SEASONAL SETTLEMENT

IN THE MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN COUNTRYSIDE

edited by PIERS DIXON & CLAUDIA THEUNE

RURALIA XIII

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Contents

Plows, herds, and *chafurdões*. Vernacular architecture and land use in modern Castelo de Vide (Alto Alentejo, Portugal)

Fabián Cuesta-Gómez and Sara Prata***

Abstract

The *chafurdões* are one of the most characteristic ethnographic buildings in the Alto Alentejo countryside. These are circular drystone structures topped by corbelled domes. Written sources suggest that at least some of them were built from the 17th century onwards. Their usages in the peasant landscapes were numerous: as a shelter for shepherds and farmers, storage facilities for tools and produce, and, less frequently, to keep livestock. Nevertheless, their location, deep within cultivated fields, suggests that they were not permanent housing structures, but rather periodically occupied during certain moments, in which it was necessary to be closer to the fields. Nowadays, many of these structures are still standing, kept by farmers mostly for storage purposes. Their presence in the landscape constitutes an important example of rural cultural heritage that should be further examined and preserved. This paper will consider the distribution of these structures in the countryside, review the techniques used to build them, discuss their seasonal use during agricultural practices of the modern period, and reflect upon their meaning and preservation today, from a cultural heritage perspective.

Keywords: *vernacular architecture, modern period, corbelled dome, Castelo de Vide (Portugal).*

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Résumé

Charrues, troupeaux et chafurdões. Architecture vernaculaire et occupation du sol à Castelo de Vide Moderne (Alto Alentejo, Portugal)

Les *chafurdões* figurent parmi les édifices traditionnels les plus caractéristiques de la campagne de l'Alto Alentejo. Ce sont des structures en pierre sèche avec des dispositions circulaires, surmontées de coupoles en encorbellement. Des sources écrites suggèrent que certains d'entre eux remontent au XVII[e] siècle. Leurs fonctions dans les campagnes étaient nombreux : abri pour les bergers et les agriculteurs, entrepôts pour les outils et les produits et, moins fréquemment, pour garder le bétail. Néanmoins, leur localisation, au plus profond des champs cultivés, suggère qu'il ne s'agissait pas de structures d'habitation permanentes mais plutôt temporaires lorsqu'il fallait se rapprocher des champs. De nos

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jours, bon nombre de ces structures sont toujours debout, conservées par les agriculteurs principalement à des fins de stockage. Leur présence dans le paysage constitue un exemple important de patrimoine culturel rural qui devrait être examiné et préservé davantage. Nous examinerons la distribution de ces structures à la campagne, passerons en revue leurs techniques de construction, discuterons de leur utilisation saisonnière dans les pratiques agricoles de l'époque moderne et réfléchirons à leur signification et à leur préservation aujourd'hui, dans une perspective de patrimoine culturel.

Mots-clés : *architecture vernaculaire, époque moderne, coupole en encorbellement, Castelo de Vide (Portugal).*

Zusammenfassung

Pflüge, Herden und Chafurdões. Volksarchitektur und Landnutzung im modernen Castelo de Vide (Alto Alentejo, Portugal)

Die *Chafurdões* sind eines der charakteristischsten ethnografischen Bauwerke im Alto Alentejo. Hierbei handelt es sich um Trockensteinstrukturen mit kreisförmigen Grundrissen, die von Kragkuppeln gekrönt werden. Aus schriftlichen Quellen geht hervor, dass zumindest einige davon im 17. Jahrhundert und danach erbaut wurden. Es gab zahlreiche Verwendungszwecke in den bäuerlichen Landschaften: als Unterschlupf für Hirten und Bauern, als Lager für Werkzeuge und Erzeugnisse und seltener für die Viehhaltung. Trotzdem lässt ihre Lage tief in den bebauten Feldern darauf schließen, dass es sich nicht um permanente Wohnstrukturen handelte, sondern um periodische Besetzungen in bestimmten Momenten, in denen es notwendig war, näher an den Feldern zu sein. Heutzutage stehen noch viele dieser Strukturen, die von den Landwirten hauptsächlich zu Lagerzwecken aufbewahrt werden. Ihre Präsenz in der Landschaft ist ein wichtiges Beispiel für das kulturelle Erbe des ländlichen Raums, das weiter untersucht und erhalten werden sollte. Wir werden die Verteilung dieser Strukturen auf dem Land betrachten, ihre Bautechniken überprüfen, ihre saisonale Nutzung während der landwirtschaftlichen Praktiken aus der modernen Zeit diskutieren und ihre heutige Bedeutung und Erhaltung aus der Perspektive des kulturellen Erbes reflektieren.

Schlagwörter: *Volksarchitektur, Neuzeit, Corbelled Dome, Castelo de Vide (Portugal).*

Introduction

Vernacular architecture has recently been gaining traction in European research in the context of the protection and analysis of historical rural landscapes (*Mileto et al. 2015*). With regard to the Portuguese landscape, new approaches are still scarce and most of the available information stems from the extensive ethnographic surveys of the 1960s (*Oliveira et al. 1994*), although there is recent comparative work from the Spanish countryside.

This paper focuses on the *chafurdões* of the territory of Castelo de Vide (Alentejo). These circular drystone structures, topped by massive corbelled domes, are the most characteristic ethnographic buildings in the countryside. Their location, deep within the rural areas, suggests that they were not for permanent occupation, but were periodically occupied on those occasions in which it was necessary to be closer to the fields.

The authors are currently carrying out a research project promoted by the Municipality of Castelo de Vide to revise the local archaeological inventory. The work carried out so far has included extensive surface field survey and a critical overview of previous archaeological documents. The drawings and dimensional data that will be referred to in this paper were chiefly gathered during the 1990s by the archaeology department of the municipality (Seção de Arqueologia Câmara Municipal Castelo de Vide [SACMCV]).

Although the territory of Castelo de Vide is our study area, this kind of drystone hut is a much broader phenomenon, having been in use in several areas of the Iberian Peninsula and the Mediterranean area until recently. In some regions, especially in the north of Portugal, there was a clear connection to seasonal pastoralism such as transhumance (*Barroso et al. 2018*), whereas in others their uses might have been more diverse, but in all documented cases they were only used seasonally. For the purpose of a comparative analysis, only the *charfurdões* documented in the neighbouring regions of Alto Alentejo and Spanish Extremadura will be considered, because of the spatial proximity of the two regions and the coherence of them both as landscape features and in relation to land use patterns.

There are several other types of drystone structures and buildings preserved in the countryside: field walls, terraces, stone hut bases, watermills, cattle pens, and some corbelled-dome buildings that are still standing, such as small bread ovens or medium-sized pigpens. These are all relevant examples of vernacular architecture from the modern period that survive in today's landscape and should consequently be analysed together. For now, as a starting point, the focus of this research is on the *chafurdões*, since these are the most noteworthy architecturally and comprehensively documented to date. It is also our notion that their primary function was to be used by people as temporary

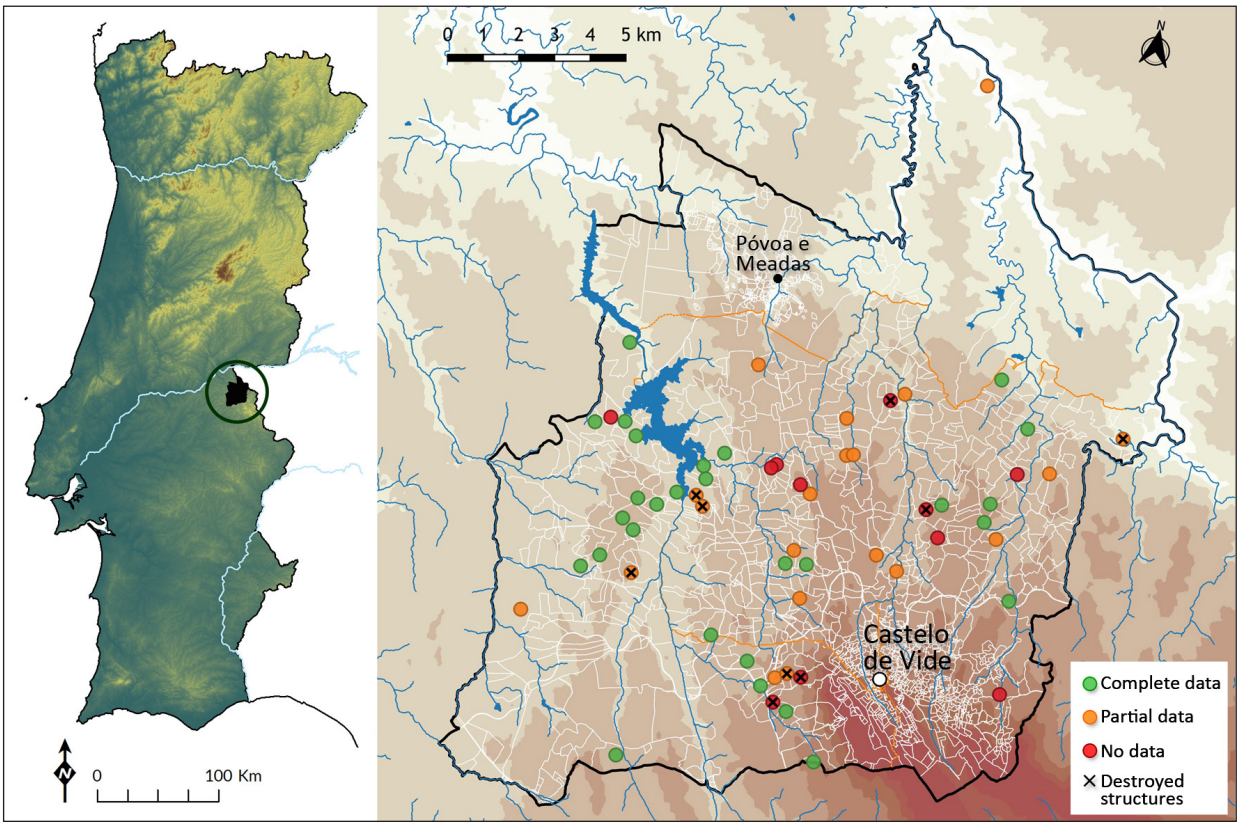

Fig. 1. left: location of Castelo de Vide in the Alto Alentejo region (Portugal); right: distribution of the 59 chafurdões in the territory of Castelo de Vide (© Fabián Cuesta-Gómez and Sara Prata).

accommodation. Understanding the location of *chafurdões* in relation to permanent settlements, the seasonality of their use, and their connection to different types of land use models is key to characterising the transformation in agricultural practices of the modern period.

The village and the countryside

Castelo de Vide is a municipality located in the Portuguese region of Alto Alentejo (Fig. 1). Its territory covers an area of 265 km^2, which includes the northwestern hilltops of the S*ão Mamede* mountain range but is mostly composed by a gentle peneplain crossed by seasonal streams and marked by rocky outcrops. The Alto Alentejo region preserves abundant archaeological evidence in its rural areas, mainly from the Neolithic, the Roman era, and the early medieval period, that reflects different models of dispersed settlement occupation. From the 12th century onwards a strong nucleated settlement pattern started to emerge, organised around castles and fortified boroughs, controlled directly by the Portuguese monarchy or assigned to noble families and religious orders. During the late medieval period these medieval settlements grew into villages and continued to expand during the modern period, their castles and walls transformed into bastion fortifications. Like Castelo de Vide, most of the urban areas in Alto Alentejo occupied today saw this development sequence.

However, evidence of what can be described as rural settlements is very scarce during the high and late medieval periods and it seems likely that most farming activities were carried out in the areas surrounding the fortified urban centres. Only in the second half of the 16th century is there evidence of structures, suggesting that the outermost areas of the territory were starting to be farmed regularly. From the 17th century onwards drystone walls were built for the enclosure of the fields, a reflection of land use and ownership transformations caused by the many changes of the modern period, such as economic growth, diversification of crops and agricultural processes, and population increase (*Videira 2008,* 178). In Castelo de Vide the average size of the rural enclosures (under 10 ha) suggests small-scale properties scattered around the urban areas.

Written sources indicate that most of the population was focused in this territory's two main urban areas, Castelo de Vide and Póvoa e Meadas, both of which were granted charters during the early 16th century. Farmsteads and

agricultural estates, in the sense of places where the rural population both lived and worked in the surrounding fields, here seem to be much later phenomenona, possibly dating from the 19th century.

The building of the *charfurdões* marks the first point in the modern period when a gradual increase in agricultural activity can be seen. The construction was probably carried out not by full-time farmers, but rather as an extensive secondary activity of people who lived mainly in the urban areas and were periodically required to support different kinds of agricultural and cattle-raising activities. In this context, *chafurdões* were used as short-term accommodation for these local farmers, smallholders, or even for seasonal farm workers coming from the northern provinces of the country to work in the harvest.

Information about early modern agricultural activities in this region is still scarce. Overall, the average depth of soil in the territory of Castelo de Vide is very low, with vast areas of exposed outcrops, and a highly acidic soil pH, resulting in soils with reduced ecological value, according to current standards. Nowadays polyculture is frequent in a continuous-tilling regime, simultaneously with grazing land and small-scale cereal production. Some parcels still maintain old cork oak forests (*Quercus suber*), chestnut (*Castanea sativa*), and traditional olive groves (*Olea europea L.*). While today the most common practice is extensive livestock production, mainly cows for meat consumption, not so long ago flocks of sheep and goats − mainly for wool and milk for cheese production but also for meat − and herds of pigs for fresh and cured meat were the norm.

Although further research is necessary, considering the natural characteristic of this area, it seems feasible to suggest that agricultural practices in the Modern Era were based on a diverse exploitation strategy that combined traditional livestock (sheep and goat) husbandry in parallel with small-scale agriculture of cereals, fruit trees, cork oaks, and vineyards. This land-use model is still visible today in some of the small farmsteads located around the village.

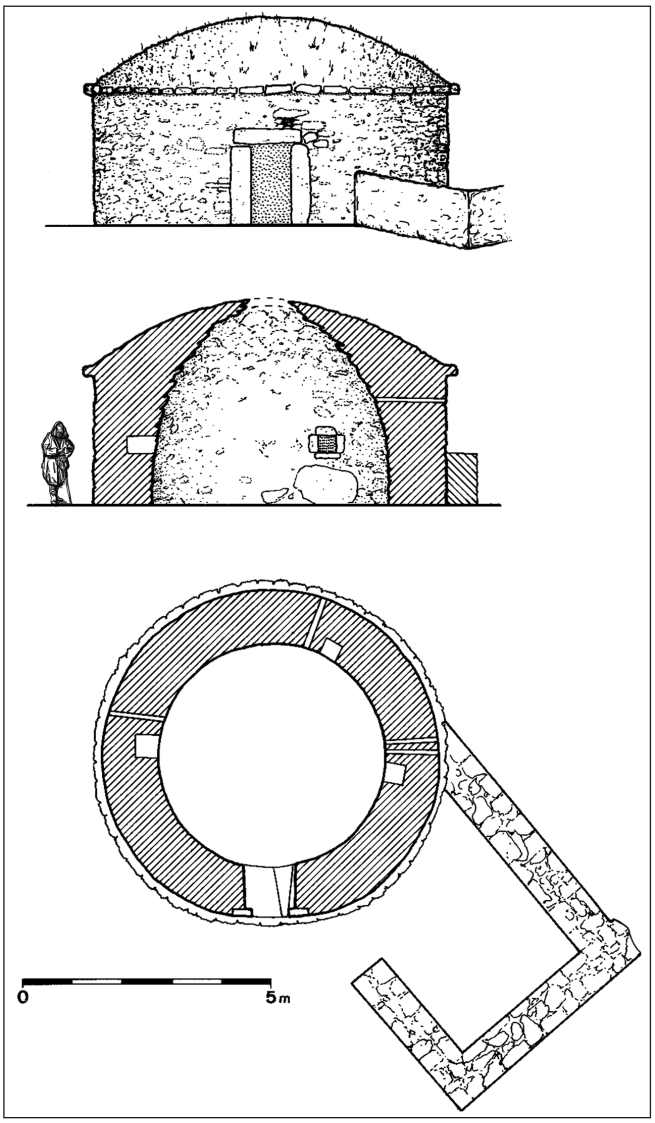

Fig. 2. Front view, section, and upper view of the chafurdão in Vale de Cales (© J. Magusto, SACMCV).

Spatial distribution

The information on the Castelo de Vide *chafurdões* comes from the data included in its original archaeological inventory (*Rodrigues 1975*) and, fundamentally, from the surveys carried out by the SACMCV during the 1980s and 1990s. These works focused on three of the four municipal *freguesias* (civil parishes). The territory of Póvoa e Meadas, located in the north, was an autonomous municipality up until 1836, and the land ownership regime, with larger properties and more land suitable for crops, was quite different from that of Castelo de Vide. These socioeconomic differences and the lower incidence of archaeological surveys in the territory explain the absence of *chafurdões* in the area of Póvoa e Meadas, so our analysis will mainly focus on examples in Castelo de Vide.

The relationship between the countryside and the village was direct and intense right from its foundation in the first half of the 13th century. Regardless of the land ownership regimen, there were no other places in the vicinity that attracted and concentrated the population. The proximity to the border with Spain, a constant menace until the beginning of the 19th century; the limited productivity of its poor soils; and the thrust towards industrial textile production made Castelo de Vide the local centre for trade, ideas, and people. As far as farming was concerned, most parcels would be worked directly from the village, meaning periodical trips to the fields whenever necessary.

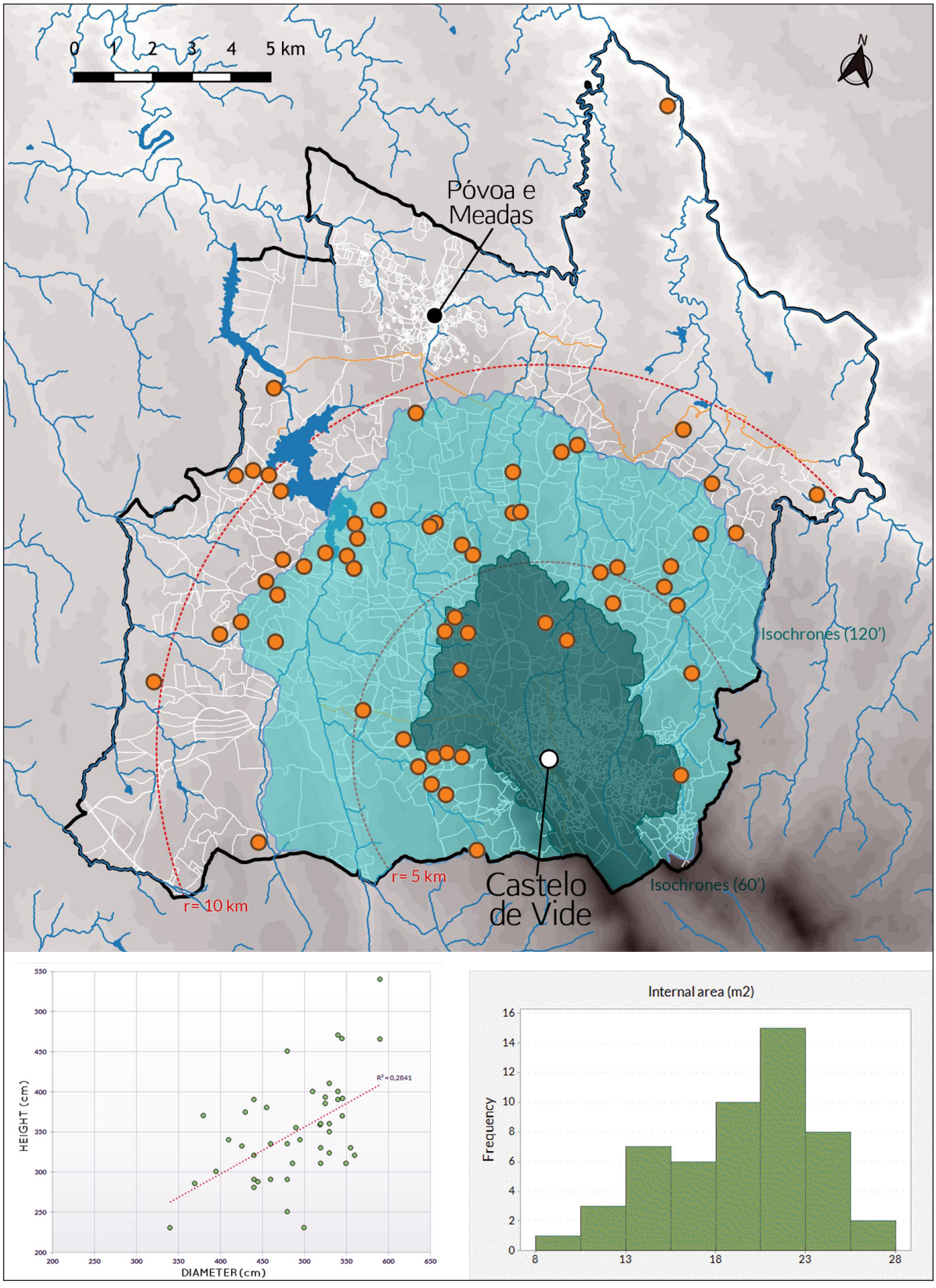

Fig. 3. Top: map of walking isochrones (60 and 120 minutes) from the village of Castelo de Vide; left: scatter plot graph with height and diameter values distribution; right: histogram with the representation of the internal area (m²) of the chafurdões (© Fabián Cuesta-Gómez and Sara Prata).

A cost path analysis of the time taken to travel from the village to the fields was carried out, which seems to indicate that many of the *chafurdões* are between the 60- and 120-minute isochrones (Fig. 3). This reinforces the idea that these structures were temporary dwellings: places for occasional shelter, storage of produce, and keeping animals. Their relative proximity to the village, where permanent homes were situated, and their character reinforce this notion. Although there is no existing study of local property changes, the spatial distribution of the *chafurdões* in this territory seems to be linked to small- and medium-sized properties. Our working hypothesis is that this municipality's rural subdivision has not undergone major changes in its configuration during the last three centuries, regardless of whether the property was dispersed or numerous single-family plots are reflected in the landscape.

Building techniques and formal features

Chafurdões are a classic example of vernacular architecture. They are built with local materials – irregular stones (granite and/or slate) and compacted earth – and feature a rather straightforward, if demanding, building technique. They were built by overlapping layers of stones in successive rings, the top being closed with a corbelled dome (Fig. 5). Lastly, the dome was covered with earth and gravel to guarantee that the outer stones remained protected and in place. Thus, the steadiness of the *chafurdão* was achieved by its dead weight, the vertical forces combined with the horizontal as a result of the interlocking of the stones (*Rovero – Tonietti 2014*). No lime mortar was used during the building process, but sometimes the walls were coated with packed earth. Thick walls and the earth used for covering the dome also ensured thermal insulation.

The masonry units used were small and irregular, very similar to the ones used in the enclosure walls, and most likely resulted from quarrying granite outcrops and field-clearing actions. The exception is the entrance, which is usually framed by large dressed stones (Fig. 4).

A total of 59 *chafurdões* were considered for this analysis. In terms of dimensional data, the maximum height, diameter (orthogonal measurements), wall thickness, and entrance orientation were recorded. For 28 of the analysed structures (47.5%) all parameters were recorded, for an additional 20 structures (33.9%) at least 2 of the measurements were recorded, and for the remaining 11 only 1 data factor or none were recorded. This uneven record is justified by the fact that most *chafurdões* present some degree of decay: either the domes or the walls have partially collapsed, which no longer allows for rigorous measurement. Finally, 9 (15.3 %) are destroyed, and the data were obtained from previous surveys (*Rodrigues 1975*; *SACMCV 1987-1995*).

As a result, a series of parameters that portrays the morphology of these structures has been established. From a total of 45 cases, it can be determined that the average height of these constructions is 3.51 m (SD = 0.64 m), with a maximum interior diameter of 4.93 m (SD = 0.56 m, for 52 cases) and an internal area of 19.35 m^2, although in this case the variability is significantly greater (SD = 4.24 m^2) with examples ranging from as little as 9 m^2 to as much as 27.34 m^2 (mode = c. 22 m^2). However, it does not appear that the variations in size imply differences in the primary use of the buildings studied. Finally, of the 38 cases in which the entrance's orientation is recorded, over half (21) face east, and if those that face northeast and southeast are included, this totals 82% of documented cases. This circumstance reflects the need for protection against the most frequent winds in the region, as well as to optimise exposure to the sun in the morning.

The interior structure of the *chafurdões* is quite similar, with vertical walls that begin to curve inwards from the base of the dome. Niches, between 1 and 6 square-shaped spaces delimited by slabs that were used as built-in shelves for storing domestic utensils or food, are frequently found on the inside walls. Less frequently these openings go through the wall, functioning as windows. Ventilators are also frequent as small triangular- or square-shaped holes located at the base of the dome, or, less frequently, at ground level to facilitate debris discharge (Fig. 4).

Outer structures added to the *chafurdão* are also common, notably semicircular walls and squared buildings with thatched roofs, which would be used as additional spaces to keep animals or for storage of wood, hay, building materials, and farming tools. Of the 59 documented cases, 32 had at least one attached structure, such as a cattle pen or a tiled-roof rectangular building (Fig. 2). In some cases, the *charfurdões* were eventually included in farmstead building complexes, evidence of the later process when the first permanent settlements developed in the countryside.

Unfortunately, there are very few elements to date precisely when the *chafurdões* were built and first used. Although the possibility of excavating a test pit inside one of these structures with the aim of identifying pottery remains or other dating elements was considered, most of the *chafurdões* were built directly over the granite bedrock. In the few cases that they preserve deposits, these are completely sterile or rather the result of recently added soil layers for cattle keeping.

The granite inner-door frame of the *chafurdão* from Tapada do Couto presents the peculiarity of an engraved name *Bartholome[u?]* and the date 1733 (Fig. 4). The inscription was made using cursive characters, similar to those found in civil documents from the 18th century. This could be the name of the builder, or, most likely, the owner and the date when the *chafurdão* was built

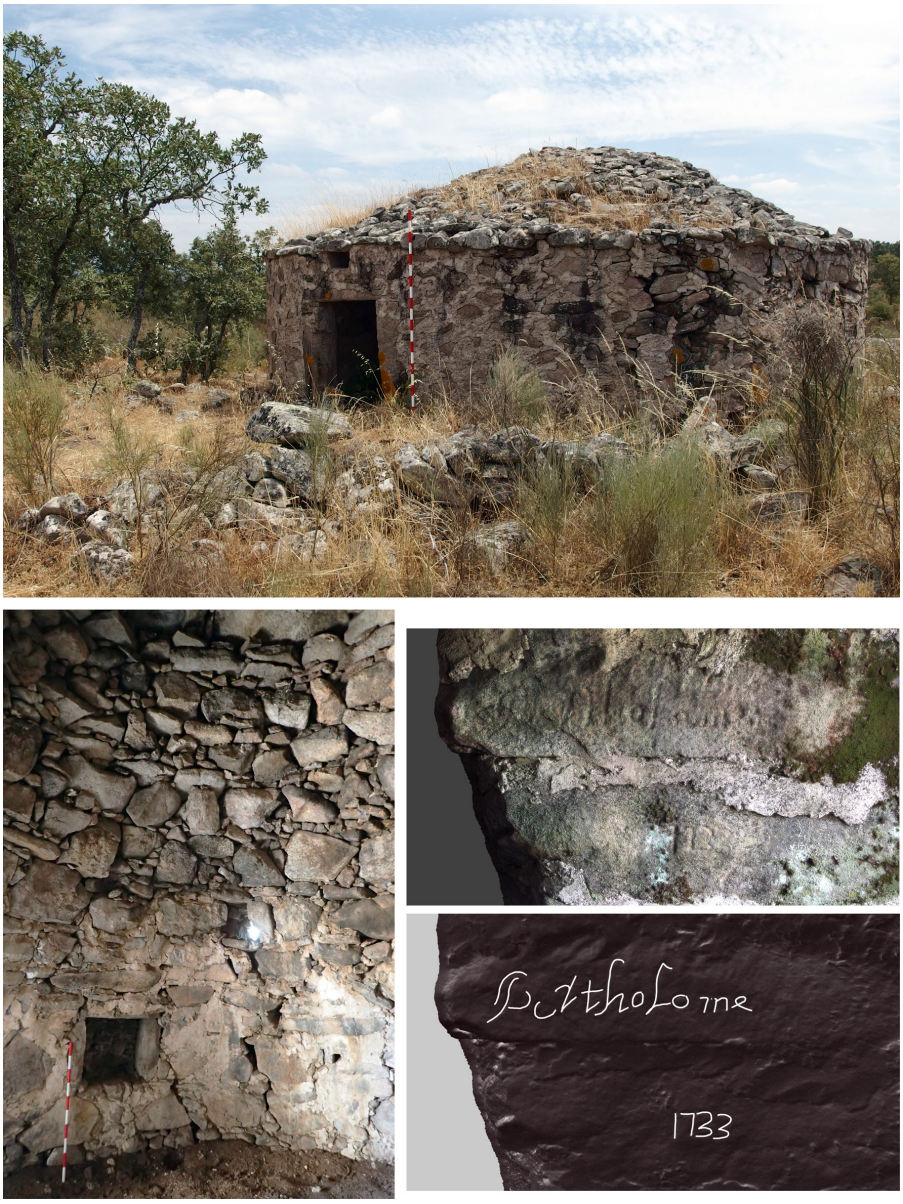

Fig. 4. Chafurdão from Tapada do Couto, which presents the peculiarity of an engraved name, 'Bartholome'[u?], and a date '1733' on the doorway frame (right); left: inner view of Maria Cecilia's structure, where a niche and an air vent can be seen (© Fabián Cuesta-Gómez and Sara Prata).

or rebuilt. It is rather frequent to find dates such as this on stone buildings, but this is the only known case for a *chafurdão* of Castelo de Vide.

Although these types of buildings are very common in different parts of the Iberian Peninsula (*Vegas et al. 2009*), the functionality and morphology of the *chafurdões* of Castelo de Vide find their closest reflection in similar structures in the neighbouring territories of Marvão (*Oliveira et al. 2007*) and in the Spanish provinces of Salamanca, Cáceres, and Badajoz. While in the Spanish Extremadura the variability of the materials used and the size of these auxiliary agricultural structures seems to be greater (*Cruz 2010; Galindo – Muñoz 2004; Blanca 2004; Lorenzana 2017*), the drystone hut with corbelled dome and marked agrarian polyfunctionality is frequently present. In fact, the presence of Portuguese workers who specialised in their construction was common in these border territories (*Martín Galindo 2006,* 848-849).

Lasting structures for seasonal use?

The building of a *chafurdão* was a substantial material investment, and the *chafurdão*'s ability to last was certainly a significant feature. The review of ethnographic studies carried out in the neighbouring Spanish region of Extremadura indicates that once the stone blocks were obtained − the most physically demanding part of the work − the construction of the drystone hut could be completed by a small group of workers in just a few days (*Martín Galindo 2006,* 852). Experience and the

Fig. 5. Top: Alto da Cumeada's chafurdão, one of the largest examples of this form of vernacular architecture preserved in Castelo de Vide; bottom: detail of the corbelled dome, seen from below (© Fabián Cuesta-Gómez and Sara Prata).

coordination of work and materials, as well as knowledge of stone construction, were needed to raise the *chafurdão* from a simple circle drawn on the ground to delimit its foundations (*Mena 2003*). It was common for specialised crews of quarrymen to travel around the region to work where required, both in the construction of new huts and in the maintenance of others.

There is evidence for numerous different uses for these structures in the peasant landscape: as seasonal shelters for shepherds and land workers, storage facilities for tools and produce, and, less frequently, for keeping livestock. During the ethnographic surveys carried out in the 1960s (*Oliveira et al. 1994,* 157-163), at least some of the *chafurdões* from Castelo de Vide were still in use, but mainly for storage purposes, and it was clear they had already lost their original dwelling function. It is worth noticing that their name originates from *chafurda*, a term given to pigpens, which might also refer to poorly kept living accommodations.

In relation to this, it is also worth considering another type of ethnographic structure: the *choça*. *Choças* are drystone circular structures with a similar layout to *chafurdões*, but instead of corbelled domes they have conical thatched roofs made with oak beams and branches of broom (*Cytisus sp.*). They have been identified in places such as Cabeçudos (Marvão) as permanent household structures (*Oliveira et al. 1994,* 130-135). Even though the thatched roof would have to be replaced periodically, it offered some breathability and a more comfortable living environment, while the inside of a *chafurdão* retains a lot of moisture. For its part, the main advantage of a *chafurdão* would be its durability and the possibility of reusing construction materials. In this sense, it would be possible to invest in the construction

of one of these buildings, next to a plot of land, and to ensure that it would survive for a considerable period. If repairs were needed at some point, the materials would be easily available, since, unlike organic components that required total replacement, the stone elements can be continually reused.

It remains unclear whether *chafurdões* were built with a single purpose in mind rather than a multifunctional structure meant to support a wide range of agricultural activities. While there seems to be no correlation between the different documented layouts and known uses, it would appear that they were mainly built to be used as temporary accommodation for land workers, as suggested by the fact that there are no *chafurdões* around the urban areas and their spatial distribution in relation to the villages.

While smaller types of drystone corbelled-domed structures were built specifically to keep sows and raise piglets, it must be considered that at least some of the *chafurdões* were built to keep livestock, as reflected by the ground-level openings for the discharge of liquid waste and stone mangers. These structures could be used for periodic stabling and to stockpile manure to be used as fertiliser.

As farming practices progressed, there was an increased demand for permanent rural labour and farmstead type settlements from the late 19th century onwards. Some of these farms − called *montes* − developed in areas where *chafurdões* had previously been built, suggesting a transition from seasonal land use and thus seasonal occupations to progressively more intense agricultural activities. *Charfurdões* became storehouses and barns, as some of them still are today.

Chafurdões from a cultural heritage perspective

Chafurdões were the result of a traditional agricultural system that is no longer in use. They survived due to their structural robustness, while their uses were continuously adapted to the new needs of the population of the region in each era. Only by the second half of the 20th century did they become obsolete, when the region was profoundly transformed and the countryside progressively abandoned. The increase of land dedicated to permanent pasture throughout the year and the incorporation of motor vehicles and metal and electrified fences made the need for people in the fields more sporadic, as well as less demanding and time-consuming.

Agricultural activity and livestock husbandry together no longer formed a generalised way of life: for a few it became a professionalised sector, and for others it was consigned to a temporary occupation or a hobby in small family plots. Between both worlds, the presence of the *chafurdão* became less relevant. While some of these structures remained as storehouses or barns, especially those that were closer to or integrated into contemporary houses or farms, most accentuated their degradation. The memory of their use is being eroded, as well as the know-how needed to build and repair them.

Currently there are 59 known *chafurdões* in the territory of Castelo de Vide with different degrees of preservation. A logical step for these structures might be to regard them as part of the local heritage and ensure specific programmes for their preservation. Only a few of them are integrated in walking trails that are maintained by the municipality for this purpose. The others are primarily located on private lands and the interest and effort to maintain them resides solely with the will of the landowners.

The Alto Alentejo region has been steadily growing as a tourist destination. Although projected as 'rural', most tourist activity is organised around historic urban centres and the countryside is essentially being left out. This area preserves an impressive number of archaeological sites, but only a few are open to the public. Museums and collections are equally scarce. As a result, there are no effective links between these elements of the past and the current villages of Alto Alentejo, whether to inhabitants or to visitors. In this context, *chafurdões* and other examples of ethnographic buildings have an added difficulty: they are no longer important in today's agricultural practices, whilst not old enough to be considered as archaeological, and thus lack the legal protection inherent to other buildings and sites. For this reason, specific lines of research and protection must be promoted. Fortunately, some important steps have already been taken, such as the addition of 'Art of dry stone walling, knowledge and techniques' (Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Slovenia, Spain, and Switzerland) to the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2018.

From an Alto Alentejo perspective, and focusing specifically on the *chafurdões*, it might be advantageous to establish work groups integrating both the Portuguese and Spanish inland regions where these stone structures are common. Both territories have regional and municipal archives where documents from the modern era are kept, which include testaments, deeds, and other similar records. While it seems unlikely that these might include direct references to the building or use of *chafurdões*, they could be mentioned as part of plot descriptions, especially in documents dealing with land ownership. Documentary research is certainly an area that deserves further attention.

Perhaps specific programs for vernacular architecture could be promoted, based on multidisciplinary approaches that would include architecture, ethnography, archaeology, history, and geography. A project of this nature would also need to involve traditional drystone masons and engage directly with the last rural workers who used the *chafurdões*. Thus, preserving the physical

structure and the memories of the last *charfurdões* could also be an important tool to engage local communities with cultural heritage.

Conclusion

Chafurdões were mainly built to be used as temporary accommodations for land workers while they were carrying out seasonal agricultural tasks in the 18th century, if not before. Some of the *chafurdões* were built to keep livestock, as is evident from the presence of mangers. Over time their use diversified, with them becoming storehouses and barns as more permanent settlement and agriculture developed from the late 19th century.

Chafurdões are not the only example of vernacular architecture buildings in the Alto Alentejo region, but they are certainly the most demanding technologically. Corbelled domes are an impressive example of technical execution and a vivid testimony to the knowledge, skills, and way of life of people of the recent past. Their conservation should indisputably be connected to the revival of the rural hinterland of Portugal. However, this is unfortunately still a poorly defined issue on political agendas and has no clear solution in sight. As in other similar areas of the Mediterranean, depopulation and aging inhabitants handicap the continuity of rural territories, which suffer the dichotomy of abandonment versus intensive agriculture practices and energy use (solar panels, opencast mines, ponds, dams etc.). With the increase of these landscape altering land uses perhaps it is not realistic to preserve all these vernacular buildings that are abandoned in the contemporary countryside.

But efforts must be made to ensure their adequate survey, recording, and analysis before more information is lost. Ethnographic heritage must be examined collectively and from different points of view. In this paper, *chafurdões* have been analysed from an archaeological and historical perspective, considering their seasonal use in the context of contemporary agricultural practices. The understanding of their locations in relation to the village of Castelo de Vide have helped to shed light on a poorly understood period and to characterise the progressive changes undergone in the countryside during the modern period.

Ultimately, relevant insights can only be gathered by considering ethnographic heritage such as *chafurdões* as an historical source from which to collect useful information about past communities. Appreciation of this point might in turn help develop effective tools for vernacular heritage management and preservation, as well as raise awareness among professionals, cultural managers, and local communities.

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