

Resilience landmarks: the survival of rural hermitages in Alentejo (Portugal)

Introduction

Alentejo is a predominantly rural region comprising roughly three-quarters of Portugal's national territory. In the early twentieth century, it experienced a strong Republican anti-clericalism, accompanied by a harsh economic context. Large parts of the population left the countryside and migrated to the cities in search of better living conditions. The social impact of this process on local populations is still under survey. This is a timely topic, as there are many unanswered questions regarding the fate of the hundreds of abandoned religious buildings scattered throughout this territory. Nonetheless, still today the region retains a distinct cultural identity, as evidenced by its architecture.

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Fig.1. Hermitage of Our Lady of Carmel (Arronches).



Fig. 2. Hermitage of Saint Andrew of "the Hill" (Montemor-o-Novo).

Objectives

- To determine the best (and most viable) use for each of the abandoned Alentejo's chapels and hermitages;
- To develop coherent rehabilitation interventions that are adequate for this built heritage;
- To establish institutional partnerships (particularly within the parishes) to support new religious, didactic, and touristic projects for the preservation of religious heritage;
- Incorporate religious built heritage into new sustainable strategies for the regional economy.



Fig. 3. Hermitage of Our Lady of Carmel (Arronches).



Fig. 4. Hermitage of Saint Andrew of "the Hill" (Montemor-o-Novo).

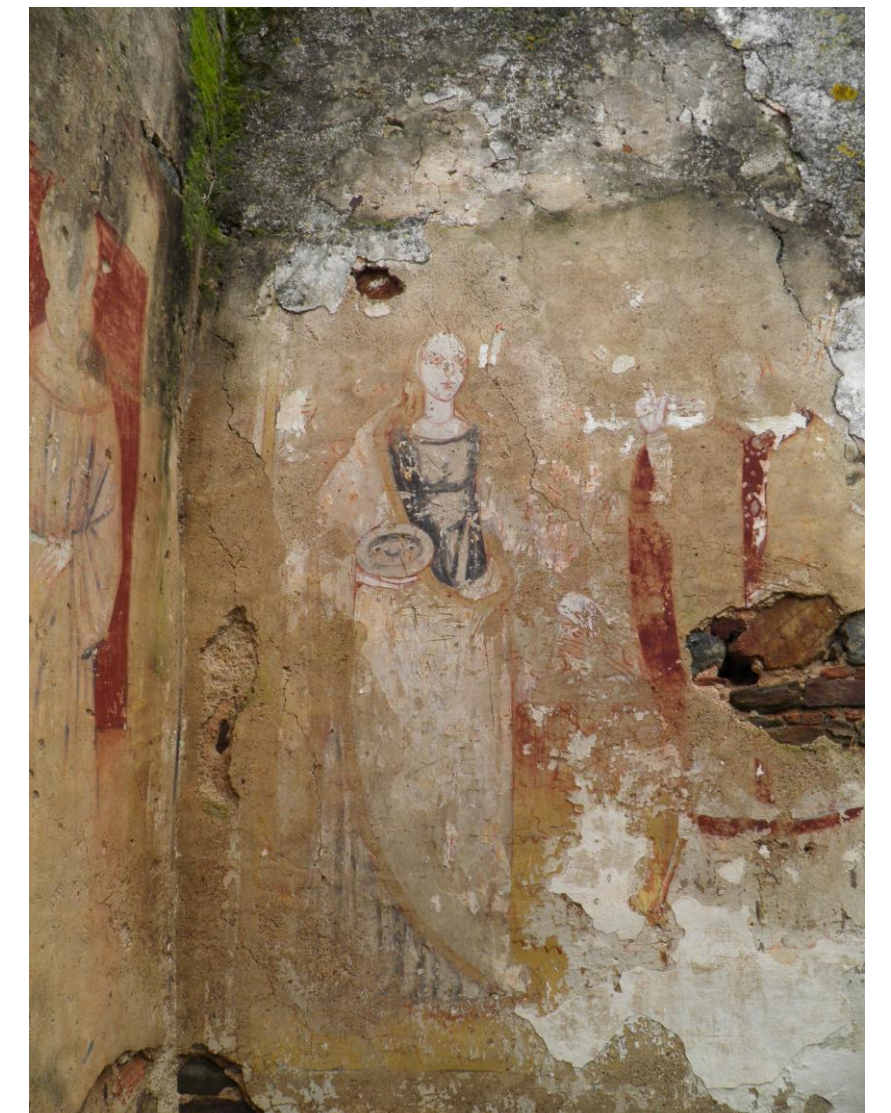


Fig. 5. Hermitage of Saint Peter of "Almuro" (Monforte).

Preliminary conclusions

- Most of the rural religious buildings surveyed are in an irreversible state of decay;
- It is not possible to preserve everything, so it is important to prioritize the buildings that have the best chances of being rehabilitated and having a new use
- All the decisions concerning the future of this important legacy must rely on a strong multidisciplinary approach, with the collaboration of the Catholic Church and the local population.

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