



33.

BRIDGE
OF ESMORIZ



Caminho da Ponte de Esmoriz, Ancede Baião



41° 6' 46.46" N
8° 3' 48.14" W



+351 918 116 488



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Submitted to classification



P. 25



Free



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Halfway along a path made of large, worn-out paving stones, we find the Bridge of Esmoriz, over the river Ovil, at the heart of the former “couto” [a type of Portuguese administrative division] of Ancede. From the place where it stands, flanked by farmlands, it is almost possible to see all the manorial houses that “watch over” this crossing at first sight: Esmoriz, on the right bank’s hillside, and Penalva, on the left bank.

So, for being at the centre of that triangle of ecclesiastical and manorial power, the Bridge of Esmoriz fits into the category of local and regional crossings. Unlike what is often assumed, stone bridges did not always mark a site of intense traffic or a national route, along which pilgrims would travel in their quest for great medieval sanctuaries. Local reality was more prosaic and based on the needs of daily life, such as ensuring that cattle would arrive safely to the pastures and, also, in the case of Ancede, that the products incoming from the river wharfs of Porto Manso and Pala would reach the Monastery of Ancede (Baião) (p. 139). Yes, here the major road is the river Douro, a channel for the circulation of people and goods towards the coast and on the opposite sense.



However, the fastest path between Pala and the Monastery was a different one, which was well-known by the monks and parishioners who crossed another bridge downstream of Esmoriz, which is mentioned by the parish priest in 1758 as being close to the “Machoças” mills. The Bridge of Esmoriz was crossed by animals and by people seeking the “honra” of Lage and for the church of Saint Leocadia (Baião). Although it inherited the medieval model of the trestle-shaped platform on a round

arch, the Bridge of Esmoriz was probably built between the 15th and the 17th centuries due to local economic reasons. The first documentary reference we find dates back to 1666, although in 1400 there is an allusion to a cattle path leaving Esmoriz. With a single round arch, a slightly raised platform with parapets and without any breakwaters or buttresses, the Bridge of Esmoriz shows regular, well-carved ash-lars with narrow and long voussoirs.

