5th- and 6th-century African and Phocaean Red Slip wares from Ossonoba (Faro, Algarve, Portugal): the assemblage from Horta da Misericórdia

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1. Roman and Late Antique import trade to Ossonoba

Faro, the ancient city of Ossonoba, is located in the south-eastern Portuguese coast. An important urban center from at least the Roman period, it has, since the early Iron Age period, been the capital of the Algarve - once a kingdom under the Portuguese monarchs, now the southernmost region of Portugal.

The import trade to Ossonoba during Roman and Late Antique times was studied by Caterina Viganò in her doctoral thesis dedicated to the Roman settlement and economy in the central and eastern Algarve, completed in 2009 and published in 2011. As far as two other key sites in the region - the ancient cities of Bâloes (now modern Tarrafal) and Barreiros (Castril de Castro Marim) - Viganò analyzed the amphorae and the fine wares present in assemblages from two areas in modern Faro: one within the Municipal Museum and the other outside (Ossonoba Museum) the walls of ancient Ossonoba. Being the first and only study on amphorae and tableware imports to Ossonoba in a systematic and comprehensive way, Viganò's work is crucial to understand the import trade to this area of southern Lusitania during the Roman and Late Antique periods.

While 4th-century A.R.S is still very common in the assemblages studied by Viganò, 5th-century A.R.S is scarce, particularly the forms dated to the second half of the century. The only exception to this picture would be Hayes 67, well represented with 31 vessels (Viganò, 2011: 158, Table 1). Despite the rarity of A.R.S forms dated to the 5th and 6th century, it is clear from the assemblages studied by Viganò that the import trade on fine wares did not cease before at least the mid-4th century, as proven by the occurrence of a form of Hayes 104B and two decorated fragments of Style E (I) (Viganò, 184-186).

2. The excavations at Horta da Misericórdia

Horta da Misericórdia is an area within the ancient walls of Ossonoba that was given to the Holy House of Mercy ("Santo Casa da Misericórdia") of several wealthy lay institutions of Catholic inspiration of Faro as a vegetable garden ("Jardim") in the early 20th century. It is located next to the Municipal Museum of Faro and is adjacent to a square behind the cathedral. In 1984, 1993-1995 and 2019-2020, Teresa Justo Garrido conducted archaeological excavations in Horta da Misericórdia (Garrido, 2007: 30).

Thanks to the description made by Garrido, we know that Sector I was probably filled with soil coming from Lagoa de Oli (the cathedral's square). Sections B and C had a thin archaeological layer above the bedrock that yielded Italian magaica and Chinese porcelain. In Sector D, a medieval house, an Islamic house and a Roman sewer were discovered. In Sector I, two Islamic houses, a citizen's wall and a studded wall, as well as Roman sewers and some Roman garumna, were found. The courtyard to the east, with storeys in eto for washing clothes, was located in Sector I. During the 16th century, a storage facility was built on the courtyard pavement. There was also an olive oil mill nearby. This courtyard was a working, public area, connected to the rest of the site. It was also connected to another area of private housing. Under the pavement of the citizen courtyard, either in Sector B or C, the traces of a possible late Roman house were discovered. Another courtyard, paved with bricks and surrounded by column bases, which was interpreted as a possible pedestrian, was also found (Ist: 10-31).

3. 5th- and 6th-century African and Phocaean Red Slip wares from Horta da Misericórdia

This poster deals with the 5th- and 6th-century A.R.S and P.S.I found in Horta da Misericórdia. Therefore, only the tableware corresponding to these productions and chronology is addressed here. In addition, only rims, bases and decorated fragments that may be strictly related to the 5th and 6th centuries were analyzed. 4th-century forms that may continue until the very beginning of the 5th century were not considered. The statistical method of the minimum number of vessels (M.N.V.), established by Neil Brendon and Tuffourd (1980), was followed. The fluctuations in the A.R.S and P.S.I import trade to Ossonoba during this period are represented by means of a linear graph containing the import probabilities per decade, according to the method proposed by Elizabeth Fertig and Philip Perkins (1986). Finally, the results may require minor corrections in the future, but these shall not change the overall picture presented here.

4. Conclusions

The analysis of the 5th- and 6th-century A.R.S and P.S.I from Horta da Misericórdia gives us a different perspective on the Late Antique import trade to Ossonoba. It is now clear that A.R.S continues to be acquired in significant amounts until the mid-6th century. The analysis of the collections reveal that while most 5th and 6th-century forms are analyzed, 4th-century forms that may continue until the very beginning of the 5th century were not considered. The statistical method of the minimum number of vessels (M.N.V.), established by Neil Brendon and Tuffourd (1980), was followed. The fluctuations in the A.R.S and P.S.I import trade to Ossonoba during this period are represented by means of a linear graph containing the import probabilities per decade, according to the method proposed by Elizabeth Fertig and Philip Perkins (1986). Finally, the results may require minor corrections in the future, but these shall not change the overall picture presented here.

5. Bibliography


6. Acknowledgements

To Mariana Almeida, MA (IA, Universidade Nova de Lisboa/HC, Universidade Nova de Lisboa), who prepared the drawings presented in this poster, assisted me with its overall design and layout, and generally contributed to improve this work.

To João Pedro Fernandes (Universidade da Madeira/CEACAM, Universidade de Coimbra), who kindly and selflessly allowed me to study the fine-wares assemblage from Horta da Misericórdia during my doctoral thesis and a visit to this site.

To Dr. Miguel Valente (Universitat de Barcelona), who read the text and made valuable suggestions to improve its style.

All errors and shortcomings remain my own.