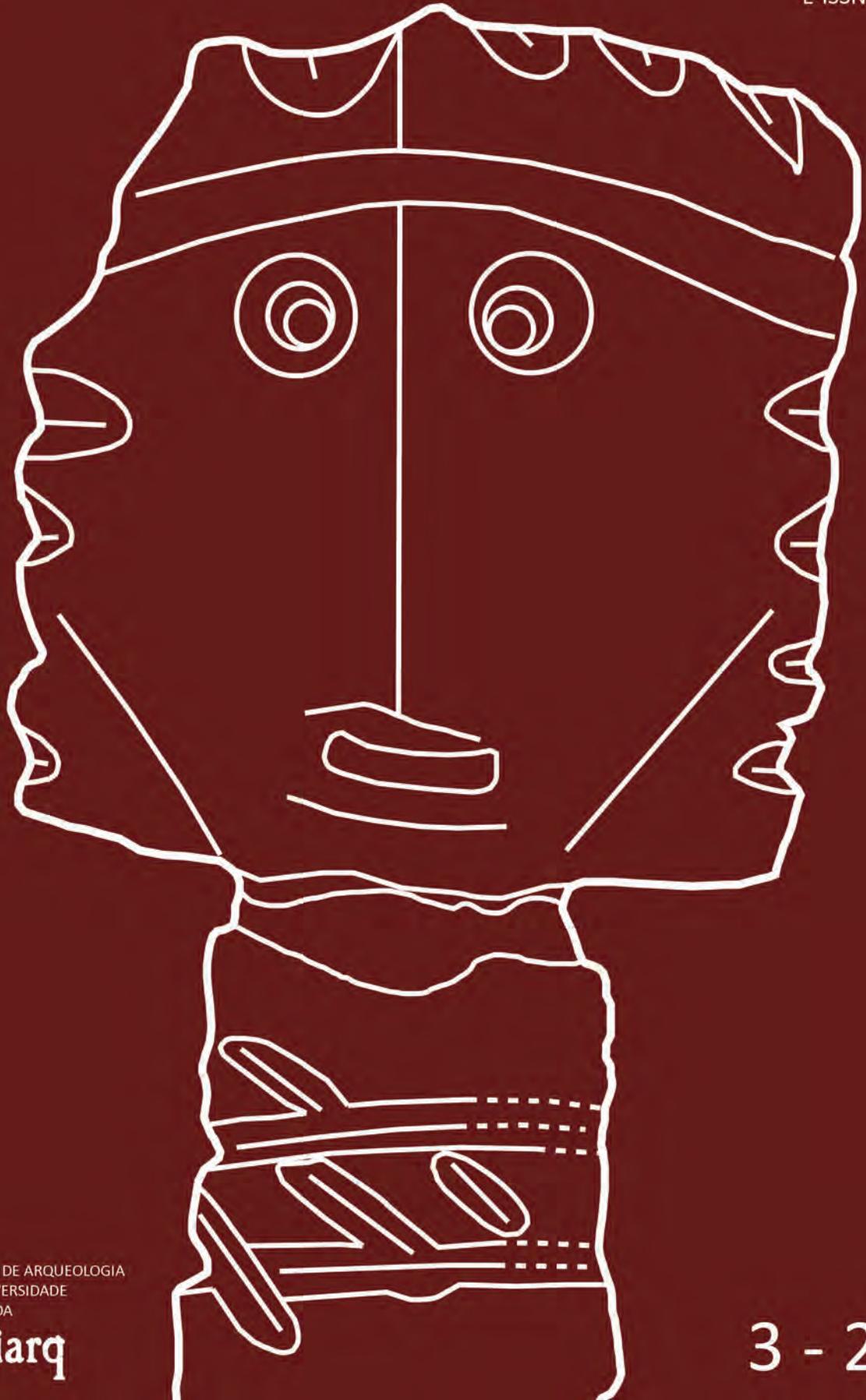


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## 400 YEARS OF WATER CONSUMPTION: EARLY MODERN POTTERY CUPS IN PORTUGAL

## 400 ANOS DE CONSUMO DE ÁGUA: PÚCAROS DA IDADE MODERNA EM PORTUGAL

TÂNIA MANUEL CASIMIRO<sup>1</sup>  
SARAH NEWSTEAD<sup>2</sup>

### ABSTRACT

This paper aims to provide an analysis of the production and consumption of drinking cups in Portugal examining their productive and decorative characteristics and establishing their relation with the ingestion of water between the 15th and 18th centuries. Although drinking cups started to be used much earlier, during the early modern age an international demand for such objects emerges. This fame will take them to places from Northern Europe to the New World where their colour, taste and smell were highly appreciated.

**Keywords:** pottery cups, water consumption, smell, taste.

### RESUMO

O presente artigo tem como objectivo uma análise da produção e consumo de púcaros em Portugal, atendendo às suas características produtivas e decorativas, estabelecendo a sua relação com o consumo de água entre os séculos XV e XVIII. A produção de púcaros em barro, utilizados para o consumo de água será certamente uma tradição mais recuada, contudo, foi durante a época moderna que os púcaros portugueses desenvolvem uma fama internacional, que os faz serem exportados em grandes quantidades para locais como o Norte da Europa ou as colónias do novo mundo onde a sua cor, cheiro e o sabor que fornecem os fez serem apreciados.

**Palavras-chave:** púcaros, consumo de água, cheiro, sabor.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

It is not clear when ceramic drinking cups (known as *púcaros* in Portuguese) started to be made in Portugal. Most likely this habit of drinking water from unglazed ceramic cups started in previous periods. Nevertheless when we reach the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century the number of these objects increases significantly in the archaeological record. About 50 years later these *púcaros* are found and produced everywhere in the country (fig. 1) and by the 17<sup>th</sup> century they are in demand not only in Portugal and its colonies, but also in other European countries and their colonies as well (Casimiro - Newstead 2019).

There is still a paucity of research when it comes to everyday Portuguese coarse red wares which goes beyond basic identification. The usual paper on this topic presents a simple description of form, focused on basic typologies. Discussions about manufacture, decorations, consumption, distribution and what can these objects tell us about cultural, social, economic and even symbolic activities have only recently emerged in the literature (Newstead 2012, Casimiro 2014, Newstead - Casimiro 2015, Newstead - Casimiro forthcoming). Cups and other water related objects are usually included in the category of domestic pottery that people acquired and used abundantly,



**Fig. 1** - Map of Portugal with the places mentioned in the text.

with high consumption and breakage rates, but, as we will see, these were not the only reasons that made people discard large amounts of drinking objects.

## 2. THE OBJECTS AND THEIR USE

Although there is variability in the type of production, and these items change according to different locations and different times, these had similar features related to the fact that they shared similar functions. For the purpose of this paper a *púcaro* or drinking cup is a small vessel made of red clay which takes approximately between 180 to 350 ml of water. The size of these objects is not random and it is related to the measures in use in Portugal at the time. Their contents are related to the *quartilho* (approx. 350 ml) and the  $\frac{1}{2}$  *quartilho* (approx. 180 ml). We cannot be sure that other liquids were consumed from these vessels, but the majority of early modern documents mentioning the use of such vessels always relate them to water and the properties these passed to this liquid (Vasconcellos 1921: 16).

A major concern of consumers was to maintain these vessels new, tasty, and releasing their aroma, a concern that is well explained in some documents (Leão 2002). When the vessels got old they lost their characteristics and were discarded. This is why large amounts of these objects are found discarded in near new condition.

Their shape can be considered regular and these small globular vessels with one handle and small necks do not change greatly during four centuries (fig. 2). However the use of water in domestic environments associated to pottery was not only to relieve thirst. Recently some objects have appeared in archaeological contexts which had only one function: to contain water. This water was not to drink but just to have a pot that was wet and releasing an earthen smell. This seems to have been the case with a type of plate or large bowl decorated in their inner surfaces with small quartz stones creating patterns, entangled strings of clay (fig. 3) or little ceramic aquatic animals, such as snakes and frogs and even shells, such as the one found in Campo das Cebolas (fig. 4). People would fill these objects with water and while evaporating they would smell "like sunburnt earth exhaling after a rainfall" (Magalotti 1695), according to a 17<sup>th</sup> century Italian author who describes the use of Portuguese red ware vessels. Although these seem extraordinary objects we do not know that much about them at the moment. We are only aware of their manufacture in Lisbon

and possibly Coimbra. They are open shapes (deep plates or large bowls) with decoration all over their inner surface. People would fill them with water and they would exhale comforting earthen aromas into the rooms, just as Magalotti described. They are usually found in contexts associated to domestic occupations although some have also been found in Hospital Real de Todos-os-Santos (Bargão - Ferreira 2016: 234), which may be related to the type of healthy environment that it was expected to exist in an hospital, ridding the space of unhealthy 'miasma'. The highly decorated inner surfaces would possibly be even more interesting when filled with water.

### 3. PRODUCTION AREAS

Every city in Portugal produced its own drinking cups. These were quite regular in shape across the country, with no accountable decoration, and used by the local populations. However, there were some areas which became famous for their cups. The characteristics that made them special were mostly related to the colour or decoration of the objects, as well as to the smell and taste they gave to water. Estremoz, Montemor-o-Novo, Aveiro, Coimbra and Lisbon are the areas which had a high demand of their products in Portugal and abroad. A word must be said about a type of *púcaros* known to have been made in Maia. These are referred to in at least two documents (one from late 16<sup>th</sup> – 1599 - and the other from mid-17<sup>th</sup> century - 1647) (Leão 2002, Serafim 2011: 289). In spite of the growing research we have not been able to locate where this place was in Portugal. The only large city with this name nowadays is located near Porto, in the north of the country. Nevertheless in the documents revealing this production centre they always mention it together with the high Alentejo productions and we are still in doubt where it was located.

The most famous production area is probably Estremoz. According to early modern writers, such as Duarte Nunes de Leão (a document from 1599), the finest quality water drinking *púcaros* were produced in Estremoz. These had a very distinctive look, with dark red colours, some of them being burnished while others were decorated with inlaid white stones or incisions. They become popular not only due to their decoration but also due to their distinctive smell and taste. Even today the objects sold as souvenirs in this city present the same smell and taste. This attribute seems to survive even in archaeological objects (Casimiro - Newstead 2019, Newstead -

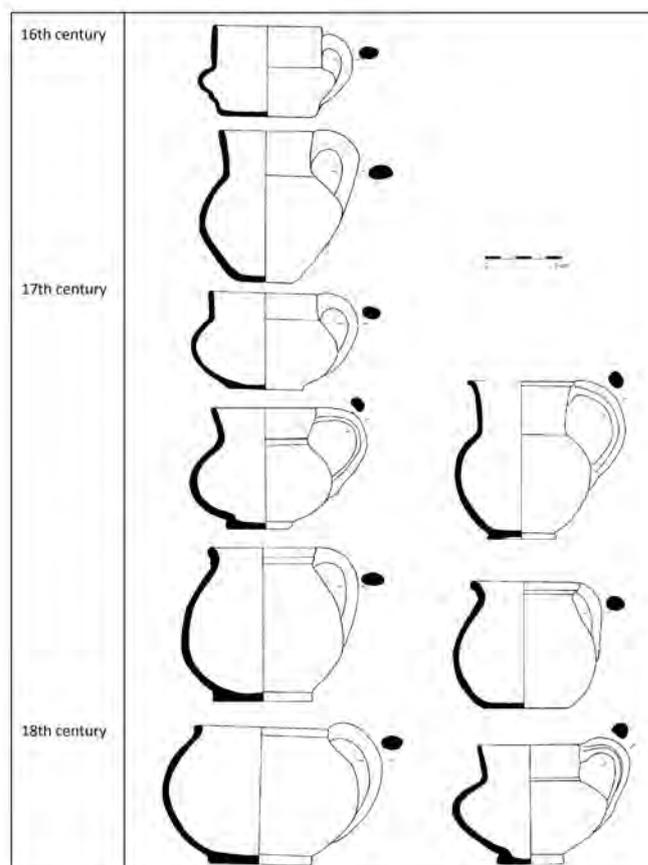


Fig. 2 - Different cup forms (16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century).



Fig. 3 - Bottom of plate decorated with entangled clay strings (Almada – Rua da Judiaria- 17<sup>th</sup> century).

Casimiro forthcoming).

Initially it was believed that these inlaid quartz decorations were exclusively made in Estremoz, though we now know that Lisbon was clearly another large production centre producing these 'Estremoz type' vessels (fig. 5). We are still not certain if the Lisbon potters were actively copying Estremoz designs (as Estremoz productions had the reputation as the highest quality drinking cups, reserved for



**Fig. 4** - Bottom of redware plate with shell impressions found in Campo das Cebolas, 17<sup>th</sup> century (courtesy by Cláudia R. Manso).



**Fig. 5** - Inlaid quartz decorated cup (Almada - Rua da Judiaria- 17<sup>th</sup> century).

super-elite consumers), or whether it was a separate tradition, although Duarte Nunes de Leão only refers to this decoration made in Estremoz. A few centuries later, the tradition spreads to a city close to Estremoz called Nisa, where it flourishes in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The reputation of the Estremoz cups, as well as other water recipients, providing a special taste to the water endures until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A report made in 1906 about the match factory in Lordelo do Ouro (Porto) mentions that all of the employees were well



**Fig. 6** - Montemor-o-Novo cup (Castelo de Montemor-o-Novo, 17<sup>th</sup> century).

taken care of and special concern is given with their health. Everyone had access to water to drink kept inside Estremoz vases (*Boletim do Trabalho Industrial* 1906: 5).

Montemor-o-Novo is also described in Duarte Nunes de Leão's book where he mentions: *Other cups exist, which are produced in Montemor-o-Novo [...] these are cups that never become old as the ones from other places: the reason is that these cups are made with a sort of clay which possesses a very pleasant smell, tempered with many small stones and sometimes it seems that there are as many stones as there are clay. When people want to use these cups they scratch the cups' surface and reveal new stones giving the vessels a new look. This happens every time that someone wants to make a cup look like new or recovering the scent these had when new, making new small stones appear.* The main characteristic of this pottery is the large amount of small white stones included in the clay (Gomes - Casimiro 2018) (fig. 6). Both the Montemor-o-Novo and Estremoz productions are located in a relatively small area in central Portugal, which has some similarities in its underlying geology which could account for the unusually scented vessels.

Much like the Estremoz pottery, scent played a major role in the reasons why Montemor-o-Novo cups were popular. The pottery from this High Alentejo village is famous around the country. A letter written by Vicente de Nogueira in 1647 has interesting information about these cups. He orders that a dozen of such cups are sent to him, although these were not regular cups. Neither of them could be larger than two *quartilhos* (approx. 600 ml) or smaller than 1/2 *quartilho* (approx. 180 ml), and the rim could not be everted since it made him spill his water (Serafim 2011: 289).

In the Aveiro region, ceramics are recognized by their highly micaceous orange body, more micaceous than any other major production zone in the country (Bettencourt - Carvalho 2008, Barbosa - Casimiro - Manaia 2009). Cups from the Aveiro region were consumed all over Northern Portugal and exported in large amounts to Galicia, Northern Europe and the New World with large amounts being found in Newfoundland (Newstead 2014). They are morphologically quite similar to the Lisbon productions although a large portion of it these objects are decorated with vertical burnished lines which gave them a distinct look (fig. 7).

Coimbra is probably one of the most under studied pottery production centres in Portugal, despite the beautiful design attributes of the earthenware vessels which were made there. We are still working on the full identification criteria for earthenware productions from Coimbra during the early modern period, however, we know that it was a highly variable production. Cups and other water pottery were either plain red or highly decorated with very bright red walls painted, and sometimes incised, in white (Casimiro - Newstead 2019; Silva 2019) (fig. 8).

Lisbon was the largest city in the country and the centre which had the highest number of redware kilns in the early modern period. In 1552 a document mentions the existence of 60 redware kilns (Brandão 1990), although just a few have been found (Marques - Leitão - Botelho 2012, Cardoso *et. al.* 2017). When excavating urban sites in Lisbon, it is easy to understand the scale of that production. Red ware cups were produced by the thousands and often discarded with minor damage or as they became old and did not pass to the water the necessary attributes of coolness, taste and smell. This led to large archaeological deposits forming, meaning that water drinking cups are recovered archaeologically in significant quantities (Fig. 9). The number of cups in these collections permits us to see the variability within these objects: some cups are taller, more globular, with larger rim diameters than the others, for example (Casimiro - Gomes forthcoming).

During the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century the archaeological record starts to present a new type of earthenware decoration made in Lisbon, known as moulded decoration. Although it becomes very popular for cups to be moulded in this fashion, this decoration is also found on other vessel types, such as bowls and jars (fig. 10). There is quite a bit of skill and creativity demonstrated in these vessels, and a



**Fig. 7** - Aveiro cup (Baiona, Galiza).



**Fig. 8** - Cup found in Coimbra (17<sup>th</sup> century).



**Fig. 9** - Lisbon cups (Carnide, 17<sup>th</sup> century).



**Fig. 10** - Lisbon moulded cup/bowl (Almada – Rua da Judiaria- 17<sup>th</sup> century).

wide range of moulded styles have been recovered archaeologically. At the same time these objects also start to be decorated with male, female and mythological busts, possibly a Renaissance influence (fig. 11). It is difficult at this point to know if these objects were as widespread across social contexts as the plain water cups were. We know that they are more regularly found in wealthier contexts, but they are certainly not absent from poor domestic contexts either; just found in smaller quantities. We also know that these moulded vessels were exported widely and they appear quite often in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century paintings from Spain (António de Pereda) and Northern Europe (Frans Francken the Younger) (Sánchez 1978).

#### 4. WRITTEN AND ICONOGRAPHIC EVIDENCE

From the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, cups and other water related objects become so important in

Portuguese society that written evidence starts to appear about them. In 1507 King Manuel's mother's will mentions that several cups, made in different parts of the country, were being left as assets to a convent in Beja (Vasconcellos 1921). A few years later, the daughter of this same king married Carlos V and several cups are present in her dowry (Gomes - Casimiro 2018). Estremoz cups are a frequent find in Portuguese probate inventories although that written evidence has never been summarized. However, the most interesting testimony is the aforementioned description of Portugal by Duarte Nunes de Leão (2002), written in 1599 and published for the first time in 1610. The author describes several water cup production centres and the characteristics of each one of these. Duarte Nunes de Leão's presentation of this detailed information signifies how important these cups had become in Portugal, particularly within the Portuguese royal court and elite societies (Leão 2002).

Redware drinking cups appear regularly in paintings by Portuguese and European painters. In one of Cristovão Figueiredo's paintings *O Trânsito da Virgem* (mid 16<sup>th</sup> century) it is possible to see how redware cups could be used. In this scene the cup is presented, filled with water, together with a lusterware bowl, thus confirming its elite/luxury connections. However, earthenware cups in Portugal are archaeologically being found in all types of early modern domestic contexts from poor dwellings to rich palaces. Everyone drank from these objects. A foreign visitor to King Sebastião's court was taken by surprise when he saw the king drinking from one of these cups during a meal, intrigued by the fact that the king was not drinking from a silver vessel, which was common in other courts around Europe (Vasconcellos 1921).

Josefa de Óbidos, active in the mid-late 17<sup>th</sup> century, is probably the Portuguese painter who represented the greatest amount of these objects in her paintings. These vessels are always associated in de Obidos' still natures to rich table settings, sweets and cakes, potentially signifying the social connection these types of vessels had with sweetening water, and, for some chroniclers, female vanity.

The Velázquez painting, *Las Meninas* (1656) is possibly one of the best known iconographic representations of the use of a Portuguese redware cup, so similar to the ones found in archaeological contexts. The vessel is being used to drink from, so this is once again a confirmation that these vessels were the choice of Iberian nobility to drink water

from and not silver or even glass, as was common in most other parts of Western Europe. This is the same activity that was performed by thousands of people every day in Portugal and abroad.

## 5. WORLD DISTRIBUTION

Portuguese drinking pottery was well appreciated outside of Portugal. These objects are found in every country where Portugal had colonies and in countries that traded with Portuguese cities using well established and traditional trading routes.

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of March and 23<sup>rd</sup> of July 1687 two ships set sail from Lisbon towards England to Topsham and London. Among the various cargos were two boxes of Estremoz pottery (Casimiro 2011), although we are not aware if this was actually Estremoz production or Lisbon wares replicating the High Alentejo pottery. Drinking cups made in Portugal are frequently found in European countries such as Spain, England, the Low Countries and Germany (Bart 1992, Stephenson 2001, Gutierrez 2007). They seemed to have satisfied the curiosity of European consumers who also (sometimes!) enjoyed the taste and smell of water from these cups. Moulded vessels and small cups do appear in Dutch paintings depicting cabinets of curiosities and other collections, which suggest that these vessels were held in high regard outside of Portugal. We also know that, at least in Spanish and Italian courts, there was a thriving trade in the scent-laden drinking ceramics from Portugal which even drove an unusual habit of consuming small pieces of these ceramics for 'health' reasons, called '*bucarofagia*' (Saseña 2009: 43).

Although the publication of such objects is rare in the former Portuguese colonial territories, the consumption models for these vessels must have been similar to mainland Portuguese ones, although an ocean apart (Sorensen - Evans - Casimiro 2012). Portuguese people abroad often attempted to reproduce their Portuguese domestic lives in this new area of the world.

Portuguese drinking cups have also been found in English colonies in the New World such as Ferryland and St. John's (Newfoundland), and other settlements along the American eastern seaboard, such as Boston, Jamestown and St. Mary City (Virginia) (Casimiro - Newstead 2019). The non-Portuguese colonists were also attempting in some ways to reproduce the lifestyles they had in Europe, however the use of these Portuguese objects was probably slightly different than in Portuguese colonies. In



**Fig. 11** - Busts onced used to decorate cups (Almada – Rua da Judiaria- 17<sup>th</sup> century).

particular, fine Portuguese vessels were likely kept as status objects and curiosities, rather than an attempt to replicate European domestic life. For the English colonies, Portugal was a privileged trade partner so Portuguese pottery was quite accessible when English merchants acquired wine or olive oil in exchange for New World commodities in Portuguese ports (Newstead 2014).

## 6. CONCLUSION

The clearly elite connections present in the documents and visual records, combined with the widespread archaeological evidence that these cups were used in all levels of households in Portugal, suggests that the practice of drinking water from these delicate earthenware vessels was a very important part of Portuguese domestic practice; one that transcended class boundaries. It also provides clear evidence that production of these vessels was at a significant enough scale to allow for affordable (at least in some cases) and widespread acquisition within Portugal.

We are not aware of their price for the majority of the production centres. Occasionally some documents survive mentioning their cost. The average price for unglazed *púcaros* was around one or two *reais* (Fernandes 2012: 779) making them cheap objects, inexpensive enough to be thrown away once they lost their sensorial properties, stimulated by their color and the taste and smell they gave to water. This simple fact justifies the large amount of these objects found in archaeological sites. Once old they were discarded, possibly intentionally broken not to be used again by anyone. This could have happened to the open forms which function was just to contain water (figs 3 and 4), although they were probably kept for longer since their aesthetical proprieties

could continue to be appreciated even when old.

Because we find so many of these vessels, associated with other ceramic productions from Portugal, it is possible to accurately reconstruct the visual diversity within a Portuguese-style table setting from the early modern period. The bright red of these vessels would have been on the table with a variety of blue and white porcelains and tin glazed wares, creating interesting contrasts in colours, textures and even scents.

These drinking cups reached their pinnacle in the early modern period, yet they resulted from hundreds of years of production and daily practices, intimately connecting the early modern consumers of these wares to the complex history of Portugal.

The particular smells of these vessels and their ability to impart these smells/tastes to water and surrounding air were valued attributes. Huge amounts of contemporary literature was written about these vessels, with each production area being associated with a recognizably different scent.

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# OPHIUSSA

## POLÍTICA EDITORIAL

A *Ophiussa* – Revista do Centro de Arqueologia da Universidade de Lisboa foi iniciada em 1996, tendo sido editado o volume 0. A partir do volume 1 (2017) é uma edição impressa e digital da UNIARQ – Centro de Arqueologia da Universidade de Lisboa.

O principal objectivo desta revista é a publicação e divulgação de trabalhos com manifesto interesse, qualidade e rigor científico sobre temas de Pré-História e Arqueologia, sobretudo do território europeu e da bacia do Mediterrâneo.

A *Ophiussa* – Revista do Centro de Arqueologia da Universidade de Lisboa publicará um volume anual. A partir de 2018, os artigos submetidos serão sujeitos a um processo de avaliação por parte de revisores externos (*peer review*). O período de submissão de trabalhos decorrerá sempre no primeiro trimestre e a edição ocorrerá no último trimestre de cada ano.

A revista divide-se em duas secções: artigos científicos e recensões bibliográficas. Excepcionalmente poderão ser aceites textos de carácter introdutório, no âmbito de homenagens ou divulgações específicas, que não serão submetidos à avaliação por pares. Isentas desta avaliação estão também as recensões bibliográficas.

Todas as submissões serão avaliadas, em primeira instância, pela Coordenação Editorial, no que respeita ao seu conteúdo formal e à sua adequação face à política editorial e às normas de edição da revista. Os trabalhos que cumprirem estes requisitos serão posteriormente submetidos a um processo de avaliação por pares cega / *blind peer review* (mínimo de dois revisores). O Conselho Científico, constituído pela direcção da UNIARQ e por investigadores externos, acompanhará o processo de edição.

Esta etapa será concretizada por investigadores externos qualificados, sendo os respectivos pareceres entregues num período não superior a três meses. Os revisores procederão à avaliação de forma objectiva, tendo em vista a qualidade do conteúdo da revista; as suas críticas, sugestões e comentários serão, na medida do possível, construtivos, respeitando as capacidades intelectuais do(s) autor(es). Após a recepção dos pareceres, o(s) autor(es) tem um prazo máximo de um mês para proceder às alterações oportunas e reenviar o trabalho.

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# OPHIUSSA

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*Ophiussa* – Revista do Centro de Arqueologia da Universidade de Lisboa started in 1996, with the edition of volume 0. From 2017, this journal is a printed and digital edition of UNIARQ – Centro de Arqueologia da Universidade de Lisboa.

The main objective of this journal is the publication and dissemination of papers of interest, quality and scientific rigor concerning Prehistory and Archeology, mostly from Europe and the Mediterranean basin.

*Ophiussa* – Revista do Centro de Arqueologia da Universidade de Lisboa will publish an annual volume. From 2018, submitted articles will be subject to a peer-review evaluation process. The submission period will always occur in the first quarter of each year and the edition will occur in the last quarter.

The journal is divided into two sections: scientific articles and bibliographic reviews. Exceptionally, texts of an introductory nature may be accepted, in the context of specific tributes or divulgations, which will not be submitted to peer-review evaluation. Exemptions from this evaluation are also the bibliographic reviews.

All submissions will be considered, in the first instance, by the Editorial Board, regarding its formal content and adequacy in face of the editorial policy and the journal's editing standards. Papers that meet these requirements will subsequently be submitted to a blind peer-review process (minimum of two reviewers). The Scientific Council, constituted by the directors of UNIARQ and external researchers, will follow the editing process.

This stage will be carried out by qualified external researchers, and their feedback will be delivered within a period of no more than two months. The reviewers will carry out the evaluation in an objective manner, in view of the quality and content of the journal; their criticisms, suggestions and comments will be, as far as possible, constructive, respecting the intellectual abilities of the author (s). After receiving the feedback, the author(s) has a maximum period of one month to make the necessary changes and resubmit the work.

Acceptance or refusal of articles will have as sole factors of consideration their originality and scientific quality.

The review process is confidential, with the anonymity of the evaluators and authors of the works being ensured, in the latter case up to the date of its publication.

Papers will only be accepted for publication as soon as the peer review process is completed. Texts that are not accepted will be returned to their authors. The content of the works is entirely the responsibility of the author(s) and does not express the position or opinion of the Scientific Council or Editorial Board.

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