

Portuguese-Spanish border in the XIX century

The establishment of the frontier control

João Sarmento.

In studying the cohesive nature of a space, the political differentiation of a country and its continuity during the ages, we have to consider many geographical implications. The political border plays a vital role in this process: its establishment, its solidification and its control. The creation of the Guarda Fiscal (fiscal body), along the Portuguese-Spanish border in the second half of the XIX century, reflects a commercial protection policy, and also a tight surveillance on peripheral areas, which are more open and independent, and therefore, more dangerous.

In this paper I intend to identify and analyse the structure mechanisms and the geographical distribution of the Guarda Fiscal checkpoints, which are connected with innumerable factors of different orders. The main source used was the "Coleção dos Boletins Oficiais das Alfândegas" (1892-1910), a journal of the Guarda Fiscal corporation.

The fixation of the Portuguese-Spanish border.

The Portuguese border, delimited in a general way when the Reconquest was over, is the oldest political line in Europe, dating back seven centuries (Orlando Ribeiro, 1987). After independence (1143), the territory was delineated from the North to the South. In 1297, the Alcañices Treaty, between Portugal and Castilla, established precisely the outline of the Portuguese border.

In a physical sense, this border corresponds to 59% of the outline of the national territory, with 1215 km in total: 339 km in the North and 876 km to the East. This border is known as the dry streak and is about two thirds of the total extension. The river courses were taken more as reference lines than as obstacles that are difficult to cross over. In many kilometres, the political lines coincide only with small streams. Even the larger rivers that in some sections suit the border, do not always coincide with this limit in the areas, where they assume a natural barrier form. The border as much as it cuts valleys of substantial dimension, it also cuts flat areas. The natural obstacles, according to C. A. Medeiros, are used in some sections, but are not the base of the border delimitation. In some adjacent areas, separated by strong physical features (Trás-os-Montes Vs Léon), the Spanish side is not very different from that of the Portuguese.

In terms of human expression, the border areas generally have low population densities, and there is a trend to the accentuation of this reality. The demographic imbalance between the littoral and the inland increased slowly during the years. So, the border is far from being a natural limit, but today it is a perfect division line of people, splitting two different linguistic areas that coincide with it in the most absolute way (Orlando Ribeiro, 1987).

A border can act upon spatial organisation in several ways. Sometimes it is a strong political and economical barrier, not easily traversed, and the populations are "obliged to turn back" to the other side. This has caused a growth in the clandestine trade of people and goods. When a border works as a symbolic line, there are numerous relations - social, cultural and economical.

The concept of a border in the XIX century was significantly seen as an innovator: there was the need to determine and fix a precise limit. The border was no longer a vague imprecise line, that divided two states. It was in the XIX century that those *rectification's* were made, that accords were established and treaties were signed. We can not neglect the detailed changes, to the seven centuries old Portuguese and Spanish border. Olivença is, without doubt, the most remarkable change, with its occupation by the Spanish in 1801. Other adjustments included Rio de Onor in Trás-os-Montes and Contenda de Moura, in Alentejo.

In 1864 and in 1926, two treaties dealt with the accuracy of the border outline. The first one lead to the general Act of Demarcation, in 1906, and the second included the partial agreement of 1893. According to J.

M. Cordeiro Torres (1960), the main objective of these treaties was the confirmation and not the transformation of the existing limits.

The Guarda Fiscal Institution.

The creation of the Guarda Fiscal can be affiliated to the "Homens de El-Rei" or to the "Homens da Alfândega", although their functions were not strictly that of fiscalization. These bodies, according to 1461 Act, included the military and a body whose function were similar to those of guards. Due to the modification of the rules of commerce, initiated in 1852 and the development of the Portuguese external commerce, the 1864 Act (7th Dec), settled that the customs organisation, had the objective of "conciliate the convenience of commerce and travellers with the most reasonable fiscal demands".

The Guarda Fiscal ("special corporation of the public force"), was established in 1885, to defend the State. The aim of this force was to discover and repress fiscal transgressions. In the same year of the approval of the organisation plan (1886), there was a reorganisation of the forces, infusing a more lively military influence. In 1894 there was another reorganisation of the customs services and of the Guarda Fiscal. This reorganisation ended an agitated time of creation and structuration of this body. It is on this reorganisation that I shall make my geographical analysis.

The geographical distribution of the Guarda Fiscal force.

Generally, the checkpoints of the Guarda Fiscal are very close to the border, making a *continuum* of points (Figure 1). However, there are exceptions: in certain bands, the checkpoints retreat some kilometres from the border. This is well illustrated in the Penamacôr area, where we can see an arc, made by seven checkpoints, that protect this ample open disjointed space. When we look to the coast, we can observe that there are not many areas with a retreated checkpoint. This can be explained by the necessity of port and beach control, where the boats can moor. There are no longer vast spaces, as in the terrestrial border.

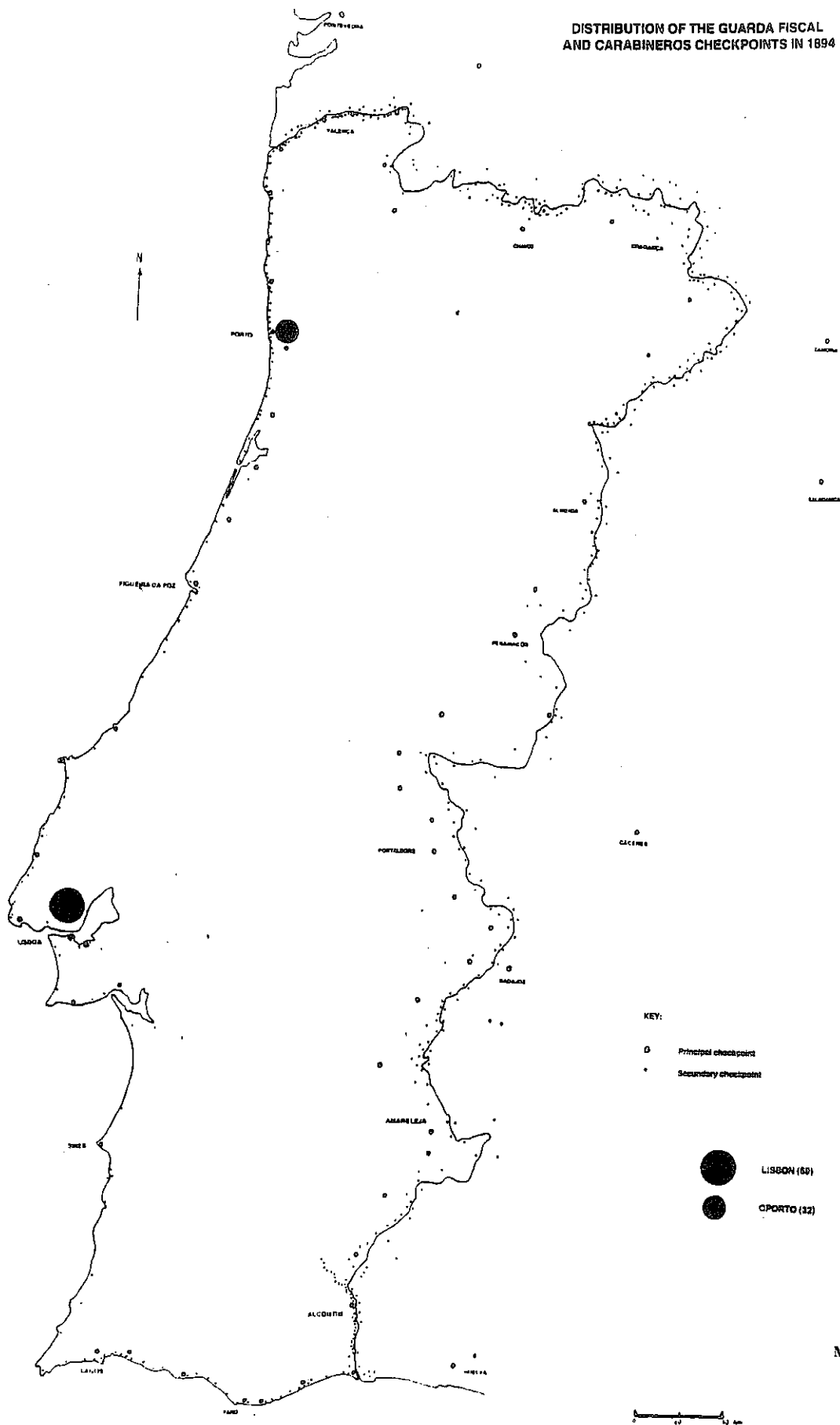
In the Guadiana river, we can see a *unique* situation. Upstream of the confluence of the Guadiana and the Chança river (political limit from this point towards north), the checkpoints accompany the border, but they also follow the Guadiana river on its right bank, (at this stage in Portugal), and they are even located *circa* 20 kilometres from the border. This can be explained by the intense trade in the XIX century, along the Guadiana river, because this river is navigable until Mértola. Although there are some sections where we cannot find a checkpoint for almost 20 kilometres, usually the distance between the them is less than 1000 meters. Nevertheless, the relation between the population and the spatial distribution of the checkpoints is not direct. In certain areas where the checkpoints are regularly distributed, there may not exist a hamlet for a dozen kilometres (Vila Verde de Ficalho and Córte do Pinho).

Let us compare this example with a completely opposite case. In spite of the similar pattern of the Guarda Fiscal checkpoints, along the Guadiana river (terminal section) and the Minho river, the topographic, demographic and accessibility characteristics are very different. While the Minho frontier river works as a passage, like a "big gate" where the goods are traded through, between the populations of the two margins, the Guadiana river is more like a in/out channel. Along its banks there are few communities, and the river channel is the main axis of communications between the coast and the south-east of Portugal, due to the unsuitability of the physical characteristics of the space for road and rail network.

The Carabineros (Spanish forces) checkpoints, that face the Guarda Fiscal from the other side of the border, have a similar geographical pattern, with the exception of the distance between the checkpoints (greater along the Spanish border). The distribution of the Guarda Fiscal checkpoints is hierarchically more decentralised than that of the Carabineros (Figure 2). There is a higher number of principal command posts in Portugal in comparison to the Spanish (36 against 7). For each principal Carabineros post, there are many more secondary command posts than for the Guarda Fiscal ones, and they are distributed in a wider border strip. In a more detailed analysis, I have made a selection of some border areas with different characteristics: North Minho, Chaves area, international Douro river and north-east Alentejo.

The first area (Figure 3) presents high population densities, especially alongside the Minho river. The

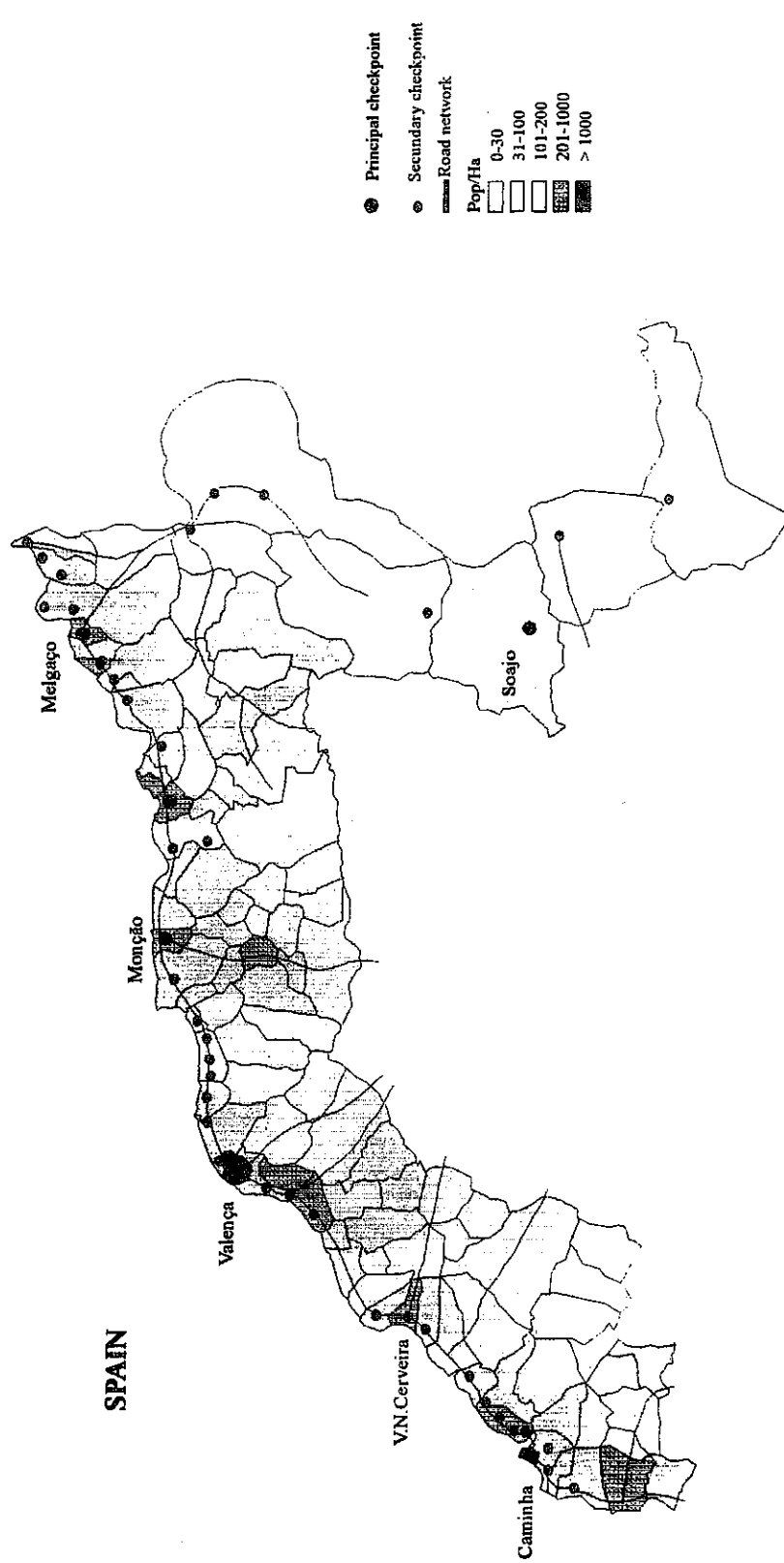
DISTRIBUTION OF THE GUARDA FISCAL AND CARABINEROS CHECKPOINTS IN 1894



MAP I

Source: Coleção dos Boletins oficiais da Direcção Superior dos serviços aduaneiros e contribuições indirectas, 1894 e Coleção dos Boletins Oficiais da Direcção dos Alfândegas, 1892.

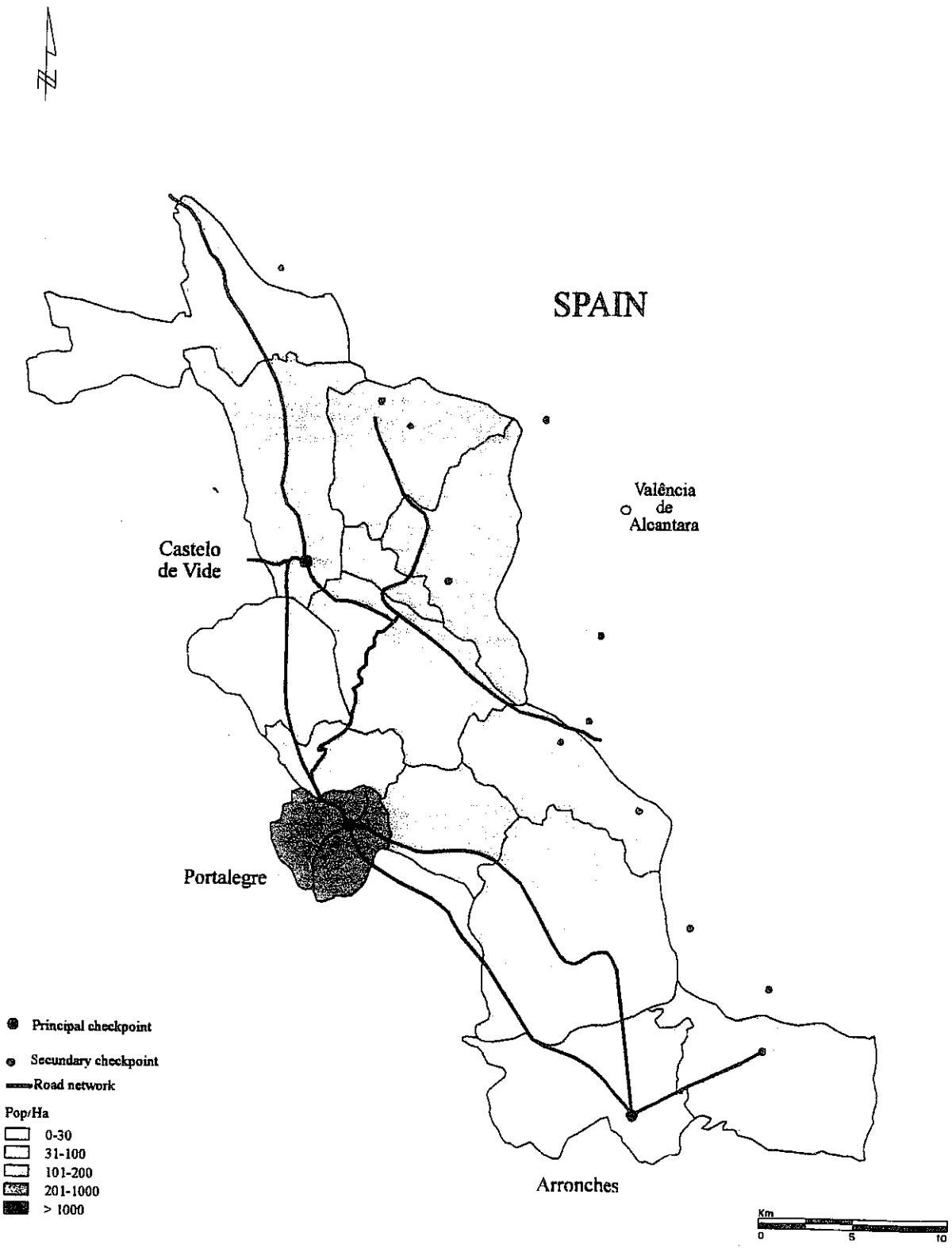
Population density (parish) in Minho's border in 1890



Source: Recenseamento Geral da População, 1960
 Carta Geographica de Portugal (Dir. Filipe Folque), 1860-65

MAP III

Population density (parish) in Portalegre's border in 1890



Source: Recenseamento Geral da População, 1960
 Carta Geographica de Portugal (Dir. Filipe Folque), 1860-65

MAP IV

riverside populations are connected by an vital road axis along the river bank. In the high altitude areas (Peneda, Soajo and Gerês mountains) the settlement is weak and the road network is scarce. The Guarda Fiscal checkpoint distribution reflects these factors. There is a tight mesh of posts, parallel to Minho river. The border, easily traversed, presents great areas for smuggling between the two banks. In the Castro Laboreiro and Gaveira parishes, the checkpoints are not located close to the border, but beside the principal road. The low population density and the mountainous character of this area explains this situation.

In the second area (Chaves) the concentration of checkpoints around the passage that Vila Verde da Raia parish forms, is visible. The connection between inland Galiza and this North Trás-os-Montes, is made through Verin, where relief is not an obstacle. Here the settlement is more dense and activities related to agriculture and commerce are concentrated.

Along the international Douro it is possible to observe that either the higher population densities (although low), or the localisation of the majority of the Guarda Fiscal checkpoints are near the valley. Along the bank (even though inland), the road that connects Freixo de Espada à Cinta with Miranda do Douro is located. In spite of the fact that the characteristics of the settlement and the physical features of the valley of the Douro river, constitute a strong natural barrier, there is a significant amount of Guarda Fiscal Checkpoints (19), between the Picote and Póiares parishes. Magalhães Basto (1923) stated that although there were very few relations among the Portuguese and the Spanish, in the summer, the river was crossed in rafts or with the help of a suspended rope.

The border of the Nisa, Castelo de Vide, Marvão, Portalegre and Arronches parishes, is characterised by low population densities (see MapIV). Communication between the populations on both sides of the border is infrequent, so, in this area, the distance between Guarda Fiscal checkpoints and the Carabineros checkpoints is greater. The relief (S. Mamede mountain), strongly affects the population nucleus distribution and the road network pattern. The general orientation, the altitude and the topographical characteristics of the mountain, structure the space and define the boundaries of the transfrontier links.

The efficiency of the fiscal barrier.

Supported by these examples, we can clearly see a close relation between the relief, settlement, road network pattern and the Guarda Fiscal checkpoint distribution. While the first factor is inversely proportional to the posts existence, the other two factors are directly proportional. I support the idea that the distance of the checkpoints is closely related to demographic issues and to the hinterland penetration facility. Whenever the population is scarce, we observe a retreat of the Guarda Fiscal checkpoints. High altitudes do not always mean limited accessibility, nor low altitudes do not necessarily mean easy communications (case of Algarve's mountains). It is more the topographic characteristics that are related to the population densities and hence the number of checkpoints. Strong physical barriers are not always an impediment to frontier relations: it is enough to observe Peneda's mountains and international Douro river. In the first case, the fiscal checkpoints nearly disappear because there are no contacts; in the Douro, the river flows in a deep canyon, between abrupt banks, but the connections are numerous.

The first conclusion that we have to make concerns the spatial distribution of the Guarda Fiscal checkpoints. Their pattern was built under valid criteria and is explained in a rational way and potentially effective. The quantity of checkpoints and their spatial gap is clearly associated with the factors that were previously mentioned. This "wall" of fiscal points attempted to control the more inter-communication intensive routes, the economical strategically *trouées*, some parts of the coast, etc.

Although all this "construction" occurred, it was possible to observe, through the honours that were awarded to the "soldiers", that the number of smugglers apprehended was insignificant. So, we have a surprising result: the barrier does not function successfully. Since the smuggling existence along the border is not questionable, the conclusion is that the Guarda Fiscal watching points and their guards did not act as was stipulated in legislation and thus did not achieve their proposed aims.

Acknowledgements:

I am especially indebted to Dr. João Garcia's comments to this article. His outstanding review is greatly appreciated. I am also grateful to Zé Pedro Manso for the cartographic help and to Elaine Sheridan for her assistance in the English translation of this paper.

References

Sources:

- Colecção dos Boletins Oficiais da Direcção Geral das Alfândegas; 1892.
Colecção dos Boletins Oficiais da Direcção Superior dos Serviços Aduaneiros e Contribuições Indirectas; 1893-94.
Colecção dos Boletins Oficiais da Administração Geral das Alfândegas; 1894-1910.
X Recenseamento Geral da População; Tomo I; Vol 1º; 1960
Tratado de Limites entre Portugal e Hespanha - 1864, Lisboa, Imprensa Nacional, 1866.

Cartography:

- Folque, Filipe; Carta Geographica de Portugal; 1860-65; escala 1:500000.
Instituto Geográfico Nacional; Mapa Topográfico Nacional de España (esc. 1: 25000); Madrid.
Instituto Hidrográfico; Carta Administrativa de Portugal ; 1979 (esc. 1: 250000).
Serviços Cartográficos do Exército; Mapa Militar de Portugal (esc. 1: 25000); Lisboa.
Servicios Cartográficos del Ejército; Carta Militar de España (esc. 1: 50000), Madrid.
Studies:
Basto, Artur de Magalhães; Fronteira Hispano-Portuguesa ; Separata de "O Instituto"; vol. 70; Coimbra; 1923.
Brandão, Fernando de Castro; Para uma Bibliografia da História Diplomática Portuguesa; Lisboa; Ministério dos Negócios Estrangeiros; 1989.
Cavaco, Carminda; A região fronteira do rio Minho ; Lisboa; CEG; 1973.
Fonseca, F. Belard da; Alfândegas e Guarda Fiscal; Lisboa; 1952.
Marques, A.H. de Oliveira; História de Portugal, Vol. III; Lisboa; 1981.
Medeiros, Carlos Alberto; Aspectos geográficos da formação de Portugal; Lisboa; 1985.
Medeiros, Carlos Alberto; Introdução à Geografia de Portugal ; Lisboa; Imprensa Universitária; 1987.
Ribeiro, Orlando; A Formação de Portugal; Lisboa; Instituto de Cultura e Língua Portuguesa; 1987.
Ribeiro, Orlando; LAUTENSACH, Hermann; DAVEAU, Suzanne; Geografia de Portugal; Vol. III; Lisboa; 1987.
Serrão, Joaquim Veríssimo; História de Portugal, IX Vol; Lisboa; Verbo; 1986.
Cordero Torres, J. M.; Fronteras Hispanicas; Madrid; 1960.
Vasconcellos, José Leite; Etnografia Portuguesa; Vol II; Lisboa; Tipografia Imprensa Nacional; 1942.