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# Characterization and territorial distribution of religious heritage in the parish of Cernache do Bonjardim, Central Portugal

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**Abstract.** Since Portugal is a mainly Catholic country, there are several testimonies of the practice of this religion and the faith of the people. In the parish of Cernache do Bonjardim, Central Portugal, birthplace of São Nuno de Santa Maria (canonized on April 26, 2009), there are several types of buildings related to religion, such as churches, chapels, field crosses and built sets. The number of churches and chapels is impressive: 18 religious buildings exist in a territory with about 7000 Ha and 3000 inhabitants (Census 2011). These buildings dated from different periods, have different characteristics and, within the same category, interesting differences can also be found. The main objectives of this article are to characterize and analyse the current situation of this heritage and its dissemination, enhancement and subsequent protection. The methods used were based on bibliographic, iconographic, photographic, cartographic, webgraphic research, in situ surveys and interaction with local residents. The approach comprises the survey of the religious heritage mentioned above, subsequent cataloguing and analysis regarding the orientation chosen for its construction, its age and its geographic distribution. With this analysis it is possible to group the elements into categories that facilitate their characterization. One of the main limitations of the investigation was the lack of documents and registrations about the described elements, which is partly due to the fire of 1917, in the City Hall, which destroyed all existing documents, and partly due to the disappearance of some of those elements and the subsequent reuse and relocation of the materials that made them up, making it difficult to recognize them, as well as the geographical and temporal location of their construction. The main conclusions are that most of the churches and chapels, against all expectations, do not respect the traditional canonical orientation and, that the majority of them was built in the 20th century and (probably) in the 17th century. Although distributed uniformly throughout the territory of the parish, the religious heritage is mostly found in the village of Cernache do Bonjardim and in the area of Serra da Santa, the highest point in this territory (475 m). This work does not intend to influence even more the attitudes of the population because they already value, appreciate and care for this heritage. However, the point of view presented in this article is different from the usual one and may open a new way of looking at this heritage. The originality of this work is that this type of heritage has not yet been approached in the territory under study. The article contributes to another study about this parish. As future developments, an analysis of the relationship between the dominant terrain orientations and the location of these patrimonial elements is suggested in order to be able to estimate more relationships that may exist.



## 1. Introduction

In 1911, during the First Republic in Portugal, the so-called Law for the Separation of the State from the Churches was proclaimed, where Portugal became a secular State, ceasing the Catholic Church to be the religion of the State, authorizing the practice of different religious confessions and forbidding persecution on religious grounds [1]. However, with the establishment of the Estado Novo and the Salazar dictatorship (1933-1968), and its motto “God, Fatherland and Family”, the Catholic Church once again had a lot of power over citizens; thus, it is not surprising that Catholicism remains deeply rooted in Portuguese culture and way of living [2].

The religious heritage reflects the beliefs and faith of the people. Portugal, where the majority of its inhabitants are Catholics, presents, of course, many symbols and buildings related to this religion. Cernache do Bonjardim parish is no exception, and as such, there are many temples and constructions of a religious character [2].

The object of study of this article is the parish of Cernache do Bonjardim (CAOP2011<sup>1</sup>), municipality of Sertã, in central Portugal, with about 3000 inhabitants (CENSOS 2011) and an area of 7000 Ha, where, throughout its history, many religious buildings were built. The purposes of this article are to register and analyse the current situation of these constructions, characterizing them and locating them in the territory where they are inserted, for their dissemination, enhancement and subsequent protection. In addition to bibliographic, iconographic, photographic, cartographic and webgraphic research, surveys were carried out *in situ* and interaction with local residents was valued.

The amount of bibliography presented is testimony to the innovation and originality of this work, as there are not many works about this territory with a similar approach. There are several limitations to this investigation, including the 1917 fire in the City Hall, which destroyed all the documents there, the disappearance of some religious buildings and the relocation of some of its elements, as well as the scarcity of documents about these buildings. All of this makes it very difficult to recognize these buildings, their geographical location and the determination of their period of construction. Thus, this work contributes to the dissemination of rural territories, isolated and without apparent interest, also opening up a new way of looking at this heritage.

The survey of the religious heritage of the parish of Cernache do Bonjardim, its subsequent cataloguing and analysis regarding the orientation chosen for its construction, its age and its geographic distribution, constitute the approach adopted.

In this parish, the existing heritage is essentially vernacular, rural and ethnographic. Despite the fact that, in 1999, ICOMOS [3] published the Charter on Vernacular Built Heritage, it is still considered emerging heritage, in contrast to consolidated heritage, such as chapels and churches [2]. Fortunately, attitudes towards heritage have changed and are (still) changing, which makes it possible to include the humblest heritage in this concept.

## 2. The religious heritage of the parish of Cernache do Bonjardim

Portugal has always been a mainly Catholic country and, therefore, testimonies of the practice of this religion and the faith of the populations abound in the national territory. The parish of Cernache do Bonjardim, the birthplace of São Nuno de Santa Maria (canonized on April 26, 2009) is not different, with many types of buildings related to religion.

In order to be able to study the elements found, that is, the constructions related to religion, an inventory was elaborated based on field surveys, which included all the existing public and private

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<sup>1</sup> CAOP2011 – Administrative and Organizational Charter of Portugal, 2011.

temples, as well as those already extinct or missing. They represent a long list and demonstrate the devotion of the inhabitants of this territory.

To make it easier to analyse and characterize, the elements collected were grouped into types, according to their initial use, with four groups being obtained: field crosses; built sets; manor houses; churches and chapels, which are presented. Figure 1 shows an example of each of the types considered. More details can be found in Gonçalves (2016) [2].



**Figure 1.** Examples of the type of religious heritage in the parish of Cernache do Bonjardim: a) Escudeiros' field cross; b) Built sets: Cernache's Seminary; b) Church of S. Sebastião de Cernache do Bonjardim; d) e) Manor house of Rua Torta and chapel of N. Sr<sup>a</sup> da Conceição in Cernache do Bonjardim; f) Sambado's chapel (authors)

## 2.1 Field crosses

Usually, field crosses are built when someone wants to mark an event that happened in a given place. It was not always possible to identify this event on the field crosses found, nor the person who ordered them to be built. Unfortunately, no more information was found about the field crosses found, which are: Sto. António (St. Anthony) field cross in Cernache do Bonjardim; Calvaria's field cross; Escudeiros' field cross.

**2.1.1 Sto. António field cross.** This field cross is located at the end of Rua Torta street, near the Camélias' Farm and Guimarães' Farm, in the village of Cernache. Being the intersection of two roads, it currently serves as a small roundabout. It is made of hewn stone and has an inscription that mentions the date of 1997, but it is assumed that this is the date of some recent intervention it suffered, and that it existed long before.

*2.1.2. Calvaria's field cross.* This field cross is located in a small square formed by a curve in the main road that runs through this village. It is made of masonry and has its construction date - 1941, so it is admitted that this was the date of its construction.

*2.1.3. Escudeiros' field cross.* This field cross is located on the side of the road that connects Quintã to Escudeiros, close to the villages of Louriceira and Escudeiros. It is made of hewn stone, but it was not possible to know the date of its construction, despite the conjecture that it is from the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## 2.2 Built sets

In the category of built sets were considered the buildings that, in addition to containing a temple, are made up, as a whole, by more buildings that were or are part of religious installations. The examples found are both linked to instruction in the region: S. José convent or Águias' Farm, in Cernache do Bonjardim; Seminary of Missions in Cernache do Bonjardim.

*2.2.1. S. José Convent or Águias' Farm.* This convent was opened in 1699 as a hospice and in 1720 as a convent of Capuchin friars. It has a chapel called São José. The convent was small, and next to it, there was a beautiful vegetable garden and orchard that are now a private property known as the Águias' Farm, due to the two statues of eagles that are standing at its entrance [4].

*2.2.2. Missions Seminary.* This seminary was built in 1794 [5] in the Closure field where the Palace and Castle of Bom Jardim existed and where, in 1360, D. Nuno Álvares Pereira was born (national hero and canonized as São Nuno de Santa Maria). It was one of the main factors of the intellectual development of Cernache and even today its building, imposing compared to the others, visually marks the town and is an identifying and iconographic factor of Cernache do Bonjardim. Its church is that of the Imaculada Conceição (Immaculate Conception).

## 2.3 Manor houses

There are also some temples that are part of private houses and that constitute the manor houses, which are manorial buildings that have a big house and a chapel, usually related to a primogeniture or noble families [2]. There are four manor houses: Paparia's manor house and the chapel of Menino Jesus (Child Jesus) in Paparia; Quintã's manor house and the chapel of S. João Batista (St. John Baptist) in Quintã; Rua Torta's manor house and the chapel of N. Sr<sup>a</sup>. da Conceição (Our Lady of Conception) in Cernache do Bonjardim; Farm and chapel of Sto. António (St. Anthony) in Cernache do Bonjardim.

*2.3.1. Paparia's main house and Menino Jesus chapel.* The Mendonça Granado family's manor house, a progeniture located in Paparia, consists of several volumes, one of which is the chapel of the Menino Jesus. The entire property is in an advanced state of ruin, and its disappearance is evident in the short term. It is conjectured that its original construction might have occurred in the 15<sup>th</sup> century [4]. This manor house has a modest chapel, adjacent to the house. Nowadays, it is in ruins, but you can still see parts of the choir and murals from the interior. Outside, the chapel can only be identified by a cross painted over its door.

*2.3.2. Manor house of Quintã and chapel of S. João Batista.* The Quintã manor house has the chapel of S. João Baptista inserted in one of its volumes. It belonged to the Serpa da Câmara family, also linked to a progeniture, is currently in ruins, and its disappearance in the short term is also evident. It is a manorial house, which adapts and follows the public road. There are no written elements about the house or the chapel, conjecturing that it is from the 17<sup>th</sup> century [4,6]. This chapel features a hewn stone crucifix on the chapel door and a small bell tower that still exists.

*2.3.3. Manor house of Rua Torta and N. Sr<sup>a</sup>. da Conceição chapel.* This house has a Baroque architecture, having been the home of Cernache's Majorat and is located in the centre of the village. It

was erected in 1775 by order of the Majorat, having undergone changes in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century [5]. Its construction adapts to the winding structure of the public road with which it borders. It has two floors and consists of several volumes. The chapel of N. Senhora da Conceição, one of the several volumes that make up the property, has a Baroque structure [5], having the date from 1777 above the door.

2.3.4. *Farm and chapel of Sto. António.* Is a property with a considerable area, within the village of Cernache do Bonjardim. The farmhouse is separate from the chapel, which is a unique case in this territory. Both the exterior aspect of the house and the chapel were improved in 2013, but between 2002 and 2013 the chapel lost its bell. The chapel of Sto. António was built by the inhabitants of Cernache do Bonjardim, it was a chapel slightly outside the village and the construction period, conjectural, was from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, with its vernacular and baroque architecture [5].

## 2.4 Churches and chapels

Churches and chapels are usually a testimony to the faith and religiosity of the people. They are constructed elements, testimonies of the local history. The specimens found, many of them relatively recent (20<sup>th</sup> century), show that the population of the parish of Cernache continues with great religious activity. After a bibliographic search and surveys on the site, due to the large number of elements found in the parish, whether existing or missing, an organization was adopted in alphabetical order of the place where they were built and not by the date of its construction, which, in most cases, is impossible to define precisely due to lack of documentation.

We found 18 specimens: N. Sr<sup>a</sup>. do Loreto chapel (Our Lady of Loreto), in Brejo Fundeiro; S. José chapel (St. Joseph), in Brejo da Correia; chapel of Sto. António and N. Sr<sup>a</sup>. de Fátima (St. Anthony and Our Lady of Fátima), at Calvaria; Chapel of Bom Jesus (Good Jesus), in Cernache do Bonjardim; chapel of N. Sr<sup>a</sup>. do Desterro (Our Lady of Exile), in Cernache do Bonjardim; chapel of N. Sr<sup>a</sup>. do Rosário (Our Lady of Rosary), from the cemetery of Cernache do Bonjardim; church of S. Sebastião (St. Sebastian) of Cernache do Bonjardim; chapel of N. Sr<sup>a</sup>. da Conceição (Our Lady of Conception), in Matos do Pampilhal; chapel of N. Sr<sup>a</sup>. de Lurdes (Our Lady of Lourdes), in Mendeira; chapel of N. Sr<sup>a</sup>. da Estrela (Our Lady of Star), at Monte Minhoto; chapel of N. Sr<sup>a</sup>. das Neves (Our Lady of Snows), in Pampilhal; chapel of N. Sr<sup>a</sup>. da Esperança (Our Lady of Hope), in Paparia; chapel of Imaculado Coração (Immaculate Heart), in Porto dos Fusos; chapel of S. Bento (St. Benedict), in Quintã; chapel of Salvador do Mundo (Savior of the World), in the Sambado; original chapel of Sta. Maria Madalena and S. Macário (St. Mary Magdalene and St. Macário) in Serra da Santa; current chapel of Sta. Maria Madalena and S. Macário in Serra da Santa; chapel of Divino Espírito Santo (Divine Holy Ghost), in Várzea de Pedro Mouro.

2.4.1. *Chapel of N. Sr<sup>a</sup>. do Loreto in Brejo Fundeiro.* Missing. It is known that in 1758 this chapel already existed, its existence is confirmed in 1791, but it is not possible to define the exact date of its foundation [4,6].

2.4.2. *Chapel of S. José in Brejo da Correia.* This chapel is a building from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, possibly from the time of the Estado Novo. It features a bell tower topped by a cross, and its roof has an interesting geometric shape, not very common, either in the area or at the construction time. It presents an approximately E-W orientation (in the orientations indicated, the first cardinal point corresponds to the altar and the second to the main door).

2.4.3. *Chapel of Sto. António and N. Sr<sup>a</sup>. de Fatima at Calvaria.* This chapel is quite recent, from 1986. The volume of this chapel is considerable, and the possibility of being very frequently visited should be considered. It has a narthex with pointed arches and has an E-W orientation.



2.4.4. *Chapel of Bom Jesus in Cernache do Bonjardim.* It is a relatively small chapel having been built in the 16<sup>th</sup> century [5,7]. It has a small tile panel on the outside and has an approximate E-W orientation.

2.4.5. *Chapel of N. Sr<sup>a</sup>. do Desterro in Cernache do Bonjardim.* It is a relatively small chapel, and served as a wayside chapel. It was built in 1677, according to the inscription on the main facade of the chapel [4,5]. It has an N-S orientation.

2.4.6. *Chapel of N. Sr<sup>a</sup> do Rosário in Cernache do Bonjardim.* This chapel is located in the cemetery of Cernache. It was erected around 1896 [4]. The orientation of this chapel is approximately N-S.

2.4.7. *S. Sebastião Church in Cernache do Bonjardim.* It is the Main Church of Cernache, the most important religious cult temple. It was built in 1554 or 1555 [5], but the bell tower was only constructed in 1893, as shown on the tower's information board. It is referenced in the most important bibliography about the parish, being the only building in the parish that is classified as a National Monument. It has a N-S orientation.

2.4.8. *Chapel of N. Sr<sup>a</sup>. da Conceição in Matos do Pampilhal.* This chapel is probably a relatively recent 20<sup>th</sup> century building, as can be seen from its architectural style. It has a bell tower formed by two pillars joined at the top, and a brick facade, which sets it apart from all other chapels in the parish. This chapel has a NE-SW orientation.

2.4.9. *Chapel of N. Sr<sup>a</sup>. de Lourdes in Mendeira.* This chapel was built in 1900, however, it was only consecrated in 1903. The chapel is part of a building with three bodies. It only has a small bell tower, with a bell. This chapel has an approximate W-E orientation.

2.4.10. *Chapel of N. Sr<sup>a</sup>. da Estrela on Monte Minhoto.* Missing. Farinha (1930) [7] states that this chapel would be the oldest in the parish, and it was not possible to define exactly the date of its foundation.

2.4.11. *Chapel of N. Sr<sup>a</sup>. das Neves in Pampilhal.* This chapel is very old, having been built by two priests whose names disappeared, knowing, however, that it already existed in 1661, due to a wedding register that took place there [4]. It has a bell tower, located in the centre of the facade, with a clock and the main door. It has a N-S orientation.

2.4.12. *Chapel of N. Sr<sup>a</sup>. da Esperança in Paparia.* It is a very old chapel, knowing, however, that it already existed in 1657 [4,7]. It has a hexagonal plant, unique in the parish and on the right side there is a small bell tower with a bell. Its door, with stone lintel and two side lanterns, resembles the Manueline style. It presents an approximately NE-SW orientation.

2.4.13. *Chapel of Imaculado Coração in Porto dos Fusos.* This chapel is a building from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as can be seen from its architectural style. It consists of a bell tower and two bodies that make up the central nave and the main altar. It features an E-W orientation.

2.4.14. *Chapel of S. Bento in Quintã.* It is a very old chapel, already existing in 1680 [4,7]. It has a small bell tower on the left side, between the chapel and the left side body. It has an E-W orientation.

2.4.15. *Chapel of the Salvador do Mundo in the Sambado.* This chapel is very old, already existing in 1591 because that year a wedding was celebrated there [4,7]. It is a small chapel, with a right-side body and a bell tower incorporated in the main body. It has E-W orientation.

2.4.16. *Former chapel of Sta. Maria Madalena and S. Macário in Serra da Santa.* This chapel is located at the highest point of the parish (475 m), Serra da Santa (Saint Hill), close to the current chapel with

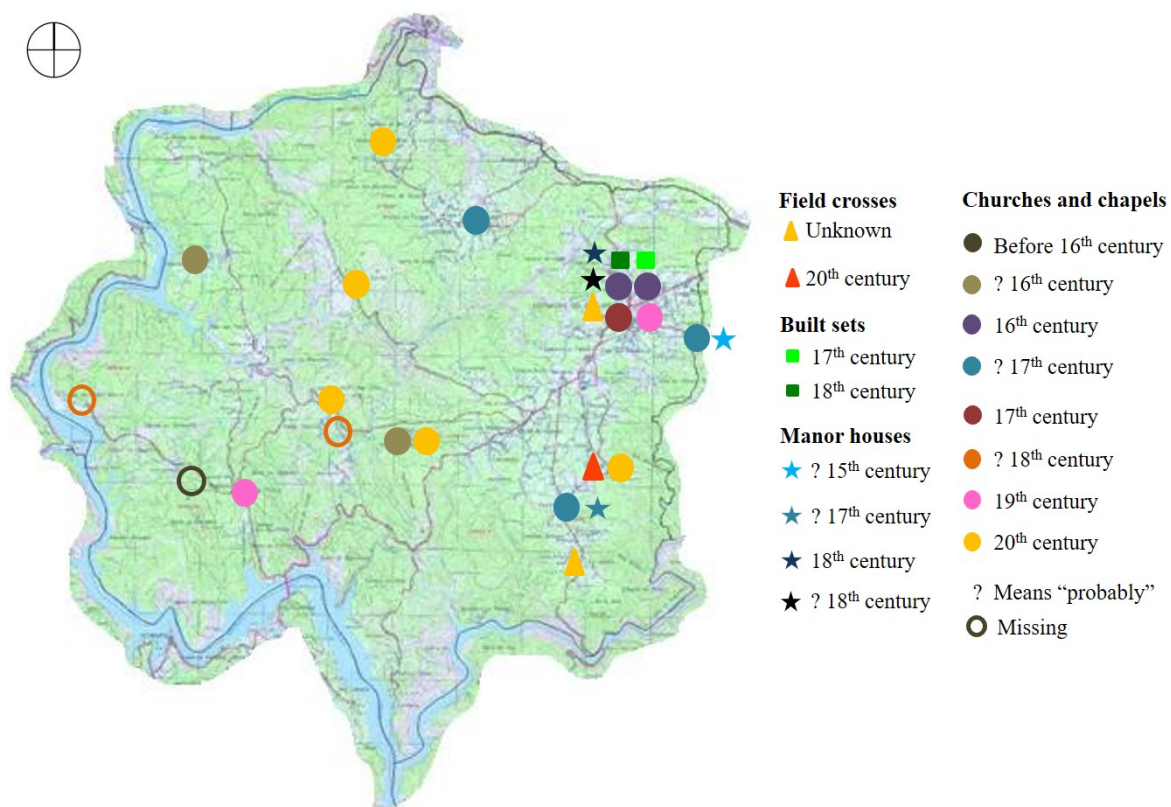
the same name. It already existed in 1581 [4,7]. It is a small chapel, very modified and transformed, currently serving as a bar. It has an E-W orientation.

*2.4.17. Current chapel of Sta. Maria Madalena and S. Macário in Serra da Santa.* It is located near the primitive chapel and was built in 1920. It was built to replace the initial chapel, which has become too small to accommodate the pilgrims during the annual pilgrimage that takes place there. It has W-E orientation.

*2.4.18. Chapel of the Salvador do Mundo in the Várzea de Pedro Mouro.* This chapel, in Várzea de Pedro Mouro is currently missing, although the small bell tower with the bell has remained, however, it is not known whether it is approximately at the chapel site or if it has been delocalized. It is known that in 1730 it already existed [7] and that it is very old, ignoring its time of construction [4].

### 3. Results and discussions

In order to group the information and better visualize the time of construction of each of the religious elements found, as well as their geographical location, Figure 2 was elaborated, where all this information is gathered.



**Figure 2.** Time of construction and geographical location of religious buildings in the parish of Cernache do Bonjardim (authors)

At the beginning of the population development of the parish and from the above, it is estimated that, apart from the Paços do Bom Jardim (Bom Jardim Palace), which already existed in 1360, the nobility began to establish at the Eastern part of Cernache, as attested by the manor house of Paparia, which already existed in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and when probably the chapel located on Monte Minhoto was built.



With the 16<sup>th</sup> century more chapels appear, located in strategic points of the territory: where there was gold exploration (Sambado), at the highest point of the parish (Serra da Santa) and in the parish's main village. In this case, the first church built was Bom Jesus, but the development of the village of Cernache was so quick that, in the same century, it became necessary to build the Main Church (S. Sebastião). It is also in this century that the Convent of S. José was built in Cernache when the territory began to consolidate with the establishment of the nobility in Quintã, where another manor house was built.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Cernache continues to progress. Two more important manor houses have been built: Rua Torta manor house and Sto. António Farm. The territory consolidated even more with the construction of two more chapels, one in Várzea de Pedro Mouro, where there was gold mining and another in Brejo Fundeiro, almost in the centre of the parish territory. It was at the end of this century that the Seminary was built, an iconic and very important element of education for the parish and all neighbouring areas, as it admitted external students.

The beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was very troubled, due to the French Invasions (1807, 1809 and 1810) and the Lutas Liberais (Liberal Struggles, 1828-1834), which plunged the country into chaos. So, it is not surprising that only two more chapels appeared in the second half of this century. Probably at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>, two of the found field crosses appeared.

With the 20<sup>th</sup> century also came the Estado Novo, with the evangelization of the people as one of its objectives. Thus, 5 more chapels were built, located in a central strip of the territory. It was also during this time that the Calvaria field cross was built.

Considering the “classical canonical orientation” of a temple, that is, E-W (altar to E and door to W), it was discovered that in relation to the churches and chapels found, and excluding those that are not known because they disappeared, only 53% have this orientation. Of the oldest, only the Main Church does not have a classic canonical orientation, while most of those of the 20<sup>th</sup> century respect this orientation. Therefore, there are several obstacles to the adoption of this orientation for the temples, depending, among others, on the orography and the available space.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Although distributed uniformly throughout the territory of the parish, the religious heritage is mostly found in the village of Cernache do Bonjardim, the parish's chief town.

Field crosses are located in the eastern part of the parish; the built sets only exist in the village of Cernache do Bonjardim, which, in fact, gathers the largest number of religious buildings: 9. The oldest manor houses are also located in the eastern part of the parish, and in the village of Cernache exist the most recent ones, whose construction is attributed to the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

In relation to churches and chapels, it appears that previously and during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the construction of the chapels occurred mainly in the parish's main village, in the high points of the territory and next to the Zêzere river. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, it seems to have been important to reinforce the religious presence in sufficiently populated places in the parish, especially in the NE and SE quadrant of the territory.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, two more chapels were built, located in places with difficult access in relation to Cernache, but sufficiently populous to justify its construction. Two other chapels were erected in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, one in the cemetery of Cernache (1896) and another, already at the threshold of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in 1900 at Mendeira. The 20<sup>th</sup> century brought a great increase with the construction of 5 more chapels.

On the contrary to the expectations, almost half of the churches and chapels do not follow the classic canonical orientation. However, in most temples built in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and in the oldest, this orientation was respected.

The religious heritage of the parish of Cernache do Bonjardim is very rich, although rural and vernacular. This heritage reflects well the religiosity and faith of the natural people who keep their traditions and customs, where the religious aspect plays an important role. This heritage, although humble, has its place, must be maintained and valued. This article is another way to spread it and make it stand out.

As future developments, an analysis of the relationship between the dominant orientations of the land and the implantation of these patrimonial elements is suggested in order to be able to estimate more relationships that may exist.

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