

Ceramics from Almada (Portugal) between the Late Middle Ages and the Early Modern Age: the evolution of technical, formal and decorative patterns based on the findings from 2-2A, *Capitão Leitão* street

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Abstract: This paper presents the ceramic assemblages recovered during the archaeological intervention carried out on building numbers 2-2A of *Capitão Leitão* street, in Almada, a town located on the south bank of the Tagus River mouth, across from the Portuguese capital, Lisbon. The study was developed in 2021 in the scope of the project “*Almada Velha: Heritage Enhancement of the Urban Historic Core*”, run by Almada’s municipality and the School of Social Sciences and Humanities of NOVA University of Lisbon. One of the project’s aims is to systematize ceramics as a working basis for urban archaeology and for debate on the historical evolution of the historical urban centre. The paper traces the evolution of the ceramic sets and patterns recorded in Almada from the Late Middle Ages to the Early Modern period, based on the well-defined stratigraphy recognized on the aforementioned site. Furthermore, it is also a contribution to the study of consumption patterns in Lisbon’s region within the timeframe addressed herein.

Keywords: Ceramics, Medieval Archaeology, Early Modern Archaeology, Urban Archaeology, Lisbon.

Resumen: Los conjuntos cerámicos que presentamos proceden de la intervención arqueológica en la Rua Capitão Leitão n.º 2-2A, en Almada, ciudad situada en la orilla sur de la desembocadura del Tajo, frente a la capital portuguesa, Lisboa. Su estudio se desarrolló en 2021 en el marco del proyecto “*Almada Velha: Valorización Patrimonial del Núcleo Histórico Urbano*”, del Ayuntamiento de Almada y de la Facultad de Ciencias Sociales y Humanas de la Universidad Nueva de Lisboa. Entre sus objetivos está la sistematización del conocimiento sobre los materiales cerámicos, como base de trabajo para la arqueología urbana y para la discusión de la evolución histórica del núcleo urbano. En este artículo intentamos definir la evolución de los patrones cerámicos registrados en Almada entre la Baja Edad Media y la Edad Moderna, aprovechando la estratigrafía bien definida de este yacimiento arqueológico. Esta investigación es también una contribución al conocimiento de los consumos de la región de Lisboa durante las épocas estudiadas.

Palabras clave: Cerámica, Arqueología Medieval, Arqueología Moderna, Arqueología Urbana, Lisboa.

HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The exact date of Almada’s foundation is unknown, but in the 12th century was referred to as an *hisn*. Under Medieval Islamic domination, the town was part of the territory headed

by Lisbon and was renowned for the extraction of gold from the riverbanks. Its geostrategic value was equally important, as Lisbon and Almada jointly controlled the mouth of the Tagus River (Fernandes, 2004: 56-58). After the conquest of Lisbon in 1147, the territory

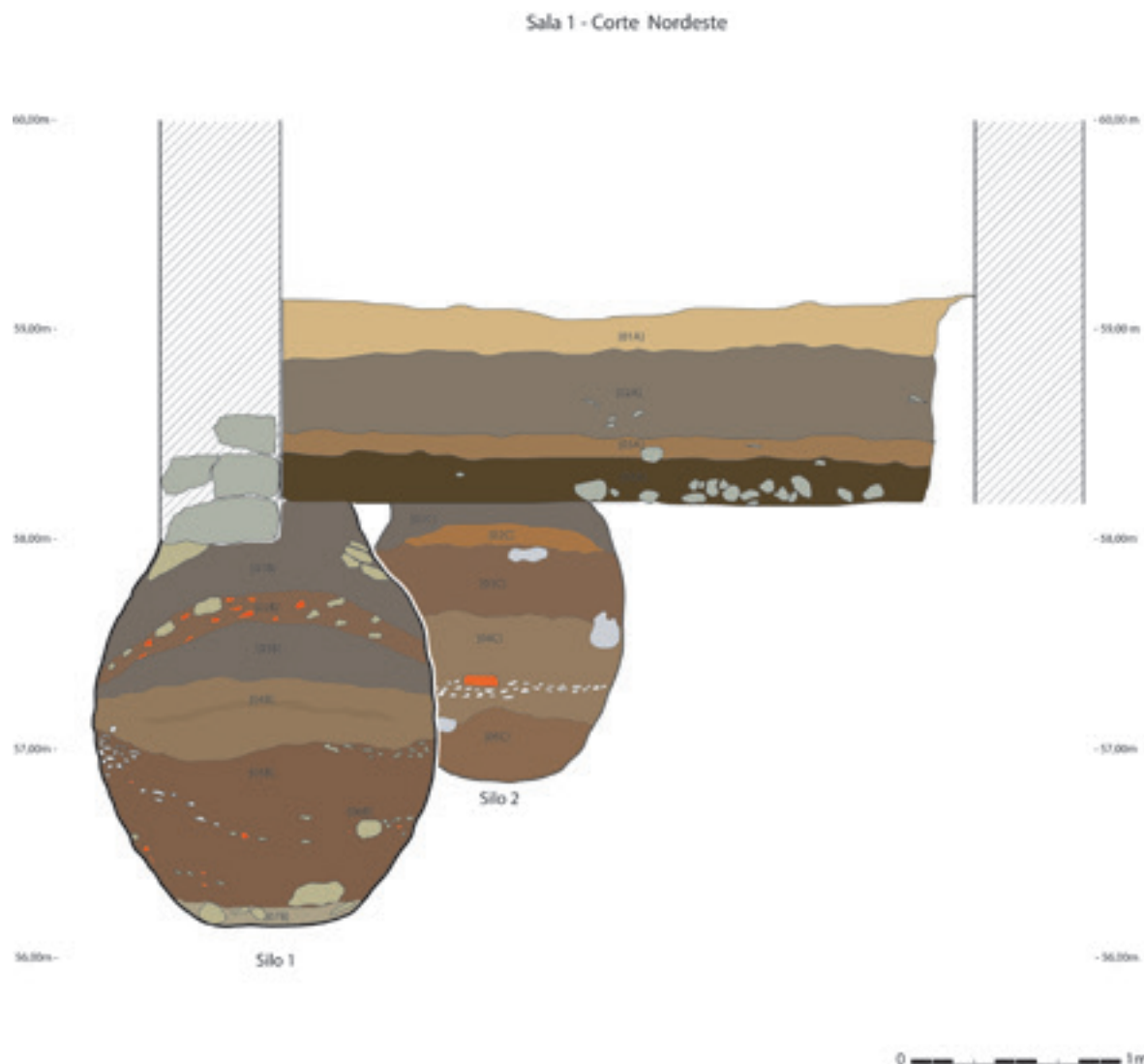


Figure 1. Stratigraphic sequence in *sala* 1, including *silos* 1 and 2.

became part of the Portuguese kingdom. Privileges were granted to the resident Islamic population to secure possession of the territory and avoid its depopulation, leading to coexistence between Christians and Muslims (Barros, 2004: 86).

During the medieval period, agricultural production became the main economic activity, particularly the production of cereals (Oliveira, 2008: 249-252). This assumption is supported by the abundance of storage pits (*silos*) revealed by the archaeological works in Almada's historical centre, which were used to store cereals (Rosa, 2019: 45-46). The prosperity of the region ended up boosting urban development, leading to the construction of a large number

of dwellings over areas with *silos*. Hence, they were subsequently dug in increasingly peripheral areas.

In early modern times, new urban transformations occurred in Almada, certainly a result of broader investment on the south bank of the Tagus as part of the logistical support for Portuguese overseas expansion. The town became part of the new trade networks and the capital's elites expanded their estates in the territory, bringing it into the global cosmopolitan circuits (Oliveira, 2008, p. 453).

The building located at 2-2A, *Capitão Leitão* street was excavated in 2015 and 2017. The site yielded evidence of several phases of construction, use and abandonment, attesting to the con-



Figure 2. Fragment of a pot handle displaying white paint and punctured decoration.

tinuous occupation of space between the 13th century and the present day (Fig. 1).

The oldest remains correspond to two *silos*, possibly belonging to a storage pits area (*coval*) that probably existed in this area in the Late Middle Ages. During the late 13th to 14th centuries, these structures were abandoned and filled with domestic waste, strata units (S.U.) corresponding to that first period addressed herein (S.U. [04B], and [05B] of *silo* 1, and [03C], [04C], and [05C] of *silo* 2). During a second phase, dating from the second half of the 15th century or the beginning of the 16th century, space was levelled for the construction of a possible habitation and the upper part of these *silos* was filled in (S.U. [01B], [02B] and [03B] of *silo* 1, and [01C] and [02C] of *silo* 2). The third occupation phase corresponds to the landfilling of the whole area, attributable to the second half of the 16th century, probably associated with a remodelling of the aforementioned building (S.U. [02A], [03A] and [04A] of compartment *sala* 1). There is a lack of preserved archaeological contexts between the end of the 16th century and the beginning of the 18th century, therefore we assume that the house was in use during this period. In the mid-18th century, however, a new remodelling took place, resulting in the infilling of a tank in the storehouse (*armazém* 1) (S.U. [07D], [08D], [10D] and [11D]). This is possibly related to the 1755 Earthquake, which caused great destruction in the town, just like in neighbouring Lisbon. The last occupation phase

of the site corresponds to the present-day building, which essentially features elements from the 19th and 20th centuries, and whose rehabilitation project prompted archaeological works.

LATE 13TH TO 14TH CENTURIES

The ceramics recovered from these contexts are characterised by the predominance of unglazed wares (98.7% of NMI), burnished ceramics being residual (1.7%); both are local or regional productions. The few glazed ceramic fragments identified (1.3%) correspond to imports, namely two fragments of Andalusian origin and a rim fragment of a Flemish pitcher produced in Bruges. This scenario is similar to Lisbon's pattern, where imports are relatively frequent in 14th century contexts, albeit in quite reduced percentages (Oliveira *et al.*, 2017: 1529-1531).

From a formal point of view, we would highlight the pots with flattened rim, the lids, the casseroles with bifurcated rims (Fig. 3), the carinated mugs (*púcaros*), and the framed rim water jugs and pitchers (*cântaros* and *bilhas* or *infusas*) (Fig. 4). These vessels have numerous parallels in settlements of the Lower Tagus and Sado Valley, such as Palmela (Fernandes, Carvalho, 1997: 228-230), Cascais (Cardoso, Rodrigues, 1991: 581-585), Lisbon (Gaspar, Amaro, 1997: 341-345; Gomes *et al.*, 2005) and Santarém (Mendes *et al.*, 2002: 268-272), particularly in 14th century contexts.

The ceramics decorations tend to be relatively schematic. We would highlight the items with fluting, incised decoration, and impressed plastic cordons, the latter generally associated with large storage containers. White painting, generally associated with a regional Islamic potter tradition, is also noteworthy, 29 fragments were recorded, corresponding to nine individuals (only 3.8%). This seems to be consistent with a scenario of decadence in the use of this decorative technique, as previously noticed in this region (Liberato *et al.*, 2021: 288-289). We also have identified a fragment of a pot handle displaying both white paint and punctured decoration (Fig. 2): this is a solution that combines cultural elements traditionally associated with southern (Islamic) and northern (Christian) cultural spheres, with parallels in other Portuguese settlements, such as Coimbra (Ramos, Albuquerque, Santos, 2014: 75).

CHRONOLOGY (centuries)	BASIN	COOKING POT	LID	CASSEROLE
13th				
14th				
15th				
16th				
17th				
18th				

Figure 3. Typological evolution of cooking ware forms identified

LATE 15TH TO EARLY 16TH CENTURY CERAMICS

Unglazed ceramics are still predominant in these contexts, but in a much smaller proportion (76.9% of NMI), while burnished wares are more abundant (14.3%). The amount of glazed ceramics increases (6.6% of NMI), with a predominance of Seville wares (66.7% of all glazed wares) over Portuguese productions (33.3%). Some tin-glazed wares from Seville were also recorded (2.2% of NMI).

From a formal point of view, this phase shows significant continuity with the previous one, e.g. pots with flattened rims, lids (Fig. 3), and carinated jugs. However, the appearance of new types is noticeable, such as the flat-bottomed bowls with burnished internal surfaces, the mugs/tumblers with disc bases and the “gourd-like” water jugs, as well as the plates with omphalos at the bottom and the tin-glazed shallow bowls (*escudelas*) from Seville (Fig. 4). These innovations indicate a chronology from the second half of the 15th century or the beginning of the following century, as evidenced by parallels identified in Cascais (Cardoso, Rodrigues, 1991: 582-585), Lisbon (Bugalhão, Coelho, 2017: 121-122 and 133; Cardoso *et al.*,

2017: 1729), Vila Franca de Xira (Pires, 2019: 179) and Barreiro (Torres, 1990: 137).

In decorative terms, there are also some continuities to the previous phase, the most common types being flutings, incised decoration, and impressed plastic cordons. White painting remains similar (3.3% of the total). There are, however, some innovations, such as the finger-pressed decoration applied to a basin, with parallels in Vila Franca de Xira (Pires, 2019: 186).

CERAMICS FROM THE SECOND HALF OF THE 16TH CENTURY

The ceramics from this period are different from the previous ones due to the higher diversity of identified productions. Unglazed ceramics account for 64.2% of the individuals, with burnished ceramics representing 20% of the total; part of the objects correspond to fine wares, not previously recorded, including the so-called modelled wares (10.3%). Glazed ceramics amount to 18% of NMI, indicating a change in the available supply of this type of wares, in-

cluding productions from Lisbon (87% of the total glazed ceramics) and Seville (10.4%). The tin-glazed productions become more significant (7.5% of the NMI), including productions from Italy (1.1% of the total) and Seville (6.4% of the total). Among the exogenous productions, Chinese porcelain (1.1% of NMI) is also noteworthy, along with two fragments of German stoneware and a fragment of a probable *martaban* storage jar.

From a formal point of view, the identified types correspond to the most widespread models, not only in the Estuary and the Lower Tagus valley but also throughout southern Portugal and the adjacent overseas territories. The unglazed productions are very close to the Lisbon productions published, such as the basins, pots, pans (Fig. 3), bowls, and water jugs. Concerning fine wares, there are also parallels with the known productions from Lisbon, especially tableware (cups and *púcaros*), not unlike the glazed productions, particularly basins, bowls, and plates (Bargão, 2015, pp. 255-283) (Fig. 4). The most common enamelled forms, plates and *escudelas*, parallel multiple sites of the Lower Tagus, e.g. Cascais (Rodrigues *et al.*, 2012: 873), Lisbon (Barradas, Silva, 2017: 1702; Silva *et al.*, 2012: 76-80) and Vila Franca de Xira (Pires, 2019: 213-216).

Concerning decoration, fluting and incision remain relevant, in line with the previous phase. There are, however, new techniques, particularly the so-called modelled decoration, associated with the finer types. White painting was also recorded, but now in residual percentages. The highest decorative diversity can be found in tin-glazed ceramics. Among the productions from Seville, we would highlight linear blue, linear manganese, figurative blue, and blue and manganese (Pleguezuelo *et al.*, 1992: 135-142; Gutiérrez, 2000: 44-61). Among the Italian productions, there are examples from Montelupo with decoration *alla porcellana*, *a losanghe*, and *blu graffito* (Carta, 2008: 722-728), and from Deruta, with *quartieri* decoration (Carta, 2008: 744). As far as Chinese porcelain is concerned, all the examples fall within the productions from the first half to the middle of the 16th century.

MID-18TH CENTURY CERAMICS

During this phase, the proportions of ceramic products change substantially. Unglazed ce-

ramics represent 40% of NMI, 9.5% of them corresponding to fine wares, whilst glazed ceramics account for 13.6%. Most items were produced in Lisbon and/or in other production centres from the Lisbon area, indicating a clear regional supply. Tin-glazed ceramics, in turn, reach 36.5% of the total, with Portuguese faience prevailing (97.7%). This is almost completely Lisbon-based (96.5% of the faience), with a few fragments originating from Coimbra and some possibly from Vila Nova de Gaia.

Scarce imports were recorded, with the remarkable exception of a faience plate of French origin, from Rouen, corresponding to the Normandy Blue on White series, whose production peak occurred between the late 17th and mid-18th century (Waselkov, Walthall, 2002: 65-67).

Regarding formal aspects, unglazed ceramics include pots and pans, while basins, as well as some types of pots and casseroles, are particularly prominent among glazed ceramics (Fig. 3). Fine wares are dominated by *púcaros*. Faience includes plates and bowls, as well as small cups and sweets bowls (Fig. 4).

The decoration is particularly scarce, occurring most frequently on faience, which at this stage is characterised by a loss of quality and simplification of the decorative array (Sebastian, 2010: 515; Casimiro, 2013: 362). Geometric and vegetal decoration prevails, nearly always schematic and mostly in cobalt blue on white glaze. The use of manganese, either isolated or in association with cobalt blue, is mostly limited to «*contas*» [beads] (Casimiro, 2013: 364-365).

CONCLUSIONS

This ceramic assemblage reflects the evolution of pottery consumption in Almada between the late 13th and 18th centuries, mirroring the evolution of ceramic patterns in one of the main port areas of the western façade of the Iberian Peninsula and Atlantic Europe.

Even though Almada was founded in Medieval Islamic times, no materials from this period were found. Therefore, late medieval ceramic productions stand out, with a scarce amount of glazed materials. They attest the intersection of Islamic pottery traditions and northern influences, mostly peninsular. The scarce fragments of ceramics imported from northern Europe, with a limited range and very closely related to wine

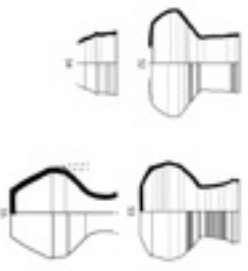
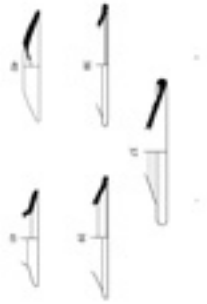
CHRONOLOGY (centuries)	BOWL	PLATE	MUG	PITCHER	SMALL JUG	JUG
13th						
14th						
15th						
16th						
17th						
18th						

Figure 4. Typological evolution of tableware and water vessels forms identified.

consumption, are a significant testimony of the maritime relations linked to the Tagus estuary in the 14th century (Oliveira *et al*, 2017, p. 1531).

The early centuries of the Modern Age, strongly marked by the emergence of overseas expansion, reveal a significant diversification of ceramic assemblages, with an increase in glazed and enamelled pieces, including Andalusian and Central Italian productions, as well as occasional productions from northern Europe and eastern Asia. This space seems, therefore, to be part of a beam of maritime and terrestrial networks connecting the most dynamic trading centres of the West Mediterranean and the Atlantic.

At a later phase of the Modern Age, tin-glazed productions of Portuguese origin were predominant, particularly tableware, and the range of international connections in this area was reduced.

The identified contexts portray the historical evolution of the town, marked both by a phase of large-scale food production to supply Lisbon and by increasing construction due to the expansion of commerce around the capital, reflecting overseas trade. The study of these dynamics lacks, however, a much larger number of case studies and more in-depth work than currently available. Without this, it will be difficult for archaeological research on this period and geographical area to overcome the impressionistic phase in which we still stand.

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