



Fig. 2: Odemira cemetery on All Souls' Day.

Odemira in accordance with the Catholic calendar of religious holidays in order to petition in favour of dead souls. As is widespread in other regions of Portugal, children go around the locality on the eve of All Saints' Day, the 31st October, asking for sweets and small presents. Groups of two to four young boys of up to around 10 years old gather together on this evening, knocking on all doors and repeating their short formula: "A small cake, a small cake, for the souls of the deceased" (*Bolinhos, bolinhos, p'ra alma dos seus fontinhos*).¹³

¹³ Asked the precise meaning of the formula, both children and parents were sometimes unable to provide me with an explanation. This lack of knowledge is also mentioned by Machado Guerreiro (1987). Dias and Dias (1957) explain it as follows: *fontinhos* is derived from *defuntos*, deceased. They suspect that this mortuary custom is related to a very old and widely disseminated cult. The background to this cult is thought to be found in the notion that the bodies of the dead continue to require food and drink (living corpses), and that they take revenge if they do not receive the offerings (1957: 10). I consider the millennia-old connection which Dias and Dias seek to uphold in an evolutionist vein to be historically unprovable. Dias and Dias are an example of those who are of the opinion that the existing customs are in fact surviving forms of supposedly primitive, pagan rituals right up to the present All Hallows' Day. Fabian has criticized these notions as evolutionistic and speculative (1991: 188).

I have also been provided with accounts of door-to-door customs of demanding goods in respect of other days in the religious holiday calendar. On one particular holiday children are presented with nets to which they say: *filó, filó, pela alma da avó* (Net, net for the soul of the grandmother). These petitioning verses exhibit the link between offerings and belief in souls which may have survived intact without linguistic changes. But what interests us now is the present performance and the position in the local discourse.

The children disguise themselves with masks and scarves while demanding presents. They then put their booty into small cloth sacks and plastic bags. In the past, the offerings which they received included nuts, cakes, figs, and chestnuts; today they obtain money and purchased sweets as well. The small cakes referred to as *bolinhos* are in fact corn cakes, so-called *broas do milho*. The children receive an extra portion of these cakes from their godparents. I was told on several occasions that this old custom used to be carried out only by poor children – better-off families continue not to allow their children to participate today.

Several dance parades (*baiões*) are also organized on this evening. On the following day a holy festival with a kermis takes place in São Pedro, a small locality near the district capital. The women begin to embellish the cemetery as of All Saints' Day, the day preceding All Souls' Day (Fig. 2). Gravestones are washed, and where necessary whitewashed. All the graves of each family are decorated with white chrysanthemums. All Saints' Day may no longer be an official holiday, but requiem mass (*missa dos finados*) is nevertheless held in church. In the main, it is women who come to visit the graves in order to pray for the dead. They kneel down and pray, cry out for their deceased loved ones and weep.

If I recount these stories, I in no way wish to convey the impression that all Odemira residents are "soul-worshippers" in exactly the same manner and that they have all adhered to the same rituals since time immemorial. Many of the traditions de-