




44.

BRIDGE
OF ARCO




-  Rua do Arco
Folhada
Marco de Canaveses


-  41° 13' 19.72" N
8° 5' 17.22" W


-  +351 918 116 488


-  ×

-  ×

-  Public Interest Building
1982

-  P. 25

-  Free

-  ×

Located amidst a luxurious landscape with plenty of Loaks, the Bridge of Arco connects the banks of two parishes, Folhada and Várzea da Ovelha e Aliviada, in the current municipality of Marco de Canaveses. Until the 19th century, it stood at the heart of the municipality of Gouveia.

Built over the river Ovelha, the Bridge lives up to its name [“arco” means arch]: it features a single large arch supporting a trestle-shaped platform together with its parapets. The fact that it takes advantage of the outcrops on both banks gives it a delicateness and verticality that are only disrupted by the mismatched ashlar placed at the base of the arch, on the right bank, whose location was interrupted by the installation of the centring (the wooden structure that serves to mould the arch). However, despite this mismatch, the arch is still an architectural statement built by experienced stonemasons. Despite being considered by the parish priest of Folhada as a very ancient bridge in 1758, we can place its construction in the modern period, when Middle Ages models were still being used. Despite its trestle-shaped structure, the fact that this shape is not associated with a broken arch - a common model



in Gothic crossings - suggests a later chronology. Despite the fact that it is located outside the flood plain, the builders added a breakwater to the Bridge; it was placed against the east face of the structure and, close to it, we can see an opening with an almost rectangular shape that allows draining water during major floods or leading a small water course (to supply a mill or irrigate cultivated lands).

Together with the bridge of Aliviada, located downstream, the Bridge of Arco was part of a municipal or inter-parish network of roads that connected relatively close villages. The regional roads were located to the north (Amarante-Lamego) or to the south (Penafiel-Douro) and crossed, respectively, the bridges of Amarante-Padronelo and Canaveses (which no longer exists) (p. 177 and 180).

THE SOCIAL IMPORTANCE OF BRIDGES

Travelling in the Middle Ages and in the Modern Period was both dangerous and costly. Therefore, it is erroneous to consider all the bridges as infrastructures with regional, national, or even international nature, solely intended to allow the access of pilgrims to major sanctuaries, such as Rome (Italy) or Santiago de Compostela (Spain). It was mainly during the Modern Period that pilgrimages became more frequent: at the end of the medieval period there was a climatic cycle that favoured travelling, which led to the dissemination of sanctuaries with Marian invocations and appealing to the therapeutic powers of different patron saints.

In the region of Amarante, people visited the body of Saint Gonçalo (p. 278); in the lands of [Cabeceiras de] Basto, pilgrims had sought Saint Senhorinha since the Middle Ages and, from the 16th century onwards, they crossed the river Douro seeking the help of the Virgin of Lapa (Sernancelhe) in the Nave mountain range. Kings, queens and bishops went to Santiago de Compostela and Rome. However, more often than not, the peasant was able to find a significant number of chapels that, being close to his house and his parish, would be able to assist him, his family, his animals and his crops through fervent invocations.
