public points of water withdrawal. Yet the quantitative balance is positive. Being relatively near the surface, the groundwater mass is quite vulnerable by contaminant substances (*ib.*). Despite this, the chemical state of the water mass is good, although there is an excess of nitrate and other contaminants. The main ecological pressure is exerted by livestock and agricultural activities (AA.VV., 2012b Maps 56, 73, 74, 76, 78).

### 2.2 *Heritage and water in the territory under study*

Being one of the most important water courses, the Cerdeira creek is the main responsible for the several floodplains in its banks (*nateiros*) and for the several weirs that allow the existence of grinding systems moved by water.

In relation to the Zêzere river, there exist an "old river", before 1951, and a "new river" (Figure 1): the *old river*, narrow, almost savage, to which man has adapted, with characteristic watering systems, with several *nateiros*, very fertile agricultural lands, with boats adapted to the river and fishing systems, was transformed into an immense mirror of almost still water, where the *nateiros* disappeared, where the boats, which were able to carry out their function were maintained, but where fishing techniques have changed and traditional irrigation systems have

disappeared. This territory is characterized, among other things, by the diverse heritage that was covered by the waters of the reservoir of the Castelo do Bode dam (M M Gonçalves & Rosendahl, 2010; Marta Marçal Gonçalves, 2016).

In the three main water lines mentioned above, there are bridges over the Zêzere river (Bouçã and Vale da Ursa) and on the Ribeira da Sertã creek (Porto dos Cavalos). With the exception of the Cerdeira creek, the typical Zêzere's boats – the *abrangel* or *boat of three boards* - continue to navigate and to be a daily used means of transportation (Figure 2). In the Zêzere river there were also two other bridges, which are currently submerged (M M Gonçalves & Rosendahl, 2011; Marta Marçal Gonçalves, 2016).

In this parish there is also a spring of mineral-medicinal waters, which, according to the bibliography (Farinha, 1930; Teixeira, 1905), would be advised against diabetes and conjunctivitis, among others. Testimonies related that this water cured eczema (Marta Marçal Gonçalves, 2016). There was also here, a water bottling factory, which was abandoned in 1974 (Tawaret, n.d.).



Figure 1. Zêzere river in the área of the parish of Cernache do Bonjardim. Left: before the construction of the Castelo do Bode Dam, the *old river* (Mendes, 2009); right: after the construction of the same dam, the *new river* (authors).

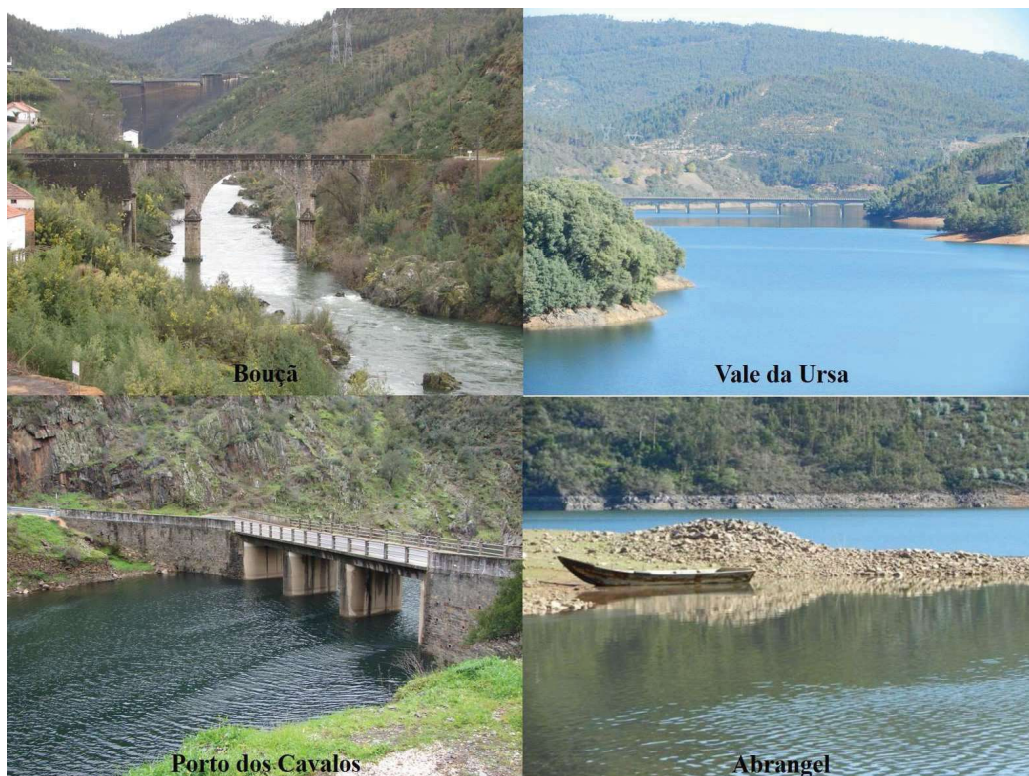


Figure 2. The bridges of Cernache's parish and a *abrangel* docked (authors).

### 3 WELLS AND WHEELS

#### 3.1 Wells

To this group the public points of water abstraction and supply were collected. It should be added that many more exist, but private, and as such, excluded from this work. Thus, the standpipes (16 specimens), springs: fountains and minas (mines) with washhouse or sink (14 specimens) and springs: fountains and minas without washhouse or sink (24 specimens) can be grouped in this theme (Marta Marçal Gonçalves, 2016).

A *mina* is a small gallery inside the open ground where the water is retained (M M Gonçalves & Rosendahl, 2010): it consists of a horizontal hole that goes into the earth, with a little wall at the entrance to serve as a reservoir. It is a typical form of capturing groundwater in this region.

In the first group - the standpipes (Figure 3, left) - the various fountains without a spring were considered, that is, the water comes from a spring located elsewhere and is channeled to the standpipe. Most of them were built during the *Estado Novo* (1933-68), with the aim of providing potable water to the population, which is why they are located mostly within villages, unlike the natural springs that are located at some distance from the villages. They are mostly composed of a concrete wall where there is a faucet and a water pipe. They are usually covered with tiles of a single color, and with the date of construction printed.

The springs: fountains and *minas* with washhouse or sink are abstraction points constituted by a building that allows the protection of the spring (the *mina*); the tank, when it is a washhouse, usually has stones on its edge to facilitate the washing of clothes (Figure 3, right). Its appearance does not follow a norm and depends on the place of implantation/capture, the existing space, the possessions of the village, among others.

The springs: fountains and *minas* without a washhouse or sink constitute the majority of the found specimens of water abstraction and supply. They are abstractions similar to the previous ones, but without tank or washhouse, being, in some cases, of wallowing (*de chafurdo*) or diving (*de mergulho*) - Figure 3, center. In general, they are *minas* that go unnoticed in the landscape due to their location and small size. Its appearance also does not follow a general typology for the reasons presented above.

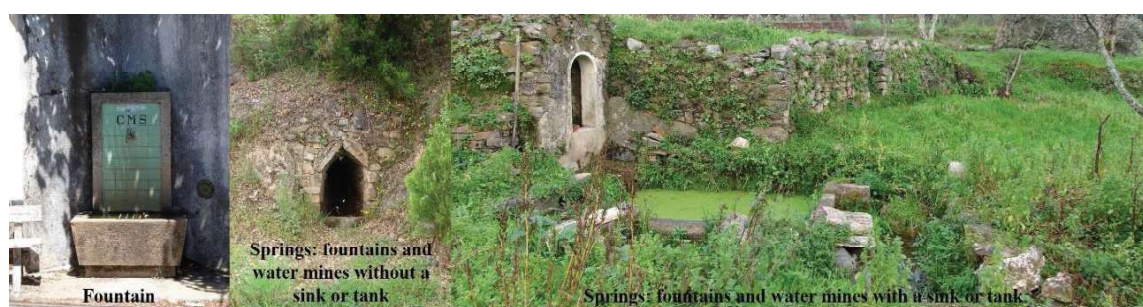


Figure 3. Examples of standpipe, *mina* and springs (authors).

#### 3.2 Wheels

The irrigation wheels, traditionally used on the banks of the Zêzere river, disappeared completely with the construction of the Castle Bode dam. These wheels may be included in the group of water-driven irrigation devices as defined in Dias & Galhano (1986).

It is thought that these wheels are of Arab origin and in many places they are known as *wheels of the Moors* (de Sousa, Ferreira, & Rodi, 2012). Similar wheels existed on the Nabão river, a tributary of the Zêzere river, where, in the city of Tomar, there still is a working specimen for the registration of the collective memory. These wheels were an integral part of a complex system of weirs that retained and led the water, ensuring that its flow was sufficient to move the blades of all the existing wheels along the river (Marta Marçal Gonçalves, 2016).

These wheels were made of wood, of large diameter, of rays and blades, working in canals constructed of wood and with clay or zinc buckets, with capacity of about 5 liters (Rosa, 1982) - Figure 4.

### 3.3 Wells and wheels

This item includes water mills and wells with engineered pump; the first specimens may be included in the group of wind-driven irrigation devices and the latter in animal-driven irrigation devices as defined in Dias & Galhano (1986).

Three specimens of wind powered water wells were found in the territory under study. These wells have a metallic structure which serves as a support for a set of metallic blades, forming a wheel, making the assembly to take advantage of the force of the wind. There is no record of wooden specimens in the territory under study. These elements mark the landscape and were very popular for pipe water from the wells using a renewable energy (Marta Marçal Gonçalves, 2016) - Figure 5. Having lost their function, they are gradually disappearing or being used as decorative elements (*ib.*).

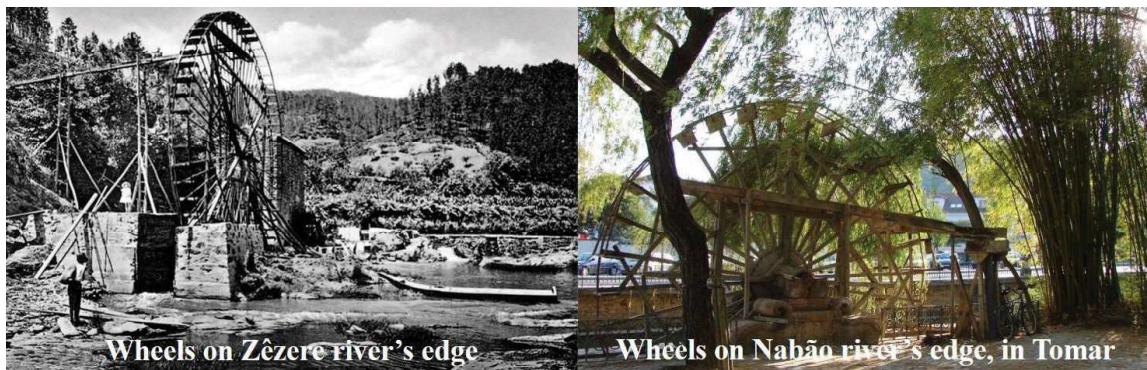


Figure 4. Wooden wheels used for watering on the banks of the river: left – Zêzere river (Mendes, 2009); right – Nabão river, at Tomar (authors).



Figure 5. Wind powered water wells. Left: overview; right: detail (authors).

Animal-driven irrigation devices were used to collect water from wells using an engineered pump, also designed by *modern metallic ancient water wheels* (Dias & Galhano, 1986). The operating system consists of a gear that rotates the wheel with the buckets, which pour the water into a gutter, thus watering the fields. A total of 10 specimens were found, with variations due to the gear system (Marta Marçal Gonçalves, 2016) - Figure 6.

Progressively, we moved from the engineered pump constructed in wood, moved by animals, to the metallic ones. Later, the animal force was replaced by electric pumps, with the consequence that these previous systems have gradually disappeared, except when used for gardens' decoration (*ib.*).

## 4 WEALTH

### 4.1 Contextualization

In this item, the heritage founded was joined in two groups, and in some cases, these groups are subdivided into subgroups. Thus, the authors considered the heritage that uses water energy to produce final or semifinals products and the type “work” grouped in oil presses, watermills and grain mills; loggers; fishing; and gold exploitation -

Table 1.



Figure 6. Examples of animal-driven irrigation devices using engineered pump (authors).

Table 1. Water-related heritage, a direct producer of wealth, not included in the previous groups, found in the parish of Cernache do Bonjardim (authors).

Type	Group	Subgroup
Use of water energy to produce final or semifinals products	Cerdeira creek's weirs (3 specimens);	---
	Casa das Águas and Foz da Sertã Hotel (touristic products).	---
Work	Oil presses, grain mills and watermills. The olive-oil; Loggers; Fishing; Gold exploitation.	Oil presses, grain mills and watermills; The <i>zorros</i> ; The <i>abrangel</i> ; The <i>conheiras</i> .

In the first type the elements that use the hydric energy to obtain final or semifinals products, such as vegetables, hotel industry and thermal springs were collected. The second type is identified by the equipment used in the transformation of raw materials into final or semifinals products intended for immediate consumption or for the supply of other industries, equipment related to industries and equipment used in agriculture, both existing and missing but related to water.

#### 4.2 Cerdeira creek's weirs

Several weirs were made in the Cerdeira creek to ensure that the volume of water is sufficient for the irrigation of the agricultural fields. Dias & Galhano (1986) describe the use of irrigation weirs as follows: “they make a weir, or a reservoir in the creek, where it retains the water. When it is full, they open the reservoir and the water comes out through the hole and follows a furrow, called ‘levada’, until the fruit trees”. In their vicinity there are often grinding systems, but as a rule, these grinding systems had their own way to divert water (Marta Marçal Gonçalves, 2016) - Figure 7.

#### 4.3 Casa das Águas and Foz da Sertã Hotel

The *Casa das Águas* of Foz da Sertã and the Foz da Sertã Hotel (Figure 8), although located in different places near the Zêzere's lake in the Vale da Ursa (Ursa Valley), are closely linked, since the *Casa das Águas* was built to serve as reception of the Hotel, for those who came from Tomar by road, and wished to check-in in the Hotel by boat. It is located in the parish of Cernache do Bonjardim, near the main road, immediately following the concrete bridge of the Ursa Valley.

Located next to the mouth of the Sertã creek and next to the village with the same name, there is here the Foz da Sertã Hotel and the only thermal spring of the parish, which was previously exploited, being completely abandoned today. For the thermal waters, it was granted authorization of exploration (bottling and thermal baths) in 1894 and the Hotel was built in 1959. Both were abandoned in 1974. These waters were very famous and people came from many sides to enjoy their properties. According to Teixeira (1905) and Farinha (1930), they would be adequate for diabetes. This water has even been bottled and marketed, as we can see on the right side of Figure 8.



Figure 7. One of the weirs in Cerdeira creek (authors).

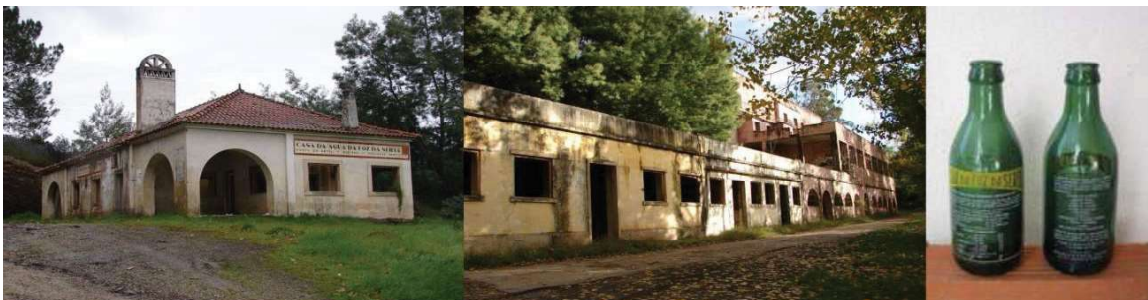


Figure 8. Left: *Casa das Águas da Foz da Sertã*; center: Foz da Sertã Hotel (authors); right: bottles for water from Foz da Sertã (Tawaret, n.d.).

#### 4.4 *Oil presses, grain mills and watermills. The olive oil*

In the parish of Cernache do Bonjardim, the oil presses, the watermills and the grain mills found are mainly used for milling cereals for the production of flour and the grinding of olives for the production of olive oil. They are, in general, private property, but of a professional nature, grinding cereals out by means of a payment (Marta Marçal Gonçalves, 2016).

The driving force used is, as a rule, the creek's water, hence its location near or over water courses, but since the great majority is in ruins or could not be accessed inside, it was not possible to determine the type of grinding systems used in each case (*ib.*). A total of 3 oil presses and 3 grain mills or water mills was found.

The oil presses were very important for the grinding of the olive, with the purpose of producing olive oil, which is a very important product in the Portuguese diet (and in the Mediterranean diet) and was also very important as a fuel for the candles, for example. Bagasse, which is a by-product of olive oil production, could be used to feed swine (Marta Marçal Gonçalves, 2016; Nabais, 2012). At the moment, these specimens are almost all in ruins or with other functions. They are testimonies of the production of olive oil and the culture of the olive tree in the parish under study. Once it meant wealth because this area was a major producer of olive oil (Marta Marçal Gonçalves, 2016).

The existence of these oil presses is almost as old as that of agriculture itself. From the moment that man was able to plant and dominate the plantation of the olive trees, there was a need to improve the existing grinding techniques, gradually adjusting them (Marta Marçal Gonçalves, 2016; Nabais, 2012).

Socially, oil presses are important. One reason is that the quantity of olive oil produced is directly linked to the quantity of land owned and therefore to the wealth of the owner and, consequently, good marriages were obtained and wealth was increased (*ib.*).

The watermills and the grain mills were used for the milling of cereals, for the purpose of producing flour. Flour is very important for the production of bread, among other products. Bread plays a fundamental role in the Mediterranean diet and in the daily life of the Portuguese people, therefore in the Portuguese diet. As such, the production of flour is fundamental (Marta Marçal Gonçalves, 2016).

The largest production of flour in this territory was wheat and corn, being the traditional bread here used, consisting of a mixture of wheat (*trigo*) flour and corn (*milho*), from which comes its designation: "*trigamilha*" (*ib.*).

It is usual for houses attached to agriculture - and they do not need to be very large or prosperous - to own a wine press. In this case, these are situated inside house's facilities and produce wine using the man work, who steps the grapes. At other times presses are used to squeeze the grapes, but there were not found sufficient elements to perceive which kind of driving force was used (*ib.*).

#### 4.5 *The loggers' work: the zorros*

A *zorro* is a trait in the slope, visible because it had no vegetation, which served as a kind of corridor, to slide the trunks of felled trees, from the mountain range to the nearest watercourse, where they were transported by floating with the current to the nearest sawmill.

On top of these floating trunks, there were always men guiding them with a rod. This work was very dangerous because if someone fell into the river, the probability of coming to the surface was minimal and even then, there was the risk of being crushed by the trunks. It was common for the former rafters to have no feet, because they were crushed by the trunks when they were caught between them.

The "corridor's ground" of the *zorro* was usually very slippery because the wood exploited in this region was mostly pine, which made the base of the *zorro* completely full of resin's overlay. If someone fell or slid, he would probably only stop at the river, which is another factor of the profession's danger (Marta Marçal Gonçalves, 2016) - Figure 9.



Figure 9. Example of a *zorro* that is marked in the photo on the right (authors).

Since the territory under study was one of the most forested areas of the country and there were extensive pine forests, it is only natural that the activities related to the forest still remain in the population livingness. At the moment the forestry activity is mainly related to the production of eucalyptus, but in a so not very distant past, it was the pine tree that dominated the forestry. The exploitation of the pine was made not only for its wood, but also for the production of the resin. Of this activity very little remains, in the territory under study, however, it should be more valued because it was a very important activity in the area (iib.). It is not by chance that this region is inserted in the region designated Southern Interior Pinewood (*Pinhal Interior Sul*).

#### 4.6 Fishing

Fishing was an important element in the medieval economy and in this respect the area was important because it was very rich in fish. From an early age the importance of fishing in these waters has been documented, and the earliest known record is a Decree of King D. Afonso V, dated from 1462 (Mendes, 2009). The diversity of species that inhabited these waters was greater than after the construction of the Castelo do Bode dam, according to testimonies of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, presented by the same author.

It is thought that fishing techniques are likely to have been modified before and after the existence of the Castelo de Bode dam, which is why this construction is a historical landmark in the region's Territorial Planning and Heritage (Marta Marçal Gonçalves, 2016).

Before the construction of the Castelo de Bode dam, built in 1951, the two creeks - Cerdeira and Sertã - were abundant in fish as well as the Zêzere river. With the rise of the lake's waters, most of these species disappeared from the site, being nowadays largely bass and perch (M M Gonçalves & Rosendahl, 2011). It is known, for example, that trout is a fish that needs a well-watered, well-oxygenated and fresh water, so its disappearance is an indicator of the degradation of water quality: it has been seen that this and other species of fish, who lived on the *old river* were replaced by others that proliferate in the *new river*, which corresponds to a lake with stillest waters (*ib.*). Of course, other possible reasons for this change are pollution by detergents (phosphates), agricultural residues (fertilizers), residues of textile factories in Covilhã, mining residues from the Panasqueira mine (both located upstream of Cernache's parish), among others (*ib.*).

#### 4.7 Gold exploitation

Human occupation of this region of Zêzere dates from the period of the Late Bronze Age (1300 BC - 700 BC), with the *Castros* (hillforts) settlements of S. Pedro (Dornes, in the municipality of Ferreira do Zêzere) and Santa Maria Magdalena in the territory under study. This occupation extends, in these cases, during Iron Age, and finished later to be Romanized. Man has settled here in the middle of the Metals Age, and the first economic activity that left traces of systematic exploration in the region is related to gold mining (Mendes, 2009).

The mining activity, which was very common in the territory under study, dates back to the time of the Romans (Batata, 1998). Witness of this activity are the still existing *conheiras* along the course of the river, from its source to its mouth.

A *conheira* is, according to the same author, “*an ancient alluvial exploration of gold*”. Also according to the same author, a *conheira* was characterized by “*typical mounds of big pebbles (conhos). The sands were washed and thrown directly into the river*”- Figure 2, photo on the right side, where we can see mounds of *conhos* belonging to a *conheira*, and one *abrangel*.

Batata (1998) says that, a *conheira* “*may have been exploited from the Chalcolithic to the 20<sup>th</sup> century*”. During the early centuries of the Roman Empire these sites are associated with the exploration of alluvial gold (Batata & Arsénio, 2006). According to the same authors, “*the conheiras would be a controlled exploitation, as it seems to be proved by the existence of a Roman spear with the initials of the roman tria nomina*”.

In the Archaeological Chart of the Municipality of Sertã (Batata, 1998), only three *conheiras* are known in the studied territory, although there are many more along the banks of the Zêzere river and probably also along the Sertã creek.

Being a river that resembled to a stony bed where a timid stream of water was paraded (Janeiro de Cima, n.d.), and, both this river and its tributary, the Sertã creek, were always auriferous, the mining of this precious metal lasted in the memory and in the imaginary of the region. In the middle of the 20th century their sands were still prospected for gold (Mendes, 2009). However, with the construction of the Castelo do Bode dam, this practice is no longer possible and has disappeared.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

Although in a summarized way, this paper shows that the water’s heritage or heritage connected to it comprises an enormous number of various specimens in the parish of Cernache do Bonjardim.

Water and the heritage connected to it constitute one of the greatest cultural richness of this region, being an asset (still) very abundant.

Water had, in this territory, negative effects with the construction of the Castelo do Bode dam as its lake, submerged much of this heritage; but the same water also has positive effects, since, with the construction of the same dam, it was gained a beautiful landscape, marked by the water mirror of the dam’s reservoir, offering a huge tourist potential. Another of the positive points connected with water is the immense vernacular heritage that was found, which was generated by the richness of water resources in this territory and that, despite everything, for the most part still remains.

With this work, it is expected to draw attention to the importance of a so-called “minor” heritage which slowly emerges, but, as in this case, it may constitute one of the greatest richness of rural regions that so much need local development bases and strategic planning.

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