

# PORTUGAL AND TERRA NOVA

## CERAMIC PERSPECTIVES ON THE EARLY-MODERN ATLANTIC

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**RESUMO** Os achados arqueológicos de cerâmica portuguesa sustentam a tradição de que navegadores do Porto, de Aveiro e de Viana exploraram a costa leste da península de Avalon, na Terra Nova, durante o século XVI. É necessário, contudo, reconhecer que a cerâmica portuguesa também é comum em sítios ingleses da Terra Nova.

Os navegadores ingleses não foram participantes activos na pesca da Terra Nova até cerca de 1565. Depois desta data ocorreram à força estabelecimentos piscatórios na costa leste da ilha, tendo até 1620 desalojado não apenas os portugueses, mas também os bretões, os normandos e os bascos. Os pescadores ingleses do West Country passaram então a deter aqui uma área de actuação exclusiva, iniciando a ocupação costeira desta parte da Terra Nova.

Ao longo dos últimos 20 anos, escavações em Ferryland, Cupids e St John têm ilustrado estes primeiros assentamentos. Os dados arqueológicos sugerem que os portos portugueses foram marcos importantes na paisagem económica e cultural do Atlântico. O peixe seco seguia em frotas anuais para Portugal, enquanto o vinho fluía para Londres, Amesterdão, Terra Nova e, mais tarde, Nova Inglaterra. Navios ingleses trouxeram cerâmica portuguesa para a Terra Nova, incluindo loiça vermelha, faiança decorada e até a elegante cerâmica pedrada. Cada tipo pode ser lido, à sua maneira, para perspectivar a paisagem cultural transatlântica moderna. Propõe-se aqui que, nos sítios da Terra Nova, a faiança portuguesa é o elemento que marca o assentamento permanente de famílias agricultoras.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE** Portugal, Terra Nova, assentamentos, cerâmica, faiança

Portugal and Newfoundland have a long relationship, which dates from the beginnings of the transatlantic world. If we understand this relationship in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, we will have a context for some of the archaeological evidence recently excavated in Newfoundland. Finds of Portuguese ceramics, in particular, can in turn tell us something about the early transatlantic cultural landscape. Recurring finds of particular Portuguese ceramics in Newfoundland suggest that some, such as decorated *faiança*, were widely distributed amongst the planter families who had actually settled in Newfoundland, and can therefore be used by archaeologists to distinguish settled sites from the more transient stations used by seasonal migratory fishers.

The construction of the Atlantic world was a long series of small steps, rather than a few big ones. Portugal's first step to the west was the colonization of the Açores, which started with Santa Maria in the 1440s and moved westward, from island to island, until Flores was settled, around 1500 (Goulart Costa, 2008, p. 25-50, Carita, 2008, de Freitas de Meneses, 2008). About this time, Açorean captains made some of the earliest documented exploratory voyages to *Terra Nova*, including early fishing voyages (Quinn, 1977, p. 126-127). On a map of Newfoundland's Avalon Peninsula, the evidence is everywhere, for the earliest place names are Portuguese: including *Cavo de la Spera* or Cape Spear, the part of North America closest to Europe; *Farilham* or Ferryland, now an important archaeological site; and St John's, originally *Sam Joham*, now

the capital of Newfoundland (Seary, 1971, p. 27-33).

The only known attempt to continue the Açorean pattern of island-hopping colonization westward to North America was sponsored, in the 1520s, by investors from Viana, probably associated with João Alvarez Fagundes. A small colony of *laboradores* survived for a year or two in the New World. Some historians have placed this short-lived colony in Newfoundland, but 16th-century accounts suggest that after visiting the island, the Açoreans moved on to Cape Breton, in what is today the neighbouring Canadian province of Nova Scotia (Quinn, 1977, p. 352, Pope, 1992). The question is, in fact, confusing, for in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, *Terra Nova* or *New Found Land* often meant the whole Atlantic coast and not just the island we know today. Wherever they settled, by the mid 1540s, the Açoreans were only a memory to the French fishing masters who reported the disappearance of their settlement.

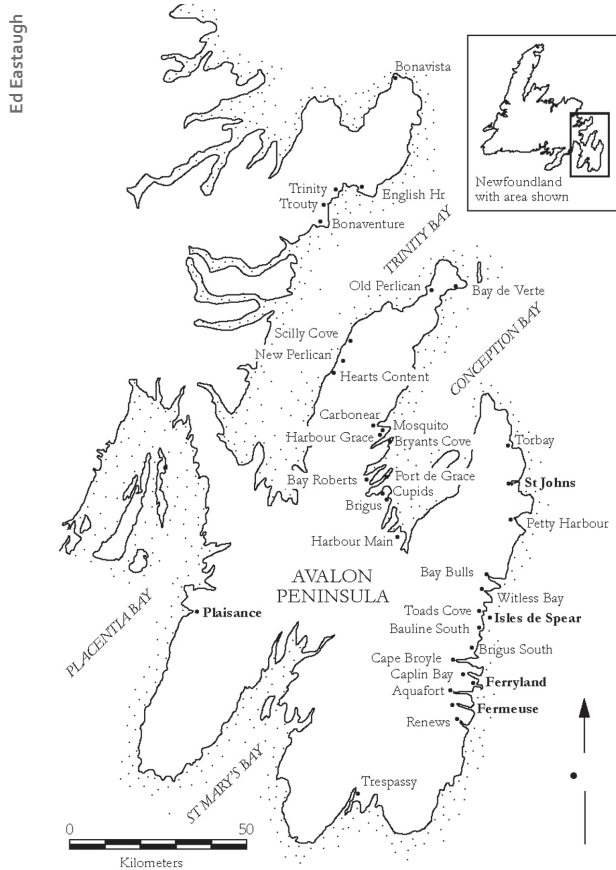
When a seasonal, migratory, shore-based, dry salt-cod fishery developed at Newfoundland and Cape Breton, during the early decades of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it was the northern Portuguese ports best linked to the Açores, whose merchants also invested in the *Terra Nova* voyage: Porto, Aveiro and Viana. The Canadian historian Darlene Abreu-Ferreira has recently minimized Portugal's participation in the 16th-century transatlantic fishery, but Amandio Jorge Barros shows that as late as the 1580s the Terra Nova fishery was, in fact, commercially significant for the ports involved (Abreu Ferreira, 1996, 1998, Barros, 2004). The archaeological

evidence, in the form of Portuguese redware, supports the tradition that Portuguese crews played an important role in the 16<sup>th</sup>-century migratory cod fishery on the east coast of Newfoundland's Avalon Peninsula (fig. 1). There is a potential confounding factor here, which complicates this conclusion: Portuguese ceramics also occur, in significant quantities, on early English sites in Newfoundland. It is unlikely, though, that Portuguese redwares occurring, for example, at Ferryland, in mid-16<sup>th</sup> century contexts, relate to an English presence, even seasonal. Although the English took part in some of the very earliest transatlantic fishing voyages, around 1500, they were not a significant part of the Newfoundland migratory fishery until after 1565 (Pope, 2004a, p. 15-20). So early finds of common Portuguese earthenware are almost certainly traces of the seasonal presence of Portuguese fishing crews, in the first century of the transatlantic fishery. A cook pot, recovered from an early context at Renew's, an fishing station near Ferryland, was almost certainly used by a 16<sup>th</sup>-century seasonal Portuguese fishing crew; English planters of the following century used North Devon cook pots not Portuguese ones (Mills, 2002). In the later 16<sup>th</sup> century, English crews occupied Newfoundland fishing stations in an increasingly aggressive way. By 1620 they had displaced the crews of other

European regions from the harbours of the eastern Avalon. Portuguese investment in the *Terra Nova* fishery was falling off anyway, with the increasing allure of the Brazilian trade (Barros, in press). But the English also displaced Breton, Norman and Basque crews, who fell back on fisheries they had already developed, elsewhere in Newfoundland and Atlantic Canada (Pope, 2003). England's West Country fisherfolk now had an exclusive *English Shore* and they then began to settle Newfoundland, starting in 1610, at Cupids Cove in Conception Bay. Over the last 25 years, archaeological investigations at Ferryland, Cupids and St John's have done much to shed light on the social and economic context of these early English settlements (Tuck, 1996, 1998, Tuck & Gaulton, 2001, Gaulton & Tuck, 2003, Gilbert, 1996, 2003, Pope, 2004b.).

17th-century ceramic assemblages from the English Shore reflect the West-Country connections of the settlers or "planters" as they were called: the wares excavated are predominantly North Devon, South Somerset and Rhenish stonewares, the latter an exotic ware but widely distributed in England itself, or at least at English ports. Portugal is probably the next most common continental source of 17th-century ceramics excavated in Newfoundland – comprising perhaps 5 or 10 percent of assemblages. Most of these Portuguese wares are also known from excavations at West Country ports like Plymouth – but they are more common in Newfoundland, as in New England (Fairclough, 1979, p. 46, 52, Gaskell-Brown, 1986, p. 28-29, Pendery, 1999). What is more, the range of Portuguese wares recovered from early Newfoundland sites is surprisingly wide.

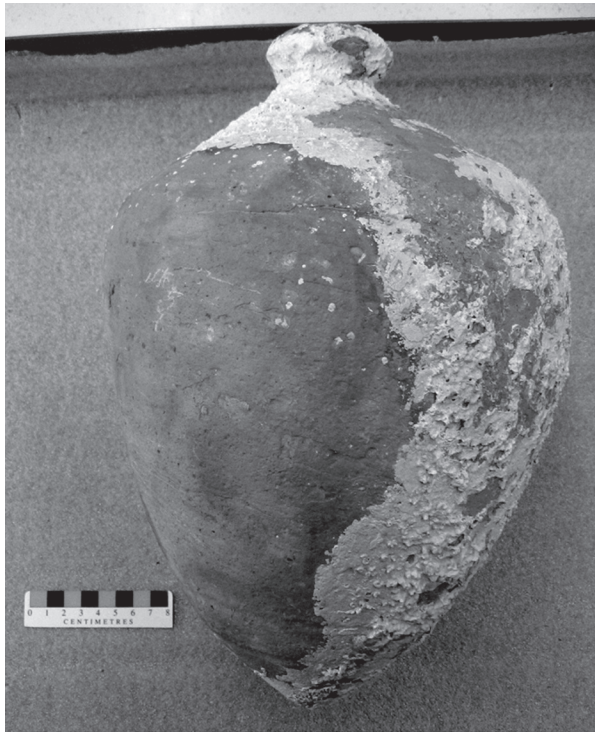
One of the conclusions we must draw from these assemblages is that several Portuguese ports were key landmarks in the circum-Atlantic cultural landscape. *Bacalhau* came in annual convoys from *Terra Nova* to Lisbon, Porto and Aveiro, while wine and other goods flowed from these ports to London, Newfoundland and New England (Abreu-Ferreira, 2003, Pope, 2004a, p. 91-96). Meanwhile, the Açores remained an important provisioning station for transatlantic mariners, particularly on the more difficult westward passage. Ships coming to Newfoundland and New England frequently arrived with fruit and Fayal wine (Pope, 2004a, p. 377).<sup>1</sup> The Portuguese ceramics that English traders brought to Newfoundland include decorated *faiença*, *louça vermelha* and even elegant *louça pedrada*, the latter otherwise not recorded in North America. Each class of Portuguese ceramics can be read in its own way, to add a perspective to our understanding of the early modern Atlantic.



1. Map of Newfoundland's Avalon Peninsula. Places mentioned in the text are shown in bold.

1. The wine was actually produced on Pico. As I was told there: "In Pico we work, in Fayal, they make money."

Sarah Newstead



2. Portuguese *louça vermelha* olive oil jar, recovered from an underwater site at Kingman's Cove, Fermeuse Bay, Newfoundland (CfAf-09).

Sarah Newstead has shown us that the *louça vermelha* – the Portuguese redwares – excavated in Newfoundland were probably produced in northern kilns, around Aveiro (Newstead, 2008). This makes perfect sense, given the commercial connections of the period. She has also researched the range of vessel forms excavated in Newfoundland. Certain forms, including jars for oil (fig. 2), bottles, costrels, plates and small pans are widely represented on English settlement sites in Newfoundland, throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Portuguese redware in these contexts is essentially a sturdy, inexpensive, utilitarian good, suitable for storage and service of food and drink for ordinary working people, including Newfoundland settlers and their more transient fishing servants. We even know some of these forms from the wreck of the Royal Navy frigate *Saphire*, sunk in Bay Bulls harbour in 1697 – so British naval crews were also sometimes equipped with plain Portuguese wares (Pope, 1984, p. 232).

Some forms of *louça vermelha* have turned up in earlier contexts, which may reflect Portuguese fishing activity in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. On the St John's waterfront, the relative representation of Portuguese redware is stronger amongst waterworn sherds, which we can assume have been redeposited from the active beach area (fig. 3). Unworn Portuguese redware sherds occur in the contexts which we can associate with the English planters of the 1660s and 1670s, but in a somewhat smaller proportion (Pope, 2004b). The earlier material

probably echoes the importance of Portuguese crews among the cosmopolitan mix at St John's in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The later material reflects the cosmopolitan character of European imports to English Newfoundland, when settlement took root. As Tânia Manuel has shown by examining the Porto export records, these included a surprising range of goods from Portugal, ranging from cork, to lemons, to wine, oil and fruit and including, notably, earthenwares and *faiança*, brought back to Newfoundland by the same ships which brought cod to Portugal (Manuel in press).

Some of the finest examples of *faiança* excavated in Newfoundland were excavated by James Tuck and Barry Gaulton at Ferryland (Stoddart, 2000). This 16<sup>th</sup>-century migratory fishing station became an English colony in the 1620s, sponsored by Sir George Calvert, Lord Baltimore – whose sons eventually established the colony of Maryland, in Chesapeake Bay, far to the south. From 1637, Ferryland was dominated by Sir David Kirke, a merchant with wide Atlantic connections (Pope, 2004a, p. 79-121). The quality of Portuguese *faiança* pieces excavated in contexts associated with Kirke or, after his death, his widow Sarah or their sons suggests that this family of merchants had close commercial connections in Portugal. In her study of tin-glazed vessels excavated at Ferryland in the 1990s, Eleanor Stoddart noted the quantity and quality of the Portuguese vessels recovered, particularly the plates (Stoddart, 2000). One bears a winged heart with the word *Amors* (fig. 4). Other motifs include the coat of arms of the da Silva family and imitations of Chinese Wan-Li designs. A closer analysis of the provenance of such finds might enable us to reconstruct the commercial network of the Kirkes in Portugal. But Portuguese *faiança* is not confined to contexts associated with the merchant gentry. A smaller planter's house at Ferryland showed similar material, even if not quite as grand as that used by the Kirkes. Stoddart's analysis of the provenance of tin-glazed wares at Ferryland is interesting. After English Delft style wares, Portuguese

St. John's Waterfront Archaeology Project



3. Waterworn Portuguese *louça vermelha* olive oil jar mouth, from an early beach context at 327 Water Street, St. John's, Newfoundland (CjAe-08).



Barry Gaulton



4. Portuguese *faiança* decorated plate, inscribed with the word *Amors*. From a mid-17<sup>th</sup> century context at Ferryland Newfoundland (CgAf-02).

*faiança* is, in effect, the second most common tin-glazed ware, probably representing almost a third of tin-glazed vessels at that complex site (Table 1). Portuguese *faiança* has, in fact, been recovered from virtually every 17<sup>th</sup>-century settlement site excavated to date on Newfoundland's English Shore. Figure 5 is a cup uncovered by Bill Gilbert from his excavations at Cupids, the site of the first permanent English settlement in Newfoundland and, indeed, Canada. The site was occupied from 1610 to about 1665. It has yielded a *faiança* bowl very similar to one recovered, appropriately enough, from the Rua dos Bacalhoeiros, in Lisbon (figs. 6 & 7). Gilbert has also recovered similar material at New Perlican in Trinity Bay, a plantation of the later 17<sup>th</sup> century. Portuguese tin-glazed earthenwares were also recovered from the St John's waterfront, in contexts associated with John Collins, a planter of the 1670s and 80s (Pope, 2004b). Finds included a saucer (fig. 8) and a decorated plate, recovered from a somewhat later context (fig. 9). Portuguese *faiança* also turned up at a planter's house in Clears Cove, in Fermeuse Bay, south of Ferryland, dating to the same period (Pope, 2005). Portuguese *faiança* was, it would seem, a normal part of the English Newfoundland planter

William Gilbert

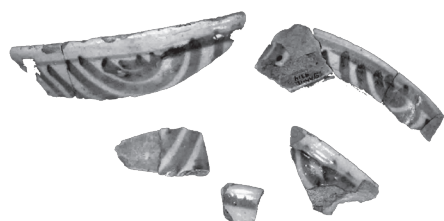


5. Portuguese *faiança* cup, from a mid-17<sup>th</sup> century context at Cupids, Newfoundland (CjAh-13).

household – a decorative ware associated with people of the “middling sort” to use a contemporary phrase, people who had some social pretensions, even if they depended on others, like the Kirkes, to market their fish in Europe. If utilitarian Portuguese redwares were widely used by planters and fishing servants alike, Portuguese *faiança* was restricted in distribution to the planter class, the proprietors of permanent Newfoundland fishing stations, in the period. We might ask what Portuguese *faiança* represented to consumers in Newfoundland. A reminder of a colourful world overseas? The flowers and lush foliage of the south? Perhaps simply, the exotic? These are questions worth thinking about.

A third group of Portuguese ceramics has been excavated in Newfoundland. These are delicate *púcaros* and other finely decorated forms, called *terra sigillata* by the Dutch archaeologist Jan Baart (1992). Lively discussions at the *Velhos e Novos Mundos* conference in Lisbon made it pretty clear that there is no real consensus even among Portuguese archaeologists about what the finely thrown and decorated Portuguese redwares should be called – except for general agreement that it was unnecessarily confusing to call them *terra sigillata*. I will use the term *ceramica pedrada*, following the

William Gilbert



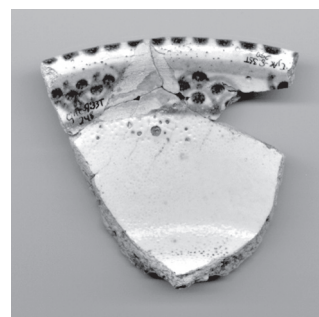
6. Rim sherds from a Portuguese *faiança* bowl excavated from a 17<sup>th</sup>-century context at Cupids, Newfoundland (CjAh-13).

William Gilbert

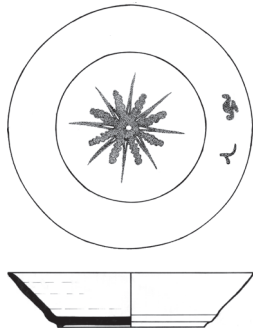


7. A complete Portuguese *faiança* bowl excavated in the Rua dos Bacalhoeiros, Lisbon.

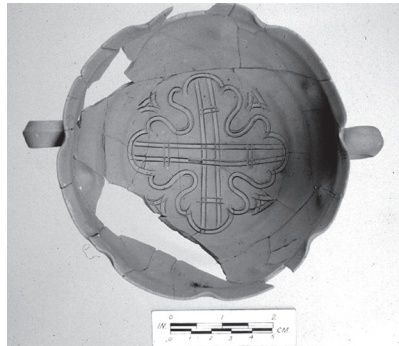
St. John's Waterfront Archaeology Project



8. Portuguese *faiança* bowl, from a late 17<sup>th</sup>-century context at 327 Water Street, St. John's, Newfoundland (CjAe-08).



9. Portuguese *faiança* pan, from an early 18<sup>th</sup>-century context at 327 Water Street, St. John's, Newfoundland (CjAe-08). Drawing from Pope 2004b.



10. Ornate Portuguese *ceramica pedrada* handled bowl (Bart's "terra sigillata"), from a mid 17<sup>th</sup>-century context at Ferryland, Newfoundland (CgAf-02).



11. Ornate Portuguese *ceramica pedrada* costrell, from a mid 17<sup>th</sup>-century context at Ferryland, Newfoundland (CgAf-02).

terminology Olina Sardinha used in her presentation (Sardinha, 2011 and cp., 1992). These baroque parallels of similar Roman products were incised, pierced and often decorated with inlays of fine white clay or mica. There was a fashion for such decorated wares among the Spanish and Portuguese elite in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. In his famous painting *las Meninas*, Diego Velasquez shows one of the children of Philip II holding a *púcaro* (Seseña, 1991). Archaeological examples have been recovered from the homes of wealthy merchants in Amsterdam and Antwerp and at one merchantile site at Limehouse in London – but this type of ceramic is unknown archaeologically in the rest of the English-speaking Atlantic world... except from the Kirkes plantation in Newfoundland, where about a dozen vessels have been recovered (Tuck & Gaulton, 2002). Baart thinks that the vessels reported from the Netherlands were produced in Estremoz, in Alentejo. Is this the most likely source of the vessels excavated by Tuck and Gaulton at Ferryland? Perhaps it is time for some ICP chemical analysis. Although these exquisite ceramics could possibly have reached Newfoundland via Amsterdam, they more likely reflect close direct connections with Portugal.

The bowls, chalices, and handled jars found at Ferryland are delicate decorative pieces, obviously intended for display rather than table use (figs. 10 & 11). *Ceramica pedrada* is ostentatiously non-utilitarian. In fact, in Portugal *púcaros* are supposed to have sometimes been eaten (Pleguezuelo, 2000, p. 130). This is conspicuous consumption taken to an extreme! The pseudo-classical style of these pieces suggest that they might have represented a self-conscious celebration of Western Europe as the new Rome, on the threshold of empire. They were probably not imported to Newfoundland

for sale – as with the best of the *faiança* uncovered at Ferryland, they are more likely gifts, sent from commercial partners in Portugal, to strengthen the personal ties, so essential to business in the period. Their very fragility gave them the potential to signify to all who saw them on display that their possessors had the transatlantic connections needed to obtain and protect such rare and delicate objects.

Each of the three groups of Portuguese ceramics identified in Newfoundland archaeological contexts has its historical significance. Together we might use them as evidence for the continuing economic connection between Portugal and *Terra Nova*, even after Portugal abandoned direct participation in the transatlantic fishery, at least for a few centuries (Garrido, 2003). In Newfoundland, *louça vermelha* is a good indicator of the presence of fishing servants or other mariners. Portuguese *faiança* can be taken as a *type fossile* for 17<sup>th</sup>-century planter proprietors. To date, *ceramica pedrada* has been reported only from the premises of the most powerful merchants in Newfoundland, in the period, the men and women who were, in effect, the regional gentry (Pope, 2004a, p. 268-273). The three groups of Portuguese ceramics recovered from early modern site in eastern Newfoundland nicely parallel the tripartite structure of the society, which consisted of fishing servants, employed by planter proprietors, themselves in turn clients of a small class of merchant gentry. The Portuguese wares are not the only ones which reflect such status distinctions but they are a unique cluster, given their common provenance. Read critically, as cultural evidence, these ceramic finds also suggest that Portugal, in effect, exported attitudes and ideas to this part of North America, as well as specific goods.

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