

The documentary evidence for pottery and tile production in medieval (14th-15th century) Portugal

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Unpublished documents held in the National Archives of Portugal (ANTT) and the Lisbon City Archive (AML), derived from the monasteries of Chelas and Santos-o-Novo, are examined. These documents provide important information about Lisbon potters in the 14th and 15th centuries and offer a new perspective on the craft developed by Christian and Moorish potters working in the greater Lisbon area. The work was undertaken as part of the “Medieval Tiles in Portugal - a study of provenance” (PTDC/CPC-EAT/4719/2012) project.

Medieval tiles in Portugal – A study of provenance

During the first half of the 20th century scholars examining medieval ceramic production in Portugal separated the study of earthenware pottery from that of tiles, and only occasionally provided any discussion on the artistic and industrial relationships between them. Given the close links between pottery and tile production, in relation to technology, artistic influences and economic connections within Portugal, such a distinction appears false (Trindade 2007, 77).

The associations between tile and pottery production in Portugal between the mid 14th century and the first decades of the 16th century were quite difficult to establish. Few tiles were known from this time-period and they were difficult to connect to pottery production since most of them were thought to be imported. This paucity of evidence was partially addressed by archaeological excavations, particularly in the southern Lisbon area. These discoveries not only confirmed the Portuguese production of tiles but also demonstrated the importance of foreign influences, particularly from Spain, on medieval tile production (Trindade 2007, 76). Domestic tile production in Portugal in this period was partially obscured by replication of foreign styles and also by the ease Portuguese consumers had in obtaining imported objects.

The idea that most tiles are of Spanish origin is pervasive in early approaches to the post-medieval period (more specifically from the second half of the

15th century onwards), with Portuguese production rarely being considered (Meco 1989). Portuguese potters were not perceived as having had the skills to produce glazed tiles and the idea that tiles might have been manufactured in Portugal was disregarded in the literature, even when evidence seemed to indicate otherwise. Where unambiguous evidence of tile production is present it was disregarded as a ‘casual’ activity undertaken by a particularly skilled potter, rather than being a part of an established industry. Given the widespread association of pottery and tile production across medieval Europe, and particularly elsewhere in the Iberian Peninsula, there is no reason to assume that quality tiles were not produced in the Kingdom of Portugal in the later Middle Ages (Trindade 2007, 76).

The Portuguese production of tiles has been widely recognised in recent studies. However, scholarship has not yet established an understanding of the connections and interactions between the production of tiles, building materials and pottery. The documentary analysis undertaken as a part of this project does not aim to confirm tile production, but the sources studied here have the potential to demonstrate interconnections between pottery and tile making in the later Middle Ages. As well as providing evidence for local production, these documents demonstrate that Spanish tiles were imported in large quantities for use around the country and not only in the largest urban centres (Meco 1989). Given the strong similarities in terms of aesthetics and quality between Portuguese and Spanish products it is still difficult

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Table 1. Existing documents in the Municipal Archive of Lisbon that reference Potters.

Reference	Type of Document	Year	Name of the Potter(s)
2nd Book of the town council, pg. 58	Oath of Potters	1561	António Pyrez and Pedro Vaz
3rd Book of the town council pg. 139	Oath of Potters	1554	Domingues Fernandez and Jorge Fernandes
2nd Book of the town council, pg. 86v.	Provision of craft to potters and their clerks	1566	Amtonio Pirez and Pero Vaz
2nd Book of the town council, pg. 107	Provision of craft to judges and clerk of Potters	1574	Amtonio Pirez and Manoel Bras
2nd Book of the town council, pg. 123	Provision of craft to judges and clerk of Potters	1579	Jorge Fernandez and Afomso Martinz
2nd Book of the town council, pg. 128	Provision to examiners of craft potters	1579	Framisco Gomcalvez and Pero Alluarez
2nd Book of the town council, pg. 139	Provision of craft to judges and clerk of Potters	1590	Afomso Martinz, Antonio Omem, Joam Fernamdez and Asemço Aluarez
2nd Book of the town council, pg. 169v.	Provision of craft to judges and clerk of Potters	1591	Luiz Fernamdez, Manoel Rodriguez, Bras Pirez, Luis Gomcalvez and Emsemço Aluarez
2nd Book of the town council, pg. 191	Provision of craft to judges and clerk of Potters	1610	Framisco Jorge, Amador Jorge, Simão Rodriguez and Baltezar Fernamdez
2nd Book of the town council, pg. 214	Provision of craft to judges and clerk of Potters	1613	Agostinho Antunes, Diogo Soares, Antonio Dias and Francisco Fernandez
3rd Book of the town council, pg. 17	Provision of craft to judges and clerk of Potters	1575	Jorge Fernamdez and Jorge Fernamdez
3rd Book of the town council, pg. 40	Provision of craft to judges and clerk of Potters	1577	António Pirez and Jorge Fernamdez
3rd Book of the town council, pg. 62v.	Provision of craft to judges and clerk of Potters	1580	Djogo Fernamdez, Gaspar do Couto and João Garcia
3rd Book of the town council, pg. 101	Provision to examiners butler, clerk and of craft potters	1556	Domingos Fernamdez and Guaspar Alluarez
3rd Book of the town council, pg. 139	Provision of craft to judges and clerk of Potters	1554	Domingos Fernamdez and Guaspar Alluarez
4th Book of the town council, pg. 56v.	Agreement of the Council officials of the city of Lisbon for determinations concerning the exercise of the craft potters, because they falsified the works. So was published in the city council posture the duties of the potters in the exercise of his office	1514	
4th Book of the town council, pg. 136	Provision of craft to “vedores” (the person responsible for construction works) and examiners of potters	1532	Francisco Gomez and Diogio Fernandez
4th Book of the town council, pg. 182	Provision of craft to judges and glassblowers	1539	Abastiam Alluarez and Manoel da Rosa
1st Book of the town council, pg. 22v.	Provision to “vedores”, judges and examiners of various crafts	1515	Gomcalo Pirez
1st Book of the town council, pg. 105	Election of examiners for the craft of potter	1551	Amtonio Rodriguez
1st Book of the town council, pg. 150	Provision of craft to examiners of Potters, glassblowers and tile makers and their clerk	1551	Gaspar de Coimbra and Pero Vaz

to establish why these tiles were imported. Were the Portuguese potters not able to fulfil the required demand from a country where large buildings were being constructed? Were the foreign tiles considered of a better quality? For a long period of time researchers always considered Portuguese products to be of a lower quality. However, the documentary and archaeological evidence calls this assertion into question.

Documentary evidence for pottery production in Lisbon (1400–1500)

The historical research undertaken during the *Medieval Tiles in Portugal – A study of Provenance* project was intended to identify, synthesise and disseminate documentary evidence about pottery production. Unpublished documents, particularly those held by the National Archives of “Torre do Tombo” (ANTT), and the Lisbon City Archive (AML), were searched. Amongst the 15th-century documents from the monastery at Chelas we identified and studied three *Emprazamentos* (Table 2).

Twenty-seven of the documents in the Lisbon City Archive had already been studied by Virgílio Correia (1922). However, the authors could only locate 21 of those related to 16th and 17th-century potters (Table 1). It is unknown where the remaining documents are located. These documents are mostly related to similar subjects such as the nomination of potters to occupy the positions of examiners, clerks, judges, people responsible for construction sites where tiles were being used, as well as an agreement of the Council officials of the city of Lisbon for determinations concerning the activities of the craft potters.

Most of the documents found in the Portuguese National Archives relate to monasteries and convents, which were among the largest consumers of pottery and tiles in the 15th and 16th centuries. Although hundreds of convents existed in Portugal, this research was mainly focused on the Chelas Convent (Table 2) and Santos-o-Novo Monastery (Table 3). These were both located in Lisbon and the latter was situated close to the earliest known areas of tile production in the city. The documents identified during this project which relate to this monastic consumption are mainly contracts. The most common and informative documents are the *Emprazamentos*, or

rental contracts. These contracts vary in length, some extending over three generations. Payment was most typically made in cash or food, although payments of tiles and pottery objects were also identified. These ceramics presumably had some value, rather than being typical plain, utilitarian earthenwares. Most of the documents mention payment by one pottery vessel ‘*uma peça de barro*’, suggesting that these vessels were of higher quality, although it is not possible to define what type of pot it was (ANTT, Mosteiro de Santos-o-Novo, n. 596, Mouraria, mç 1, doc.16). Some of these documents also mention where clay was collected. In two specific cases, in the years 1449 and 1460, contracts between potters and the Santos-o-Novo monastery record clay as originating in Coina (on the south bank of the river Tagus, opposite to Lisbon), among other places already known in the Lisbon area (documents no 1245 and 1228). This information broadens our knowledge of where the ceramic producers in Lisbon were sourcing their clay.

This period of the history of the Santos-o-Novo Monastery is interesting because most of the nuns were not actually settled in the new building at Santos-o-Novo, but were still living at the Recolhimento de São Lázaro. It took them almost a century to move from the old monastery (Santos-o-Velho) to the new monastery (Santos-o-Novo). It is possible that the one thousand roof tiles mentioned in the contracts could have been used there, at Santos-o-Novo.

Twenty documents relating to the Santos-o-Novo monastery and dating to the period 1431–1555 were analysed (Table 3). These documents were contracts that potters established with the religious order when renting tents, backyards or even kilns that were located in the area. The potters had to make annual payments to the monastery for these items. Most of the time the payment was made in money or food such as chickens or rabbits, but sometimes these payments could be made in other goods, such as pottery objects. In fact, seven of the twenty recognised contracts had this form of payment. Most of these payments were made either at Christmas or Easter, which may indicate that nuns preferred highly decorated objects rather than utilitarian objects which they could acquire easily. In one specific case a contract dated 1431 with the potter Joane Esteves makes reference to the delivery of one

Table 2. Existing Documents on the National Archives of “Torre do Tombo” concerning the Monastery of Chelas.

Reference	Type of document	Year	Name of the Potter(s)	Payment
Notary of the Convent of Chelas mç. 23, n. 449	“Emprazamentos”		Afonso	
Notary of the Convent of Chelas, mç 45, n. 887	“Emprazamentos”	1445	Joham Luys	450 “reis” and two chickens
Notary of the Convent of Chelas, mç 15, n. 299	Sales and “Emprazamentos”	1462	Gonçallvez	600 white “reis” and two chickens

Table 3. Existing Documents in the National Archives of “Torre do Tombo” concerning the Monastery of Santos-o-Novo.

Reference	Type of Document	Year	Name of the Potter(s)	Payment
Mosteiro de Santos-o-Novo, Lisboa, n. 1779	Emprazamento	1554	Diogo Luiz e sua Mulher	20 reis, two chickens one pottery vessel and 12 pottery cups
Mosteiro de Santos-o-Novo, Lisboa, n. 1638	Emprazamento	1555	Miguel Mouta	20 reis, two chickens one pottery vessel
Mosteiro de Santos-o-Novo, n. 759	Sales	1432	Joam Pires e Catalina (wife)	80 pounds
Mosteiro de Santos-o-Novo, n. 655, Mouraria, mç. 4, doc. 7	Emprazamento	1435	Asmede	Eight pounds
Mosteiro de Santos-o-Novo, n. 641, Mouraria, mç. 3, doc. 13	Emprazamento	1432	Afonso Pires	One ‘coroa’ of gold and half ‘coroa’ of gold
Mosteiro de Santos-o-Novo, n. 639	Emprazamento	1469	Catharina e Afonso de Lima	140 white reis and one pottery vessel
Mosteiro de Santos-o-Novo, n. 629	Emprazamento	1434	Azeme	80 white reis
Mosteiro de Santos-o-Novo, n. 610	Emprazamento	1448	João Afonso	700 white reis and 2 chickens
Mosteiro de Santos-o-Novo, n. 603	Emprazamento	1503	Diogo Luiz	20 reis, two chickens and one pottery vessel
Mosteiro de Santos-o-Novo, Lisboa, n. 1624, documentos diversos, mç 1, doc. 29	Emprazamento	1498	Joam Affonso	400 reis and two chickens
Mosteiro de Santos-o-Novo, Lisboa, n. 1394	Emprazamento	1488	Afonso Pires Castella	120 reis and two rabbits
Mosteiro de Santos-o-Novo, Lisboa, n. 649	Aforamento	1454	Coleima	14 pounds
Mosteiro de Santos-o-Novo, Lisboa, n. 645. Mouraria, mç 3, doc 17	Emprazamento	1455	Rodrigo Annes	25 white reis and two chickens
Mosteiro de Santos-o-Novo, Lisboa, n. 600. Mouraria, mç 1, doc 20	Emprazamento	1476	Joam Affonso	400 white reis and two chickens
Mosteiro de Santos-o-Novo, Lisboa, n. 597. Mouraria, mç 1, doc 17	Nomeação (de Joam Afonso)	1510	Agostinho Affonso	400 reis and two chickens
Mosteiro de Santos-o-Novo, Lisboa, n. 596, Mouraria, mç 1, doc.16	Emprazamento	1491	Lourenço Affonso	500 reis and one pottery vessel from ‘foro laudo’
Mosteiro de Santos-o-Novo, Lisboa, n. 584, Mouraria, mç 1, doc.3	Emprazamento	1491	Garcia Lopez	300 reis and one vessel by ‘foro’ each year
Mosteiro de Santos-o-Novo, Lisboa, n. 125, Santa Engrácia, mç 1, doc. 8	Emprazamento	1431	Joane Esteves	200 pounds, one thousand roof tiles and two chickens
Mosteiro de Santos-o-Novo, Lisboa, n. 1245	Emprazamento	1449	Antal Domingues	10 reis
Mosteiro de Santos-o-Novo, Lisboa, n. 1228	Emprazamento	1460	Luiz Martins	

thousand roof tiles, possibly used to cover a part of the monastery.

The Municipal Archive of Lisbon (AML) curates 56 books related to City Hall activities and among these 75 documents relevant to this project were identified (Table 1). Town council books are crucial in determining who the most important Lisbon potters were, as they were nominated as *juizes do oficio* (men elected from Lisbon's community of potters to oversee potting and ensure that quality and regulations were upheld) and clerks. These documents provide the names of hundreds of potters working in Lisbon between 1445 and 1613. Potting was a very well organised craft and Book 2 of the town council (fl.169v.) documents the taking of oaths by *juizes do oficio*. In this particular document (1591) the potters Luiz Fernandez, Manoel Rodriguez, Bras Pirez, Luis Gomcalvez and Emsemço Alvarez appear as judges of glazed wares, tile makers and craftsmen of white wares.

Some of these documents also provide important information about the origins of potters. In 1488 one Afonso Pires made a contract with the Santos o Novo monastery with an annual payment of 120 *reais* and two rabbits. The documents mention that this potter came from Castella in Spain. Two of the most curious documents are from 1434 and 1435. These are typical contracts except for the fact that they are between the monastery and two potters with Moorish names, Azeme and Asmede, which seems to be the Portuguese interpretation of Azem and Ahmed, and are referred to as *mouros forros* (free Moorish). In fact, it is known that Muslim communities continued to exist in Portuguese cities after the Christian conquest, sometimes organised in neighbourhoods named *mourarias*, and continued to produce pottery (Barros 1999).

A document from 1514 records the passing of a law stating that pottery could not be sold if it was not fired properly, since many objects were being sold with production flaws such as having very thin walls or having been fired at too low a temperature in an effort to save wood and clay. The penalty for non-compliance with this law was to be arrested for eight days and to pay a large fine of 1000 *reais* (AML, Livro 4º da Vereação, fl. 56v).

Conclusion

The documents examined in this paper provide a valuable database for 15th and 16th-century potters in Lisbon and convey key information on how the craft was organised. It is clear from these documents that professional status could only be achieved by demonstrating proficiency in the craft through an examination. Only after being evaluated by the *juizes do oficio* would a potter be authorised to have their own workshop. For example, to be allowed to own a workshop producing lead-glazed ceramics

it was necessary to demonstrate proficiency in the preparation of the clay and the lead oxide and the manufacture of fourteen different forms in front of the judges. We know that different types of pottery were judged by different potters. Potters also had their own regulations and could not produce lower quality pottery. It is known that in the 17th century some potters were also tile makers (Mangucci 1996) and we suspect that the same situation could have occurred in the 16th century. Evidently, the tiles and vessels recorded in these contracts were considered valuable items and could be used in payment for the renting of spaces and facilities.

Finally, these documents reveal that the area of Coina, on the other side of the Tagus River, was one of the major areas for clay sources for these potters. This is not surprising considering the number of pottery kilns already identified in that area, namely in Mata da Machada and Santo António da Charneca, which were active from the late 15th to mid 16th century (Torres, n.d.; Barros *et al.* 2000). Lisbon had its own clay sources but those in Coina were probably considered to be better for some types of products which justified the collection and transportation of this raw material by boat.

The group of documents discussed in this paper provide an important resource for examining the intricacies of pottery production in Lisbon. The information available in these documents, from rental contracts to details about the potters themselves, combines to demonstrate the varied circumstances in which ceramics were made in the city. This resource provides a firm basis from which further examinations of the inter-connections between the different production streams can be undertaken and is particularly valuable for gaining new insights into the nuances of pottery production in the Lisbon area.

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Résumé

Des documents inédits, tenus dans les Archives Nationales du Portugal (ANTT) et Les Archives de la Ville de Lisbonne (AML), dérivés des monastères de Chelas et Santos-o-Novo, sont examinés. Ces documents fournissent des informations importantes sur les potiers de Lisbonne au 14^{ème} et 15^{ème} siècle et offrent une nouvelle perspective sur l'art développé par les potiers chrétiens et musulmans qui travaillaient dans la région métropolitaine de Lisbonne. Le travail a été entrepris dans le cadre du projet « Carreaux médiévaux au Portugal – une étude de provenance » (PTDC/CPC-EAT/4719/2012).

Zusammenfassung

Untersucht werden unveröffentlichte Dokumente aus den Klöstern von Chelas und Santos-o-Novo, die sich im portugiesischen Nationalarchiv (ANTT) und dem Stadtarchiv Lissabon (AML) befinden. Diese Dokumente bieten wichtige Informationen über die Lissabonner Töpfer des 14. und 15. Jahrhunderts sowie eine neue Perspektive auf das von christlichen und maurischen Töpfern in der Lissabonner Region entwickelte Handwerk. Die Arbeit wurde als Teil des Projekts “Mittelalterliche Fliesen in Portugal – eine Provenienzstudie” (“Medieval Tiles in Portugal – a study of provenance”) (PTDC/CPC-EAT/4719/2012) unternommen.