

# The Moorish Tradition in Portuguese Archaeology

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This study aims to synthesize the multifaceted presence of the Moors in the Portuguese landscape by analysing archaeological remains, toponymy, legends and popular beliefs, all supported by historical documentation and studies on Portuguese oral tradition. By adopting an interdisciplinary approach, I seek to bridge the tangible aspects of material culture with the intangible heritage of oral narratives, exploring how these elements inform and reinforce one another. This involves establishing connections between archaeological evidence and the rich corpus of oral traditions and folklore, which often reinterpret or preserve the memory of these archaeological vestiges. Through this analysis, I aim to demonstrate how these pre-existing materialities can be understood as remnants of the past and as living elements of “our tradition”, continuing to shape identities and the collective memory. This synthesis offers new perspectives on the enduring legacy of Moorish influence in Portugal’s cultural landscapes.

KEYWORDS: landscape, archaeological remains, Moors, place names, legends, beliefs

Z delom želim povzeti večplastno prisotnost Mavrov v portugalski krajini z analizo arheoloških ostankov, toponimije, zgodb in ljudskih verovanj, pri čemer se opiram na zgodovinske vire ter študije portugalske ustne tradicije. Z interdisciplinarnim pristopom skušam povezati oprijemljive vidike materialne kulture z neoprijemljivim izročilom ustnih pripovedi ter raziskati, kako ti elementi medsebojno učinkujejo in se dopolnjujejo. To vključuje vzpostavljanje povezav med arheološkimi dokazi in bogatim korpusom ustnega izročila in folklore, ki pogosto reinterpretirata ali ohranjata spomin na te arheološke sledove. S to analizo želim pokazati, kako je mogoče te predhodno obstoječe materialnosti razumeti kot ostanke preteklosti in hkrati kot žive elemente »naše tradicije«, ki še naprej oblikujejo identitete in kolektivni spomin. Ta sinteza ponuja nove poglede na trajno dediščino mavrskega vpliva v kulturnih krajinah Portugalske.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: krajina, arheološki ostanki, Mavri, krajevna imena, legende, verovanja

## INTRODUCTION

This study explores how the Moors are perceived in Portuguese collective memory and how their presence is manifested in both the landscape and oral tradition. The key objective is to understand how material and immaterial heritage – such as archaeological

remains and folklore – interact to preserve and reinterpret the traditions associated with the Moors, offering insights into their relevance for contemporary cultural identity.

The presence of the Moors in Portugal represents a significant chapter in the country's history, leaving a lasting imprint not only on the physical landscape but also on its cultural heritage. From architectural remnants and place names to enduring legends and beliefs, Moorish influence continues to shape how history and tradition are perceived and expressed. To fully understand the depth and diversity of these traditions, it is imperative to adopt a multidisciplinary approach that allows for the comprehensive integration of material and immaterial evidence.

This study takes an interdisciplinary approach, combining archaeology, historical research, linguistics and folklore studies to examine Moorish influence. Through the analysis of archaeological remains, place names, legends, popular beliefs and historical documents, the research integrates tangible evidence with intangible cultural expressions. This synthesis allows for a comprehensive analysis of how these diverse sources contribute to interpreting historical vestiges and preserving social memory. Key references include scholarly publications and studies on Portuguese oral tradition and folklore, which provide a theoretical framework for this multidisciplinary investigation.

Among the various cultural manifestations analysed, legends stand out as central elements of intangible heritage, offering a unique perspective on how place names and oral traditions preserve and reinterpret the legacy of the Moors. Legends occupy a central place in intangible heritage, transmitting values, beliefs and collective memories that shape the identity of communities. These oral narratives are more than stories; they represent a symbolic interaction between people and the surrounding environment, creating a continuous dialogue between the present and the past. Thus, by exploring legends that emerge from a landscape, it is possible to uncover layers of cultural and historical meaning, which root communities in their territories and strengthen the sense of belonging.

In the specific case of legends associated with the Moors, these stories offer a unique tool for interpreting and valuing archaeological sites. Narratives about the Moors perpetuated by oral tradition enrich intangible heritage and build bridges to a deeper, more contextualized understanding of the material remains we find. Exploring these legends allows us to reflect on who the Moors were and the cultural imprint they left over the centuries, providing new perspectives on the encounter between history, archaeology and collective memory.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employs a comprehensive methodology to investigate the presence and legacy of Moorish culture in Portugal, integrating historical documentation, toponymy and oral tradition. The methodology used to combine landscape analysis with oral tradition – focusing on legends and traditions associated with the Moors in Portugal – was based on a bibliographic analysis of documents, publications, historical maps, military maps and other relevant sources.

For this study, an inventory was made of archaeological sites in Portugal whose names are associated with Moors or Moorish women, or which are located in areas whose toponyms are linked to the Moors. These place names were analysed to identify recurring patterns. Based on this survey, a structured database was created to organize and systematize the collected information.

Based on this data, a map was created to visualize the spatial distribution of the identified archaeological sites. This information was then cross-referenced with specialized bibliographical sources and databases of Portuguese legends, allowing for a comparative analysis between the inventoried archaeological sites and the traditional narratives associated with the Moors.

Historical documentation played a central role in contextualizing the archaeological sites and interpreting the legends tied to these locations. The Parish Memoirs (*Memórias Paroquiais*) of 1758, a nationwide survey conducted after the 1755 earthquake, is particularly valuable for its records of local histories, geographical descriptions and popular narratives about archaeological remains. This document and other historical and military maps help trace the persistence of Moorish heritage in the Portuguese landscape.

From the vast corpus of traditional oral literature in Portugal, we highlight the legends relating to the Moors and Moiras of the Iberian Peninsula. They are significant because they can be linked to archaeological remains, and because they constitute an excellent instrument for analysing the landscape (Alves, 2001), revealing how communities project their beliefs and social order onto their surroundings (Reboredo, 1999). There are currently several authors whose work focuses on legends – either in general or specifically on the Moors – covering works in the field of oral literature, Portuguese culture and anthropology. They include Amália Marques (2013); José Joaquim Dias Marques (2014; 2021); Maria Manuela Casinha Nova (2012); Maria de Lourdes Cidrães (2013; 2014); Alexandre Parafita (2006; 2007); Fernando Alonso Romero (1998); Buenaventura Aparicio Casado (2004); Rafael Quintia Pereira (2016; 2020; 2021). Oral traditions, especially legends about the Moors and Moiras, were examined through two key Portuguese projects that are especially relevant to this research. The first is the Portuguese Archive of Legends (*Arquivo Português de Lendas – APL*, 2022), which is dedicated to the “study of oral tradition (intangible cultural heritage), in its various genres, namely tales, legends, novels, songs and proverbs” (Centro de Estudos Ataíde Oliveira, 2022). The second is the Digital Archive of Traditional Oral Literature<sup>1</sup> (ADLOT, 2022).

## THE DATA

The data collected in this preliminary phase of the study is presented on this map. It illustrates the geographical distribution of archaeological sites whose names are associated with the Moors.

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<sup>1</sup> Arquivo Digital da Literatura Oral Tradicional – ADLOT.



In addition, a sample image of the database contains detailed information on each identified site, including its name, description, location, access, toponyms, legends, and associated rituals.

Nº de inventário	Designação	Topónimo	Topónimo/Lugar	Freguesia	Concelho
562	A-de-Moura//ES-TÁTUA-MENIR De A-DE-MOURA	A-de-Moura	Tapada	ADÃO (GUARDA)	GUARDA
2201	Crasto/Alto da Moura	Alto da Moura		CANEDO DE BASTO (CELORICO DE BASTO)	CELORICO DE BASTO
1815	Povoado fortificado do Alto dos Moiros, ou Outeiro dos Mouros	Alto dos Moiros/Outeiro dos Mouros	/Parada da Ribeira	PEDRAÇA (CABECEIRAS DE BASTO)	CABECEIRAS DE BASTO
952	Alto dos Mouros/Mourão//Castro do Mourão	Alto dos Mouros	Alto dos Moiros/Outeiro dos Mouros	CERVA (RIBEIRA DE PENA)	RIBEIRA DE PENA
271	Buraco da Moura	Buraco da Moura	Buraco da Moura/Fragas Donas	MILHÃO (BRAGANÇA)	BRAGANÇA
438	Medorra/Cabecinho dos Mouros	Cabecinho dos Mouros	Medorra/Cabecinho dos Mouros	VILA DE ALA (MOGADOURO)	MOGADOURO
439	Medorra/Cabeço de Pena Palim//Medorra/Cabecinho dos Mouros	Cabecinho dos Mouros	Medorra/Cabeço de Pena Palim	VILA DE ALA (MOGADOURO)	MOGADOURO
1632	Medeiros//Castro de Medeiros/Cabeço dos Mouros	Cabeço dos Mouros		CHÃ (MONTALEGRE)	MONTALEGRE
2438	Serra das Vinhas/Cabeço dos Mouros//Serra da Vinha	Cabeço dos Mouros		PENA LOBO (SABUGAL)	SABUGAL
2310	Cama do Mouro	Cama do Mouro	Soutelinho do Mezio	TELÕES (VILA POUCA DE AGUIAR)	VILA POUCA DE AGUIAR
730	Campo dos Mouros	Campo dos Mouros	Serra de Santiago	SOBROSA (PAREDES)	PAREDES
1183	Casa da Moura	Casa da Moura	Alhões	ALHÕES (CINFÃES)	CINFÃES
1419	Casa da Moura (Orca do Gato)	Casa da Moura		TOURO (VILA NOVA DE PAIVA)	VILA NOVA DE PAIVA
537	Dólmen do Carapito I/ Casa da Moura//Dólmen 1 do Carapito//Carapito 1	Casa da Moura	Casa da Moura	PENA VERDE (AGUIAR DA BEIRA)	AGUIAR DA BEIRA
1384	Orca de Pendilhe/"Casa da Moura"	Casa da Moura	Orca	PENDILHE (VILA NOVA DE PAIVA)	VILA NOVA DE PAIVA
1354	Orca do Porto Lamoso ou dos Moinhos de Rua//Orca, Casa da Moura de Porto Lamoso, Casa da Moura dos Moinhos da Rua ou Corga Sintineira.	Casa da Moura	Alhais	ALHAIS (VILA NOVA DE PAIVA)	VILA NOVA DE PAIVA

Table 1: The database of Archaeological sites associated with the Moors (place names).

To date, 659 archaeological sites have been inventoried across various regions of the country. However, there is an apparent lower incidence in certain areas, a pattern that requires confirmation through additional research.

Many identified sites have multiple designations, reflecting the nomenclature attributed by local populations and the names recorded in national databases, scientific articles and archaeological monographs. Archaeologists often document sites without prior knowledge of their popular names, making it challenging to systematise this information. Therefore, the data presented here should not be considered an exhaustive survey, but rather as the beginning of an inventory process that aims to deepen our understanding of the archaeological sites and the oral tradition associated with the Moors. This process will later be expanded to include archaeological sites associated with legends.

### PLACE NAMES

Toponymy serves as a crucial link between the geographical landscape and the historical presence of the Moors in Portugal. When we register toponyms related to Moors and Moiras, we are dealing with *mythotoponyms* (names derived from mythological entities), a subtype of *hierotoponyms*, which reflect various beliefs. These toponyms were recorded in modern documentation, namely in the Parish Memoirs of 1758. There are numerous references to the Moors throughout the country, frequently associated with ancient buildings. A similar phenomenon can be observed in Spain, particularly in Galicia: “The northwest of the Iberian Peninsula offers us a good example of this process of cultural appropriation of elements from the past: the many popular traditions that link mythical characters (mouros and mouras of the Galician peasantry) with prehistoric monuments such as megalithic mounds and forts /.../” (Fábrega-Álvarez et al., 2011: 326). This appropriation of elements from the past is evident in some descriptions dating from the late 19th to early 20th centuries – for example, at the site of Cividelhe or Cividade (Basto), where a well was said to lie under a rock. When Martins Sarmento visited the site, the well had already been filled with stones, yet it remained rich in traditions involving enchanted Moors. About 1000 metres northeast of this well, lies the hill known as *Campas dos Mouros* [Graves of the Moors], a toponym that existed even before the graves were discovered. Near these remains, there is the *Fonte da Moura*, which never dries up, a small valley called *Corgo da Moura*; and amid the ruins, a rock with a visibly artificial flat top, which can be climbed by rough steps, is called *Cama da Moura* (Sarmiento, 1878: 66). As we can see, in a relatively small area, the presence of the Moors is mentioned numerous times.

There are dozens of place names in Portugal usually associated with megalithic monuments – such as dolmens and mounds – some of which are associated with the Moors. Examples include House of the Moors, Little House of the Moors, Moorish Barn, Moura Cave, Cave of the Moors, Moorish Corral, Oven of the Moors, Moorish Oven, Moorish Table, Moorish Stone, Moura Rock and Moors’ tomb (Jorge, 1982: 393). The architecture of megalithic tombs has led them to being interpreted as houses, ovens or caves.





Figure 2: *Castro de Ribas* or *Cerca dos Mouros*; Argeriz, Valpaços. Walls of the hillfort. (Photo Alexandra Vieira)

However, they were not just seen as any houses – they had names like *Casa da Moira*, *Forno do Moiro*, or *Pedra dos Mouros* (Vasconcelos, 1897: 257). Martins Sarmiento refers to the *Casa da Moura*, in Vila Chã, Barcelos, as the “largest antella” he knows (Sarmiento, 1888: 113, fn. 1). The *Orquinha dos Juncais* (Queiriga, Vila Nova de Paiva) is locally known as *Forno da Moira* and is situated approximately 150 m to the W.S.W. of the *Orca dos Juncais* (Cruz, 2001: 370). Not only are dolmens and megalithic tombs regarded as houses, but caves are also described in similar terms: “In our country, we have many caves called *Covas da Moura* and *Casas da Moura*, which are referred to in popular legends and superstitions” (Vasconcelos, 1897: 47).

According to José Leite Vasconcelos, the legends associated with the Moors indicate the existence of fortified hillforts: “Whenever there is a hill, or a simple rise in the land, bearing names such as *Crasto*, *Castello*, *Cêrca*, *Cividade*, etc., and connected to legends or vague traditions of *Mouros* and *Mouras*, it is reasonable to suspect that we are dealing with a *Castro* (an Iron Age hillfort)” (Vasconcelos, 1895: 5). The *Cerca de Ribas* is located north of the village of Ribas, in Argeriz, Valpaços, at an altitude of 750 metres (Freitas, 1989: 336). This site is also called *Castro de Ribas*, *Alto da Cerca*, and *Cerca dos Mouros* (PA). It is a large hillfort with a well-established defensive system consisting of four lines of walls (Silva, 2010: 33–34). The walls appear to reflect distinct periods of construction, ranging from the Iron Age to the Middle Ages (PA). The site is considered a sizeable fortified settlement with a well-preserved defensive system and a deep ditch dug into the rock to the northwest – its most accessible side – along with a second open ditch at the northern end. The width of the walls varies and can reach more than four metres. Several entrances have been identified at different points in the settlement (Lemos, 1993: 523–525). During the first archaeological intervention, two rectangular houses were discovered in an area outside the walls (Silva, 2010: 33–34). The site also features two rock-cut wine presses and three boulders with rock engravings (PA).

The most common place names associated with fortified settlements include the terms castle, old castle or Moorish castle, *castelejo* or *castrilouço*, old tower or tower, and wall or wall of the Moors. However, according to Sande Lemos, the most frequent expression – at least in Trás-os-Montes – is castle of the Moors. Its use dates back to the

Middle Ages (Lemos, 1993: 143). Three toponyms bearing the name *Castelo dos Mouros* are recorded in the municipalities of Sabugal and Almeida, as noted in Joaquim Manuel Correia’s *Antiguidades do Concelho do Sabugal*: “/.../ Near Cardeal, a small village belonging to the parish of Rendo, there is a hill that the people call *Castello dos Mouros*, and there are others that bear the same name near Vale de Espinho. /.../ We must also mention *Castello dos Mouros*, the name of a hill in the parish of Parada, municipality of Almeida, which borders Sabugal. A large granite sink opens up at the summit, certainly artificial” (Correia, 1906: 134–135).

Terms such as house, castle, residence, city and mine are used to designate these constructions. The *Castelo dos Mouros* in Algozo (Vimioso), is a fortified Iron Age settlement located on a hill known as *Cabeço dos Moiros* (Carta Arqueológica de Vimioso, 2015: 5). The *Castelo dos Mouros* or *Moiros* in Adeganha (Torre de Moncorvo) is situated on a hill located at the northern end of a spur. Below it, within a broader perimeter, remnants of two small parallel walls are preserved, delimiting the mountain to the north-northeast and west. It appears to be a small fortified settlement (PARM, 1993) where undecorated fragments in poor condition were recovered (Rodrigues and Rebanda, 1997/1998: 113). In 1993, it was considered vulnerable due to stone extraction and the activity of “treasure hunters” (PARM, 1993).

The expression *Cabeço do Mouro* (or *dos Mouros*) has also been recorded several times in the Archaeologist’s Portal (PA). It is associated with archaeological remains – mostly fortified villages. The site of *Serra das Vinhas/Cabeço dos Mouros* (CNS 25721) is a fortified settlement with evidence of occupation ranging from the Late Bronze Age to the Iron Age. It is located in the municipality of Sabugal. Regarding the *Cerca dos Mouros* in Landeira, Mário Cardoso says that the hill is called *Cabeça do Muro*, and that the walk to the top is challenging because of the steep climb. At the top of *Cabeço do Muro* [Head of the Wall], he came across “the remains of a large collapsed wall, which surrounded the top of the hill, forming an oblong enclosure, with its longest axis running north-south measuring approximately 150 metres, and about 80 metres along the perpendicular axis. The site is called *Cerca dos Mouros* [Fence of the Moors]” (Cardoso, 1975: 147).

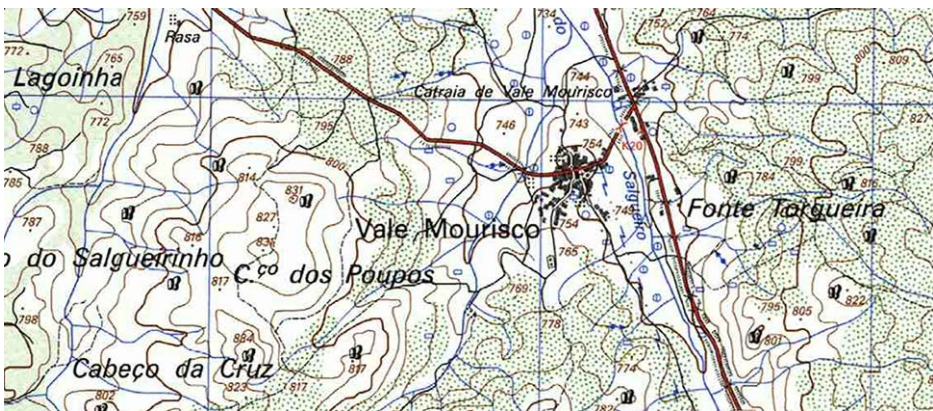


Figure 3: In Guarda District, near the town of Sabugal, there is a place named Vale Mourisco Carta Militar de Portugal (esc. 1:25,000). (Editor: Instituto Geográfico do Exército)





Figure 4: Pias dos Mouros, Argeriz, Valpaços. (Photo Alexandra Vieira)

The toponym *Cabeço do Muro* suggests the existence of some stone structure – specifically a wall – and there is indeed a walled enclosure. Another example is *Valle Mourisco*, where, according to local tradition, a settlement once stood (Correia, 1906: 133). In fact, in Vale Mourisco (CNS 5280), in the municipality of Guarda, an oven of undetermined chronology has been recorded, where bricks and tiles were found (PA).

Martins Sarmiento refers to the *Pias dos Mouros* in Valpaços, which reminded him of the “lakes” of Panoias (Sarmiento, 1878: 24) – cavities carved into the rock that the people also call “presses of the Mouros” (Sarmiento, 1878: 77). Nowadays we know that the “lakes” of Panóias (Vila Real) or the *Pias dos Mouros* in Argeriz (Valpaços) are not wine presses, but places of worship – pre-Roman or Roman sanctuaries – where various rituals were performed. The *Pias dos Mouros* rock sanctuary (CNS 3699) is located in the parish of Argeriz, municipality of Valpaços. It is a small rock sanctuary, similar to that of Panóias, and is probably of Roman origin. On the surface of a granite outcrop, at ground level, there are two rectangular cavities positioned parallel to each other, flanked by two sets of almost parallel steps – one on each side. The outcrop also has some notches, which could have been the foundations of a former structure. Two inscriptions are reportedly present on one of its faces (PA). A local legend tied to Argeriz speaks of enchanted Moors – both men and women – who emerge when the sun’s rays warm the rocky slope, laying out their treasures to tempt the greed of mortals. There are said to be skeins of golden thread that can only be seen from afar. Yet, when someone tries to approach – whether to take possession of the treasure or simply to observe it up close – everything disappears, as if by magic (Freitas, 1978: 265).

## LEGENDS AND MYTHS ABOUT THE MOORS

There are hundreds of legends associated with archaeological remains referring to the Moors – both the enchanted figures of folklore and the “historical” Moors – of which only a few are presented here.

Martins Sarmento lists some springs in the Serra da Estrela region that are associated with the Moors: “The Torrozelo spring [Seia] belongs to the Moors, and there are hidden treasures there, according to legend. The Valentine’s Fountain in Três-Povos belongs to the Moors. Gold bars have appeared in the Pena Lisa fountain. In Santiago, opposite Seia, at the “Mourinha fountain”, a Moura has been seen washing gold. When surprised by an observer, she makes a face and disappears in a flurry of wool flakes” (Sarmento, 1990: 14).

The Lorga de Dine (Vinhais) was known in local tradition as the “house of an Enchanted Moura”, believed to guard “Pots of Gold”. As Harpsoe and Ramos report (1985: 202), the work carried out confirms the local accounts that it was the habit of young people in the region to go looking for the “pot of gold”, thus disturbing the archaeological layers to find whole vases. According to the legend, the vases had to be broken to reveal the treasure.

The Legend of the Fraga dos Corvos (Macedo de Cavaleiros): “There is also a large crag in Vilar do Monte, which they call the Fraga dos Corvos. The ancients said that the crag holds back an arm of the sea beneath the Bornes mountain range and that on the day the world ends, the sea will burst forth and flood everything within a radius of seven leagues. The Moors used to live in this crag, and they created an underground passage to the village of Chacim, about four kilometres away, which allowed the Moors of Chacim and Vilar do Monte to meet. No one has ever managed to enter this passage because if anyone tried, the light used to show the way would immediately go out (Parafita, 2006: 258). The Abade de Baçal states that the underground passage connected the Moors of Vilar do Monte with those of Balsamão, four kilometres away on the other side of the Serra de Bornes, near the town of Chacim (Alves, 2000 [1934]: 494–495).

The two “pigs” of Almofala (Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo): “Within the walled enclosure of Monte de Santo André, on either side of an iron gate that closes the path to the chapel, there are two granite pigs on top of the wall, facing each other”. These are two *berrões* (Iron Age wild boar sculptures), although locals consider one of them to be a bull. There is a belief in Almofala that there is a great treasure on Mount Saint Andrew, a belief expressed as follows: “On Mount Saint Andrew, between the pig and the bull, there is a great treasure belonging to the Moorish king” (Santos Júnior, 1975: 397).

Santo André, Almofala (CNS 4085) is a settlement spanning the Iron Age, Roman and Medieval periods, located in Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo. Situated on the top of a prominent hill, close to the Águeda River, it offers a wide view over this watercourse and possesses good natural defences, particularly to the north and east. The ruins of a line of walls are still visible. In the vicinity of the chapel, fragments of a column and a Roman funerary inscription have been found, along with a likely Gothic pulpit, suggesting a medieval occupation of the site (PA).

According to the Parish Memoirs, in Algosó, Vimioso: “There is no Plaza ‘de Armas’ in this town, but there is a castle [Castelo de Algosó] above it, said to be of Moorish origin,



Figure 5: Pottery from Lorga de Dine, Vinhais. (Photo Manuel Santos, Museu de Arqueologia D. Diogo de Sousa)



Figure 6: Santo André, Almofala, Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo. The Church of Saint Andrew. (Photo Jaime Grandes)

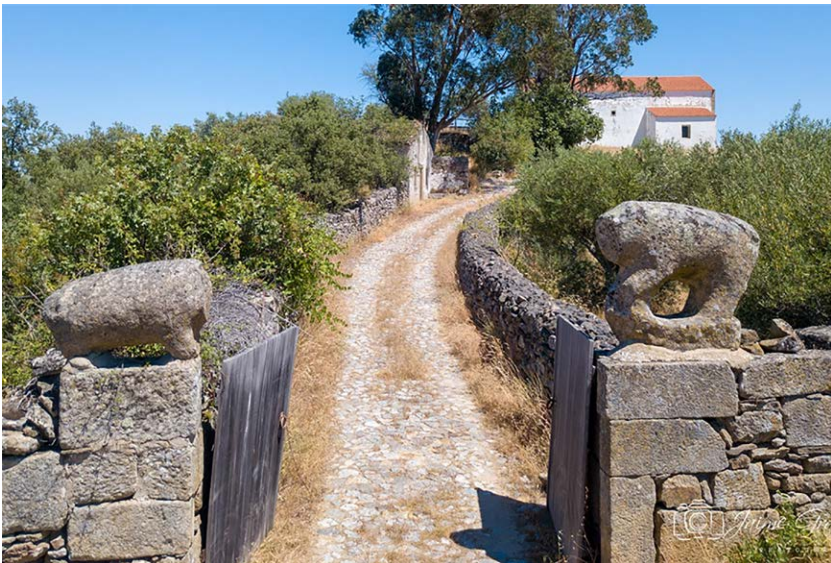


Figure 7: Santo André, Almofala, Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo. The *Berrões*. (Photo Jaime Grandes)



built on the edge of a rock /.../” (Capela et al., 2007: 71). Algosó is steeped in legends. An example that is connected with the Moors is the Legend of Algosó Castle:

It is said that the castle of Algosó, in the municipality of Vimioso, was inhabited by a Moorish king who exercised great tyranny over the villages in the area. He had a daughter who fell in love with a Christian nobleman and helped the Christians when they tried to recapture the castle. The Christians thus managed to defeat the Moorish king and he soon discovered his daughter’s betrayal. And so, as punishment, he cast a spell on her, turning her into a serpent and leaving her in the castle’s underground chambers to guard a valuable treasure. He himself escaped through a mine, hoping to return one day to recover his treasure.

Local people say that this mine goes through the Penenciada mountain. They also believe that on the night of Saint John, a very beautiful maiden with her hair loose has been seen sitting by a nearby fountain, crying. At the first light of dawn, she vanishes – only to be replaced by a huge snake with a large head of hair, which slithers away before it too disappears. For this reason, no one dares enter the mine to look for the treasure there. The spring is known as the “Fonte de São João Batista”, and it is believed to cure certain illnesses. For this reason, it is visited by many pilgrims, especially on Saint John’s Day. A chapel dedicated to this saint stands beside it (APL 3752<sup>2</sup>).

#### THE *PALA DA MOURA* DOLMEN (VILARINHO DA CASTANHEIRA)

Martins Sarmento, a Portuguese archaeologist from the nineteenth century, was informed by local people of the remains of dolmens in the region of Vilarinho (da Castanheira, Carrazeda de Ansiães), which were called *Pala dos Mouros* (Sarmento, 1878: 77, fn. 179). In Portuguese toponymy and popular traditions, *pala* can refer to a cave, rock shelter, or stone ledge. In this case, the local people refer to the dolmens as the “Moor’s Ledge” or “Moor’s Shelter”.

Name	CNS	Municipality/Parish
Anta de Zedes (Casa da Moura I)	995	Carrazeda de Ansiães/Amedo e Zedes
Casa da Moura II	2375	Carrazeda de Ansiães/Amedo e Zedes
Casinha da Moura da Samorinha	16941	Carrazeda de Ansiães/Carrazeda de Ansiães
Pala da Moura	3078	Carrazeda de Ansiães/Vilarinho da Castanheira
Pala da Moura	16961	Carrazeda de Ansiães/Castanheiro e Ribalonga

Table 2: Five dolmens in the municipality of Carrazeda de Ansiães whose names include references to female Moors.

<sup>2</sup> Interview. Year: 2001. Place of collection: Algosó, Vimioso, Bragança. Informant: António Augusto Fernandes (M), 72 y.o. <https://lendarium.org/en/apl/springs/legend-of-the-castle-of-algoso/>.



Figure 8: Pala da Moura, Vilarinho da Castanheira, Carrazeda de Ansiães. (Photo Alexandra Vieira)

There are five dolmens in the municipality of Carrazeda de Ansiães, and they are all associated with the Moors. Their names all contain the term *Moura*, which refers to a female Moor. Three are interpreted as houses, and the other two are seen as small shelters. The *Anta de Zedes*, known locally as *Casa da Moura*, is located southeast of the village of Zedes, in the parish of Zedes and the municipality of Carrazeda de Ansiães. This megalithic monument, known since the end of the 19th century, dates to the late Neolithic or Chalcolithic period (Portal do Arqueólogo, 2025).

The dolmen of Vilarinho de Castanheira, also known as *Pala da Moura*, belongs to a typology frequently observed in megalithic funerary architecture. Although the tumulus has not survived, the structure consists of a polygonal chamber made up of eight megaliths, including the headstone. It also has a capstone and a corridor oriented to the east. Four stones from this original corridor appear to remain in situ. On the inner face of one of the megaliths, faint traces of a primitive pictorial composition are visible, although difficult to interpret. Like the other four monuments, it was built in the Late Neolithic or Chalcolithic period (CNS 3078, Portal do Arqueólogo).

According to popular legend, the *Pala da Moura* table was placed there by a Moorish woman who carried it from a great distance on her head, while spinning on her spinning wheel and holding her little son in her arms (Lage, 2004: 62). Otilia Lage has also collected the following information about this group of dolmens:

The most noteworthy antiquity in this town (three leagues from Carrazeda) consists of three *Antas*, commonly referred to by the locals as *Pala Mouras*.



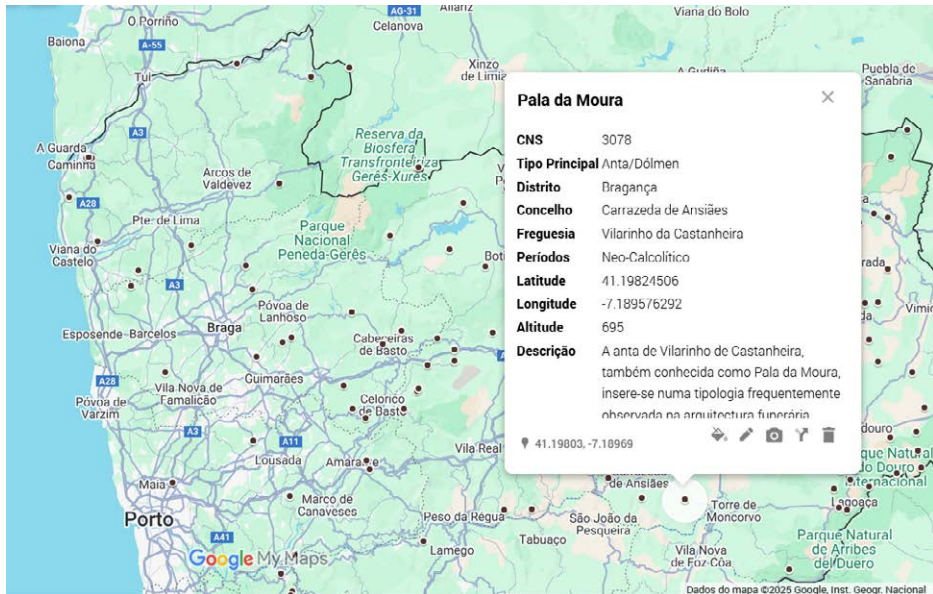


Figure 9: A map indicating the location of Pala da Moura, in the north of Portugal. (Google Maps)

According to tradition, tithes were burned there during the time of the Written Law. However, the most discerning observers of antiquities have concluded that these *Antas* were altars used by pagan priests to perform blood sacrifices to their false deities (Lage, 2004: 72).

## DISCUSSION

These legends about the dolmens of Carrazeda de Ansiães reveal how the perception of these dolmens has evolved from mythical interpretations to scholarly debates on their original purpose. The coexistence of these narratives reflects the enduring cultural significance of these monuments and their role in shaping local identity. The first legend, which tells that the “house” was built by a Moorish woman carrying a stone table on her head while spinning and holding her child, emphasizes the supernatural and heroic elements often embedded in oral traditions. The Moors are portrayed as the creators of magnificent buildings, endowed with extraordinary and supernatural gifts. This narrative not only highlights the strength and resilience of the female Moura but also imbues the monument with a sense of mysticism and otherworldliness, linking the physical structure to the enduring presence of the Moors in the cultural imagination. Spinning has often been metaphorically linked with fate and the passage of time.

In contrast, interpreting the dolmens as altars where pagan priests performed sacrifices introduces a more ritualistic understanding of these sites, aligning them with ancient practices that predate both Christianity and Islamic influence. However, the mention

of tithes being burned there during the “Written Law” suggests a transformation of the site’s role, merging older religious practices with later legal and social customs, perhaps as a way of reconciling past beliefs with present religious and cultural structures. By analysing these different perspectives, it becomes clear that the dolmens are not simply relics of a bygone era but living symbols, continuously shaped by evolving cultural values and beliefs. These legends show how the past is reinterpreted, adapted and integrated into the cultural fabric of later generations, remaining relevant through the centuries.

Local communities associate the Moors with ancient times. The female Moors (*Mouras* or *Moiras*) are associated with treasures, gold, and enchantments or spells. According to Martins Sarmento, the people attribute all the ancient buildings to the Moors, the relics of which abound in our hills and valleys: “Many monuments attributed to the Moors were already in ruins before the Arabs passed through our country” (Sarmento, 1881: 105–106). As shown, oral narratives serve as valuable tools for contextualising and reinterpreting these archaeological sites, offering insights that may not be evident from material evidence alone. Local stories and legends often provide alternative perspectives on the purpose and history of archaeological sites. For instance, legends surrounding Moorish castles or ruins frequently offer unique interpretations of their functions or origins, bridging gaps in historical understanding. They also allow us to examine how Moorish vestiges were absorbed and reinterpreted within the post-Reconquest Christian landscape. The persistence of Moorish cultural elements in the landscape has been integrated into local narratives. Legends and myths played a key role in shaping the perception of Moorish remnants, influencing how they were understood and valued within the Christianized cultural framework.

To grasp the “temporal thickness” of the landscape – the accumulation of meanings, uses and memories over time – it is vital to conduct a comprehensive analysis of local beliefs. Legends and place names not only aid in the discovery of archaeological sites but also offer insights into how structures and landscapes can be interpreted. They can challenge existing understandings, providing new perspectives on how such sites were perceived and used throughout history. The traditions and toponyms associated with the Moors and the enchanted *mouras*, the *mourama*, and similar concepts point to locations of potential archaeological interest, functioning as “instruments of archaeological topography” (Hrobat, 2007: 31–32).

I believe that toponyms associated with the Moors may reflect fixed oral expressions that have endured through time and space, some of them preserving elements of oral tradition. Some authors argue that it is possible to rescue the memory of a place – or an archaeological site – by analysing and interpreting toponyms (Carvalhinhos, 2003, 2004, 2007; Mayor, 2007; Soutou, 1954). Therefore, we believe that popular beliefs associated with archaeological remains may have persisted over time in a particular geographic space through toponyms. As Fernández (2011: 139) notes, “/.../ where oral tradition invested spaces with a certain symbolic importance or a certain mythological charge, archaeologists usually identified some vestige of human occupation” – as seen in the examples involving caves, tunnels, wild boars and treasures.

Contrary to the scepticism shown by early archaeologists and historians in Portugal towards the legends of the Moors, this study demonstrates that oral traditions, even in their legendary forms, possess remarkable complexity and richness and can provide valuable insights. It is essential to approach these legends as multi-layered phenomena that require exploration from various perspectives. It is precisely in this exploratory process – opening pathways to new ways of understanding the territory and the landscape – that their significance and relevance lie. These are not merely “old Moorish legends” relegated to the past; they are an integral part of the daily life of specific communities. These communities have sought to explain the origins and architecture of ancient remains, linking them to their ways of life, fears and historical memories. The legends reflect a continuous effort to make sense of the surrounding environment, blending cultural memory with local identity. Considering these narratives as part of the broader cultural fabric, we can uncover how they inform our understanding of the relationship between people and the landscape. Rather than dismissing them as relics of superstition, we recognize their role as tools for interpreting both the material and immaterial aspects of archaeological sites that are believed to be the work and legacy of the Moors.

The legends associated with the Moors can be divided into two major categories. On the one hand, the legends of Enchanted Moors and Mouras delve into the realm of the supernatural and the fantastical. On the other hand, some legends are rooted in the Arab occupation of the Iberian Peninsula and the Christian Reconquista – a centuries-long struggle between Christians and Moors, often framed as good versus evil, oppressors versus the oppressed. These legends appear to weave together historical elements from the Reconquest with local narratives, blending broader historical events with the specificities of regional history and social coexistence. The result is a complex interplay of historical, local and mythical spheres, giving rise to oral traditions passed down through generations. Passed from neighbour to neighbour and through the years, these stories echo the past while adapting to the needs and circumstances of everyday life. By examining these narratives, we gain insight into how communities perceive and interpret their heritage, not only as a reflection of historical events, but as a living, evolving part of their cultural identity. This interweaving of facts and folklore enriches our understanding of the landscapes they inhabit, highlighting the dynamic relationship between memory, history and the physical world.

The *castros* (ancient hillforts) are often associated with legends of enchanted *mouras*, hidden treasures left by the Moors, and various superstitions. These include miraculous holy springs, trees endowed with supernatural powers, or rocks believed to produce powders capable of curing specific ailments. Sometimes, the afflicted would process around these sites or lie upon them in the hope of being healed. References to such phenomena are not uncommon in the Constitutions of Portuguese dioceses, in pastoral letters from bishops, and in the canons of medieval councils – especially those of Braga and Toledo, which are of particular relevance to this region. These documents contain directives aimed at abolishing superstitions tied to sacred springs and trees. However, Christianity, unable to eradicate entirely these deeply rooted beliefs among a population fiercely attached to tradition, skilfully redirected such practices. Churches, chapels and temples were erected on or near the ruins of *castros* or other sites marked by traces of ancient civilizations.

By doing so, the Church “Christianized” these locations, substituting pagan gods with saints from the Christian calendar. In the understanding of the local population, these saints often inherited some of the protective and healing powers previously attributed to their pagan predecessors. With little more than a name change, these figures continued to hold sway, at least in the popular imagination, as evidenced by the festivals and processions that persist to this day. This phenomenon explains the presence of chapels on hilltops near ancient settlements, and the processions that still take place in many villages to specific sites within their territories. These sanctuaries also serve as valuable indicators for archaeological research, guiding explorations and shedding light on the cultural layers that connect the pagan past with Christian traditions (Alves, 2000 [1934]: 173–174).

Oral traditions often carry centuries of knowledge passed down through generations, either through place names or legends. These can offer insights into the significance of archaeological sites beyond what is visible in artefacts or structures. For instance, local myths, legends and stories can explain a site’s original use or cultural importance, such as why a particular location was regarded as sacred or chosen for settlement. In some examples, legends or place names explain the origins of sacred landscapes and provide a deeper understanding of why a specific site has religious or spiritual significance – even if there is no written or material evidence to support it – just by being associated with the Moors. The presence of enchanted Moors, some of them cursed and many guarding treasures or concealing gold, imbues the landscape with many meanings.

Archaeological evidence, while invaluable, is often fragmented or incomplete. Oral narratives and toponyms help bridge these gaps by preserving the collective memory. For example, legends about an ancient castle might describe its founding, cultural practices, or important events not reflected in the surviving ruins or artefacts. Material evidence such as pottery, carvings and tools may be complex to interpret without understanding the culture and symbolism behind them. Oral traditions can clarify the meanings behind these objects, offering insights into their intended use, symbolism and significance. A sculpture of a wild boar (or bull), for instance, may be interpreted differently with the help of oral narratives that describe its role in ceremonies, the deity it represents, or the ritual practices associated with it. These narratives about ancestors or deities provide insights into religious practices or social organisation that are not evident from the physical remains of a site, as illustrated by the case of the *Palas Mouras*.

Legends play an essential role in understanding the temporal dimension of archaeological sites, providing a historical perspective beyond material evidence. Although archaeology can provide data on the chronology and arrangement of artefacts and structures, oral tradition allows these elements to be contextualized in time and space, providing a broader and often more detailed timeline – such as that relating to the period when the historical Moors lived in the Iberian Peninsula. The toponyms, myths and legends passed down from generation to generation act as living testimonies that can fill in temporal gaps in the archaeological record. Oral histories can often describe events or cultural changes that occurred when physical evidence is either unavailable or has not been preserved. In addition, oral tradition also explains the sequence of events – how certain practices and traditions evolved over time – and establishes connections between different layers of history.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The aim was to explore the relationship between the Moors and the archaeological remains scattered across the Portuguese landscape. We have presented several cases to demonstrate how Portuguese communities have reinterpreted and resignified Moorish vestiges, integrating them into their cultural identity through toponymy, legends and social practices. This approach highlights how material and immaterial heritage interrelate in the context of local memory dynamics. By analysing these elements, archaeologists can better understand how landscapes, monuments and ruins are perceived and integrated into collective memory. This perspective underscores the importance of considering both tangible and intangible heritage when studying the past, bridging the gap between physical evidence and the stories that bring it to life.

This study has demonstrated that the Moorish presence in Portugal is reflected in archaeological remains and is deeply ingrained in the cultural landscape through toponyms and oral traditions. Place names linked to the Moors and their associated legends reveal how historical memory is preserved in everyday language, serving as enduring markers of a past that is continuously reinterpreted. These toponyms, often associated with sites of archaeological interest, reflect how local communities have integrated and adapted Moorish heritage into their own identities.

Legends about Moors and enchanted Moiras further reinforce this connection, offering symbolic narratives that explain and give meaning to the material vestiges scattered across the Portuguese landscape. These stories, shaped over centuries, function as bridges between tangible and intangible heritage, transforming ruins and ancient sites into living elements of cultural memory. Through them, historical remnants are not merely preserved but actively woven into the fabric of Portuguese identity, sustaining a dialogue between past and present.

The coexistence of these elements – toponyms that silently record the past and legends that bring it to life – demonstrates how memory is constructed and transmitted. Studying these interactions enriches our understanding of Portuguese cultural history and highlights the importance of oral tradition in shaping perceptions of heritage. Future research should further explore regional variations in these narratives, their connections to local landscapes, and the evolving role of these cultural markers in contemporary society.

Today, we recognize that ethnographic records documenting these traditions and narratives are invaluable to archaeologists. They provide essential tools for analysing and reflecting on how local communities shaped, understood and reimagined landscapes over time. Toponymy and oral traditions, therefore, are not merely supplementary resources; they are integral to the study of landscape archaeology, bridging the material and the symbolic, the tangible and the intangible.

Recognizing and preserving the interplay between toponymy and legend is essential for a deeper comprehension of Portugal's historical identity. By valuing these expressions of collective memory, we ensure that both the spoken and written traces of the past remain essential to cultural heritage, enriching how history is perceived and lived today.



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## LA TRADITION MAURE DANS L'ARCHÉOLOGIE PORTUGAISE

Ce travail explore les multiples traces de la présence maure dans le paysage portugais, en croisant vestiges archéologiques, toponymie, légendes et croyances populaires, étayés par des sources historiques et des études sur la tradition orale. Grâce à une approche interdisciplinaire, l'étude met en lumière les liens profonds entre patrimoine matériel et immatériel, en montrant comment les communautés portugaises ont réinterprété et réintégré les vestiges maures dans leur identité culturelle.

En analysant divers cas concrets, l'auteur montre que les noms de lieux, les récits issus de la tradition orale et les pratiques sociales ne sont pas de simples souvenirs du passé, mais des marqueurs vivants d'une mémoire collective en constante évolution. Les toponymes associés aux Maures ainsi que les légendes de Maures enchantés, contribuent à expliquer, à donner du sens et à maintenir une présence symbolique autour des ruines et des monuments. Ces récits oraux, façonnés au fil des siècles, transforment les vestiges matériels en éléments actifs de l'identité culturelle locale.

Cette coexistence entre des noms de lieux porteurs d'une mémoire silencieuse et des légendes qui les animent témoigne de la richesse du dialogue entre le tangible et l'intangible dans la construction de la mémoire collective. L'étude souligne ainsi l'importance de prendre en compte la tradition orale et les perceptions locales dans l'analyse archéologique des paysages. Elle invite à une lecture plus complète et plus humaine du passé, en intégrant les récits et symboles qui donnent vie aux traces matérielles.

Enfin, l'auteur appelle à une reconnaissance accrue de ces interactions entre toponymie, légendes et vestiges dans les recherches futures. Loin d'être accessoires,

ces éléments sont essentiels pour comprendre comment les communautés ont imaginé, interprété et transmis leur patrimoine. Préserver ces expressions de la mémoire collective, c'est aussi garantir que les voix du passé continuent de résonner dans la compréhension contemporaine de l'histoire et de l'identité portugaise.

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