

# Government Does Not Take Urgent Action In The Face of Archaeological Destruction at Alentejo

Since 2017, the destruction of archaeological heritage thousands of years old, from the late Neolithic period to the historic Roman occupation of the Iberian Peninsula, has intensified, without urgent measures being taken of real protection of the remains already destroyed and those who, fortunately, have not yet been razed by the hand of unscrupulous businessmen who ignore culture and heritage, to the detriment of making their plots of land more "unobstructed" than "historical obstacles". Unfortunately, the year 2021 began with another complaint in the Department and Criminal Action of Évora, this time for the [destruction of the archaeological sites of the Roman period of Vale Diogo do Campo and Serra de Espinheira 4](#), in the parish of Torre de Coelheiros, near Évora. Once again the technique used for destruction was deep rippage, planting and installation of irrigation ditches. Despite the numerous previous warnings and alerts to various entities, by the Regional Directorate of Culture of Alentejo (DRCAAlentejo), the planting of an intensive almond in Monte da Negaça ended up irreparably destroying, more archaeological remains at Alentejo.

Again, an owner was warned in advance about the need not to damage archaeological heritage, before proceeding to the almond extensive planting. However, once again, an owner ignored the legal obligations communicated to him in advance, in this case in May 2020. When the archaeologist, hired by the owner (common procedure under the Heritage Law), went to the ground in 2020, the destruction had already been carried out deliberately by the owner, who completely ignored his legal obligation to safeguard the areas indicated as containing traces of the Roman presence. The DRCAAlentejo presented, therefore the complaint in the DIAP Évora, not only because the owner has not complied with the legal guidelines previously communicated, but for having definitively destroyed all the traces contained in the land



*The techniques of ripping and construction of irrigated ditches for intensive tree plantations is razing our history and archaeological remains.*

Already in 2017 the same DRCAAlentejo had asked the Public Prosecutor's Office and the Directorate General of Cultural Heritage to suspend planting work in Beja by planting an intensive olive grove that implied the complete destruction

of a bridge of the Roman period. because the owner ignored the orders of that Regional Directorate. [In the 2017 news reported in the Public Journal, even an almost daily average of complaints of this type is reported](#), which is frightening. The origin of the problem is intensive and extensive planting of monocultures of olive groves, vines, almond, eucalyptus and even pine forests. The owners with whom the worst cases of destruction have been given seem to be mostly linked to Spanish companies, especially those producing olive and almond for the food industry. So perhaps it is not surprising the coldness with which our archaeological heritage is destroyed, a part of it that has been preserved for thousands of years thanks to the greater humility and lesser greed of the Alentejo people. But now, the massive occupation of the fields of cultivation is destroying not only our archaeological history, but also the landscape itself. The Alentejo we knew from *chapparos* (young cork oak), holm oaks and other native species.

In the 2017 interview with Jornal Público (newspaper), archaeologist Miguel Serra mentions the danger of any day only the remains that are, for now, safeguarded and preserved in museums, if we consider that this destructive behavior has intensified in the last decade, without the competent authorities, an effective and robust response that allows not only to penalize those who, consciously after being warned, they committed these crimes of property destruction, as well as to prevent future situations. And many could be preventive measures, such as including in the deed of these properties specific clauses with protection rules, such as performing more effective information work with the owners, how to protect and delimit the archaeological areas physically, with networks or other protections, or creating even enclosures for tourist visits, properly monitored and conserved. The destruction of this type of heritage is equivalent to the extinctions of animal species, it is forever. It's unrecoverable.

Why, then, is the Portuguese Government allowing this type of Cultural Terrorism to continue to increase in Portugal?



*The romantic Alentejo landscape can have its days counted because of the extensive planting of monocultures*

The destruction of the archaeological heritage in Portugal comes from afar, simply now the technological means lead to a greater and more intensive agricultural production and a deeper riping of the land (with heavy machinery), which is increasing the number of occurrences and the level of destruction. The lack of protection and sealing of archaeological sites considered "less relevant" on the one hand, and the lack of information to owners on the other, is growing exponentially this type of phenomenon. Many companies belong to people from other regions, especially coming from Spain, as is the case of the company with Spanish capitals **De Prado Portugal SA**, which [alone razed more than two dozen archaeological sites duly marked in the Archaeological Plan of Beja](#), between May and August 2017, without having suffered any legal consequences so far. In this specific case were destroyed traces of the Chalcolithic, Iron Age, Bronze, Roman, Medieval and Modern periods, of which the most important belonged to the Roman presence. Unfortunately, it seems that this destructive practice has been so widespread in Spain that at the moment few are the archaeological sites still existing, especially in the Spanish Extremadura, near to the portuguese frontier.

In most cases, the owners continued their "work" of destruction, even after being warned by the Regional Delegation of Culture. For example, the Roman villa of Represas, near Beja, after being destroyed, attracted some poachers of archaeological treasures, who managed to find still several Roman coins. Also the works of the Alqueva, near Baleizão, dragged to total destruction, tombstones of the Chalcolithic period and a Roman villa, among other later traces, according to the account of archaeologist Monge Soares. [In 2020 it was the turn of another Roman village to be partially destroyed in Serpa](#), at the archaeological site Torre Velha 1, of [prehistoric remains in Salvada \(Beja\)](#) and a [Dolmen located in the Herdade do Vale da Moura \(Évora\)](#). On the basis of these cultural crimes is also the easing of the cultivation law that exempts farmers from an archaeological accompaniment whenever there is deep revolving of land.

The [lack of more specific regulations for the protection of this type of heritage](#) and the lack of coordination between the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Culture and the Directorate-General for Cultural Heritage is one of the main reasons why [the destruction is happening at an increasing rate](#) and with increasingly serious impacts, but without establishing a plan to protect this type of unique heritage. [Not even the numerous national public petitions launched by groups of archaeologists](#) has altered the disinterested attitude of the protection of the State in safeguarding Alentejo archaeology.



*Anta da Herdade do Vale da Moura, after being destroyed in October 2020, due to intensive almond trees planting*