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Oil and wine in early medieval rural settlements from Castelo de Vide (Alentejo, Portugal): dating, context, and scale of production

Summary

This paper analyses the significance of olive oil and wine production in the post-Roman countryside by focusing on recent data obtained in the area of Castelo de Vide, in central Portugal. The research carried out consisted of excavations, surface field surveys, material culture analyses, and a critical overview of previous work conducted in the region. The available data suggest a shift from a centralized Roman production model, based on medium-size *villae*, to a countryside shaped by a network of small farmsteads. As production scale changed, new buildings – with smaller, more manageable lever-and-screw presses – were built to accommodate the new production model, while some of the larger presses documented in the villas were abandoned. This shift in scale is also perceptible in several different aspects of the early medieval peasant landscape. However, the fact that several new presses were being built and used during this period points to a demand for transformed products (most likely olive oil, but also wine), that exceeds the local needs of this specific territory. This in turn indicates a surplus production that was likely intended for supra-local trade, implying the integration of these peasant communities into broader scales of power.

Keywords: Early Middle Ages, Rural settlements, Oil and wine production, Lever-and-screw press technology, Alentejo (Portugal).

Resumo

Datação, contextos e escala de produção de azeite e vinho no povoamento rural alto-medieval de Castelo de Vide (Alentejo, Portugal).

Este artigo analisa a importância da produção de azeite e vinho no campo pós-Romano, focando-se em dados recentes obtidos na área de Castelo de Vide, no centro de Portugal. A pesquisa realizada consistiu em escavações, prospeções, análises de cultura material e uma revisão crítica dos trabalhos anteriores realizados na região. Os dados disponíveis sugerem uma mudança de um modelo romano de produção centralizada, baseado em *villae* de tamanho médio, para um campo formado por uma rede de pequenas granjas. À medida que a escala de produção muda, novos edifícios – com prensas de parafuso menores e mais fáceis de operar – são construídos para acomodar o novo modelo de produção, enquanto algumas das prensas maiores documentadas nas vilas são abandonadas. Essa mudança de escala é também perceptível noutros aspetos do povoamento rural alto-medieval. No entanto, o facto de que várias prensas novas são construídas e utilizadas durante este período indica uma demanda de produto transformado (provavelmente azeite, mas também vinho), que excede as necessidades locais deste território específico. Estes dados sugerem uma produção de excedentes que seria provavelmente destinada ao comércio supralocal, implicando a integração destas comunidades camponesas em escalas mais amplas de poder.

Palavras-chave: Alta Idade Média, Povoamento rural, Produção de vinho e azeite, lagares de vara e parafuso, Alentejo (Portugal).

Riassunto

Olio e vino negli insediamenti rurali altomedievali di Castelo de Vide (Alentejo, Portogallo): datazione, contesto e scala di produzione.

Questo articolo analizza l'importanza della produzione dell'olio d'oliva e del vino nella campagna post-romana, concentrandosi sui dati recenti ottenuti nell'area di Castelo de Vide, nel Portogallo centrale. La ricerca svolta si è contraddistinta in scavi, ricognizioni di superficie, analisi della cultura materiale e uno studio critico di precedenti lavori svolti nella regione. I dati disponibili suggeriscono un passaggio da un modello di produzione romano centralizzato, basato su *villae* di medie dimensioni, a una campagna formata da una rete di piccole fattorie. Man mano che la scala della produzione cambia, vengono costruiti nuovi edifici – con presse a leva e vite più piccole e più agili da usare – per accogliere il nuovo modello di produzione, mentre alcune delle presse più grandi documentate nei villaggi vengono abbandonate. Questo cambiamento di scala è evidente anche in altri aspetti dell'insediamento rurale altomedievale. Tuttavia, il fatto che in questo periodo siano stati costruiti e utilizzati diversi nuovi torchi indica una domanda di prodotti trasformati (probabilmente olio d'oliva, ma anche vino), che supera le esigenze locali di questo specifico territorio. Questi dati suggeriscono un surplus di produzione probabilmente destinato al commercio sovra-locale, implicando l'integrazione di queste comunità contadine su scale di potere più ampie.

Parole chiave: alto Medioevo, insediamenti rurali, produzione di vino e di olio d'oliva, tecnologia di pressatura a leva e vite, Alentejo (Portogallo).

1. INTRODUCTION

Recent research in central Iberia has been shedding light into the early medieval countryside. New findings, and also an organized effort to structure data from reports of previous fieldwork, has put forward an important amount of information, showing the co-existence of different land use models, settlement patterns and social settings through which the countryside was reshaped and reorganized in the post-Roman centuries (QUIRÓS CASTILLO 2013, 2016, 2018). Evidence for wine and olive oil production in these contexts is still, however, very scarce, and thus its significance deserves careful consideration.

By focusing on recent fieldwork carried out in the terri-

tory of Castelo de Vide, a municipality located in east-central Portugal, in what was once a rather isolated area of the inner Lusitania province, we will consider the archaeological evidence for olive oil and wine production in early medieval settlements and elaborate about its implications in the peasant landscape.

Our research consisted of excavations, surface field surveys, material culture analyses, and a critical overview of previous work in the region. After a brief research framework we will present the main archaeological evidence for oil and wine production: excavations (a Roman settlement where there is evidence of an olive oil *torcularium* and two early medieval settlements where lever-and-screw press facilities were identi-

fied) and surface finds (an overview of rock-cut presses and other relevant remains).

The discussion segment will seek to contextualize our finds in the light of current research concerning the early medieval countryside and offer possible interpretations for the meaning of press facilities in the peasant landscape. We will also address the issue of the under visibility of wine and oil production in the post-Roman period, elaborate on the difficulties intrinsic to the material record when analysing these productions and draw comparisons between the available data from neighbouring territories.

2. FRAMEWORK

Castelo de Vide is a municipality in the Portuguese region of Alto Alentejo with a territory of 265 km² characterized by a transitional landscape between the hilltops of the Beira region (north of Tagus river) and the plains of Baixo Alentejo (Gadiana river basin) (fig. 1). Most of its territory consists of peneplain terrain, except for the SE part of the municipality, which presents a mountainous area that reaches up to 762 m (Facho peak).

Up until the 1960s most of the rural area was ploughed with animal traction since the mechanical plough was not an option in a territory where most of the soil layer is rather thin and rocky outcrops very frequent. This almost absence of intensive mechanized agriculture has resulted in a significant degree of preservation for archaeological sites. Most land parcels are now used for cattle grazing, cork oaks and olive trees (fig. 2).

The archaeological inventory of Castelo de Vide was one of the first to be published in Portugal, a leading work that highlighted the potential of this area for research (RODRIGUES 1975). During the 1980s and the 1990s, the local council of Castelo de Vide promoted a specific department devoted to archaeological activities: SACMCV (*Secção de Arqueologia da Câmara Municipal de Castelo de Vide*). SACMCV undertook regular field surveys and excavations, collecting considerable amounts of data for all chronological periods, documented by means of survey reports, inventory sheets, structures and artefact drawings and photographs. Although this data is mostly unpublished, the SACMCV archive and library can be accessed by researchers. Furthermore, the authors are currently undertaking a joint project with the Municipality to systematize these data and publish an updated archaeological inventory of the territory.

A first approach to this municipal archaeological archive made clear that there was a considerable amount of evidence from the early medieval period: rock-cut graves, cist graves and sarcophagi; remains of stone walled structures, sherds of ceramic tiles and vessels; stone weights and elements from press facilities.

It should be noted that the Roman town of *Ammaia* (S. Salvador de Aramenha, Marvão) is located just 5 km southeast of Castelo de Vide's limit, and that during the Roman period this area was part of the town's rural territory, an important feature to consider when examining the post-Roman countryside. *Ammaia* was a small-size town, probably funded during the Augustan age, and elevated to *civitas* under Emperor Claudius, becoming a *municipium* probably during the 2nd century AD (CORSI, KLEIN, WEINLINGER 2012). It seems that *Ammaia* struggled to maintain its urban status as early as the mid-5th century, as later imported wares were not recorded (QUARESMA 2014). This was probably due to the town's position, deep into the province of Lusitania, and simultaneously distant from any of the inland urban centres that gained status by becoming bishoprics, such as *Egitania* (Idanha-a-Velha, Castelo Branco) or *Caurium* (Coria, Cáceres) (CORDERO 2019). There is evidence of a reasonable number of Roman settlements in the town of *Ammaia*'s surrounding areas.

Archaeological information is sparse – mostly surface data and unclear results from old excavations – but it seems likely that some were medium-scale villa estates, the supposed remains of a countryside organized in close connection with the needs of the town. Likewise, the 11 possible Roman sites known in Castelo de Vide still lack stratigraphic data and clear occupation sequences, it being uncertain how these estates adapted from the 5th century onwards, while *Ammaia* faded as an inland urban enclave.

Information from neighbouring villas of the Alto Alentejo region suggest that quite different processes were happening simultaneously. Recent excavation works at Horta da Torre (Fronteira) revealed the remains of hut structures inside the great reception hall and the reuse of a *peristilum* as a discharge area for faunal remains (CARNEIRO 2017). In Monte dos Pombais (Marvão), the Roman baths are reused as a large funerary complex (FERNANDES 1987), with at least 37 graves that can be framed between the 3rd and the 6th centuries. At Torre de Palma (Monforte) an impressive basilica was built, alongside baptisteries and large burial areas dated from the 5th/6th centuries (MALONEY, HALE 1996). These transformations attest the abandonment of the former luxurious areas of the villas, deeply related to the Roman way of life (LEWITT 2003), and the emergence of an elite that manifests its power by constructing religious buildings; and are of course coherent with trends common to all Hispanic villas, which have been lengthily examined (CHAVARRÍA 2007).

However, up until recently most of what was known about the post-Roman countryside stemmed from research carried out on villa estates. Evidence of levels of use later than the 5th century allowed a glimpse into this changing world, but any analysis focusing on former elite domains – their abandonment, transformation or reuse-, would necessarily present a partial picture of a very complex period.

The archaeological research project PramCV (*Povoamento rural alto-medieval no território de Castelo de Vide*), carried out between 2014 and 2018 and led by the authors, aimed to identify and analyse what other types of rural settlements emerged in the post-Roman landscape¹. Excavations were carried out in 6 sites with remains of early medieval occupation, bringing to light domestic structures and press facilities, the latter of which will be the focus of this paper.

Our findings suggest that a new settlement pattern emerged while the above transformations are documented in the former villa estates, a process that might have started in the second half of the 5th century and developed up until the beginning of the 8th, when these settlements are abandoned (PRATA 2019, 2018; PRATA, CUESTA-GÓMEZ 2017). The material evidence for the early medieval farmsteads in the territory of Castelo de Vide consists mainly of rectangular stone buildings made of double-faced granite walls and covered with decorated ceramic roof tiles (CUESTA-GÓMEZ, PRATA, RAMOS 2018). Inside there are ground level hearths, locally produced pottery, and a few iron tools (PRATA 2017). Organic materials are seldom preserved, due to the acidity of the granitic soils, however, the presence of stone mills indicates cereal or grain grinding, and spindle whorls point to textile production. There is also evidence of cattle pens, large crescent shaped stone walls that partly enclose outdoor areas. The fact that the settlements are usually located on shallow valleys where pastures are available throughout the year is another strong indicator for cattle farming.

The early medieval funerary areas are composed of cist graves and, predominantly, rock-cut tombs, built into granite boulders

¹ This project was supported by the Municipality of Castelo de Vide. The findings were included in a recent PhD dissertation (PRATA 2018).

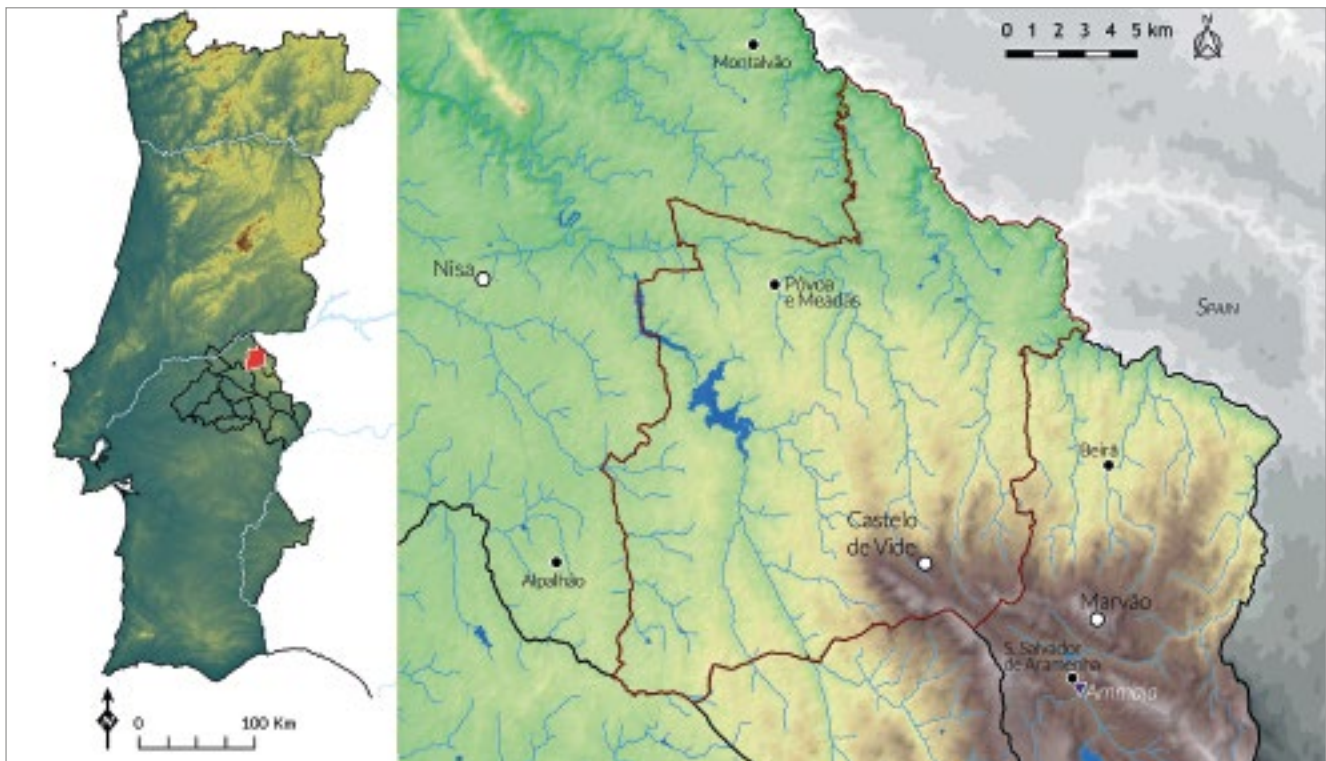


fig. 1 – Location map showing the municipality of Castelo de Vide in the Portuguese Alto Alentejo region.



fig. 2 – Typical Alto Alentejo granitic landscape with oak trees and pasture.

usually within a radius of 50 m from the domestic or productive structures. The graves themselves are usually individual, or in small groups of 2 or 3 graves, a reflection that each household was a self-recognized group, and the graves could be part of a complex process to claim land use rights within the peasant landscape (MARTÍN VISO 2012, 2017).

Amid this rather localized and seemingly household managed economy there is evidence for a type of production that suggests the inclusion of this territory on a larger scale: press facilities to produce olive oil and wine.

3. THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL DATA

3.1 EXCAVATIONS

The first published references to the site of Mascarro concern the find of two gold Visigothic coins (*tremisses*); one was identified as a piece of King Egica, coined in Toledo after 692 (ALMEIDA 1971, pp. 224-226); the other, from the blurry obverse

published (RODRIGUES 1975, Est. CXV, fig. 2), is a pseudo-imperial Visigothic *tremis*, probably coined in the name of Anastasius I (491-518, group A3 from Tomasini). The presence of the coins, alongside ceramic building materials from the Roman period, fragments of granite columns, one altar stone (MNA n. 2015.13.1), many walled remains and hydraulic surfaces suggested the site was a rural villa with two main separated occupation phases (RODRIGUES 1975, p. 168).

The site was later excavated in the context of summer international work camps, funded by *Fundo de Apoio aos Organismos Juvenis*, directed by D. Trindade (1983) and J. Oliveira (1984, 1985) in collaboration with the SACMCV technicians. Unfortunately, there is little information regarding stratigraphy, and it seems that there were unclear selection criteria of finds collected during excavation. The field diaries, reports and graphic documents are available at the municipality archive and were examined as part of a master's degree dissertation that included their transcriptions (RICARDO 2015).

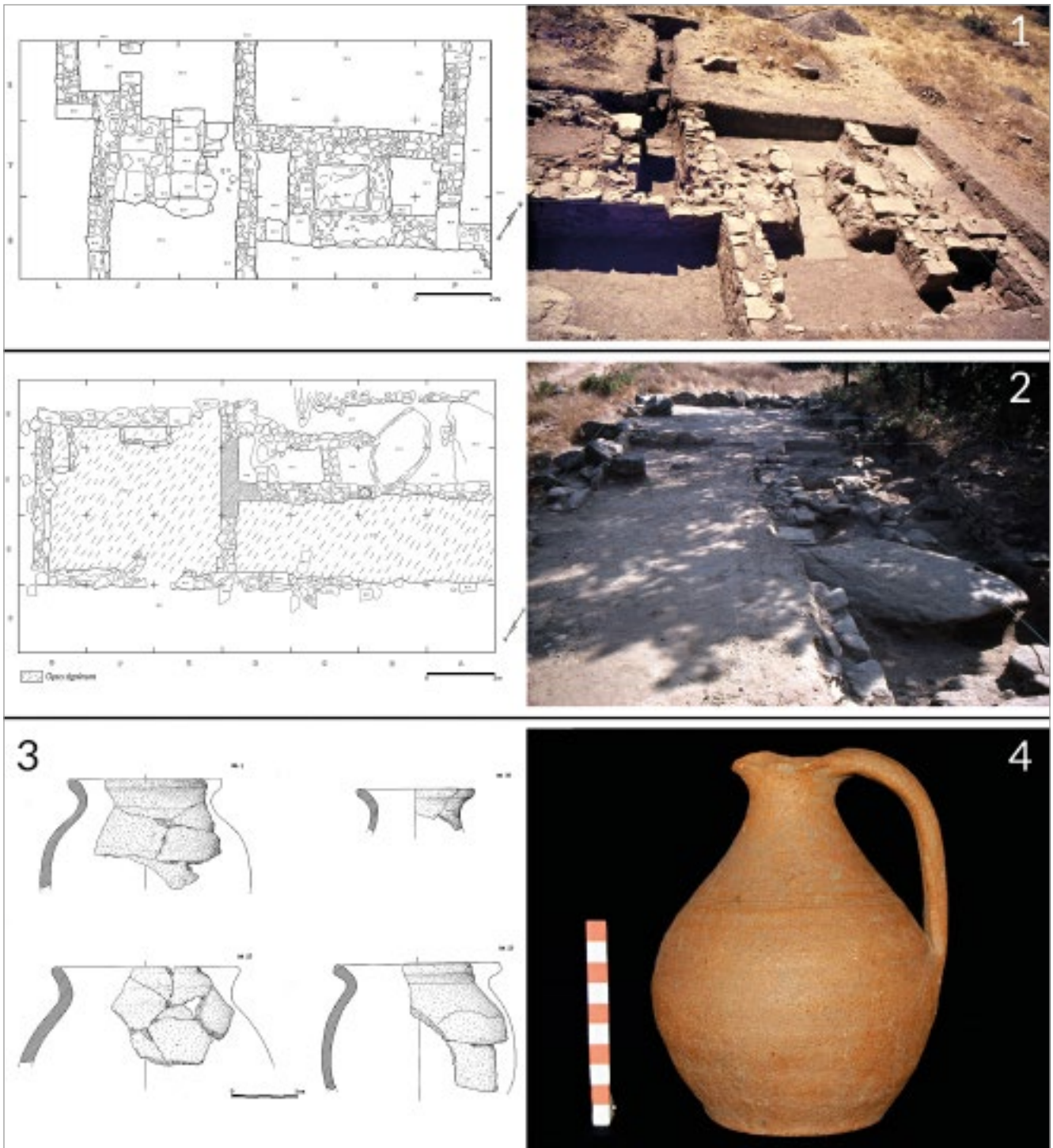


fig. 3 – Excavations at Mascarro (1983-1985). 1) Sector A, decantation tanks of the olive oil *torcularium*; 2) Sector D, Roman building reused during the early medieval phase; 3) Early medieval pots; 4) Jug from one of the early medieval cist graves (© SACMCV).

Trenches were carried out in 5 separate areas showing structures from the Roman period (Sector A), late Roman period (Sector C), the early medieval period (Sector B/D and F) and the contemporary era (Sector E). There is also reference to two individual Visigothic cist graves at the site, now destroyed, located at 200 and 400 m North of Sector A (fig. 3).

Although the archaeological finds lack stratigraphic data, they seem to mirror the occupation sequence proposed for the site. A small number of finds is coherent with the initial Roman occupation, which can be set at an imprecise moment around

the 3rd century. The most significant items are from between the 4th and the 5th century: glass fragments and 14 coins dated between the years 337 and 361 A.D. (RICARDO 2017a, p. 251). Interestingly, according to their grid coordinates, most of these bronze coins were recovered roughly in the same area of Sector A. We believe they might be the remains of a hoard from the early years of the second half of the 4th century. Lastly, there is a group of material evidence from the 6th/7th centuries recovered from the excavations, but also in the surrounding areas: the two gold coins, a jug from one of the cist graves, two rock-cut

graves, two areas with remains of unmortared collapsed walls and fragments of domestic pottery similar to the productions documented in the early medieval households (PRATA 2017) (fig. 3.3). Oddly, as far as we know, the decorated roof tiles typical of the early medieval sites (CUESTA-GÓMEZ, PRATA, RAMOS 2018) were not identified at Mascarro.

For the purpose of this paper we will only be focusing on Sectors A and D, which we believe are key to understand the diachronic occupation of this settlement.

Sector A presented the partial remains of a structure made of robust mortared walls with at least three individualized compartments, and an area with three joined tanks, one of them covered with *opus signinum* and presenting a drainage channel. This area was interpreted as the remains of a decantation system from an olive oil *torcularium* (OLIVEIRA 1984 [6]) (fig. 3.1).

In sector D there was evidence of a N-S wall and three associated walls E-W. The base of the middle E-W wall is T-shaped and cut into the granite bedrock. The circulation floor is an *opus signinum* pavement, a reddish surface made of crushed tiles and bricks, and mortar applied on a base of river stones, like the pavement identified at Sector A. The North half of the pavement was enclosed by a rectangular structure made of double-faced walls. Inside there is evidence for small rectangular structures, built alongside the walls, probably for storage purposes. This area was referred to as an early medieval building (RICARDO 2015). However, if we consider the *opus signinum* floor, it seems more likely that the early medieval walls were built on top of a pre-existing Roman structure (fig. 3.2).

Two fragments of stone weights were also found at the site, which were interpreted as the possible remains of a double lever-and-screw press from the Roman period (RICARDO 2017a, p. 259). From the published drawings, considering the size and shape of the fragments, we believe they might correspond to a sole small weight, with an estimated diameter of about 70 cm (RICARDO 2015). This seems rather small when compared to the large weights usually documented in Lusitanian *torcularia* (i.e. villa of Milreu (Faro, Portugal) (PEÑA CERVANTES 2010, pp. 950-954). With due caution, we propose that these weight fragments might be in fact evidence of a smaller lever-and-screw press that operated in Mascarro, during post-Roman times.

Excavations at Junçal were led by the authors during the summer of 2015 and brought to light a lever-and-screw press and a possible domestic structure (fig. 4). This site was known for having a group of 11 rock-cut graves, the largest concentration known in this territory, and a widespread area of around 2000 m², where remains of stone walled structures are visible on the surface. Trench 1 covered a rectangular structure that presented a large stone weight in the middle. The granite bed rock was used as ground level, the structure was made with robust stone walls and covered by roof tiles (of which 2144,10 kg of fragments were recovered, fig. 4.5). It presented 3 compartments: compartment 1 (C1) was the first to be built and displayed a main entrance facing North and a second entrance facing East, towards compartment 2 (C2). Compartment 3 (C3) was built around the outer northern wall of C1 and its entrance faces the building main doorway. It is possible this smaller dwelling was a porch area.

The press weight was in the middle of C1, only slightly displaced from its original position which was marked by a circular base of stone slabs (fig. 4.1, A). The building develops lengthwise on a smooth slope, which facilitated the pressing process by creating a height difference between the pressing surface and the weight. The third West section of C1 was the pressing surface (fig. 4.1, B), a slightly elevated area which preserved remains of

a coating made of crushed sherds and mortar set directly on the bedrock, a less compact version of *opus signinum*. Compartments 2 and 3 would function as additional storage spaces.

The stone weight is slightly cone-shaped, with 85 cm of base diameter, 70 cm of top diameter and 70 cm high (fig. 4.2). The top section presents a central hole, typical of screw-press mechanisms (BRUN 1986), and two sets of grooves, one of them broken, which indicates two separate moments of use.

Among the charcoal samples collected inside the press there were remains of olive tree (*Olea europaea* L.)² and an olive pit, so this was most likely a facility for olive oil extraction. There was no evidence of tanks inside the press so the liquid must have been collected in ceramic vessels, many sherds of which were identified inside (fig. 4.4). There were also smaller pots, mostly pitchers, some of them with fire marks, and a fragment from a possible ceramic stove; these could have been used to warm water which would be essential in the olive pressing process (PEÑA CERVANTES 2010, p. 39). Remains of granite manual mills have been found at surface level around the press, and during the excavation of Trench 2, which could have been used for olive crushing.

An equine tooth cap fragment was also recorded during excavation. Horses have been documented in early medieval Iberian rural settlements, probably used as draught animals (GRAU 2013).

The archaeological levels inside Trench 2 were too compromised, but the building techniques and the ceramic sherds were like those documented in the press. Overall, the material culture sets the use of this complex around the 6th/7th centuries. As is usually the case, the rock-cut graves were all empty, but a fragment of a bronze ring was collected on the surface, close to the grave site. This is consistent with grave goods from this period, suggesting a timeframe of use coherent with the press and other buildings in this area.

The site of Tapada das Guaritas is in the Vale de Galegos, in the western part of the municipality. Intensive field-survey was carried out in this valley area rendering a very significant amount of finds from the early medieval period: 41 rock-cut graves, 1 sarcophagus, 1 cist grave, and at least 15 areas with remains of stone structures and pottery (CUESTA-GÓMEZ, PRATA s.d.), four of which were archaeologically excavated. The intense occupation of this area was most likely driven by an old Roman roadway that led to and from the town of *Ammaia* (CARNEIRO 2014), which certainly kept an important role in the early medieval countryside.

The excavations at Tapada das Guaritas II were led by the authors and carried out during the summers of 2015 and 2017 (fig. 5). A large storage building was fully excavated (Trench 1), and a smaller square test-trench was excavated around stone press elements (Trench 2). There is a group of three rock-cut graves facing the buildings, 60 m west.

The storage building had a quadrangular layout with two compartments. The main compartment (C1) had two entrances, one facing south, towards the press, and the other facing west, connected to the second compartment (C2), which also faced the exterior, towards the gravesite. The bases of the main entrances were framed by large granite blocks, most likely reused from a previous Roman building located in the surrounding area. A total of 3183,71 kg of roof tiles were recorded during the excavation of this building, and a posthole was identified in the centre of C1, indicating a gable roof (fig. 5).

² The botanical remains mentioned in the text were analysed by Dr Patrícia Monteiro (ICArEHB – University of Algarve) to whom we would like to express our gratitude.

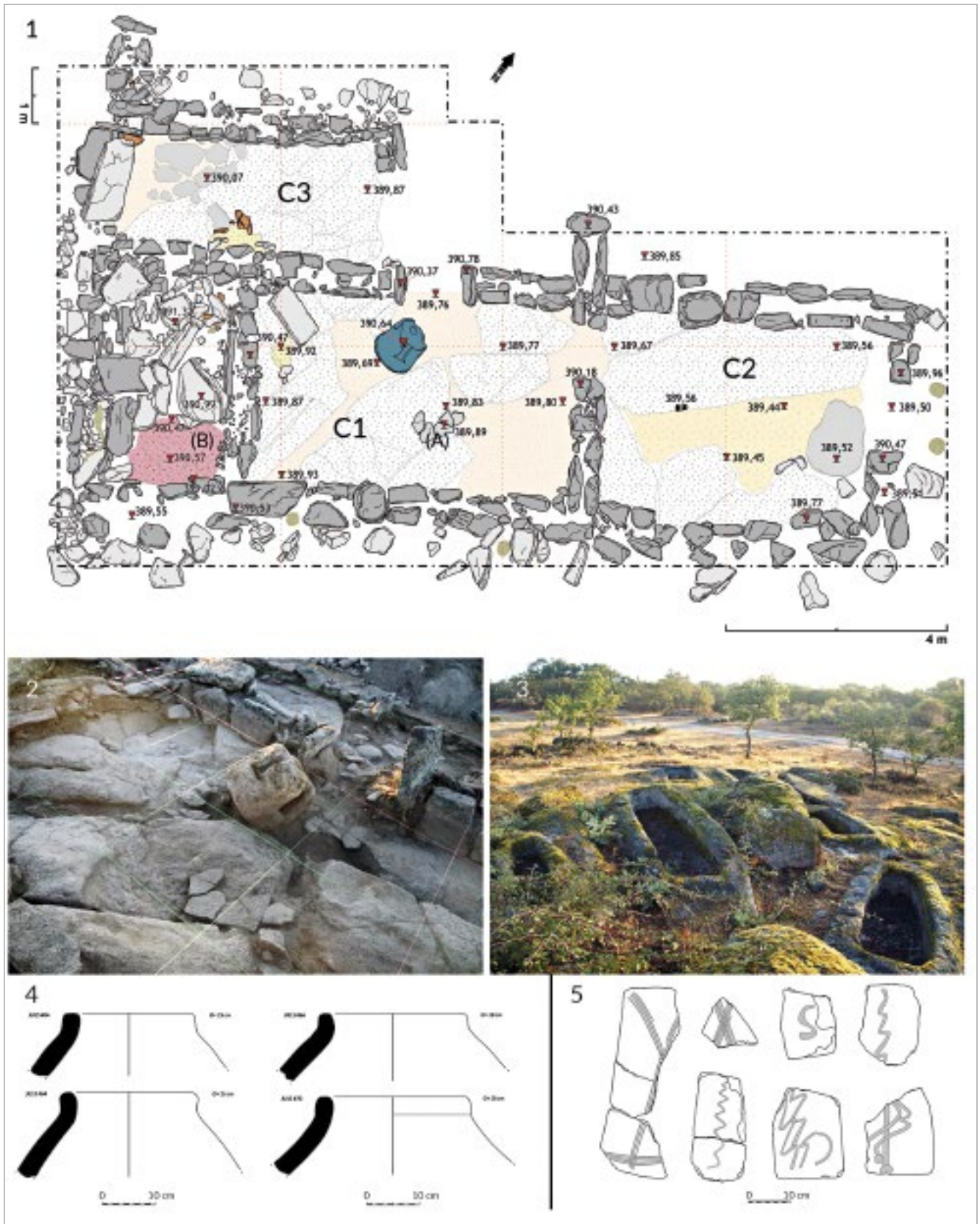


fig. 4 – 1) Lever-and-screw press building excavated at Junçal (A) original weight base and (B) pressing surface; 2) granite weight with two use phases; 3) Rock-cut grave necropolis; 4) Examples of large storage vessels; 5) and decorated roof tiles recovered inside the press building.



fig. 5 – Storage building (Sondagem 1) and lever-and-screw press (Sondagem 2) excavated at Tapada das Guaritas II.



fig. 6 – Tapada das Guaritas II. 1) Stone components of the lever-and-screw press mechanism; 2) General plan of Trench 1 storage building; 3) Detail of the hearth and the small compartment identified inside the storage building; 4) Rock-cut graves associated with the press facility; 5) Examples of decorated storage vessels; 6) Cobalt blue glass beads; 7) Fragment of ceramic bottle with two handles.

Lab.	Trench	Context	SAMPLE (charcoal)	BP Date	CAL. AD DATE (2 σ)	Median probability
Beta-431500	1 (C3.1)	[110]	Arbutus unedo	1250 ±30	676- 779 (74.8 %) 790- 870 (20.6 %)	739 AD
Beta-431501	1 (D3.13)	[105]	Pinus sp.	1270 ±30	663- 778 (92.3 %) 792- 804 (1.3 %) 819- 821 (0.2 %) 842- 859 (1.6 %)	725 AD

tab. 1 – AMS radiocarbon dating results from Tapada das Guaritas II (Trench 1). Calibration (two-sigma 95,4% probability) made with OxCal v. 4.3.2/Intcal 13 software.

[OxCal v4.3.2; IntCal 13]

Inside there were the remains of a ground level hearth, and 662,44 kg of sherds of large ceramic storage vessels that were crushed by the fall of the roof and the walls (fig. 6.5). Only one of these containers survived partially intact because it was in the NE corner of the building, inside a small storage compartment (fig. 6.3). Remains of domestic pottery, metal tools and two

cobalt blue glass beads (fig. 6.6-7), were found on the outside of the east wall, which might suggest some sort of adjacent structure build with perishable materials.

Trench 2 revealed that the stone weight was in its original position, inside a circular dent cut into the bedrock. This stone weight is 77 cm tall and presents 80 cm of base diameter and



fig. 7 – Rock-cut lever-and-screw press of Alcogulo (drawing: © J. Magusto, SACMCV). A) Tank to collect the pressed liquid; B) Weight; C) Remains of double-faced wall; D) Rock-cut grave; E) Remains of stone building.



fig. 8 – Additional types of rock-cut facilities: 1) direct press; 2) and 3) trampling tanks (© SACMCV).

62 cm of top diameter (fig. 9.3). The holes on top indicate a screw-press mechanism. Located 4 m apart there is a rectangular block with two parallel holes (fig. 6.1), which were the base for the wooden structure that kept the beam in place (referred to as *lapis pedicinorum* in archaeological literature about the Roman period; PEÑA CERVANTES 2010, p. 47). There is also evidence of two poorly preserved walls that create an entrance facing north, towards the storage building, located just 15 m away. While small, the excavated area revealed remains of the stone walls, roof tiles (152,09 kg) and a great quantity of ceramic sherds from large vessels (77,85 kg).

Two samples of vegetable charcoal from Trench 1 were dated (tab. 1). Both samples were recovered while excavating the lower collapse levels that formed after the building was abandoned and slowly started to decay, as suggested by the formation processes documented. The results obtained place this building's last use phase in the beginning of the 8th century.

3.2 SURFACE FINDS: ROCK-CUT TANKS, PRESSES AND WEIGHTS

There is yet another type of archaeological evidence that attests to the production of olive oil, or, more frequently, wine. These are rock-cut presses and tanks. For the current analysis we will only be considering the facilities that were identified in close spatial relation to other evidence of the early medieval period, amounting to 19 structures in the territory of Castelo de Vide. These can be divided in three types: lever presses (4), direct press facilities (5) and trampling facilities or tanks (9).

Rock-cut lever presses preserve three fundamental elements: indentations related to the fixation of the lever support system; an area for pressing (press bed); and a tank to collect the pressed product (although this is not always present, since the pressed wine or oil could be collected in wood or ceramic containers). Rock-cut lever-and-screw presses would function very similarly to the facility described for Junçal, although their

estimated pressing capacity would be inferior, since the weights used were smaller.

Among these sites, Tapada da Ribeira do Alcogulo (from now on Alcogulo) is perhaps the most relevant. The rock-cut press was built on top of a horizontal, slightly sloped granite outcrop; it presents two parallel rectangular indentations for the lever fixation system, a press bed and a small rectangular tank at its lower side. Bordering the granite outcrop there is also the remains of a double-faced wall, typical of the early medieval construction, which suggest that this press was at least partially covered by a walled structure (fig. 7.C). Located just a few metres away there is evidence of another stone building, ceramic sherds, and two rock-cut graves, which reinforces the dating of the press as early medieval.

Rock-cut presses that only present a press bed and a tank suggest direct press mechanisms. These would be made entirely out of wood and would not require a beam system, yielding less, due to inferior press strength. Like lever presses, direct presses could be used for wine or oil extraction. On the other hand, basic tank facilities, consisting of one or several juxtaposed circular or rectangular vats, can be related solely to grape treading and thus wine production (fig. 8).

Another frequent find that we have chosen to consider are stone weights and stones with marks for beam supports (*lapides pedicini*). In Castelo de Vide 22 of these elements (4 beam supports and 18 granite weights) were documented in sites with evidence for early medieval occupation (fig. 10). All the documented stone weights in which it was possible to analyse their top section present evidence of screw press mechanisms.

There are an additional 19 press elements without context that could, at least in part, have been associated to Roman settlements (RICARDO 2017b). It is worth noting that 12 also present evidence of screw press mechanisms (RICARDO 2017b, pp. 1108-1109). It is currently accepted that screw presses were generalized in the Iberian Peninsula around the 3rd century, even though there is evidence of their use since the Flavian period, as well as the coexistence of lever-and-screw press systems (PEÑA CERVANTES 2010, pp. 43-44; ID. 2012; BURTON, LEWIT 2019). The fact that there seems to be no evidence of lever presses in Castelo de Vide could be an indicator that the existing Roman *torcularia* were only built at a later moment when screw press technology was already widespread in Hispania.

Concurrently, the fact that the technological knowledge to build lever-and-screw presses was available in the early medieval peasant societies is in itself a very significant matter. In several Mediterranean territories the adoption of new press technology has been linked to the active presence of landowners (LEWIT 2008), while further comparative analysis displayed the significance of press facilities in determining transformations in land use patterns (CHAVARRÍA, LEWIT, IZDEBSKI 2019).

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 OIL AND WINE: ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

Ideally, an analysis of early medieval press facilities should be able to determine the product being pressed. Unfortunately, even though wine and olive oil production present very distinct timings and procedures, from a material record perspective it is quite difficult to distinguish one production from the other.

Due to their physical structure, an effective olive oil production must start by crushing the olives. Elements for olive crushing are briefly mentioned – merely a typological inventory – by three classic authors: Cato (*De Agri Cultura*), Varro (*Rerum*

rusticarum libri tres) and Columella (*De Re Rustica*), but their exact correspondence in the material record has stirred debate (PEÑA CERVANTES 2014, pp. 233-237). This process would likely be done using stone mills, the remains of which are rather rare in press facilities (ID. 2010, p. 36). Hot water could be added during the crushing process to ensure a more homogeneous paste that was then transferred to a press surface, and more water could be added during the pressing as well (*ibid.*, p. 39). The result of the pressing process was a mixture of olive oil, water naturally present in the olives, and the added hot water. Olive oil would be separated from the watery components through decantation, which could be done manually or with more complex systems involving interconnected tanks (as those identified in Mascarro) or large ceramic vessels (*ibid.*, pp. 81-83).

The first step in wine production was grape treading, a straightforward process that is still the practice nowadays in traditional winemaking. Additionally, the remains of the treading process could be pressed mechanically, to enhance production. The treaded or pressed liquid was then transformed into wine through a natural fermentation process which demanded careful technical attention. The first fermentation phase could be done directly in the large vessels associated with treading or pressing, and would take about seven days (ID. 2014, p. 230). The second phase would be carried out in buildings specifically designated to this effect, called *cellae vinariae*, where the wine would rest for at least 6 months, and indefinitely for old wines (ID. 2010, p. 33). The second fermentation could be done in *cupae* (wooden barrels) or *dolia* (ceramic vessels), which could be partially or totally buried (*dolia de fossa*), a tendency that seemed to be influenced by local traditions and regional climate, since the temperature needed to be kept between 14 and 30 degrees Celsius for a correct fermentation (*ibid.*).

Thus, the only facilities that can be strictly associated with one or other production would be, for olive oil, elements for crushing and decantation, and for wine, treading surfaces and fermentation vessels/areas. Press facilities, either direct presses or lever presses, could be used for either wine or olive oil.

Furthermore, these same processes could also be carried out with elements built entirely with perishable materials: olive crushing could be done in leather sacks (*ibid.*, p. 37), and olive decantation, grape treading and fermentation in different kinds of wooden receptacles. In fact, it is highly likely that a whole range of transformation activities were carried out in structures entirely built in perishable materials, which are not represented in the archaeological record. These are the “silent productions” examined by Peña Cervantes (ID. 2014, pp. 218-228). For these reasons, it is currently accepted that the most accurate way to determine the type of product that was transformed in archaeological presses is by identifying conclusive carpological remains or by chemically analysing residues from the pressing surfaces (BRUN 1993; PEÑA CERVANTES 2010, p. 49; ID. 2017, p. 57; PECCI, CAU, GARNIER 2013).

For the early medieval presses of Castelo de Vide’s territory such residue analyses are still not available, although samples were collected at Junçal. From the range of early medieval transformation facilities identified in Castelo de Vide, only basic rock-cut tanks can be prudently linked to the treading of grapes, and thus wine production.

Olive tree charcoal fragments were collected at the press facility of Junçal, a reliable indicator that this was an olive press. In Tapada das Guaritas II, Trench 2 preserves evidence of a lever-and-screw press mechanism, but there is no additional proof to determine what product was being transformed in this facility. The building excavated in Trench 1 contained many

large ceramic vessels and was certainly a storehouse. It would seem logical to assume this was a fermentation room for wine. However, there is also a fireplace inside, and we believe its use would hardly be compatible with the thermal stability needed to ensure good preservation of fermenting wine. The hearth could be used for warming water, suitable for crushing and pressing olives, but is just as likely that this building would also function as seasonal living quarters.

We propose that the press identified in Tapada das Guaritas II was also an olive oil press. In fact, with due caution, we are proposing that the early medieval press facilities built inside stone buildings would be primarily associated to the production of oil. This hypothesis needs further archaeological validation, but considering the fact that wine production is overall less demanding, it could certainly be ensured in rock-cut tanks or with modest facilities made of wood components, not requiring the sort of large investment intrinsic to a stone walled facility.

4.2 DATING, USE SEQUENCES AND PRODUCTION SCALE

Another aspect that deserves a more detailed analysis is the dating of the early medieval press facilities of Castelo de Vide. The two samples from Tapada das Guaritas II presented above are the only absolute chronologies available so far. This is because in the granitic acidic soils of the region there are very few organic finds suitable for radiocarbon dating, combined with limited funding. Secondly, since we are analysing rural settlements with local pottery production, material culture comparisons are equally restricted as a dating tool.

Our current timeline for the early medieval settlements in Castelo de Vide's territory is that they started to develop during an imprecise moment after the 5th century, since both building techniques and material culture present none of the typical features of the Roman period, pointing to a very profound change in technical skills. Formally and technologically the pottery is similar to that found in other central Iberian settlements that were in use during the 6th and the 7th centuries (VIGIL-ESCALERA 2007). For all six excavated settlements there is no evidence for destructive or violent episodes and their structural decay appears to be very slow. We believe this happened during the first half of the 8th century, as suggested by the radiocarbon samples of Tapada das Guaritas II. Simultaneously, there is no evidence for intensive occupation sequences: the buildings have no structural reforms and there are no overlapping use levels or accumulations of discarded pottery that might suggest otherwise. Furthermore, Islamic style pottery or building techniques that might bring the occupation sequences to a latter period are also lacking. It is more likely that the countryside infrastructure manifested by these rural settlements in northern Alentejo was no longer viable in face of the progressive administrative changes that the Iberian Peninsula faced from the 8th century onwards.

Two centuries is certainly a broad interval to frame the building, occupation and abandonment sequence of all these farmsteads. The settlements excavated by the PramCV project are very coherent in terms of material culture, building techniques and use sequences. We believe that they were occupied mainly throughout the 6th and the 7th centuries. But considering the available evidence it is not yet possible to attest if they were all built and used simultaneously. It is possible there are slight chronological differences that we have not been able to determine.

Even so, it is our understanding that these finds are evidence of a coherent moment when the early medieval countryside was structured by small scale farmsteads and where oil and wine production played an important role. Based on criteria of spatial

proximity, we are considering both the excavated settlements with presses, the rock-cut facilities and other press elements correlated to early medieval finds.

It is of course rather difficult to accurately date press elements without clear archaeological contexts, and to date tanks or stone weights solely based on their size or technical execution can be misleading. However, we must note that in the territory of Castelo de Vide, stone weights from Roman sites are usually larger (around 75-100 cm height), cylindrical, built in fine-grained granite and present well executed symmetrical notches. On the other hand, stone weights that have been identified in early medieval settlements were built in coarse-grained granites, are conic or trunk shaped and overall less carefully executed. A prominent example of this aspect is the stone weight from Junçal, with two use phases, as previously explained. Likewise, stone weights identified near rock-cut facilities are usually small and somewhat asymmetrical, as we can see in the case of Alcolgulo. Thus, it seems conceivable to suggest that, at least for the most part, post-Roman stone weights were smaller and unevenly carved (fig. 9).

Documental sources, iconographic representations and archaeological data widely reflect the importance of wine and oil in the Roman agricultural economy and way of life (MATTINGLY 1988). Concurrently, it has been suggested that these industries would be substantially reduced in the post-Roman period, when agricultural practices became more diverse and less specialized (VIGIL-ESCALERA QUIRÓS CASTILLO 2013). This is in part because the volume of data for the post-Roman period is still limited, and thus our capacity to adequately frame these productions severely compromised.

For the Iberian Peninsula the most comprehensive works about this subject have been carried out by Peña Cervantes (2010, 2012, 2014, 2017, among others)³. Iberian archaeological sites where transformation facilities for wine and/or olive oil have been identified in use during the post-Roman period can be broadly divided in three main groups: (1) Roman villas with *torcularia* that remain active after the collapse of the western Roman state, mostly places in the province of Lusitania – such as Olival dos Telhões (Almendra, Guarda), Torre de Palma (Monforte, Portalegre) (MALONEY, HALE 1996) and La Sevillana (Esparragosa de Lares, Badajoz) – where wine and olive oil production was maintained into the 6th century (PEÑA CERVANTES 2010, p. 193); (2) Roman sites where new press facilities are built in post-Roman times, a rare phenomenon documented in the villas of Vilauba (Pujarnol, Gerona) and El Saucedo (Talavera La Nueva, Toledo) (PEÑA CERVANTES 2017, p. 61); and (3) Visigothic contexts where production structures are built *ex novo*, near old villas, in places such as La Solana (Cubelles, Tarragona) and Sanitja (Menorca) (PEÑA CERVANTES 2010, p. 193), or in new peasant settlements, such as Gózquez (Madrid) (VIGIL-ESCALERA, QUIRÓS CASTILLO 2013, p. 384) or El Cuquero (Villanueva del Conde, Salamanca) (ARIÑO, BARBERO, DÍAZ 2005). Concurrently, there are several other examples of Lusitanian villas where Roman *torcularia* were completely altered during the post-Roman phase, as in the case of Monte da Salsa (Sarpa) (LARRAZÁBAL 2014), with no further evidence for the continuity of wine or oil production.

Considering these categories, settlements like Junçal and Tapada das Guaritas II would fit into group 3 and it is possible that Mascarro would fit into the second group. We still lack stratigraphic evidence to adequately characterize the last phases of the Roman villas from the territory of Castelo de Vide, so it

³ For a framework on the Mediterranean please see BRUN 2003, pp. 7-13.

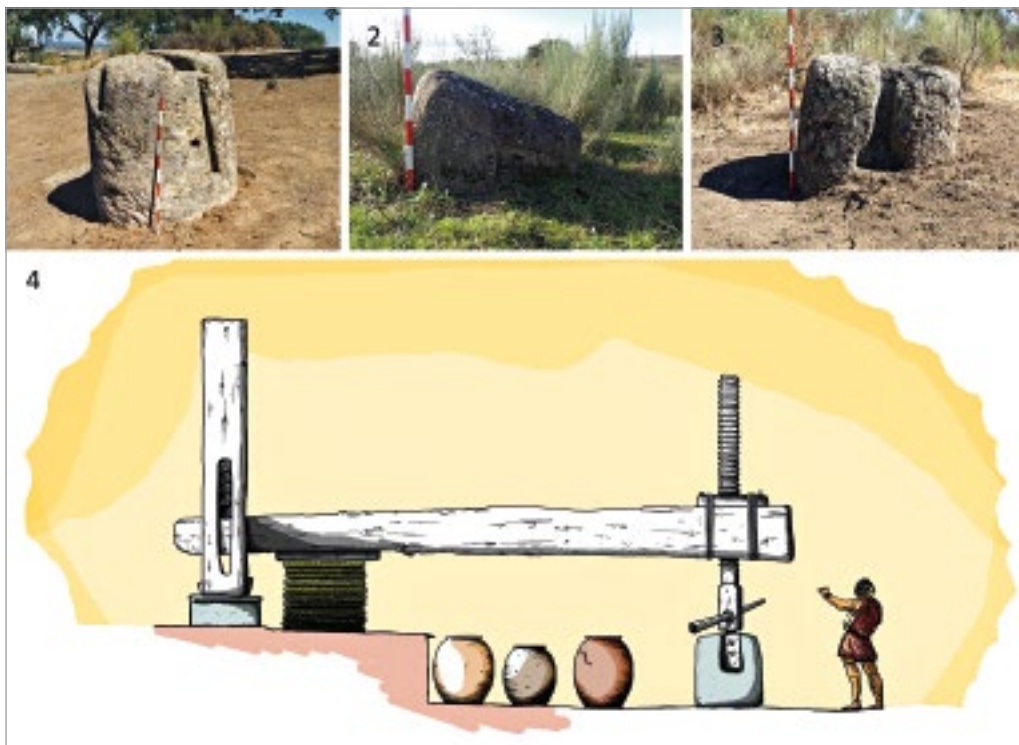


fig. 9 – Examples of lever-and-screw press weights. 1) Large weight from the Roman villa of Tapada Grande (© SAC-MCV); 2) Weight from the early medieval rock-cut press of Vale Silvano; 3) Weight from early medieval press building of Tapada das Guaritas II. Reconstruction of a lever-and-screw press mechanism. Drawing: F. Cuesta-Gómez, based on the model by J.P. Brun (1986, fig. 149).

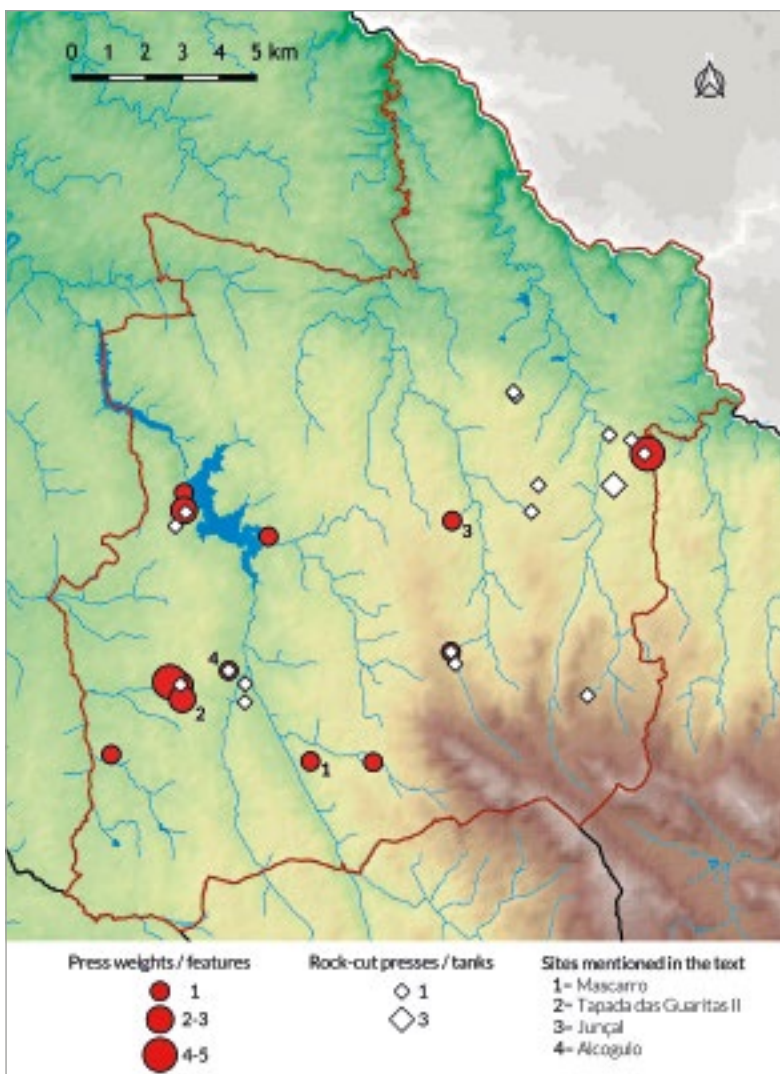


fig. 10 – Distribution of press facilities in the territory of Castelo de Vide mentioned in the text.

is not possible to determine if any of these settlements behaved as the Lusitanian villas of group 1. In some areas there is enough overlap with early medieval finds – such as rock-cut graves – to suggest that at least some parts of the villas remained partially in use in post-Roman times, as seems to be the case in Mascarro. Nonetheless we do not believe that the early Roman press facilities continued to be used in this territory beyond the 5th century.

Even though there is evidence to sustain that wine and olive oil production were maintained in this territory during the early medieval period, the new production scale would not be adequate for the use of the Roman *torcularia*, both in terms of necessary work investment – force and amount of workers needed to operate this facilities (see LEWIT 2012, p. 134) –, and in terms of the interest in renovating these possibly damaged old large presses. If we consider that this post-Roman countryside is based on small farmsteads, and that each household unit would manage its production processes to an extent, it seems likely that the amount of product available for pressing in each production cycle (olives and/or grapes) would be substantially lower than the volumes managed by previous Roman estates. We must also take into account that the maintenance of the wooden components of beam presses was very demanding and would degrade in a very short time without proper maintenance (PEÑA CERVANTES 2014, p. 225).

In Mascarro we know that some of the Roman buildings were compartmentalized and reused in the early medieval period, as evidenced by sector D. In Sector A (*torcularium*) there are no clear indicators of overlapping use levels, and so we lack archaeological data to determine if the press was still in use in post-Roman times, although our hypothesis goes against it.

Additionally, rock-cut tanks and press facilities can also be understood within the early medieval rural settlement system. The main distinction between these facilities would be their productive capacity. If we accept that in some moment of the early medieval period these different types of structures were simultaneously in use, then they would reflect the coexistence of separate production scales.

Lever-and-screw presses, like Junçal and Tapada das Guaritas II, could be evidence of larger scale production, mainly focused on surplus accumulation, that would justify the initial investment in such buildings, while rock-cut tanks and presses could relate to smaller production, mainly for self-consumption or limited local exchanges. If this hypothesis is correct, this would be the first significant proof of social-economic differentiation between the analysed sites (*fig.* 10).

Likewise, it seems quite evident that these different press structures reflect individualized productions. From a strictly productive point of view, the use of large presses would be more cost-effective than the processing of smaller quantities in different presses. In this sense, while a single large press would be indicative of centralized production, several smaller presses would reflect the interests of small production (LEWIT 2012, p. 135).

It is also necessary to consider the role that the Tapada das Guaritas II storage building could have played. The most linear explanation would be that it had only been used to store the processed product transformed in the press of the same complex, predictably the largest in this area. But another possibility would be for Tapada das Guaritas II to function as a place to accumulate production surplus from its own press and other nearby productions. An aspect that seems to reinforce this notion is the fact that Tapada das Guaritas II is located in Vale de Galegos, an area associated with a Roman roadway where remains of press facilities are very abundant: apart from the screw press and storage building (Tapada das Guaritas II), there

are 2 rock-cut screw press facilities (Vale Silvano and Tapada da Ribeira do Alcolgulo), a rock-cut tank (Monte da Cabeça) and 5 press elements without context.

An accumulation of processed product could correspond to a centralization of production prior to distribution. In any event, this profusion of press facilities suggests a production that exceeds self-consumption needs.

4.3 LOCAL ELITES, TAXES AND THE MANAGEMENT OF THE PRODUCTION PROCESS

Based on the data available so far, we believe there is enough archaeological evidence to suggest the coexistence of different production scales concerning the oil and/or wine production in the early medieval settlements analysed in the territory of Castelo de Vide. On the one hand, productions directed mainly towards self-consumption and limited local exchange, and on the other, productions directed towards the accumulation of surpluses and product outlets.

In this context, oil and wine surplus production in the post-Roman countryside could incorporate a logic of rent payments or other type of tax burden or be intended for regional trade. Both hypotheses would necessarily lead to the integration of these peasant settlements into a scheme of vertical social relations. Unfortunately, the scarcity of data on early medieval rural settlement in the other territories of the Alto Alentejo – only in the neighbouring territory of Marvão does there seem to be archaeological evidence for early medieval press facilities (OLIVEIRA, PEREIRA 2012, p. 175) – makes it difficult to establish whether all the peasant settlements in the region would have been oriented towards this type of production, which would help to frame their relative importance.

It seems difficult for these processes to be managed directly from the scale of the peasant family units. However, there is no evidence that these different farms functioned as a self-recognized group. On the contrary, the absence of shared cemeteries or other communal work areas (such as the press facilities), and the presence, in turn, of family funeral areas, directly associated with residential buildings, together with the large amount of press structures, are indicators that each farm functioned as an individualized group. In this context, we must consider whether surplus production was managed directly by each family or if there were distinguished settlements capable of centralizing local production, as previously suggested for the storage building of Tapada das Guaritas II.

If prominent social groups were operating in this territory, we should consider how it would be possible to identify them in the material record. The examined peasant settlements are quite consistent, both in terms of material culture, layout and building features. Sites that in other territories have traditionally been linked to the presence of local elites, such as the hillforts or strongholds (TENTE, MARTÍN VISO 2012), have not been documented in this region so far. Likewise, no indicators of direct control networks – such as epigraphic slates (MARTÍN VISO 2013) – were identified.

There are, however, some elements that could be described as luxury goods: the cobalt blue glass beads recovered from Tapada das Guaritas II; glass fragments (that could not be discarded as residual pieces from the Roman period) at Junçal and Mascarro; and copper and bronze ornaments in early medieval cist graves previously excavated (RODRIGUES 1975). Since the production of glass and bronze goods was likely carried out beyond the peasant sphere, their presence is significant. Whether these material elements respond to commerce processes (market trade) or exchange processes (redistribution, gifts), either in vertical

or horizontal circuits, are possibilities that must be addressed in the future.

For the early medieval villages and farms of the centre of the Iberian Peninsula glass and bronze artefacts were interpreted as prestige goods, indicating the existence of certain individuals within the peasant settlements that would maintain direct associations with outside elites (VIGIL-ESCALERA, QUIRÓS CASTILLO 2013, p. 337). On the other hand, recent research has demonstrated other ways by which social differentiation could be established in early medieval societies, aspects not always visible in the material record that also need to be considered, such as food consumption patterns (QUIRÓS CASTILLO 2016).

Another strong indicator of broader contacts with rural settlements from the territory of Castelo de Vide is the presence of two *tremissis* in Mascarro. This type of coin has also been linked to the presence of local elites who would manage to keep direct or indirect relations with the Visigothic central power (MARTÍN VIÑO 2008). By interpreting oil and wine surpluses as a way of tax payments, we could place the peasant communities at the base of these interactions, and at the far end we would have the central power, as suggested by these coins. Though direct relations between these two circles must be ruled out, these dynamics reinforce the authority of local elites.

It has been suggested that ecclesiastic centres played an important role in the management of wine production (PEÑA CERVANTES 2008). One of the most outstanding examples in the province of Lusitania comes from the villa of Monte da Salsa (Brinches, Serpa). Excavations carried out in the mid-20th century uncovered an undetermined number of *dolia*, apparently preserved *in situ*, marked with a stamp that according to A. Viana (1955, pp. 3-5) read: +ECLESIAE SCE MARIE / LACANTENSIA AGRIPi. More recently, during development-led projects, four additional fragments were identified with this same stamp in three locations in the city of Moura (Beja) (MACIAS, GASPAS, VALENTE 2016, pp. 41-42). According to A. Canto (1997, pp. 155-157) the stamp would read: (cross) *Eclesi(a)e S(an)cte Mari(a)e / Lacaltens(is). i(n). Agripi. Lacalt(a)* could be the Roman name of the city of Moura and *Agripi* a reference to a micro-toponym where the church of Santa Maria would be situated. In its turn, the villa of Monte da Salsa (located 20 km south-west) would be a rural settlement that belonged to this urban church (PEÑA CERVANTES 2008, p. 352). However, it's worth noting that both sites – Moura and Monte da Salsa – present evidence of press facilities, which could rather be an indicator that both areas functioned as wine presses belonging to the same religious centre (*ibid.*, pp. 352-353).

While it seems clear that the early medieval peasant settlements in the territory of Castelo de Vide are integrated into economic and social interactions that exceed local exchange, it is yet not possible to propose a satisfactory model for the management of these processes and their regional significance. Additional research is needed to adequately frame the meaning of these industries.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the archaeological evidence from the territory of Castelo de Vide we know that during the 6th and the 7th centuries there is a significant production of olive oil and wine. During this period, a new dispersed settlement pattern emerges (PRATA 2019), based on small farmsteads where new press facilities with different productive capacities co-exist. Some are technologically equivalent to the previous Roman lever presses,

but smaller, and thus its production capacity would necessarily be inferior. Sites such as Junçal and Tapada das Guaritas II show that large stone structures were being built to harbour these lever-and-screw press mechanisms, while rock-cut facilities suggest smaller presses in the open air, or partly enclosed by either stone or wooden structures, as could be the case in Alcolgulo. Simultaneously, we witness the use of rather basic systems, such as rock-cut tanks, which would be used simply for the treading of grapes.

In this paper we have presented the first set of evidence for early medieval oil and wine and elaborated on its possible local significance. The scarcity of botanical remains and available analysis makes it difficult to safely determine if these press facilities were used for oil or wine making, however, it is our current understanding that the lever-and-screw presses would be constructed fundamentally for the more demanding olive oil production, while the basic rock cut tanks were indicative of winemaking.

Evidence for significant oil and wine production in the early medieval countryside further redefines our understanding of this complex period. It shows that in the context of a dispersed settlement based on small farmsteads, there is enough stability to be able to keep olive groves and vineyards, and invest time and resources in the construction and maintenance of press facilities, some of which were quite large buildings built specifically for this function. It also shows that the complex knowledge of how to build and operate lever-and-screw press mechanisms was maintained in the post-Roman centuries.

Henceforth, we must expand the borders of our analysis and determine if these productions were a regional tendency in these inland territories of former Lusitania. For now, the fact that there were early medieval peasants consolidated to such an extent that they were able to build and use press facilities further questions outdated notions of an isolated self-consumption focused countryside. On the contrary, as we have shown, the production of olive oil and wine suggests the integration of these peasant communities in larger social and economic relations, and the intervention of local elites. Understanding the balance between peasant agency and the mediation of outside powers is among our future concerns.

Another question raised by the production of oil in early medieval settlements is whether during this period the use of ancient Roman olive groves was maintained. This hypothesis of the reuse of arboreal resources, which is difficult to validate archaeologically, could be an additional element to explain the spatial overlap documented between the old Roman properties and some of the new early medieval settlements, in addition to the previously recognised reuse of building materials. On this issue, we are certain that several answers can be found through a critical analysis of the early medieval phases of former villa estates, and for this reason, controlled excavations at such sites should be a research priority.

Although the number of early medieval press structures documented in the Iberian countryside is at present very low, we are confident that at least the neighbouring territories preserve additional material evidence similar to the sites we have examined. Particularly in survey reports and inventories, there still seems to be a tendency to attribute remains of press facilities and stone weights to other time periods (Roman or Modern), even when these are evidently associated with finds such as rock-cut graves and early medieval pottery. This is in part due to persisting misconceptions about the post-Roman centuries, and overall unfamiliarity with early medieval material cultural and architectural features, a tendency we hope will soon shift.

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