

# Montemor-o-Novo pottery production

## Characteristics and distribution

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*This paper presents an overview of the most recent research undertaken on early modern pottery production at Montemor-o-Novo, Portugal. The pottery produced in this region was highly distinctive and this paper discusses the range of forms found archaeologically in both Montemor and other contexts around Portugal. It also discusses the presence of this ware type in the documents and some of the factors driving the consumption and production of these vessels.*

### Introduction and documentary background

Montemor-o-Novo, Portugal (Fig. 1), was the production centre for a distinctive type of early modern pottery. This paper presents the documentary and archaeological evidence for this pottery industry, and provides a gazetteer of findspots.

Many 15th-century texts mention the presence of potters and pottery kilns (*fornos de louça*) in Montemor-o-Novo. A shop (*tenda*) where vessels were sold is also mentioned in a document of 1499. The production of ceramic vessels, known as *louça de olaria*, was sometimes confused with the activities of *telheiros*, the producers of roof and floor tiles, since some people could have worked in both activities (Fonseca 2005, 87–8).

During the Middle Ages, Montemor-o-Novo had a *Rua dos Oleiros* (Potter's Street) (now Rua de Santo António) going back to the 15th century. In the 17th century there are references to potters in the Padrão Street, a continuation of the Potter's Street but closer to the Almansor River, just outside the city (Carvalho 1987, 10; Fonseca 2005, 88 and 93). In 1646 the potter António Jorge had a house there and 30 years later the construction of the São João de Deus convent began in the *Rua dos Oleiros* (Potter's Street) (Fonseca 1993, 50).

In the 15th century Montemor-o-Novo was already an important pottery production centre. One might, therefore, expect there to be a later community of potters, kilns and stores selling these wares. According to the *Emmentia*, a document of 1646, there were at least seven potters working in the village. This document describes the characteristics

of the pottery industry, and establishes the prices of twenty seven different objects (Carvalho 1987, 10 and 12; Pereira *et al.* 2005, 136–8). The cheapest vessel was the '*tigela de comer*' (eating bowl), costing 1 *real*, and the most expensive the '*alguidar de dois alqueires*' (two alqueires large basin). In this same document some other forms are recorded such as the '*panella de rosadura*', '*cantarinho de rosadura*' and '*alguidarinho de rosadura*' (scratched pan, cup and basin). The *rosadura* term means that these objects' surface could be scratched in order to reveal the white inclusions in the fabrics, giving them a newish look. This feature is also commented upon in one of the most important descriptions of Montemor-o-Novo pottery production, by Duarte Nunes de Leão (1610 [2002], 185, fl. 47v) in 1599. When writing about pottery cups and other vessels used to serve or contain water he mentions the Lisbon products first and then adds:

'Others exist, after these ones from Lisbon which are produced in Montemor-o-Novo, that in scent cannot take their place, since 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 vessel's 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.'<sup>1</sup>

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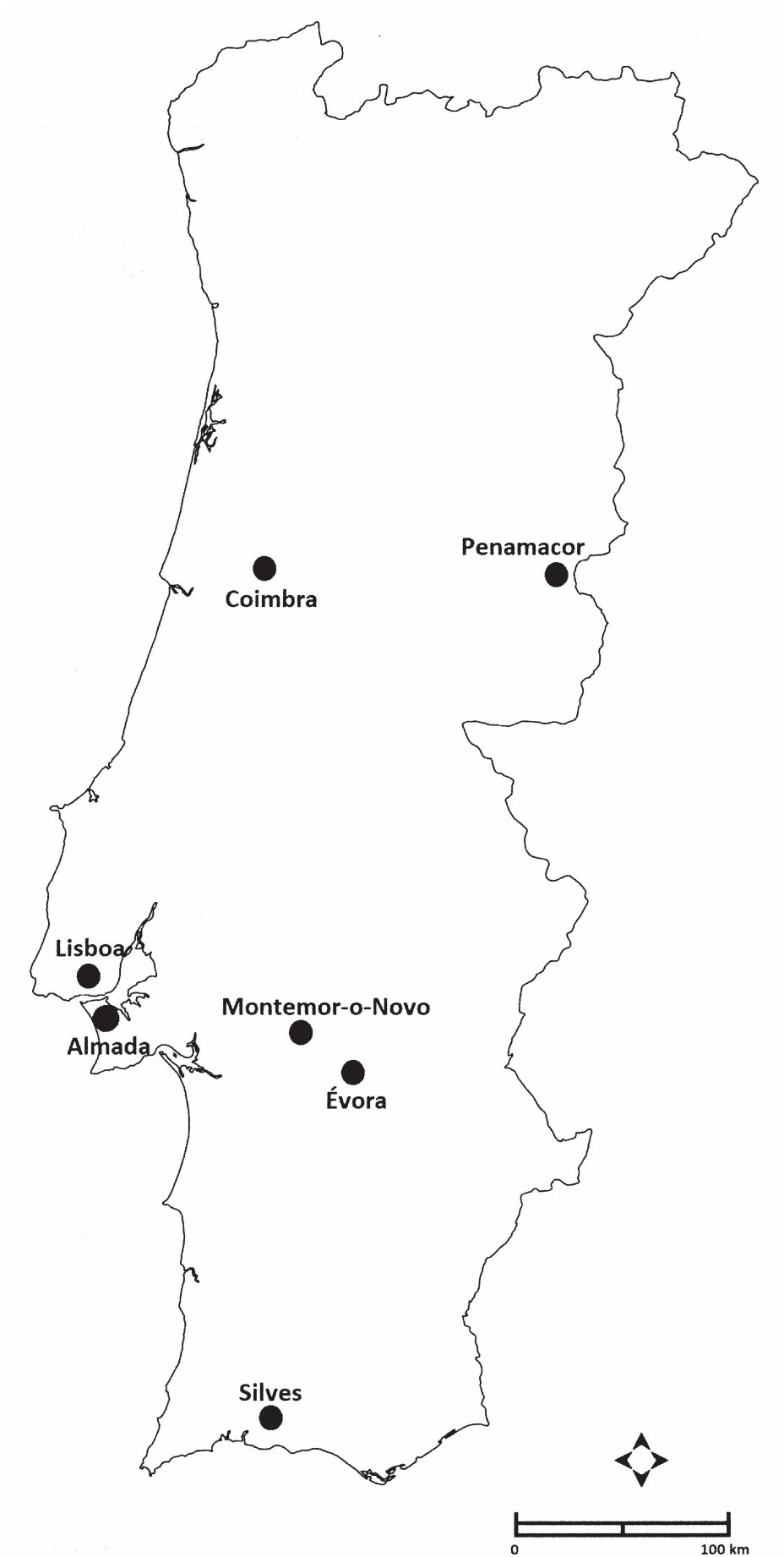


Figure 1. Map of Portugal with the locations mentioned in the text. (Image: Authors).

Documentary evidence confirms the potters' presence in the village in the 16th century, with references to their craft organisation and licenses allowing them to develop their activity (Fonseca 2005, 88). Similar developments occurred in the organisation of the pottery craft in large cities such as Lisbon and Coimbra, two of the most important Portuguese pottery production centres (see Alho *et al.* this volume). During the 17th century, pottery production at Montemor-o-Novo continued to prosper, and documents record the names of dozens of potters. There are frequent references to gifts, such as the one made to Misericórdia de Évora in 1635 of 'twenty big and small, Estremoz and Montemor cups', or the gift of 'small cups and jars' that Montemor gave to Charles II of England's widow, D. Catarina of Braganza, in 1699 when she stayed overnight in that village (Fonseca 2005, 90–1). In 1646 a document called *Emmenta* was produced by the village's administration, where types of vessels and their prices are listed for Montemor-o-Novo products.

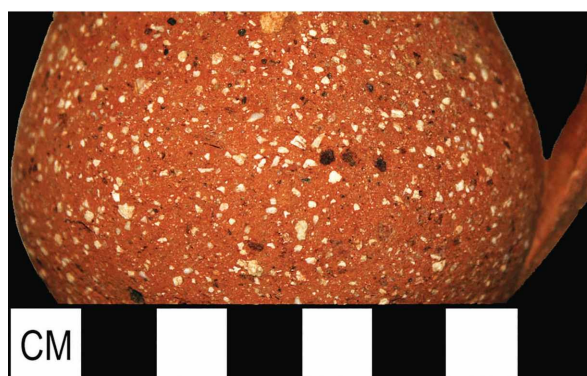
The oldest reference to a specific Montemor-o-Novo pottery type dates from 1507, when the Conceição de Beja monastery received, among other pottery assets, 'thirty nine Montemor cups'<sup>2</sup> in the will of Beatriz', the mother of King Emmanuel I (Carvalho 1921, 120). The production of pottery at Montemor is clearly referenced in Isabel of Portugal's (Manuel I's

daughter and Carlos V's wife) dowry, with 'seventeen Montemayor cups; another large vessel which is a Montemor jar; another large vessel from Montemayor and another large Montemayor jar, resembling an olive jar'<sup>3</sup>. Some of these objects are also included in Isabel's will. No reference is made to vessels from other production centres which were also producing redwares, such as Lisbon, Estremoz, Pombal, Sardeal and Maia (Seseña 1991, 44).

In 1552, João Brandão de Buarcos writes in the document *Estatística de Lisboa* that a shipment from Estremoz and Montemor-o-Novo arrived in Lisbon with three hundred cups of all types, together with many marble mortars, and each cargo is valued from 2500 to 3000 *reais*<sup>4</sup> (Brandão de Buarcos 1552 [1990], 51). Princess Joana, sister of Filipe II of Spain, who married Prince João, son of king João III of Portugal, also had large water vessels made in Montemor, according to a 1573 inventory, as well as pots from Estremoz, Lisbon and Spain in her dowry (Seseña, 1991, 44).

The early 17th-century Évora cantor, Manuel Severim de Faria, mentioned pottery production at Montemor in his writing:

'This village is known by the excellent clay it has making many rough cups with a very good scent and with lots of stones making the drinkable water



A



B



C



D

**Figure 2.** A: Surface detail from one cup found in Montemor-o-Novo Castle; B: Fabrics from a brick found in Montemor-o-Novo Castle; C: Bowl body surface with red slip found at the Santana Convent (Lisbon); D: Surface detail from jar found at the Santana Convent (Lisbon). (Images: T.M. Casimiro, 2014).

very fresh (...) From the same clay many different accounts with variable prices are made and other curious things<sup>5</sup> (Serrão 1974, 70; Fonseca 2005, 90).

At the beginning of the 18th century the Catholic priest António Carvalho da Costa (1708, 431) wrote in the *Corografia Portuguesa* about the Montemor products, referring to the 'famous cups with the clay filled with small white stones'<sup>6</sup>, possibly inspired by Duarte Nunes de Leão.

## The pottery

Thanks to archaeological excavations in Montemor and the surrounding area, it is now possible to present an archaeological characterisation of the pottery produced in the village, both in regard to fabric and form.

### Fabrics and surfaces

Pottery was produced in Montemor in the medieval and post-medieval periods because of the presence of high quality clays within the village and its surrounding area (Fonseca 2005, 93–4). The most distinctive characteristic of the fabric of vessels from Montemor is the amount of quartz and feldspar present. In some objects the amount of these minerals can be up to 25–30% of the paste, together with some pottery grog (crushed, fired ceramic). After being fired the white minerals create a contrast with the red clay, speckling red surfaces with white. The inclusions tend to be small, except in building material such as bricks, floor tiles and roof tiles and in larger storage vessels where they are coarser. Occasionally, some vessels have small white quartz stones laid in geometric patterns on the objects' surface.

In the late 16th century and early 17th century a large proportion of vessels received a red-orange clay slip, reducing their permeability, possibly to make them closer in appearance to the famous Estremoz or Lisbon redware products. Exceptions were the vessels related to water storage and consumption. The distinctive Montemor fabric, with significant amounts of quartz and feldspar minerals connected by the clay, causes an effective evaporation effect, cooling the water and revealing the noted clay scent and flavour.

### Forms

From archaeological analysis, eight different vessel types are known to have been made using the Montemor-o-Novo fabrics, with further variations in shape and size.

The forms can be summarised as follows:

#### *Cups* (Fig. 3 A-B,D-E)

These are the most abundant form and exhibit the most variety in terms of shape, with forms changing

from the 16th-18th centuries. The earlier examples are ovoid in shape, with wide slightly everted rims and flat bottoms (MN CAST 3/05, 0498). Some have a small ridge near the rim (MN CAST 2/172, N3/001, 8/9), a feature that also occurs on larger vessels such as jars, and which is observable in two examples discussed later in this paper (MN CAST 7/09, 0119; Silo). These cups have a handle connecting the rim to the lower part of the body. Later cups are of a more globular form, being slightly smaller than the earlier examples, but with tall trunco-conical necks and with a semi-circular lip. These also have one handle connecting the rim to the mid-part of the body. One possible measuring cup (MN CAST 05/07, UE4) is slightly bigger than the other cups, with a tall vertical neck and with a U-shaped horizontal handle, both ends of which connect to the body of the vessel. Its shape is quite similar to other measuring cups found in early modern contexts in Lisbon (Viana 2015).

#### *Bowls* (Fig. 3 C)

Examples are present with hemispherical, trunco-conical and slightly carinated forms, with a semicircular lip and flat base.

#### *Porringers*

Examples are present with a trunco-conical and slightly carinated form, with a vertical rim and flat bottom.

#### *Bottles* (Fig. 3 F)

Two variants were recorded. An example from Montemor-o-Novo has a slightly trunco-conical body with a flat bottom, tall and narrow neck and with evidence of a former handle connecting the neck to the body at the middle section, while the other is hemispheric with everted semi-circular rim.

#### *Pitchers*

One example was found in Lisbon, and although only part of the bottom survived, it seems that it had a deeply ringed foot.

#### *Jars*

These have an ovoid body, flat bottom, narrow and vertical neck with a slightly carinated semi-circular rim. The handles connect the neck's upper part with the body's mid-portion. Slightly elevated, the handle's cross-section is oval or convex.

#### *Costrels*

Although mentioned in the documents, only one sherd corresponding to the rim of one such vessel is known, representing a tall cylindrical neck and thick rim which is flattened at the top (MN CAST 8/10, UE5).

#### *Lids*

These have a trunco-conical body, some of them with small central knob handles. Lids came in many





Figure 3. A: Two handled cup from Carnide (Lisbon); B: One handled cup with lid from the Montemor-o-Novo Castle; C: Carinated bowl, from the Montemor-o-Novo Castle; D: Cup with lid from Montemor-o-Novo Castle; E: Measuring cup or '*medida*' from the Montemor-o-Novo Castle; F: Bottle or '*almotolia*' from the Montemor-o-Novo Castle. (Image: T.M.Casimiro, 2014).

different dimensions reflecting their varied uses: to cover cups, jars, costrels or cooking pots. Some of the lids used to cover cups would also function as saucers, where the cup could rest on the table.

Building material is scarce and finds are restricted to Montemor-o-Novo, where large bricks, floor and roof tiles made with densely quartz and feldspar-tempered fabrics were used in the construction of buildings and floors.

### Archaeological data

As expected, Montemor-o-Novo has yielded the

largest quantity of Montemor pottery in Portugal, most of it from archaeological contexts ranging in date from the early 16th to early 18th centuries.

In addition to the Montemor-o-Novo area, these ceramics have been discovered at sites across southern Portugal, for example in cities like Évora, Almada, Lisbon, and Silves, with some occasional finds from abroad (Baart 1992). Despite many occasional finds the highest quantity of finds are from the castle excavations at Montemor-o-Novo, coordinated by Manuela Pereira, which permitted the identification of many different forms and types, as well as helping to refine the chronology of these products.

## Gazetteer of finds

### Montemor-o-Novo

The largest quantity of Montemor pottery has been recovered from its place of origin. Pottery has been found in excavations within the village area, but mostly within its castle (Fig. 4). Inside the fortification of Montemor-o-Novo ceramics were found in three different contexts: the Saudação convent; from a storage pit transformed into a cess pit, and associated with structures believed to be the remains of a

dwelling and its well (Resende and Carvalho 1986; Carvalho 1987; Pereira 2004; Pereira *et al.* 2005). The composition of the assemblages is variable, with a large quantity of cups, bowls, bottles, possible measuring cups, jars, a large storage vase and building material such as bricks (Pirata 2008, 29, 45 and 47).

Fragmented cups, produced in the same fabrics, were found in the São João de Deus Convent archaeological excavations, where the local library now stands (Pereira 2003, 163–64; Pirata 2008, 29).

Outside of the village, at Herdade da Infanta, the

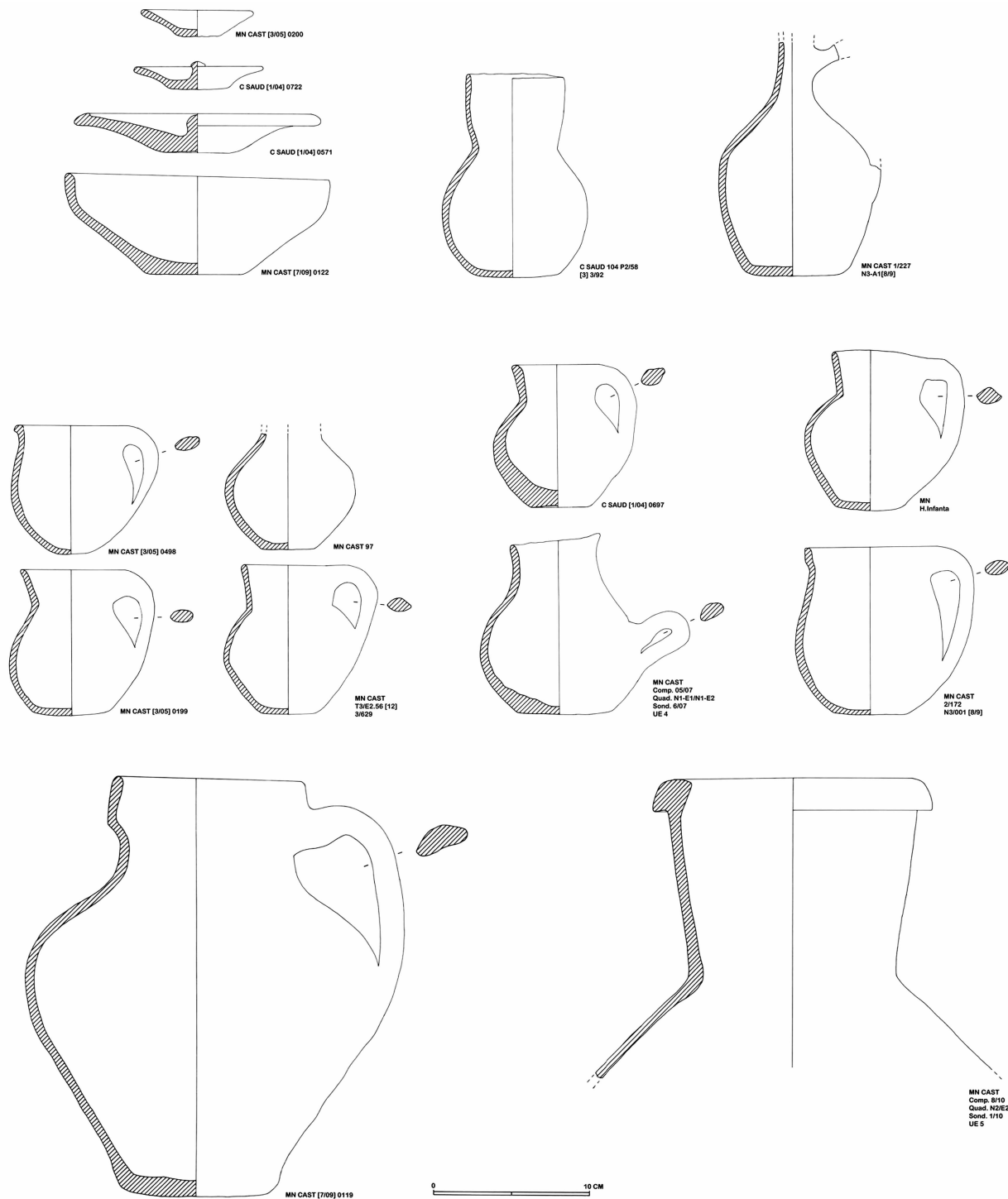


Figure 4. Pottery from Montemor-o-Novo castle and town. (Images drawn by J. Gonçalves).

remains of a post-medieval house were discovered, although it was not comprehensively recorded archaeologically. Inside and associated with its structures a complete cup was found which closely matches ceramics from Montemor-o-Novo.

### Évora

In Évora, a city approximately 30 km from Montemor-o-Novo, many sherds were found, though none were ever published. In the 1980s sherds from Montemor were found inside some abandoned storage pits by José Olívio Caeiro, at Chão das Covas, as observed by one of the authors (M.V.G.).

### Lisbon

In the Lisbon area there are at least two sites where sherds from Montemor have been found.

In the Santana convent, a religious house occupied by nuns from the late 16th to 19th centuries, nine fragments of Montemor vessels were recovered from two different wells and a cess pit (Fig. 5 A). The shapes correspond to small lids (possibly associated with cups), hemispherical bowls, one pitcher and a tall footed carinated bowl with its surfaces covered with red orange slip. These artefacts were found in late 16th to late 17th-century contexts and associated with other ceramic types such as Portuguese, Spanish, Italian and Low Countries tin-glazed wares and other imports, such as Chinese porcelain (Gomes and Gomes 2007; Gomes, Gomes and Casimiro 2015), revealing that these ceramics were being used on a daily basis by the nuns living in the building.

In Carnide (a former rural settlement which is now a parish in Lisbon), the excavation of more than a hundred storage pits re-used as cess pits provided an almost complete vessel of probable Montemor type (Fig. 5 B). The site has been interpreted as one of the rural settlements associated with a large convent close by (Caessa and Mota 2013). The vessel recovered from these excavations is a hemispheric bowl with a flat bottom slightly recessed from the body, an everted rim and two small handles. The context can be dated to 1600–1630 based on the other objects within the context (Caessa and Mota 2013).

### Penamacor

A few sherds were discovered during the excavations of the castle in this city (Silvério, Barros and Teixeira 2003) and were not large enough to establish vessel forms. Nevertheless, these sherds (together with the Coimbra finds) are the most northerly finds of this type of pottery in Portugal to date.

### Coimbra

Sherds from this type of pottery were found during the excavations of the Museu Nacional de Castro

cryptoporticus and are dated to the late 16th century (Silva 2015). The fragments are from jars and bottles and were found associated with a large quantity of local products as well as pottery from other areas of Portugal and from Spain, Italy, and China.

### Almada

The excavation of a post-medieval site in Rua da Judiaria, on the south bank of the Tagus River opposite to Lisbon (Barros and Henriques 2003), provided sherds from fifteen different vessels produced in Montemor (Fig. 5 C). Seven cups, three lids, two bowls and three jars were identified in a mid-17th-century context, identified as a midden containing household rubbish representing daily activities. The objects associated with this context include other Portuguese products, both local and regional, and also other imported wares.

### Silves

The excavation of a cistern well built in the Islamic period (12th-13th centuries) in Silves revealed that the structure was abandoned and filled in the late 16th century, around 1570–80 (Gomes and Gomes 1996). Fragments of one cup produced in Montemor-o-Novo were found inside and associated with many other Portuguese and European ceramics and a small number of porcelain imports.

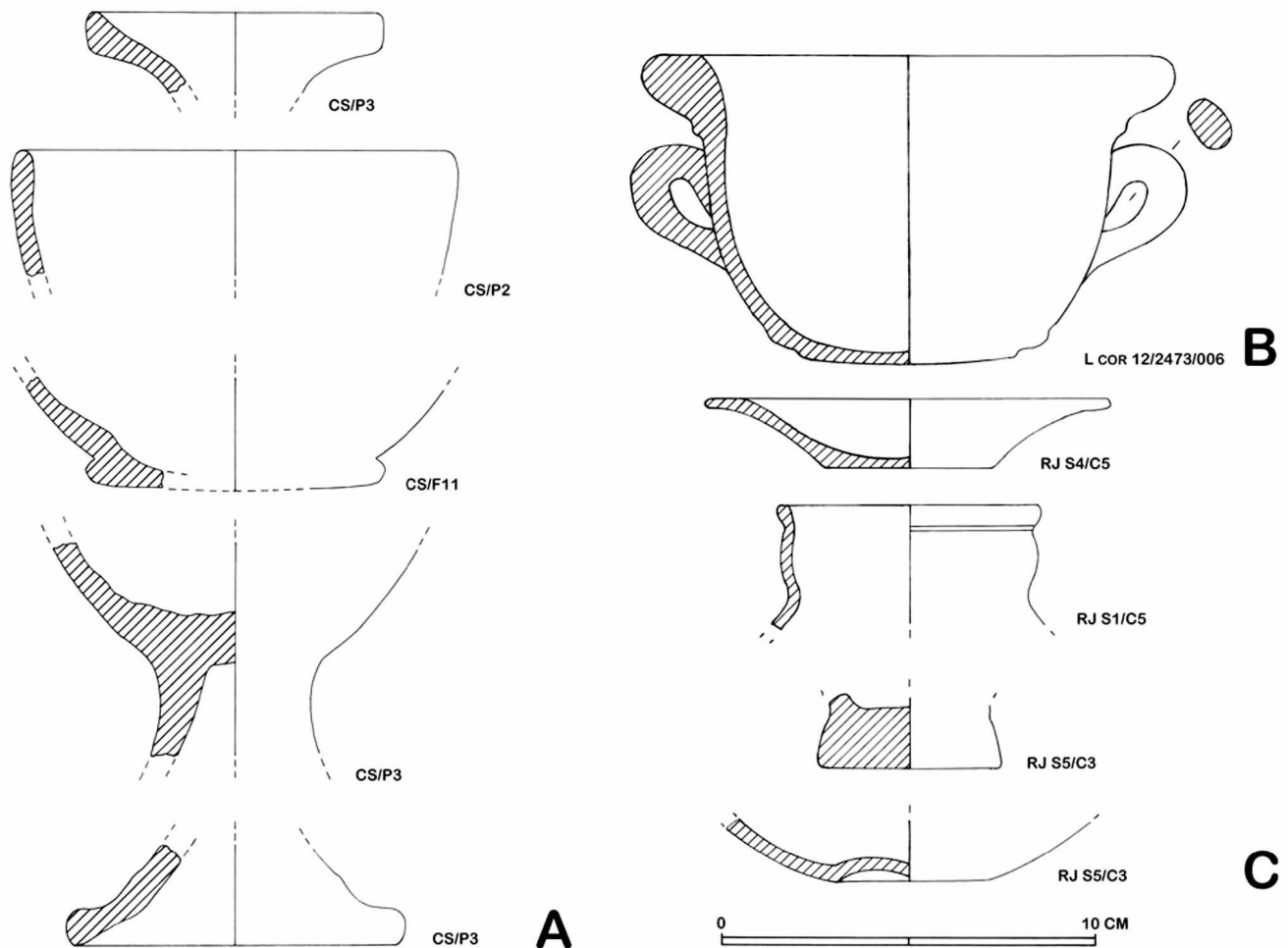
### Amsterdam

During the 1980s excavations of the Jewish neighbourhood of Waterlooplein in Amsterdam a small cup identified as a Montemor product was excavated (Baart 1992, 273, pl. 15, note 2). Some of the inhabitants of this area are known to have belonged to Jewish families with Portuguese ancestry (Baart and Calado 1983). The site produced an enormous amount of other Portuguese ceramics such as redwares, tin glazed wares and even a black pottery vessel (Baart and Calado 1983). Therefore it is possible that this assemblage relates to a household, or households, with a direct knowledge of production centres and Portuguese products.

### Discussion

The characterization of Montemor pottery is now possible based on the identification of vessels from its production centre and from other Portuguese settlements. The known distribution of this ware (*cerâmica roçada*), based on recovered sherds, reveals that vessels were exchanged over a wide area but not in particularly high quantities as argued by Pirata (2008, 29).

If one trusts Duarte Nunes de Leão's description, this was a well-recognised ware in the country and frequently used in cities such as Évora and in the



**Figure 5.** Pottery from Montemor-o-Novo found at: A: The Santana Convent (Lisbon); B: Carnide (Lisbon); C: Almada. (Images drawn by J. Gonçalves and T.M. Casimiro).

Lisbon area. However, archaeological excavations, although providing some finds, suggest that this was not a very common ware, or at least not a common ware being disposed of in these areas.

Whilst the vessels discussed in this paper occur fairly frequently in late 16th-century and (especially) 17th-century archaeological contexts, it is difficult to determine when they were first made and used. Although the Montemor-o-Novo pottery was well-known from the early 16th century, there is no evidence for the production of the red-white mixed fabric characteristic of later products during these earlier phases of pottery production. However, documentary references to this ware suggest that it was already popular in Portugal from at least the late 16th century. This would appear to suggest that potters had begun producing this ware from at least the early 16th century.

Only a limited range of products were made in this ware, mostly tableware and vessels associated with water consumption. The popularity of these products related to the ware's physical and aesthetic characteristics, but also to the freshness and taste which the ware gave to the water. Furthermore, as

Duarte Nunes de Leão wrote, these cups were never old (looking) since, with the aid of a small pebble, the surface could be scratched and, in this way, made to appear new.

Production at Montemor is clearly related to the dramatic increase of redware pottery production across Portugal in the mid 16th century. Many documents refer to cups being made in different Portuguese cities, from Pombal to Estremoz and even Lisbon (Vasconcellos, 1921, 13). Nevertheless, archaeological excavations have demonstrated that production was widespread within the country and every major city was probably producing their own small water vessels.

The vessel shapes of the Montemor pottery are comparable to other cups produced in Portugal around the same time. Few post-medieval kilns have been excavated in Portugal, but similarly shaped objects, such as cups, bottles, truco-conical bowls and large storage vessels were found in Silves, dating from the late 16th to early 17th century (Gomes 2008) and in Lisbon (Marques, Leitão and Botelho 2012), associated with mid 17th-century production areas. These vessel shapes would, therefore, be very common



in southern Portugal from the mid 16th to late 17th centuries.

It should be mentioned that no *Cerâmica de roçar* shapes have yet been identified in the late 16th century pottery collection from the vault ceilings of the São Domingos Convent published by Margarida Ribeiro (1984). This absence may well be related to chronological factors, or to the fact that the scratched pottery was produced in smaller quantities, which did not yield the excess numbers of vessels required for use in architectural structures such as the aforementioned vaults. Most of the Montemor-o-Novo ‘cerâmicas de roçar’ are found associated with deposits of domestic waste and appear together with other wares produced in Portugal as well as imports, suggesting that these were used on a daily basis by their owners.

## Conclusion

It can be concluded that the type of Montemor-o-Novo product examined in this paper maintained a certain importance from the second half of the 16th century to the late 17th century. Despite its utilitarian function, this ware presents some aesthetic connections with the mannerist and baroque movements, as demonstrated by the cup from Carnide. In addition to its aesthetic appeal, senses such as smell and taste were also stimulated by the vessels produced in this ware, which conveyed freshness and sweetness to the water within. It appears to be the very ability of this ware to combine multiple sensory experiences that resulted in its popularisation in the early modern period. The archaeological sites where these objects have been found should be classified as wealthy. This conclusion is based on the high number of imports found in the same contexts showing that Montemor-o-Novo ceramics were used at the same table as Chinese, Italian, Dutch and Spanish ceramics. On the other hand documentary evidence, such as the aforementioned will and dowry, reveal that these objects were consumed by royalty and probably traded has a high fashionable item.

## Notes

- 1: ‘Outros sam após estes os de Montemoor-o-Novo, que em cheiro lhes nam dam lugar, porque sam pucaros que nunca sam velhos como os de outras partes: e a razão é, que sam feitos de barro mui cheiroso, e amassados com muitas pedrinhas, que parece que sam tantas as pedras como o barro: dos quaes quando querem usar, os roção primeiro como ãa pedra, e assi descobrem outras mais pedras, e fica novo barro: e assi cada vez os que querem fazer novos, que tenham o cheiro que tinham quando novos, os tornam a roçar, e começo aparecer outras pedrinhas.’
- 2: ‘Trinta e nove pucaros de Montemoor’.
- 3: ‘17 piezas de bucaros de Montemayor; otra pieza

*grande que es un jarro grande de Montemayor; otra pieza grande de Montemayor, a manera de botija’.*

- 4: ‘Também vêm a este Reino, da Vila de Estremoz e de Montemor-o-Novo, trezentas cargas de púcaros de toda a sorte, e graís, que vale cada carga dois mil e quinhentos e três mil rs, que são dois mil cruzados.....2.000 <sup>\*dos\*</sup>
- 5: ‘Faz (...) não pouco conhecida esta Villa o excellente barro de que he dotada, do qual lavrão muitos pucaros posto que de feições grosseiras, de cheiro excelente e muy pedrados, que fazem o beber mui fresco (...). Do mesmo barro fazem contas de muito preço e outras coisas curiosas.’
- 6: ‘Muy celebrados seus pucaros de barro semeados de pedrinhas brancas’.

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## Résumé

*Ce document fait un tour d’horizon des recherches plus récentes qui ont été entreprises sur la production de la poterie pendant le début de l’époque moderne associée à Montemor-o-Novo, Portugal. La poterie produite dans cette région était très distinctive et ce papier traite de la gamme des formes trouvées archéologiquement à Montemor et à d’autres contextes autour de Portugal. Elle traite également de la présence de ce type d’article dans les documents et de certains des facteurs qui poussant la consommation et la production de ces récipients.*

## Zusammenfassung

*In diesem Beitrag wird ein Überblick über die jüngste Forschung auf dem Gebiet der frühmodernen Keramikherstellung im portugiesischen Montemor-o-Novo vorgestellt. Die in dieser Region erzeugte Keramik war höchst markant. Dieser Beitrag diskutiert den Umfang der Formen der archäologischen Funde sowohl in Montemor als auch anderen Zusammenhängen in ganz Portugal. Das Vorkommen dieses Warentyps in den Dokumenten und einige der Faktoren, die den Konsum und die Produktion der Gefäße vorantrieben, werden dabei ebenfalls erörtert.*