

# POTTERY IN CIDADE VELHA (CABO VERDE)

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**RESUMO** Em 2006 arqueólogos da Universidade de Cambridge iniciaram escavações arqueológicas na Cidade Velha (Cabo Verde). Foram reconhecidas diversas estruturas, identificadas como casas, edifícios públicos e igrejas, e dentro delas muitos fragmentos de recipientes cerâmicos. A maior parte foi produzida em Portugal e apresenta características semelhantes a outros sítios portugueses, tendo sido igualmente identificadas produções europeias e chinesas. No entanto, foram encontradas outras cerâmicas sem paralelo com produções europeias, louça claramente africana, fabricada em Cabo Verde ou importada do continente africano.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE** Cabo Verde, Cidade Velha, louça comum, utensílios de estanho e esmalte, cerâmica africana

## INTRODUCTION

In 2006 archaeologists from the Cambridge University (M.L.S and C.E.) were invited by the Cape Verde Minister of Culture to supervise and perform archaeological rescue excavations in the Cidade Velha, the original capital of Cape Verde.

These would be made following a plan to replace and introduce sanitation facilities and water pipes along the city, necessary in a World Heritage site since 2009. The paradox is actually interesting since Cidade Velha's archaeological heritage was well preserved until it received the UNESCO's category (Evans, 2010). Although other parts of the city were excavated by Portuguese and Spanish archaeologists during several years, namely in the Old Church and in the São Filipe fortress, these were probably the largest areas to be excavated along the city so far (Amaro, 1990).

Several structures and buildings were excavated along the trenches dated from early 16<sup>th</sup> century up until the 18<sup>th</sup> century with the discovery of old cobbled streets and even what the archaeologists believe to be the old Customs House a large building subdivided into five rooms that unfortunately were not excavated very deep. Many cannon balls were recovered inside the building suggesting the remains of the French Corsair Cassard's raid of 1712 as well as quite a few slave manacles from the second compartment.

The trench-exposures revealed a dense urban site and, also, an array of 17<sup>th</sup> century mercantile facilities

attesting to the early town's 'World Trade Depot' (Evans, 2010).

Excavations continued with the discovery of new buildings, and an early modern cemetery and many different types of pottery.

The contexts where the ceramics have been found are mostly from the trenches open in the streets of Cidade Velha and inside the buildings identified in those excavations and have revealed what can be considered as domestic remains resulting of the daily activities performed by the city's habitants during post-medieval times.

## THE POTTERY

The first analysis of the ceramics recovered in Cidade Velha permits to establish a division between three types of pottery: European, of which Portuguese productions have obviously a larger widespread, Oriental and African pottery.

Portuguese ceramics are represented in all of its known post-medieval productions. The most frequent are coarse ware recipients used in household daily activities. Forms such as cooking pots, cups, jugs, bowls, plates, bottles and large flared dishes were found in large amounts. A single find of a woman figurine head is very alike to the bells found in Santa Clara-a-Velha (Coimbra) reproducing feminine figures.

The fabrics are very variable between a light red-orange and a dark brown colour tempered with quartz and

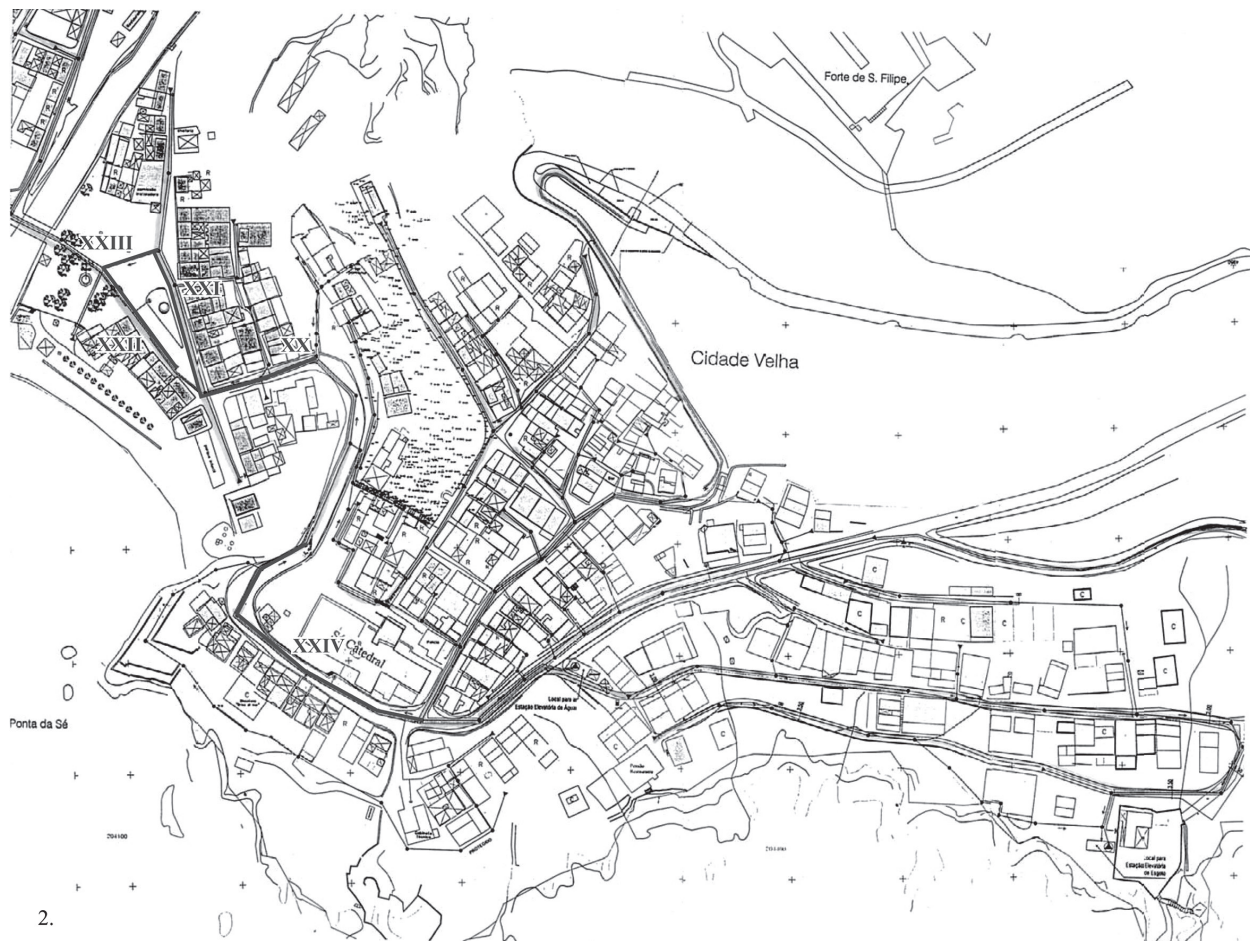
micaceous inclusions. When discovered in Portugal these artefacts are usually classified as local productions, however in overseas contexts they are not easily identified.

The Cidade Velha finds suggest that the majority of the coarse ware ceramics were produced in Lisbon. They present very reddish micaceous fabrics similar to the city's productions regularly found in post-medieval archaeological contexts (Diogo and Trindade, 2000; Casimiro, 2011). The same can be said about most of the exhumed forms very similar to the Lisbon finds. Even some decorations have a high resemblance with the Lisbon pottery, essentially in small modelled cups. Although Lisbon was the largest production centre almost every Portuguese city had its own coarse ware pottery kilns producing everyday items such as cooking pots, water jars, plates, bowls, cups and all other necessary objects. Some of these centres such as Estremoz, Montemor-o-Novo or Aveiro developed very specific ceramics with peculiar decorations becoming well known and appreciated across the country. Productions from these places are regularly found many kilometres away.

In early 17<sup>th</sup> century Lisbon had 28 kilns producing faience and 49 producing red coarseware (Oliveira, 1804). It was one of the most populous cities in Portugal however these structures would produce much more than requested for the use of its population and surroundings. In this sense, many of the pottery was clearly sent overseas, especially but not exclusively to Portuguese colonies.

Lisbon was the major production centre but other places in Portugal were also sending coarse ware pottery to Cape Verde. One of these places was in fact Aveiro. The recognition was made based on small cups, bowls and bottles presenting the fabrics similar to the Aveiro productions as well as comparable forms recovered in terrestrial and underwater archaeological sites, namely in Rua Homem de Christo (Barbosa, Casimiro and Mania, 2008) and in the Ria de Aveiro A wreck (Alves *et al*, 1995 Bettencout and Carvalho, 2004).

The presence of such pottery in Cape Verde is archaeologically confirmed but also through written evidences. In the *Livros de Portagem do Cabido da Sé do Porto* it is recorded that in the 16<sup>th</sup> of December 1695 a boat sets off from Porto towards Angola passing through



1. Plan of Cidade Velha with the trenches opened by Cambridge archaeologists.

Azores, Cape Verde and Guinea with pottery from Aveiro, Coimbra and Prado but also two hundred olive jars, among other commodities:

*Em 16 de Dezembro de 1695*

*Despacho do navio São Domingos e São Cosme mestre Manuel de Leal vezinho de São João da foz que vai para Angola com escala pelo Faial, Cabo Verde, Costa da Guiné, com a carga seguinte:*

*João Nunes Gomes setenta e quatro quintais e meio de ferro cinco carros de louça de Aveiro três carros de louça do prado quatrocentas dúzias de louça de Coimbra noventa e um barris de aguardente com cento e vinte almudes três pipas de vinho maduro e duas em quinze barris setenta alqueires de sal trinta e cinco almudes de azeite em duzentas botijas quatro pacotes com quatrocentas varas de pano vizeu e setenta varas de pano pintado, quinze pacotes de sufilie, quatrocentas varas de panos de baixo, duzentas fivelas, oito pacotes de serafina, noventa quintais de arame, dois carros de arcos, duzentos e setenta chapéus da terra, trezentas e setenta dúzias de facas marinheiras, duzentos arráteis de buicos, duzentos maços de cadeados grandes e cinquenta e oito dúzias dos redondos de argola e meia de cascaeis, cinco milheiros de pedreneiras, quarenta dúzias de fuzis, doze dúzias de laminas de ferro, duas dúzias de*

*trombetas, uma dúzia de balanças e quatro arráteis de lobs em peros e duas canastras de alhos, seis barris com cinquenta e oito arrobas de farinha.*

*Deve de malastostas trinta e seis reais e de Portagem sete mil e oitocentos reais que tudo faz soma de sete mil oitocentos e trinta e seis reais*

*Jurou o mestre não levar mais nada e assinou (ADP/CABIDO/183/40v.)*

Many of these wares were lead glazed, especially bottles, large flared bowls and basins in green and yellow. The glaze covers inner and outer walls and waterproofs the recipients.

Several evidences of olive jars have been found in Cidade Velha, most of them with light buff pinkish fabrics. Recent studies have revealed that these recipients, originally believed to be exclusively manufactured in southern Spain were also produced in large quantities in Portugal, probably near port cities related to international trade. Although no kiln site was yet discovered evidences of these Portuguese pots are scattered across the globe transporting goods such as olive oil, vinegar, olives and other food items in different shapes and sizes.

Only two examples of the Cidade Velha finds can certainly be said to have been made in Portugal while all the others are not easily identifiable. Nevertheless they belong to the types A and B of Marken's classification (Marken, 1994) and Goggin's Middle style types A and B (Goggin, 1964) and clearly all produced in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Written evidences only indicate that these recipients took olive oil, although other products could have been transported.

As for Portuguese faience there are large numbers of objects being recovered in Cape Verde. Once again the majority of the finds was produced in Lisbon with very thick and shiny tin glazes covering white homogenous fabrics with very few inclusions. Some examples of Coimbra productions were also recovered presenting a less quality glaze and pinkish fabrics. Vila Nova wares are yet to be discovered.

Plates are the most frequent form followed by bowls and bottles. This seems to be a rule for every Portuguese and overseas site where Portuguese faience has been found. In fact about 85% of Portuguese Faience production was of plates and bowls (Casimiro, 2010).

Despite the large quantity of finds no evidence of high quality productions was discovered. The tin glaze ware forms represent what in Portugal would be considered as the everyday wares, used by regular people in diverse household activities. The majority of finds presents half concentric circles and the Santiago Order sword in blue and the baroque garland in blue and



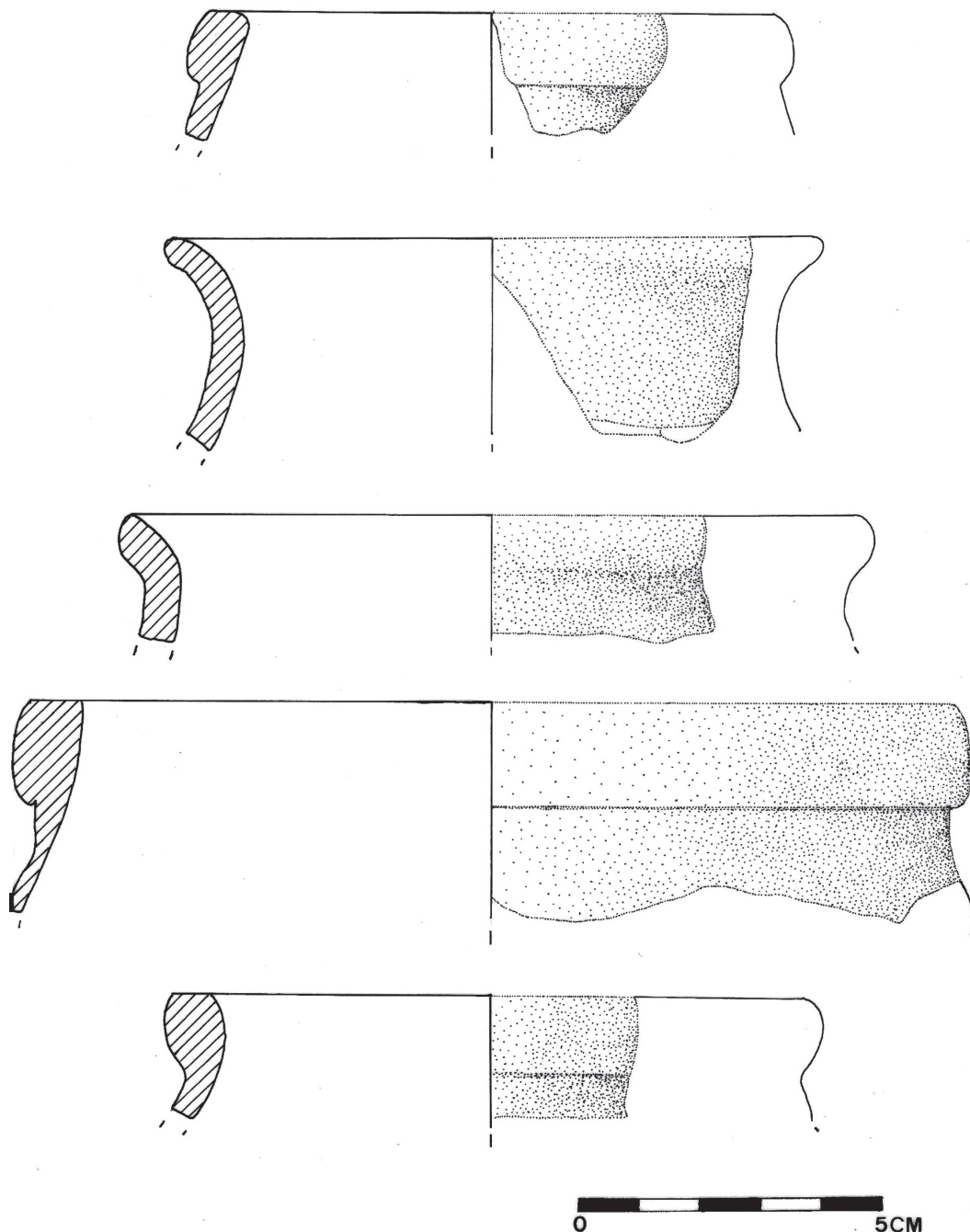
2. Large building walls interpreted as the Costums house.



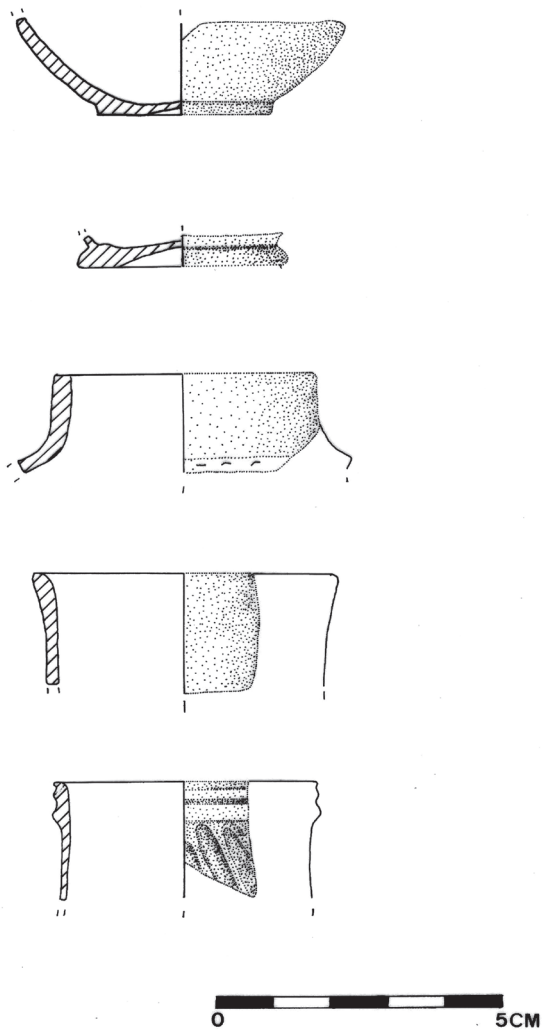
purple very similar to finds from Lisbon, namely in Rua dos Bacalhoeiros (Fernandes *et al*, 2006) and other finds from Cape Verde, especially in underwater sites (Gomes, Casimiro and Gonçalves, 2011).

Very few fragments can be placed in the earlier stages of manufacture and the majority of the Cidade Velha finds were produced between 1660 and 1700 with some sherds that can be placed in 19<sup>th</sup> century factory production. Although Chinese inspiration decorations tend to be very frequent in European and North American sites in Portuguese colonies most of the finds present very plain decorations entering the category of useful artefacts without any aesthetical or decorative purpose.

A very curious clothing button was recovered among the faience finds. Although this is a frequent find in Portuguese archaeological contexts they are usually made to fulfil that purpose while the Cidade Velha find was made reusing a tin glaze ware plate shaped in a circular form and two holes were drilled at the centre. The possibility is that it could replace a lost button before they arrived from Portugal in some shipment. Nevertheless and despite the quantity of the Portuguese faience sherds none of the finds can be considered a luxurious item. The desire for more valuable ceramics should be fulfilled by Italian, Spanish and North European productions. Montelupo and Liguria finds are the most frequent, dated from early and mid



3. Portuguese cooking pots found in Cidade Velha.



4. Portuguese cups found in Cidade Velha.

16<sup>th</sup> century up to mid 17<sup>th</sup> century with several large plates decorated in yellow, blue, green and orange “*a ovali e rombi*” and blue on blue (Carta, 2003). Quite remarkable when compared to all the ceramics recovered in Cidade Velha these are very regular finds in Europe and in Portugal. According to Rafaella Carta the presence of this majolica in Cape Verde may be related to the Florentine merchants established in Portugal who were a regular presence in slave trade with the Cape Verde archipelago.

Only a single sherd of a much eroded lusterware bowl was recovered but, nevertheless, sufficient to support the presence of Spanish ceramics in Cape Verde. Similar finds were found in other previous archaeological excavations in this city.

German stonewares, although less frequent were equally found, especially part of a very beautiful jug with a man playing a flute but also parts of other vessels.

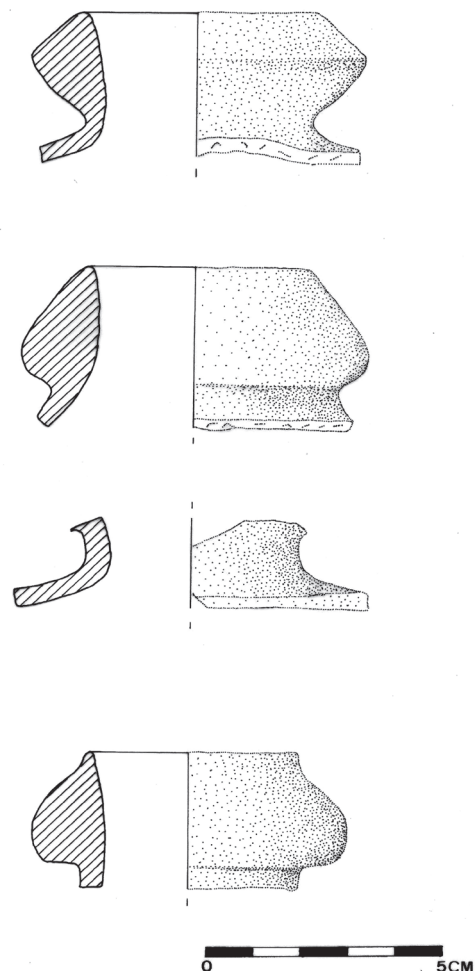
From China more than a few examples of porcelain

were recovered dated from late 16<sup>th</sup> century up to the 18<sup>th</sup> century revealing to be very similar to what has been found in Portuguese archaeological contexts with bowls and plates decorated in blue.

Numerous tiles have also been found. These were supposed to cover the walls of religious and government buildings and were associated to chronologies that can go from early 16<sup>th</sup> century with “*aresta*” tiles to mid 18<sup>th</sup> century with blue figurative tiles, some of them found *in situ* still attached to some walls.



5. Decorated cup found in Cidade Velha.



6. Olive jars (anforetas) found in Cidade Velha.



7. Montelupo majolica found in Cidade Velha.



8. African pottery found in Cidade Velha.

A large quantity of handmade pottery was identified. This production was not similar to anything manufactured in Europe so the first impression was to be locally made. Fabrics analysis reveal that at least some recipients have very similar fabrics to what is still made today in Cape Verde so it was assumed that many of them, especially the brown dark ceramics were made in this city or its surroundings. The techniques used were coils or hand mold from a chunk of clay. The surface was made even with a cloth or a spatula. The vessels are almost bag shaped and the decoration preformed by incision or with red paint giving the idea of cloth bags or baskets and fired in an open fire. Since there is not an autochthonous group of people from Cape Verde it was important to understand where the people responsible for this pottery production were getting their major ideas.

However there is another type of handmade pottery with red light fabrics covered with a very reddish slip covering a burnished surface. These are mostly very large bowls with very little decoration. The presence of this red burnished ware made us wonder where was this pottery made.

The decoration is very scarce and when existing simply resembles bags and baskets so the major function of these vessels was certainly a domestic use to cook and store food. However in some African tribes pottery had sometimes other uses such as a bride's dowry or used in ceremonies such as burials (Rodrigues, 2006). It's not possible to know at this point if the African pottery used in Cape Verde during the 17<sup>th</sup> century had any of these purposes but one has to try to understand the symbolic uses of many ceramic artefacts.

The social analysis of the African people in Cape Verde demonstrates that many of them were brought from the coast of Guinea or from Angola, most as slaves. Although there is a substantial lack of bibliography where the authors could get parallels to these pottery productions for the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, ethnographic studies have shown that similar pots were produced in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Guinea and Angola. Even today in Cape Verde some women still produced similar shapes to the ones found in Cidade Velha (Barley, 1994; Correia, 1958 e Cardoso, 1997). Pottery production was in fact women attribute in many African tribes and probably also in Cidade Velha, a subject that the authors intend to develop a bit further.

Potters inspired their production in their homeland shapes and decorations and when possible would use original productions. The reddish bowls were most likely imported from Guinea although it's not possible to know if they were brought with the slaves when being sold or if it there was a proper trade of these items.

## CONCLUSIONS

This paper tries a first analysis on the study of the pottery found in Cidade Velha in Cape Verde. More studies are being developed at the moment hoping to be able to identify the social groups that would consume such pottery.

However some conclusions can be advanced and one thing is certain, different people were using different types of pottery in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. From Portugal all kinds of ceramics were being sent to support everyday requests for European settlers. People could cook and consume food reproducing the same habits they had while living in their hometown. Coarsewares and tin glaze wares were used by a group of people who did not produced their own pottery and needed

to import it in order to supply their everyday demands. Although Portuguese pottery exists in large amounts these people would like to have a little bit of luxury on their home creating similar environments to the ones they had in Portugal so it's our believe that the imports from Italy, Spain, Germany and China were used to create that environment. Far from the luxurious European atmosphere that nobles and rich merchants were used to, they tried to maintain the same life style. The majority of the pottery presents domestic features, this is, was used in household daily activities such as cooking, eating, washing and storing. However the use of this low valued pottery is opposed by the recovery of many examples of European and Eastern imports revealing that the city had some inhabitants with the economical capacity to acquire such goods. The best hypothesis is that these commodities were taken by Portuguese merchants. This pottery represents the will of the Portuguese settlers to maintain a similar life style to the one they had in Portugal.

However although these ceramics were probably available to be used by African people they would certainly prefer to use their own pottery, importing it or bringing it from the midland or even to produced it own their own. There are many sherds of handmade pottery that were certainly used by this group, mostly composed of slaves.

Considering the type of social divisions between Europeans and Africans it's not impossible but very unlikely that these people would use ceramics from the other group so pottery is just another social indicator of the differences between the Portuguese settlers and the African people.

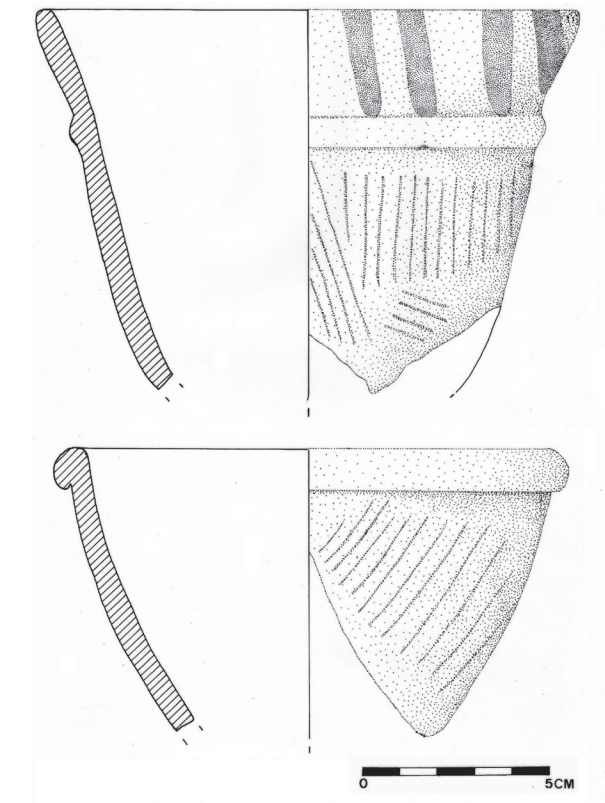
Recent studies have demonstrated that although African Portuguese colonies were the original place of production and consumption of this pottery it sometimes reached Portugal in small quantities. Evidences of it have been found in Lisbon, Almada, Cascais and Cadaval (Barros and Cardoso, 2008).

Most of the Cidade Velha's pottery was recovered associated to 17<sup>th</sup> century structures. Although these are very interesting finds similar ceramics have been recovered in other archaeological excavations in Cape Verde, namely in the old church and in the São Filipe fortress (Amaro, 1990).

The records from Portuguese port books reveal that several types of pottery, from coarse red wares to tin glaze wares were taken into Cape Verde, among other goods such as wine, sugar, nails, olive oil... everything someone needed to subsist in that remote part of the world. A ship from 1695 was presented here, however there are records of other ships leaving from Porto towards Angola in 1681, 1686 and 1689, with pottery on

their cargo which could have stopped in Cape Verde (Leão, 1999).

Although only pottery is present in this paper the archaeological excavations in Cidade Velha have revealed many other artefacts that are being studied such as metals, glass and bones.



9. African pottery found in Cidade Velha.



10. Faience button found in Cidade Velha.



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